

{sample section from the book: “The Afterlife and the True Nature of Reality” by John T. Mennella}

{partial chapter offered here}

Chapter 18

Hacking Reality

Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

- Mark 11:24 (Holy Bible, New International Version)

If you believe you can or if you believe you can't ... you're right.

- Henry Ford, engineer and industrialist

The power of the imagination is a great factor in medicine. It may produce diseases in man and it may cure them.

- Paracelsus, alchemist and physician

Science believes the world is truly there – it is naive in its empiricism. Magic knows that the world is ... a construct of forceful imagination.

- Terence McKenna, author

The stuff of the world is mind-stuff.

- Sir Arthur Eddington, astrophysicist

Lynn Grabhorn: Deliberate Creation

Many years ago I was watching a video of a talk given by Deepak Chopra during which he made a statement, as an aside to his main topic of discussion, that literally brought me to the edge of my seat. I no longer can recall the title of his talk nor the particular topic he had been discussing, but I vividly remember him pausing and somewhat parenthetically remarking that it is possible for humans to affect external reality through the power of their minds. Back then this was a novel idea – certainly one that I had never heard before – and I remember thinking to myself: Is such a thing actually possible? It seemed like magic to me, and if such a claim had been made by anyone other than Deepak Chopra I would have dismissed it as ludicrous. But I had read several of Dr. Chopra's books and had viewed many of his video lectures – I had even attended one of his talks in person in Manhattan – and as a result I had come to consider him an intelligent and level-headed person of integrity. Thus I took his claim, incredible as it was, quite seriously, and I slide my butt to the edge of my couch and leaned towards the TV in excited anticipation of hearing how one might accomplish this feat. Much to my dismay, Dr. Chopra did not elaborate on his claim but simply returned to his main topic of discussion. His assertion – that people can influence material reality via thought – haunted me for quite a while but, as is often the case, over time it was gradually forgotten.

Several years later I read a very short blurb in a magazine about a book by Lynn Grabhorn entitled "Excuse Me, Your Life Is Waiting." The blurb was so brief that it wasn't particularly clear what the book was about, but it noted that people were getting together and "doing the book" in groups. That comment caught my attention – I had never heard of people coming together to "do a book" and I wondered what exactly that meant – so, intrigued, I took a chance and purchased a copy of the book. In retrospect, it was one of the best gambles I've ever made.

As I began to read Ms. Grabhorn's book it quickly became clear that the subject matter was precisely related to Deepak Chopra's disturbingly provocative claim that we can affect reality through our will – a capability Ms. Grabhorn calls "deliberate creation." After having my appetite so teasingly whetted by Dr. Chopra, I greedily devoured Ms. Grabhorn's book, and I was both surprised and grateful to find that she explained the process by which this "deliberate creation" can be accomplished very early on in the book (unlike many other authors who save the Big Revelation for the very last paragraph while devoting the rest of the book to the cultivation of maddening curiosity and frustration on the part of the reader). Throughout the period of time that I was reading the book I would discuss its amazing content with my wife, who, to say the least, is highly skeptical of any and all new age, "airy fairy" concepts. She predictably shrugged off the entire notion and found humor in my exuberance over it.

One day during that period I had seen an ad in a newspaper indicating that one of the premium cable channels was going to air a production of one of my favorite plays – Sam Shepard's "True West" – starring actor Bruce Willis. Being a big fan of both "True West" and Bruce Willis, I was deeply upset over the fact that, not being a subscriber to any premium channels, I would not get to see the play. I had seen the PBS American Playhouse production of "True West" (starring John Malkovich and Gary Sinise) several times, and I had also attended a live performance of the play (with Daniel Stern) off-Broadway at the Cherry Lane Theater. This is a play that I truly love, and I was extremely distraught at the thought that I would not get to see this new production. I drove my wife crazy that week, bitching and moaning about how badly I wanted to see the play and about how unfair it was that I would not be able to.

That weekend I awoke in the middle of the night, unable to sleep. I got up and did something I virtually never do: I sat on the couch and started to channel-surf. Round and round I went, cycling through the channels and finding nothing worth watching – until... On one of the channels there was an announcement that coming up next would be "True West" starring Bruce Willis! What? I thought, I don't

get that channel. I checked the channel my TV set was tuned to and then I checked the TV Guide – sure enough, my TV was set to the premium channel that I had read was scheduled to air "True West." At first I was mystified, but then I remembered that my cable provider occasionally ran promotions where they would broadcast a premium channel for several hours for free as a come-on to entice subscribers to add that channel to their account. I presumed that this was the case, thanked my lucky stars, and settled in for a wonderfully unexpected viewing of Sam Shepard's great play. When the play ended I grabbed my TV Guide to check what else this premium channel would be showing, my plan being to tape it for viewing with my wife the following night. As I flipped open the TV Guide the transmission abruptly ended and my TV screen went to snowy static. I sighed, turned off the TV, and went to bed.

The next morning I said to my wife, "You won't believe what happened last night," and proceeded to relate the entire story to her. I brought my story to a close by saying, "Isn't that unbelievable?"

My wife simply laughed. "It's that book you're reading," she said matter-of-factly.

"Huh?" I replied.

"That book," she reiterated. "All week you did exactly all the stuff that you've been telling me about from that book."

And by God, my skeptical, non-believing wife had realized what I – the new-age believer in spirituality and mysticism – had been too blind to see: I had precisely applied – unknowingly – Lynn Grabhorn's method of "deliberate creation" to manipulate reality. Inexplicably, the extreme unlikelihood of the amazing coincidence and incredible luck required for me to wake up and stumble upon that broadcast precisely at its beginning, and then the bizarre fact of the transmission ending immediately after the play ended,

had never occurred to me. It was only after my wife opened my eyes that I realized the almost statistically impossible confluence of events that were necessary to bring about my opportunity to watch that play. It was at that moment that I began to take Ms. Grabhorn's premise of "deliberate creation" very seriously.

The Law of Attraction/Intention

As I'm sure most of you know, the idea that one can affect material reality via an effort of thought and will is now a commonly held notion – going by names such as "the law of attraction" and "intention" – and has been covered in a multitude of books by many famous authors, including the likes of Gregg Braden, Wayne Dyer, Lynne McTaggart, and Deepak Chopra, among many, many others. Probably the single greatest factor in popularizing the law of attraction has been Rhonda Byrne's book (and DVD) "The Secret."

The idea behind the law of attraction is surprisingly simple. The principle is based upon the premise that thoughts are composed of energy and that "like energy attracts like energy." Often coupled with this notion is the belief that we exist in a field of infinite potentiality (akin to the Zero Point Field) and that the thoughts and emotional energies we transmit to that field will result in the manifestation of whatever desires are underlying those thoughts and emotions. An important point often made about the law of attraction is that it is non-judgmental and morally neutral: positive thoughts will result in positive experiences and manifestations, while negative thoughts will bring about negative results – one possible interpretation of the Bible's, "As ye sow, so shall ye reap."

The process by which one employs the law of attraction generally involves: (1) picturing in your mind precisely what it is that you wish to manifest; (2) fueling or empowering those thought-forms with strong emotion; (3) firmly believing that you can and will manifest that which you desire; and (4) vividly picturing yourself as already having or experiencing the object of your desire.

There are many subtle variations in technique and method, depending upon which proponent's book you read, but the core process typically involves at least the four points indicated above.

In retrospect, I realized that during the week leading up to the airing of Bruce Willis in "True West" I had unwittingly, yet vigorously and repeatedly, performed steps (1), (2), and (4) of the law-of-attraction process: I continually imagined how the play would be with Bruce Willis in the role of Lee, and because I knew most of the play by heart, my imaginings were very detailed and specific. Also, my imaginings were always accompanied by very powerful emotions – anger, sadness, longing. Without realizing it I had assembled the ingredients necessary for an application of the law of attraction, and I then proceeded to mix them with gusto. The result was, needless to say, astounding.

A Personal Experiment

I have to admit that, before this unplanned test of the theory, I had my doubts about Ms. Grabhorn's claims regarding the law of attraction. But after my "True West" experience I began to take the idea much more seriously. To see if this law-of-attraction thing was truly legit, I decided to do an experiment: I would intentionally apply the process to attempt to bring about a desired result. After days of thinking, I decided to try it on an upcoming and recurring source of misery for me: seasonal hay fever.

At that time in my life I had suffered every year, without exception, awful hay fever symptoms which would begin with amazing precision the last week of August and continue on to the first week of October. Each year, during this approximately seven-week period, my nose would get so runny and my eyes would tear so profusely that I would have to place boxes of tissue as well as bags for the used tissue at various strategic locations about my house. It was an awful, awful time of the year for me that I faced with utmost dread as the month of August would come to a close.

So my plan was to try to avert my hay fever misery by applying the law of attraction/intention to the problem. Specifically, I would take a few moments several times each day and picture myself getting through the upcoming months with clear, dry eyes and a dry and free-breathing nasal passage. I would mentally see myself in my mind's eye going about the routine business of life with absolutely no hay fever symptoms whatsoever. I used the powerful emotions of my extreme dread of that seasonal torture to empower my mental imagery. And I used my amazing experience with "True West" to reinforce my belief in the reality and effectiveness of the process. The result? That year, during my usual hay fever period, I barely had a sniffle. Honestly, I sneezed a couple of times and had to blow my nose once or twice, but other than that – nothing. As I went around my house in early October collecting up the tissue boxes and plastic bags I marveled over the fact that they were all unused. I remember thinking: This Grabhorn thing really works!

Hacking Reality

The model of reality developed throughout Part III of this book maintains that our so-called "physical" reality is merely perceived by us as being a material reality but is, in actuality, an energy-information construct designed in accordance with mathematical principles and possessing many attributes typical of holograms and holographic projections.

It is no accident, then, that I have sometimes used the computer as an analog for our reality. Computers are, after all, also energy-information constructs – they use electricity as their energy and they rely on intelligently-designed instructions, in the form of firmware and software, to direct their processing of data. Furthermore, mathematics and logic serve as the basis for computer circuitry design, and,

significantly, computers create real-seeming experiences (web sites, applications, games, etc.) that are, in truth, merely light-based illusions with no actual material existence (again, akin to holographic projections). So the analogy between our holographic reality and the computer experience is quite strong and defensible.

But the analogy can be carried even further. A "binary system" is a system that can exist in either of two possible states; in mathematics, the simplest number system is the binary number system, composed only of the two digits 0 and 1 (known as "binary digits", or "bits"): this is a complete number system in which all numerical quantities can be represented and all arithmetic operations can be performed. Computers, at their most fundamental level, operate in a binary environment: data is represented in a computer by means of electricity – a circuit either has electricity passing through it (ON = 1) or it does not have electricity passing through it (OFF = 0); decisions are made in computers by means of logic gates that evaluate conditions as being TRUE or FALSE. The entire basis of computer function and design is predicated upon the binary system. Now consider our physical reality: magnetism involves a NORTH POLE and a SOUTH POLE; electricity involves a POSITIVE CHARGE and a NEGATIVE CHARGE; in biology there is MALE and FEMALE. Our reality is dependent upon polarities; at its core, our reality is a binary reality – a digital reality. Author and computer systems designer Greg Braden has extended this analogy between computers and reality to encompass wave-particle duality, as follows: when subatomic particles exist in wave form they are in their OFF state, when they exist as physical entities (matter) they are ON. He then quotes physicist John Wheeler: "Every it – every particle, every field of force, even the space-time continuum itself – derives its function, its meaning, its very existence entirely from binary choices, bits. What we call reality arises ... from the posing of yes/no questions."

Well, if the design and function of our reality is so amazingly similar to that of a computer, then it's quite logical to suspect that our reality is capable of being hacked. That, I believe, is precisely what is happening with the law of attraction/intention and, indeed, with other heretofore unexplained phenomena as well (such as ESP, precognition, remote viewing, and the like). Just as with computers, if someone is well-versed enough in understanding how the system functions, then he/she should be able to "break into" that system, gain control over it, and manipulate it in ways that are inconsistent with the expected functioning of the system. There are countless examples, across many diverse areas, of people intentionally and successfully hacking our reality. Let's take a look at several of these extraordinary cases.

Hacking Reality: Examples

The Placebo Effect

If there is any truth to the claim that we possess an ability to alter reality through the power of our minds, then it stands to reason that we would enjoy the greatest possible success when applying the process to our own bodies, for if mind can truly affect matter, then the best chance for doing so should be with matter that is most directly connected to mind. True to expectations, the most numerous examples of mind-over-matter hacking of reality are to be found in situations related to human health and healing.

The expression "placebo effect" is a phrase used by the medical field to describe situations where an illness is cured or an injury healed as a result of so-called "fake" treatment as opposed to "real medicine"; in other words, a placebo effect is a healing that results from an intervention that does not in-

volve an active chemical substance or a medical or surgical procedure recognized and validated by mainstream medical science. Placebos are typically used as controls in drug trials and medical research: patients are given a pharmacologically inert pill ("sugar pill"), an injection of saline solution, or sham surgery so as to provide a frame of reference to evaluate the effectiveness of the actual therapy being studied. Interestingly, the placebos used in such trials often demonstrate an effectiveness equal to or almost equal to that of the therapy under scrutiny. While the medical establishment has been aware of the placebo effect for many decades, its view of the phenomenon was largely narrow-minded: first seen as little more than a bothersome artifact of clinical trials, it is now gradually being recognized as a treatment modality worthy of study in its own right. Indeed, the study of how a patient's attitudes, beliefs, and expectations impact their health and their ability to heal is now the subject of a special field called psychoneuroimmunology.

The placebo effect is a perfect example of how reality can be hacked. What is happening here is that the patient's physical body is literally being changed (in this case, healed) simply because the patient has been led to believe that something has been done to that body – chemically or surgically – that will cause it to heal; the reality of the situation is that no chemical has been introduced and no surgery has been performed, but the perceived reality, on the patient's part, is that some medically valid intervention has occurred, and that perception of a false reality is enough to effect the healing. Thus reality has been hacked: the patient's physical body has been healed solely by convincing the mind that it is so. This is analogous to hacking a computer program or web page by going directly into the source code or HTML script and rewriting it.

While the medical profession may have shrugged off the placebo effect as a "mere" mind-over-matter phenomenon, the implications of the effect are potentially huge – it has all the markings of one of those Asimovian "Gee, that's funny..." situations, and as such demands formal and honest study. If aspects of our mental state and attitude can affect our physical health, then the likely rewards are enormous: placebo pills and sham surgeries are not only much cheaper than prescription drugs and fully invasive surgeries, they are also much safer and involve little or no side effects. To ignore the possibility of such an avenue to healing is unconscionable.

Fortunately, western medicine's heretofore narrow-minded attitude towards the therapeutic potential of placebos is changing. Headquartered at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, the Program in Placebo Studies and the Therapeutic Encounter (PiPS) is "the only multidisciplinary institute dedicated solely to placebo study." One of its founders, Ted Kaptchuk, an acupuncturist and associate professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School, champions the need for an in-depth study of the mechanisms underlying the placebo effect: he believes that dismissing the evidence that placebo treatments appear to affect certain ailments "is like ignoring a huge chunk of healthcare." "[W]e should be using every tool in the box," he wisely notes.

A study by Mr. Kaptchuk dramatically illustrates the power of the placebo effect. In Mr. Kaptchuk's trial the subjects were seeking relief for severe arm pain; half of the subjects were given pain-reducing pills, while the other half received acupuncture treatments. The subjects were warned of possible side effects involving sluggishness, swelling, and pain. About one-third of the subjects, coming from both groups, experienced the side effects. Most of the other subjects reported genuine relief from their arm pain, with the acupuncture group claiming the more effective results. What was most telling about these results, however, was the fact that both treatments had been shams: the pain-relief pills were simple corn starch, and the supposed acupuncture needles were retractable needles that never pierced the skin. In spite of the completely bogus nature of the "treatments," subjects nevertheless experienced effects, both positive and negative, that they were led to expect. It should be noted that sham treatments that cause negative effects are known as "nocebos," while the term "placebo effect" refers to positive

effects resulting from such treatments . Another nocebo example involved a chemotherapy study in which 30 percent of the control group – i.e., the folks receiving the placebo – lost their hair.

In meta-analyses of clinical trial data (both published and unpublished) for antidepressant drugs, Irving Kirsch, Associate Director of the Program in Placebo Studies and a lecturer in medicine at the Harvard Medical School and Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, showed that the effectiveness of certain antidepressant drugs over placebos was "not clinically significant." Kirsch attributes such results to what he calls "response expectancy theory" which posits that people experience results, at least in part, from what they expect to experience.

In eleven separate trials involving colitis patients, fifty-two percent of the patients treated with placebo reported feeling better, and assessment via sigmoidoscopy indicated that fifty percent of the inflamed intestines actually looked better. The sigmoidoscopy results highlight the important point that positive results from placebo treatment are not limited to subjective patient reports of improvement but often include actual physiological changes – such as shrunken tumors, elimination of warts, dilation of airways, and increased blood flow – confirmed by medical tests. Placebos appear to be effecting genuine healing.

A scientific explanation for this expectation-experience connection is suggested by the work of neuroscientist Fabrizio Benedetti at the University of Turin, who has studied the effects of placebos on brain chemistry. "What we 'placebo neuroscientists'...have learned [is] that therapeutic rituals move a lot of molecules in the patients' brain [sic], and these molecules are the very same as those activated by the drugs we give in routine clinical practice," Benedetti has noted. "In other words, rituals and drugs use the very same biochemical pathways to influence the patient's brain."

Dr. Benedetti's findings raise an important point: as a method for hacking reality, I am not suggesting that the placebo effect (or, for that matter, any of the other "hacks" to be discussed) is some kind of spooky, supernatural mojo working through an unfathomable agency; on the contrary, I firmly believe that these methods for hacking reality employ natural processes that are very much a part of this reality. However, I think that the mechanisms through which they function address reality at a much more fundamental level than that which we routinely experience, and the processes they employ are of a deeply subtle nature. There is no magic happening here; rather, it is a manipulation of our reality that is being accomplished through avenues and methods presently unknown to us, and occurring at a level of reality presently hidden from us. At some point in the process, the placebo effect then integrates into material reality and utilizes normal biological mechanisms and avenues to actuate the healing.

The literature and internet are rife with similar examples of the placebo effect, and as such there is no reason to belabor the point here. Suffice it to say that there is more than enough evidence available in this area to justify a formal and rigorous study of how and why the placebo effect works, and for seriously considering its utilization as a therapeutic intervention in its own right. Before I move on to other areas, there is one more case I'd like to highlight because it strikingly illustrates just how powerful the placebo effect can be.

An absolutely amazing case involving the placebo effect was reported in an article entitled "Psychological Variables in Human Cancer", from the Journal of Projective Techniques, Vol.21, No.4, (December 1957), concerning a cancer patient referred to as Mr. Wright. The patient was suffering from advanced malignancy involving the lymph nodes (lymphosarcoma). Among other problems, Mr. Wright had tumor masses "the size of oranges" in the neck, armpit, groin, chest and abdomen. He was diagnosed as untreatable and terminal, and his doctors assessed a life expectancy of, optimistically, two weeks. But Mr. Wright had read about a new drug called Krebiozen and became convinced that it

would be his salvation; he begged his doctors to administer it and, although he did not qualify under the trial criteria, his doctor relented and gave him his first injection on a Friday. When the doctor next saw Mr. Wright, on that following Monday, he was astounded to see his patient in excellent spirits, no longer bedridden but walking about and cheerfully chatting with people. The tumor masses were reported to have "melted like snowballs on a hot stove" and in those few days had shrunk to half their original size. Within ten days Mr. Wright was discharged with "practically all signs of his disease having vanished." Barely able to breathe only two weeks earlier, Wright was now able to take out his plane and fly it at 12,000 feet with no discomfort. Wright remained in almost perfect health for two months until he began reading reports that Krebiozen had proved ineffective. As a result, Mr. Wright lost faith in the drug and quickly relapsed to his original state. Wright's doctor, now realizing why his patient had previously recovered so miraculously, decided to lie in order to see if Mr. Wright's original mind-induced recovery could be repeated. The doctor told Wright that Krebiozen was indeed effective, but that it had "deteriorated on standing"; he then claimed he expected to receive a more refined, more powerful product. After a couple days the Doctor announced he had received the product and gave Mr. Wright an injection (of what was, in reality, merely "fresh water"). As a result of this placebo injection, Wright's second recovery was even more dramatic than his first – tumor masses once again melted, chest fluid vanished, and he was back on his feet and even resumed flying. The water injections were continued and Mr. Wright remained symptom-free for more than two months. However, upon reading an American Medical Association press release stating that Krebiozen was worthless in the treatment of cancer, Mr. Wright again lost hope, was readmitted to the hospital near death, and died two days later.

By virtue of Mr. Wright's (unwarranted) faith in the healing potential of Krebiozen, and his (false) belief that he had received injections of it, his mind was able to effect a recovery from terminal cancer that was nothing short of miraculous. This happened in direct defiance of the reality of Mr. Wright's situation – Krebiozen was, in fact, determined to be ineffective against cancer, and Mr. Wright had, in fact, not been injected with it in any case. Yet Wright's mind was able to somehow utilize some unknown healing potential, presumably inherent in his body, and vaporize huge tumors. Physical reality was altered – hacked – with no discernible physical cause apparent.

The doctrine of scientific materialism holds not only that matter is the fundamental substance in nature, but also that all phenomena are the result of material interactions. What we are seeing in the placebo effect, however, are material results springing from non-material causes: instead of the physical excisions of surgery or the chemical effects of drugs, we have, in the placebo effect, physiological changes resulting solely from mental processes. And that is the unique feature that distinguishes the hacking of reality from the normal process of reality: when one hacks reality one is bringing about changes in physical reality exclusively through the use of one's mind. And notice the interesting correspondence between the placebo effect and the steps involved in the law of attraction: in these placebo cases the participants are given a clear picture of the results they should expect, they are given reason to believe that they will get those results, and (presumably) there are powerful emotions implicit in their desperate desire to be healed. That is virtually a step-by-step application of the law of attraction/intention.

While the placebo effect is most often associated with drugs – the placebo as "sugar pill" – it turns out that there is also a placebo counterpart associated with surgery. So-called "sham surgeries" are fake surgeries in which routine aspects typical of all surgery – anesthesia, incision, pre- and post-op care – are performed on a patient, while the step that is thought to be therapeutically necessary (i.e., the actual surgery) is omitted. As is the case with placebo pills, sham surgeries have frequently been found to result in the healing of the condition for which treatment was sought. Again we have a situation where the health problem itself is not being addressed via any physical intervention, but where deceiving the

mind into believing it was so addressed is sufficient to effect healing. Examples of healings due to sham surgery are often even more dramatic than those of the sugar pill variety.

A study was conducted by the Baylor School of Medicine to evaluate the relative effectiveness of two types of surgical procedures used to treat osteoarthritis of the knee. One of the surgical procedures, arthroscopic lavage, involves a washing or flushing out of the knee joint, while the other surgery, arthroscopic débridement, involves shaving and removal of damaged cartilage. The study began with 180 patients randomly divided into three groups: one group received arthroscopic lavage, a second group received arthroscopic débridement, and the third group was a control group which received placebo surgery consisting of incision and "a simulated débridement without insertion of the arthroscope." The results were not what the doctors expected: "At no point did either of the intervention groups report less pain or better function than the placebo group." The study's conclusion says it all: "In this controlled trial involving patients with osteoarthritis of the knee, the outcomes after arthroscopic lavage or arthroscopic débridement were no better than those after a placebo procedure." Dr. Mosley, first author of the study, was refreshingly blunt in his assessment of the results: he discounted any benefits due to actual surgery and gave full credit for the "entire benefit" to the placebo effect.

Other examples of placebo surgeries proving equally effective as true surgeries include: cases of angina pectoris (chest and arm pain due to decreased blood flow to the heart), where tests indicated actual improvement of blood flow in addition to patients' reports of pain relief ; vertebroplasty, a surgical procedure for "fixing broken backs by injecting them with a special kind of medical cement" ; brain surgery for Parkinson's disease ; and laser surgery to improve cardiac blood flow . Again, as with placebo medications, reports of the effectiveness of placebo surgeries are voluminous. But the core point is the same: If the mind can be fooled, then it can override reality. When one considers the dangers inherent in invasive surgery as well as the phenomenal monetary costs and the limited availability of qualified surgeons, sophisticated medical technology, and hospital facilities, then one must wonder why considerable effort is not being expended to understand and harness the process underlying the incredible effectiveness of the placebo effect.

What is especially interesting with regard to placebo surgery is the fact that some medical professionals are acknowledging its extraordinary effectiveness as a counterargument to those who complain that use of sham surgeries in medical trials is unethical. This ironic situation has come about because critics have objected to the use of sham surgeries as experimental controls on the grounds that trial participants who receive the sham surgery "have no prospect of benefit from the trial, yet they are exposed to all the risks of the sham intervention"; these critics therefore claim that using sham surgery in clinical trials is unethical. After all, participants in the control groups are not getting the potential rewards of the "real" surgery, yet they are being exposed to all the potential dangers associated with other aspects of the surgery – infection, anesthesia risks, etc. Proponents for the use of sham surgery as experimental controls, however, counter the critics' claims by noting that the proven effectiveness of placebo surgeries suggests that they do, in fact, offer potential benefits to the subjects. A direct quote from the abstract of a relevant professional paper says it all: "[T]he placebo effect associated with sham procedures can often be substantial and has been well documented in the scientific literature. We argue that, in light of the scientific evidence supporting the benefits of sham interventions for pain and Parkinson's disease that stem from the placebo effect, these sham-controlled trials should be considered as offering potential direct benefit to participants." Thus the medical profession is acknowledging that the healing potential of sham surgery is "substantial," which is precisely what the evidence shows.

The placebo effect, as we have seen, is dependent upon fooling the subject into believing in the reality of something that has, in fact, not occurred. What if we could knowingly and successfully employ

the mechanism behind the placebo effect and us it intentionally to heal? Would that not be a desirable application of this miraculous ability? After all, the placebo effect is telling us that the ability to heal ourselves via our minds actually exists. It seems logical that our next step should be to learn to exploit this ability and use it in a more direct manner. Fortunately, people have been doing exactly that for a number of years.

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