National Capital Area
SKEPTICAL EYE

• encouraging critical thinking and scientific understanding • serving as an information resource on extraordinary claims • providing extraordinary evidence that skeptics are cool

Vol. 20, No. 1
2008/2009

James Randi & Bob Park Receive Philip J. Klass Awards

NCAS honored James Randi and Prof. Robert L. Park with the 2007 and 2008 Philip J. Klass Awards for outstanding contributions in promoting critical thinking and scientific understanding.

stories on pages 10 and 12

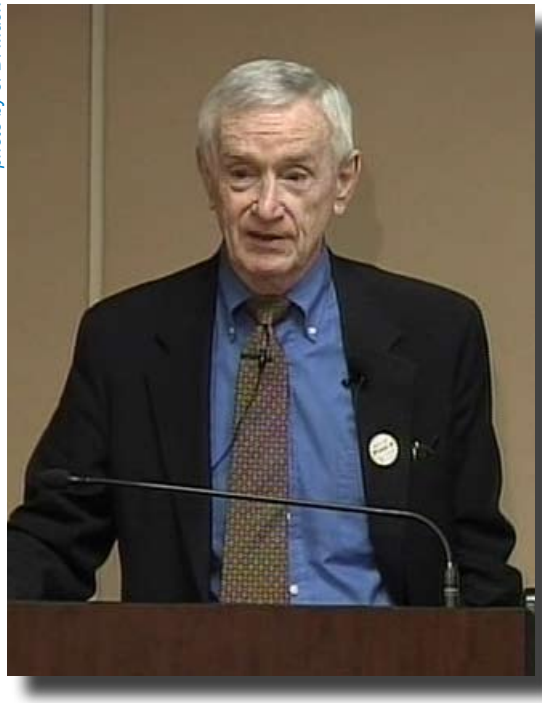

photo by J. D. Mack

photo by Helen Hester-Ossa

A publication of the National Capital Area Skeptics (NCAS)

current & coming events

Election Results

Two new board members were elected in the recent voting: Nelson Davis, Jr. and Melissa Pollak. Reelected and incumbent members are: Chip Denman, Grace Denman, Mike Epstein, Herb M. Federhen, Bing Garthright, Curtis Haymore, J. D. Mack, Brian Morton, Eugene W. Ossa, and Jamy Ian Swiss. Officers are: Scott Snell, president; Gary Stone, vice president; Walter F. Rowe, secretary; and Marv Zelkowitz, treasurer.

Join Us For *Drinking Skeptically*

Come to *Jackie's Restaurant* at 8081 Georgia Avenue in Silver Spring on the 2nd Wednesday of every month at 7:00 p.m. to join fellow NCASers for their DC-area *Drinking Skeptically* event. What is *Drinking Skeptically*, you may ask? (You are a skeptic after all; questions are expected.) *Drinking Skeptically* is an informal social event designed to promote fellowship and networking among skeptics, critical thinkers, and like-minded individuals. It gives skeptics a chance to talk, share ideas (and yes, drink) in a casual, relaxed atmosphere. We discuss the issues of the day and whatever else is on our minds. But most of all, we have fun while promoting skepticism, science, and rationality.

Don't drink? Don't let that stop you from joining us! Some of the world's most famous skeptics are teetotalers, and you are welcome!

http://www.jackiesrestaurant.com
http://www.drinkingskeptically.org

Remember that *drinking skeptically* means drinking responsibly. If there's one thing science has taught us, it's the effects of alcohol on the human body.

Monthly Meeting Times & Places 2009

February 2009: Saturday, Feb 14, 1:30 pm—Public & FREE
Darwin At 200 Years, Human Nature At A Few Million Years, And A Socio-Legal Myth Undermined At 40 Years
Dennis K. McBride, Ph.D., Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, Georgetown University Medical School, & GU Public Policy Institute, National Science Foundation, Room 110
4201 Wilson Blvd., Arlington, VA

March 2009: Saturday, Mar 14, 1:30 pm—Public & FREE (program to be announced)
National Science Foundation, Room 110
4201 Wilson Blvd., Arlington, VA

April 2009: Friday, Apr 10, 11:30 a.m.—NCAS 2009 Philip J. Klass Award Presentation to CFI's Paul Kurtz, Ph.D., at the Center For Inquiry's 12th World Congress, Bethesda, MD (details to be announced)

May 2009: Saturday, May 9, 1:30 pm—Public & FREE (program to be announced)
Bethesda Library, 7400 Arlington Rd., Bethesda, MD (near Bethesda Metro)

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prez sez

by Scott Snell

Dear NCAS Members:

I'm Scott Snell, NCAS president for the 2008-2009 term. I've been an NCAS member since its founding in 1987, served on its board of directors since 1998, and been vice president for the previous few years.

In taking the reins from my predecessor, Gary Stone, I see NCAS continuing on the course set during his tenure. As always, we remain focused on our chartered objectives: promoting critical thinking and scientific understanding, serving as an information resource regarding extraordinary claims, and providing extraordinary evidence that skeptics are cool.

NCAS activities are also aligned with the four goals that the board of directors laid out during our October 2006 strategy session. Recent examples are shown below:

1. Expand and prioritize the demographic groups reached by NCAS

Holding some of our monthly public lectures at National Science Foundation in Arlington has helped us connect with its diverse workforce

2. Increase community and networking among NCAS members

NCAS has started a monthly *Drinking Skeptically* event at Jackie's Restaurant in Silver Spring

3. Increase collaboration between NCAS and external organizations

NCAS will present its 2009 Philip J. Klass Award to Paul Kurtz during the Center for Inquiry's World Congress in Bethesda this April

4. Expand and prioritize the relevant topics addressed by NCAS

Sex/gender definitions and race-based urban legends were recent lecture topics.

Another notable accomplishment is the new NCAS Channel on YouTube. Our premiere video is November's excellent lecture, "Autism and Vaccines: How Bad Science Confuses the Press and Harms the Public," by Steven Salzberg, Ph.D., of the University of Maryland. Other past and future NCAS programs will soon be posted. Visit *YouTube.com/NCASVideo.*

As a membership organization, NCAS can derive energy and ideas from any of you. The process is relatively straightforward. If you have an idea for a project that would further NCAS's objectives, contact us (*ncas@ncas.org*, or 301-587-3827). We'll match you up with one or more of our 16 board members to see your idea through.

A simple case of this occurred a few months ago. One of our members learned that The George Washington University's Lisner Auditorium would be the site of an upcoming performance by "clairvoyant" Lisa Williams. In response, some of our board members collaborated with another member to compose a letter to GW, suggesting that the university post a disclaimer that would prevent the public from mistakenly assuming it was endorsing Williams' claims. Shortly afterward, our suggested disclaimer appeared, verbatim*, at the Lisner website advertising the Williams event. This was a small but genuine victory in the battle to inform consumers and, we hope, prevent them from throwing away their hard-earned money. The disclaimer also helped GW safeguard its reputation by dissociating itself from Williams' claims.

Often our members suggest particular topics or speakers for our free public monthly lecture series. Please keep your ideas coming—we still have a few unfilled slots for the remainder of the current season.

We also appreciate members' help in publicizing our events. If you're willing to post our event flyers, especially at local universities or scientific institutions, please contact us.

Of special note is the aforementioned Center for Inquiry (CFI) World Congress, "Science, Public Policy, and the Planetary Community," which will be held at the Hyatt Regency Bethesda, April 9-12, 2009. We encourage our members to attend, where they'll see outstanding presentations by James Randi, Joe Nickell, Paul Kurtz, Christopher Hitchens, Elizabeth Loftus, and others. Register online at *http://www.centerforinquiry.net/worldcongress* or by calling 1-800-458-1366.

During the Friday (April 10) luncheon, NCAS will bestow its 2009 Philip J. Klass Award on Paul Kurtz, founder and chairman of the Com-

continued on page 4

Scott Snell is a charter member of NCAS and serves as president for the 2008-2009 term. He received his Bachelor of Science degree in physics from the University of Maryland. He is employed as a flight software engineer by Computer Sciences Corporation at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center, tending the onboard computers of several astronomical and Earth-observation satellites.

prez sez continued from page 3

mittee for Skeptical Inquiry and Prometheus Books. Admission for NCAS members is free (or $35 to include lunch). More details to come in our monthly *Shadow of a Doubt* bulletins.

In closing, I note that this is the final issue of the *Skeptical Eye* that will be distributed in hardcopy to all our members. NCAS will begin primarily providing an electronic (PDF) version, to reduce the time and cost of production and distribution. Instructions for obtaining the *e-Eye* will appear in upcoming *Shadow* bulletins. (Those of you who aren't online, or prefer to receive hardcopy, will still be able to have it delivered to your mailbox from ongoing limited production runs.)

Scott Snell
President
National Capital Area Skeptics

*"The views expressed by the presenters of this event do not necessarily reflect the views of Lisner Auditorium nor The George Washington University."

It Was 20 Years Ago Today . . .

by Scott Snell

So begins one of my favorite albums, the Beatles' *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, which was celebrating its own 20th anniversary in 1987. As of March 29, 2007, the same can be said of the National Capital Area Skeptics (NCAS).

Even the most credulous might find it hard to believe that two decades have passed. Try "a generation" or "one score" years ago and it may sound even longer. How likely would it have seemed at the time that an all-volunteer group dedicated to promoting critical thinking and scientific understanding could've flourished in, of all places, probably the most political community in the world?

Part of the answer can be found by looking back to the beginning of NCAS, and just before…

I remember getting a postcard announcing the first gathering of like-minded skeptics at the Edmund Burke School in Washington, DC. (I still have it somewhere and will find it in time for our 25th anniversary!) I knew that a hero of mine, Philip J. Klass, the aerospace journalist who'd written the eye-opening book *UFOs Explained*, would be there, so I brought my copy in hopes of an autograph.

The beautiful spring day compensated for an unexpected change of plans on arrival. All the school's doors were locked! So we met in the outdoor amphitheatre, over a hundred of us *Skeptical Inquirer* (SI) subscribers, including my friend and fellow University of Maryland physics major, Tim Warner. It was Tim who'd gotten me interested in SI over a year earlier.

As Klass approached, I recognized him immediately from his book jacket photos, but was surprised that he wasn't as tall as I'd expected. Yet he impressed with a sharp-looking gray suit topped off with a fedora. He was smoking a cigarette and reminded me of someone out of an old film noir. I think he was still of the time when men wore suits almost every day. My friendly acquaintance with him, extending over many years afterward, began that afternoon.

Another familiar face emerged in front of the crowd. It was Jamy Ian Swiss, one of the local magicians (doubling as bartenders) I'd seen at the opening of Wheaton's "Inn of Magic" on April Fool's Day almost exactly

two years before. Jamy had performed a card trick (called "Card Warp") for me and my friends that "blew us away," so much so that I kept (and still have) the torn playing cards from that evening.

I also remember Stan Bigman, a retired sociologist from the Department of Health and Human Services, addressing us. Tim and I recalled seeing his name signed to a sharply-worded letter to the editor of a Mensa publication after it had printed a credulous article on the paranormal. (Like Bigman, Tim and I quickly became disillusioned regarding the critical thinking capabilities of many Mensa members shortly after we'd joined.)

It's easy to recall the excitement of the first DC skeptics' gathering. We learned from the organizers that we wouldn't be directly affiliated with CSICOP (the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, the publisher of SI), and yet the opportunity to be more than a passive reader of books and articles was thrilling. Now we could organize and *do something* about uncritical media coverage of sensational paranormal claims and such. The ball had begun rolling on creating NCAS. The interested reader can learn more by reviewing our early newsletters at *http://ncas.org/newsletters/shadow-mz.html*.

What is the backstory on all of this? It was SI that had brought everyone together, but what had brought the organizers to SI in the first place? And what had happened behind the scenes during the infancy of NCAS?

It wasn't until recently that I learned that two other important NCAS founders, both present on that first day, Chip and Grace Denman, had also met Jamy at the Inn of Magic on opening night. That chance encounter was one of the threads that eventually led to the formation of NCAS. Over the next couple of years they'd discussed the possibility of forming a local skeptics group (inspired by the [San Francisco] Bay Area Skeptics and others). In the meantime, SI began publishing a call for forming local groups, starting with its Fall 1986 issue. In response, Jamy and the Denmans wrote to CSICOP. Individually, so did a local psychotherapist named Seán O'Néill.

O'Néill was probably the first to make contact. It was his name that headed the initial SI listing (in its Spring 1987 issue) for a DC-area skeptics group, named "The Committee for Scientific Inquiry of the National Capital Area (CSI/NCA), Sean O'Neill, Chairman."

In fact, it was a "committee" of only one at the time of its first public foray, a letter to the editor in the November 6, 1986 edition of the *Washington Post* (see sidebar) regarding a "Style" section Halloween article that featured a Fortean cryptozoologist.

Bigman saw the letter and contacted O'Néill. Undaunted by the discovery that the "committee" was only a one-man paper organization, he began working with O'Néill to turn the committee into a reality.

Soon CSICOP put O'Néill and Bigman in touch with Jamy and the Denmans, and together they enlisted the help of CSICOP Executive Committee member (and DC resident) Philip J. Klass.

But before the first organizing meeting (held at Bigman's Chevy Chase apartment), O'Néill had been seriously injured in a motorcycle accident and was unable to participate during much of the group's formative period. However, he returned later and served on its board of directors for many years.

O'Néill passed away in 2003, but his ex-wife, Pamela Hirsch, talked to me recently about him. She described him as having a strong sense of justice, being an activist dedicated to righting wrongs. He was especially concerned about misinformed consumers who were duped into spending money on cures or treatments that were known not to help. Ironically, he was never able to fully recover, both physically and emotionally, from his motorcycle accident. But he helped others through his private practice to overcome drug addiction and to control pain through hypnosis.

Bigman's version of the story is now limited to his early NCAS newsletter columns and the recollections of other early board members. He was interim president until he stepped down after about a year. He decided not to continue after the direction of NCAS deviated from his vision of it solely sponsoring academic discussions (moving also towards grassroots activism and entertainment programs).

Following Bigman's departure, interim vice president Chip Denman assumed the presi-

continued on page 6

20 Years Ago ... continued from page 5

Creatures

Strange Stories & Elusive Tails

By David Streitfeld

And then there was the baffling case of the angry kangaroo.

"We found him hopping up the street," said Chicago patrolman Michael Byrne. "We chased him for two blocks, but he was always one hop ahead."

Byrne and his partner eventually cornered the growling animal. The roo wasn't very receptive to being handcuffed, and it put up a good fight—so good, in fact, that it escaped.

All during that fall of 1974 in Illinois there were other verified sightings of kangaroos, some close enough together in time that it seemed more than one beast was loose. None was ever captured, nor were their brief appearances explained. It was "Wild Kingdom" gone wild.

That's typical of the cases investigated by cryptozoologist Loren Coleman, who for 20 years has been investigating things that not only go bump in the night, but during the day as well.

This is the time of year when he finds his most receptive audience. "It's part of our culture that there's only one month when you can talk about strange and inexplicable things," Coleman says a bit grumpily. During the non-Halloween months, he adds, people can "laugh you out of the room."

The problem is that the rational western mind tends to think in black and white: There either are UFOs or there aren't, there is a Bigfoot or there isn't. But the 39-year-old researcher feels there's actually a continuum of possible explanati

At the one extreme

some reports of Bi misidentificatio ever, he belie an unknown ing around i His desire is evidence any o

'S

He's also a research associate in child welfare at the University of Southern Maine, which not only helps pay the rent but has provided some psychology training to alert him when he's being fooled. Only about 20 percent of the thousands of cases he has checked out belong to the hard-core unexplainable, he feels.

"In south I was told a big blac a kitten with l nus or

LOREN COLEMAN

Bigfoot? Prove It.

Thank you for the balanced presentation of the paranormal in "Strange Stories and Elusive Tails" [Style Plus, Oct. 31]. Cryptozoologist Loren Coleman, who says he is a scientist, commentsthat Bigfoot may be "a thought form or psychic projection, some form of time or space travel."

Science operates by testing hypotheses and seeking the simplest explanation that accounts for all the data; it is difficult to imagine Mr. Coleman's arranging an experiment in order to prove these ideas.

It is creative, imaginative and fun to think about such ideas as psychic projection, and if they are true, then the world is a much more exciting place than it seems to be. Still, we should be careful not to confuse speculation with scientific evidence.

SEAN O'NEILL
Chairman, Committee for Scientific Inquiry of the National Capital Area
Annandale

Shown above is the Halloween 1986 Washington Post *"Style" article that inspired Seán O'Néill to write the letter on the right to the Washington Post editor, debuting his one-man paper organization that later became NCAS.*

dency. He later won a seat on the first elected board of directors, which retained him as president.

O'Néill, Bigman, and Klass are gone, but Jamy Ian Swiss and the Denmans are still available to tell their stories.

Jamy was a lifelong skeptic, nurtured in large part by his interest in magic, and by reading about Houdini's exposés of mediums. Chip's continuing interest in magic began in childhood also, but then his focus shifted to science. Both men were later galvanized into skeptical activism by the same book: James Randi's *The Magic of Uri Geller* (later re-titled *The Truth About Uri Geller*). Jamy describes this 1975 book as "radicalizing" him. He went from bookstore to bookstore getting them to sell copies. Chip vividly recalls its passion in covering a topic that he had previously seen serious evaluations of only in dry and somewhat equivocal academic terms. "This was the first place I'd seen the BS of the [psychic] phe- ▶

nomenon exposed," he said.

Within a couple of years, Chip was working as a statistician at NIH, and met Grace through a coworker. Grace already had an affinity for science and magic, and quickly took up an interest in skepticism, thanks to Chip.

Jamy is unsure of how he learned of the existence of SI, but thinks he read about it in Randi's 1980 book *Flim-Flam!* Chip and Grace first learned of CSICOP and SI from Douglas Hofstadter's February 1982 *Scientific American* column (reprinted in his book *Metamagical Themas*) and started subscribing. Apparently many others did the same, for SI circulation increased sharply after that article appeared.

By the time the NCAS founders had first come together, CSICOP recommended against their forming a membership organization, which might conceivably be infiltrated by non-skeptics and redirected, subverting its mission. Instead CSICOP suggested creation of a self-perpetuating committee. But the interim NCAS board of directors developed a membership organization after all, hoping to tap into its participatory and activist advantages. CSICOP's concern about potential undermining of the nascent group was addressed by conceiving NCAS with a large board of directors (numbering 16), that then elects its officers, safeguarding the integrity of the group.

CSICOP was eager to help start local skeptics groups, but had recently become wary of formal ties or affiliation with them. In 1986 a Hawaiin parapsychologist filed suit against the Hawaii Skeptics for defamation and interference with his contract to teach parapsychology at a community college. But he also named CSICOP and two members of its executive committee (Paul Kurtz and James Randi) as defendants, even though they were not involved in the events leading up to the lawsuit. Fortunately the case was later adjudicated in the skeptics' favor, but the lesson of strict autonomy was established in CSICOP's institutional relations with local groups thereafter. (See the Bay Area Skeptics' newsletter *BASIS* from December 1988 at *http://linuxmafia.com/pub/skeptic/newsletters/basis/basisdec.88*.)

Despite their self-imposed arm's-length relationship with local groups, CSICOP's role in helping NCAS get jump-started was significant. They provided a 64-page manual to NCAS (as well as to other eligible local groups around the country) incorporating the lessons learned from the formation of the Bay Area Skeptics and other early groups. And CSICOP Executive Council member Philip J. Klass was an important participant and mentor to NCAS during its formative stages, even after NCAS resisted CSICOP's urging against becoming a membership organization.

Only a few days after the inaugural NCAS gathering, an annual CSICOP meeting was held in Pasadena, California. Chip and Jamy realized it was important to "network" with the leading lights of the skeptics world, so they scraped together enough money to register and fly to the meeting, and benefited from the generosity of a friend who let them stay at his apartment.

Highlights of the meeting included a keynote speech by Carl Sagan, and awards banquet entertainment provided by magicians Penn & Teller, whom Jamy had met the year before. (Upon seeing Jamy at the meeting, Penn Jillette exclaimed "Wait a minute! Magic, rock and roll, and skepticism. How often does that happen?") This was the start of a friendship among the four men. And it was at this meeting that Jamy and Chip first met James Randi.

They met again the next year at the Chicago CSICOP conference, this time with Grace along as well. Her first memory of Randi was after he apparently misread a sign directing patrons to the registration desk, and instead ascended on an escalator heading away from where he wanted to go. "I fear I have taken the wrong path again," he ruefully said as he was carried away.

On New Year's Day in 1989, Chip and Grace drove to Philadelphia, where Penn & Teller were performing, and bought them brunch. The four discussed the duo's upcoming summer DC multi-week stand at the National Theatre, and how they might help "pimp" NCAS. Penn & Teller graciously worked out a ticket sale discount for NCAS members to a particular evening show that helped raise funds for NCAS, and concluded with a special Q&A with the audience. They

continued on page 8

20 Years Ago ... continued from page 7

also wore NCAS T-shirts to their May DC press conference, a detail noted in a *Washington Post* "Style" section article.

In July, Penn guested on several DC morning radio programs, promoting the Penn & Teller National Theatre show, but also plugging a July 8 NCAS event held at NIH featuring Randi (with an introduction by Penn). This helped draw over 550 attendees, still the largest crowd in NCAS history.

Among the other favorite memories of NCAS's first twenty years are…

…The first public NCAS event (June 7, 1987), held at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences in Bethesda, featuring Dr. Bruce S. Maccabee and Philip J. Klass discussing "UFO Abductions: Fact or Fantasy?" However, Maccabee, a physicist generally recognized as the most technically competent researcher who believes that some UFOs may be extraterrestrial in origin, essentially changed the subject at the start of his presentation, claiming that the historical context of abductions should be examined first. He focused on comparatively mild cases of early UFO sightings instead of the recent sensational abduction claims. When it came time for Klass to speak, he apologized to the audience members who had come to hear a debate on claims of alien abduction, which he had prepared for, but apparently Dr. Maccabee had not. Had he known of the change of subject beforehand, Klass said he would've read through his files regarding these earlier UFO sightings and provided a very different perspective about them than Maccabee. Instead, Klass provided his prepared critique of abduction claims, which Maccabee had sidestepped.

…The October 1988 Seánce show (12 performances), which was written by Chip and Jamy, based on 19th-century spiritualism, and staged at the Silver Spring Armory. At the special Halloween show, Philip J. Klass was among the audience members who witnessed slate-writing by the summoned spirit of William J. Casey, the director of the CIA who had died before he could testify to Congress regarding the Iran-Contra affair, still very much a news item at the time. When Jamy revealed the slates, written upon them in chalk was Casey's signed greeting to the woman in the audience who'd requested that he be summoned, and then his message, "Spirits speak, spooks do not." Klass was incredulous and approached Jamy after the show. "Well, obviously she's a confederate," Klass proposed, which meant the Casey message could be prepared beforehand, but Jamy assured him otherwise. "Go talk to her, Phil…she's not."

…Noted parapsychology critic Professor Ray Hyman on his whirlwind DC tour in January 1990, when he was a guest on several DC radio shows, and was accompanied by members of the NCAS board of directors, all the while videotaped by a crew from CBS-TV's *48 Hours* for its program on "Psychics and Skeptics," broadcast the following month. Included were segments of his NCAS lecture to an overflow crowd at the Tysons-Pimmit Regional Library.

…NCAS hosting the 1990 CSICOP conference in DC (held March 30 through April 1). Gary Stone coordinated more than 40 volunteers in the effort, including setup and operation of the audio-visual resources. CSICOP's executive director, Barry Karr, complimented NCAS for running their smoothest conference yet.

…Standing with James Randi in his time of need. During 1991 and 1992, Randi, CSICOP, and others were sued by Uri Geller in many U.S. jurisdictions and in other countries as well. Although all the suits were eventually resolved favorably for skeptics, this was a tense time for the skeptical movement, generating fears that critical evaluations of paranormal claims might be silenced by potentially staggering legal defense costs and having to pay settlements or court awards. But through this, NCAS provided financial and moral support to Randi thanks to its member donations to his legal fund, and with some board members accompanying him to his DC court dates.

…Jamy's NCAS benefit show (2001), which played to a huge crowd at the DC Jewish Community Center.

…The weekend workshops, often held at retreats, covering topics ranging from Y2K (Spring 1999) to "Ghostbusting 101" (Fall 1999), and featuring guests such as James Randi, physicist Bob Park (2002) and Professor Ray Hyman's "cold reading" workshop (2003).

…The April Anti-Fools event (2005), which ▶

20 Years Ago ... continued from previous page

provided an afternoon of consumer information on how to avoid being (harmfully) fooled, and then an evening of illusionist entertainment to enjoy being (harmlessly) fooled.

And what do the *next* 20 years hold for NCAS? There's no way to say until we see it happen ourselves (or make it happen ourselves) because precognition is just…well, a "tricky business."

NCAS 20th Anniversary Greetings:

Happy 20th Birthday NCAS! You're wiser than your years, but you don't look a day over 19. Here's to many more years of science and critical thinking advocacy...

Paul Jaffe, NCAS President (1998—2003)

Happy 20th Birthday NCAS! I still vividly recall the first organizational meeting that led to the establishment of NCAS. We were milling around outside waiting for the doors of the meeting room to open—a motley bunch of nerds, geeks, magicians, intellectuals and just plain folks with the courage to question. Who would have thought that such a ragtag group could come together in Washington and change the world? Well... Nobody... because we're skeptics and we know that we can't change the world—particularly in Washington...and we were right, as we usually are. But the Mission of NCAS is more needed than ever in world where politics has declared open war on science and the media have embraced pseudoscience and hucksterism to a degree unseen since the 1890's.

NCAS certainly opened a new world for me—one in which Premanand ate light bulbs in my kitchen, Paul Kurtz toasted humanism in my dining room, Jamy Swiss mystified a crowd in my back yard, and Randi made my baby daughter's box of Cheerios vanish. I am ever thankful for geeks, magicians, intellectuals, and just plain skeptical folks. Here's to another 20 glorious years and more...

Sincerely,

Randy (non-amazing) Lockwood—founding member and NCAS Vice President (1989—1991)

The notice regarding the 20th anniversary of NCAS sparked a bit of nostalgia in me. I took a few minutes to go back and look through the file I have on the formation of NCAS. I found letters from such people as Stanley Bigman, Sean O'Neill, and Phil Klass, along with responses from Mark Plummer, the former Executive Director of CSICOP, Paul Kurtz, and myself. Some of these letters date back as far as November 1986 (maybe you are a bit older than you realized!). The names Chip and Grace Denman, Jamy Ian Swiss, and Randall Lockwood start showing up regularly in the file soon afterwards.

Looking back it is clear that was an exciting time—there are letters to the editor in the *Washington Post*, announcements of meetings with such people as Steven Barrett and Jamy Swiss. Within a couple of years plans were begun to bring the CSICOP conference to DC, where we met at the Hyatt Crystal City Hotel.

I know I speak for all of us old-timers here at CSI(COP) who were able to play a role in the formation of NCAS, we are proud of our involvement and we salute you for all of your amazing efforts over the years.

It is one thick file—the one I have kept here detailing our relationship with NCAS over the last 20 years. I am looking forward to an even larger file for the next 20 years!

Congratulations.

Barry Karr
Executive Director
Committee for Skeptical Inquiry

Physicist Bob Park Receives 2008 NCAS Klass Award

by Scott Snell

On March 8, NCAS bestowed its 2008 Philip J. Klass Award on Robert L. "Bob" Park, Professor* of Physics at the University of Maryland. Park, a prominent skeptical commentator to the public for over a quarter-century through op-ed columns in major newspapers, appearances on radio and television, and his often controversial *What's New* feature on science policy issues (posted weekly at ***BobPark.org***), accepted the award before an audience of about 80 NCAS members and guests at the National Science Foundation's headquarters in Arlington.

Bob Park [has been] a prominent skeptical commentator to the public for over a quarter-century through op-ed columns in major newspapers, appearances on radio and television, and his often controversial* What's New *feature on science policy issues . . .

The award, presented each year since 2006, is given in memory of Philip J. Klass, the noted aerospace journalist and skeptical investigator of UFOs. He was one of the original conveners of NCAS in 1987 and a long-time mentor to the organization. In 1976 he, along with Carl Sagan, Isaac Asimov, James Randi, Ray Hyman, Martin Gardner, Paul Kurtz, Sidney Hook and others, was a founding member of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP), now called CSI, the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry.

all photos by J. D. Mack

NCAS President Gary Stone presented the 2008 Klass Award, thanking Park for his long career and "for outstanding contributions in promoting critical thinking and scientific understanding," quoting the citation engraved beneath Park's name on the award base. When Stone pulled back a concealing shroud (not from Turin) to reveal the award, audible gasps of approval emanated from the audience, joined by Park exclaiming "Wow!"

Park followed with his lecture entitled, "The Lingering Death of Superstition," presenting a sneak preview of his upcoming (October 2008) book, *Superstition: Belief in the Age of Science*.

Leading off with a rebuke of the current Bush administration's handling of science policy issues, Park lamented what he perceives as an ongoing lack of access to the president and his advisors by leading scientists. He noted that the president's science advisor, John Marburger, has no office in the White House (although he does have one next door, in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building). Park recalled that Marburger had been in the unenviable position of being asked for comment after his boss (Bush) had told reporters that "both sides [evolution and intelligent design] ought to be properly taught [to public school students]." Marburger rightly stated that "evolution is the cornerstone of modern biology" and "intelligent design is not a scientific concept," but Park suggested that the deeper concern was the equal weight that the leader of the free world appeared to be giving to science and superstition.

Park added, "He's not alone among world leaders in his reverence for the supernatural." ▶

Park continued from previous page

To Park, superstition should've ended over 2,500 years ago: May 28, 585 BCE to be exact. On that day, the first predicted total solar eclipse in human history was witnessed when the Moon's narrow shadow passed across Asia Minor. It was the philosopher Thales of Miletus who had foretold the event (although some historians believe he may have "predicted" it after it had already happened), and stated the law of cause and effect: for every physical effect there is a physical cause.

Park calls this the first scientific announcement, and with it came the birth of science. Using causality as an operating principle for understanding the world necessarily excludes supernatural events. Park considers Thales' law of cause and effect the first scientific law.

The remainder of Park's lecture focused on one of the several perils he sees posed by humanity's continuing embrace of superstition in our modern technological age: overpopulation. He noted that *Genesis* 1:28 says "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it," but God "forgot to point out that Earth is finite!"

Park touched on Paul Ehrlich's 1968 book, *The Population Bomb*, legal battles over access to abortion and contraception, and described the (literally) far-out ideas of Gerard O'Neill, whose visionary space colonies would presumably offload millions of people from Earth someday. (Park, an outspoken critic of the International Space Station (ISS), said that at least the ISS had stopped all discussion of creating space-station colonies.)

Contrasting the population issue's "technological optimists" (O'Neill, economist Julian Simon, "skeptical environmentalist" Bjørn Lomborg, and others who believe that no measures for checking growth are necessary) with Ehrlich and other "pessimist" counterparts, Park indicated that many physicists were reluctant to join with the optimists "because [physicists] understand exponentials… it doesn't matter what the rate is, if you wait long enough, whatever you do to try to improve the lot of mankind, it is going to be wiped out by population growth." Park sees women's rights as a key to population control.

In closing, Park described the efforts of the John Templeton Foundation to bind together science and religion. Recently deceased founder Sir John Templeton, Park claimed, was "convinced that science will prove that the Presbyterian God is the right one," and established the annual Templeton Prize to honor "a living person who has made an exceptional contribution to affirming life's spiritual dimension," sometimes honoring physicists and other physical scientists, surprisingly enough. Templeton even offered a million dollars to the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) so they would start programs on the dialogue between science and religion ("AAAS Dialogue on Science, Ethics, and Religion [DoSER])." Although the project's financial support remains intact, Park has successfully joined with others at AAAS to limit the amount of money that the Templeton Foundation could invest in each individual program.

Using causality as an operating principle for understanding the world necessarily excludes supernatural events

**As of late 2008, Park is Professor Emeritus.*

Beware: Skeptic on the Loose!

On Sunday March 18, 2007, James Randi, skeptic extraordinaire, presented "Beware: Skeptic on the Loose!" at the NCAS 20th Anniversary Celebration, 1:00 to. 4:00 p.m. at the Aiton Auditorium, National Conference Center, 7100 Connecticut Ave., Chevy Chase, MD.

Randi was presented with the Philip J. Klass Award by then-NCAS president Gary Stone.

After Randi's talk and audience questions, NCAS members and non-members were invited to participate in an open discussion focused on the future of NCAS and how best to accomplish our mission of promoting critical thinking and scientific understanding.

all photos by Helen Hester-Ossa

James Randi

Jamy Ian Swiss

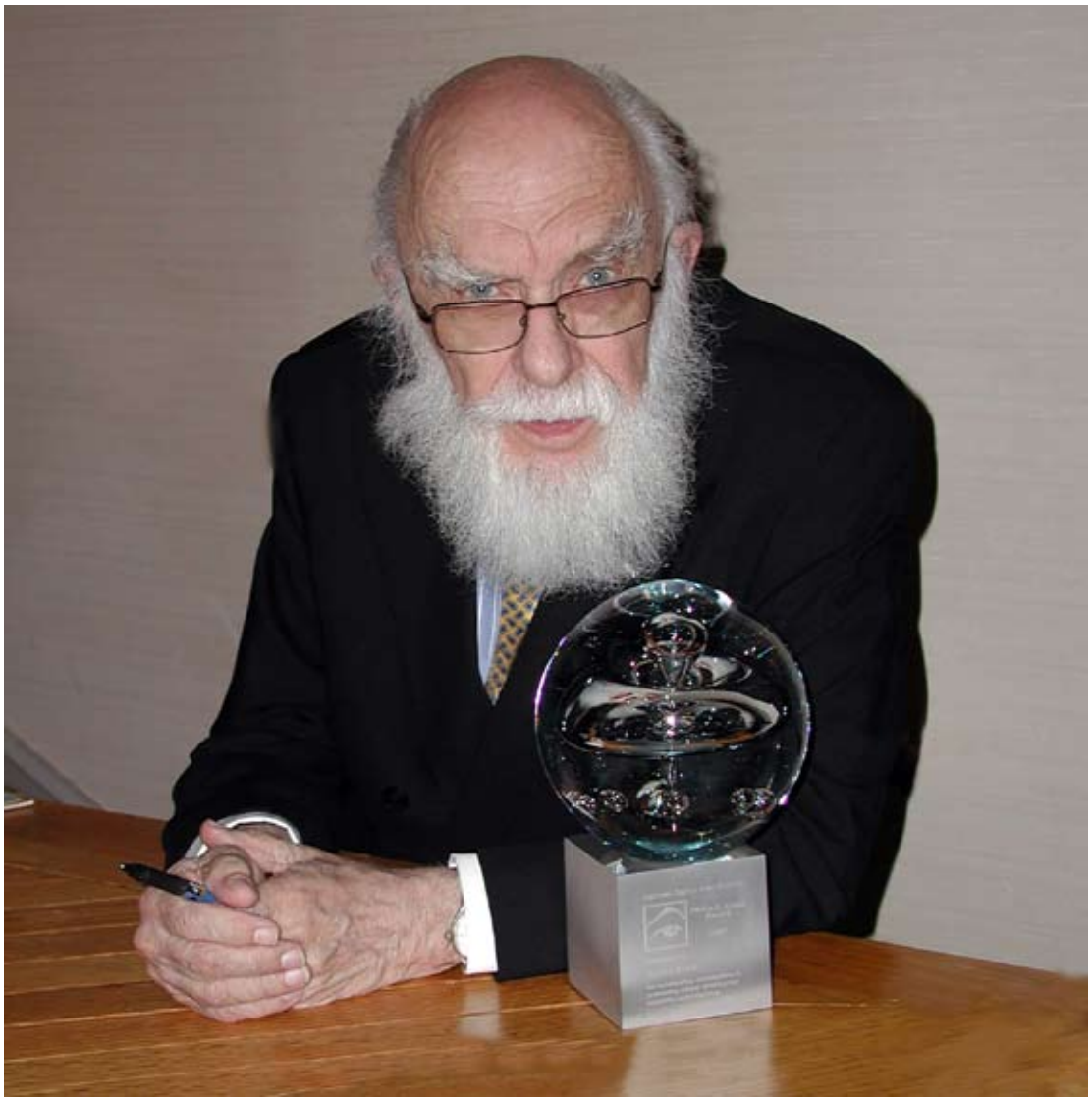
Gary Stone and James Randi

Jamy Ian Swiss and James Randi

James Randi, Chip Denman, & Jamy Ian Swiss

Audience

Randi continued from previous page



James Randi

Philip J. Klass Award

NCAS presidents, past and present (as of 2007), Paul Jaffe, Gary Stone, Marv Zelkowitz, Grace Denman, & Chip Denman. Not shown: Joe Himes, Stanley Bigman.

Brunch at Jackie's Restaurant Before James Randi's "Beware, Skeptic on the Loose!"

all photos by Helen Hester-Ossa

Bing Garthright, second from right

Paul Jaffe and his bride, Rachael Schoenbaum

Kevin Parker on right

Bing Garthright and James Randi

Jackie's Restaurant, where Randi's brunch was held before he was presented his Philip J. Klass Award at the Aiton Auditorium, is the site of monthly "Drinking Skeptically" gatherings every second Wednesday of the month at 7:00 p.m.

Marv Zelkowitz in foreground

Brunch continued from previous page

Clockwise from top: Jamy Ian Swiss, Grace Denman, Chip Denman, James Randi

J.D. Mack in blue on left, with Gary Stone next to him on right.

Walter Rowe

Jackie, of Jackie's Restaurant, and her wonderful crew.

Examining Extrasensory Perception (ESP) in a Course on Physical Science

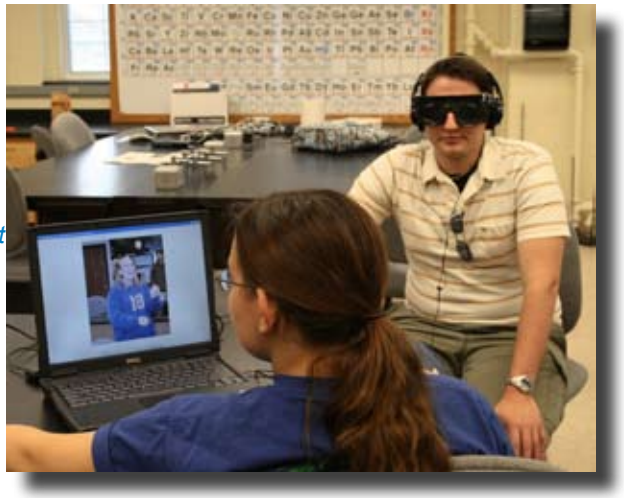
by Mike Epstein

Michael Epstein graduated from the University of Maryland in 1976 with a Ph.D. in Analytical Chemistry and was a research chemist at NIST for more than 30 years. His research interests are in improving the accuracy and precision of atomic spectroscopy (AAS, ICP, ICP-MS) through instrumental design and automation. He has been involved in the certification of over 120 Standard Reference Materials. He was group leader of the Atomic and Molecular Spectrometry group from 1989-1990 and served as a scientific advisor to the Director of the Chemical Science and Technology Laboratory (CSTL) from 1993 to 1994 and 2000 to 2002. He retired from government service in 2002 and is now a guest researcher at NIST and is on the faculty in the Department of Science at Mount Saint Mary's College in Emmitsburg, Md. He was formerly vice-president of NCAS.

Authors of introductory college science textbooks are beginning to realize that traditional methods of teaching the scientific method and the fundamentals of physics, chemistry, astronomy, and earth science are not enough to immunize students, particularly non-science majors, from the continuous barrage of pseudoscience in the popular media. Two of the more popular textbooks, such as Hewitt, *et al*., *"Conceptual Integrated Science"* and Trefil and Hazen's *"The Sciences: An Integrated Approach"* both dedicate several pages to an examination of pseudoscience and, particularly, astrology, but still do not emphasize these to the extent needed to allow students to discern the real from the imaginary.

For the last 4 years I have been developing and teaching an introductory course in Physical Science that is part of the core curriculum at Mount Saint Mary's University, a Catholic and liberal arts institution in Emmitsburg, Maryland. A significant feature of the course is the incorporation of specific examples of pseudoscience that are, to various extents, perversions of important scientific concepts. To that end we use Robert Park's *"Voodoo Science"* as supplemental reading and examine topics such as perpetual motion, astrology, cold fusion, polywater, magnetic therapy, homeopathy, and extrasensory perception as they relate to the scientific method, as well as our current understanding of science. Unfortunately, since the course involves extensive laboratory time as well as lectures, it is difficult to design experiments to examine most pseudoscientific concepts. While the students do brief experiments on astrology (random selection of horoscopes), psychic chemistry (James Randi's investigation of a Russian psychic), the Shroud of Turin (polarization method to evaluate the claim of a coin of Pontius Pilate in the eye of the Shroud), and magnetic therapy (measuring the strength of magnets in therapy devices), the most extensive experiment involves a study of extrasensory perception (ESP).

Ganzfeld (Nicole Miller, sender and Adam Spacht, receiver)



Students are given an opportunity to do the following experiments and then are asked to evaluate the results. While these are not done with the rigor and repetition claimed for most ESP experiments in the parapsychology literature, it does give the students a feeling for the type of experiments, as well as possible flaws in their implementation.

- Ganzfeld–remote viewing with sensory deprivation of randomly chosen pictures
- Zener cards—traditional 25 card deck of 5 different symbols using an original J. B. Rhine set of "ESP Cards" from the Duke University Parapsychology Laboratory
- Dice throwing
- Billets–Sealed envelopes with good and bad images
- Various online and local ESP testing programs
- PEAR lab random event generator
- Electronic Voice Phenomena–Recording white noise and listening for voices of the dead
- Instrumental Transcommunication–Chaotic video feedback loop for viewing faces of the dead on a television screen.

A few student conclusions from this semester's experiments include the following:

- ESP appears to be an imagined phenomena ▶

ESP continued from previous page

since results from all our experiments were within the probability limits defined by chance.

- Psychic phenomena are merely a popular illusion that captivates the masses on television shows
- If there is any such thing as ESP, we certainly don't have it.
- Everything can be explained by coincidence.

To use a rather well-known quote, but in perhaps a more valid context: "Mission Accomplished."

Ganzfeld (Nicole Miller, sender and Adam Spacht, receiver)

Mike Epstein is an assistant professor at Mount Saint Mary's University, former NCAS vice-president and currently on the board of directors of NCAS. *Special thanks to students Ralph Jones, Jess Root, Adam Kauffman, Marie Graney, Nicole Miller, Adam Spacht, and Nicole Sauriol for their work on this experiment.*

Ganzfeld (Jess Root, sender and Adam Kauffman, receiver)

Zener cards (Adam Spacht, Marie Graney, Nicole Sauriol)

From Magic To Science: Sir Isaac Newton

by Richard Dengrove

Godfrey Kneller's 1689 portrait of Isaac Newton (aged 46) from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isaac_Newton

Was Sir Isaac Newton a magician or sorceror, as some recent writers have claimed? It is true he had something to do with occult magic, as these writers claim; however, it is not the same occult magic as people believe in today.

From the Middle Ages until Newton's time, the respectable position among scholars was that everything had to have an observable cause that could be known in some detail. Most likely, it could be traced to the four elements: earth, air, fire, and water. This view was attributed to Aristotle, although medieval Arabs may have originated it.

By contrast, one school that was not completely respectable claimed causes could be hidden, or occult, unknowable in the requisite detail. The causes could be such unobservable influences as the stars or our imagination. Such phenomena were known as Natural Magic. While it was not completely respectable, it had a number of famous and respected advocates, like Della Porta and van Helmont. One could even consider Johannes Kepler a Natural Magician.

. . . one school that was not completely respectable claimed causes could be hidden, or occult, unknowable in the requisite detail.

Newton was just one in a long line. He made his reputation in Natural Magic by advocating action at a distance. Aristotle had said in *Physics, Book VII*, that an object had to have been pushed to be in motion. That could include it pushing itself. However, that could not include action at a distance. Such action was amended later to exclude pushing that was done by a hidden or occult cause.

There was opposition to this reading of Aristotle. Many in the 17th century had weighed in on the weapons' salve. You applied a "sympathetic powder" to the weapon, the sword or gun. Then no matter how far away the victim was, it reunited the vital spirits shed with his blood, thus healing him. Hence, healing action at a distance.

Sir Francis Bacon, one of the founding fathers of science, was one of many who vouched for the weapons' salve theory. In 1658, a Sir Kenelm Digby published a book advocating that cure. While he had a less savory reputation than Bacon, his book went into twenty-nine editions.

Academics should have considered Sir Isaac Newton an even worse offender because he was not using action at a distance to justify some peasant cure. No, he was applying it to the most important topics of natural philosophy: the motion of heavenly bodies and the study of light. These topics had been tackled by great thinkers since ancient times. In addition, he applied it to a less respectable topic, the action of chemicals. That was associated with alchemy, Natural Magic of the first order.

However, change was in the air. In the two preceding centuries, all the ancients had been challenged: Ptolemy on an earth-centered universe, Galen on the flow of blood, and Aristotle on the trajectory of projectiles.

Newton was right on the cusp for dispensing with detailed causes. While a theory of optics of his was rejected in 1675 because he had described the cause in insufficient detail, a cause with even less detail was accepted by 1704. By then, natural philosophers had become sufficiently empirical to accept any approach based on careful, repeatable observation. And Newton, as opposed to Sir Kenelm, certainly based his approach on that.

Newton used action at a distance in one of his most important achievements, his work on gravitation. He claimed all heavenly bodies were attracted to one another by unknown means; (i.e., categorized under action at a distance). Although the cause was unknown,

Newton continued from previous page

you could say something about it: its attraction would follow the inverse square law, which Newton constructed from the ideas of Euclid, Galileo, and Kepler.

Also, Newton applied action at a distance to his work on light. He suggested rays of light going through a prism divided into different colors because the prism was attracting, in an unknown way, rays of certain colors more than others. He wrote about this in his famous *Principia*, and expanded on it later.

The main criticism of this work was on empirical grounds rather than theoretical. He was criticized less for insufficiently detailed cause than for problems with experimental replication. That was why the French would not accept it until 1715. In that year, some members of the Paris Académie des Sciences visited London to study an eclipse, and Newton's experimenter, Francis Hauksbee, showed them how to replicate Newton's experiments on light. Ultimately, enough scientists replicated this experiment for it to be accepted.

Furthermore, Newton applied action at a distance to chemicals (i.e., stating that their microscopic particles attracted each other). This speculation may have grown out of his experiments in alchemy. However, while he had long practiced alchemy, he did not publish this idea until 1706. There, he pointed out how attraction explained precipitation, deliquescence, and displacement in metals.

A difference existed, though, between the attraction in metals and gravity. For metals, the formula could not be 1/r2, like gravity. Rather Newton and his followers claimed it had to be 1/rn, with n more than 2.

Newton only became certain of the attraction of atoms of metals in 1717 because his experimenters, Hauksbee and Desaguliers, had proven it indirectly in experiments with electricity, showing its attraction, capillarity, and cohesion.

Even with all these results on gravity, light, and chemicals, Newton was reluctant to make hypotheses in public that went beyond observation. This is not to say that Newton did not hypothesize in private. For instance, he believed that gravity was a continuous miracle of God's that attracted the planets to one another. For him, just like some occult thinkers going back to the middle ages, God's miracles could permeate nature.

In the two preceding centuries, all the ancients had been challenged: Ptolemy on an earth-centered universe, Galen on the flow of blood, and Aristotle on the trajectory of projectiles.

However, unlike modern purveyors of the "unknown," he admitted the possibility of an unknown, natural explanation, as well as a spiritual one; and so he did not mention this belief in public.

On the other hand, Newton, early on, had been forthright about his debt to Natural Magic, which was less than respectable. For instance, his debt to Hermes Trismegistus, folk magic, and alchemy. This changed. In the 18th century, because of his debate with Leibniz and his rivalry for preference at the Hanoverian court, he and his disciples downplayed Natural Magic. That, of course, did not fool Leibniz. However, it established how Newtonianism was presented during the Enlightenment and beyond.

The earlier objections to Newton were that he was an adherent of Natural Magic. However, by the late18th and early 19th centuries, William Blake and Samuel Taylor Coleridge could claim that there was no room for God in Newton.

Selected Bibliography

John Fauvel, Raymond Flood, Michael Shortland, and Robin Wilson, *Let Newton Be!* Oxford, 1988, 272 p.

Richard Dengrove is a librarian in the U.S. Department of Agriculture and a member of NCAS since 1987. In recent years he has researched any topic that took his fancy, from the sublime to the ridiculous: from explorers, to the occult, to extraterrestrials, to the Newton apple tree, to the propeller beanie. He has published numerous articles in The Skeptical Eye.

photo by Helen Hester-Ossa

A Self-Contained Critique of "Expelled"

by Scott Snell and James Hawks

The infamous 2008 "documentary" entitled *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed* (hosted by Silver Spring's very own Ben Stein, a 1962 alumnus of Montgomery Blair High School*) purports to reveal a systematic suppression by "the scientific establishment" of anyone who considers intelligent design (ID) a valid field of scientific inquiry. Reviews by knowledgeable critics have exposed it as little more than a groundless propaganda piece.

. . .the National Center for Science Education has created a valuable Web site (expelledexposed.com) that responds point by point to the falsehoods and distortions promulgated by the film.

Nevertheless, the movie grossed about 7.7 million dollars at the box office this past spring, good enough to finish 12th in lifetime earnings among documentaries. October's DVD release also performed fairly well, placing 30th among all rentals in its opening week. Its long-term prospects for viewings could be favorable, particularly among church and community activist groups.

Fortunately, the National Center for Science Education has created a valuable Web site (*expelledexposed.com*) that responds point by point to the falsehoods and distortions promulgated by the film. We hope many viewers of the film will eventually find their way to the site or to other sources of reliable information that set the record straight.

But how likely is it that viewers will go searching for this site? Is the movie likely to leave viewers suspicious of its claims?

Sadly, we must report "probably not." The movie "hangs together" fairly well, and its basic premise may be plausible for many laypeople who vaguely recall cases of "political correctness" that emerge from college campuses from time to time. Given that type of environment, it may not seem so farfetched that some of the academic establishment could be trying to suppress IDers purely on political or religious grounds.

Although cleverly edited and free of self-contradiction, there are a few telltale signs that the movie is not leveling with its viewers. Highlighting them might convince a concerned viewer to check for more information. Imagine yourself encountering an intelligent layperson who's seen *Expelled*. What could you point out from the film that can raise doubts and encourage critical thinking? One memorable point will probably suffice, but here are three:

1. Separate Interviews

Stein interviews both evolution and ID proponents, but always separately, never together. This prevents the free flow of discussion between them that would quickly expose ID as unscientific. Maybe it just wasn't feasible to bring the parties together, but Stein never asks any of the evolution experts point-specific questions about the ID claims at hand. It is always the ID proponents who get to share their full perspectives, including tales of their work being suppressed. The evolution proponents are never asked to respond in terms of the specific claims. Thus ID is insulated from detailed criticism throughout the film.

2. We Don't Want Our Kids Taught The Earth Is Flat

Stein opines, "Maybe ID should be suppressed…we don't want our kids being taught that the earth is flat or that the Holocaust never happened." So there is at least one point on ▶

"Expelled" continued from previous page

which we can agree with Stein, that patently false claims should be excluded from the educational setting. However, he never asks any evolution proponent what, if anything, makes ID akin to flat-earth theories. All we see are unsupported assertions that it's absurd, thanks to the film's editor. See the *expelledexposed.com* website to read about the missing pieces.

3. Darwinism Dehumanizes Victims

Stein asserts that Darwinism paved the way for dehumanizing the victims of eugenics, communism, and Nazism. At that point he's set aside the question of whether evolution actually occurred and instead focuses on the notion that accepting evolution as fact is harmful. But do the hideous acts perpetrated by those movements invalidate the facts illuminated by Darwin and other evolutionary researchers? Does this line of reasoning also suggest that horrific transgressions of religionists (the Crusades, jihads, Inquisition, etc.) necessarily invalidate their religions? Even if we must limit the argument to scientific matters, we can find other examples. Unlocking the forces of atomic nuclei has allowed humanity to harness enormous destructive power, yet the findings of nuclear physics remain unchanged whether those forces are used to destroy a city or for a beneficial purpose such as obliterating an asteroid on a collision course with Earth. Stein's arguments from an ethical perspective only serve to underscore the larger and unspoken truth that morality must evolve as new information is obtained or new situations emerge (*e.g.,* the ethics of cloning).

We hope *Expelled* will quickly sink into obscurity. Thankfully, it's dull and its call for action is relatively feeble. We note with some optimism that Stein himself has not been promoting the movie with verve. During a recent appearance on CBS's *Late Late Show with Craig Ferguson*, the host tried to detour Stein's conversation away from the upcoming election over to the *Expelled* DVD, but Stein interrupted him with a dismissive gesture towards it, said "Don't bother," and continued their political discussion. Most likely this reflects not a disavowal but a realization that context matters. Stein couldn't make his argument in a few minutes without sounding foolish. With luck, Stein will eventually realize the irony of his predicament for promoting a film that does much the same (albeit with malice) to reputable scientists.

Although cleverly edited and free of self-contradiction, there are a few telltale signs that the movie is not leveling with its viewers.

** **Full disclosure:** co-author Snell is a fellow alumnus of Montgomery Hills Junior High School and shares Stein's opinion that it was "loathsome."*

We hope* Expelled *will quickly sink into obscurity. Thankfully, it's dull and its call for action is relatively feeble.

Scott Snell is a charter member of NCAS and serves as president for the 2008-2009 term. He received his Bachelor of Science degree in physics from the University of Maryland. He is employed as a flight software engineer by Computer Sciences Corporation at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center, tending the onboard computers of several astronomical and Earth-observation satellites.

James Hawks received his Bachelor of Science degree in geography from the University of Maryland University College. He is employed as an information technology specialist at the Silver Spring headquarters of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), working for the Coast Survey Development Laboratory within the Office of Coast Survey.

Considering (or renewing) an NCAS membership?

If so, your support is greatly appreciated.

Marv Zelkowitz is a retired professor of Computer Science at the University of Maryland in College Park. He has been a member of NCAS for 17 years, was a past president of the organization, and is now on the Board of Directors. His research interests are in the evaluation of new technologies used by the computer industry to produce software. He has been applying skepticism professionally within the academic research community for the past 38 years, validating claims made about those new technologies.

Even though our meetings are free and open to all, and our *Shadow* calendar is freely available on the web, we still need members to meet our commitments as an organization. While we are a 100 percent volunteer organization, we must pay for many of our activities, including:

- Hosting lectures with top-notch speakers, which requires renting meeting spaces, providing refreshments after each lecture, recording the lectures, and having handouts available
- Staying in touch with our members and the public, which requires maintaining a telephone line, a postal box, mailing lecture announcements and board election materials, and an active website
- Recognizing distinguished service, which includes supporting our annual Philip J. Klass Award to an individual deserving of recognition by NCAS (including providing a venue and the engraved award itself)
- Community service and outreach, which has included judging local school science fairs and providing awards to encourage students to think critically about the world around them
- Camaraderie with members, which has included boating parties, attending other local events as a group, and now includes a get-together, *Drinking Skeptically*, where like-minded skeptics can informally meet in Silver Spring one weekday evening each month for drinks (alcoholic or not) and talk (check the *NCAS.ORG* website for the date of the next meeting). Luckily, camaraderie is mostly free!

When pseudoscience arises within our region, we try to inject some science and reason into the discussion. But supporting all this does require some funds. We hope that you will join us, or renew your membership, and continue to support our programs. Renewals start at $30 per year. Please fill out the form in this newsletter and send it in today. NCAS is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, so your membership fee is tax deductible.*

Again, we hope that you will become or remain a member and help us meet our goals.

Thank you in advance for your support.

Sincerely yours,

Marv Zelkowitz
NCAS Treasurer

**IRS Publication 526, page 4, example 1*

From the Copyright Office

How do I protect my sighting of Elvis?

Copyright law does not protect sightings. However, copyright law will protect your photo (or other depiction) of your sighting of Elvis. File your claim to copyright online by means of the electronic Copyright Office (eCO). Pay the fee online and attach a copy of your photo. Or, go to the Copyright Office website, fill in Form CO, print it, and mail it together with your photo and fee. For more information on registration a copyright, see SL-35. No one can lawfully use your photo of your sighting, although someone else may file his own photo of his sighting. Copyright law protects the original photograph, not the subject of the photograph.

http://www.copyright.gov/help/faq/faq-protect.html#elvis

Scene from a Vienna (Austria) Storefront, September 2008

Mind you, that's not just any "Ron's" bookstore. That's Ron as in L. Ron Hubbard, developer of Dianetics, and founder of the Church of Scientology, thank you very much. This store carries nothing but his works.

Photo by Max Anselm

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