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NEW AGE: THE NEED FOR MYTH
by Ted Schultz

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I am a sympathetic skeptic of the New Age and other unorthodox belief systems. I am sympathetic because, whether or not they're actually true, some of these unconventional ideas are fascinating cases of human creativity and imagination. I am also sympathetic because of sentimentality, having thrilled to many unorthodox beliefs in my youth.

When I was in the seventh grade I wrote away for a book that was modestly entitled "The Hollow Earth: The Greatest Geographical Discovery in History." It described a vast "inner earth" illuminated by a central sun and inhabited by an advanced race who were the pilots of the flying saucers. I also wrote away for a book called "Do Abominable Snowmen of America Really Exist?" advertised in the classifieds in "Boy's Life" at a cost of 98¢.

My interest in the paranormal obviously didn't end with childhood. In 1973, at the age of twenty, I dropped out of college, left my home state of Illinois, and headed for San Francisco. There I moved into the heart of the Haight-Ashbury and immersed myself in the budding New-Age movement. I explored Eastern religions, psychic development systems, meditation, and various occult and psychic practices.

Today, more than fifteen years later, I'm a biologist doing graduate study in insect evolutionary biology at Cornell University. I've become a scientist. One old New-Age friend wrote to tell me that I had "sold out" to the "big Satan of materialistic science." Naturally, I don't see it quite like that. Despite the superficially radical transformation from mystic to scientist, I haven't really changed very much. My consistent goal in life has been to seek out the most wondrous, the most awe-inspiring experiences the universe has to offer. What has changed in the last fifteen years is that my standards for establishing what is true have become a lot more stringent.

What I quickly came to realize as I explored the New Age -- and what I had come to realize about paranormal theories in my teen years as well -- is that many New-Age theories are mutually

contradictory. For instance, a lot of channeled teachings tell completely different stories about rather important matters, like how the universe was formed and where the stars and planets came from. They disagree about where the origin and evolution of life on earth, and about human evolution. They give differing versions of history, with different ancient civilizations and different lost continents; each has its unique complement of extraterrestrials, levels of existence, celestial beings, life-after-death scenarios etc.

As I encountered these contradictions during my exploration of the New Age, it became obvious that some kind of objective standard was necessary to figure out who was right. The most reliable objective standard I found was the scientific method. Despite derogatory New-Age epithets like the "big Satan of materialistic science," "Western science," "orthodox science," and "mainstream science," I found that the scientific method is simply the application of critical thinking and the rules of evidence to determine the validity of propositions about the natural world. When I began to apply the scientific method to the ideas that interested me, I found, to my dismay, that in the New Age objective evidence is in short supply.

I don't want to give the impression that I think that I wasted my time in the New Age, however. I had many beneficial and rewarding experiences. In retrospect I realize that these benefits have very little to do with cosmologies describing how the universe really functions -- instead, these beneficial experiences were largely psychological in nature. New-Age practices have their most profound effects in such areas as altered states of consciousness, meditation, physical therapy (yoga, etc.), psychological counseling, and the simple pleasures of sharing experiences with friends.

How do most New Agers deal with the contradictory nature of New-Age teaching? Obviously they haven't felt the need to resort to the scientific method, as I did. Most New Agers attempt to evaluate the truth or falsity of a belief system by appealing to feelings. In the New Age it is frequently said that if a belief "feels right" to you, then it is "true" for you. Thus, there are two ways we use to try to understand: the scientific method (objective) and "feelings" (subjective).

Is one method right and the other method wrong? The answer isn't an easy yes or no. I think, instead, that each method is appropriate within certain realms of human experience. Relying on intuition, faith, and feelings is appropriate for the inner, "subjective" realm of emotions, dreams, myth, metaphor, and symbolism. I think even arch-objectivists would agree that, for example, feelings and intuition -- and not objective standards -- are a good way to determine whether or not a work of art, a novel, or a piece of music is "good" or not. Likewise, a large degree of subjectivity must prevail in one's choice of a system of psychotherapy or a system of psychological or spiritual growth, since by definition

how the system makes you feel determines whether it works or not. The scientific method and the rules of evidence, on the other hand, are appropriate for the other, "objective" realms of physical reality or the natural world. The scientific method is the only way to evaluate explanations of how the natural world functions.

Making this admittedly oversimplified distinction between inner, subjective experience and outer, objective experience has clarified for me how the cathartic psychological benefits of certain New-Age beliefs can be high even though they simultaneously impart a large degree of misinformation about the natural world.

For example, there are many New Agers who feel that they've benefited from past-life therapy, a controversial form of psychotherapy in which the patient relives alleged past incarnations while under hypnosis. Because this therapy has improved their lives, they are convinced that reincarnation is a fact. But the therapeutic effect of past-life therapy does not constitute evidence one way or another for the existence of reincarnation. This requires evidence of an objective kind, and I've never seen any that has convinced me. (Why, for instance, hasn't one of these thousands of past-life memories led us to an old file in some obscure records office that verified the existence of the previous incarnation?)

EFFECTIVE THERAPIES

Likewise channeling, psychic reading, or astrological counseling may be beneficial on a psychological, subjective level. This says nothing about whether disembodied entities, psychic powers, or celestial influences on human affairs are objectively real phenomena. Why, for example, hasn't one of the many thousands of channeled entities ever told us the latitude and longitude of some buried, ancient temple, which we could then objectively verify?

To clarify how New-Age therapies may be effective despite their objective unreality, a useful comparison can be made with "psychodrama," a form of psychotherapy that does not rely on any paranormal theories. In psychodrama, patients participate in imaginary interactions with their mothers or fathers (roles sometimes played by the therapist or fellow patients). As in New-Age-style therapies, the catharsis produced by such sessions may be very real and beneficial. Unlike New-Age-style therapy, however, the participants in psychodrama feel no necessity to afterward insist that their mothers or fathers were actually present, or that interactions were "real" in every respect.

New-Age teachings abound with claims that clearly lie in the realm of empirical testing, including stories of lost continents, communications from 30,000-year-old entities from other dimensions, and strange histories that include unknown civilizations and extraterrestrial beings. Though I have become skeptical about many of these notions, I am highly sympathetic toward them. Whether or not they are actually true, they can be appreciated from the point

of view of mythology and folklore, and as the products of imaginative, eccentric minds motivated by the admirable human urge to defy orthodoxy and think independently.

My position seems to provoke the ire of both ends of the psychic-skeptic spectrum, so maybe I'm doing something right.

WEBSTER CREATIONISM DECISION APPEALED

by Eugenie Scott

"If a teacher in a public school uses religion and teaches religious beliefs or espouses theories clearly based on religious underpinnings, the principles of the separation of church and state are violated as clearly as if a statute ordered the teacher to teach religious theories such as the statutes in Edwards did."

Thus did Federal District Court Judge Harold Dinger rule earlier this year on a suit by Ray Webster. In March, 1988, junior-high teacher Ray Webster sued the New Lenox, Illinois school district and its superintendent for "deprivation of rights by censorship contrary to the 1st and 14th amendments. . . ." The superintendent had told him that he was "not to teach creationist science as the federal courts have held that this is religious advocacy. You may discuss the historical relationship in a purely objective manner without advocacy of a Christian viewpoint and only if such discussion is an appropriate part of the standard curriculum."

ICR attorney Wendell Bird has taken the case as a key strategy to follow upon the Edwards v. Aguillard decision banning the required teaching of scientific creationism. Creationists have interpreted the decision to mean that even if states can't REQUIRE teachers to teach creationism, an INDIVIDUAL teacher could do so on his/her own. Mr. Webster is their first test case.

Judge Dinger dismissed the case, noting that precedent required a teacher to "teach within the framework of curriculum. . . ." and thus, "Webster's rights as a teacher to present certain material within his social studies curriculum is not absolute." The District has no right to enact a curriculum that would "inject religion into the public school setting," and in fact, has the RESPONSIBILITY to monitor what is taught to "ensure that the establishment clause is not violated."

Part of Webster's amended complaint was a petition by a student, Matthew Dunne, for his "right" to be taught creationism. Dinger noted that Dunne was not being denied his right to hear these ideas, just "limited to receiving information as to creation science to those locations and settings where dissemination does not violate the first amendment." In other words, learn all you want about scientific creationism, but do it outside of school.

The conclusion of the decision was particularly strong. Dinger said, "The relevant issue here is what Webster was prohibited from teaching. He was prohibited from teaching creation science. The U.S. Supreme Court has found that creation science is a religiously based theory and that teaching this theory in a public school violates the first amendment. Prohibiting this teaching is thus constitutionally valid." This is the strongest statement on the teaching of creationism since the Arkansas McLean decision, which defined scientific creationism to be without merit scientifically and educationally.

The Webster case is being appealed on procedural grounds. If the decision is upheld, expect Bird to look for a client who is teaching something without the word "creation" in it. Because the Supreme Court has declared that the "theory of creation science" embodies a creator and thus "embodies a religious belief," any form of antievolutionism with creation or a similar word in it will be frowned upon by the courts. Bird has already published a book espousing the "theory of abrupt appearance," and others are promoting the "theory of intelligent design." Webster identified himself as teaching "creationism," a legal no-no. Bird's next case probably will involve a teacher teaching one of the euphemisms.

After all, there is no constitutional provision against teaching bad science, only religion. However, until the Appeals Court rules, Ray Webster et al. v. New Lenox School District cannot be considered a closed case.

[BAS board member Dr. Eugenie Scott is the Exec. Director of NCSE]

MORE REBUTTAL

by Hal Draper

About your "Editor's Corner" (Dec. issue) and your discovery that a creationist opponent of yours was using a definition of science different from yours: a good point, certainly. But it may also be useful to point out that all of us (scientific types included) habitually use the word "science" with something less than scientific exactness, and thereby contribute to public confusion. To take a common case, consider any sentence beginning, "Science says that . . ." as in "Science says that Homo sapiens developed on this planet about X million years ago."

What is it that "says" this? Science. I submit that, quite apart from different definitions of words, all of us who might make this statement may actually be thinking of any one of three different concepts, all of which are correct.

In (1), "science" is viewed as a body of knowledge. You or I might add implicitly: Knowledge gained through scientific investigation. Obviously the "scientific" in "scientific investigation" refers to a different concept of science than merely "a body of knowledge."

In (2), "science" is viewed as a **METHODOLOGY**, a guide to investigation of the universe. It is used to mean scientific method.

In (3), "science" denotes the totality of social institutions and activities established to carry on the other two conceptions of science. In a sense, this is the only sense of science that says anything directly. It is perhaps needless to add that the Stanford physics department and the AAAS (et al.) are social institutions (instituted by society for scientific purposes).

Well, then, I submit that it would be difficult to carry on any argument about science (with anyone) without all three conceptions popping in and out of the conversation like little green men. Besides, under **EACH** of these conceptions of science comes the further matter of differing definitions.

I suggest that in further discussions with creationists, astrologers, and other pseudoscientists, it would be advisable to determine in advance which conception of "science" you're talking about, before working on definitions. In this connection, may I mention a sentence of yours that puzzled me very much? You write that your creationist friend's "definition [of science] allows voodooism and cow-chip tossing as valid scientific areas of study." **YOU** do not allow these as "valid scientific areas of study?"

You must have some other conception in mind. Did you mean something different from "valid areas of scientific study"? I cannot believe that (for example) you disallow astrology as an area of study -- to be studied scientifically, naturally. (As a matter of fact, your lead article in this same issue of "BASIS" does exactly that.) So there must be a misunderstanding behind your words. My guess is that you are using not concept (1) -- which accepts a body of knowledge **ABOUT** voodooism just as happily as any other -- but concept (2) which is concerned with methodology; and you are really saying that voodooism and cow-chip tossing are not valid **METHODS** of scientific investigation.

Well, two people could argue about these things for hours and merely argue past each other, without ever making contact. An exact definition of science is certainly necessary, but it is advisable to concede that there are many correct definitions (lexicographically speaking). If you want to confuse your opponent, tell her that her definition of science is correct -- but unscientific. Then you can argue about it far into the night.

[(Reply: One may study voodooism scientifically, but it is not science. I said my friend allowed "knowledge" as the definition of science. Thus everything is science and there is nothing to debate. Not everything is science. -- Ed.)]

CREATIONISM'S OTHER FACE

by Yves Barbero

"Follow the money!" -- Journalist maxim.

Scientists all over the United States have stepped into the breach and have spoken for evolution as fact and theory. The need for them to step away from their instruments and address this question has become obvious.

While this is time consuming and takes them away from the interesting activities they were trained for and prefer doing, a failure to address the question would pose a threat to the educational system and create misunderstandings of their role and views by the public. The opposition generates, both intentionally and unintentionally, a lot of misinformation.

Quite aside from the heady victories science has experienced in the courts and in public opinion in recent years, the debate has served to heighten awareness of scientific issues in general and the educational system in particular. It has also made scientists better understand their role in the public forum. Volunteer groups which have supported the effort to keep scientific education "scientific" have grown stronger and the members of these groups have benefited in their individual educations. On the whole, they should be grateful to the scientific creationists. Now if they would only go away.

Unfortunately, they won't and the fight is far from over.

Creationist groups will keep coming back again and again, beating after beating, denunciation after denunciation until (they hope) a more amenable government gives them the victory they desire. They can only hope for a political victory. As of this writing, there isn't even a hint from the evidence that science has a need to reverse itself on evolution.

And they can afford to wait. Their support and funds do not come from the usual scientific sources but from supporters predisposed as to the "scientific" conclusions they will reach. (Would a proper research institution accept money on the grounds that only certain conclusions be reached?)

At this point, I depart from the usual presentation of scientific evidence (there are people better equipped for this role) and from the politeness of assuming honest motives on the part of the professionals who support scientific creationism. To be sure, there are some who genuinely BELIEVE. But for the majority, a cynicism has crept into the lecture circuit.

After all, giving lectures for fee or selling books beats working for a living or the anonymity of a colorless job. The temptation of public notoriety can be overwhelming to some. It's difficult for an individual who has invested years of his life to suddenly thrust it aside and admit defeat. If scientists can hold on to notions long

past their useful life (history is full of such examples), and even if we were to assume sincerity on the part of professional creationists, can we expect better from the untrained?

SINCERITY GAMBIT

Sincerity is usually assumed of the rank and file believers in scientific creationism because they donate time and money without reward (except perhaps some sort of fellowship). That's fair enough. Their leaders, however, are better rewarded (and often better educated). If sincerity has been assumed of them, it's been more because scientifically oriented groups acknowledge that they can't read minds and are wary (however tempted) to ascribe motives to others. Trained in the scientific method, they are cognizant of the hazards of assuming anything. On top of that, most have middle-class backgrounds and have the habit, part and parcel with that background, of fair play. Finally, let's not forget the legal hazards of assuming anything but sincerity unless (like here) we speak in general terms.

Let us resolve to be made of sterner stuff and examine the powerful underlying motivations which could prevent a change in lifestyles by the creationist should he become convinced of the error of his ways.

Unlike the atheist who suddenly sees the light, he cannot come sobbing to the nearest scientific conference and give testimony. His potential colleagues will still expect him to come up with original research and produce some legitimate credentials. A former hydraulic engineer will not be accepted into a crowd of zoologists without going back to school. Scientists, however foolish the notion, usually prefer merit to ideological solidarity.

The former creationist (often in middle age) will have to stop selling books (although one bearing his testimony of how he changed his mind might find a modest place) and avoid the lucrative lecture circuit (although he might be invited to lecture on what changed his mind for the fee paid speakers at scientifically-oriented volunteer groups -- a beer after the talk).

Such a creationist would certainly lose prestige as well as followers. He would be denounced by his former flock and possibly see violence from the more fanatical of that flock.

Mailing lists, the backbone of any American enterprise, would be lost. Without the mailing lists, the politicians who once came courting would now send form letters.

Political agendas come in clusters. The guy who's willing to mess around with the First Amendment by disguising a religious idea as a scientific theory usually has (to put it politely) a very eclectic political agenda. Giving up one part is likely to bring down the house of cards.

Historically (meaning without rational cause), creationists have seen themselves as conservatives (to the embarrassment of Barry Goldwater and other real conservatives) and they may feel that giving up one facet of a political ideology will require that they become bleeding-heart whatevers. Because facets of the creationists potpourri of right-wing reactionary political belief are not dealt with on a day-to-day analytical basis, he may actually retain them after giving up beliefs that he can analyze . . . creationism. This becomes a powerful motive to continue preaching an absurdity.

It is human nature to turn on sincerity when arguing a point. Our creationist, from the evidence that he must have come across, may have become convinced that creationism is nonsense while retaining other facets of his cluster of ideology. But in order to do his "job," he must perform a mini-brainwash on himself to be convincing. (The used-car dealer, knowing he's selling lemons, will first convince himself that the cars are wonderful before approaching a mark. He understands that he's really selling himself.) An emotional motive, that of retaining an ideology, combined with financial incentives can make a person spin his wheels for a long time.

In addition, there is the "in-group" phenomenon. When a minority group is suddenly thrust into the limelight, as creationists have been, everything is reduced to two-minute bites to fit into the public media. They must get our attention instantly to be heard. If the group is small, as are the creationist professionals -- they exist outside mainstream religious thought -- they don't have the panorama of peers or the professional publications to keep them in check or force them to think out their ideas as scientists and mainline theologians. They begin to mistake slogans and ad hoc conclusions for reality during those moments when they have to turn on "sincerity."

Let's not forget the personal problems this can also cause. Creationists share, as with most people, a social life oriented around their interests. Even confidence people who know and acknowledge that they operate outside the law have their own internal rules of behavior when dealing with each other.

Creationists would have to give up friends and lovers.

All the court decisions and scientific ridicule, all the legislative acts and removal of certifications will do nothing to stop them and will barely slow them up. What will stop them, in the long run, is the better scientific education of our children. When the checks stop coming from below, they will find other, hopefully honest, work.

C.S. EQUALS LONG LIFE?

Even though Christian Scientists abstain from tobacco and alcohol,

they apparently die younger than the rest of the population, perhaps because they also shun most therapies offered by modern medicine. A new study, reported by William Simpson, at Emporia University in Kansas, found evidence of the higher-than-average death rate in statistics compiled over a twelve-year period.

The founder of the Christian Science faith, Mary Baker Eddy, taught that illness is just a product of the mind, and that all drugs do is tap into human faith and belief. Eddy urged members of the church to avoid most medical therapies and to treat affliction with faith and prayer instead.

CSICOP has conducted investigations into C.S. healing, and "BASIS" has reported on some of the more notable court cases against C.S. parents who have withheld medical attention from their children.

ENLIGHTENMENT SEARCH IS A WASTE by Don Lattin

You know there is something different about U.G. Krishnamurti when you read the disclaimer on page 1 of his book "Mind is a Myth."
"My teaching, if that is the word you want to use, has no copyright. You are free to reproduce, distribute, interpret, misinterpret, distort, garble, do what you like, even claim authorship, without my consent or the permission of anybody."

For 20 years, thousands of disillusioned spiritual seekers have come to see this 72-year-old native of southern India at the homes and apartments of his friends in Switzerland, India and the United States, among which he divides his time. After they discover that their own guru is a fraud, they come to Krishnamurti. He offers no consolation, provides no hope. He has No Answers. Krishnamurti has no church, no ashram, no organization, no publishing house, no spiritual message. He has no desire to have any followers, disciples or devotees.

"They always call me a guru. I don't know why. There is no religious content to what I am saying," he said at a friend's home.
"People come to see me. Except for a few friends, they don't stick around because they don't get anything from me."

Perhaps the easiest thing to say about Krishnamurti is that he is not related to the more famous reluctant sage of India, the late J. Krishnamurti. Both, however, were raised in the inner circles of the theosophy movement in India, and went on to reject occult philosophy. They have similar messages, but U.G.'s is more radical, more controversial, more hopeless.

Categorizing U.G. is not easy. He has been called a guru, as well as the "un-guru." Some see him as a philosopher, while "anti-philosopher" may be more to the point. Words such as cynic, nihilist and iconoclast could also be used to describe this

disarming, charming and alarming little man.

Krishnamurti says there is no such thing as mind, soul, psyche, self, spirituality, individuality, enlightenment or afterlife. Spiritual seekers, he says, are wasting their time meditating, praying and worshiping. All of the world's gurus, priests, preachers, rabbis, philosophers, psychologists and theologians are operating under one gigantic, illusion, he says. They have, in his view, been fooling themselves and the rest of us for centuries.

U. G. Krishnamurti is the Don Rickles of religion. He makes Madeline Murray O'Hair look pious.

"All of this talk of personal change, of spiritual transformation, has no meaning to me because there's nothing to transform. There is no mind. Our thoughts are not self-generated. They are simply responses to stimuli. What we call 'mind' is simply the totality of thoughts, feelings and experiences."

Searching for "peace of mind" or the "meaning of life" is useless because there is neither mind nor meaning.

According to Krishnamurti, all mystical experiences, transcendental states and spiritual experiences are simply neurological glitches in the brain -- biological functions with no more supernatural meaning than other natural functions of the body.

Dr. Paul Lynn, a 47-year-old San Francisco physician and Marin County resident, spent years in a search for spiritual enlightenment before coming to Krishnamurti. Lynn, who first met "U.G." on a trip to India in 1973, went on to become a devotee of Da Free John, an American guru who was born in New York as Franklin Jones. Jones founded a Marin County-based spiritual empire and now lives on his own Fijian island.

After realizing Da Free John "either didn't know what he was doing or was a total fake," Lynn left the fold in '82 and reconnected with Krishnamurti. He hasn't simply switched gurus.

"It's very different," he said. "Da Free John said he was a guru and there is something you can do to get enlightened. I don't expect U.G. to make my life better. I have no expectations of U.G." Julie Thayer, a New York photographer who hosted Krishnamurti during a recent visit to that city, stumbled across U.G.'s first book, "The Mystique of Enlightenment." Like this other book, it consists of transcripts of dialogues with his visitors.

(Krishnamurti says he receives no payment or royalties from either book. One New York rabbi has even taken his disclaimer seriously and published his own version of "Mind Is a Myth.")

"I asked U.G. about surrendering, which was the path of this guru I was following," said Thayer. "He asked, 'What are you surrendering and who are you surrendering to?' It just clicked that

I was on the wrong track. Since then, there's been no more seeking."

Krishnamurti acknowledges that many of those who come to see him mistakenly believe he has The Answer, and want to make him their new guru. "Everybody is selling enlightenment in the marketplace. It has become a shoddy piece of spiritual goodies," he said. "There is a market for it. Once you feel all your needs are taken care of, naturally the question arises, `is that all there is?'"

THE BEGINNING OF RELIGION

What we call "religion," Krishnamurti said, began somewhere along the evolutionary process when humans -- unlike the rest of the animals -- began feeling self-conscious and separate from nature. "That is what is responsible for this feeling of fear -- of feeling lost and all alone," he said.

"There is no room for the religious man in the natural scheme of things," he said. "The saints and saviors have only succeeded in setting you adrift in life with pain and misery and the restless feeling that there must be something more meaningful to do. . . ."

In the gospel according to Krishnamurti, all political ideologies, wars, economic systems, value systems, senseless violence and ideas about morality flow from this ultimately false assumption that there is mind, spirit or meaning.

So what are we to do with our lives? "Don't ask me," Krishnamurti replies. Humanity, he says, long ago started down the path of total annihilation and absolutely nothing can be done to save it.

(Don Lattin is the "San Francisco Chronicle" Religion Writer. His article appeared in the December 18, 1989 "Chronicle".)

[Comment: If one gives up New-Age weirdness, an endowment from our primitive ancestors, one loses nothing of value. That is, if one has an appreciation for the laws of nature -- physics, chemistry, biology, etc. -- one actually lives a happier life. -- John Taube]

THE PSYCHICS AND SKEPTICS CON by Moleen Matsumura

The recent "Psychics and Skeptics" segment of CBS' "48 Hours" was a bad joke on any viewer who hoped to see any skeptical viewpoint presented. The program trotted out the standard psychic menagerie, including a woman who did tarot readings over the air, psychic detectives, faith-healers, and a channeler for an extraterrestrial entity whose accent wouldn't get her a bit part in "Bride of Frankenstein."

By contrast, the program showed only one clip of CSICOP skeptic Dr.

Ray Hyman, which lasted less than two minutes. Dr. Hyman was not interviewed about his field of expertise, but confronted with the channeler and asked whether he thought she was genuine. All the psychics, and often their clients, were given a chance to explain their beliefs in detail, but the reporter did not ask Hyman to explain his doubts -- he was only asked to rate on a scale of 1 to ten how credible she was (he said "minus three") -- about the channeler, much less his skeptical philosophy.

This kind of gee-whiz programing doesn't deserve to be called journalism, and CBS needs to be told that viewers want to see genuinely critical reporting. If ONE determined housewife could influence Coca Cola to drop an extremely popular series, we should be able to squeeze a bit of decent journalism out of Dan Rather. What were some of the worst moments on the show? Was it the woman who wanted licensing of psychics? the family that visualizes the ideal vacation spot? the "detective" exploiting the desperate family of a missing child?

The low point in the program was the reporter's statement that a cancer patient's hair had grown in after she was given the "healing touch." Of course it had! ANY cancer patient's hair grows back once chemotherapy is stopped. "48 Hours" should have just run an ad for snake oil.

Please write to "48 Hours" to express your opinions of the programming. Mail to "48 Hours," 524 W. 57th St., New York, NY 10010.

[Editor's note: There is a behind-the-scenes story here. "48-Hours" had contacted BAS founder Bob Steiner to be a major part of the program. Most of our readers know that Bob is a professional magician and that he does a cold reading better than any psychic you'll meet. The 48-Hours team wanted Bob to do a cold reading for them, but the reporter on whom he was to do the reading knew that it would not be done by a psychic. Bob tried to explain that that would not work -- the most important part of the reading is the belief of the subject. They would not understand. Bob spent the better part of two days with the crew taping and explaining what was happening with the psychics they contacted around the Bay Area.

The producers chose not to use a single inch of the tape, presumably because the parts with Steiner did not put psi in the light they wanted to cast it. We believe those producers should know what we think about the program and what they chose to omit. Write them.]

WHO IS A BAY AREA SKEPTIC?

by Bob Steiner

Someone recently posed an interesting question to me about membership in BAS.

First some background. Loyd Auerbach is a parapsychological consultant. He is author of "ESP, HAUNTINGS AND POLTERGEISTS: A Parapsychologist's Handbook". He teaches Parapsychology at JFK University. He is President of the California Society of Psychical Study. He has given presentations to BAS, attends BAS meetings and subscribes to "BASIS". He is, in short, an activist in our organization.

Monroe Pastermack, Price Burlingame, and I are activists in Bay Area Skeptics. We attend and participate in meetings. If you were to speak to each of us you would most assuredly conclude that all three of us are skeptics. We all subscribe to "BASIS".

For ease of addressing this question, assume that the above-named persons were the only ones in the room who have activated to any extent in Bay Area Skeptics. BAS is not a membership organization. Activation in our wonderful group is easy: you simply activate.

Enough background.

On December 13, 1989, I attended the Annual Banquet of The Society of American Magicians Assembly No. 112, in Concord. A visitor from out of state was talking with Monroe and me. The visitor, wondering about the extent of overlap of magicians and skeptics, inquired, "How many Bay Area Skeptics are in this room?"

How would you answer that question?

PELL TO WIN

Claiborne Pell will win reelection to the senate. How do we know? RAY WESTERGARD sent us a clipping from the "Oakland Tribune" (2-20-90) revealing that Uri Geller "will beam [his] energy for [Pell] to win the election."

Senator Pell's well-publicized personal interest in the paranormal has prompted him to introduce Capitol Hill measures to promote government sponsorship of psi research. Pell (dem., Rhode Island) has a truly rare opportunity to lend credibility to parapsychology.

He could stop all active campaigning and let Uri quietly do the job for him. The millions saved could then be philanthropically spent on psi research instead of spending taxpayer funds -- provided Uri would live up to the oft-cited maxim that psychics cannot receive money for their prognostications without tainting their powers. (Never mind that he is a multi-millionaire from his psychic activities.) As in all psychic demonstrations it would be a win-win circumstance: If Pell loses, Uri was preoccupied, or some other excuse. If he wins, psi is confirmed.

Think of the future of political contests if it came down to the Battle of the Beams as two opposing psychics would concentrate

their energies at us. (There would be an added benefit for those of us who would rather be subjected to psychic energy than to listening to the huckstering hooey of the candidates.) The psychic energies could become so powerful as to actually cause our hands to jump back and forth in the polling booth. It might be difficult to even hold the voting stylus.

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SCIENCE EDUCATION OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

Sue Douglas

With fifteen years of classroom teaching experience in Colorado, Kansas, and California, and 12 years in museums, much of that at the helm as Chair of Education at the California Academy of Sciences, there is little Sue Douglas doesn't know about getting young people interested in Science.

Have you ever wondered how you got a child interested in science so he or she could become a professional scientist? Or at least an educated voter? The structured environment of schools is much to be admired, but much of the motivation must come from parents, relatives, and interested neighbors making use of public facilities such as museums and libraries.

Douglas has worked with parents, trained teachers, and guided hundreds of children through the fascinating world of natural science at the Academy. A graduate of Wichita State University, she has demonstrated a dedication rarely matched by other professionals.

Bring your questions.

BAS CALENDAR

Science Outside the Class
by: Sue Douglas

WHEN: Monday, May 21, 7:30 pm
WHERE: South San Francisco Library

The South San Francisco Public Library is at 840 West Orange Avenue in South San Francisco. From 101, take Grand Ave. exit west, left onto Chestnut Ave., right on El Camino Real, left on Westborough Blvd., and left on Orange. From 280, take Westborough east to Orange and turn right. The SSF Public Library is a half block in and parking is plentiful.

Watch for coming events in the BAS CALENDAR, or call 415-LA-TRUTH for up-to-the-minute details on events. If you have ideas about topics or speakers, leave a message on the hotline.

WARNING: We **STRONGLY URGE** that you call the hotline shortly before attending any Calendar activity to see if there have been any changes.

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

The above are selected articles from the May, 1990 issue of "BASIS", the monthly publication of Bay Area Skeptics. You can obtain a free sample copy by sending your name and address to BAY AREA SKEPTICS, 4030 Moraga, San Francisco, CA 94122-3928 or by leaving a message on "The Skeptic's Board" BBS (415-648-8944) or on the 415-LA-TRUTH (voice) hotline.

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