



Benjamin Rush (Reproduced with permission.)

ed bloodletting, purging, intimidation, hot and cold baths, and chair restraints—can hardly be considered clinical advances, Rush's view of mental disease represented a major advance in the understanding of that subject. He believed that insanity often has a physical cause, and that mental illnesses, like physical illnesses, may be as treatable. Through his insistence that insanity was a disease requiring treatment rather than a crime calling for impris-

onment, Rush helped bring **mental health** under the domain of medicine. He also authored the first psychiatry book written by an American, *Medical Inquiries and Observations upon the Diseases of the Mind*, in 1812.

In addition to his contributions to medicine and politics, Rush worked on behalf of many social issues of his day, including the establishment of public schools, education for women, prison reform, and the abolition of slavery and capital **punishment**. He was in the forefront of the struggle against Philadelphia's yellow-fever epidemics of the 1790s. Although he did note the apparent connection between the disease and the presence of mosquitoes, he continued to advocate bloodletting as the primary method of treatment, unfortunately influencing several generations of physicians who treated similar epidemics in the nineteenth century. (He fell ill when he used his treatment method on himself in 1793.) Rush's name is also linked with physicians' rights in relation to freedom of the press. Attacked in the newspapers for his controversial medical and political views, he sued his detractors and was awarded damages by a Pennsylvania court.

In 1789, Rush gave up his chemistry professorship at the University of Pennsylvania in order to begin teaching medicine, which he continued to do for the remainder of his career, serving as a mentor to a generation of medical students. In 1797, he was appointed to the position of treasurer at the United States Mint and held that office until his death in 1813. Rush's other books include *Medical Inquiries and Observations* (1794-98) and *Essays: Literary, Moral and Philosophical* (1798).

Further Reading

Binger, Carl A. *Revolutionary Doctor: Benjamin Rush*. New York: Norton, 1966.

Weisberger, Bernard A. "The Paradoxical Doctor Benjamin Rush." *American Heritage* 27 (1975): 40-47, 98-99.

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Satanic ritual abuse

Activities such as cannibalism, animal sacrifice, and child sexual abuse that are assumed to be carried out by organized underground cults.

In 1984, *Newsweek* printed a feature article on an “epidemic” of **child abuse** in day-care settings. During the next 10 years or so, numerous newspaper and magazine articles described criminal trials in which reference was made to **sexual abuse**, torture, and ritual worship of one kind or another. For example, in 1988 Kelly Michaels was charged with sexually abusing children in her care at a nursery school in New Jersey. On the basis of children’s testimony, she was convicted of 115 counts of sexual abuse against 20 different children. In Manhattan Beach, California, seven teachers were accused of abusing hundreds of preschool children over a 10-year period. The case was one of the longest and most expensive trials in California history. There have been numerous cases like these in the U.S., Canada, and the U.K. All have involved accusations by children that they had been terrorized, abused, and tortured during strange ceremonies with satanic, ritualistic overtones. Some professional child care workers assumed that the accused perpetrators were members of an organized network of child predators.

What evidence is there to support the belief in an organization of child abusers? One study in Great Britain investigated 84 cases of reported ritualistic abuse involving sexual abuse, murder, bestiality, and torture. In only 3 of the 84 cases was there any material evidence to support the allegations, and none of them entailed witchcraft or Satanism. In the United States, a nationwide study identified more than 12,000 accusations of cult-like, satanic, ritual abuse. None of the allegations were substantiated, and neither the police nor the FBI have ever uncovered any evidence of child-abusing satanic **cults**. In the McMartin Preschool case, none of the accused teachers was ever convicted of a crime. Kelly Michaels was

released from jail when the Appeals Court of New Jersey reversed her conviction.

There is no dispute that children are often abused, and that the consequences can be devastating. Raising questions about the (assumed) existence of organized, satanic, child-abusing cults is not the same as doubting the existence of actual child abuse, nor to question its wrongfulness. If organized ritualistic abuse does not occur, then how can we explain the widespread belief in it? Contributing factors include adults who have been persuaded by their therapists that they were abused as children, children who have been interviewed in aggressive and manipulative ways by investigators who believe the worst, and uncritical and sensationalized media accounts of satanic sexual abuse.

Timothy Moore

Further Reading

- Bottoms, B.L., and S.L. Davis. “The Creation of Satanic Ritual Abuse.” *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 16 (1997): 112-32.
- Nathan, D., and M. Snedeker. *Satan’s Silence: Ritual Abuse and the Making of a Modern American Witch Hunt*. New York: Basic Books, 1995.

Virginia M. Satir

1916-1988

American family therapist who championed the worth of the individual person.

Although Virginia Satir devoted her career to **family therapy**, she believed strongly in focusing on the self-worth of individuals. The family unit might be critically important, she felt, but the **self-esteem** of each member of the family had to come from within each person. Because of her studies, her experience based on working