

CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editor:

Permit me a brief reply to Keil's hatchet review (in the June, 1990, *Journal of Parapsychology*) of my book about Stepanek. I did indeed fail to notice that in one test, out of many, the jiffy bags were larger than I realized, making it impossible for Stepanek to touch the target with a fingertip. So far as I know, this is the only factual error in a book containing thousands of details. Keil plays up this mistake as though it is characteristic of the entire book. Actually, it concerns only a minor test, which is described so briefly that we know nothing about the conditions under which Keil administered it.

On page 157 Keil publishes a photograph taken from a film of Stepanek, not during an actual test, but only to record the procedure. (Why was only the procedure recorded, not the experiment?) If you study the picture you will see that the front edges of the jacket are slightly open, and Stepanek's right index finger could easily be inside the jacket. Naturally, he would not do this during the filming, but the photo is significant in showing that an inserted finger would not be visible to the experimenter during the actual test.

I found it enlightening to learn that Keil still thinks Ted Serios was a genuine psychic and that Honorton still believes Felicia moved that pill bottle by PK. Keil urges all parapsychologists to read my book. I hope that if they do they will judge it as a whole, and not fault it for one small inadvertent error about the length of a book bag!

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To the Editor:

Gardner's claim that "this is the only factual error in a book containing thousands of details" and "it concerns only a minor test which is described so briefly that we know nothing about the conditions under which Keil administered it" are false. In another test (Series 22) with jackets as targets and book mailing bags as containers, highly significant results for the jackets were obtained when Pratt and Keil conducted the experiment (1969, p. 322). This publication was cited by Gardner. Series 22 and Series 23 consisted of 400 trials each. As I had indicated in my review (Keil, 1990) of Gardner's book, Series 23 was conducted with a third experimenter. Series 23 had been selected by Pratt from all the research with Stepanek as providing the best evidence for psi. Pratt (1973) had selected two publications for this distinction, and the three-experimenter article (Pratt, Keil, & Stevenson, 1970) was one of them. This is what Gardner calls a "minor test."

The description of the test conditions which Gardner called brief included sufficient details in two publications (referred to above and also cited by Gardner) to show that the jackets could not be touched during the experiment when they were concealed in book mailing bags. In the three-experimenter test we had also referred to the position of the open ends of the containers "which were always away from" Stepanek. Yet Gardner presented photos of a book mailing bag and of a jacket in a vertical position without informing his readers that this was not the way in which they were presented during the experiments. Book mailing bags were never used in a vertical position during experiments, and jackets were probably never used in this way either. Without re-reading all the earlier experimental reports I cannot say this with certainty as far as the jackets are concerned. None of the experiments in which I participated involved containers with target material in a vertical position.

Gardner claims that Figure 3 in my review (1990, p. 157) shows that a finger touching the edge of a target would not be visible during an actual test. Stepanek handled the jackets by picking them up approximately at the middle of one side. If from this position he had tried to touch the target from the side (during tests when the flaps of the jackets were not closed) this would have been quite obvious as indicated in Figure 9 (p. 163). The black-and-white print of this photo may give the impression that perhaps two fingers were inserted between the flaps. In fact only the index finger is positioned between the flaps, as is clear from the original color photo.

If Stepanek had tried to touch the target from the open end, he would have had to hold the jacket in an unbalanced way which would also have been quite obvious. Figures 6 and 8 (p. 161) show this with a book mailing bag as an example. Gardner ignores that any such moves would have had to be carried out about 100 times in 400 trials and within a very short time interval in order to obtain the significant results which Stepanek achieved.

In his brief note Gardner provides us with two further examples of his misrepresentations. In my review I wrote, "Gardner repeatedly refers to psi research not related to Stepanek, claiming that definite nonparanormal explanations have been found when in fact the questions remain open" (p. 151). I did not express any views as to whether I think that Ted Serios is a genuine psychic or not. Gardner also claims that Keil "urges all parapsychologists to read my book." In fact I said, "I would still recommend that various parapsychological groups obtain a copy of the book to compare Gardner's claim with my brief review and with the original publications. It is very likely that for many years to come pseudoskeptics will repeat Gardner's false claims that he has found a satisfactory nonparanormal explanation for Stepanek's results" (p. 165).

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