

The Association For Rational Thought News  
Practicing The Art Of Clear Thinking In All Walks Of Life  
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The Association for Rational Thought is a new organization committed to encouraging clear, rational, well-informed thinking. ART encourages the investigation of paranormal and pseudo-scientific claims from a responsible, scientific viewpoint and the distribution of the results of such investigations to the public. You are cordially invited to become a member of ART.

Come to the October Meeting!

Saturday, Oct. 10, Greenwich Tavern and Restaurant 10:00 AM. Reports on pseudoscientific hot spots in the tri-state--Discussion of topics for this year's meetings. Lunch and conversation with new officers afterwards.  
Support a Vital Voice for Reason in the Tri-State--Pay Your Dues!

Continue to receive meeting notices and The Association for Rational Thought News--Pay your 1992-93 dues today. Send a check for \$15.00 payable to The Association for Rational Thought to Treasurer Peggy Borger, 4419 Ashland Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio 45212-3212 in the enclosed envelope. Keep down the costs of mailing reminders--send your check now. ART dues pay for the newsletter and meeting notices mailed to members.

April Meeting: Election of Officers; Oran Dent on Magic and Military Deception

President Joe Gastright presided over the first annual meeting of The Association for Rational Thought on Saturday, April 25, at the Greenwich Tavern. The membership elected these officers for the coming year: President, Keith Brabender; Vice-President, Dick McGrath; Secretary and Membership Secretary, Mary Pacinda; Treasurer, Peggy Borger; Investigations Officer and Media Resources Chairman, Joe Gastright; Newsletter Editor, Virginia Jergens; and Publicity Coordinator, Porter Henry. The Meeting Organizer slot is unfilled--if you would like to help plan meetings for small groups of lively skeptics as Meeting Organizer, please call President Keith Brabender at 351-0921 and volunteer.

Porter Henry reported that skeptics and amateur magicians came from all over the country to attend the CSICOP conference in Lexington, Ky., on the history and practice of magic

ART member, psychologist and magician Oran Dent gave a highly entertaining demonstration of the military's use of deception, illustrating each point with a magic trick and explaining how such deception exploits weaknesses in human perceptual processes. He explained that perception is not what you see, but a hypothesis about what your visual sensations mean. If your hypothesis is faulty, your interpretation of the world is faulty. Both generals and magicians rely on leading their victims to pick faulty hypotheses, hypotheses that reflect the real world incorrectly. Oran demonstrated that such misleading is not difficult.

Oran divided into simulation (creating what is false) and dissimulation (hiding what is real). Simulation includes mimicking, or imitating, as in a spy's impersonation of an enemy soldier. Simulation also includes inventing, in which an enemy is misled into an incorrect hypothesis by inventing a new, but false reality--rubber tanks and wooden guns to simulate the real thing. The use of decoys is also a form of simulation. Dissimulation includes masking--electronic jamming, or smoke screens--and repackaging, in which one thing is disguised as another. A military unit might be repackaged by dressing it in the uniforms of another unit, thus encouraging the enemy to develop incorrect hypotheses about troop movements. Another form of dissimulation is dazzling, in which the aim is to confuse the victim, who is then unsure of what she saw, and thus unable to form a good hypothesis. Camouflaging ships and coding communications are forms of dazzling.

Success in forcing your victim to develop a faulty hypothesis, the heart of deception, is a matter of systematically rearranging what your victim believes he perceives. Begin by choosing a strategic goal and deciding how you want your victim to react. From there determine what you want your victim to perceive and what you must hide or show to produce the desired perception. Then analyze the pattern of the thing to be hidden or shown to see which aspects are amenable to which kind of simulation or dissimulation--masking or mimicking or whatever. Provide the masking or

mimicking, make sure the your victim gets the message and is able to see your carefully arranged version of reality and will accept it as real, and voila, your enemy accepts a field of imaginary tanks and guns as real. The same procedure will of course persuade an unwary viewer that she has just seen a spoon bent by unaided mental power, which explains why magicians make good consultants in paranormal investigations. It takes someone who knows how to lead a viewer to incorrect hypotheses to recognize someone else who is using same techniques. Oran Dent's presentation is good evidence that the magician provides much more than entertainment--he provides a method invaluable to any viewer trying to evaluate extraordinary claims.

#### Executive Committee Meeting

The newly elected Executive Committee met August 8 to plan for ART's second year. Investigations Officer Joe Gastright reported that CSICOP has sent him to talk to a family in Hamilton, Ohio troubled by ghosts for the past seven years. Family members have come to believe that they see ghosts in reflected light in snapshots and elsewhere. Joe will report in full at the November membership meeting. Treasurer Peggy Borger reported that ART has \$314 in the bank, including a generous \$100 gift to support the newsletter.

Articles of incorporation, a first step toward tax exemption as a non-profit corporation, were prepared by Peggy Borger and signed at the meeting. The committee scheduled monthly meetings on second Saturdays, October through June, except when CSICOP events conflict with second Saturdays. See the calendar below for details. The newsletter will be published quarterly in October, December, February, and April, and will serve as a meeting notice for those months. Postcard meeting notices will be mailed in months when the newsletter is not published. The committee raised annual dues from \$10 to \$15 a year to cover the cost of the meeting notices and the newsletter. The committee also chose topics for the October, November, and December meetings; details are included in the calendar below.

#### Cold Spring Mary Sightings Not an Isolated Event

Tri-state TV stations and newspapers widely reported the predicted appearance of the Virgin Mary, venerated by Christians as the mother of Jesus, at St. Joseph Roman Catholic Church in Cold Spring, Kentucky, on August 31. A sizable crowd, although not the hordes predicted, gathered at the site under the watchful eye of the local police and the Kentucky National Guard. Participants prayed, sang, and compared notes on rosary beads which allegedly turned gold, sightings of the sun 'spinning,' and other paranormal events.

This event, with its attendant possibilities for excess spending by the Cold Spring authorities and the Kentucky National Guard and excess profit-making by Cold Spring citizens, is neither isolated nor unique, but part of a pattern of increasing incidence of Mary sightings, according to Ari L. Goldman ("When Mary Is Sighted, a Blessing Has Its Burdens," New York Times, September 6, 1992, p. A1). Goldman reports that church authorities say that such incidents have "increased sharply across the country in recent months." Gabriel Meyer, editor of *Mary's People*, a monthly magazine, Goldman reports, estimates that there are about 150 investigations of such alleged visitations underway worldwide. Explanations include the example set by the visions alleged to have occurred in Medjugorje, in former Yugoslavia, where 17 million people have visited over the last 10 years, seeking physical and spiritual healing in visions of Mary, and the approach of the millennium in the year 2000, widely expected by religious scholars to produce many such incidents. Periods of great social and political change, particularly when accompanied by poor economic times, are also thought to provoke such sightings.

The news media, however, rarely mention such secular explanations, usually accepting by implication the paranormal explanations offered by those who see the apparitions. Church authorities prefer to downplay such incidents because they threaten to replace the authority of the church with the voices of visionaries. Like the news media, they are also reluctant to bring reason to bear on the problem. One cause for their reluctance is the immense popularity of Mary among the faithful, who are likely to accuse anyone who appears to doubt the visions of being anti-Mary. The burden of providing alternative hypotheses rests squarely on local skeptics.

Sources a skeptic may want to consult to prepare for the next time Mary sightings are predicted include Dr. Sandra Zimdars-Swartz's history of such sightings over two centuries, *Encountering Mary*, published by Princeton University Press. Any standard introductory psychology textbook can provide information on perception and how the human mind may be misled. And keep in mind Oran Dent's notion that perception is a hypothesis about reality, and thus be quite wrong.

Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. --I Thessalonians, 5.21

Calendar

October 3, Saturday, 10:00 AM. Executive Committee Meeting. Greenwich Tavern and Restaurant.

October 10, Saturday, 10:00 AM. Business Meeting. Greenwich Tavern and Restaurant, 2440 Gilbert Ave., Cincinnati.

October 16, 17, 18. 1992 CSICOP Conference. "Fairness, Fraud, and Feminism: Culture Confronts Science." Dallas, Texas. Topics include Multicultural Approaches to Science: The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly; Gender Issues in Science and Pseudoscience; The Future of Skepticism: The Price of Reason; Fraud in Science; Crashed Saucers; The Paranormal in Science. Keynote Address by Richard Dawkins, professor of zoology, Oxford University and author of *The Blind Watchmaker* and *The Selfish Gene*. Registration, \$125.00; Hotel, double, \$68.00 plus 11% tax per night. For information call Mary Rose Hays at CSICOP, 716-636-1425.

November 14, 15 CSICOP & CODESH Workshops. Boston. Saturday: Skepticism and the Paranormal: Where Do We Stand? (Topics: Does ESP exist? What is the evidence for extraterrestrial visitations and abductions? Past-life regressions? Is reincarnation true? Does faith-healing work? Is there life after death?) Sunday: What is Secular Humanism? (Topics: Definitions of "Secular Humanism;" Aspects of Humanism: Atheism, Freethought, Critical Thinking, Affirmation of Life, Humanism as a Positive Alternative to Religion, The Ethics of Humanism, Sexual Morality, Humanism and Church/State Issues, Practical Action: The Modern Challenges to Humanism and Ways to Respond.) Registration: \$30. each workshop, \$50 for both. For information, call Barry Karr at 716-636-1425.

November 14, Saturday, 10:00 AM. Executive Committee Meeting. Greenwich Tavern and Restaurant.

November 21, 10:00 AM. Regular Monthly Meeting. Greenwich Tavern and Restaurant, 2440 Gilbert Ave., Cincinnati. Joe Gastright, Investigations Officer, will report on his investigation of a family in Hamilton, Ohio, troubled by ghosts.

December 12. CSICOP Workshop. Ft. Lauderdale. Same program as November 14 and 15 workshops. For information, call Barry Karr at 716-636-1425.

December 19, 10:00 AM. Regular Monthly Meeting. Greenwich Tavern and Restaurant, 2440 Gilbert Ave., Cincinnati. We will view and discuss a videotape made by Joe Nickell, author, University of Kentucky technical writing instructor and CSICOP Fellow, of a Jerry Springer show including a refrigerator reading (a cold reading, no doubt) and other attempts at the demonstration of psychic powers.

1993 Regular Monthly Meetings: Jan. 9, Feb. 13, Mar 13, Apr. 10, May 8, June 12.

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