

Bay Area Skeptics Information Sheet
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Editor: Kent Harker

I CAN SEE CLEARLY NOW
by Don Henvick

[Our resident psychic mole, Don Henvick, can't keep his hands out of the cookie jar for very long. He's at it again, this time at SRI. While many skeptics try to carefully work themselves into a situation to witness what goes on inside, Don brazenly barges in unannounced, unregistered and unwanted! Don doesn't like the armchair theorizing of which most of us less ambitious sorts are guilty -- he will be in the thick of things or he has nothing to say.

Don is becoming something of a minor celebrity around the circuit for his imaginative exploits. It's always a pleasure to learn about his latest feather rufflings.]

D'ya remember SRI? You know, the research outfit that got involved with Uri Geller and parapsychology "experiments" back in the seventies? Remember Targ and Puthoff and how they tried to put the stamp of scientific legitimacy on metal bending, remote viewing and "you-name-it-we'll-believe-it"? Remember how silly they all looked once critics got a good look at how they actually did their work? Well, settle back in your chair with a big bowl of popcorn. It's time to watch "SRI-II: The Nightmare Continues."

In June I hear about screening going on at SRI for participants in remote viewing experiments. It's only open to SRI employees but through the good offices of some skeptical employees there, I get inside to see what is going on. What is going on is that a hundred or so SRI people have gathered in an auditorium to listen to Edwin May describe SRI's involvement in "psychoenergetics," or ESP to us common folk. He tells us the program started in '72, reached its public height with Targ and Puthoff in '76 and then continued in a more quiet vein since then.

Translation: since the Targ-Puthoff work was shown to be so shoddy once it appeared in print, the new team has taken the precaution of not publishing. Mr. May explains that the folks at SRI have done some THREE THOUSAND trials of remote viewing since then and have found significant results in about ten percent of them. We are assured that previous, unnamed shortcomings in the testing procedures have been overcome and that the tests are now scored in an objective, statistical manner.

Well, it doesn't sound too flaky so far, and it looks as if the uncredited criticisms of men like Ray Hyman and James Randi may have had an effect of making this kind of research more reliable. May gives an example of a still picture used as a target in one test and the response the subject drew, and explains the basis for scoring it a partial hit. Seems a bit subjective to me, but I'm willing to give them the benefit of doubt as long as they don't claim their results prove remote perception.

Enough of the explanations, now is the time to get down to the reason everybody's here: SRI is looking for a few good men and women who might have The Power, and we're to be tested to see if any of us is a promising candidate for future study. Since I don't work at SRI, I won't be able to get further than this test, but I'm looking forward to see how my guesses stack up against those of the rest of the participants. We're given triplicate answer forms (we are told we can keep one copy to ourselves for posterity) for four different tests.

The procedure looks fairly legit. A member of the staff will leave the auditorium to go to a second-floor lab in the building, and, at a given time, will turn on a laser disc player which will randomly select a scene and run it on a monitor in that room for thirty seconds. Then we're to try to "remote view" the remote monitor and write whatever words or draw whatever pictures come to us. Finally, all the responses will be collected and sealed in an envelope, and only then will the staff on the 2nd floor play the video disc target for us on TV monitors in the auditorium so we can see how we did. Feedback, we are told, is a good learning tool.

At the appointed time we start concentrating -- or rather not concentrating, since we've been told that we shouldn't think about what the target might be, but we should be receptive to whatever pops into our heads. I make my mind a blank (gee, that was easy!) but nothing pops in. I don't try even harder than I was not trying before and now I think my blank mind is becoming a blankey-blank mind, 'cause whatever they're looking for, I ain't got. In desperation I draw some lines and blocks and write things like "wispy" and "angularity" down so maybe I'll hit SOMETHING in the picture and not be a complete doofus.

The answers are collected and the target finally shows up on the monitors and I am shocked, folks. All this time May has been talking about THE target and THE image to be transmitted and I think we were all thinking of a single picture to concentrate on. I mean, how else could you score a test unless you kept the target relatively simple so one could get some idea of what response was close and what was not. Well, kiddies, it turns out this particular target is not one picture, but at least SIX: a thirty-second video montage centered around the theme of the Allied code-breaking efforts in WW II! You got a picture of the words "Project Ultra," you got a picture of a Nazi, you got a picture of a code machine, you got a picture of women working at an early computer, you even got a picture of the wreckage of Coventry Cathedral, which was not

defended from Nazi bombing so as to protect the secret of our having broken the Nazi codes.

This, then, is THE target for the first test. Mr. May tries to calm the general disconcertedness of the crowd by explaining that the subjects in the previous tests generally did better with multiple or free-form targets than with simple pictures! Well I guess so! To paraphrase Chairman Mao, "Let a thousand targets bloom." How they could begin to score responses to so many images is quite beyond me. In fact, I'm amazed that my own pitiful response has so FEW hits. I can only conclude that my effort is a wonderful example of "psi-missing." At least now I know what they mean by the usefulness of feedback.

Armed with a better knowledge of what a target is likely to be, I'm ready to play the next round. Before we start, however, a picture of a room briefly flashes on the screen. Apparently the experimental controls aren't foolproof. Second test is coming up. I skip trying to receive impressions, and, betting that the random images may not be as random as advertised, I try to think of a PLAUSIBLE response. I draw a pair of converging lines, some scattered shapes and a face. I write "fast air" and "strange language." I cross my fingers. The papers are collected and up on the monitors comes film of the Tacoma Narrows Bridge collapsing due to high winds in 1940, accompanied by a sound track of a Calypso song! Don't ask why. I check my notes. The lines could be a perspective view of the bridge cables; the fast air and strange language fit. The face isn't there, but I'm getting better. This is fun.

Ready for number three? Number two was outdoors so this time I think I'll go urban. I draw a kind of grid and below it sort of a street-like thing with branches. I write "massive, imposing" and "looking from above?" and "many people far away; different faces," because this is stuff we haven't had yet and I say we're due. And the target is . . . I'll be damned, it's the same picture which flashed momentarily after test number one! So this is their idea of random targets? Mr. May acknowledges the goof and says maybe we'll have to discard this one because the protocols were broken, but what the heck, we can look at it anyway.

Turns out this thirty seconds is a clip from the movie "War Games" and the scene we just got a glimpse of is the big war room with the giant map on the wall with lines of missile tracks, kind of "massive, imposing" I calls it, and the Air Force personnel "many people far away" walking in front of it. This IS fun. May says if anybody got something grid-like, that would be a pretty good hit. He's a nice man. I like him.

I'm really getting into this stuff, but we have only one target to go. Let's see, if these were really random, it wouldn't matter what the previous target was, BUT, since the last one was indoors and technological, I'm gonna go with outdoors and bucolic and see if it pans out. I sketch a scene with a river going through trees and

past a rocky hill and to cover my bets I put in a fence and write "barren and hot." At the top of the whole mess I write "outdoors, fresh air, light." The final target on the monitor is a clip from another movie featuring a closeup of an eagle in flight. No prize for that one, but the camera pans over what the eagle is overflying: a jungle with plenty of trees and a stream culminating in a waterfall and closeup of rocks. Yippee, I'm psychic!

I've come closer than the other people I've talked to, but as a non-employee this is the end of the line for me. I would love to know how I scored, how other people scored and how in the world they scored any of it anyway. However, every time I call to inquire about the status of the remote viewing experiments, I get the big run aroundski. I suppose I could assume that it all went well, that there are no more glitches in the equipment, that targets are more precise, and that they really do have a statistically valid method of scoring responses. I could accept on faith that the reason they haven't published their findings after twelve years and three thousand trials is because they don't like to brag. And I can certainly accept that if they continue to get funding, it might be another twelve years before they publish. I can take it all on faith.

SAM INVITES BAS

The Society of American Magicians local affiliate in Concord, CA. invited BAS to their monthly meeting. Several of us went to see how magicians are with magicians.

The Concord group is doubly interesting because BAS co-founder Bob Steiner, now international President, attends this local, and the President-elect of the Concord affiliate is none other than parapsychologist Loyd Auerbach. Two more widely-divergent opinions could hardly be held by two different people -- proof that personalities can transcend ideology. In a warm display of mutual respect, President Auerbach presented President Steiner with a 1.5' x 3' photographic portrait of the latter in a hilarious pose, to the delight of all.

The proceedings were fascinating: several people unconsciously manipulating a deck of cards; one fellow doing what appeared to be knitting stitches in the air with no thread; and others producing various objects from what seemed empty hands.

We wondered how magicians would perform for magicians. Steiner's and Auerbach's were among the scheduled acts. Several of the less experienced had a few moments to present some effect they had worked up. The "oohs!" and "aahs!" seemed to be a little forced, and the applause was politely enthusiastic. How does one wow a fellow prestidigitator?

WRITERS!

Please send materials for consideration in "BASIS" directly to the Editor, address in the "CALENDAR"; the high mail volumn at our S.F. address can delay your requests. Electronic transfer is available at the BAS bulletin board or direct to the Editor at (408) 946-5531.

SOVIET SILLINESS

With all the hue and cry raised in the revelations that the President of the United States consults his horoscope before arranging his calendar, some have wondered what his counterpart in the Soviet Union does.

In a special report in the "New York Times", Bill Keller did a little research into the extent of mystical behavior in the country that prides itself as the land of scientific materialism. The results are worse than we could ever have imagined. Keller reports, "In the United States, land of all faiths, people laugh at Nancy Reagan for consulting an astrologer, "while in Russia such things are almost a given.

A case in point is Madame Dzhuna Davitashvili, a psychic healer and reigning queen of the Soviet occult, who operates a one-room clinic "just a step from Moscow's most popular pedestrian mall." People flock from all over for her healing touch -- which she calls the "Effect - D" for Dzhuna, naturally. She is accepted so widely that when Brezhnev was failing beyond conventional medicine, Dzhuna was called in. When questioned about the case, she says the Hippocratic oath precludes her discussing the details of her work.

The main difference between Mme D.D. and her American peers is that she has a state business license, "an honored spot on the Soviet Peace Committee, and a coterie of friends that includes scientists, artists, journalists and intellectuals." The sad reality is that horoscopes, psychic medicine and every brand of mysticism pervades every level of soviet society apparently with the open blessing of the state, according to Keller.

"It is our secret silliness," said the wife of a government official. "Leave Nancy Reagan alone," she chided. She admitted that as soon as Mikhail Gorbachev became Soviet leader he immediately looked up his horoscope. He is a Pisces.

Horoscope swapping in Red Square is a most popular pastime. When a world-renowned Soviet physicist received permission to emigrate, the first thing he requested on American soil was where he could get his horoscope cast. This despite the fact that Soviet Encyclopedia lists astrology as a "false science." Parapsychology is accorded serious discussion in the Soviet Academy of Sciences.

Maybe we'd better see how the charts look for a Bush-Gorbachev compatibility.

ACUTE PUNCTURE

by Kent Harker

BAS advisor Dr. Wallace Sampson, M.D. addressed our November meeting on the topic of acupuncture. This article is a summary of Dr. Sampson's presentation.

Dr. Sampson began by noting that there is very little data on AP effectiveness available in refereed journals -- no extensive studies have been done in the scientific community. This is either a surprise, given the length of time AP has been around, or it is testament to the indifference MDs feel toward it. The amount of hard data even in AP journals is very sparse. (As a point of interest, Dr. Sampson told us that the formal Clinical Trial method was only developed in the early 1940s.) Stringent testing is very costly in money and time -- millions of dollars and several years for a rigorous study. Why should practitioners bother? AP "works." Recipients attest to the worth of it. In effect, the craft has nothing to gain from any sort of testing, and potentially much to lose, so the motive for research is next to nil.

The difficulty of testing is compounded by the inability to blind the therapist (a double-blind procedure). But the patient can be, and so can the evaluator (this is called a triple-blind study). In all, Sampson found only thirty-five studies that had been done on AP, and in them he found the procedures laced with protocol errors, the most glaring of which was patient selection.

Understandably, those seeking AP help are predisposed to believe in its curative effects -- they are often refugees of primary medicine. Thus, there could not be a valid randomizing of the data base, and randomization is essential to ensure accurate statistical analysis. The other major flaw was that control groups were sparse to non-existent. When control groups WERE used, they were so disparate it is scientifically impossible to compare the results of one trial with those of another. The tests were done to measure the response to pain. What is pain? Is pain a medical condition? The difficulty and subjectivity of what we term pain throws another cloud over whatever results one might hope to glean from the data.

Dr. Sampson graded the papers on the strictness of controls, and found that the more careful they were the less significant the results. To the best of his knowledge, no general study has been done to compare the studies as he did.

Acupuncturists tell us "it works." Sampson advised us that when offered a claim that some procedure works, we need only respond, "Where are the data?" If one cannot produce hard data to support

the validity of the claim, we need go no further.

In the U.S., AP burst on the scene around 1973, coinciding with Nixon's journey to the People's Republic. The reportage brought home some incredible pictures and the story of one of his aides, stricken with an acute appendicitis attack during the trip. They could not get him to an outside facility soon enough, so he underwent surgery there. Pictures showed him fully awake, ostensibly suffering no pain, thanks to AP, while the gore in full color lay before us on the photo plates. AP had arrived.

The truth was that, besides the AP technique, surgeons had administered heavy doses of topical morphine. Dr. Sampson pointed out that abdominal surgery is effectively impossible without heavy anesthesia: the quantity of nerves in and around the abdomen is so great that severe pain is almost impossible to overcome, and, just as important, the involuntary nervous reactions of the patient tighten the muscles to such an extent that the surgeon cannot work effectively. Thus, if for no other reason, anesthesia is necessary for the surgeon to have a relaxed patient.

Surgeons have used AP in some thyroid operations with success, but that is because the area of the thyroid has few sensory nerves, and the thyroid itself has none. Pain receptors are only in the skin, so once that is breached there is not much interference. As far as its anesthetizing capabilities are concerned, AP acts as an interference -- a kind of distraction, and distraction is effective only for mild pain. Local agents such as cocaine and morphine are administered in addition to AP in cases of acute pain, but rarely mentioned in write-ups. The road to legal recognition of AP is interesting and important. Dr. Sampson noted that after the rapid spread of public awareness, it took only a short time for licensing, diplomas, etc. A "degree" of OMD (Doctor of Oriental Medicine) may be earned in a few weeks, and the certified acupuncturist may treat any condition except cancer. Acupuncturists may advertise any way except to offer a cure. Since the practice has been around for so long, and there are so many people using it, the California legislature felt it had to do something to control the practice and proliferation of AP. The AMA officially denounced AP adding that there is no scientific basis for its practice, but did not vigorously oppose the institution of regulatory laws and concomitant recognition acupuncturists would thereby enjoy.

The reasons for the AMA's uncharacteristic tameness are significant. AP is mostly a cultural practice, and to oppose it could easily be construed as racially motivated. The AMA recognized that the practice is so widespread that it would continue in spite of sanctions -- it would be better to legalize it and thereby be able to control it. The negative trade off would be that regulation would accord a certain legitimacy that could lead some to seek help from AP, foregoing primary health care.

After weighing all this, the AMA ultimately decided to keep a low profile for one reason: AP is largely benign. With the exception

of the real threat when a patient skips legitimate medicine, the acupuncturist is likely to do little harm to his patients outside of the obvious problems of unsterile needles and puncturing vital organs, dangers that would be greater without controls. Legislation ensued and with it, recognition; there began a veritable explosion of AP clinics.

Dr. Sampson wanted to understand the foundations of the ancient practice of AP. He found that it harks back to the Chinese yin-yang -- a kind of "give-and-take" dichotomy closely paralleling Greek thought. At the core is the thoroughly discredited notion of the *elan vital*, the life force. Anciently, feelings were assigned to organs: excitement, the heart; anxiety, the stomach; depression, the respiratory system; fear, kidneys; anger, bile. It is easy to understand how prescientists made these associations. These associations were taken for granted well into the 19th century, even in the West. In China, the life force was (is) the "chu-e" and its various transliterations. Other forms of fringe medicine still center on the notions of a life force, e.g., chiropractic.

Dr. Sampson pointed to what is perhaps the most important reason that AP was so popular before the advent of modern medicine: the LESS that was done to a patient, the better off he was! The draconian measures of primitive procedures proved as often as not to be fatal to the unfortunate victim of the doctor's knife: Purging, leaching, blood-letting, and poisoning, coupled with unsanitary conditions were at least as dangerous as any condition the poor patient could ever have suffered. Since the body is a marvelous instrument of curative and restorative powers, most conditions, left to themselves, will ameliorate if the victim survives.

Hence whatever procedure had been performed last would get the credit for the cure in a "post hoc, ergo propter hoc" reasoning. Since AP is benign, it was often the procedure of choice and therefore got the credit, so anecdotes flowed freely.

Modern Chinese medicine is still imbued with vital force traditions. AP is part of a holistic, philosophic approach to healing. Homeopathy, herbal medicine, iridology and chiropractic are all very similar in their approach to medical problems, and they all are philosophically centered on the ethereal "energy" that vivifies the human body. In each of these systems, the procedures are not directed at a specific condition, and this is probably the greatest single distinction between them and modern medicine. The function of these types of fringe treatment is to "realign the body with the forces of nature." AP designates the points of alignment as the "meridians," which are arbitrarily assigned to organs, which are in turn associated with EMOTIONS, not disease. This is why there need be no real diagnostic process or correlation between the locus of the condition and the placement of needles. If one has a malfunction in the kidney, one might get a needle in the earlobe because that is the site where the "force" is most "out of alignment," and it is that "misalignment" which caused the kidney

problem.

Dr. Sampson contrasted the approach of modern medicine with these holistic genres: modern medicine is disease specific. There are, for example, over 100 different kinds of cancer (Dr. Sampson is an oncologist) each with its specific treatment. The only degree of similarity in their various treatments is excision of the tumors. The revolution in modern medicine is that it sought to understand the function of each organ. The western mind has taken hold of AP without understanding the real function of AP, and has tried to take it in the direction of empirical science. This has caused confusion both in the practice and public understanding of AP.

ACUPUNCTURE TODAY

One of the most common medical conditions is back pain. Doctors do not like to treat back pain because it is so complex and often non-specific. It can arise from simple lack of proper conditioning to the most intractable diagnoses. Treatment can be long, expensive, and often unsatisfactory. Enter chiropractic and AP. In cases other than disease or chronic conditions, back problems respond favorably to the passage of time.

The best evaluation of AP is that it works by distraction (a counter-irritation), suggestion, consensus and the placebo effect. AP is upbeat, requiring high rapport between patient and therapist. Wally compared this with the veritable confrontation between a medical doctor and his patient when the latter is required by law to read and sign the "informed consent" papers before surgery in which he is told of all the pitfalls and side effects he may experience!

Acupuncture is definitely here to stay, and the establishment will probably have little effect on its practice. For those on the fence, the facts may help, and all of us can help spread the facts.

CSICOP IN CHINA

There is no evidence to support the claim of amazing paranormal abilities of Qigong masters and extraordinary psychic Chinese children, according to a report issued by CSICOP. The report is the result of a two-week, three-city tour of China by a CSICOP delegation.

The CSICOP team traveled in China in late March and early April at the behest of the Institute for Technical and Scientific Information of China. Members of the Institute were concerned by the rapid rise of belief in the paranormal in China and the lack of scientific criticism of these claims. The investigators provided lectures, conducted seminars, and offered demonstrations on a number of topics of the paranormal. They also carried out tests on individuals claiming paranormal abilities.

"We had heard fantastic stories of the miraculous abilities of these people," said CSICOP chairman Dr. Paul Kurtz. "We were quite curious to see if they could actually do the things they claimed." One such series of tests included an examination of alleged psychic children. It was claimed that they could read characters written on bits of paper stuffed in their ears, held in their hands, or placed on top of their heads. They also supposedly had the ability to break or restore matchsticks sealed inside boxes by the power of their minds. The CSICOP team found that in all of the trials they ran on the miracle children, under controlled conditions and strict observation, in no instances were the children able to perform as alleged.

The CSICOP paper reports on one test conducted by a Chinese researcher, in which CSICOP members acted only as observers when "strange" results were obtained. Four children were each given a matchbox containing either a broken or unbroken green matchstick. The children were to reverse the condition of their matchstick. The Chinese experimenter wrapped the matchboxes with paper and tape and gave the sample to the children. The children immediately ran from the testing room and were seen to leave the building entirely.

After a period of time, the children returned and said they were as yet unsuccessful and requested more time. The experimenter agreed and allowed the children to take their boxes home with them. Eight hours later, the experiment resumed. One child did not return his box claiming it had been destroyed while he was playing. Two boxes were returned in fairly good condition. They were opened and no change in the matches' condition was observed.

The fourth box proved to be a different story. Upon casual observation, the box showed obvious signs of having been tampered with. Vegetative matter and hair were under the tape. Upon opening the box, it was found that the broken green match was now an intact red match. Despite the evidence of cheating, and the total lack of control over the test sample, the Chinese experimenter maintained that this experiment could be "proof of paranormal abilities." The CSICOP team examined television tapes of similar testing done by Chinese scientists who found that Chinese children were prone to cheat and that this explained so-called paranormal effects.

CSICOP was also able to test the claims of Chinese Qigong masters. Qigong (pronounced "chi-gung") is a form of traditional Chinese medicine dating back more than 2500 years. In its most basic form, it is a system of mental concentration and deep-breathing exercises to reduce stress. Some Qigong masters claim that they are able to direct their "chi" energy into others and affect cures of tumors, cancer, and ulcers.

The CSICOP team was permitted to observe a Qigong master as he treated a patient for a spinal tumor. The master began a series of rhythmic movements and the patient began writhing on the treatment table. After the demonstration, CSICOP placed the master and

patient in separate rooms. In a number of trials, the master was asked to direct his "chi" towards the patient. Although the master said his power could go through walls and travel some distance, there was no correlation between the movements of the master and those of the patient.

Next, the CSICOP researchers tested a Qigong master and his psychic sister who claimed to be able to diagnose team members' relatives back in the United States and Canada by merely seeing their names and relationships written on a piece of paper. The results of these tests were also negative. In one trial, the psychic "saw" that a relative had liver and leg ailments -- the person had been dead for two years. Kurtz commented, "Belief in the paranormal is a world-wide phenomenon. We have found, however, that when you submit the claims to rigorous testing, the evidence just isn't there."

CSICOP's full report on the experiments conducted in China are published in the Summer 1988 edition of "The Skeptical Inquirer".

RAINING FISH
by John Lattanzio

No self-respecting skeptic would believe stories of fish falling from the sky. Whiting and flounder, to be precise. I imagine we would not openly embrace claims of frogs or crabs plummeting to earth from the heavens, either. But suppose the claims persisted? It would be nice to have some explanation. I know, I can hear some screaming "Show us the evidence first. If it is convincing, THEN we look for an explanation, not before." Quite right.

But in lieu of further evidence or information, I might hypothesize that one day a couple of frogs fell from a tree. Someone noticed, and commented on it "raining frogs." The story gets retold, distorted, overheard . . . and presto. It's raining, if not cats and dogs, then crabs and frogs. Maybe even fish. It's not a particularly convincing explanation, but at least it seems more likely than the claim that it did rain frogs.

Well, there is more information and evidence. On May 20, 1984, Ron Langton found six fish (whiting and flounder) on the roof and in the backyard of his home in East Ham, London. Two residents of nearby Canning Town independently reported 30 to 40 fish in their gardens. So much for my explanation.

More impressive, perhaps, are the many eyewitness accounts of frogs falling from the sky. Once, in 1844, people held out their hats to catch them. On June 5, 1983, Julian Gowan saw a huge spider crab fall on the grounds of his Brighton home.

Enter TORRO, the Tornado and Storm Research Organization, a privately supported research group which studies severe storms. These diligent detectives have an explanation for these "remarkable

showers," as they have dubbed them. They use the showers as a tool to probe meteorological phenomena.

TORRO believes that whirlwinds are to blame, because a vortex can explain how objects can be lifted and transported long distances. The fallout usually covers an elliptical area on the ground, again suggesting a concentrated updraft, consistent with a waterspout or tornado hypothesis, and waterspouts were observed at sea around the time of the storm which deposited the crab in Brighton.

Although TORRO may have provided an explanation of these "remarkable showers," this is not their main area of research. They are concerned about the more serious threats waterspouts can pose. There is a lesson here, of course. We are reminded of the dangers of dismissing "ridiculous" stories (like rocks falling from the sky, later called meteorites). We must judge ONLY according to the evidence. No conclusion is far more desirable than jumping to the wrong one.

(For further information on "remarkable showers" and TORRO see "New Scientist," 2 June, 1988.)

[Perhaps another lesson of this event is that, given hard evidence and a workable theory, even the most fantastic claims can be easily established or refuted. -- Ed.]

BAS IN THE NEWS

BAS's year-end roundup of psychic fizzles has made the rounds. The efforts of erstwhile BAS chairman Robert Sheaffer have been appreciated as far away as Philadelphia. We have subscribers there who sent a clipping from the "Philadelphia Inquirer" which quoted Robert's article we ran in "BASIS" last year almost in its entirety.

Media contacts are opening up more and more, affording us increasing column space and air time to present an alternative to the barrage of nonsense that clogs the minds of millions. Time was when the fringe had a corner on the media. The newsfolk didn't know where to go for a counter. Now that there are specific centers of information with the formation of CSICOP and like-minded local groups, we are pleased to report that we are being sought.

We can only hope that information is the main problem, not just soft brains.

BENNETTA AT APPLE

BAS advisor William Bennetta spoke to the employees of Apple Computer and their guests in November. The monthly presentations

are part of Apple's Distinguished Lecture Series in which speakers are invited from all walks to address the employees. Organizer Joe Wujek is the heart and mind of the program, and he has provided a long list of interesting and varied topics, very few of which have anything to do with computing or corporate structure. BAS founder Bob Steiner and BAS director Andy Fraknoi are among the names on the speaker's list and their success has led to other requests from the fount.

Bill Bennetta is probably one of the best authorities on the legislative and legal forays creationists have sprung on our educational system. He has written extensively, and has had his articles and essays published in professional journals, newspapers and special interest papers, so he is eminently qualified to teach on the subject.

Very few Americans are aware of the extent to which creationists are willing to go to wage their campaign against science education in the public schools. Apple Computer, in their Distinguished Lecture Series, asked Bill to speak about this very important and sensitive subject.

Bennetta began by defining scientific creationism as the political arm of ultra-orthodox fundamentalist Christianity and its insistence on absolute Biblical literalism. He alerted his audience that the creationist agenda is not, as fundamentalists would have the public believe, to have equal time for alternate theories of origins. The fundamentalists want to have the entire science curriculum turned out: physics, chemistry, biology, geology, etc.

In short, they want total control of the schools, and they have shown their willingness to use the courts to have their way -- arm twisting is too slow, and they cannot bring scientific evidence to bear to make their case in the custom of the scientific method.

Some of the creationist legal maneuvers are astonishing for their brashness; Bill covered the Louisiana and Arkansas cases and traced their histories through the system all the way to the Supreme Court in the Louisiana instance. They lost, but only because of preparation near the end to present the case in the true light of the creationists' goals. The Justices found that the case really turned on the transparent attempt to have the narrow religious dogma of a specific sectarian religion introduced into the classroom. The Constitution, of course, precludes such favoritism. The question whether the notions of creationism have any scientific validity was not at issue in the court cases. This is fortunate, because it would put the judiciary in the position of trying to understand and rule on the scientific validity of a claim; of course, such a role for the courts is entirely misplaced.

Bill's talk was well attended and well received. Almost all those in attendance came to the front to get literature Bill had prepared (copies of some of the articles he has had published) and to ask questions at the conclusion.

BAS would like to recognize Apple Computer and Joe Wujek for the courage they have shown in addressing sensitive and controversial subjects. Few major corporations would dare invite speakers to express their views on themes as potentially volatile as religious beliefs. Congratulations, Apple. Congratulations, Joe Wujek. And thanks to Bill Bennetta for his worthy representation of BAS.

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