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Georgia Skeptics is a non-profit local group which shares a common philosophy with the national organization CSICOP (Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal), and seeks to promote critical thinking and scientific inquiry as the most reliable means to gather knowledge of the world and universe. Like CSICOP, Georgia Skeptics encourages the investigation of paranormal and fringe-science claims from a responsible, scientific point of view, and helps disseminate the results of such inquiries.

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For further information, contact the Georgia Skeptics through the Astronomical Society of the Atlantic BBS at (404) 321-5904, or:

Becky Long, President
2277 Winding Woods Dr.
Tucker, Georgia 30084
(404) 493-6847

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PSYCHIC PREDICTIONS FOUND LOAFING FOR 1992

By Anson Kennedy, Georgia Skeptics

Early every year, tabloids and other media publish psychic predictions for the coming months. Every year, psychics foretell a wide variety of events, from the mundane to the cataclysmic. Psychic predictions come in many varieties. Some are placed far enough into the future that they are forgotten by the time the predictions are due. Others are so vague and generic that no assessment of their success is possible. Still

others, while specific, are not surprising (e.g. predicting an aging politician will retire). To properly judge the success of an individual prediction, it must meet three criteria: It must be specific, unusual, and verifiable. Few individuals or groups keep track of those predictions, so every year the psychics may make claims of fantastic predictive powers with little concern for accountability. For 1992, the Georgia Skeptics monitored the predictive success of a local psychic who received prominent press in early January.

The cover story of the January 4, 1992, edition of Atlanta's free weekly, *Creative Loafing*, was "In the Stars for '92," subtitled "Bush Rises, Braves Sink, Lomax Leaves, and Zell Goes Hollywood." *Creative Loafing*'s psychic, Marilyn (no last name given), gave predictions ranging from the November presidential race to the traffic problems of a local television personality. Her predictions fell into all of the categories above, from the vague to the specific and from the mundane to the unusual.

Marilyn's prediction for the presidential election: "The candidates in the 1992 presidential race will be Bush and Dan Quayle vs. Bill Clinton and Tom Harkin. Bush will win, but Democrats will control both the Senate and the House." The Bush/Quayle ticket was hardly ever in doubt, so that portion of the prediction was hardly extraordinary. Clinton was the front runner at the time of the prediction, so his selection as the Democratic candidate was also not extraordinary. The portion of the ticket which was "unknown" at the time was the Democratic vice-presidential candidate. On this prediction, Marilyn made a clean miss. On the outcome of the election, Marilyn made another clean miss by predicting Bush as the winner. Her prediction of Democratic control of both houses could hardly be extraordinary since they have controlled the Senate and the House for most of the last four decades.

More important than what she predicted for the presidential race is what she failed to predict. Marilyn completely missed the extraordinary rise to prominence of the third party candidate, Ross Perot. In fact, her prediction seems to specifically exclude any but the traditional Republican and Democratic parties from the running. So in the case of the presidential election, Marilyn's predictions fall far short of the mark for success. But she's in good company. Just a couple of weeks before the election, psychic Jeanne Dixon predicted that Bush would win in a landslide.

Marilyn had this to say for Mayor Maynard Jackson: "Jackson will face a challenging year... The most urgent events will happen around Memorial Day, when there will be a gathering of protesters which will spark volatile emotions - quick action coordinated between the mayor's office and various security agencies will fight for order and finish off a riot before it gets started. Again, watch periods around July 3-6, Aug. 28 and Sept. 10 for demonstrations which cause both confrontation and deep community involvement." Well, since the Rodney King trial was scheduled to end in April or May and it had been getting significant media coverage, predicting protests at "around" that time would take very little psychic ability. However, the riots surrounding the King verdict occurred on April 29, requiring a very generous interpretation of

Marilyn's "around Memorial Day." Even then, though, Marilyn predicted that riots would be avoided, another clear miss. What's more, Marilyn again failed to predict one of the most critical, for the mayor, events: Maynard Jackson's heart bypass surgery.

For Jane Fonda and Ted Turner: "This marriage will be electric, to say the least! ... Miss Fonda will be offered a tempting Broadway role late in 1992 which will definitely establish her presence in that medium for the rest of her lifetime. Ted Turner will undergo tremendous pressures in keeping his empire steady; 1996 will see him making the decision whether he should relinquish one part of his realm to others." Most of the predictions for the duo were either very general ("..undergo tremendous pressures...") or placed years into the future. The one prediction for 1992, that Jane Fonda will be offered a Broadway role, could not be confirmed.

For Governor Zell Miller: "Sometime this summer, we will read in the paper that Gov. Zell Miller will play himself in a movie being shot in and around Atlanta." A quick call to the Governor's office settled this prediction. Governor Miller has no plans to play himself in a movie. Perhaps she based her prediction on the governor's cameo appearance as a "prominent Georgia politician" in the movie Grass Roots. Marilyn did not predict the filming of some scenes for the television series I'll Fly Away in the Governor's office (which he did not appear in). Another miss for Marilyn.

For local and state politics, Marilyn made very many predictions. Unfortunately, the ones she got right were not extraordinary. For example, she predicted that both Bush and Clinton would win their respective state presidential primaries. She also predicted that DeKalb County Commission Chairman Manuel Maloof would retire. Given that his retirement has been much talked about over the years, this prediction is not extraordinary.

More spectacular, though, were Marilyn's political misses: "Ben Jones will return to the House ... He is to become one of the most beloved figures to represent this state in Congress." And "Sen. Wyche Fowler will ... land back in the Senate." And "Michael Lomax will gracefully step down from his commission position..."

Marilyn failed to predict the historic first-ever Senatorial run-off election which resulted in the upset victory of Republican Paul Coverdell. Marilyn failed to predict the redistricting which resulted in Rep. Newt Gingrich's winning, not the Fifth District as she foresaw, but the Sixth District for another term in office. In short, Marilyn's political predictions again fell far short of the mark for success. Moving to sports, Marilyn predicted that the Braves would "come in third, only to come back in 1993 as World Series champs." Since the Braves won the National League pennant and went on to the World Series, the worst that could be said of them is that they finished second. Marilyn strikes out.

On the Falcons: They "will win their division in 1992." Unfortunately for football fans, the other teams were unaware of Marilyn's prediction.

The Falcons did not even finish in second place this year. Marilyn fumbles.

Most of Marilyn's other sports predictions were not for 1992, but for 1993 and so are still safely in the future. For example, she predicted that Georgia Tech and UGA will meet in the Final Four in 1993 (and that UGA will win in double overtime - this Tech alumnus finds this prediction quite extraordinary). She also predicted that 1993 will be when the Hawks get their "best shot at an NBA crown." This latter prediction is sufficiently vague that almost anything which happens to the Hawks might be considered a hit.

On Atlanta's economy: It "will show signs of definite life by the end of March ... The communications industry in all its phases [including the film industry]... all converge here. Television opens its eye even wider." Atlanta has long been working on attracting Hollywood productions; vague predictions of their increase cannot be considered hits. The closest that Marilyn came might be the unveiling of Ted Turner's Cartoon Network, but she certainly never mentioned it in her predictions for Mr. Turner. In any case, Marilyn's economic predictions for the year were far too vague.

Marilyn also made several vague predictions about the homeless in Atlanta: they "will gain support" and "the response from the business sector will be favorable." Certainly, the plight of the homeless has received much press this year and charitable organizations have helped them, so Marilyn's prediction that they would gain support could be accurate. Unfortunately, as most of her successful predictions, it was far too vague to be of any use. In fact, the prediction's relative success could probably be attributed to its generality.

In another prediction still lodged safely in the future, Marilyn foresaw an AIDS vaccine by 1995. Time will tell.

Moving to the world front, Marilyn had some things to say about the former Soviet Union: "... there will be a period of unrest ... Look for all the negative things we have seen in the transition so far: hunger, poverty, uncertainty, lawlessness, etc. But the Russian people will not give up." Suitably general predictions of turbulence surrounding the fall continuing, but hardly extraordinary.

Marilyn did have one fairly specific prediction for the Commonwealth of Independent States: The czar will return "within three years." We only have two more years to wait.

Marilyn then concluded her 1992 predictions with a scatter-shot of predictions for local personalities. No, Marilyn, Rhubarb Jones was not in the same movie that Governor Zell Miller appeared in. No, Marilyn, Glen Burns did not go to London on vacation. No, Marilyn, Ken Cook did not suffer a fall while working around his home, "more annoying than dangerous, but [leaving] him quite sore." No, Marilyn, Ken McCleod did not interrupt and foil a robbery attempt in progress.

In all, Marilyn made 113 predictions for Creative Loafing. 24 (21.2%)

of those were placed in 1993 or later, and so are not considered here. Of the remaining 89, 59 (52.2% of the total) were too vague to properly consider. The 30 specific predictions were a mix of 16 mundane and 14 unusual ones. Of the 16 specific but mundane predictions, Marilyn had six hits, or 37.5% of the 16 predictions. This is less than we would expect from chance. We will now consider the 14 specific, but unusual, predictions. Only 12.4% of Marilyn's 113 predictions were sufficiently specific, timely and unusual enough to be considered. Of those, Marilyn had no hits. We do acknowledge that the decision of whether a prediction was unusual or mundane was, at times, subjective. However, even lumping the mundane and unusual specific predictions together gives only six hits out of 30, or 20%. This is less than expected from chance.

Is Marilyn psychic? We cannot say whether she is or isn't. However, based on her success rate of 0% for the specific and unusual predictions, we can say there was little evidence of psychic ability in her predictions for 1992.

But Marilyn isn't alone. No psychic predicted any of the major events of 1992. No psychic accurately predicted the events surrounding the presidential election, from Ross Perot's unorthodox campaign to Clinton's victory. No psychic predicted the devastation hurricane Andrew wreaked in south Florida last August. No psychic predicted the L.A. riots, let alone the riots in Atlanta and elsewhere, in the wake of the Rodney King verdict. No psychic predicted the military action in Somalia to protect aid shipments to the starving population. No psychic predicted the civil war continuing to rage in Yugoslavia, nor the ensuing human rights violations. No psychic predicted the U.S. Supreme Court would uphold Roe v. Wade this year. No psychic predicted the last of the Western hostages held in Lebanon, two German men, would be released this year. But each of these events were among the top ten news stories of 1992, according to an Associated Press poll of newspaper editors and broadcast news directors in the United States.

Anson Kennedy is Secretary of the Georgia Skeptics, and Chairman of the UFO Subcommittee. He is an electrical engineer.

REPORT ON THE 1992 CSICOP CONFERENCE

By Jim Lippard, Phoenix Skeptics

"Fairness, Fraud, and Feminism: Culture Confronts Science" was the name of this year's annual conference of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, publisher of the Skeptical Inquirer. The conference was hosted by the North Texas Skeptics at the Harvey Hotel near the Dallas-Fort Worth Airport on the weekend of October 16-18. The conference featured five panel sessions on multicultural approaches to science, gender

issues in science and pseudoscience, fraud in science, crashed saucers, and the paranormal in China.

The conference began on Friday morning with opening remarks by CSICOP chairman Paul Kurtz, who spoke briefly about various meanings of the term "skepticism." He distinguished the "total negative skepticism and unbelief" of Pyrrho and Sextus Empiricus from the "mitigated skepticism" of David Hume and "the new skepticism" which emphasizes inquiry rather than doubt. (Not coincidentally, Kurtz's new book from Prometheus is titled *The New Skepticism*.) He commented on the fact that this conference, like the Berkeley conference last year and other CSICOP conferences before that, is addressing issues which are not directly connected with pseudoscience and the paranormal. The CSICOP Executive Council has debated "how far afield" it is appropriate for the conferences to go.

Multicultural Approaches to Science

The first panel of the day, "Multicultural Approaches to Science: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly," was moderated by Eugenie Scott of the National Center for Science Education, who began the session by stating that "I believe in objective reality. I believe that you exist even if I never saw you. ... I believe the nominalist/realist debate is irrelevant outside freshman philosophy."¹ She began with these statements because there are those who disagree, who maintain that consequences of ideas are more important than their content and that any idea is as valid as any other. She gave some examples from some materials criticizing textbooks for lack of an appropriate multicultural stance which have influenced textbook decisions in Berkeley, California. These materials consist of an excerpt from a textbook, followed by a comment, a format which Scott compared to the textbook critiques of fundamentalists Mel and Norma Gabler of Texas. Scott gave two examples from this material. The first criticized a textbook for claiming that the first people in the Americas arrived over a land bridge, characterizing this claim as "unsubstantiated theories of white anthropologists" and pointing out that "Natives believe they have always been here." The second example questioned a textbook's claim that horses were brought to the Americas by the Spanish, arguing that horses may have always been in America or have been brought over by Persians in the 12th century.

The first speaker, Diana Marinez, professor of biochemistry at Michigan State University and member of the National Academy of Science's Committee on Standards, commented on "the good." Marinez maintained that multicultural education is important even in science classes because science and what scientists do is influenced by culture. Science is normally taught as something isolated from reality, in such a way that students come away knowing only collections of facts. By learning science from a familiar cultural base, students can recognize the importance of science in their lives, become scientifically literate, and become motivated towards science as a career. Marinez gave statistics

showing the paucity of minorities in scientific fields and argued that this is a problem which multicultural approaches to science education can correct. She then gave some examples of how this might be done using Mayan math and astronomy, American Indian food plants and nutrition, and Diego Rivera murals.

The second speaker, Joseph Dunbar, a professor of endocrinology at Wayne State University, addressed "the bad." His talk, titled "Myths of Melanin," described the claims of the so-called "melanin scholars" that dark-skinned humans have special abilities in virtue of magical properties of the melanin in their skin. Dunbar described different kinds of melanin in skin pigment (eumelanin and pheomelanin) and how they differ from melatonin (secreted by the pineal gland) and neuromelanin. The "melanin scholars" do not distinguish these things, and use studies relating to the latter two substances to support their claims that melanin improves reaction time, allows communication with plants, protects DNA, converts sunlight into knowledge, and numerous other outrageous claims.²

Bernard Ortiz de Montellano, an anthropologist at Wayne State University (with a Ph.D. in organic chemistry), spoke on "the ugly." (Eugenie Scott introduced him with the comment that "bringing critical thinking to multiculturalism is `the task of de Montellano," with due apologies to Edgar Allan Poe.) Ortiz de Montellano, who has written two articles on multicultural pseudoscience for the *Skeptical Inquirer* and one for *Creation/Evolution*, discussed the *African-American Baseline Essays* (also known as the *Portland Baseline Essays*).³ This was published in 1987 by the Portland, Oregon school district and has been distributed to schools around the country as a resource for setting up a multicultural curriculum. Detroit, Boston, Atlanta, Indianapolis, and other school districts have had seminars on this material, but it is unknown how many are actually using the material in the classroom. This material claims that Egypt is the source of all civilization, that religion and paranormal abilities are important aspects of scientific methodology, that Egyptians flew for travel and recreation, and many other ridiculous claims.

The material on science claims that the ancient Egyptians used "Maat," religion as a scientific paradigm, according to which (1) there is a supreme consciousness or creator; (2) the universe came into existence via divine self-organization; (3) the universe is alive, all parts of it are related and are living; (4) man and life itself is a mystery; (5) there are material and transmaterial causes and effects. Ortiz de Montellano looked at some of the specific claims made in the science essay of the *Baseline Essays*, showing that the purported evidence for each was weak to nonexistent (or, in some cases, actually evidence to the contrary, as was the case with the alleged Egyptian "glider" model, whose dimensions were such that it could not possibly be flown).

Unofficial Session on Faith Healing

During lunch time, the North Texas Skeptics arranged for Christian critic of televangelists Ole Anthony to speak at the Excell Inn next door to the Harvey Hotel. Anthony was one of the prime movers behind PrimeTime Live's expos of Robert Tilton, Larry Lea, and W.V. Grant. Anthony recounted the various legal tactics Tilton has been using against him and stated that his group will be filing a lawsuit against the television stations that air Tilton's program around the country. Tilton has sued Anthony for conspiracy to deprive him of his Constitutional rights under the First Amendment. At least one of Tilton's claims was dropped, regarding remarks Anthony made about his faith healing abilities, when the court ruled that, as part of the discovery process, Anthony was entitled to obtain the names and addresses of people Tilton claims to have healed.

Anthony stated that he wants to get FCC rules changed to say that claims made by a living person on a television or radio broadcast must be verifiable. When asked how that fits with the First Amendment, Anthony became angry at the questioner and stated that fraud is not protected by the Constitution. (Anthony did not bother to explain how the FCC would determine what is and what is not verifiable, nor how this would affect broadcast of such things as fiction, opinion, discussions of art, or religious broadcasts of any kind. The proposal seemed to me to be quite ill thought out.)

A fact sheet on Anthony's organization, the Trinity Foundation, Inc. (P.O. Box 33, Dallas, TX 75221, (214) 827-2625) states that the group was founded in 1972 and "sponsors several non-denominational home church groups with the goal of recapturing the First-Century Christian experience." The same fact sheet says that the group assisted in the production of a Canadian television documentary titled "Adolph Hitler, The New Age Messiah," which "shows how New Age philosophy inevitably leads to fascism." This and the FCC proposal lead me to question the reliability and objectivity of this organization, but it has apparently been effective in getting media scrutiny on a few televangelists.

Gender Issues

The afternoon session was on "Gender Issues in Science and Pseudoscience" and was moderated by York University psychologist and CSICOP Executive Council member James Alcock. Before the session began, Lee Nisbet, the conference chairman, gave what were supposed to have been his introductory remarks before the first session. They turned out to be as appropriate for this session as for the earlier one. He spoke briefly on "The Consequences of Inquiry"--how the process of discovery can destroy old ideas, giving Darwin as an example. He stated that our prior likes and dislikes should not determine what we think is true.

Alcock began by briefly describing the role of women in spiritualism (e.g., the Fox sisters, Eusapia Palladino, and the girls involved in the Cottingley fairies hoax). He asked why

women were so prominent in spiritualism, why they are more likely to follow horoscopes, why they are less represented at CSICOP conferences than men.

The first panelist, social psychologist and CSICOP Fellow Carol Tavris, the author of *The Mismeasure of Woman*, began with a word of annoyance about the title of the conference. "There are loony feminists, but they are not the whole of feminism," she said. She went on to discuss the role of gender biases in science. "Notice how easy it is to see the bias in 'feminist science,' but not in the name of normal science?" she asked, suggesting that "chauvinist science" might be appropriate for science with a masculine bias. She discussed how research on sexual selection has assumed active males and passive females, and how women entering the field have made new discoveries by neglecting that assumption. Many bird species, for example, have now been found to have promiscuous females. When the male leader of a harem of birds was vasectomized, all of the females still conceived.

Tavris next discussed studies of sex differences in humans. She described two sources of bias in current opposition theories of bias: (1) normal (chauvinist) bias, or the "women as problem" view; and (2) feminist bias, or the "women as solution" view. The first view asks questions of the form "Why aren't women as _____ as men?", filling in the blank with such words as "moral," "rational," "intelligent," "aggressive," etc. The second view says that women are different from men--they're better. To illustrate the point, she described a series of hypothetical study results from the point of view of each. With a normal bias, studies might conclude that women have lower self-esteem, are more gullible, less self-confident, or have trouble developing autonomy. With a feminist bias, the same studies with the same results might conclude that men are more conceited, too inflexible about their beliefs, overvalue their work, and so forth.

Tavris gave as a specific example of these interpretive biases an experiment with babies who could pull a cord to reveal a mask. After the mask was removed, boys would continue pulling the cord longer than girls would, which a male researcher concluded showed that they show more courage, fortitude, etc. than girls. A female researcher replied, "no, girls learn faster."

Tavris also pointed out that there is a psychiatric disorder in diagnostic manuals called self-defeating personality disorder which is based on "chauvinist bias." When some female psychologists suggested adding the male converse counterpart, "delusional domineering personality disorder," they were told that "there is no rich psychiatric tradition for such a disorder."

Tavris did maintain that there is one clear difference between males and females: that men are more violent. She did, however, qualify this by stating that women have been just as active in wartime as men, "to the extent culture permits," and

that they are just as likely as men to regard enemies as beasts.

She also discussed one area where women are treated as the normal sex and men treated as deficient--studies of love. For women, according to Tavis, love is the "feeling of squishiness" when the object of love is present, while for men love is behavior, doing things for the loved one. Studies of intimacy assume that what is important is the ability to talk about feelings, while ignoring behavior.

Tavis rejected studies of biological differences between the sexes, pointing out that an article in *Science* arguing for sex differences in the brain cited a paper on rat brains for evidence of differently sized corpus callosi in men and women. The *Science* paper meanwhile cited another study of 500 fetal brains for another purpose, overlooking the fact that that study found no sex differences. Tavis stated that not only did *Science* refuse to publish letters pointing this out, it has refused to publish any papers which argue that there are no sex differences in the brain. Many studies, she said, are not finding the results reported in headlines in periodicals such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *Elle*.

Finally, Tavis pointed out that when you look at actual behavior, gender is not a fixed category. People act in different ways in different contexts, and we do not need to attribute differences to static properties of persons. For example, people in the subordinate role in a relationship exhibit "female intuition," no matter what their sex.

CSICOP Executive Council member Susan Blackmore began her talk by asking the question, "Why are so few of us here women?" She examined and rejected a few possible explanations: (1) It's general to all of science. No, the situation is worse in CSICOP than in science in general. (2) Women are more likely to believe in the paranormal. Blackmore put up a slide with various quotes to this effect, including one from Zusne and Jones' *Anomalistic Psychology* (1982, Lawrence Erlbaum, p. 189): believers are characterized as "female, unintelligent, misinformed, poorly educated, authoritarian, and emotionally unstable."⁴ She then reviewed the literature on paranormal experiences and belief, including some of her own studies. Only two studies found significant sex differences in paranormal experiences and only one study of sex differences in belief attempted to control for other factors. The latter study found no sex differences; the primary correlates of belief in the paranormal were "paranormal" experiences, belief in life after death, and practicing dream interpretation. So Blackmore rejected this explanation. (3) The kind of science that CSICOP is involved in is not attractive to women. This seemed to be Blackmore's favored explanation.

She next put up a slide contrasting features of "masculine" science with those of "feminine" science, according to feminist philosopher of science Sandra Harding.⁵ The contrasting terms

were conquest/discovery, objective knowledge/subjective knowledge, control/participation, prediction/understanding, dichotomous/continuous, right-wrong/deeper understanding, fight and win/progress together. Blackmore did not come out and endorse this picture, but instead pointed out that it is itself a (false?) dichotomy.

She then shifted gears and described how, in 1982 at the 100th anniversary conference of the Society for Psychical Research, she criticized parapsychology for accomplishing nothing in a century. Parapsychology, she argued, makes no progress, does not build on past findings, has findings which disappear with better methods, does no prospective design of experiments, and has no repeatable experiments. She proposed doing psychical research without the psi hypothesis. Since asking the question "Does psi exist?" has not been successful, parapsychologists should try taking the experiences seriously and trying to understand them. Psi is only one possible explanation.⁶

Blackmore discussed the Ray Hyman/Charles Honorton "debate" over the Ganzfeld database of parapsychology experiments, Helmut Schmidt's psychokinesis studies, meta-analysis of random number generator experiments, and other recent studies in parapsychology which have had positive results, with the emphasis on Honorton's Ganzfeld experiments. In response to Hyman's criticisms, Honorton developed an automated Ganzfeld experiment which he repeated numerous times, reporting his results in "Psi Communication in the Ganzfeld," *Journal of Parapsychology* vol. 54, no. 2, June 1990, pp. 99-139. Blackmore asked, "What has been the response from CSICOP? Where is the panel on meta-analysis? ... It's not here."

She described how the Italian skeptics asked three of the best known skeptics and three of the best known parapsychologists to write about the future of parapsychology, with commentaries on all six contributions by Honorton and Blackmore. The result? The skeptics repeated the same old arguments from the past. None mentioned Honorton's 1990 paper. Two mentioned meta-analysis, only to dismiss it briefly (one rudely, according to Blackmore). In other words, the skeptics are now exhibiting the failings which she criticized the parapsychologists for in 1982.

The problem, according to Blackmore, is that the dichotomy--psi or not--puts enormous pressure on both sides not to change their views. The solution, according to Blackmore, is to get rid of our antipathy towards negative evidence, to stop setting ourselves up as "on one side" or another.

The third panelist, Steven Goldberg, chair of the sociology department at the City College of New York, began by disagreeing sharply with Tavris. Goldberg stated that most of what she talked about was not about science *_per se_*, but about politics or social life. Bias, according to Goldberg, is only relevant when it leads to error.

Almost without exception, scientific results in studies of sex differences are statistical. "Men are taller" doesn't mean "all men are taller than all women." Heights of men and women are overlapping bell curves with close means, but to conclude that the difference is therefore not important is wrong. A small mean difference can be a big difference at the extremes. Almost everyone over 6'8" is male.

Goldberg noted (in response to Tavis) that the studies which don't find sex differences do not cancel out the studies that do. The experimenter might be using a different method and be looking at the wrong thing.

Goldberg described how he came to be involved in these issues. In 1971 he was writing a paper in which he stated that all sex differences are environmental, which he took to be common knowledge. He decided, however, to get a citation from the anthropological literature to support it, but was unable to find anything which held up under scrutiny. He found, on the contrary, that in every society males are stereotypically aggressive and females are stereotypically nurturing. You never hear a stereotype that's totally false, said Goldberg. You never hear anyone say that "those damn Jews are dominating the National Football League."

Hierarchies are dominated by males, everywhere in all societies at all times. Whatever is viewed in a society as having the highest status is more closely associated with males, whatever it happens to be. Men seek it out.

Social attitudes can sometimes be the crucial determinants of behavior, according to Goldberg, such as in the prevalence of premarital sex (maybe, he said). But for tendency to dominance, social attitudes are not the crucial determinant, he claimed. He appealed to hormonal sex differences that can be hormonally reversed as evidence of biological differences between the sexes.

Feminists who have argued against him on this point, said Goldberg, typically refute a straw man (brain hemisphere studies) while ignoring the hormone studies.

Goldberg went on to claim that socialization cannot explain the tendency of male dominance, because it begs the question--why are males socialized to be dominant, and not females? On the contrary, he argued, societies attempt to fit with the characteristics they observe in the sexes, and so, for instance, men tend to do the heavy lifting.

Goldberg concluded his talk by pointing out that he was not arguing that males should dominate, but only that they do. You can't derive what should be the case from what is the case. How things work is a scientific question, while how they should work is not.

Keynote Address: "Viruses of the Mind"

On Friday evening, after a fundraising dinner for the Center for Inquiry titled "The Price of Reason," Oxford zoologist Richard Dawkins spoke on the subject of memes. Children are programmed by evolution to absorb culture and language, but a side effect of this absorbency is a tendency to gullibility--making children "easy prey to Moonies, Scientologists, and nuns." All of our genes are parasites of each other, said Dawkins, and the only differences between viral DNA and ordinary DNA is the way it's passed on.

He compared DNA and computer viruses. Both are "copy me" programs which, in order to be most effective, are not too virulent and don't wipe out everything immediately. Genes lethal to young organisms don't reproduce.

Are there any other "humming paradises of code replication?" Dawkins asked. "Minds," he answered. Information is exchanged between minds through language, body movement, etc. In human beings there is a readiness to replicate ideas and a readiness to obey what has been replicated. As examples, he pointed to the fact that most people are religious and follow the religions of their parents, to crazes that sweep through schools with similar pattern to measles epidemics, and to the worldwide epidemic of wearing baseball caps reversed.

"What would it feel like from the inside if one's mind were inflicted with a mental parasite, a mind virus?" Dawkins asked next. An effective mental virus in the "neosphere," Dawkins asserted, would be good at coexisting with other viruses and disguising the fact that it had been picked up. A medical textbook diagnosis of such an infection might read that: (1) The patient is impelled by deep inner conviction that something is true, compelling, and convincing, without any evidence. (2) The patient makes virtue of beliefs not having evidence, and may even think that the less evidence, the more virtuous the belief. "Lack of evidence is a virtue" is itself a self-supporting mental virus. (3) The patient thinks that mystery is a good thing. We should enjoy mysteries, and revel in their insolubility. (As an example, Dawkins gave the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation--that wine literally becomes the blood of Christ; the appearance of wine that remains is "an accidental property that inheres in no substance." Dawkins repeated philosopher Anthony Kenny's observation that if this doctrine makes sense, then "for all I can tell, my typewriter might be Benjamin Disraeli" and referred to author Douglas Adams' "electric monk" who does your believing for you and is capable of believing "things they have trouble believing in Salt Lake City."7)

Dawkins enumerated several additional symptoms, such as an eagerness to be deceived by religious leaders ("Send me your money so that I can use it to convince other suckers to send me their money, too"). He was particularly repelled by the view

promulgated by some televangelists that the more difficult it is to give, the more God likes it.

He then addressed the question of whether science is itself a virus, answering it in the negative. While ideas become fashionable and spread, he refrained from using the virus analogy for all ideas because viruses are pointless--it is good at spreading because it is good at spreading. Good programs, on the other hand, spread because they are good programs--good at performing some function, not just at spreading. Faith, according to Dawkins, spreads despite the complete lack of any useful virtues. "Religion," Dawkins concluded, "is an infectious disease of the mind."

In the question and answer session, Robert Sheaffer pointed out that religions seem to have some useful characteristics, such as working as a system to control mutual envy, give rules for behavior, and so on, and Dawkins answered that "you may be right."

Scientific Fraud

The first session on Saturday was a panel on fraud in science moderated by Ray Hyman. I missed most of the first speaker's presentation while having breakfast with a few members of the CSICOP Executive Council and the delegation of speakers from China, but did get enough of Elie Shneour's talk to hear him recommend the following policies: (1) Nobody who hasn't done any work should be listed as author on a scientific paper. (2) Papers should be subjected to peer review. (3) Bad papers shouldn't be published at all, which means many journals should be euthanized.

The second panelist was Paul Friedman, professor of radiology at the University of California, San Diego School of Medicine. After the John Darsee affair at Harvard, Friedman helped write up a policy for dealing with allegations of research "hanky panky." In the past, the first reaction to such things would be to tell the perpetrator that "there's a mistake in your paper." If guilty, his reaction might be "I can't find my data," followed by "I resign," and the process would end there.

Friedman stated that the definition of "scientific fraud" depends on context. There are always problems with sloppy work, corner cutting, etc. that create noise in the scientific process, but deliberate fraud is not very common. It has increased, but seems to be proportional to the number of people practicing science. Senator John Dingell brought scientific fraud into the public arena, whereas in the past it had typically been kept quiet--perpetrators being bought out, fired, etc. Was that appropriate? Friedman views that as an open question.

Generally, when something goes wrong, other researchers know about it. Younger researchers, however, worry about their careers being wrecked, or worry that there may not really be anything wrong but they simply don't understand what's being done. When Robert

Millikan performed his oil drop experiments to measure the charge of the electron, he did not report all of his data; he selected the ones he thought were representative. An experimenter may completely screw up an experiment and start over; nobody publishes all of their data. There is also systematic misrepresentation in journals of the order of experimental proceedings, and so forth (i.e., the logical structure of a paper is not the temporal order). In applying for research grants, researchers tend to report the most promising results which they've already obtained, leaving out the rest.

Peer review at the level of a journal submission or grant application, according to Friedman, is not capable of screening out fraud. A certain level of honesty on the part of researchers is assumed. On the other hand, peer review by other people in the same lab may be able to catch fraud.

Other touted self-correcting methods of science are also not so great, said Friedman. Replication, for example, may fail because the original work made a mistake. It may succeed even when the original work is fraudulent, if it was plagiarized from elsewhere. Furthermore, a large number of papers are never cited by anyone, and no replications are ever done. It does tend to be effective in work that is particularly interesting, such as superconductivity and cold fusion (two cases which have had very different results).

Friedman expressed some worry over the Office of Scientific Integrity, a self-perpetuating agency which gets millions of dollars a year. Will this agency harm the practice of science with fraud accusations? Institutions doing their own investigations, on the other hand, tend to deal with things very quietly to avoid wrongly damaging reputations.

The third speaker was Walter Stewart of the National Institutes of Health, who has been involved in numerous investigations of scientific fraud. He began by taking issue with a statement made by Richard Dawkins during the question and answer session following Friedman's presentation, in which Dawkins stated that although there have been some minor problems, the scientific community is a shining example to other professions, such as journalism, of self-policing that they would do well to emulate. By the time Stewart finished his presentation, Dawkins stood up to withdraw his previous remarks, but added that "science does, at least, have standards to violate."

Stewart discussed in great detail the case of MIT researcher Thereza Imanishi-Kari (also known as TIK), who fabricated data in a paper published with Nobel prizewinner David Baltimore as a coauthor.⁸ In essence, what occurred was that Margot O'Toole, TIK's assistant, discovered the fraud and brought it to the attention of other people, including MIT Dean Gene Brown and David Baltimore, in whose lab the experiments allegedly took place. For her efforts, she was told by Baltimore that anywhere she went with

her story, he would go too, and that he would be believed. She had given up when Stewart got involved, and they wrote a paper documenting the fraud which was rejected by _Cell_ and _Science_, and sat upon for four years by _Nature_ before being published. In 1988 Senate hearings on the matter took place, the Secret Service did analysis of the lab notebooks, and David Baltimore continued to defend TIK and call for support from the scientific community--which he got. For three or four years, O'Toole was isolated from and ridiculed by the scientific community and was unable to find a job.

The second case Stewart described involved Heidi Weissman, who worked in the lab of radiologist Leonard Freeman at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine. Freeman plagiarized some of Weissman's work by whitening out her name on a photocopy and typing in his own. Weissman lost her job while Freeman was promoted to vice chancellor. (Stewart says that the "freeman" is the unit of plagiarism.) Weissman sued for the rights to her work, and won. She has been effectively blacklisted from working in her field.

Paul Friedman remarked that Weissman had already been complaining about not being promoted and had a reputation for being difficult to work with, and that she took legal action before the university had finished investigating her complaints. Stewart responded that the legal case which she won has been out of the courts for three years now, and that a lawsuit is not a reason for scientists to avoid criticizing something (e.g., blatant plagiarism) that is clearly wrong. He said that he knew of no scientists who had publicly stated that Freeman was wrong; both Shneour and Friedman proceeded to do so. (Shneour maintained that other scientists had done so, but could not remember the names of any. He stated that he had a list of names at home.)

Crashed Saucer Claims

Following lunch and brief talks by Sergei Kapitza, editor of the Russian edition of _Scientific American_, and Evry Schatzman, founder of the French Union Rationaliste and former president of the French Physics Society, two concurrent sessions were offered.

One was on crashed saucer claims; the other on the paranormal in China, specifically the form of Chinese traditional medicine known as qi gong. I attended the session on crashed saucers. CSICOP Executive Council member and leading UFO skeptic Philip Klass moderated the panel, which looked at the three most famous cases of alleged crashed saucers: the Roswell, New Mexico case, the Bentwaters/Woodbridge, England case, and the Kecksburg, Pennsylvania case.

Tucson resident and retired U.S. Air Force Major James McGaha spoke on the Bentwaters/Woodbridge incident, which took place in December 1980. This case involved sightings over two nights, December 26 and 27. None of the principals described any crash, but Jenny Randles, Dot Street, and Brenda Butler wrote the book

Sky Crash about the incident, based on the claims of Larry Warren, who was a security policeman stationed at Woodbridge at the time. None of the principals involved in the sightings reported Warren's presence.

On the first night, airman John Burroughs heard a radio report that something had been tracked on radar at Heathrow, then saw a light in the woods which he thought might be a crashed aircraft. After obtaining permission to leave the base and investigate, he saw an object flying through the forest, which he described as being triangular and about ten feet wide (about the distance between the trees). The next day, some circular holes were found in the ground in the area.

On the second night, security police saw a light, called the deputy base commander, Lieutenant Halt, and left the base and entered the forest with equipment, planning to debunk the UFO claim. They saw a winking light, three lights in the sky, and a light beam coming down from the sky. Halt arrived and saw the light, which winked and broke up near a farmhouse, which was then lit with a red light, seemingly from within. (Vic Cuttings, the farmer who was present at the time, noticed nothing unusual.) Burroughs said he saw a light fly through the cab of the truck they had driven to the site.

McGaha explained how the TV show _Unsolved Mysteries_ made these events seem more mysterious by reporting that on the second night, much of the equipment was working intermittently. McGaha pointed out that their radios were intermittent because they were line of sight radios, and their "light-alls," devices with very powerful lights on them, are notoriously unreliable. The holes in the ground were examined by the Suffolk police, who said they looked like rabbit diggings.

McGaha offered the following explanation for these sightings: On December 26, Cosmos 740 reentered the earth's atmosphere at around 21:10, and was picked up on radar. Shortly before 3 a.m., when the first light was seen, a fireball crossed the sky. At around 4 a.m., the Suffolk police were driving in the area (in response to the reports) with their lights flashing. McGaha attributes the lights seen by Burroughs to the fireball and the police lights. On December 27, the three lights in the sky were Vega, Deneb, and Sirius, while another light was a lighthouse 5 miles away (in the right direction) which has a 5 second period. Lt. Halt is on tape saying "there it is," followed by a five second pause, followed by "there it is again."⁹ Although McGaha gave his explanation to interviewers for _Unsolved Mysteries_ and one of the producers told him that he wasn't sure the segment would be aired because McGaha had completely destroyed the case, the show aired anyway--with McGaha's explanations left on the cutting room floor.

Robert Young, the education director of the Harrisburg Astronomical Society, reported on the 1965 Kecksburg, Pennsylvania

alleged UFO crash. On December 9 of that year, a brilliant bolide was seen in the sky by tens of thousands of people over nine states and Ontario, Canada. The path was determined by examining photographs and triangulating, and it was determined to have disintegrated 14 kilometers above southwest Ontario, and this result was published in 1967 in a Canadian astronomical journal.

Young has examined 91 eyewitness reports, all of which can be explained by the Ontario fireball. Yet his experience with Fox's Sightings show was similar to McGaha's experience with Unsolved Mysteries. (Young was on the air for about ten seconds.)

Both Sightings and the September 19, 1990 Unsolved Mysteries based their shows on other information. They looked at Ivan Sanderson's calculations of the motion of the fireball, which (because of errors) showed the fireball changing direction. They looked at a newspaper headline in the early (county) edition of the December 10 Greensburg Tribune-Review which stated "Unidentified Flying Object Touches Off Probe Near Kecksburg," but omitted the later (city) edition's story about searchers failing to find anything. They reported on five witnesses who claim to have seen a crashed object which was retrieved by the military. Young gave details on each of these five witnesses and their reports: (1) First reported his story in 1979 on KDKA radio; claimed to have been fire chief of Kecksburg at the time. In fact he was the fire chief in 1964, but not in 1965. (2, 3) These witnesses were a father and son; the father is deceased. The son claims the military used their home as a base of operations, but does not claim to have seen any recovered object. Other witnesses dispute the claim about the use of their home. (4) A UFO group's display at a local mall in 1987 resulted in this witness coming forward. He says he saw the recovered object, but can't remember anyone else who was present. (5) This witness showed up during the filming of Unsolved Mysteries and claimed to have seen a hieroglyphic-covered object that was recovered.

Young pointed out that the description given by witnesses 4 and 5 of where the object landed match the location where the local newspaper said the search took place--but the newspaper account was inaccurate. None of these five witnesses' accounts stand up under scrutiny. On the other hand, 46 people signed a statement which was sent to Unsolved Mysteries prior to their show's airing, stating that there was no object which crashed and no recovery of an object by the military. The show failed to mention this statement.¹⁰

The final speaker on the panel was Donald R. Schmitt, a medical illustrator, co-director of the late J. Allen Hynek's Center for UFO Studies (CUFOS), and co-author (with Kevin Randle) of UFO Crash at Roswell, which Phil Klass in his introduction called the best of the books on Roswell. Schmitt began by giving his credentials as a skeptic, pointing out that CUFOS debunked the Gulf Breeze sightings, MJ-12, and Gerald Anderson, who has made claims about the Roswell crash. He went on to argue that

something peculiar occurred in Roswell, New Mexico on July 8, 1947.

Schmitt's central evidence was the wire transmissions between Roswell, Fort Worth, and Washington D.C. on July 8. An "official press release" was issued on that date, resulting in a news story titled "Flying Disc in Army Possession" at 4:26 p.m., Washington time. By 5:30, it was reported that a reporter in Fort Worth was allowed to examine debris, which was sent on to Wright field. At 6:30, Major E.M. Kurtan said there was nothing to it, it was a high altitude sounding device, and there was no need to send it on to Wright.

The wire transmission evidence prompted Schmitt to ask: Why did it take two hours to identify the object as a radar device which had been in use for twenty years? (Before the invention of radar, according to Schmitt, the same kind of balloon device was used for visual tracking.) Schmitt argued that what was found at Roswell was no such thing. He eliminated various possible explanations: a V2 launch scheduled for July 3 was cancelled due to a pad fire, there are no Japanese balloon bombs unaccounted for, etc.

Schmitt said he has talked to 150 people who were involved in some way. Of 30 military personnel he has spoken with, he said that none of their military records can now be found. Two witnesses say there was a nurse at the base hospital who observed alien bodies, who was allegedly transferred to another base and then died in a plane crash. Schmitt can't find any record of the plane crash, nor any records supporting the existence of this nurse. Rather than conclude that the witnesses were in error, however, he concludes that there is a coverup.

Schmitt claimed that some of the witnesses he has spoken to say that they were threatened by military personnel that their children would be killed if they ever talked about it; children were told they'd never see their parents again if they did. W.W. Brazell, the rancher on whose property debris was found, allegedly told his family that the military had threatened him. Schmitt said he has six deathbed statements, including one of a general, stating that "it was no goddamn weather balloon."

After some skeptical questioning by audience members, Phil Klass then addressed the subject. He began, "It may shock some of you to hear what I am about to say. I agree there is a major saucer crash coverup. We disagree about who is covering it up." He then proceeded to present information which he said had been neglected by proponents of a UFO crash at Roswell. On September 23, 1947, Lieutenant General Nathan Twining, Wright-Patterson base commander, wrote to the chief of staff of the Army Air Force with an assessment of UFOs. In this letter, which is quoted extensively by UFO proponents, Twining stated that "the phenomenon reported is something real and not visionary or fictitious." What they never quote, however, is that he also wrote in the same

letter that there is "a lack of physical evidence in the shape of crash-recovered exhibits which would undeniably prove the existence of these objects." This was several months after Roswell, so Klass offered three possible implications of this letter: (1) Twining was lying to Air Force headquarters. (2) Nobody told Twining about the crashed saucer. (3) There was no crashed saucer. Klass enumerated case after case of documents, many formerly classified Secret or Top Secret, which made similar comments, all after Roswell and authored by people who should have known if flying saucers had crashed there.¹¹

CSICOP Video

After the two concurrent sessions on crashed saucers and qi gong, the new CSICOP video, "Beyond Belief," was premiered. The video, hosted by magician Steve Shaw of Project Alpha fame, addressed the subjects of astrology, firewalking, and the Gulf Breeze UFO. The video will be made available to local groups for their meetings or for public access cable.

Dinosaur Valley State Park/Dealey Plaza

On Sunday, after another screening of the CSICOP video and a "conversation session" with some of the CSICOP Executive Council members, the North Texas Skeptics arranged an optional trip to Dinosaur Valley State Park. This trip, guided by Ronnie Hastings, was a visit to the dinosaur tracks at the Paluxy River which have been claimed by creationists as evidence of human beings living contemporary with dinosaurs.¹²

A number of conference attendees, however, chose instead to visit Dealey Plaza, the site of John F. Kennedy's assassination in 1963. At Dealey Plaza, one can visit The Sixth Floor, a museum in the former Texas School Book Depository, walk on the grassy knoll and observe the view from behind the wooden fence (where vandals have written "Kenney [sic] was shot from here" in several different places), or talk with any one of several conspiracy theorists hawking tabloids which describe their theories.

Notes

1. I disagree with Scott's last sentence. The nominalist/realist debate is relevant outside freshman philosophy classes--for example, in graduate philosophy classes.
2. Dunbar pointed out a couple of cases where there were some studies which bore some resemblance (though quite distant) to the claims of the "melanin scholars." For example, a study did find that reaction times of people with brown eyes were faster than those of people with blue eyes for some task. The "melanin scholars" claim that this can be attributed to melanin. What they don't note is that all the participants in this study were white males.
3. "Multicultural Pseudoscience," Skeptical Inquirer vol. 16, no. 1, Fall 1991, pp. 46-50; "Magic Melanin," Skeptical Inquirer vol. 16, no. 2, Winter 1992, pp. 162-166; "Afrocentric

Creationism," *_Creation/Evolution_* vol. 11, no. 2 (issue XXIX), Winter 1991-92, pp. 1-8. These articles address the specifics of the *_Baseline Essays_*.

4. The passage continues with "However, there are several reasons for exercising caution when interpreting these data" and offers many qualifications.

5. Harding is the author of a number of books, including *_Whose Science? Whose Knowledge_* (1991, Cornell University Press). In an August 31, 1992 message to the BITNET SKEPTIC Discussion Group, Bernard Ortiz de Montellano pointed out that Harding in this book uncritically accepts bogus claims from Afrocentric pseudoscientist and "melanin scholar" Hunter H. Adams. Harding cites Adams as a reference for the claim that ancient Egyptians invented the telescope, based on alleged Russian discovery of an ancient Egyptian lens. Adams in turn cites Peter Tompkins' book, *_Secrets of the Great Pyramid_* (Harper & Row, 1971), which in turn cites Peter Kolosimo, *_Terra Senza Tempo_*, published in 1969 in Milan. Tompkins points out in a footnote that "Several attempts to check these data with Soviet academicians have so far been without result." Ortiz de Montellano points out that Tompkins is also coauthor of the 1973 book *_The Secret Life of Plants_*, about Cleve Backster's claims that plants feel pain, enjoy music, communicate with humans, and so forth.

6. Blackmore has taken her own advice, and some of the fruits of her research include non-paranormal explanations of out-of-body and near-death experiences and other "psychic" experiences. See her "Near-Death Experiences: In or Out of the Body," *_Skeptical Inquirer_* vol. 16, no. 1, Fall 1991, pp. 34-45 and "Psychic Experiences: Psychic Illusions," *_Skeptical Inquirer_* vol. 16, no. 4, Summer 1992, pp. 367-376.

7. See his book, *_Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency_*. A "holistic detective" investigates a case under the assumption that all things are connected, and therefore everything is evidence, reminiscent of Carl Hempel's raven paradox ("All ravens are black" is equivalent to "all non-black things are non-ravens," so whatever is evidence for one is evidence for the other).

8. See, for one summary, Philip J. Hilts, "The Science Mob," *_The New Republic_* vol. 206 (May 18, 1992):24-31. Stewart himself wrote a summary for *_Nature_* (July 28, 1988). The Stewart article makes the case that fraud occurred; the Hilts article covers how the scientific community and Baltimore in particular responded.

9. See, for more details on this case, Ian Ridpath, "The Woodbridge UFO Incident," *_Skeptical Inquirer_* vol. 11, no. 1, Fall 1986, pp. 77-81. Also see Robert Sheaffer's "Psychic Vibrations" column, *_Skeptical Inquirer_* vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 209-210; Steuart Campbell's letter, "The Suffolk 'UFO' Lights," *_Skeptical Inquirer_*, vol. 11, no. 4, Summer 1987, pp. 425-426, and Ridpath's reply.

10. See Robert R. Young, "'Old-Solved Mysteries': The Kecksburg Incident," *_Skeptical Inquirer_* vol. 15, no. 3, Spring 1991, pp. 281-285.

11. See Philip J. Klass, "Crash of the Crashed-Saucer Claim," *_Skeptical Inquirer_* vol. 10, no. 3, Spring 1986, pp. 234-241.

12. The Paluxy River footprints have been thoroughly debunked and

even most creationists now admit that they do not provide evidence of humans and dinosaurs living together. See, for example, the special issue of Creation/Evolution: vol. 5, no. 1, 1985, titled "The Paluxy River Footprint Mystery--Solved."

Jim Lippard is the editor of The Arizona Skeptic, the newsletter of the Phoenix Skeptics and TUSKS. He is currently pursuing a doctorate in Philosophy at the University of Arizona. The above article was reprinted with permission from the November 1992 and January 1993 issues of The Arizona Skeptic.

BOOK REVIEW

Angels and Aliens: UFOs and the Mythic Imagination
By Keith Thompson. Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, New York, NY. 1991 283 pp. Cloth, \$19.95.

Reviewed by Anson Kennedy

"Angels and Aliens prepares us for the provocative conclusion that, where mind and matter intersect, what we term reality may in fact be a limited spectrum within a much larger realm of possibilities." So promises the dustjacket of Keith Thompson's history of the modern UFO phenomenon. Whether the book lives up to the promise is debatable. That he offers an interesting perspective on UFOs, painting their history in terms of great mythic battles between opposing forces, is not. Relying heavily on the ideas of Joseph Campbell, Keith Thompson's UFO history is the story of a modern myth in the making. As such, it is neither a "debunker's" book nor a "believer's" book.

Beginning in 1947, with Kenneth Arnold's sighting of nine high-speed objects moving "like a saucer skipping over water," Thompson details the strange penchant UFOs have for confusing the public. Arnold's "disk-shaped objects" quickly became known in the headlines as "flying saucers", and subsequent sightings by others corresponded more to the public's impression of what "flying saucers" should look like than with Arnold's description of what he saw.

It was in the '50s, Thompson tells us, that the UFO craze was first on the verge of dying out. Every time the UFO proponents came up with a case, the debunkers would counter with mundane explanations. This point-counterpoint came dangerously close to losing the public's interest until UFO "manifestations" transformed, evolving into the (skeptics say tall) tales of "contactees" such as George Adamski, as well as other, sinister, visitations of so-called "Men in Black," or MIB. These added elements gave UFOs a renewed fantastic nature which revitalized the public's interest. At the same time, the introduction of this odd force foreshadowed the

eventual evolution of the cast of characters for the development of Thompson's "modern myth."

The saga of these characters is on-going. In the '60s, UFO researchers seemed to concentrate primarily on "hard" reports, sightings of objects in the sky or (relatively) close encounters. Even the pro-ETH (extraterrestrial hypothesis, the idea that UFOs are intelligently-guided craft not of this world) investigators dismissed the contactee stories as too bizarre to be real. The "nuts and bolts" investigators of organizations such as the Aerial Phenomena Research Organization (APRO) gave way in the '70s and '80s to softer elements influenced for the most part by the New Age movement and the popularization of "alien abductions."

Part of the transition from hard reports to soft was due to what Thompson calls the "Trickster" element of UFOs. Thompson likens the variable nature of UFOs, their penchant for shape shifting, for slipping away just when investigators think they have "solved the riddle," to the Trickster, a figure from Native American (among others) mythology. Investigators seemed unable to ever pin them down to a single (or even a group) of nuts and bolts explanations involving physical spaceships piloted by beings from far off star systems. So UFOs became "interdimensional," able to pop in and out of "normal" space at will. This new feature neatly countered the objections of skeptics by moving UFOs even further from the realm of reality.

Throughout the pro-ETH researchers' efforts, skeptics have worked to explain UFOs in mundane terms. Harvard astronomer Donald Menzel, who Thompson terms "UFO archskeptic," was the first and most vocal of these. Menzel was succeeded by Philip J. Klass (chairman of CSICOP's UFO subcommittee), who remains a leading figure among skeptics today.

It is the interplay between believers and disbelievers which gives Thompson's history its "mythic" proportions. Referencing the work of Carl Jung and anthropologist Paul Radin, Thompson points out that the Trickster "makes his presence felt in phenomena ranging from frustrating `accidents of fate,' to `the malicious tricks played by the poltergeist' to the uneasy coexistence of angelic and demonic potentials within both individual and collective unconsciousness." With Trickster, Thompson describes UFOs in terms of other, perhaps more well-known, mythical figures such as Hermes, Dionysus and Proteus. Proteus, like Trickster, wraps himself in ambiguity, and UFOs are nothing if not ambiguous.

This apparent ability of UFOs to change their form in order to satisfy public expectations has been discussed elsewhere. Robert Sheaffer, in his book *The UFO Verdict*, calls UFOs a "jealous phenomenon" because this variable aspect serves to prevent researchers from gaining any significant knowledge of them. Sheaffer builds on this interpretation, noting that no legitimate phenomenon exhibits this "jealous" nature. Jacques Vallee uses this characteristic to theorize that UFOs are some sort of

interdimensional beings, whereas Carl Jung postulated this variability is a manifestation of the collective unconscious. Thompson makes much of Jung's and Vallee's ideas but says nothing of Sheaffer's. In fact, the only mention of Robert Sheaffer is in reference to Betty and Barney Hill's alleged alien abduction, and there Thompson misspells his name "Schaeffer" (a fault which may be his editor's).

In the battle between the believers and the disbelievers to unmask Trickster and expose him for what he is, Keith Thompson sees a drama unfolding which transcends the mundane point of which side is "right." For the Trickster has, by the controversy he engendered and the attention he has attracted, made UFOs "real" in a sense seldom acknowledged by either side. It is at this point that Thompson attempts to fulfill the promise of the dustjacket, and it is at this point that he loses the reasonable reader. For Thompson goes beyond just describing the UFO story in mythic terms, and beyond just describing the great epic. By the conclusion of the book, Thompson seems to have de facto accepted the underlying "reality" of UFOs and their alien (or "angel") occupants. He theorizes "that we humans may already share significantly in *their* realm without realizing it, that we already inhabit *with them* a ground of shared forms, and that, from an evolutionary perspective, humankind may be following a largely unconscious course toward dimensions of `contact' at once more remarkable and more intrinsic than we have begun to imagine."

This idea sounds remarkably similar to the thesis of Dr. Kenneth Ring's book, *The Omega Project*, in which Ring sees parallels between those who have near-death experiences and those who have encounters with UFO occupants. Ring calls these people "experience prone" and suggests that they are suffering the birth pangs of a racial transition to a higher consciousness. Thompson echoes this idea in his concluding remarks. He draws an analogy to fish living in water being captured ("abducted") by fishermen. Occasionally, a captured fish is thrown back to relate his story to unbelieving friends. "Depending on how this news is revealed and received, the fish is deified, eaten, or simply isolated ... where it is left to muse aloud, `Water! We live and swim in *water*! I have just seen that which is *not* water: I have glimpsed "dry land," and "open sky." Does anyone hear me? Does anyone *care*?" Thompson suggests that the fish thrown back are amphibians - and so are the people who claim to be abducted by aliens. The abductees are taking the first steps onto the "dry land" of some sort of enhanced awareness. To his credit, Thompson acknowledges his final remarks are speculative.

So what good is this book to skeptics? It offers an interesting history of the UFO phenomenon from a perspective seldom seen in the literature. Ignoring the speculation of the final chapter, Thompson's retelling of the UFO story in mythic terms makes fascinating reading and may provide some useful insights into the interplay between the various factions involved. Unfortunately, Thompson did not leave it at that. His speculation about abductees

representing a transcendent form in human development seems unwarranted and based more on a desire to find *something* real in UFOs than anything else. Does he make good on the dustjacket's promise? Not in this reviewer's opinion. Should skeptics read it? Certainly, for Thompson's speculation may represent (in fact, it probably *does* represent) yet another new manifestation of the phenomenon.

Anson Kennedy is Secretary of the Georgia Skeptics, and Chairman of the UFO Subcommittee. He is an electrical engineer.

THE END