

Bay Area Skeptics Information Sheet
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Editor: Kent Harker

"REAL" METAPHYSICS
by Joseph Waterhouse

[After having seen one too many "metaphysicals" plastered on occult presentations and writings I thought "BASIS" readers would like to have a clearer picture of what metaphysics is really about. The term is little understood even without the obfuscation contributed by the occult, and since it has more than one syllable it tends to lend profundity to otherwise vacuous constructs. The idea is, I think, that if one muddies the waters they appear deep. I asked Joseph Waterhouse, Asst. Prof. of Philosophy at San Jose State University to clarify the matter for us by presenting the elements of philosophic metaphysics.

Dr. Waterhouse received his Ph.D. in scientific Philosophy at UCLA, and is published in professional journals. Our kind thanks to him for his considered effort. -- Ed.]

It is somewhat embarrassing to philosophers that metaphysics, one of the central and most cherished areas of philosophy, is associated in popular thinking and writing with the occult. One wishes that philosophical metaphysics and occult metaphysics had different names. After all, astronomy is not embarrassed by the existence of astrology; chemistry is not embarrassed by the existence of alchemy and psychology is not embarrassed by the existence of parapsychology. On the other hand, philosophical metaphysics sometimes seems disreputable and discreditable only because it is associated in popular thinking with the occult.

Sometimes students enroll in college metaphysics classes expecting to hear about mysticism, the zodiac, telekinesis, apparitions, omens, portents, numerology, metempsychosis, magic, incantations, astrology, hypnosis, hierarchies, theosophy, demons, sympathies, signs, images, witchcraft, potions, harmonies, illuminations, and the like. Shock, disappointment and anger sometimes follow when students with these expectations are told that philosophical metaphysics does not deal with occult topics. "Why not?" it is asked.

Metaphysics, along with logic, ethics, aesthetics, and epistemology, is one of the five central fields of philosophy. Each of these five fields studies one or two central ideas. Logic attempts to determine what forms of reasoning are justifiable. Ethics attempts to distinguish ethical "goodness" from ethical

"badness," and "right" from "wrong." Aesthetics attempts to determine aesthetic goodness. Epistemology attempts to distinguish good from bad procedures for gaining knowledge. Metaphysics, as a philosopher understands it, studies various broad kinds of existence. Philosophers call these kinds of existence the "categories". Metaphysicians attempt to determine what the categories are, and what the fundamental characteristics of each are.

The earliest and probably the most important metaphysician was Aristotle. The word "metaphysics" comes from the name some followers of Aristotle applied to one of his books. Among Aristotle's many writings was his book "Physics", dealing with the nature of matter and what Aristotle called the simple bodies -- earth, air, fire and water -- out of which he believed all material things are made. The book placed by Aristotle's followers after his book on physics became known as Aristotle's "Metaphysics", meaning "after physics." Aristotle actually called the subject matter of this book "first philosophy."

It was Aristotle's fundamental belief that the entire universe is ordered in a pattern of genus and species. He would gladly have welcomed the modern scientific idea that all living things belong to a biological classification system giving each organism's species, genus, family, etc. For Aristotle, everything in the universe, even non-living things, is ordered in such a systematic way, and the entire purpose of science is classification. Science aims to discover the universal order by locating all things in the universe in their true classes.

Moreover, each class of things is studied by a particular science, according to Aristotle. Zoology is the science that studies animals; botany, plants; and biology is the more general science that studies living things. The general science that deals with physical things, whether living or not, for Aristotle, is physics. The science that studies the most general classes in the universe - the categories -- is called by Aristotle "first science" or "first philosophy." First philosophy is distinguished from the particular sciences in that first philosophy studies the broadest classes in the overall genus-species system of the universe.

According to Aristotle there are ten categories of things that first philosophy studies. The most important of these are substance, quality, relation and place. Everything that exists in the universe is first either a substance (e.g., a goat), a quality (e.g., white), a relation (e.g., offspring), a place (e.g., near the Red Sea), or one of the other broad ways of existing. First philosophy, for Aristotle, studies how things exist as substance, as quality, as relation, as place, and so on.

Modern philosophy has introduced two related changes into Aristotle's general approach to metaphysics. First, modern philosophy has thrown out the idea that the entire universe is constructed on a genus and species pattern. In modern philosophy,

only living things are seen as ordered in a genus and species pattern, and these species are seen as evolving. Aristotle rejected the idea that species evolve. Second, modern philosophy has introduced the idea that there are universal laws and causal connections underlying everything that exists and everything that happens. Today, philosophers see science as aiming not at a classification of items into their proper genus and species, but at the discovery of the underlying causal laws governing the universe.

The most important metaphysician after Aristotle, and the first metaphysician capturing this modern approach, is Kant. Kant proposed twelve categories of existence, and introduced causality as one of these categories. Five of Kant's most important categories are substance, quality, causality, time and space. Today, two centuries after Kant, philosophers usually still treat these as five separate categories.

It is possible to be a little more specific about each of these categories of existence. The best way to understand the major categories is to understand the kinds of questions philosophers ask about them, and the kinds of theories philosophers propose as answers to their questions. Consider the category of substance. The term "substance" was introduced by Aristotle to refer to particular things: this man, this goat, this house. Major philosophical questions about the category of substance include: (i) what are the defining characteristics of substance?; (ii) must the universe contain substances?; and (iii) how is one substance to be distinguished from any other?

To illustrate metaphysical theories, consider a pair of theories proposed as answers to the first question. One theory about the defining characteristics of substance is that they are primary and simple. They are primary, it is argued by some, because the existence of anything else in the universe -- qualities, causality, time and space -- is dependent upon the existence of substances. They are simple, it is argued, because substances have a kind of unity, a oneness, that renders the several components of a goat, say, one goat.

An alternative theory about the defining characteristics of substance is that substances need be neither primary nor simple. This side argues that substances are not primary because they could not exist if qualities, causality, time and space did not exist; and substances are not simple because whether a group of several components is regarded as a unity depends upon human thinking, not on the way the world is independent of human thinking. Neither side in this metaphysical dispute has won.

Consider as a second example the category of time. Major metaphysical questions about the category of time include: (i) what is time? (ii) how is time to be distinguished from space? and (iii) is time something that has independent existence, or is its existence dependent upon and reducible to the existence of

something else such as substance, matter, or events?

To illustrate the kinds of metaphysical theories about time, consider a pair of theories proposed to answer the question: What is time? One theory is that time necessarily has a number of set-theoretical properties such as irreflexivity, asymmetry, and connectedness. On this theory, time is irreflexive because one event logically cannot be before itself; time is asymmetric because if one event is before a second then the second event logically cannot be before the first; and time is connected because given two non-simultaneous events, one logically must be before the other.

A second theory is that time does not necessarily have the properties of irreflexivity, asymmetry, and connectedness. According to this view, if time is irreflexive, asymmetric and connected then this is a result of the physics of the universe, not the logic. This view says that a physical universe is possible in which one event is before itself, one event is both before and after a second event, and non-simultaneous events are neither before nor after each other. This side of the dispute constructs models of such a universe which arguably are logically possible. For example, it is argued that a temporally cyclical universe would, under certain conditions, be reflexive and symmetric.

Without giving any further examples of metaphysical disputes, it is possible to see the broad differences between what philosophers regard as metaphysics and what occultists regard as metaphysics. The main difference is that only philosophical metaphysics is concerned with theories about what categories must exist if there is to be universe at all. Philosophers propose that if there is to be a universe at all then the universe must contain certain categories. A typical twentieth-century metaphysician will propose, for example, that the universe without substances, qualities, causality, time and space -- or some portion of these -- or these plus some other categories, cannot exist. It is argued, for example, that if substances do not exist, or if time does not exist, then a universe is impossible.

The two key features of philosophical metaphysics, then, are that (1) it is concerned with categories rather than with specific kinds of existence; and (2) it is concerned with what logically must exist rather than with what as a matter of fact does exist. Metaphysicians attempt to discover the logical categories of the universe.

On the other hand, occultist metaphysics seems to be concerned with theories about (1) specific objects or forces that (2) may exist within the universe. Occultist metaphysics is not designed to show that a universe must logically contain a general category, but that it factually does contain some specific object or force such as an image or an illumination. Occultist metaphysics does not seem to try to prove that a universe without these objects or forces is impossible. Instead, they seem to try to believe that some specific experience or events should lead us to accept various hypotheses

about the existence of these objects or forces.

To a PHILOSOPHER, occultist metaphysics seems to be more like a science -- albeit pseudoscience -- than like philosophical metaphysics. Sciences are concerned with specific kinds of things, and with the factual existence of these specific kinds.

Philosophical metaphysics is concerned with the most general categories of existence, and with the logical existence of these general categories. Philosophical metaphysics attempts to determine what general categories logically must exist for universe to exist at all.

"CREATION" SCIENCE

by Dr. Francisco Ayala

[Dr. Ayala is Chairman of the National Academy of Science Section of Population Biology, Evolution and Ecology. The following article was written for "The Best of LASER", newsletter of the SCS and reprinted here with kind permission.

The theory of evolution 1) asserts that evolution has occurred, and 2) explains how it occurred.

Biological evolution is a fact established beyond reasonable doubt. Living beings descend from other organisms more and more different as we go farther back into the past. Our ancestors of many millions of years ago were not human. We are related to the apes and other animals by common ancestry. Biological evolution is a fact established with the same degree of certainty as the rotation of the planets around the sun or the roundness of the earth.

The theory of evolution explains, on the basis of scientific evidence, how evolution happened. For example, scientists explain the functional organization of organisms as the result of natural selection. In a similar way, scientists use gravity for explaining the motions of the planets. Many details of the explanation (for example, whether the rate of change is more or less jerky) are debated by scientists, and some views change with time. Similarly, scientists have changed from Newtonian mechanics to relativity theory as a better explanation for planetary movements.

No biological concept has been more extensively tested and more thoroughly corroborated than the evolutionary origin of living organisms through millions of years of descent with modification. Moreover, nothing in modern biology makes sense except in the light of evolution.

Many religious people accept the fact of evolution. It is possible to admit that God is the Creator of the world without denying biological evolution -- as it is possible to accept that a human being is a creature of God without denying that he has developed from a fertilized egg and embryo by natural processes.

To claim that the statements of Genesis are scientific truths is to deny all the evidence. To teach such statements in the schools as if they were science would do untold harm to the education of American students, who need scientific literacy to prosper in a nation that depends on scientific progress for national security, individual health, and economic gain.

The Council of the National Academy of Sciences has declared that "Religion and science are separate and mutually exclusive realms of human thought whose presentation in the same context leads to misunderstanding of both scientific theory and religious belief." Scientific reasoning and religious belief are distinct modes of thought. Let science and religion follow their separate courses. That is the American way. And only thus will rationality and common sense survive in our nation.

EDITOR'S CORNER

An acquaintance who knows of my skeptical proclivities enjoys sending me articles and book reviews whenever he thinks he has come upon something that will turn me from darkness. Well, yes, he is a Christian, and he believes that theistic questions can be solved in the science lab and by the propositions of formal logic. He knows of my mathematics background, so anything that relates to the "Queen of the Sciences" is eagerly deposited in my hands. His eyes spark with a little of the just-try-to-refute-THIS anticipation when he presents me with something that bears on the question.

Now, while BAS takes no formal position with respect to religion, when one makes a specific, testable claim it is susceptible to the skeptical knife regardless of its origin. The material I pass along here certainly does not require a surgeon's knife -- a hacksaw would do just fine -- but it is instructive in a general sense for the lengths to which "true believers" of any ilk will go to uphold their faith. (Which is not to say that faith, in the proper sense of the term, is to be disparaged by skeptics. As an epistemological tool most would reject it; but nonetheless if a theist expresses his or her faith in a transcendent god there is little a skeptic can say. Maybe a shoulder shrug would be an appropriate response.)

Anyway, the acquaintance calls me and excitedly tells me he has some proof that I will be unable to brush off. I smile a little to myself because the guy is really sincere, and I don't want him to think I am cynical or patronizingly pompous. "Bring it over and I'll probably be baptized tomorrow," I joke. In ten minutes he is on my doorstep, slapping the booklet in my hand, his jaw set to match the hint of gloating in his eye.

The forty-seven page pamphlet is titled, "God, The Master Mathematician," published by "Watchman on the Wall Ministries" for those who wish to own their personal copy. The theme of the book

centers around numerological phenomena, mostly manufactured ad hoc, which "could not have occurred by chance."

I have tried several ways of reviewing this opus without it seeming like I am just making rollicking fun of it, but its authors came up with such off-the-wall stuff that simply repeating it is enough to make it appear to be poking fun. (I think "main-line" churches would wince as much as skeptics at the inanities offered by the booklet in the name of the god they worship.)

Mush on, huskies. Chapter one is "The Bible -- The Master Math Book." The authors claim that the Bible is the basis for all "absolute mathematics" and assert: "...the Bible establishes the rule for all theoretical mathematics: a straight line is the shortest distance between two points. It is from this theorem that ALL other theorems and postulates from which geometry, trigonometry, analytics, [sic.]...spring [emphasis added]." Matt. 7:14 is then cited as the basis for this: "Strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life..." The authors explain, "Not only is the shortest distance between point 'A' (earth) and point 'B' (heaven) a straight line, unless you find point 'A' (Jesus) [wasn't A the earth?], you will never make it." May Euclid rest in peace, and may Mr. Whitmore, my high school geometry teacher, be assigned an extra hour of hall monitoring for not teaching me the fact that the line business is the "theorem for all theoretical mathematics."

The overwhelming power of the proofs reaches its zenith in chapter four: "Mathematical Patterns in the Word." Here we learn that "Old Testament, 3 letters and 9 letters, placed side-by-side make 39 books. New Testament, 3 and 9 multiplied are the 27 books of that record!" Well, I can't refute that. I checked my french Bible. "Ancien Testament" sure enough has its 69 books, and the "Nouveau Testament" is right there with all 63. And you thought hebrew was the Chosen Language.

Now for some physical science. Of course the number 7 is one of the more sacred numbers in scripture, so we are variously enlightened about the miracles of creation that bear the contrivance of the Maker through the magic of seven. Chapter 5, "Mathematics in Creation," reveals "A lunar month,...is 28 days (4x7); the distance the moon is from the earth is 238,000 miles (34,000x7). The diameter of the moon is 2,100 miles (300x7)." Can anyone fail to doubt?

Again, the Hebrews and their cubits get short shrift -- the non-biblical British system is on the up-and-coming. I also wondered if the tape measure went over that little hill near the Mare Tranquilitatis, making it 2,100.004 miles. If that doesn't matter it is of little consequence whether the measurement was equatorial or polar. Details, details. Well, there are other problems, but enough is enough. Miracles multiply when we learn that "...the sun is 93,000,000 [not 93,000,004] miles away (31M x THREE)," and that "The sun's mass is 333,000 (111,000 x THREE) times that of the

earth." (A few minutes after the measurement the sun's mass must have decreased a little, but let's not quibble.) "It fits the numerical pattern for the Godhead, the number three."

Of course this whole thing goes on for 47 pages -- it makes for light reading at bedtime if you don't want to get to sleep right off the bat.

I take it all back. In reading my column over it is unabashed ridicule. The ridiculous sometimes deserves ridicule. But there is a sobering element when the last guffaw wheezes out. People actually believe this. There are a couple of PhD's listed in the pages. What is the cost of credulity? To what lengths do humans go to uphold their beliefs? I didn't quite know what to tell my acquaintance when he eagerly sought my reaction to this overwhelming mass of irrefutable proof. It is all irrefutable proof that "homo sapiens" isn't so "sapiens" after all, and that we will all of us go to great lengths to uphold our convictions. Sometimes, the more irrational the belief the more tenaciously it will be held. It seems the only defense against this trap is HONEST skepticism -- the ability and willingness to reject anything we hold, no matter how cherished, in the light of new and refuting evidence.

I confess I have a great deal more respect for someone who says he/she believes just because he/she believes. Whenever we let the belief dictate the evidence we must find we are in trouble.

FEBRUARY MEETING

by Larry Loebig

On February 27th The Bay Area Skeptics sponsored a lecture with prominent health fraud expert James Lowell. This event had a profound impact on my outlook regarding the purpose of groups like Bay Area Skeptics and the need that exists for a dedicated effort to educate the public about the abusive and potentially dangerous scams which are currently being perpetrated in the name of science.

James Lowell is a very funny lecturer. His technique is effective and informative. The scene at the El Cerrito Public Library resembled more a comedy club than a Bay Area Skeptics monthly meeting. Laugh for laugh I don't know many comedians who could stand toe-to-toe with Lowell and throw the one liners. His slide show was the icing on the cake. The visual evidence is effective. The subject matter is perfect for a stand-up routine, and Lowell's delivery was masterful. The entire group was rolling in the aisles. Then came the slides on the screen -- it wasn't funny anymore. Linda Epping was eight years old. The lump behind her left eye was cancerous. The surgeons would have to remove one eye and surrounding tissue for her to survive. Linda's parents had met a Chiropractor who persuaded them to abandon the "experimenters" at UC Medical Center and to allow him to treat the problem using

alternative medical procedures, sparing Linda all the pain and suffering. That was in July. In November of that year Linda died.

She was presented at UC Medical Center with 50% of her face covered with a massive tumor. It's little comfort knowing the Chiropractor, Marvin Phillips, was eventually convicted of manslaughter.

The image of Linda Epping still haunts me a month later.

James Lowell identified five types of harm from health fraud: 1. Harm to society: "Is it freedom of choice to give a baby poison milk?" 2. Financial harm: "26 billion dollars per year, and that's being conservative." 3. Psychological harm: "Terminal patients sitting in a motel in Mexico instead of spending those last days with family and loved ones." 4. Harm by omission: "People who could have been saved but were not." 5. Direct harm to the individual patient: "Toxic doses of vitamins and herbs are directly responsible for causing health problems."

For more information about health fraud, misinformation and quackery write to: The National Council Against Health Fraud, Inc., PO BOX 1276, Loma Linda, CA 92354, or call (714) 796-3067

SKEPTICS IN THE NEWS

BAS is represented in the media far in excess of its proportion of the populace. It all goes to show that if one has something significant and can present it well there are ears. Erstwhile Chair ROBERT SHEAFFER, author of "UFO's, Examining the Evidence" and of the feature "Psychic Vibrations" in the "Skeptical Inquirer" was the featured guest on KGO radio's Michael Krasne show.

Robert's encyclopedic knowledge and phenomenal recall of UFO material was simply withering. People called in from as far as Oregon and Idaho, relating obscure cases with which Sheaffer was familiar; he adroitly fielded questions and challenges in a calm, reasoned way that was a pleasure to hear. The Bay Area Skeptics is an organization whose name is increasing in importance and significance.

ARROGANCE AND TRUTH

by Yves Barbero

My buddy and I were talking about "Contact", the science fiction novel by Carl Sagan. I kind of liked it and gave it to him to read during a long hospital stay. He read some of it and put it down after a few dozen pages.

He was offended, you see, because Sagan brought up the standard argument about God being "cruel." Somehow, he thought with some

plausibility, non-believers think that God must meet some sort of humanitarian test. I said that I liked it anyway but thought it was overwritten for someone like me since I'm well socialized in the science fiction genre.

My buddy, a Christian, and I, a science fiction fan, both found something to criticize since Sagan had dared to intrude on what we felt was our preserve. I don't think either of us considered that the novel was written for less specialized readers. I can well imagine the radio astronomer being bored by the lengthy description of a familiar technology.

I also have to imagine most people, innocent of science fiction, the finer parts of Christian theology, and radio astronomy, having a great time with the book. It was a best seller for good reason. Although worlds apart in our views of the order of things, my buddy and I had a mutual reaction against the book because of the way Sagan presents his information and, I suspect, we're not the only ones. He seems to present himself as a snotty professor educating us against our will. He's lecturing when we're only looking for a good read. Watching the series "Cosmos" I certainly sensed a sort of arrogance.

I had to remind myself that however he came across, he gave generally accurate information. Having followed astronomy on and off over the years, the series served to fill in a lot of holes. It's human nature, I guess, to resent the wise guy who sets himself up as an expert even if he's eminently qualified.

That's why, in fiction, the brilliant scientist is usually portrayed as an absent-minded "four eyes" with no social graces. If the poor bastard has a girl friend, she's nice but clumsy and would never have a chance with a REAL man. Research has demonstrated that the opposite is true with clever scientists and Sagan is anything but awkward and hardly absent-minded. (I don't know if he wears glasses off camera.) His movements indicate, in fact, an athletic disposition. On top of that, he writes well. It's as if Flash Gordon and Dr. Zarkov were rolled up into one character. It's no wonder he's resented at first blush.

The case of Dr. Sagan illustrates a problem that we have in the skeptics movement. Here we are, ready to take on all comers, confident that we have the truth and without a hint of humility. Most of us who have been on TV or the radio have learned enough discipline to hear the other side out, however superficial the arguments are, before going into our routine. It isn't enough. Few of our debates are more than statements by us interspersed by whatever they say. We hardly listen to them. Is it any wonder that many people see us as a bunch of self-righteous kooks? But we're not kooks just as Carl Sagan isn't arrogant in spelling out how nature operates. The image we project doesn't reflect the reality of what we say.

The other guys, the psychics, rarely make this mistake. After all,

for many of them, public relations is their bread and butter. For most of us, skepticism is a side line to our main activities and not our livelihood. We can be careless in our presentations. They portray themselves as "gifted" which implies that they are blessed by some more-powerful agency.

They do not imply that they are more learned than the common man, as we must seem to many people. People support psychics by pointing out that they have a "right to their beliefs." How dare we attack them with mere logic! It's as if logic is an unfair means of attack because we're the only ones who choose to use it. Is it fair to attack someone with a machine gun when he only has a sword (and an invisible one at that)?

I don't know if I have a solution to this problem. I, for one, have no intention of giving up my intellectual tools -- but while they have a lot of uses in various aspects of my life, they usually fail me in a debate with believers in psychic goings-on.

Recently, in arguing about faith healers, I lost my cool and raged that they'd almost killed a friend of mine with their nonsense. He was fortunate in seeking out proper surgery in time. I suddenly found myself surrounded by silence. "Arrogant" logic had been ineffective. "Emotional" truth had worked.

It worries me a great deal.

RAMPARTS

[Ramparts is a regular feature of "BASIS", and your participation is urged. Clip, snip and tear bits of irrationality from your local scene and send them to the EDITOR. If you wish to add comments with the submission, please do.]

Wiley Brooks is still at it -- the "Breatharian" who claims that eating "poisons" the body. Either God or evolution played a cruel trick giving us a stomach, but Wiley says that air -- yes even the greenish-yellow stuff we breath around here -- is better for us than mashed potatoes and broccoli.

Mr. Brooks' program proves that if you put an "ism" on your home-made neologism you suddenly have a "philosophy." He even has an "Institute," for which "BASIS" will not give free advertising by giving the Morgan Hill address... Wily Wiley "teaches that the human body is an 'air/electrical system' and that food 'short-circuits' it, reducing the body's ability to manifest energy. In man's original state he lived on just air, and his body condensed the gases in the air into liquids, solids and other nutrients."

If "real" science has anything to say, all condensed states of air are on the cool side of -200 degrees F if "condensation" in the proper sense is what he means. If he means that the various gases

can be combined by the body to make nutrients, energy would be required by the body to combine them, and this has the energy going in the wrong direction. But there is nothing real to speculate about; Wiley knows better that his PROMISES of "Life, Health and Perfect Happiness" are all he needs. His brochure announces that one can "Breathe and Live Forever."

He failed a lie detector test on F. Lee Bailey's short-lived TV show of the same name about three years ago when asked if he had eaten food during the past nine years. He squirmed out of it by saying that air was the "true" food, and of course he had had plenty of that. Attorney Bailey advised him then that he ought to be very cautious about his claims, because they looked thin. A woman who was a former "Breatharian" countered (as if there were anything to counter) that she had witnessed Wiley eating -- and not just healthful stuff, but the likes of your basic Twinkies and Big Macs!

Wiley also claims he only sleeps 1 to 7 hours per week. Being of a naturally curious nature I rang him up at 1 a.m. and he sounded very UN-alert, although I might just have caught him during his one hour for that week.

With all the extra time not spent sleeping and the extra money not wasted on poison, Brooks must have it made. Or would you still rather have pizza and 7 solid hours of z's?

Remember "I Dream of Genie?" The show is off, but the promise of genies has not been cancelled in many Moslem countries. So says the "San Jose Mercury" in a report on the quasi-religious practice. What does one get from ones genie? "The wish has to be REASONABLE and immortality is excluded. Non-believers, especially those who make fun of the occasion will be jinxed within 19 days. [emphasis added]" The occasion mentioned is the nuptials -- the day the happy couple get their wishes -- one wish per mortal per life.

What is "reasonable" is left to the genie, and before you start making fun of this whole thing and get jinxed, the custom has the approbation of the clergy who "have hastened to affirm that the Koran explicitly acknowledges the existence of genies capable of adopting exquisite life forms." There's the proof, because Barbara Eden was certainly an exquisite life form.

The "Cron" readers have been put up to date on the renewed interest in Chinese herbal foods. One gets the impression that the more bizarre the preparation (ox gallstone at \$420/oz.) the more potent its effect. Other delicacies include: "hedgehog skin, rhinoceros horn, silkworm excrement and praying mantis ovaries." Praying mantis ovaries?? What might they have over tsetse fly ovaries? Is there a federal watchdog agency to oversee this industry? The consumer has a right to know if she is getting bona-fide mantis ovaries, and not second-rate factory dust. Now these items aren't herbs, but you have to go to your local Chinese herb store to get them. Doesn't it make you want to skip your morning bowl of corn

flakes for a hearty bowl of tarantula eyes?

JOHN SAEMANN sent a copy of the TM newsletter in response to the April Ramparts blurb on TM. John knows wherewith he speaks because he was an initiate years ago. A sample of some of the ludicrous (and probably actionable) claims:

"There is nothing which cannot be accomplished through Maharishi Ayurveda,.... A long life span should mean life for many hundreds of years, thousands of years." (This, despite the fact that a picture of a hoary "His Holiness Maharishi Mahesh Yogi" on the front page does not look the picture of radiant health. More. "'Yogic flying' [levitation] -- the mechanics to create coherence in world consciousness -- was demonstrated publicly for the first time this summer in 1,000 cities in 108 countries." (Strange that TM of America flatly refused a "public" demonstration before a group of skeptics in Chicago.)

In a typical blast against science, the depth of misunderstanding is revealed in the following: "The glamour of the modern scientific approach to knowledge in every field has been basically responsible for the decline of almost all ancient traditional values of life in this century. The field of medicine could not remain unaffected by the global influence of this new, objective approach to knowledge by modern science which has basically disregarded the subjective value of life."

Science and the scientific method can only consider objective criteria. To say science ignores the subjective is simply to say that science ignores the non-scientific. I think the TM movement needs a few more lawsuits to learn the lesson.

SKEPTICAL INQUIRY AND LEAPS OF FAITH

"I know it is true because I have experienced it myself." This is perhaps one of the more common reasons for belief in a paranormal reality.

DON FREW, National Public Information Officer for the "Covenant of the Goddess", the largest national wiccam in the country, will address BAS on the subject of witchcraft and skepticism. See the Calendar for details. New board member Shawn Carlson assures us that this will be an interesting evening.

STEINERBLURB

"The burden of proof always falls upon the one who makes the sweeping generalization". -- Robert Steiner

[So okay, Mr. Steiner, show us the proof for this sweeping

generalization! - Ed.]

Opinions expressed in "BASIS" are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of BAS, its board or its advisors.

The above are selected articles from the June, 1987 issue of "BASIS", the monthly publication of Bay Area Skeptics. You can obtain a free sample copy by sending your name and address to BAY AREA SKEPTICS, 4030 Moraga, San Francisco, CA 94122-3928 or by leaving a message on "The Skeptic's Board" BBS (415-648-8944) or on the 415-LA-TRUTH (voice) hotline.

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