

The 11th European Skeptics Congress

London, September 5-7, 2003

ABSTRACTS OF TALKS

Name...Kimball C. Atwood, M.D....**Profession**...Physician.....

Title: Prior probability: the dirty little secret of “evidence-based alternative medicine.”

Brief resumé ... Well-intentioned academic physicians often contend that the problem with many “alternative medicine” practices is that they have not been adequately studied. To them it seems clear that controlled trials are the key to determining the efficacy of homeopathy, “distant healing,” “applied kinesiology,” and other claims. But is this really true? These claims are so implausible that to study them is a bad idea. It is bad science because the prior probability of their being correct is very close to zero; hence equivocal results—which are entirely expected in such cases—are paradoxically viewed as implying efficacy or, at least, the need for more (equivocal) studies, on *ad infinitum*. It is bad public policy because it gives a scientifically-naïve citizenry the misleading impression that legitimate scientists think such claims have merit, thus encouraging health fraud and waste. It is bad ethics because it wastes resources and exploits human subjects.

Name Willem Betz **Profession** Professor of Family Medicine

Title Quality in medicine: How to avoid it.

Brief resumé To be received

Name... Barry L. Beyerstein, Ph.D, **Profession**... Associate Professor of Psychology

Title: The Neurology of the Weird: Brain Mechanisms and Anomalous Experience"

Brief resumé Sudden, unpredictable anomalies of consciousness in otherwise normal individuals are among the most frequent reasons offered for believing in the paranormal. Percipients describe such experiences, which are more prevalent than most of us tend to think, as overwhelming and compellingly real, sometimes even life-changing. Among the subjective anomalies they report are feelings such as being controlled by unseen non-material entities, abducted by aliens, travelling outside their bodies, being enlightened by spiritual powers, as well as a variety of mystical "visions," "reveries," and "raptures." Barry Beyerstein, a physiological psychologist who studies the neural mechanisms responsible for conscious awareness, has long been interested in how the brain can produce hallucinations and seemingly real feelings of transcendence, possession, and disembodied consciousness that some interpret as evidence for a supernatural plane of existence. He accepts that people who have had such experiences are accurately describing what they felt like at the time. Beyerstein argues, however, that there are naturalistic explanations, derived from research in the neurosciences and psychology, that can account for these apparently supernatural interludes without the need to posit the existence of spiritual realms that are independent of the structure and function of the human brain.

Name...Michael Brass.....**Profession**...Former archaeology student.....

Title:...The Antiquity of Man: A skeptic's view of Hindu creationism....

Brief resumé The rise of religious fundamentalism in India is bringing to the fore a new version of creationism in the West: Hindu creationism as advanced by its most prominent proponents Michael Cremo and Richard Thompson, who are the authors of one of the most prominent anti-palaeoanthropological works in recent years is "Forbidden Archeology", and its shortened version "The Hidden History of the Human Race". "Forbidden Archeology" and "The Hidden History of the Human Race", since 1993, grossed sales figures of 200 000 – 300 000 and their influence around the world in pseudoarchaeological circles is immense. The aim of the presentation is to provide an in-depth critique of Cremo and Thompson's work, and to examine creationism from the perspective of palaeoanthropology and archaeology: our relationship with archaic hominins and chimpanzees through examination of targeted skeletal remains and archaeological sites.

Name Daphne Burlison.....**Profession**.....Freelance Writer

Title Focus on Misdiagnosis of Mental Illness

Brief resumé To confirm

Name..Kirsten Emmott.....**Profession** physician

Title: Alternative Medicine and the Childbirth Movement....

Brief resumé of presentation The medicalization of childbirth in the last century resulted in neglect of the human side of the birth experience, though it was associated with improvements in safety. Skepticism about "scientific" obstetrics (and pediatrics) gave rise to a spectrum of alternatives, with varying degrees of rationality.

Name Edzard Ernst, MD, PhD, FRCP (Edin.) Professor of Complementary Medicine

Title Complementary and alternative medicine for sceptics (Keynote address)

Brief resumé To receive

Name Dr .Dylan Evans. **Profession** Scientist

Title: A biological mechanism for the placebo effect..

Brief resumé The placebo effect is often invoked as an explanation for how alternative therapies work. Yet this is not really much of an explanation until and unless we have a good idea about the biological mechanisms that underlie placebo responses. In this talk, I will outline a new hypothesis about these mechanisms. I will argue that placebo-responsive

conditions all involve the activation of the acute-phase response, and that when placebos work they do so by suppressing this mechanism.

Name Chris C French **Profession** Professor of Anomalistic Psychology

Title Anomalistic Psychology (Keynote address)

Brief resumé To receive

Name... Prof. Dr. Jiří Heřt**Profession.....**Anatomist

Title:...Three principally different segments of acupuncture

Brief resumé...Acupuncture is a non-homogenous, very diversified discipline. This fact is not respected in analyses and evaluations of acupuncture. The legislative of individual states as well as national medical societies and institutions assumes their positions to the acupuncture in general only without differentiation in rationality, efficacy or risks of different forms of acupuncture. According to our analysis, it is possible to detect three different streams in acupuncture. 1/ The original oriental all-body acupuncture including its artificial form TCM – Traditional Chinese Medicine is an anachronistic, non lege artis discipline in modern medicine. It can be of interest from the historical point of view and it may be useful only in non-developed countries. 2/ The modern western acupuncture rejected all the mystic theory of acupuncture including the concepts of meridians and active point and explains the therapeutic effect of acupuncture by the placebo, reflex and opioid theory. Some simple and proven modifications (trigger-points ACU, segmental ACU micro- or periosteal ACU) can be accepted as a complementary tool by medicine in specific indications. 3/ The paranormal, pseudoscientific forms of acupuncture, as e.g. the Voll's elektroacupuncture, the so-called microsystem ACU, "bioresonanz" methods, laser- or magnetoacupuncture belong to pure charlatanism. Their eventual efficacy is based on the placebo only. They can be proclaimed as non-scientific and must not be accepted by the official medicine and included as a rational method into the medical legislative.

Name Ray Hymans **Profession** Professor of Psychology

Title To receive

Brief Resumé To receive

Name...Robert Imrie, DVM.....**Profession...**Veterinary surgeon.....

Title... Veterinary Acupuncture: A Western Invention From the 1970s.

Brief resumé Since the early 1970s, dozens of Western alt med proponents have claimed that the ancient Chinese practiced acupuncture on animals. The texts upon which these claims are allegedly based, in fact, offer not even a hint of anything recognizable as "acupuncture." While they do mention "Zhen," which is often translated as "needling," the word literally

refers to “anything done with a sharp or hot object.” When one actually reads the texts, it’s quite clear that the “needling” mentioned refers to therapeutic phlebotomy (bleeding), branding, scarification, lancing of lesions, and minor surgery. The “twiddling of fine needles to influence the flow of qi through channels (meridians)” is notably absent. One ancient Chinese text even explains why “the needling points in animals are not the same as the acupuncture points in people.” Human and veterinary acupuncture/TCM “training courses” and publications universally describe these practices as being exclusively Chinese developments. However, recent examination of texts by Western scholars has revealed clear evidence that human acupuncture, and various other aspects of Traditional Chinese Medicine for humans, are actually derived from much older Persian, Arab, Indian and European traditions. The veterinary traditions are almost certainly derivative as well.

Name...Robert Imrie, DVM.....**Profession**...Veterinary surgeon.....

Title: Just How 'Chinese' is Traditional Chinese Medicine?

Brief resumé Over the last few years, my friend and co-author, sinologist and historian of Chinese medicine, Dr. Paul Buell, and renowned German sinologist, author and TCM authority, Dr. Paul Unschuld, have discovered compelling "hard evidence" in ancient and medieval texts that what is currently being touted by Asian and Euro-Anglo-American TCM proponents as "indigenous medicine originally developed in China" is, in fact, largely and demonstrably derived from earlier Mongolian, Indian, Persian, Arab, and (especially) European sources. This information is so "close to the cutting edge of sinology and bona fide TCM scholarship," that few if any acupuncture and/or TCM advocates are even aware of its existence.

Name Lee Keener **Profession** Professor of Mathematics

Title An Amateur Looks at Egyptian Pseudohistory

Brief resumé The work of Hancock, Bauval and Wrst (??) on the origin and history of the monuments on the Giza Plateau is critically examined. In particular the dating arguments, based on the precessional changes, in th emeridian transit of the stars or Orion are shown to be seriously flawed. Several other problem areas are also discussed.

Name Paul Kurtz **Profession** Professor of Philosophy; Founding Chairman of CSICOP

Title Anti-Science: Moral Censorship of Scientific Research

The original name of CSICOP was Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal and Other Phenomena. We dropped "and Other Phenomena" only to shorten the name. But our interest from the start was with Pseudo Science and Anti-Science, and it is the latter that I wish to deal with, namely the appeal to moral arguments to limit scientific research today. Actually the term paranormal was first introduced by the parapsychologists, and it dealt with "psychic" phenomena and questions of survival. But CSICOP from the start dealt with other phenomena, such as astrology, UFOlogy, and cryptozoology, which surely go beyond the paranornmal. Today a good deal of alternative medicine is not confined to the so-called paranormal, such as herbal medicine.

Name Petr Lemez **Profession** Medical Doctor and Researcher

Title When the provider of alternative or complementary medicine becomes ill.

Brief resumé Three cases of healers who became oncologically ill will be presented. Their common characteristics was late diagnosis of their diseases connected with a bad prognosis. Furthermore, they differed in their attitudes to scientifically based treatment and this substantially influenced their fate. Some more general conclusions will be drawn from these cases.

Name Robert Morris.....**Profession**....Professor of Parapsychology

Title The Future of Parapsychology: Problems and Prospects (Keynote address)

Brief resumé To be received

Name Mark Newbrook **Profession** Lecturer

Title Old-Time Religion, Old-Time Language: Interdisciplinary Cross-Fertilisation And Mutual Support On The Fringe

Brief resumé There are surprisingly many links between non-standard ideas in respect of (a) religion and (b) language, many of them involving links between religion-related claims about the remote past and dubious amateur theories of historical linguistics and/or the histories of specific ancient languages. Examples include: Hebrew seen as an Ursprache + literal interpretations of Genesis; historical and associated linguistic claims of the British Israelites, the Latter-Day Saints, groups alleging early Judaeo-Christian diffusion, etc; Sanskrit seen as an Ursprache + accounts of early Indian (and world) history based on the Vedas; etc, etc. The paper surveys some of the most important cases and attempts some generalisations.

Name Chris Potter **Profession** Ear Nose and Throat Surgeon

Title Alternative Remedies in Ear Nose and Throat Disorders

Brief resumé I will summarise a number of ‘complementary’ therapies and their use in ENT disorders, contrasting their rationales and outcomes with those of conventional medicine.

Name Nick Pullar **Profession** IT Manager

Title Why be a Creationist?

Brief resumé Why would anyone be a creationist? An examination of the reasons that motivate professional creationists in the UK and elsewhere.

Name Dr Dorothy Rowe **Profession** Clinical Psychologist and Author

Title Does Mental Illness Exist?

Brief resumé We hold many of our beliefs, not because they are scientific and logical, but because we see such beliefs as being to our advantage. Often the advantages we seek are those which give us power or which absolve us of personal responsibility. Both these advantages operate with the belief that there are such things as mental illnesses and these illnesses have a physical cause. Psychiatrists have always defined depression, mania and schizophrenia as chronic mental illnesses which have a physical cause and which cannot be cured but managed only by the use of medications and electroconvulsive therapy. However, the evidence for the physical causes of mental illness is far from conclusive, while there is now a great deal of evidence that people do recover from these states, and that traditional treatment inhibits rather than promotes recovery. Psychiatrists resist changing their beliefs because doing so would reduce their political power, while many people want to believe that their behaviour has a physical cause and therefore they are not responsible for what they do.

(Dorothy Rowe 'Beyond Fear', second edition, HarperCollins, 2002.)

Name Amardeo Sarma **Profession** To confirm

Title The Way Ahead for Skepticism in Europe

Brief resumé To receive

Name Tom Stafford **Profession** Postgraduate Student

Title Why Creation Science Should be Taught in Schools (co-authored with Andrew Brown)

Brief resumé Creationism is a model of how not to do science. Creation Science is more than just a misinterpretation of the data, it is a abuse of the principles that guide scientific investigation. We argue that whilst it is dangerous to teach Creation Science as a valid alternative to evolution, it is just as dangerous to dismiss it outright. Creation Science can be used in schools to demonstrate the guiding principles behind science. In fact the scope already exists within the current curriculum to do this.

Name Leslie Walker **Profession** Professor of Rehabilitation

Title Conventional and Unconventional Treatments for Cancer: A Sceptical Approach

Brief resumé To receive

Name John Wall **Profession** Engineer

Title Alternative history and the Ma'atians from cyberspace: Combating pseudohistory on the Web.

Brief resumé The 'Hall of Ma'at' website (www.thehallofmaat.com) was established in July 2001 and is now probably the second largest (after 'TalkOrigins') English language website devoted to refuting mass market pseudohistory. Pseudohistory, defined by Michael Shermer as 'the rewriting of the past for present personal or political purposes', is now big business with the likes of Graham Hancock and Robert Bauval selling millions of books and being hailed as modern day 'folk heroes' by their 'followers'. Pseudohistorians are now increasingly infesting cyberspace and using 'reach' as a part of their marketing efforts. Ma'at uniquely combines specially researched/written articles, reproductions of previously published work from a variety of sources and an extremely active Message Board. Contributors of original articles include Ed Krupp, Ken Feder, Garrett Fagan and Nic Flemming. Permission to reproduce has been granted by organisations including the American Research Center in Egypt (ARCE), KMT, a modern journal of Ancient Egypt, Skeptic Magazine, CSICOP and Sky and Telescope. The presentation will outline the philosophy behind Ma'at, discuss how pseudohistory is infesting cyberspace and how it can be combated.

Name Richard Wiseman.....**Profession**..... Psychology Lecturer in

Title The Psychology of Luck:

Brief resumé How skepticism about the paranormal can help people live happier, more successful lives.

Name: G. M. Woerlee **Profession:** Anesthesiologist

Title: The Physiology of "Tunnel" and "Darkness" Experiences.

Brief resumé of presentaion I am a practising consultant anesthesiologist in a middle-large peripheral hospital, and am fascinated by, and have studied the physiological basis of the NDE for many years. Reports of NDEs often include the passage through, or the experience of a "tunnel" or of the experience of "darkness". Studies of the association of the tunnel and darkness experiences with the NDE, reveal that these experiences are associated with the initiating cause of the NDE rather than being a product of the NDE itself. The physiology of these experiences is easily explained and illustrated with examples from personal clinical experience and the literature.