



• encourages critical and scientific thinking • serves as an information resource on extraordinary claims • provides extraordinary evidence that skeptics are cool

The Psychology of “Psychic” Readings

Theory, Practice and Showbiz of Talking to the Dead

by Helen E. Hester-Ossa

Anyone can talk to the dead, but do they talk back? This was one of the questions posed by Ray Hyman, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus of the University of Oregon at a day-long seminar sponsored by the National Capital Area Skeptics (NCAS) on March 1, 2003, at the University of Maryland, College Park.

NCAS President Chip Denman opened the workshop by introducing distinguished skeptic, Ray Hyman. “For today’s workshop, I thought we would bring in a guest speaker who could bring a level of expertise beyond what we could provide from within our group. Ray Hyman has been involved with the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP) from the beginning. He is a skeptic who remains on cordial grounds with the psychic community. With that, I give you Dr. Hyman.”

Hyman laughed at the introduction, and stated “It used to be that my good friend Randi (a well-known debunker of paranormal claims) was the “bad cop” and I was the “good cop.” I think that has reversed. I talk to them, but they don’t talk to me. Anyone can talk to the dead, but do they talk back? Chip said I am on good terms with the psychics, but if I am, it’s only because they will tell me the dirt on each other.”



photos by Helen Hester-Ossa

“My goal is to introduce you to the psychic reading: any context in which someone gives someone else a description of themselves, sometimes emphasizing the past, the present, or the future. It is ‘psychic’ because the source of information is paranormal or occult, somehow outside science.”

prez sez	2
James Randi: Modern Dowsing	5
Bob Park’s Seven Warning Signs of Voodoo Science	9
Chiropractic Psychosis	11
media notes	15
about NCAS	16

continued on page 13

prez sez past

by Paul Jaffe



UFO or skeptic?

Dear Skeptical Eye reader:

It has been my immense pleasure and honor to serve as NCAS president since 1998. I've been blessed during my presidency with a hard-working, enthusiastic board that has been instrumental in putting together our programs and leading our projects. We've had many astounding workshops, shows, lectures, and other

accomplishments. Without the board's effort and that of volunteers from the membership, NCAS would cease to function. Thank you to all of you who have helped make the past 4 years so exciting and successful!

I am honored to turn the leadership of NCAS to cofounder, spokesperson, and past president Chip Denman. Under his experienced and expert guidance, I am confident NCAS will continue to flourish and fulfill its mission of spreading critical thinking and science literacy.

You can help NCAS by making a tax deductible donation in addition to your membership fee or by volunteering. NCAS has no paid staff, and all donations go directly to support activities and projects. As a 501c(3) non-profit organization, all donations to NCAS are fully tax deductible. You can always reach NCAS by calling 301-587-3827 or by emailing ncas@ncas.org.

Thanks again for your support, and stay skeptical!

Yours truly,

Paul Jaffe
Outgoing President
National Capital Area Skeptics

National Capital Area Skeptical Eye (ISSN 1063-2077) is published by the National Capital Area Skeptics, PO Box 8428, Silver Spring, MD 20907.

Copyright © 2003 National Capital Area Skeptics. Signed articles are the opinions of the authors. Opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position of the editors, the Board of Directors, or the National Capital Area Skeptics.

24-hour phone number: 301-587-3827
e-mail: ncas@ncas.org
Skeptical Eye input: s_eye@ncas.org
Internet: <http://www.ncas.org>
NCAS discussion group: ncas-share@ncas.org

NCAS Board of Directors

Chip Denman, president
Gary Stone, vice president
Marv Zelkowitz, secretary
Grace Denman, treasurer
Paul Jaffe, past president

Doris Bloch
Jonathan Boswell
Sharlene Deskins
Herb M. Federhen
Jim Giglio
Stephen J. Goodson

Eugene Ossa
Walter Rowe
Tim Scanlon
Scott Snell
Jamy Ian Swiss

Editor/Designer Photographer

Helen E. Hester-Ossa



recycled paper

prez sez present

by Chip Denman

First the bad news: NCAS membership has declined from a high of around 300 to around 120—comparable to our start-up number in 1987. On January 12, the Board of Directors held a special all-day session to review the organization’s goals and accomplishments, and to consider how NCAS can provide the most value-added to retain and recruit members.

And the good news: that session resulted in a lot of great ideas from a dedicated and committed Board.

We began with a review of various declarations NCAS has made in the past about our purpose and mission.

The NCAS Bylaws (1988) contain our formal statement of purpose:

The purpose of NCAS is to actively promote critical thinking and the scientific method; to encourage the critical investigation of paranormal and fringe-science claims from a responsible, scientific point of view; and to disseminate factual information about the results of such inquiries to the scientific community and the public. The organization does not reject claims on *a priori* grounds, antecedent to inquiry, but rather examines them objectively and carefully.

Over the years, we have described the group in less formal ways:

- Encourages critical and scientific thinking
- Serves as an information resource on extraordinary claims
- Provides the extraordinary evidence that skeptics are cool

From the beginning, our brochures and other materials have emphasized aspects of community and fellowship as a reason to join, even though this is not formally written into our charter:

- “You want an opportunity to meet other concerned and intelligent people.”
- “You would like to be actively involved in the work of an organization with people who believe that good thinking and a good time are not mutually exclusive.”

- “Members work together to create a community with special programs and social events.”
- “Volunteers form grassroots efforts to support responsible treatment of paranormal and other extraordinary claims.”

In a group brainstorming exercise, we reviewed the history of NCAS by listing events, activities and projects—large and small, one-time and on-going. We tried to identify those that provided the most value to the organization and our members, and quickly realized the difficulty of making reasonable comparisons.

Nonetheless, we looked to our history to try to answer the question, “Why would someone want to belong to a group of skeptics in the first place?” Several themes emerged:

NCAS is a source of useful information. It provides members with a sense of identity and community and an organizational voice. And most of all, NCAS provides an opportunity to do something: to develop personal skeptical skills; to be a grass-roots activist (write letters, to participate in online library efforts, judge at science fairs etc.); and to have fun.

All of these fit well with our formal organizational purpose, but also explicitly add a “sense of community” dimension. As we go forward, we are resolved to evaluate our activities, current and future, and make sure that these elements are provided for.

We intend to maintain several current activities—such as the NCAS-share email discussion, science fair judging, and online library projects—more or less unchanged:



Paul Jaffe and Chip Denman

photo by Helen Hester-Ossa

continued on page 4

But we are considering changes in a number of areas:

Public Lecture Series

You've already seen a first step, with coffee and cookies after the talk to encourage folks to mingle and exchange ideas. We will improve publicity by targeted mailings to specific reporters that we think might be especially interested in particular topics. We will try to find a balance between a limited number of "big name" speakers, along with smaller, more discussion oriented meetings. And we'll be more forthright in providing attendees with both membership information as well as feedback forms on the program.

Membership Contact

New members will receive a welcome letter. Current members will receive renewal letters, rather than just a note included with the Shadow. And the Board will publish a regular financial report so that members will know how their money is being spent.

NCAS Website

www.ncas.org is a valuable asset, but it can be improved. Behind the scenes, we will move it to a more robust and secure environment. This will allow us to add features such as online renewals and other transactions. We will also increase the information content with features such as special topic Q&As and even video clips.

Skeptical Eye

From the very beginning of NCAS, the newsletter has been one of our most important ways to keep members informed. Like many all-volunteer organizations, we had trouble

maintaining a regular publication schedule. Board member Sharlene Deskins will be joining editor Helen Hester-Ossa on the production team, specifically with an eye on scheduling. Former editor Carol Krol—now a journalist in NYC—will revive her "Media Watch" column, summarizing weirdness as seen in other media. In addition, we'll be adding features such as reports on board meetings (such as you are reading now), and more timely reporting and even contributed articles from our public speakers. We also are looking into the prospect of moving away from paper, and re-creating the Eye as an on-line publication.

Other Activities

A semi-new initiative will be regular Friday the 13th activities. We had one social event last September, but the plan is now to establish **every** Friday the 13th as a special event. June 2003 is next. We don't exactly know what sort of activities these will be, but we are looking for a bit of a twist—perhaps it's an opportunity to meet folks from "the other side."

There was also discussion about reviving the Special Interest Groups (SIGs) as provided for in the NCAS bylaws, as a mechanism for encouraging participation. There were a few SIGs in the first year or two after NCAS formed, but they were topic-based (e.g., Alternative Medicine) and ultimately faltered due to a lack of specific goals. If we revive the SIG idea, they would be project based, such as the Online Library SIG, or the *Skeptical Eye* SIG. Topical SIGs might also be formed but these would also have a targeted outcome such as organizing a presentation for the ongoing Lecture Series.

Now more than ever, we need your personal input and direction. The *Skeptical Eye* could become your personal soapbox for expressing your skeptical views. You could organize an SIG, work on the website, or suggest a speaker for the Lecture Series. Most important of all—tell us what matters most to you.

Chip Denman
President
National Capital Area Skeptics

Especially Notable NCAS Activities:

- Judging and special awards at local science fairs
- NCAS-share email discussion group
- Online library (e.g., *Condon Report*)
- Public lecture series
- *Shadow of a Doubt* monthly calendar
- *Skeptical Eye* newsletter
- Special events (e.g., séance, Penn & Teller, Randi)
- Weekend workshops
- www.ncas.org website

James Randi: Modern Dowsing

by Helen E. Hester-Ossa

Critical thinkers met at Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, on April 6-7, 2002 for a weekend workshop sponsored by the National Capital Area Skeptics entitled "Skepticism 2002: Beyond the Basics—Advanced and Recent Topics For Skeptical Thinkers." James Randi, internationally recognized debunker of paranormal and pseudoscientific claims, presented his take on modern dowsing.

James Randi immediately caught the attention of the audience in the window-lined conference room overlooking the confluence of the Potomac and Shenandoah rivers when he said, "I became aware in the last week that the DOE just spent \$408,000 on testing a new dowsing rod. I have been responsible over the years for testing many dowsing rods, and they didn't work. I could have done that for \$1.00."

A dowsing rod, according to *Webster's Dictionary*, is a forked rod believed to indicate the presence of water or minerals, especially by dipping downward when held over a vein. Usually the forked ends are held in the hands of the dowser.

Randi first encountered the whole phenomenon of dowsing and wrote about it in his book, *Flim-Flam!*. For the most part, he believes that dowsers are basically honest but deluded people. There are a few exceptions:

"One guy in Australia who was showing us [through dowsing] where pipes in a house were had worked on the city's planning commission. We told him we were going to look at one particular house, then waited [to see what he would do]. The man went to City Hall and looked at the plans. We told him we caught him in the act and didn't do the test with him."

(The test refers to Randi's long-standing challenge to psychics that now stands as a \$1,000,000 prize administered by the James Randi Education Foundation. It remains unclaimed.)

In another instance of dowsing chicanery, one dowser had a box with a meter and dials on it. He had a crystal (it turned out to be acrylic) that detected if any current went into the box. The meter indicated if current was flowing. He would lean over the box and then



photos by Helen Hester-Ossa

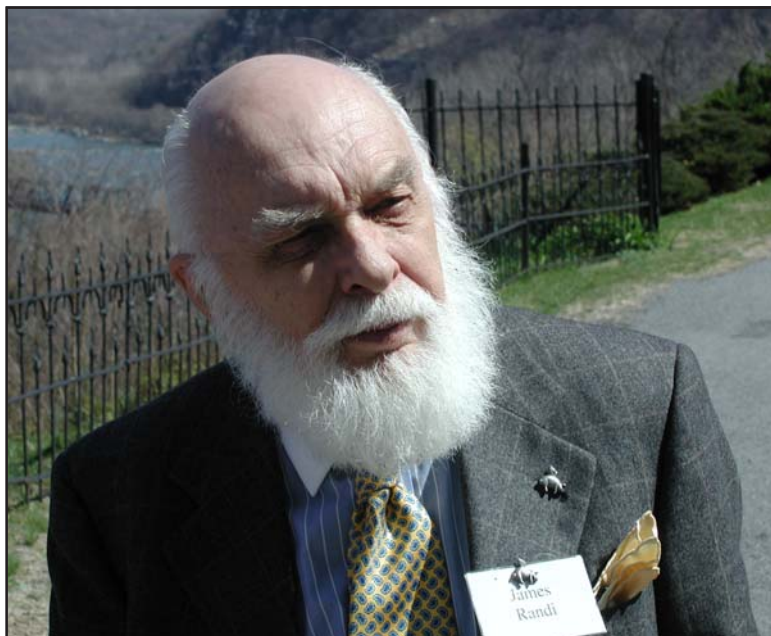
proceed. The meter did not go all the way down to zero when there was no current, so he had to lean over to see if the meter was on the mark or above it. When Randi covered the meter, the dowser got 9 out of 20 correct, which is exactly what you would expect out of random chance.

Other than these two examples of cheating dowsers, "No other dowsers have I found trying to cheat," says Randi.

Testing the Dowsers' Accuracy

Randi runs open and blind tests on the dowsers to eliminate a variety of excuses they might concoct when they inevitably fail. "One thing I found out is that they love to make excuses immediately after when things fail," said Randi. "You have to ask them in advance if they feel up to it, if conditions are right, etc. If they say things aren't quite right, we don't do the test."

continued on page 6



Randi said that another common excuse following failure is that “something was wrong.” So, if Randi is going to have the dowser do 20 blind tests, he first has them do 20 tests where the containers are open and the contents are visible. “They have to get that test 100 percent correct, because they can see if, for example, the coin is in the cup.”

“When we do the million dollar test,” said Randi, “well, we have never done the million dollar test, because no one has passed the preliminary test.”

After the dowser does the open test and has been 100 percent successful, then Randi has them do the blind test. “You would think there couldn’t be any excuses,” says Randi, “but there is always another excuse. We had ten cups on the floor, and the dowser moved the cups around on the floor to miss ‘buried anomalies.’ We used ceramic JREF [James Randi Educational Foundation] coffee mugs numbered on the bottom. He placed them on the floor and rearranged them. He said he needed 5 feet between them and he rearranged them to be closer, so I made him agree that there was enough distance between them. He brought in some sacagawea coins and some gold flakes. He used the y-shaped dowsing stick to do the tests, got 20 out of 20—100 percent correct.”

He got one out of ten on the actual tests.

“The way we did the blind tests, Mike [the dowser] and I would step outside and close the door, someone would go inside and place the item under the cup, move all the rest of the cups, then Mike and I would step back in the room. Mike would say that he was getting something between 3 and 4, and I would tell him, ‘No, it doesn’t work that way, you have to pick only one.’

“It was very interesting to hear, as it always is, the excuses why he didn’t get it right. One excuse was mirror images. He said he was getting distracted by two sets of *Encyclopedia Britannica* that had gold stamping (it’s not gold, it’s brass). When we told him the gold coins he used had no gold in them, he was genuinely surprised.

“He’s a salt-of-the-earth guy, not stupid and not real smart, but somewhere in-between, a typical American.”

Why does dowsing appear to work? Why does the dowsing rod suddenly point downward as if attracted to something?

“Systems are in poor equilibrium for how dowsing rods work,” says Randi. “It’s hard to keep in a neutral position. The movements of your body, the unconscious actions, are very slight.”

“Ideomotor response shown in a time exposure shows that their hands are moving all over the place. We did another test with sequins on a hand and a light that showed that they were moving their hands.” Despite this, Randi says, no matter how many tests you do, you will not take away a dowser’s belief that they are really dowsing.

To show the contradictions amongst dowsers, themselves, Randi said that half the dowsers say you must wear rubber footwear to insulate you from the ground and the other half say you must NOT wear rubber footwear.

Randi explained that people who become dowsers are usually talked into it by other people and are convinced they actually do it. “They always want YOU to do it, but I know I can do it as well as they can, which is to say, not at all,” said Randi.

As a profession, dowsing doesn’t have a big payoff, said Randi. “No one comes out rich. Ninety percent of the surface of the earth



has water within drillable distance, so I would like someone to find me that DRY spot.”

High-Tech Dowsing

Randi then turned his attention to a high-tech dowsing rod. “The Quadro Tracker Rod gets its name from a guy named Quattlebaum and a guy named Roe. I found out that some school system in Florida was paying something like \$15,000 for this tracking device. They had a box full of chips that were labeled “marijuana, cocaine, crack cocaine.” They would snap the appropriate chip on the side of

the rod and wander around with it. It had electronics that were embedded in acrylic epoxy, not connected to anything. The school superintendent would walk down the corridor and the rod would point at #9, the locker of a known pot user. When we tested it, it didn’t work. The superintendent acknowledged that it might not work, but later, when I got to my fax machine, there were complicated excuses why it hadn’t worked.”

After the dismal failure of the Quadro Tracker in the test, Randi wrote the FBI and other agencies about the fraud and received no answer. However, 24 hours after Randi contacted them, the FBI arrested Quattlebaum and Roe. “I received no acknowledgment from the FBI,” said Randi philosophically.

According to *The Skeptic’s Dictionary*, by Robert Todd Carroll, “On January 19, 1996, the FBI Economic Crimes unit seized the merchandise and records of the Quadro Corporation and arrested its officers. In April, 1996, a federal judge issued a permanent injunction against Quadro Corp, which was convicted of engaging in a mail and wire scheme to defraud customers, under statutes 18 U.S.C. 1341 and 1343.” <http://skepdic.com/quadro.html>

Randi was given the privilege of seeing the high-tech precision with which the chips are manufactured. “To tune the chip to a substance, they took the substance over to a molecular whatever (it looked like a Canon

“You will never disconvince the true believer. They will continue to believe.”

continued on page 8

James Randi has an international reputation as a magician and escape artist, but today he is best known as the world’s most tireless investigator and demystifier of paranormal and pseudoscientific claims.

Randi has pursued “psychic” spoonbenders, exposed the dirty tricks of faith healers, investigated homeopathic water “with a memory,” and generally been a thorn in the sides of those who try to pull the wool over the public’s eyes in the name of the supernatural.

He has received numerous awards and recognitions, including a Fellowship from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation in 1986.

On October 19, 1993, the PBS-TV “NOVA” program broadcast a one-hour special dealing with Randi’s life work, particularly with his investigations of Uri Geller and various occult and healing claims being made by scientists in Russia.

He is the author of numerous books, including *The Truth About Uri Geller*, *The Faith Healers*, *Flim-Flam!*, and *An Encyclopedia of Claims, Frauds, and Hoaxes of the Occult and Supernatural*. His lectures and television appearances have delighted — and vexed — audiences around the world.

In 1996, the James Randi Education Foundation was established to further Randi’s work.

Randi’s long-standing challenge to psychics now stands as a \$1,000,000 prize administered by the Foundation. It remains unclaimed.

—from www.randi.org




Enjoying the view from Hilltop Hotel, overlooking the Shenandoah and Potomac Rivers, from left to right: Bob Park, James Randi, Chip Denman, Paul Jaffe, and Jim Giglio.

copier), took out the sample of crack cocaine, copied it, took out the picture thus produced, cut up the picture, and put the piece of the picture in the ‘chip.’”

Quadro is back in business in England, now, with a product called “The Mole,” which they sold to the Royal Engineers!

Randi says he contacted Quattlebaum and Roe and offered them the million dollars of his challenge if they could demonstrate that

their device works. They haven’t taken Randi up on his offer.

Randi concluded with one bit of advice: “You will never disconvince the true believer. They will continue to believe.” 

“We may disagree with Randi on certain points, but we ignore him at our peril.”

—Carl Sagan

Bob Park's Seven Warning Signs of Voodoo Science

by Helen E. Hester-Ossa

Robert L. Park, author of Voodoo Science—The Road from Foolishness to Fraud, is Professor of Physics and former chairman of the Department of Physics at the University of Maryland. He also directs the Washington Office of the American Physical Society. Author of more than a hundred scientific papers on the structure of crystal surfaces, he is a prolific writer of op-eds for the New York Times and other papers, and a regular contributor of science features for the Washington Post. A frequent commentator on TV news programs, Park posts a weekly electronic column on science issues (<http://www.opa.org/WN/>).

Bob Park was one of the honored speakers at the National Capital Area Skeptics April 2002 weekend workshop entitled "Skepticism 2002: Beyond the Basics: Advanced and Recent Topics For Skeptical Thinkers" held in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia.

Bob Park is on a mission to expose voodoo science, so Dennis Lee's statement, "... find out why you may never have to pay another energy bill again," riles him up. Park says the centerpiece of Dennis Lee's presentation is a perpetual motion machine, but that he really sells dealerships, and the dealers are still sitting out there waiting for delivery of the goods.

"Several years ago I got a call from *Dateline* and they asked me to go to Hackensack, New Jersey, for a demonstration of a perpetual motion machine. What had caught *Dateline's* eye was an ad that said "Never pay an electric bill again." The demonstration actually took about 5 hours. When the demonstration, which started late, began, there were 900 people waiting in a hot parking lot of a closed down business. Dennis Lee said he had a sore throat, so his wife was going to give the demonstration. They didn't let the camera crew in before then because they were setting up."

Why were they so late? "Dennis Lee was having his aura smoothed," says Park. "His wife began giving the demonstration, but it was faltering, and Dennis Lee kept correcting her. His voice got stronger and stronger, because 'God wants me to tell you about this.'"

Park said Lee's perpetual motion machine was based on permanent magnetic motors, which he called the Fisher motor, with a model on stage. "Back behind the screen there was a loud bang. Dr. Fisher himself came out and apologized that the machine wasn't work-

ing because the room was too warm," says Park. "The Fisher engine was first called the Gam G Zero motor. You take a liquid that is just below room temperature, you vaporize it. Dr. Fisher picked ammonia, which would evaporate and drive the piston, liquefy because it cooled down, run back through and drive the piston again, and so on."

According to Park, this would violate the second law of thermodynamics. "Fisher used CO₂ instead of ammonia. They used a working fluid that operated under high pressure. What was actually happening was that the model would have run, but it would have been running on compressed CO₂. The work you have then to compress the gas would have kept it running, but not indefinitely."

NBC never ran the program, said Park. "They were pretty sure no one on *Dateline* would be interested in this."

Long ago, Dr. Robert Fludd also considered per-

petual motion because farmers had to travel to water mills to grind their grain, said Park.

Fludd's idea was that he didn't have



photos by Helen Hester-Ossa

continued on page 10



to have a stream, just a reservoir of water that would be recycled. That violates the first law of thermodynamics, which is conservation of energy. When you drop a ball, it doesn't bounce back to your hand, because there is energy loss.

In another example of a fraudulent perpetual motion machine,

Parks said a 1986 *Washington Post* described a perpetual motion machine. It had been developed by a "Simple backwood tinkerer" named Joe Newman in Mississippi. The machine produced more electricity than it took to run it. "Experts" examined the machine and said it worked just as Joe Newman claimed. However, it was connected to the local power line. "There is no claim so preposterous that you can't find a Ph.D. in physics to vouch for it," said Park.

What is it that a scientifically literate public needs to know?

According to Park, the responsibility rests with physicists to speak out on issues. "We have to have more reporters who are scientifically trained. Michael Gillen, the chief science correspondent from ABC, has a Ph.D. from Cornell. The first time I saw him in action, they announced they were going to have an interview with Dr. Patterson, who had discovered a new source of energy. Patterson claimed he had invented tiny beads coated with metal that heated up when you passed water through. Lo and behold, there's Dr.

Patterson with this information, and Gillen was obviously transfixed by this. A year later Michael Gillen is on ABC and announces that they never received so much mail as on Dr. Patterson. That started off with a picture of Dr. Patterson, and they say that there have been big discoveries since then."

Gillen went on to say that CETI (Clean Energy Technologies Inc.) not only produces energy, but neutralizes radiation. At any rate, they set up a demonstration. At the end, the radioactivity was down to less than half.

"I don't know exactly how they were doing this, but if they had moved the Geiger counter from the flask to the beads, they would have seen the radioactivity on the flask go down and on the beads go up," said Park.

Park concluded by saying that "Way back when Robert Flood built that perpetual water mill, he did a great service, because he made people start to think about the conservation of energy. ☒

Seven Warning Signs of Voodoo Science

1. The discovery is pitched directly to the news media
2. A powerful "establishment" is said to be suppressing the discovery
3. Information is withheld that would allow other scientists to check the results
4. A scientific claim relies heavily on anecdotal evidence
5. A discovery is said to be credible because it has endured for centuries
6. The discovery was made in isolation
7. No plausible theory at all is offered for a miraculous "discovery"

There is no claim so preposterous that you can't find a Ph.D. in physics to vouch for it.

Chiropractic Psychosis and Quackery in Chiropractic

A Chiropractor's Look at the Profession

by Helen E. Hester-Ossa

Frederick Kourmadas, DC, CCSP, CSCS of Manassas, Virginia, has a bone to pick with his fellow chiropractors, or is that a spine? A frequent contributor to the *Skeptical Eye*, he brings a skeptical view to the practice of chiropractic. Last year Kourmadas spoke at an NCAS-sponsored lecture on two related topics: “Chiropractic Psychosis” and “Quackery in Chiropractic.”

According to Kourmadas, if you don't know a little something about a topic, it's difficult to know if something is credible or not. His mission is to educate people about what chiropractors can and can't do.

What is “chiropractic psychosis?”

- Delusional paradigms of health; *e.g.*, vitalism, somatovisceralisms
- Self-referenced, proprietary systems of diagnosis and treatment
- Subjective reality fallacies; *e.g.*, doctor's “philosophy” affects outcomes
- Lack of any self-correction mechanisms
- Incorporation of numerous other psychotic belief systems (various “alt-med” faith-based systems)
- Acknowledgement of only the science that supports preconceived biases
- Equivocation fallacies (60,000 definitions)
- Profound intellectual dishonesty

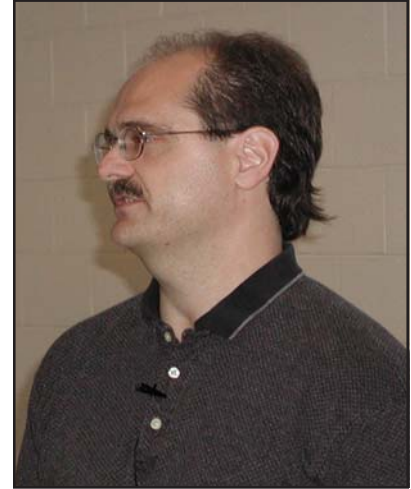
“Chiropractic psychosis is pandemic in the institutions and publications of the chiropractic profession,” says Kourmadas. “When someone has been consistently and systemati-

cally trained over 20 years to believe something, they are out of touch with reality.”

“About 3 years ago when we bought a house the neighbor across the street was very happy that we had a little boy to play with her child,” said Kourmadas. “Her brother-in-law, a pediatric chiropractor, told her, for example, that she shouldn't take her children to get their vaccinations, but should take them to the chiropractor. I said that was

nuts. Another time she asked me if chiropractors take classes to be . . . insane? Her brother-in-law said she didn't have allergies anymore because he had taken a course on chiropractic allergy elimination.” . . . Hunh?”

Kourmadas takes exception to the professional website that says, for example, “A chiropractor is a physician engaged in the treatment and prevention of disease as well as the promotion of public health and welfare.” “Bogus,” says Kourmadas. “Basically, **chiropractors treat back pain**—they are limited musculo-skeletal specialists!” Chiropractors deal with “subluxations” where the bones are out of alignment, but still touching (dislocation would mean they're not touching anymore). This treatment is known as “Adjustment.”



photos by Helen Hester-Ossa

Her brother-in-law, a pediatric chiropractor, told her, for example, that she shouldn't take her children to get their vaccinations, but should take them to the chiropractor. I said that was nuts.

continued on page 12

According to Kourmadas, “Chiropractors are people who know a lot of scientific facts, but they don’t understand scientific process. They don’t have an appreciation of how we got this knowledge.” For example, says Kourmadas, “Chiropractors say that the nervous system controls every system in your body.”

“I get in trouble [with others in my profession] because I say stuff like ‘acupuncture

is quackery.’ They don’t like that. Chiropractors will argue that you are being close-minded if you reject theories like homeopathy and acupuncture, probably because you might turn your gun sights on their areas next.”

“A word about arguing with a quack,” says Kourmadas, “—you are not going to win. The only reasons to engage with a person like that is if there is an audience that is on the fence who you can influence away from it.”



Chiropractors will argue that you are being close-minded if you reject theories like homeopathy and acupuncture, probably because you might turn your gun sights on their areas next.

Fred J. Kourmadas is a chiropractor with an MS in exercise, fitness, and health promotion. “When I embarked on my chiropractic career, I thought I was entering a profession that was scientifically based, and would soon be getting the kind of acceptance from the scientific community that it was due. Twenty years later, the ‘leadership’ (if you want to call it that) of the profession seems to have lost interest in science, now that all forms of pseudo-science quackery are in vogue.”

Chiropractors possess a unique set of psychomotor skills for the analysis and treatment of musculo-ligamentous afflictions. The pseudo-scientific element in the profession holds that we are not “back doctors,” but rather are a comprehensive system of health care that can treat a broad range of organic and even infectious disorders, all by adjusting the spine. This faction will not ‘go away’ until the public becomes more savvy and seeks out practitioners who practice on firm scientific foundations.”

Fred plans to write about what chiropractors can and can’t do, and how to avoid practitioners who will lead you down a primrose path of pseudo-scientific dogma.

Hyman went on to say that most of the people who do psychic readings who deliberately pick up advance information are called “cold readers.” (W.L. Gresham [1948]. *Monster midway*. NY: Rinehart & Company. Ch 7: The Romany Trade.) Gresham is the first person to use the term “cold reading” in the 1940s. These cold readers do not necessarily believe that they are reaching the supernatural—they are simulating.

However, 97 percent of the people who do readings are “shut-eyes.” They actually believe they are obtaining their information from an occult source such as astrology, palmistry, tarot cards, numerology, intuition or the like. Even though they have a formula they follow, these people believe as much as the victim that this paranormal process works.

Hyman himself earned money for college by doing palm readings. He studied up on the art and learned all the traditional interpretations of the lines in the hand. He was also a keen observer and received cues from the client’s dress, posture, general health, jewelry, and other observable cues. At first he didn’t believe in what he was doing, but the feedback was so positive from his “clients” that he started to think there was something to it. But, someone bet him that he would be just as successful if he said exactly the opposite of what he read. When he did so, the client was stunned because the reading was so accurate.

“The biggest secret of doing a successful psychic reading,” says Hyman, “is to get the client to cooperate with you.”

Casting a Wide Net

After listening to 18 hours of tapes of English psychic Christian Dion on the radio in England, Hyman began to notice a pattern. Dion would ask the caller:

1. If there was a problem in last 2 years
 - a. Emotional or romantic status
 - b. Career change or promotion
 - c. Organization of life
 - d. Move, always overseas (because England is an island, so where can you go?)
 - e. Travel, either visiting or someone coming to visit them

- f. Legal or financial matters, or property problems
 - g. Pregnancy
 - h. Health
2. Then Dion would say things are going to get better in the next few months or the next few years.



When Christian Dion asked one of the people who just had a reading if they thought it was real, the person said it was “right on.”

In Buffalo, Ray Hyman did radio readings, giving general statements that could apply to anyone, then refining it based on their feedback.

Hyman would cast a wide net and then see what he dragged in: “How are you?” “Fine.” “But you don’t sound fine, Emily. I see that you, or someone close to you, is going to make a career change.” “Yes, that’s my son. The idiot, he’s burnt all his bridges.” “Well, if he’s changed jobs, and there’s no turning back, you might as well stop fighting with him and help him as best you can.”

You need to get the people in a pattern of saying yes. With Christian Dion, it was practically a monologue on his part. He didn’t need to convince the caller, but the radio listeners. Talk show host Larry King typically cuts callers off after someone like well-known TV necromancer John Edwards makes a specific statement, moving to a new caller before there is feedback.

The biggest secret of doing a successful psychic reading is to get the client to cooperate with you.

continued on page 14

The psychic is like a ghostwriter: he receives all the information from the client and repackages it and feeds it back.

How Does It Work?

“The meaning a client gets from a psychic reading is only partially constrained by the specific words of the reader,” says Hyman. “If the client believes, for whatever reason, that the reader is wise and has access to privileged knowledge—especially knowledge about the client or the client’s situation—then the reading will convey one meaning. If, on the other hand, the client believes that the psychic has no special powers and has no occult knowledge of the client’s situation, then the identical reading will convey an entirely different meaning. Given the client’s assumptions and beliefs, his or her interpretation of the reading makes sense.”

“What if what you tell your client is wrong?” asks Hyman. “Believe it or not, it does not make much difference. No matter how specific and concrete you try to be, what you say will always be ambiguous. This is because language is inherently ambiguous. The words and sentences, in actual communication, convey meaning only in the context of a total situation. Language is just one component of this total situation.”


Hyman explained that there is such a thing as “belief perseverance”—that you hang onto a belief in the face of contradiction. Even

when you debrief someone and tell them the reading or test was fake, they persist in their original belief (conveyed by you) that they are capable or incapable of doing something.

“In everyday folk psychology, there is a difference between perceiving and imagining. Imagination is from within, perception is from without. In our perception, there’s always some contribution from our prior experience. Our experience constrains perception,” says Hyman.

Hyman demonstrated several card tricks where the audience saw more dots on a card than were actually visible, guided by the placement of his hands over certain portions of the card.

“The world is very ambiguous, but we perceive it as unambiguous. Therefore people can exploit us. The input should not be looked at for meaning, but what we bring to it. The psychic uses your comprehension and understanding of words to create an image. The psychic says, ‘I am going to say words that will only have meaning to you.’ Then the psychic can say anything and you will bring meaning to it.”

The psychic is like a ghostwriter: he receives all the information from the client and repackages it and feeds it back. 

Suggested Reading

Hyman, R. (1977, Spring/Summer). “Cold reading”: how to convince strangers that you know all about them. *The Zetetic [The Skeptical Inquirer]*, 18-37. [Reprinted in Hyman, R. (1989). *The Elusive quarry: a scientific appraisal of psychical research*. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.]

Hyman, R. (1981) The psychic reading. In T.A. Sebeok & R. Rosenthal (eds.) *The Clever Hans Phenomenon*. NY: New York Academy of Sciences. 18-37. [Reprinted in Hyman, R. (1989). *The Elusive quarry: a scientific appraisal of psychical research*. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.]

Ray Hyman is considered the leading constructive critic of academic parapsychology research. A longtime professor of psychology (now emeritus) at the University of Oregon, Hyman has taught about the psychology of belief and self-deception and conducted painstaking critical analyses of published parapsychology experiments.

An amateur magician, he has critiqued experiments with prominent psychics and other psychic claimants conducted by private scientific and government organizations. Despite intense controversies, he has managed to maintain the respect of both parapsychologists and fellow skeptics. As a well-informed outside critic, he is often credited with helping raise the quality of parapsychological research. He has cautioned skeptics on the need to become better informed about the research they criticize. <http://www.hcrc.org/contrib/hyman/hyman.html>

Fox News Doubts Apollo Moon Landing



On November 20, 2002, NCAS member Gary Stone wrote the following:

As I was channel surfing at 7:59 pm Nov 19, I came across Fox News. Newsreader Sheppard Smith showing footage of the second Apollo moon landing. While reading text marking the anniversary of that event, when the camera returned to Mr. Smith, he said, "Or supposedly they did."

I was outraged!

I immediately called the Fox News comments line and told them how sleazy that was for a so-called news program to deliberately

distort historical facts, and that their motto, "We report it, you decide" does not let them off the hook for their complete and utter disregard for reality. It makes it clear that they are not a reliable news source.

Fox News (sic)1-888-369-4762—Comments are recorded at the end of a long announcement.

Gary Stone
for myself

Don't be mystified.

Yes, I want to: join NCAS.
 renew my membership.

Membership Options				
	1 year	2 years	5 years	Lifetime
Single	\$30	\$50	\$100	\$200
Double*	\$40	\$65	\$120	\$250
Full-time student**	\$10	—	—	—

*(2 members at same mailing address)

Name _____

Street _____


City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ e-mail _____

**Students: List institution attending _____

Your additional tax-deductible donation _____

JOIN? **RENEW?**



Make checks payable to NCAS and mail to:

NCAS
PO Box 8428
Silver Spring, MD 20907

**Check the mailing label for your membership date . . .
you'll find a renewal form above**

about NCAS

Bits and Pieces

- *The Shadow*, NCAS' monthly calendar, can be sent to you via email! Send an email request to ncas@ncas.org to be added to the eShadow list.
- NCAS has a low-volume electronic mailing list, *ncas-share*, where members can share news items and other things of interest. Send an email request to ncas@ncas.org to be added to the *ncas-share* mailing list.
- Visit the NCAS website to find the Condon UFO report online and many other resources at www.ncas.org
- Because NCAS is a 501c(3) nonprofit organization, all donations you make to NCAS are fully tax deductible!

What would YOU like to see in the *Skeptical Eye*? Write us at

e-mail: ncas@ncas.org
s_eye@ncas.org (newsletter business)
Internet: <http://www.ncas.org>

or call our
24-hour phone number: 301-587-3827

We'd like to hear from you.

National Capital Area Skeptics
PO Box 8428
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Nonprofit Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Merrifield, VA
Permit No. 895