

Clinical Parapsychology Thrives Under Mind-Body Research Guise

James Alcock's declaration of the demise of parapsychology in his May/June 2000 SI article on CSICOP's history ("Science vs. Pseudoscience . . .") seems to be grossly premature. He bemoans the "withering" of parapsychology; he even seems genuinely concerned that the ranks of "bright, creative, and respectable scholars" of parapsychology have been declining. He claims that "respectable" parapsychologists and the skeptics of CSICOP share a common commitment to the scientific method.

One can only scratch one's head over why Professor Alcock would admire so-called "scientific" parapsychologists who for decades have refused to accept that their "science" is a chimera and who consistently contort their own and others' findings in order to keep open a window of "hope" for evidence of a psychic dimension.

I, for one, share no such admiration for these mischief makers. Indeed, has Professor Alcock not noticed that parapsychology is now achieving perhaps its greatest level of success ever, not in the "formal" parapsychology labs, but rather in alternative medicine under the guise of clinical mind-body "research"?

The most glaring example of this unparalleled success is the \$2 million in research and grant monies given last year by NIH's National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) to para-psychiatrist Elisabeth Targ for two multiyear research studies: one on "distant healing" for AIDS patients and the other for "distant healing" for cancer tumors. Targ, the daughter of "remote viewing's" Russell Targ, has done two prior studies showing strong positive results for "distant healing." When Targ completes her two NCCAM studies—with their no doubt "positive" results—those studies will stand as the gold standard for "distant healing" and "intercessory prayer" research, in other words as proof of the validity of medical psychokinesis.

Her official grant proposal to NCCAM contains numerous shabby citations from the parapsychological literature. These citations were accepted as proper science by the NIH grant reviewers. Therefore, as far as United States government health science is concerned, the parapsychological venture is alive, well, and extraordinarily credible. Indeed NCCAM has at least three parapsy-

chological supporters on its Scientific Advisory Board, including Marilyn Schlitz, the Research Director of the parapsychologically-oriented Institute for Noetic Sciences. Schlitz was a collaborator with Russell Targ on the original "remote viewing" research. Schlitz also has a NCCAM research grant to study direct "brain-to-brain" communication. Her co-researcher, Leanna Standish, is the Director of Research of Bastyr University, a naturopathic "university" that is a NCCAM research center.

CSICOP's response to this serious entry of parapsychology into medicine has been inadequate, to say the least. While SKEPTICAL INQUIRER has had several good articles about other aspects of alternative medicine, until Martin Gardner's March/April 2001 column on Elisabeth Targ, the parapsychological research breakthrough in alternative medicine had gone completely unnoticed by CSICOP and SI.

If ever there were "claims of the paranormal" that needed to be investigated, surely paranormal health research ought to be at the top of the list. If we wait until paranormal healing is covered by Medicare, Medicaid, and private health insurance, it will be too late. CSICOP should be assigning its top investigators right now to blow the lid off this debacle at the National Institutes of Health.

Then, perhaps, it will be time to celebrate.

E. Patrick Curry
Consumer Health Advocate
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Value of Negative Results

Douglas M. Stokes ("The Shrinking File Drawer," May/June 2001) has convinced me that the statistical meta-analysis used in parapsychological research is flawed, as he claims. However, I go beyond his conclusion that "the foundation [of statistical meta-analysis] may be less solid than it appears." It is impossible to decide just what statistics should be used to estimate the size of the file drawer.

For example, in the physical sciences a negative result can be just as worthy of publication as a positive one. Consider the experiment of Michelson and Morley, who set out to measure the velocity of Earth with respect to Newton's absolute space and got the most famous null result in the history of science. Should we really assume that all parapsychologists are so self-

deluding as to publish only positive results? In the physical sciences statistical meta-analysis is unnecessary.

Several decades after Einstein published his work on relativity, a collection of papers was published called *100 Authors Against Einstein* which sought to show by sheer number of contrary opinions that Einstein must be wrong. A reviewer said, "One paper, if it were correct, would suffice to refute Einstein."

In my opinion, statistical meta-analysis should be cast out of the toolbox of science.

James C. Wilcox
Palos Verdes Estates, California

Antinoüs Prophecies

I was amused by the Antinoüs Prophecies, coined by Clifford Pickover (SI, May/June 2001). They quite rightly put in light the fact that any prophecy can always be interpreted and more or less adapted to any specific case.

But Nostradamus's case is much more interesting and complex. In his troubled period, under constant threat, Nostradamus was indeed a true historian who described events of his time. The events happened of course before he wrote about them, but he disguised them in a sort of coded French. This has been demonstrated by French authors who happen to know Nostradamus well—and to read French, even coded French.

Knowing that the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER is addressed mainly towards an American public, it would be nevertheless wise—and humanist!—to give the reader broader ideas than those dominated by this "Americanotropy." I am often quite disappointed by this, even in the best American publications. As a member of the *Free Inquiry* panel of consultants, I am saddened by many Americans' ignorance of French literature.

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Prévost, Roger. 1999. *Nostradamus, le Mythe et la réalité: un historien au temps des astrologues*, Robert Laffont, Paris.

Prof. Jean-Claude Pecker
Collège de France
Paris, France

Clifford Pickover's "Antinoüs Prophecies" is very interesting and certainly valid in

demonstrating how readers can infuse fanciful meaning into more or less disconnected phrase sequences, once the suggestion has been made that such interpretations are possible.

But while it applies to twentieth-century "interpreters," it has very little relevance to the historical Nostradamus. Nostradamus did not work in a semi-aleatory, stream-of-consciousness mode of writing. His verse is written in very strict adherence to contemporary French poetry, in *vers commun*. His subject matter is not random. Most of his quatrains contain a single subject, which may often center on historical incidents of identifiable past or current events. When I say most, it is because details of court gossip or small-town histories have often been lost over the past five hundred and fifty years and connections are not always clear. The wretched English translations that are currently available are of no help.

What Nostradamus did to encourage a "prophetic" reading of his verses was to devise a very clever, complex apparatus of multivalence. He fractured grammar to create double or triple meanings; he developed enigmas to give his readers the satisfaction of interpreting them; he used a vocabulary of homonyms and antonyms to create multiple possible meanings. . . . But he did not write nonsense in the fashion of "Antinoüs." He was a most accomplished charlatan who carefully constructed verses that would appeal to his market, to whom the verses were much more open than to us.

How did Nostradamus get his verses? Mr. Pickover says that he obtained them from a "glass flask of steaming liquid." I don't find this anywhere. Nostradamus himself gives two situations, one a magical ceremony of Roman origin, the other, sitting on his roof watching stars. Actually, I think he wrote them seated at his desk or table, with a good map and a few reference books. . . .

Information about this aspect of Nostradamus may be found in rational studies of Nostradamus: my book, *Prophecies and Enigmas of Nostradamus* and the late Prof. Pierre Brind Amour's *Nostradamus Astropile* and *Les Premieres centuries ou propheties*.

Everett F. Bleier
"Liberté E LeVert"
Interlaken, New York

I'm sure the article on the Antinoüs Prophecies will produce a flood of responses from skeptics eager to try their hand at the

"game" of applying them to historical events. Here's my entry.

I think that Quatrain 8 can best be interpreted as a description of the evacuation of Dunkirk during WWII. "Lightning comes near the peninsula and one will swim" refers to Hitler's blitzkrieg, or "lightning war" pushing the British forces into the sea at Dunkirk. "There is ruin, Lester, but all is not lost." He is speaking to the British here, as "Lester" is a phonetic spelling of Leicester. All was not lost, because the British successfully evacuated most of their men.

"From the steel and silica brim/ Blood and water, but not at cost." Blood and water refers to the human resources, the soldiers themselves. They fled from their machines, but not at cost of their lives. They were rescued, while the steel and silica, or mechanical resources, were left behind.

That's how I "interpret" this quatrain, anyway, and I doubt that any better interpretation is possible. I could be wrong; human ingenuity has few bounds.

Steve Vanden-Eykel
New Westminster, B.C.
Canada

Clifford Pickover's article, "The Antinoüs Prophecies: A Nostradamoid Project," hits the mark. It would be interesting to apply his ink blot technique to psychic mediums, ESP, etc. To correct a minor error, Antinoüs was not so youthful at the age of 240!

Mark G. Kuzyk
Department of Physics
Washington State University
Pullman, Washington

Clifford Pickover replies:

*Along with Shakespeare and the Bible, Nostradamus's poems have been in continuous print ever since their first publication centuries ago. The very first editions of his prophecies are lost, and today we must depend upon the accuracy and honesty of people who transcribed the original prophecies. Nostradamus wrote most of his rhymed quatrains in French, and he obscured the quatrains with metaphors and by changing proper names by swapping, adding, or removing letters. Many say that he wanted to be obscure so the Church wouldn't condemn him. Skeptics suggest that he also used vague symbols so that the quatrains would be interpreted to fit numerous situations. I give many more details on Nostradamus's life in my book *Dreaming The Future*.*

Myths of Child Behavior

Catherine A. Fiorello's article "Common Myths of Children's Behavior" (May/June 2001) contains several questionable claims. A child who is failing at schoolwork is probably one who lacks motivation, ability, or both. If he does regard with horror the possibility of being held back a grade, that might supply an incentive to start working in order to do better. But if the problem is lack of ability, it will not be remedied by promoting him until he leaves with a credential that signifies nothing except that he has attended school for the required number of years. It is not really a kindness to promote his "self-esteem" by pretending that he is doing well; disillusionment will come later and is likely to be traumatic. (The same goes in the case of athletic ability or the lack of it.)

Concerning the effects of reward versus punishment, Fiorello appears to ignore the fact that children differ widely in temperament and personality. Even if many respond better to praise than threats, there is a hard core of intractables who do not, and we may suspect that research purporting to prove the contrary is driven by ideology rather than empiricism.

I will not dispute the claim that there is a condition, hyperactivity, for which treatment (including drug treatment) may be appropriate. But our society has been propagandized so effectively that almost any kind of undesirable behavior is labeled as a "disorder" requiring medical diagnosis and intervention. This provides prestige and financial rewards for the practitioners who run the system, but it has not been demonstrated that their activities benefit anyone else.

David A. Shotwell
Alpine, Texas

Regarding candy causing children to be hyper, I feel that I have observed that in my three-year-old granddaughter. However, I am aware of some of the literature on the subject supporting the author's view.

Therefore, I have looked for another explanation. Though not based on scientific studies, I suggest that there is something other than sugar that is causing the problem. That is chocolate. Chocolate contains theobromin, a substance that is chemically similar to caffeine and has a similar effect on humans. It seems reasonable to me that chocolate, not sugar, is the culprit.

Regarding item five on punishment, it seems that we should take our clue from

basic biology. If we do something damaging to ourselves, such as place our hand in a fire, we get hurt and learn not to do that.

Also, if we do something beneficial, such as eat, we experience pleasure and we repeat that. Therefore, it would seem that reward for acceptable behavior and punishment for unacceptable behavior would be the most successful approach.

John E. Hendrix
Fort Collins, Colorado

Catherine Fiorello replies:

Both writers fall into the same fallacy—basing their objections on feelings or personal experience rather than empirical evidence. My statements on retention were based on a rather large body of empirical research indicating that it is not effective, not just a call to promote children to save their "self-esteem" as Mr. Shotwell implies. In a brief overview, I could not go into detail about the alternatives to retention that do show efficacy; suffice it to say here that I am not advocating social promotion without interventions.

Both Mr. Shotwell and Mr. Hendrix take exception to my statement that punishment is less effective than reward. Again, this is based on a body of research, not solely my opinion. Punishment can work in the short-term suppression of an unwanted behavior, but can also lead to avoidance of the person or situation leading to punishment and to adverse emotional reactions. Positive approaches (teaching what we want the person to do through modeling and direct instruction, praising the behavior we want, and eliciting natural reinforcers for the behavior we want) don't have these side effects and in addition teach the behavior we want to see rather than just suppressing what we don't want to see. When some sort of punishment is necessary, however, we do recommend the sort of natural feedback that Mr. Hendrix suggests.

Mr. Hendrix does point out another possible reason for the perceived link between sugar and behavior. The research with which I am familiar looked only at sugar itself (where parents would say the child was hyperactive but where double-blind observers would not), but it is certainly plausible that theobromine and/or caffeine might be responsible for some of the hyperactivity that is reported. A good suggestion for extending the research base!

Janov's Primal Therapy

I am sorry to see the usually excellent Martin Gardner attacking Arthur Janov's primal

therapy (May/June 2001). He refers to Janov divorcing "his first wife, Vivien France. . . ." Vivien was Janov's first wife; France is his second. Unfortunately this minor slip is symptomatic of grosser errors.

Since in therapy there can be bad practice based on good theory, it is important to distinguish between theory and practice. Regarding theory, Janov holds that events too traumatic to be felt to the full as they happen cause problems; the unmet negative emotions act themselves out in and through the person. Often the person will repress memories of the events—but not always: those rape victims who change their personality know very well that "he ruined my life" and can be restored by reliving the event over and over until the unmet latent feelings have been felt in full.

So the issue is not repressed memory (which Gardner has attacked before) but repressed *feeling*. It is hardly surprising that people who were nearly strangled by their umbilical cord at birth (for example) do not remember it, as people do not have spontaneous memories of any event from their babyhood. But awareness that one is close to a terrifying death is more traumatic even than rape. How do false memory adherents explain that memory and feeling are often evoked together in therapy? False memories might be induced, but false feelings?

Regarding practice, Janov does not conduct "the so-called 'primal scream' technique" (p. 17), which involves screaming in an attempt to access the memory/feeling. This is a very poor technique since it aims to access trauma from symptom when causation runs the other way. Janov calls his techniques simply "primal therapy." He guards those techniques closely, but it is clear from his recent *Why You Get Sick, How You Get Well* that they include drugs administered in a controlled fashion to aid access to the memories/emotions. The resulting therapy permanently lowers such objective indicators of inner stress as resting heart rate, blood pressure, and levels of natural depressants synthesized by the body. How would Gardner explain these observations? Incidentally there can be no legitimate objection by mental health professionals to Janov's use of drugs, since drugs are the principal tool of mainstream psychiatry. There, however, they are used merely to control symptoms and the patient must take them indefinitely. Janov uses them only temporarily as part of a permanent cure.

Gardner cites the death of Candace Newmaker in a mistaken and dangerous form of therapy that attempts to access

repressed feelings by recreating the trauma. This was not primal therapy either licensed or unlicensed by Janov. Indeed Gardner does not use the word "primal" to describe Candace's therapy. This appears to be an attempt to smear Janov's work by association. Gardner also simply refuses to believe that bruises can reappear on the body of someone reliving a traumatic event that caused bruising. In this case the event was a difficult birth; but the claim can be tested with therapy on rape victims. Is Gardner saying he is incapable of revising his opinions no matter what the evidence?

Dr. Janov has certainly made some over-grandiose and immodest statements about his work. But these cannot be used to discredit the whole enterprise.

Anthony J.M. Garrett, Ph.D.
Cambridge, U.K.

Although I usually find myself in agreement with Martin Gardner, his attack on Arthur Janov and primal therapy was filled with errors ranging from the trivial to the egregious. As a card-carrying skeptic who has lectured to both New York and Philadelphia area skeptical organizations on the subject of psychology—and a veteran of primal therapy myself—I believe I am in a good position to respond.

Gardner's identification of primal therapy with New Age mysticism is wholly mistaken. The only connection between primal therapy and the New Age is that they both came along at the same time. The mere fact that Janov dismisses all other therapies as "obsolete and invalid" in one of his books automatically disqualifies him as a New Ager, since the latter freely incorporate every theory into their philosophy, rejecting only the scientific method as the test of truth. Janov's commitment to the scientific point of view should be clear to anyone who ever read him, and is exemplified by the fact that he submitted his latest work to Prometheus Books.

Gardner misrepresents what Mark Pendergrast wrote about Janov in *Victims of Memory*. Pendergrast quotes Janov as an authority, estimating from Janov's writings that only about one percent of adults were ever sexually molested as children. On the basis of my own observations while a patient in Janov's now-closed New York institute, I would concur with that figure, which is in sharp contrast with those given by such experts as Diana Russell, who claims that it is as high as 25 percent (boys

and girls combined). Janov's assumption that sexual abuse of children is relatively rare would put him in the same camp as most skeptics. One should keep in mind, however, that one percent of the adult population of the United States is more than two million people.

In contrast to other "recovered memory" therapists (who see parental sexual abuse in literally every case they treat) or orthodox Freudians (who think children really want to be abused), Janov always focused on the subtle hurts parents inflicted on their children. This does not represent any bias on his part, but rather the results from patients' sessions. As I saw, the big problems were neglect, excessive scolding, desertion, divorce, incessant guilt-tripping, overprotection, preference of one child to another, children being left at school at too early an age, and occasionally violence. The reason these rather commonplace events were traumatic was that the children were prohibited from expressing their anguish at the time; they held it in, and that added up to neurosis in adult life. Primal therapy gave them a safe place to let it out. . . .

When Janov claims that everything stems from birth trauma, I can hear his critics arguing. Wrong. Birth trauma by itself would cause few problems, unless it was extremely severe, because of what Janov calls the gating system, which locks early trauma up in the deepest parts of the brain. Birth trauma usually causes difficulties when it is compounded by later traumas. At the primal institute in New York, birth primals were rare, but they were dramatic when they did occur. Janov's tendency to focus on birth is mostly to compensate for its neglect by other therapies. Also, since births typically take place in hospitals, it should be easier to reform harmful natal practices than to change the way parents raise their children in the privacy of their own homes.

Is there any evidence that adult brains harbor birth memories? Plenty, although many in the skeptics movement might not accept it. There are already two scholarly journals devoted to the psychological effects of birth traumas, one in Europe and one in the United States. Gardner should have spent some time listening to former patients in primal therapy who resolved various problems after recovering their birth memories. . . .

We are only beginning to understand the workings of the mind, and as it happens, Arthur Janov is light-years ahead of the com-

petition. Prometheus Books is to be congratulated for having the courage to publish him.

Richard Morrock
Bayside, New Jersey

Although Paul Kurtz is among the more erudite men of our times, he nonetheless deserves a light rap on the knuckles for his lame response to an incisive complaint regarding Kurtz's Prometheus Books publishing a tome of quackery titled *The Biology of Love* by primal screamer Dr. Arthur Janov.

The complaint urged Kurtz to withdraw the book post haste in view of outrageous claims such as Janov's report that a photograph of a screaming patient re-experiencing his birth showed fingerprints of the delivering obstetrician (who by the way apparently forgot to wear his latex gloves).

Kurtz responded, we're informed, that "we sometimes err," but then suggested that it would be suppression to drop Quackov's book of astounding science.

I shudder to think of what next may be published out of a fear of suppression. Perhaps a hard-science volume reporting the appearance of Baby Jesus' footprints on a church window?

Worse, what do I now tell my daughter, whom I advised just last week to browse through Prometheus offerings to discover learned answers to just such pseudoscience?

Karl Wickstrom
Stuart, Florida

Fox TV Moon-Landing Program

Your "News & Comment" article, "Fox Special Questions Moon Landing But Not Its Own Credulity," (May/June 2001) correctly points out all the flawed points made in Fox's moon landing hoax exposé. I'd also like to point out that light reflects from Earth onto the moon's surface, causing partial illumination of areas in shadows. As a high school science teacher, I had to field a barrage of questions from my students (and fellow teachers!) regarding this show, which I hadn't seen. While I used this as an opportunity to remind students about previous discussions we'd had regarding critical thinking, some were very adamant that the program showed that there is an appreciable chance that the Apollo landings may have been a hoax.

Programs like this do help muddy the waters, and even worse, they add to the growing feeling out there that there are two sides to every

issue, and that it all becomes an issue of opinion, without any objective, demonstrable facts.

George Farago
Wayne, New Jersey

James V. Scott's News & Comment article concerning the Fox hoax was great. I do remember watching the whole original drama unfold. Walter Cronkite did the narration for CBS. He interviewed an elderly gentleman, asking the man what he thought about the moon landing. The elderly gentleman was incredulous, telling Mr. Cronkite, "I do not believe it, we are not up there."

I saw the Fox show. As Frank Zappa said:

"They ain't getting any smarter out there
We have to come to terms with stupidity
And learn to deal with it"

Your magazine is great, keep up the excellent work.

Rudy Ottaviani
r.ottaviani@worldnet.att.net

Evolution in Kansas

While I am heartened by the decision of the Kansas school board to return the teaching of evolution (News & Comment, May/June 2001), I am extremely puzzled that there were still three school board members that voted against the measure. It seems to me that some Kansas school board members have some evolving to do.

Paul Wainor
Carol Stream, Illinois

Dr. Zaius on Mars?

I have been looking at the latest pictures you have of the "Face" on Mars and I have come to a startling discovery. It is the face of Dr. Zaius of *Planet of the Apes*. So that's where all the "missing links" went! Oh my gosh!

Linda Marois
bledivision269@erols.com

What's Irrational?

It's not clear whether Paul Hilfinger (Letter to the Editor, May/June 2001, p. 72) claims that *my explanations* for paranormal beliefs are irrational or that *the reasons why* paranormal beliefs are so strongly and widely held,

which I discuss in my book, *Paranormal Beliefs*, reviewed (SI, January/February 2001, pp. 60–61) by Jeffrey Victor, are themselves “irrational.” I didn’t set out to do this in my book, but I suggest that every one of the reasons I mention can be operationalized and systematically tested with empirical evidence. Professor Hilfinger, irrationality anyone?

Erich Goode
Silver Spring, Maryland

Chiropractic Reform

As director of Victims of Chiropractic, with sixteen years of research in the field, I salute SI for printing retired chiropractor Sam Homola’s excellent article (January/February 2001). Homola and I are friends and quackbusting colleagues, and he has been one of my most valuable mentors. When I speak to any group, I always emphasize the difference between a *reformist* chiropractor and all the rest. Reformists have the character and courage to reject “traditional chiropractic pseudoscience and gobbledygook.” They acknowledge their limitations.

I especially enjoyed physicist Mohammad Ghaffari’s letter (May/June 2001) from Tucson, Arizona. Mr. Ghaffari got an introduction, as did I some years ago, into the preposterous world of Applied Kinesiology, a practice that ranks right along with astrology and homeopathy as worthy contributors to the dumbing-down of society.

Readers would do well to look again at chiropractic professor Joseph C. Keating’s July/August 1997 SKEPTICAL INQUIRER article “Chiropractic: Science and Antiscience and Pseudoscience Side by Side.” Prof. Keating talks about some areas that are of particular concern to chiropractic critics such as the penchant of chiropractors for marketing slogans like “Chiropractic Works!” He mentions the low college entrance requirements compared to other health care professions. He says that many of the chiropractic schools are “magnets for magical and mystical thinkers” and “Moreover, since the largest chiropractic colleges tend to have the strongest commitments to dogma, fuzzy thinkers are likely to fill the chiropractic ranks for decades to come.” This is more than a little disconcerting when we consider that most chiropractors want to be considered primary care physicians, on an equal level with medical doctors.

Don Paulin
Victims of Chiropractic
Huntington Beach, California

Reaction to First ‘Science and Religion’ Issue Continues



Even two years after its publication, the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER's first special issue on science and religion, July/August 1999, continues to stimulate reader reaction. This letter arrived July 8, 2001. It was preceded by a brief note from the authors. They said they had started it long ago, but "could not find the inspiration to complete it until we read your article, 'From the Editor's Seat: 25 Years of Science and Skepticism' [May/June 2001]. Your moving comments about the history of the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER, particularly about what you termed to be the journal's 'core unifying values' inspired us to submit this letter." I hope our publishing their letter in this, our second issue devoted specifically to issues of science and religion, will alleviate some of the concerns they express.—Kendrick Frazier, Editor

In our opinion the special issue, “Science and Religion” was not only the most interesting issue of the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER ever published, it was one of the most remarkable issues of any journal ever published. How sad it is that this special issue was apparently only an aberration. In his article, “Should skeptical inquiry be applied to religion?” CSICOP founder Paul Kurtz concludes that neither CSICOP nor the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER should in any way, except tangentially, deal with religious issues. In the introductory essay entitled, “Conflicting or complementary? Some thoughts about boundaries” SKEPTICAL INQUIRER Editor Kendrick Frazier seems to agree and warns that 90 percent of the population of the U.S. is self-described as religious.

While our nation’s broadly religious social milieu may explain the excitement about Stephen Jay Gould’s capitulatory (and in our opinion ludicrous) theory of “non-overlapping magisteria” of science and religion, fear of repercussions must not stifle free inquiry. Richard Dawkins’s brief article, “You can’t have it both ways” deflates Gould’s theory and emphasizes that religion should not be granted special immunity from scientific investigation. Freedom to investigate ghosts but not holy ghosts is no freedom at all. During a recent lecture at our medical center entitled, “the Power of Prayer in Healing” at least a dozen scientifically testable claims were made. Must we turn a blind eye to the absurdity of these claims for fear of offending the proselytizers who tout them? The SKEPTICAL INQUIRER has done a wonderful job of debunking myths about Bigfoot and alien abductions. Most of our patients no longer believe these childish stories. In contrast, the majority of our patients still believe that prayer can cure cancer, that holy miracles can eradicate disease, that supernatural spirits visit their hospital rooms, and a host of other religious myths. Many of these claims are indeed scientifically testable. Most importantly, unlike Bigfoot stories, religious beliefs actually have profound effects on the health and lives of countless millions all over the world. Paul Kurtz and Kendrick Frazier will go down in history as heroes in the battle for intellectual freedom. It is our hope that their legacies will not be tarnished by an inconsistent stand on the conflict between science and religion, an issue of fundamental importance to all mankind.

Bruce L. Flamm
Janice R. Goings
Riverside, California

The letters column is a forum for views on matters raised in previous issues. Letters should be no more than 225 words. Due to the volume of letters not all can be published. Address letters to Letters to the Editor, SKEPTICAL INQUIRER, Send by mail to 944 Deer Dr. NE, Albuquerque, NM 87122; by fax to 505-828-2080; or by e-mail to letters@csicop.org (include name and address).

