

Bay Area Skeptics Information Sheet  
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## IS SCIENCE UNNATURAL?

by George O'Brien

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One recurring theme in most debates between proponents of the paranormal and the skeptics is a dispute about the scientific method. One of the problems that skeptics have to face is that the scientific method is not the NORMAL way most people obtain knowledge or decide what they believe.

Historically, the most common sources of knowledge and beliefs have been:

- Common knowledge or tradition
- Authority
- Insight
- Experience

COMMON KNOWLEDGE often comes from informal sources such family, friends, co-workers, business associates, etc. Common knowledge may not be traced to any particular source, but it is believed by a fairly large proportion of reputable people.

AUTHORITY relates to the credibility of a particular, identifiable source. This credibility may come from official status, academic achievement, divine revelation, or simply reputation. Publications such as "Scientific American", "The Wall Street Journal", and the "New York Times" are often quoted because they have a good reputation for checking their facts.

INSIGHT refers to intuition, visions, mental associations, etc. Insight is often extremely important in "reading" people. In some cultures, insight is given extremely heavy considerations, while in others it is not.

EXPERIENCE refers to the personal knowledge an individual gains as a response to various events that directly effect that person.

Often knowledge results from a combination of these factors: common knowledge that originates from authority, insights that result from experience which seems to confirm common knowledge, etc. Cultures seem to vary on which methods predominate, but these four sources of knowledge can be found in all cultures throughout history.

Critical rationality as a source of knowledge seems to be a fairly recent phenomenon (the Hellenic Civilization from about 600 BC. Prior to that, reason was apparently strictly "instrumental rationality" which applied or manipulated knowledge. The Greek philosophers seem to have been the first to have applied critical rationality (inductive or deductive reasoning) to actually challenge common knowledge, authority, insight and experience. This approach was not only unpopular with the priests and social hierarchies, but was also unpopular with the average person.

Critical rationality is not natural in the sense that it is obvious to most. History seems pretty clear that most people prefer conventional wisdom and pleasant myths to unpleasant truths. Reason can lead to some unpleasant conclusions. So even when reason plays an important role, it is often subordinated to some other factor such as authority as was the case of the scholastics in the medieval Catholic Church.

It is in this context that the emergence of the modern scientific method in the late 17th century seems so extraordinary. There was a great deal of opposition from the beginning. Nonetheless, once this method was implemented, knowledge of the physical universe expanded at a geometric rate up to the present.

In a sense, the scientific method combined elements of insight, experience, and reason into an interactive system. A pattern of data (experience) might lead to an insight (a hypothesis) which would lead to a set of testable conclusions (reason) which would be tested (experience) to verify or refute the hypothesis. If the hypothesis fails, it is either modified or rejected.

The rules of hypothesis creation and testing are quite rigid. The hypothesis must be logical, testable, etc.; the testing must be conclusive, free of bias, and duplicatable by others. The new hypothesis is not going to be fully accepted unless there are no other hypotheses which can equally explain the same data. If the hypothesis contradicts other, well-supported theories, then it is necessary to develop and verify alternative hypotheses to replace those theories as well. Only then will a new hypothesis be accepted as an established theory.

Insight, reason, and experience outside of this rigid set of rules may provide interesting observations about the physical universe, but it is not science. (Attempts to apply the scientific method to the social sphere has not been fully successful because of the problem with performing controlled experiments.)

Real science is difficult to do. While invention can be done simply through trial and error, science requires training to design proper experiments or tests. This is part of the reason that most science is performed by people with formal degrees. The formal degrees appear to give professional scientists authority, but this is a different kind of authority than traditional authority. The degree

shows the individual knows how to apply the scientific method. A scientist who fails to properly apply the scientific method quickly loses that authority.

From the start, the rise of the scientific method has been extremely controversial. It challenged everything people believed about the physical universe. Opponents included organized religion, traditionalists, mystics, and often social and political hierarchies. If there had been a vote, very few people would have voted to permit scientists the right to spread their ideas. Fortunately, a few countries permitted scientists to work. One side effect was an explosion of technical innovations with a dramatic impact on economic output and the standard of living. People might resent science, but they became increasingly dependent on it.

Over the past 300 years, there have been numerous waves of anti-science, anti-technology and anti-intellectualism. The recent popularity of the occult and parapsychology is only the latest example. These ideas are attractive to people who prefer traditional methods of gaining knowledge rather than to apply the rather alien techniques of critical rationality and the scientific method.

The situation is not encouraging. Most school systems continue to promote authority rather than critical rationality and the scientific method. Even school science classes tend to treat scientific experiments more like cooking from recipes than as a real discovery process. They never really learn the scientific method.

The mass media conveys almost no understanding of what science is about. It tends to treat unsubstantiated claims with equal seriousness to well supported scientific theories. Even revealing a claim to be a hoax or a fraud is not enough to convince many media people the claim is not true.

The desire by psychics and mystics to obtain some sort of scientific support for their claims suggests they feel threatened by the authority of the scientists. They want the sanction of science without having to apply the method of science.

Scientists need to be careful about their language to avoid sounding dogmatic. They should avoid using their status as scientists to make pronouncements about whether something is possible or impossible unless they have actually done the research.

The role of the skeptics should be to ensure that claims about the physical universe are subjected to the scientific method. In addition, the skeptics need to educate people about the scientific method -- what it is and how it works. Skeptics need to show people that critical rationality is not dogmatic negativism and how they can use it in their daily lives.

This will not be easy. Intellectually and temperamentally, most

people are uneasy with science. They like the benefits, but as long as critical rationality and the scientific method is felt to be unnatural they will be open to claims of "unknown powers". We are going to be kept very busy.

## DEGREES OF FOLLY: PART IV

by William Bennetta

The first three parts of this article ran in "BASIS" in February, March and April, respectively. Part III ended with a promise: In May I would tell of a plan calling for the State Department of Education to make a new examination of the ICR Graduate School (ICRGS), an arm of the Institute for Creation Research.

I must renege. There is indeed a plan, and it evidently revolves around a formal agreement between the Department and the ICR. The agreement is embodied in two documents: a letter sent to the Department by Wendell R. Bird, the ICR's lawyer, on 10 January; and a reply sent to Bird by Joseph P. Barankin, director of the Department's Private Postsecondary Education Division (PPED), on 3 March. Not until 27 March, however, did Barankin respond to my several requests for a copy of the second letter; and so I have not had time to analyze the agreement or to get Baranakin's answers to my questions about it.

I shall delay my account of the agreement, and I shall consider here some other aspects of the ICR case. One aspect is this: The committee that the PPED sent to the ICR last August included TWO ringers -- not just one. Another aspect is this. The Department has begun an effort to obscure the PPED's fiasco and to justify the conduct of Roy W. Steeves, the PPED's man who chose and managed the committee. This cover-up includes the dissemination of foolish, false or misleading statements in the name of the Department's chief, Bill Honig.

In writing here, I assume that my readers have seen the earlier parts of this article. -- W.B., 8 April

## NO DEAL

In its issue for the winter of 1986, the "California Science Teacher's Journal" printed a fine analysis of creationism and "creation-science" by the paleontologist Richard Cowen, of the University of California at Davis. One of Cowen's best points was in his annotated bibliography. Commenting on a creationist tract, he stated the grand rationalization that all "creation-scientists" seem to revere: "Telling a lie for Jesus is presumably OK!"

Cowen's insight is valuable, for nobody can understand the antics of creationists and "creation-scientists" without understanding that their endeavors revolve around continual misrepresentation. Their need to misrepresent themselves and their enterprise is

inevitable and quite irreducible because the very core of "creation-science" is a sham -- an illusion in which Bible stories are not Bible stories but are something else.

Misrepresentation is certainly the central theme of the ICR case, for the entire affair sprang from the ICR preachers' deciding to issue degrees in fields for which they had no qualifications -- fields for which, in fact, they had only hostility and contempt.

In principle, they might have chosen to distribute degrees in fundamentalist religion, the thing to which they and the ICR were quite explicitly devoted. Instead, they picked geology, biology, "astro/geophysics" and science education.

Why? Did they think that mining companies were desperate for geologists whose work would be guided by stories of the Flood? That biotechnology labs were crying for biologists who could declare the mysterious biblical doctrine of "kinds"? That universities were clamoring for professors of education who could show young teachers how to count a beetle's feet and find only four?

Probably not. A more credible explanation lies in Henry Morris's repeated declarations that creationism and "creation-science" had to be injected into public schools. The ICR had even published a model resolution that state legislatures could use for that purpose.\* It seems likely that all four of the ICRGS's programs - - the three named after branches of science, as well as the one in science education -- were aimed at that objective. They would equip fundamentalists with diplomas that would be useful in securing certification and employment as public-school science teachers.

This view, in which the degrees are seen as political devices, provides the only evident explanation for the ICR's rejecting the deal that Bill Honig offered last autumn: The Department would expedite approval of the ICR if the ICR would stop misrepresenting its programs and would retitle its degrees to reflect the fact that it teaches religious doctrines, not science. As the "New York Times" told on 8 December, the ICR said no.

## NONSENSE FROM THE START

Because my article has focused on events during and after the three days when the PPED's committee visited the ICR, I may not have made clear that the PPED's exercise was nonsense from the start. Even before Roy Steeves chose the committee, the PPED had accepted, and so had dignified, the ICR's application; and that document was patently defective, sometimes self-contradictory and often absurd. It did not give information that it purported to give, nor did it provide a comprehensible picture of curricula, courses or faculty. Instead of academic resumes of the ICR men, it offered baseball-card sketches. It included a dummy catalog that had been assembled and edited by hand, but (according to my reading) it did not explain why the ICR was not submitting a REAL catalog. And so forth.

There were only three things, I think, that the application really made clear. First: The ICR's "science" was taught by men who had to swear, each year, that "science" was the business of believing ancient religious scriptures. Second: If only for that reason, the ICR was being absurd in claiming that its programs were comparable to those at state universities. Third: The ICR was mocking the Department of Education to its face.

Did anyone in the PPED really read the application? If yes, then the PPED -- from the time when it accepted and began to process the application -- was derelict. If no, then the same conclusion follows.

## THE SECOND RINGER

Part III of this article told that George F. Howe, a member of the committee that the PPED sent to assess the ICR last August, was an old pal of the ICR's president, Henry Morris, and was allied with Morris in an organization that seeks to "blow evolution out of the public schools". (The ICR's lawyer, Wendell Bird, serves the same organization. See the box on page 5.)

It now is clear that another committee member, G. Edwin Miller, was another of Morris's buddies. From 1973 to 1985, Miller had held a series of administrative posts at Christian Heritage College, a Bible school in El Cajon. During most of that time -- specifically, from 1973 to 1980 -- the ICR had been a part of the college; and from 1978 to 1980, the college's president had been Morris.

In his book "A History of Modern Creationism", Morris tells explicitly of his close association with Christian Heritage College and with Miller, whom he sometimes denotes by a nickname. On page 227 he says: "[The fundamentalist preacher Tim] LaHaye was president of the College until 1978. I then served as president for two years, then Art Peters for two years. Dr. Eddy Miller, who originally came as Dean in 1973, is now president (as of 1984)."

## MILLER'S RESUME

About two weeks ago, in response to a written request, Roy Steeves sent to me copies of the resumes that had been submitted to him by the five men whom he eventually named to the committee. When I looked at the resume furnished by Miller, I saw that he had not declared his association with Henry Morris and the ICR. I was not surprised.

## A RETRACTION

In Part III, I called Miller "an expert in finance and administration". That was naive. I had not finished looking into Miller, and I was taking him (and some statements by Roy Steeves) at face value. Now I say: I myself do not know Miller to be an expert in anything. On his resume, he claims a doctorate in "human

behavior" and lists some job-titles, but he describes no work or publications.

## WHAT DID STEEVES KNOW?

Although Miller had failed to declare his association with the ICR, Roy Steeves may have known about it. The dummy catalog submitted with the ICR's application mentioned (on its page 10) the years when the ICR had been a division of Christian Heritage. And Miller's resume showed HIS years at Christian Heritage. Taken together, the two documents could have told Steeves the story --if Steeves looked at them.

## THE COVER-UP

As soon as I learned (in February) that George Howe was a crony of Henry Morris, I informed several people who are following the ICR case; and some of them sent queries to Bill Honig. The Department has replied with a form-letter that ends with a typewritten "Best regards, BILL HONIG" but is signed by "Shirley A. Thornton, Deputy Superintendent for Specialized Programs". I assume that it was composed by Thornton. Her essential message seems to be: The Department is committed to an attempt at obscuring and rationalizing what the PPED did. Her rationale seems to be: Folly and dereliction are quite alright if they are STANDARD folly and dereliction, and we do not need brains if we have lists. Here is her whole text:

This responds to your recent letter regarding the Education code Section (ECS) 94310.2 reapproval application of the Institute for Creation Research (ICR). You had expressed concerns regarding one of the members of the qualitative review and assessment committee.

Standard Policy allows the nomination of one committee member by the school undergoing the committee visitation. Dr. Howe was ICR's nomination. The Department does not inquire into the political or religious beliefs of any educator who serves on a review committee, although the Department facilitator, Roy Steeves, did inquire of each member by telephone in advance as to their [sic] willingness to set aside personal religious beliefs in carrying out the duties of a committee member.

Dr. Howe is listed in the catalog of an accredited institution [The Master's College] as the person responsible for science education in that accredited institution. That school, accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, also is recognized by the Commission on Teacher Credentialing for the preparation of teachers for the public school system.

We were not aware that Dr. Howe was affiliated with the Creation Science Legal Defense Fund. However, Dr. Howe's

duties as a committee member were confined to the review of the teaching of science and science education in that institution, and he was not required or expected to defend or deny the religious beliefs of the faculty or the administrators of the school.

Thank you for your continuing interest in private postsecondary education.

I comment on Thornton's effort:

"Standard policy allows the nomination . . ." That is bafflegab. "Nomination" can mean the mere recommending or proposing of a person for a post, or it can mean the definitive choosing or appointment of that person. Which meaning applies here? "Dr. Howe was ICR's nomination." Does that mean that the other ringer, Miller, was NOT "ICR's nomination"? Did Steeves -- by a stupefying coincidence, and with no prompting by the ICR or its agents -- just happen to name a second pal of Henry Morris to the committee? Or did Steeves perhaps let the ICR make two "nominations", even though "standard policy allows only "one"?"

". . . the Department facilitator, Roy Steeves did inquire of each member. . . ." Stuart Hurlbert and James Woodhead deny that. Each man, after I recited Thornton's text to him, said that Steeves had not inquired, by telephone or otherwise, about "willingness to set aside personal religious beliefs".

"Dr. Howe is listed . . ." My friend Tom Jukes, who teaches biochemistry at Berkeley and is an eminent quack-watcher, had a basset hound -- Bellman by name -- who for many years was listed as an expert by the American Association of Nutritional Consultants. I must ask Tom whether the Department ever sought Bellman's advice.

". . . as the person responsible for science education. . . ." That is false. In the context of the ICR case, a program in "science education" means a program for preparing teachers of science. As I told in Part III, the catalog of The Master's College does not show that Howe or his Division of Natural Sciences is responsible for any such function. The school's only acknowledgment of science education seems to be a course called Elementary Curriculum II, which deals with "teaching science and social studies in the elementary school." It is given in the Division of Social Sciences.

"That school . . . also is recognized by the Commission on Teacher Credentialing. . . ." If Howe's Bible school is certifying teachers for public classrooms, then the Commission has an error to correct. But alleged attributes of the school are irrelevant to the matter at hand: Steeves named Howe, not the school, to the committee.

If Thornton thinks that attributes of the school are important, let her notice: The committee was impaneled to examine master's-degree programs in science and science education, but Howe's school does

not offer master's degrees in any of those fields or in any others but one. That one is religion, the very thing that the ICRGS stridently professes not to be teaching. Let her note too that the "Statement of Faith" in the catalog of Howe's school precludes the school's offering legitimate instruction in science.

"We were not aware that Dr. Howe was. . . ." That seems odd. Howe is listed -- yes, Thornton, LISTED -- on the Defense Fund's letterhead.

"However, Dr. Howe's duties . . . he was not required or expected. . . ." But a "creation-scientist" is still a "creation-scientist", and "creation-science" is still quackery, and the notion of sending George Howe to make a "review of the teaching of science and science education" is still as absurd as it was last August. And an imposture is still an imposture, no matter what may have been "expected" by the people who fostered it, and no matter how desperate those people now may be to hide what they did.

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\*The model ran in issue 26 of "Impact", one of the ICR's monthly bulletins about creationism. Issue 26 was undated but probably was printed in 1975. Appended to the model was "documentation" that included stuff like this: "It can be documented that the evolutionary philosophy has served as the pseudo-scientific basis and justification for racism, modern imperialism, nazism, anarchism, communism, behaviorism, animalistic amoralism, humanism and practically all other anti-Christian and anti-theistic social philosophies and movements of the past century and more."

#### SIDEBAR: WHO IS THIS BIRD?

The ICR, in its recent negotiations with the Department of Education, has been represented by Wendell R. Bird, a lawyer from Atlanta. Bird has been prominent in creationist causes during the past decade or so, but his record does not seem enviable.

In December 1981, during the trial that led to the nullification of the Arkansas "creation-science" law, Bird tried to dissuade several witnesses from testifying. (In at least one case, he succeeded.) According to an article in "Christianity Today" for 22 January 1982, Bird admitted doing this; and Steven Clark, the state's attorney general at the time of the trial, said that Bird's efforts were "tantamount to tampering with justice."

Bird also made a marginal appearance in the opinion that Judge William Overton issued when he found the Arkansas law unconstitutional: "The defendants argue that the teaching of evolution alone presents both a free exercise problem and an establishment problem which can only be redressed by giving balanced treatment to creation science, which is admittedly consistent with some religious beliefs. This argument appears to

have its genesis in a student note written by Mr. Wendell Bird. . . The argument has no legal merit."

Despite this, Bird's student note (which had appeared in a 1978 issue of the "Yale Law Journal") has been glorified, reprinted and sold by creationist organizations (including the ICR) as if it were a benchmark in jurisprudence.

From the summer of 1981 through the spring of 1987, Bird led the defense of the Louisiana "creation-science" law as it was ruled unconstitutional by a federal district court, a court of appeals, and the Supreme Court. In that campaign, he acted as a "special assistant attorney general" of Louisiana and also as counsel to the Creation Science Legal Defense Fund -- the private group of fundamentalists, headquartered in Shreveport, that supplied nearly all the money for the defense. The Fund's Board of Reference included Henry Morris and Duane Gish (of the ICR) and George F. Howe.

Bird's strategy in the Louisiana case was futile but amusing. The defense lawyers knew that any description or documentation of "creation-science" would show it to be fundamentalist religion; so, while asking court after court to uphold the teaching of "creation-science" in public schools, they refused to say what "creation-science" was. (See my article in the July/August 1988 issue of "Terra", published by the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County.)

Bird, Morris, Gish and Howe still serve that group in Shreveport, but the group now is called the ACADEMIC FREEDOM Legal Defense Fund. Its idea of academic freedom was shown in a solicitation that its president issued in August 1987. "Our best and most victorious days are still in the future!" he wrote. "We're still going to blow evolution out of the public schools!" -- W.B.

#### SIDEBAR: TAKE IT AWAY?

State Senator Becky Morgan has introduced a bill (S.B. 190) that would overhaul California's regulation of unaccredited schools, take that function away from the Department of Education, and abolish the PPED. For information about the bill, write to The Honorable Becky Morgan, The Senate, State Capitol, Sacramento, CA 95814. -- W.B.

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## LETTERS TO "BASIS"

The April issue of "BASIS" was interesting as always: but I'm especially moved to comment on "A Note on Scientism" by Yves Barbero. He performs a service in focusing attention on this term. But I'm not sure that Barbero has grasped what is the main point about it, in my opinion. There are certain to be different opinions on this point precisely because the word itself was invented to make sure this would be so. Here's what I mean.

Take the definition quoted by Barbero from the "Random House" dictionary (a better definition, by the way, than you'll find in the "Merriam-Webster"). Three different meanings are given. The third, by itself, comprises two different meanings: "Scientific or pseudoscientific language," it says.

Well, if you're charged with "scientism" (a high crime in some contexts), is your offense due to using scientific language, as is done daily by 100,000 scientists, or is it due to your use of pseudoscientific language? In the first case, you're accused of being properly scientific, in the second of being nonscientific.

These accusations are, then, diametric opposites. You can show the same pattern for the two other definitions given.

Or if you want to throw in the equally bemusing efforts of "Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary", you will find two definitions given, the first of which is: "methods and attitudes typical of or attributed to the natural scientist." You see, this too gives a choice. Again, if you're charged with "scientism," is your sin that your methods and attitudes are typical of a natural scientist, or are they attributed to the natural scientist? If attributed, then by whom? (Anybody, of course.)

You see what follows: once again, if you are on the carpet for scientism, you may have to defend yourself -- if you don't simply collapse and wither under the weight of the charge -- against diametrically opposite accusations, unless, of course, the term "scientism" is accompanied by an explanation of its intended content.

I have an extensive collection of uses of the term in current literature (all pejorative, it should be said quickly), and never once have I seen the term accompanied by ANY clarification of the sort. And that's not accidental, as they say. The whole point of using this noncommunicative term in the first place would be nullified if a content were ascribed to it.

Why? I offer an hypothesis to Barbero. In every case I have collected, the word "scientism" -- used pejoratively always, as mentioned, and therefore as an accusation of some claimed malfeasance or transgression -- is used as a stand-in for science itself, for scientific methodology or attitudes, and not for some claimed distortion of science. It is used for the purpose of taking a fallout of science without taking responsibility for any demonstration of error that can be checked, in fact without taking responsibility for saying anything about the implied offense. It is a device of pure intellectual cowardice, a hit-and-run operation.

It is true, as Barbero reminds us, that some accuse scientists or scientifically minded people of making a religion of science. That is even an accusation that may be discussable -- if any specifics are urged -- and if the accuser can make any rational statement about what he thinks a religion is. (It is easy to propose a definition of religion which makes it equivalent to "anything you believe in.") But if, instead of making a point which can be proved or disproved, or even discussed pro and con, you hurl the charge of "scientism," just see how you grab the advantage immediately!

"Scientism" is the lexicographical equivalent of a snarl or a spitting. I strongly recommend that its use NOT be met with a rational discussion of what you conceive the other fellow means by it. He doesn't mean that, whatever it is. Just tell him that it's a meaningless grunt until he tells you what content he gives it. I would add, incidentally, that its use is an almost infallible indicator of a person who can't think straight from A to B. But

don't mention that to begin with. It's both impolitic and impolite.

-- Hal Draper

## EDITOR'S CORNER

You know how it is when people learn you are a skeptic. Reactions are varied, but typical, and generally fall into three categories:

(1) The person is mildly put off -- even a little frightened by you. He or she is at least a little uncomfortable and afraid to talk about some experience for fear that it might evoke your ridicule. (2) The person is curious and will call you after some personal experience to either show you how you are wrong or to let you try to explain the experience. (3) The person is hostile because he or she assumes that you are ready to attack, and he or she is ready to counterattack. There is definitely a confrontational attitude in the air.

A friend from category (2) called me, breathless, to relate his experience, sounding certain that I would fall out of my chair. I could tell from his voice that he had been deeply moved by what had happened to him. In the throes of an impending marital breakup, he had sought counsel from a psychic card reader. He began by telling me she had revealed some things that "she could not have known."

"Well," I began, "usually these little women in possession of the secrets of the universe are in the back room of some seedy little row house. Palaces next to royalty should be their providence for the wisdom they possess." He was surprised that I knew she was in a seedy little row house. He said it was a perfect description.

"So, how did you find her and how did you make the appointment to see her?" I asked.

He responded, "My mother knows her. She's been going to her for years." He noted that his mother is very superstitious. "She comes from the old country," he added, as if to explain.

"Then how do you know your mother didn't tell the psychic all this stuff?" I immediately queried. "If your mother has been seeing this woman for years, isn't it reasonable to think that the woman knows a fair amount about you and your circumstances?"

He assured me that even if I accepted his assessment (which I didn't), mama didn't know anything about his private life. When I said that mama wouldn't have to have gotten all her information directly from him -- apparently he was not too close to her -- he assured me that his brother-in-law and sister would not have talked with their mother either, even though his sister was quite close to her. I told him he was dreaming. Skepticism didn't score points with that remark.

"Now then, what did this psychic say?" I asked. "Tell me the exact words, to the best of your recollection, she said about your soon-to-be-ex wife."

"Well, I can't say the EXACT words because she spoke in Spanish," came his astonishing reply.

"Spanish!" I blurted in disbelief. "You can't speak Spanish. How do you know WHAT the hell she said?"

"My mother translated for me," was his simple answer.

I choked back a burst of gasping laughter. "You mean your mother went with you to the seance -- your deeply superstitious mother - - and SHE told you what the psychic said?" I drilled.

He didn't seem to think there was anything to be suspicious about in such an arrangement. I spent a little time trying to help him understand that sensory leakage in his little episode was more like tidal hemorrhage. If nothing else, the information from the psychic was being filtered through a superstitious brain and then translated into a non-native tongue. Under the best of conditions, even the translation in the hands of a competent linguist is subject to interpretation difficulties without all the problems of a superstitious mind to boot.

"What were some of the astonishing things your mother said she said?", I asked. "What struck you as particularly significant?"

"She said that my wife had had an abortion in a previous marriage, and there is no way she could have known that. She has never met my wife and there is just no way she could have known," he reasserted.

I asked him if he had ever talked about such details with any of the other members of his family. He couldn't remember for sure, but didn't think he had. His lack of certainty did not seem to bother him that that might have been a source of information, and he could not entertain of the possibility that the little psychic could have taken the time and trouble to have done a little research before his visit.

My suggestion that the psychic might not have PRECISELY said that his wife had had an abortion elicited a disgusted expletive followed by, "Do you think my mother would lie to me about what the psychic said?" He thought that was the only alternative.

The crux of the matter came when I asked how he felt about the whole thing. What benefit had he derived from hearing this little Mexican woman look at his cards?

She had told him things "no one could have known."

"But someone knew these things, didn't he?" I observed.

"What do you mean?" he puzzled. "NO one knew!" he insisted.

"YOU knew. You paid her \$50 to find out things that you already knew. Information that doesn't do anything except astound you because you can't figure out how she knew it. It made you feel good because you thought for a moment that you were in the presence of some other-worldly power," I said.

A long silence. "You, just don't know, Kent," he retorted. "I was there. I tell you she couldn't have known. She has some special power, some special abilities. I know it. I could feel it. It made me feel GOOD."

That was it. I let it go. The case seemed so clear cut and easy. Feeling good is hard to talk down. Feeling good is more important than thinking good, isn't it. So it seems. The psychic's business is to take the client out of his or her mundane little world to Rod Serling's "Twilight Zone", where the week's laundry, the boss's harangues and the pain of a nagging backache are out of the picture. The psychic tells the client what he or she wants to hear.

The legitimate family counselor or psychotherapist must tell us what we NEED to hear, and at a higher fee than \$50. The psychic is certainly more attractive.

Skepticism isn't for everyone.

## KLASSIC UFOS

Who is the dean of all UFO skeptics? Who has done more than anyone else, living or dead, to bring a measure of sanity to UFOdom? Who is insulted and reviled by the UFO believers and fence-sitters more than anyone else? The answer is obviously none other than Philip J. Klass, the author of numerous books and articles on the subject, including "UFOs Explained", "UFOs -- The Public Deceived", and, most recently, "UFO Abductions -- A Dangerous Game".

On Sunday, May 14, Phil Klass will be in town to tell us about the epidemic of UFO abductions that seems to be gripping America. Listen to tales recounting the aliens' remarkable obsession with the sexual organs of earth people. Learn the shocking facts about genetic experiments that the aliens seem to be performing upon the helpless women and men they kidnap.

Learn the incredible truth about the documents concerning the "Majestic 12," which is claimed to be a top-secret UFO retrieval and investigation group (and should not be confused with the Magnificent 7, which was a stupid movie). What is the REAL story behind Whitley Strieber's frightening humanoid visitors? Phil Klass will tell us all this -- and more.

To cover Mr. Klass' travel costs we are asking a nominal fee for

admission. Check the BAS Hotline for possible last-minute changes.

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Opinions expressed in "BASIS" are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of BAS, its board or its advisors.

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