Editor's Note

Explanatory Frameworks and Investigative Exposés

For every issue of SI we try to provide a nourishing variety of material. First, there's the variety of types of material—articles, news, columns, commentaries, book reviews, letters, and so on. Then there is the variety of topics we examine and of approaches to those topics. We hope there is something for everyone in this mix, and I think there usually is.

Our feature articles tend to be evaluative, explanatory, or investigative. It interested me to see how the five articles eventually selected for this issue relate to these categories and to each other. First, their authors: a philosopher, two physicians, a physicist, and a psychologist. That's a fairly typical mix of fields represented in SI, which is irrepressibly interdisciplinary, or cross-disciplinary.

Philosopher Mario Bunge's article "The Philosophy Behind Pseudoscience" is, it seems to me, powerfully explanatory. We give it more space than usual because I think it provides a comprehensive, explanatory, intellectual, philosophical framework for virtually every issue we address in the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER. Professor Bunge notes that every intellectual endeavor, "whether authentic or bogus," has an underlying philosophy. Science has at least six philosophical underpinnings and four other distinguishing features. Pseudoscience has its own set. The philosophies of the two just happen to be perpendicular to each other. For example, the demanding ethics of science does not tolerate the self-deceptions and frauds that plague pseudoscience. Bunge argues that his "exercise in border patrolling" can help distinguish between good and bogus science and reveal why research guided by a wrong philosophy is likely to fail. Don't miss his takes on specific fields: self-organizing systems, unconscious mental processes, psychoanalysis, computationist psychology, quantum theory, string theory, and "pockets of pseudoscience ensconced in the sciences."

Physician Bruce Flamm's article on magnet therapy is resolutely investigative, as was his earlier exposé in SI of the now notorious Cha/Wirth/Lobo Columbia University "pray for fertility" study. Flamm summarizes a study he and Drexel University physicist Leonard Finegold published in the *British Medical Journal* showing that the field of magnet therapy is about as worthless as metal filings, "a billion-dollar boondoggle."

Physician/medical editor Ragnar Levi's "Science Is for Sale" is also investigative and evaluative, but here the topic is science itself, especially medical science. He finds the integrity of much medical research threatened by the economic interests of the drug industry, which influences "every institution that might stand in its way."

Psychologist D. Alan Bensley's "Why Great Thinkers Sometimes Fail to Think Critically" goes back to the explanatory. It probes the question of how two great thinkers, Arthur Conan Doyle and Alfred Russel Wallace, could be such good critical thinkers in some areas and such credulous believers in others. It turns out that having good skills in critical thinking, which they did, is not the same as exercising them in all areas, which they did not.

Finally, physicist Paul Quincey's "Why Quantum Mechanics Is Not So Weird After All" is, I think, an intriguing and valiant attempt to explain quantum theory within a framework where the bizarre oddities that it reveals are understandable from a classical physics viewpoint. It is, in effect, an experiment in explanation.

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