# Summing Up Thirty Years of the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER

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This issue of the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER marks the thirtieth year of publication of the official magazine of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal—which had been founded six months before the first issue was published in Fall/Winter 1976 as The Zetetic (meaning "skeptical seeker"), under the editorship of Marcello Truzzi. The name was changed to the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER the following year, and Kendrick Frazier was appointed the new editor, a position he has served with brilliant virtuosity and distinction ever since. Ken had been the editor of Science News, and during his tenure at the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER he also worked full time at Sandia National Laboratories for 23 years until his retirement from there this past April. He has kept abreast of the many breakthroughs on the frontiers of the sciences and is eminently qualified to interpret the sciences for the general public; hence he continues to be a perfect fit for the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER.

In preparation for this overview, I reviewed the entire corpus published in the past thirty years, which will soon be available on CD-ROM. What impressed me greatly was the wide range of topics and the distinguished authors that Ken has attracted to its pages. I can highlight only some of these in this article. I wish to use this occasion to focus on what I believe we have accomplished in the past three decades and to speculate as to what directions our magazine might take in future decades. Today, many threats to science come from disparate quarters—as Ken points out in his editorial, "In Defense of the Higher Values," in the July/August 2006 issue of the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER. These include efforts to undermine the integrity of science and freedom of research, and we are continually confronted by irrational anti-scientific forces rooted in fundamentalist religion and ideology. Given these challenges, no doubt skeptical inquiry will continue to be necessary in the future.

The original name of CSICOP was the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal and Other Phenomena, but this mouthful was deemed too long—and the acronym would have been CSICOPOP—so we shortened it! It is clear that the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER was never intended to confine itself solely to paranormal issues; and the topics it has dealt with have been truly wide-ranging. The subtitle that was eventually developed and now appears on every issue is "The Magazine for Science and Reason," which states succinctly

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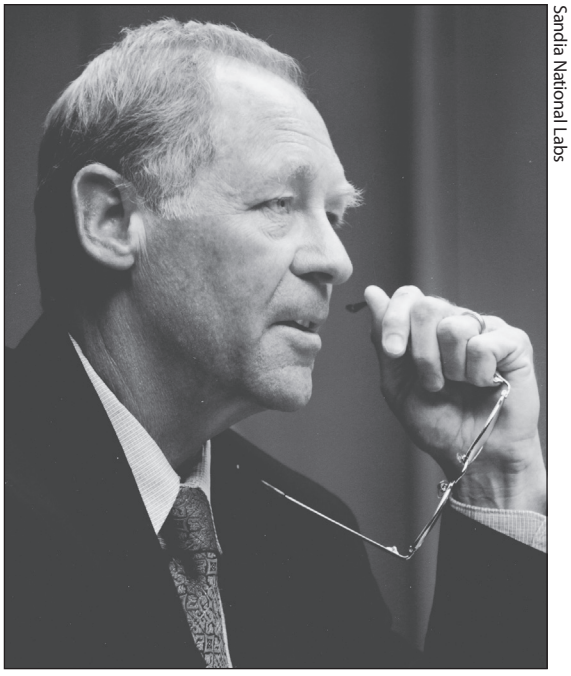
what it is all about. It has encouraged "the critical investigation of paranormal and fringe-science claims," but "it also promotes science and scientific inquiry, critical thinking, science education, and the use of reason."

## I.

The enduring contribution of the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER in its first three decades, I submit, has been its persistent efforts to raise the level of the public understanding of science. No nation or region can cope with the challenges of the global marketplace and compete effectively unless it provides a steady stream of highly educated scientific practitioners. This is true of the developing world, which wishes to catch up with the advanced industrial and informational economies; but it is true of those latter nations as well. Today, China and India have embarked upon massive efforts to increase the number of scientists in their countries—China graduates anywhere from 350,000 to 600,000 engineers annually, compared to 70,000 to 120,000 in the United States, of which some 30,000 are foreign born. Alas, we still have a tremendous task, for U.S. students rank only twenty-fourth in scientific knowledge out of the twenty-nine industrialized countries. Only 40 percent of twelfth graders tested had any comprehension of the basic concepts and methods of science. Presumably, even fewer political figures in Washington have the requisite comprehension!



Sandia National Labs

Kendrick Frazier

The long-standing policy of CSICOP has been four-fold: (1) to criticize claims of the paranormal and pseudoscience, (2) to explicate the methods of scientific inquiry and the nature of the scientific outlook, (3) to seek a balanced view of science in the mass media, and (4) to teach critical thinking in the schools. Unfortunately, the constant attacks on science, the rejection of evolution by creationists and intelligent design advocates (some thirty-seven states have proposed programs to teach ID and creationism in the schools), the limiting of stem-cell research by the federal government, and the refusal to accept scientific findings about global warming vividly demonstrate the uphill battle that the United States faces unless it improves the public appreciation of scientific research.

Clearly, the major focus of the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER, especially in its first two decades, was on the paranormal; for there was tremendous public fascination with this area of human interest, which was heavily promoted and sensationalized by an often irresponsible media. Our interest was not simply in the paranormal curiosity shop but to increase an understanding among the general public of how science works.

The term paranormal referred to phenomena that allegedly went "beyond normal science." Many topics were lumped under this rubric. And many credulous people believed that there was a paranormal-spiritual dimension that leaked into our universe and caused strange entities and events. Included in this mysterious realm was a wide range of phenomena, which the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER examined within its pages over the years: psychic claims and predictions; parapsychology (psi, ESP, clairvoyance, telepathy, precognition, psychokinesis); UFO visitations and abductions by extraterrestrials (Roswell, cattle mutilations, crop circles); monsters of the deep (the Loch Ness monster) and of the forests and mountains (Sasquatch, or Bigfoot); mysteries of the oceans (the Bermuda Triangle, Atlantis); cryptozoology (the search for unknown species); ghosts, apparitions and haunted houses (The Amityville Horror); astrology and horoscopes (Jeanne Dixon, the "Mars effect," the "Jupiter effect"), spoon bending (Uri Geller); remote viewing (Targ and Puthoff); cult anthropology; von Däniken and the Nazca plains of Peru; biorhythms; spontaneous human combustion; psychic surgery and faith healing; the full moon and moon madness; firewalking; psychic detectives; Ganzfeld experiments; poltergeists; near-death and out-of-body experiences; reincarnation; Immanuel Velikovsky and catastrophes in the past; doomsday forecasts; and much, much more!

The term paranormal was first used by parapsychologists, but it was stretched uncritically by advocates of the New Age, the Age of Aquarius, and harmonic convergence to include bizarre phenomena largely unexamined by mainline science. Murray Gell-Mann, Nobel Laureate and Fellow of CSICOP, at our conference at the University of Colorado in 1986—I can remember it vividly—observed that we skeptics do not really believe in the "paranormal," because it deals with things beyond science, and as skeptical inquirers, he reiterated that we were dealing with investigations amenable to scientific methods of explanation. We would refuse to stop at any point and attribute phenomena to occult or hidden causes; we would keep looking for causal explanations and never declare that they were beyond the realm of natural causation by invoking the paranormal; and if we found new explanations, we would extend science to incorporate them. Incidentally, he also denied the feeling of some New Agers "that quantum mechanics is so weird, that anything goes" (SKEPTICAL INQUIRER, Fall 1986).

Sociologist Marcello Truzzi, who studied satanic cults, pointed out in our very first issue that we intended to examine esoteric anomalous claims, the "damned facts," as Charles Fort

called them (hail in July, a rainfall of frogs, etc.), to see what we could make of them. The public was intrigued by such mysteries, and we tried to encourage scientific investigators to explain them and to find out if they ever even existed or occurred.

Almost every issue of the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER attempted to fathom what was really happening in one or another alleged paranormal area. Thus, Ray Hyman described the technique of "cold reading" to show how guesswork and cues were used by psychics to deceive people who thought that they were having a bona fide paranormal reading. Philip Klass, head of CSICOP's UFO subcommittee, tried to unravel unusual cases of alleged UFO visitations and abductions in answer to astronomer J. Allen Hynek or Bruce Maccabee or other UFO buffs, and offered alternative prosaic explanations to account for apparent misperceptions. Conjuror James Randi and Scientific American columnist Martin Gardner looked for fraud or deceit. This was graphically illustrated in the case of a young psychic named Suzie Cottrell, who had bamboozled Johnny Carson by card reading. Put to the test under controlled conditions, Gardner said that she used Matt Schulein's forced-card trick, and Randi caught her red-handed peeking at the bottom card (see the Spring 1979 issue).

The SKEPTICAL INQUIRER published what appeared to be solutions to previously unexplained mysteries. We became exasperated with the media—such as NBC's Unsolved Mysteries, because they would present persons as having "real" paranormal abilities in spite of the fact that those persons were fraudulent—as in the case of Tina Resch, the Columbus, Ohio, youngster. Poltergeists supposedly manifested themselves when she came on the scene, lamps shattered, lights or faucets turned off and on. She was exposed by a TV camera that the crew left on while she thought that she was alone in a room: she was seen knocking down a lamp herself and screaming "poltergeist!"

I must say that these early years were exciting and exhilarating. We loved working with James Randi, Penn and Teller, Jamy Ian Swiss, Henry Gordon, Bob Steiner, and other magicians, who could usually duplicate a supposedly paranormal feat by sleight of hand or other forms of chicanery.

Deception is unfortunately widespread in human history, and it is revealing to point it out when it is encountered, especially where loose protocol makes it easy to hoodwink a gullible experimenter. Harry Houdini performed yeoman's service earlier in the twentieth century by exposing the blatant fraud perpetuated by Marjery Crandon and other spiritualists and mediums. I surely do not wish to suggest that conscious deception is the primary explanation for all or even most paranormal beliefs. Rather, it is self-deception that accounts for so much credulity. There is a powerful willingness in all too many people to believe in the unbelievable in spite of a lack of evidence or even evidence to the contrary. This propensity was due in part to what I have called the transcendental temptation, the tendency to resort to magical thinking, the attribution of occult causes for natural phenomena. The best antidote for this, I submit, is critical thinking and the search for natural causes of such phenomena.

Some paranormalists complained that we were poking fun at them and that ridicule is no substitute for objective inquiry. Martin Gardner observed that one joke might be worth a thousand syllogisms, if it dethrones a phony or nincompoop. Editor Kendrick Frazier, in my judgment, has always attempted to be fair-minded; and if an article criticized a proponent of a paranormal claim, he would invariably give that person an opportunity to respond. We attempted to make it clear that we were interested in fair and impartial inquiry, that we were not dogmatic or closed-minded, and that skepticism did not imply a priori rejection of any reasonable claim. Indeed, I insisted that our skepticism was not totalistic or nihilistic about paranormal claims, but that we proposed to examine a claim by means of scientific inquiry. I called this "the new skepticism" (see the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER Winter 1994), to distance it from classical Greco-Roman skepticism, which rejected virtually anything and everything; for no kind of knowledge was considered reliable. But this was before the emergence of modern science, in which hypotheses and theories are based upon rigorous methods of empirical investigation, experimental confirmation, and replication, and also by whether a paranormal claim contradicts the body of tested theories or is consistent with them. One must be prepared to overthrow an entire theoretical framework—and this has happened often in the history of science—but there has to be strong contravailing evidence that requires it. It is clear that skeptical doubt is an integral part of the method of science, and scientists should be prepared to question received scientific doctrines and reject them in the light of new evidence.

## II.

Looking back to the early years of the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER and CSICOP, it is evident that the salient achievement was that we called for new investigations and researchers in our network of collaborators responded by engaging in them.

(1) A good illustration of this is the determined efforts by skeptics to evaluate astrology experimentally. Although not paranormal in a strict sense—it was surely on the fringe of science—nevertheless, the claim that there were astro-biological influences present at the moment of birth could be tested. The "Mars effect" was a good illustration of this. French psychologists Michel and Francois Gauquelin maintained that the positions of planets at the time and place of birth—in this case Mars (in the first and fourth sector of the heavens)—was correlated with whether or not a person would become a sports champion. Egged on by Truzzi and a British psychologist, Hans Eysenck, we attempted several tests of this claim, and scientists tested the birth dates of sports champions born in the United States and France (and similar tests were made for other planets and professions). The results were negative, but it took twenty years of patient investigation to ascertain that. The most likely explanation for the "Mars effect" is biased data selection by the Gauquelins. CSICOP encouraged other researchers (such as Shawn Carlson and Geoffrey Dean) to test classical astrological claims. The results, published in the pages of the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER, again were invariably negative. Astrology provided no coherent theory or mechanism for the influence of planetary bodies at the time and place of a person's birth.

(2) Similar efforts were applied to parapsychology. Ray Hyman, James Alcock, Barry Beyerstein, and others were able by serious meta-analyses to evaluate the results of experimental

research. Working with Charles Honorton, Robert Morris, and other parapsychologists, they questioned the findings of parapsychological investigations, and they found badly designed protocols, data leakage, experimenter biases, and insufficient replication by independent researchers.

The significant achievement of the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER was that it helped crystallize an appreciation by the scientific community of the need to investigate such claims. After the establishment of CSICOP, many scientific researchers were willing to devote the time to carefully examine the data. These results were published in the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER, so there was an independent record of explanation. And anyone who was puzzled by the phenomena could consult this new literature to deflate the paranormal balloon. This applied to a wide range of other phenomena.

(3) Near-death experiences provided insufficient evidence for the conjecture that a conscious self or soul left the body and viewed it from afar—this is better explained by reference to physiological and psychological causes, as Susan Blackmore pointed out in the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER (Fall 1991).

(4) The ability of fire-walking gurus to walk over hot coals was not due to some mind-over-matter spiritual power but rather because hot embers are poor conductors of heat, and it was possible for anyone to attempt it without injury.

(5) Another area of importance was the critical evaluation of the use of hypnosis by UFO investigators, who believed they were uncovering repressed memories that depicted alleged abductions. John Mack, a professor of psychiatry at Harvard, used hypnosis to probe the unconscious minds of certain troubled people who thought they had been abducted aboard UFOs by extraterrestrials. There was a similar pattern in such cases, he said, which was repeated time and time again by his patients: a sense of lost time, flashing lights, out-of-body experiences, etc. Mack thought this provided strong evidence for the claim; skeptics maintained that these evidences were not corroborated by independent testimony. At one point, Carl Sagan wrote to us, urging CSICOP to undertake an investigation of these claims, which by then were proliferating everywhere. We invited John Mack to a CSICOP conference in Seattle in June 1994 to hear what he had to say. There was a colorful confrontation between John Mack the believer and Phil Klass the skeptic—who insisted that hypnosis was unreliable as a source of truth. The influence of urban abduction legends popularized by the mass media predisposed many fantasy-prone persons to imbibe this tale, and the suggestibility of hypnotists reinforced the reality of their subjective experiences. Some critics asked Mack whether he accepted the fantasies of his psychotic patients as true—which gave him some pause.

"The Amazing" Kreskin, who used hypnosis in his act, appeared at one of CSICOP's conferences expressing doubt that hypnosis was a genuine "trance state" or a source of truth—it seemed to work in suggestible patients because they followed the bidding of the hypnotist. (Incidentally, many skeptics were highly critical of Kreskin for suggesting that he possessed ESP.)

(6) Hypnosis was also used in so-called past-life regressions to provide supposed evidence of previous lives. The SKEPTICAL INQUIRER carried many articles criticizing this technique. Past life therapists maintained that the hypnotic state provided empirical support for the doctrine of reincarnation, maintaining that the memory of a previous life was lodged deep within the unconscious. More parsimonious explanations of these experiences are available: creative imagination, suggestions implanted by the hypnotherapist, and cryptomnesia (information stored in the unconscious memory without knowledge of the true source). Again, there was no independent factual corroboration, and these methods seem to rely more on a priori belief in reincarnation than reliable empirical evidence.

(7) Many research issues in psychology were critically examined in the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER. The work of Elizabeth Loftus is especially noteworthy here. In the decade of the 1990s, the mass media focused on charges that young children had been molested by relatives, friends, and teachers. Many reputations were destroyed after lurid accounts of sexual improprieties were made public. The popularity of such confessions spread like wildfire, and thousands of people claimed that they had been likewise molested. This was dramatized by the McMartin trial in California, where teachers in a day-care center were accused of sexual assaults of young children. This was based on testimony extracted from children and extrapolated by overzealous prosecutors. It had been pointed out that there is a "false-memory syndrome," which is fed by suggestion, and that testimony based on this is highly questionable. The SKEPTICAL INQUIRER was among the first publications to point out the fragmentary nature of the evidence and the unreliability of such testimony. This helped to turn the tide against such accusations, many of which had been exaggerated.

It would be useful at this point to sum up the pitfalls that skeptical inquirers encountered in studying paranormal and fringe-science claims and of guidelines that emerged as a consequence:

- Eyewitness subjective testimony uncritically accepted without corroboration is a potential source of deception (in accounts of molestation, reports of apparitions, past-life regression, UFO visitations, etc.).
- Extraordinary claims demand extraordinary evidence.
- The burden of proof rests with the claimant, not the investigators.
- Paranormal reports are like unsinkable rubber ducks: no matter how many times they are submerged, they tend to surface again.
- There is widespread gullibility and will to believe expressed by certain segments of the population, fascinated by mystery and magical thinking and willingness to accept tales of the occult or supernatural.
- In some cases, but surely not all, blatant fraud and chicanery may be observed, even in young children.
- In evaluating evidence, watch out for hidden bias and self-deception pro and con (including your own) to determine if something is a pseudoscience or not.
- There is no easily drawn demarcation line between science and pseudoscience, for one may be dealing with a proto-science. In my view, we need to descend to the concrete data and we cannot always judge a priori on purely philosophical grounds whether something is a pseudoscience or not (although I agree in general with Mario Bunge's views about the characteristics of a pseudosci-

ence; see SKEPTICAL INQUIRER, Fall 1984 and July/August 2006).

## III.

In recent years, popular interest in the paranormal has declined markedly, at least in comparison with its heyday. I do not deny that belief in paranormal phenomena is widespread; however, there are fewer manifestations of it in the mass media, and apparently less scientific interest. In previous decades, there were huge best sellers whose sales figures numbered in the millions: Raymond Moody's Life After Life, Charles Berlitz's The Bermuda Triangle, Erich von Däniken's Chariot of the Gods, etc.

Today, very few such books make The New York Times best-sellers list; and a top-selling paranormal book is likely to sell only 200,000 to 300,000 copies. (Sylvia Browne is the current best-selling guru, but there are few others besides her.) And there are very few major television programs devoted to the paranormal, though there are smaller-market cable shows.

Attention has turned to other areas. First, alternative medicine has grown by leaps and bounds. Prior to 1996, very few medical schools taught courses or offered programs in alternative medicine—and the medical profession was highly skeptical of the therapeutic value of remedies such as homeopathy, acupuncture, Therapeutic Touch, herbal medicines, iridology, and chiropractic. This magazine published many articles critical of these areas. It may be that such therapies are useful—the criterion we suggested was to conduct random, double-blind tests of their efficacy. Until there is sufficient data to support a therapy, the public should be cautious of its use. The medical profession needs to be open-minded yet suspicious of therapies until they are demonstrated to work—notwithstanding the evidential value of placebos.

Interestingly, the skeptical movement in Europe has concentrated on alternative medicines, though this is not strictly paranormal but is on the borderline of fringe medicine. I must confess that we are dismayed by the rapid growth of alternative and complementary medicine, which has had enormous acceptance virtually overnight. This is helped no doubt by the fact that it is a highly profitable source of income for both practitioners and the companies that market herbal remedies. Homeopathy is very strong in Europe and is now making inroads in the United States, though its remedies have never been adequately tested. Therapeutic Touch is so widespread in the nursing profession that it has gained great acceptance, though the basis of its curative powers has not been adequately demonstrated. The role of intercessory prayer as a healing method has provoked considerable controversy. Some advocates of prayer have claimed positive results; however, skeptics have seriously questioned the methodology of these tests. The most systematic tests were recently conducted by a team of scientists led by Herbert Benson (see the July/August 2006 SKEPTICAL INQUIRER). Using fairly rigorous protocol, these tests produced negative results.

Many skeptics have likewise been very critical of schools of psychotherapy, notably psychoanalysis, for lacking clinical data about the efficacy of their methods. In this regard, the Center for Inquiry has taken over the journal The Scientific Review of Mental Health Practice edited by Scott Lilienfeld, which evaluates the scientific validity of mental-health treatment modalities. Some people say that the change from evidence-based medicine to other forms of medicine spells the emergence of a new paradigm; Marcia Angel has observed that this shift is toward a kind of spiritual medicine, influenced by the growth of religiosity in the culture.

Over the years, the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER has dealt with many other areas that needed critical scrutiny, including the efficacy of dowsing, graphology, facilitated communication, SETI, animal speech, the Atkins Diet, obesity, the Rorschach test, holistic medicine, and veterinary medicine. In addition, there were many articles on the philosophy of science, the nature of consciousness, and the evidence for evolution.

## IV.

Numerous distinguished scientists have contributed to SKEPTICAL INQUIRER, including Richard Feynman, Glenn Seaborg, Leon Lederman, Gerald Holton, Steve Weinberg, Carl Sagan, Richard Dawkins, Jill Tarter, Steven Pinker, Carol Tavris, Neil de Grasse Tyson, and Victor Stenger. Among the topics examined have been quantum mechanics, the brain and consciousness, and cold fusion. Thus, the scope of the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER under Kendrick Frazier's editorship has been impressively comprehensive. And I should add that his fine editorials in every issue have pinpointed central questions of concern to science.

In a very real sense, the most important controversy in the past decade has been the relationship between religion and the paranormal and whether and to what extent CSICOP and the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER should deal with religious claims. As a matter of fact, evangelical and fundamentalist religion have grown to such proportions that religion and the paranormal overlap and one cannot easily deal with one without the other. The SKEPTICAL INQUIRER has dealt with religious claims from the earliest. First, it was in the vanguard of responding to the attacks on the theory of evolution coming from the creationists. Eugenie Scott, who served on the CSICOP Executive Council for a period of time, has done great service in critically analyzing "creation science," and the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER was among the first magazines to do so, demonstrating that creationism is not a science, for it does not provide a testable theory. The young-earth view

maintains that Earth and the species on it are of recent origin, a view so preposterous that it is difficult to take it seriously. Most recently, intelligent design theory (which rejects the young-earth theory) claims that the complexity of biological systems is evidence for design. Numerous articles in the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER have pointed out that evolution is supported by overwhelming evidence drawn from many sciences. The existence of vestigial organs in many species, including the human species, is hardly evidence for design; for they have no discernible function. And the extinction of millions of species on the planet is perhaps evidence for unintelligent design.

Second, the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER was always willing to deal with religious questions, insofar as there are empirical claims that are amenable to scientific treatment. Thus, the Shroud of Turin has been readily investigated in the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER (see, for example, November/December 1999), presenting evidence (such as carbon-14 dating) that indicated that it was a thirteenth-century cloth on which an image had been contrived. Joe Nickell (CSICOP's Senior Research Fellow for the past decade) has said for years that the shroud is a forgery—as did the bishop of the area of France where it first turned up maintained. Moreover, Nickell has shown how such a shroud could easily have been concocted. Similarly, the so-called Bible Code was easily refuted by Dave Thomas (see the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER, November/December 1997 and March/April 1998).

In recent years, reports of miracles have proliferated, much to the surprise of rationalists, who deplore the apparent reversion of society to the thinking of the Middle Ages. David Hume offered powerful arguments questioning miracles, which he said were due to ignorance of the causes of such phenomena. There is abundant evidence, said Hume, to infer that nature exhibits regularities; hence, we should reject any exception to the laws of nature. In the late eighteenth century, showers of meteorites were interpreted by religious believers as signs of God's wrath. A special commission of scientists in France was appointed to investigate whether such reports of objects falling from the sky were authentic, and if so, if they were caused by natural events.

The SKEPTICAL INQUIRER has dealt with miracles in its pages, given the great public interest in them. The so-called miracle at Medjugorje, Yugoslavia, at a shrine where the Virgin Mary appeared before young children was critically discussed (November/December 2002). The conclusion was that the children's testimony has not been corroborated by independent testimony and was hence suspect. But as a result of the attention the children received, they became media celebrities. Oddly, the Virgin never warned about the terrible war that was about to engulf Bosnia and Kosovo. The cases were similar for the numerous other sightings of Mary and those of Jesus, which have attracted great public fascination. The investigations of Joe Nickell are models to follow; Nickell refuses to declare a priori that any miracle claim is false, but instead, he attempts where he can to conduct an on-site inquest into the facts surrounding the case. If, after investigation, he can show that the alleged miracle was due to misperception or deception, his analysis is far more effective.

The one area of interest in the paranormal that has also had a resurgence in recent years is "communicating with the dead." The form it has taken is reminiscent of the spiritualism of the nineteenth century, which had been thoroughly discredited because of fraud and deceit. The new wave of interest is fed by appearances on radio and television by such people as Sylvia Browne, James Van Praagh, and John Edwards. The techniques that the most popular psychics use are the crudest form of cold reading—which they seem to get away with easily. In some cases, they have resorted to doing hot readings (using information surreptitiously gleaned beforehand). This latter-day revival of spiritualism is no doubt fueled by the resurgence of religiosity in the United States, but it also shows a decline of respect for the rigorous standards of evidence used in the sciences.

The question of the relationship between science and religion intrigues many people today. It is especially encouraged by grants bestowed by the Templeton Foundation. Indeed, three special issues of the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER, beginning with July/August 1999 were devoted to explorations of the relationship or lack of it between these two perennial areas of human interest.

These issues of the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER proved to be the most popular that we have ever published. Most skeptics have taken a rather strong view that science and religion are two separate domains and that science needs latitude for freedom of research, without ecclesiastical or moral censorship. This is one of the most burning issues today. Stephen Jay Gould defended a dissenting viewpoint of two magisteria: religion, which included ethics within its domain, and science. The SKEPTICAL INQUIRER has consistently brought philosophers to its pages to discuss a range of philosophical questions on the borderlines of science, religion, and morality. Susan Haack, Mario Bunge, and myself, Paul Kurtz, among others, have argued that the scientific approach is relevant to ethics and therefore ethics should not be left to the exclusive domain of religion (see the September/October 2004 SKEPTICAL INQUIRER).

## V.

Skeptics have often felt isolated in a popular culture that is often impervious to or fails to fully appreciate the great discoveries of science on the frontiers of research. They have done arduous work attempting to convince producers, directors, and publishers to present the scientific outlook fairly. When pro-paranormal views are blithely expressed as true, we have urged that scientific critiques also be presented to provide some balance. Our goal is to inform the public about the scientific outlook. We believe that we still have a long way to go to achieve some measure of fairness in the media. Almost the first official act of CSICOP was to challenge NBC for its program Exploring the Unknown, narrated by Burt Lancaster, which presented pro-paranormal propaganda on topics such as psychic surgery and astrology, without any scientific dissent at all. Our suit against NBC citing the Fairness Doctrine was turned down by a federal judge, and our subsequent appeal to the First District Court in Washington was also rejected (see the Fall/Winter 1977

SKEPTICAL INQUIRER). Conversely, the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER has been the victim of many legal suits or threats of suits over the years. The most notorious was Uri Geller's protracted legal suits against James Randi, CSICOP, and Prometheus Books. The most recent suit has named Elizabeth Loftus and CSICOP for an article that she authored (with Melvin J. Guyer) on the case of alleged sexual abuse of "Jane Doe" in the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER (May/June 2002). So the struggle that we have waged still continues.

On a more positive note, it is a source of great satisfaction that the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER is read throughout the world and that CSICOP has helped generate new skeptics groups, magazines, and newsletters almost everywhere—from Australia and China to Argentina, Peru, Mexico, and Nigeria; from India, Eastern Europe, and Russia to Germany, France, Spain, Italy, and the United Kingdom, so that the Center for Inquiry/Transnational (including CSICOP) has become truly planetary in scope. Especially gratifying is the fact that CSICOP has convened meetings in places all over the world, including China, England, France, Russia, Australia, India, Germany, Africa, etc.

Looking ahead, I submit that the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER and CSICOP should investigate other kinds of intellectually challenging and controversial claims. It is difficult to know before- hand where the greatest needs will emerge. In my view, we cannot limit our agenda to the issues that were dominant thirty, twenty, or even ten years ago, interesting as they have been. I think that we should of course continue to investigate paranormal claims, given our skilled expertise in that area. But we need to widen our net by entering into new arenas we've never touched on before, and we should be ever-willing to apply the skeptical eye wherever it is needed. Actually, Editor Kendrick Frazier has already embarked in new directions, for recent issues of the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER have dealt with topics such as cyberterrorism, "A Skeptical Look at September 11," "The Luck Factor," and critical thinking about power plants and the waste of energy in our current distribution systems. But there are many other issues that we have not dealt with that would benefit from skeptical scrutiny—and these include issues in biogenetic engineering, religion, economics, ethics, and politics.

Perhaps we have already become the Committee for Scientific Investigation (CSI), to denote that we are moving in new directions. This fulfills our general commitment to science and reason that's stated in the masthead of the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER. But one may say, there are so many intellectually controversial issues at large in society, which do we select? May I suggest the following criteria: we should endeavor to enter into an area, first, if there is considerable public interest and controversy; second, where there has not been adequate scientific research nor rigorous peer review; third, where some kind of interdisciplinary cooperative efforts would be useful; and fourth, where we can enlist the help of specialists in a variety of fields who can apply their skills to help resolve the issues.

We originally criticized pseudoscientific, paranormal claims because we thought that they trivialized and distorted the meaning of genuine science. Many of the attacks on the integrity and independence of science today come from powerful political-theological-moral doctrines. For example, one of the key objections to stem-cell research is that researchers allegedly destroy innocent human life—even when they deal with the earliest stage of fetal development or when a cell begins to divide in a petri dish. First is the claim that the "soul" is implanted at the moment of conception and that human life begins at the first division of a cell, and second, that it is "immoral" for biogeneticists working in the laboratory to intervene. The first claim is surely an occult notion if there ever was one, and it urgently needs to be carefully evaluated by people working in the fields of biology, genetics, and medical ethics; a similar response can be made to the second claim that it is immoral to intervene. There are many other challenges that have emerged in the rapidly expanding field of biogenetic research that might benefit from careful scrutiny: among these are the ethics of organ transplants, the use of mind-enhancing drugs, life-extension technologies, etc. The "new singularity," says Ray Kurzweil, portends great opportunities for humankind but also perplexing moral issues that need examination.

## VI.

In closing, permit me to touch on another practical problem that looms larger every day for the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER and other serious magazines like it. I am here referring to a double whammy: the growth of the Internet on the one hand and the steady decline of reading of magazines on the other. No doubt, the Internet provides an unparalleled resource for everyone, but at the same time, it has eroded the financial base of the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER; and we do not see any easy solution to the deficit gap that increasingly imperils our survival.

Recognizing these dangers, we have extended our public outreach, first by offering for the first time an academic program "Science and the Public" at the graduate level. Second, we have just opened an Office of Public Policy at our new Center for Inquiry in Washington, D.C., the purpose of which is to defend the integrity of science in the nation's capital and to try to convince our political leaders of the vital importance of supporting science education and the public understanding of science.

Finally, the most gratifying factor in all of this has been the unfailing support of the readers of the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER, who have helped to sustain us throughout our first three