

Cincinnati Skeptic
Newsletter of The Association for Rational Thought
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Motto of the month:

"What wise or stupid thing can man conceive"

"That was not thought of in ages long ago."

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Faust; The Second Part, Act II, The Gothic Chamber.

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Three Near Misses: Are These Science or Pseudoscience?

April Meeting

by Wolf Roder

The April meeting was devoted to a talk on distinguishing pseudo-scientific claims from new science knowledge. This is a problem for which no clear and simple method has been found, and the speaker quoted Martin Gardner to the effect that skeptics should concern themselves "only with theories so close to 'almost certainly false' that there is no reasonable doubt about their worthlessness." (Fads and Fallacies p. 7) The speaker also emphasized this is his advice to this and any other group of skeptics. As laypersons we have no call or competence to intervene in scientific debate.

To illustrate his thesis about the difficult choice between crackpot idea and great new insight, the speaker chose three scholars, whose theories have been rejected by their peers in this century, Alfred Wegener, Elaine Morgan, and Harlen Bretz. Each of them had the honor of at least one conference chiefly devoted to examining and rejecting their theories.

Alfred Wegener (1880-1930) first propounded his theory that the earth's continents move in a professional paper in 1912, which he followed with a book on Continental Displacement in 1915. After this was translated from the German in 1922, the lack of a force or energy for moving the continents led to rejection of the theory by the geological profession. A major conference to consider Wegener's ideas, sponsored by the American Society of Petroleum Geologists, resulted in a devastating critique in their proceedings. A later writer, Hughes, quoted the president of the American Philosophical Society as exclaiming the very idea was "utter damned rot", and a British geologist as saying anyone who "valued his reputation for scientific sanity" would never dare support such a theory. He also quoted an American expert: "If we believe this hypothesis, we must forget everything we have learned in the past seventy years and start all over again," while another thought the theory "mere geopoetry".

It was not until the sixties that more research and better knowledge of sea floor topography persuaded younger scientists that there was something to Wegener's ideas. Today, under the name plate tectonics, it is the accepted geophysical paradigm that continents do move, and Wegener is considered the pioneer of this insight. Yet, as recently as 1982 Radner and Radner wrote about Wegener as a borderline case of unreason, mainly because Wegener's earth science background was in meteorology rather than geology.

Elaine Morgan is a writer and researcher for documentary television in Britain. In 1972 she published a book, *The Descent of Woman*, which defended the idea that humans in the course of evolution had undergone a phase in which near shore fishing and diving played a major role. Dubbed the Aquatic Ape Theory, she thought it might admirably explain how we lost our body hair, and how we acquired our upright walk, why as the only of all primates we have a layer of subcutaneous fat and why some of our sweat glands secrete waxy sebum. Criticism from the profession, further reading and thought have led her to modify many of her hypotheses in subsequent books.

In 1990 a conference in the Netherlands was devoted entirely to her theories with mixed results. The experts in general find other theories more attractive. One reviewer of the conference volume concluded: "The final chapter... and the epilogue ... conclude that there is little evidence in support of the AAT and that the evidence in support of the traditional Savannah Theory is much more compelling." A more devastating assessment comes from Lowenstein and Zihlman: "In summary, the Aquatic Ape Theory does not hold water, anatomically, bio-chemically, behaviorally, or archaeologically. With a similar combination of imagination, a grab bag of unrelated "facts" and a popular literary style, one could make an equally convincing case that our ancestors evolved in the air - as von Danikin has more or less done in his cult book *Chariots of the Gods*."

Harlen Bretz wrote his first paper on the channelled scablands of eastern Washington State a year after the Scopes trial. In this region the professional geologist and professor at the University of Chicago found potholes the size of Riverfront Stadium, dry waterfalls larger than Niagara, wave ripples of two meters amplitude and corresponding wave length, and sandbanks the size of large hills. Nothing but an exceedingly large flood could have carved these features into the landscape, and Bretz had no source for this water. Many of Bretz' peers could not accept his flood interpretation. Richard Foster Flint, the author of the most highly regarded textbook on American geomorphology was especially unconvinced. James Gilluly of the USGS was another prominent doubter. Bretz vindication came in 1940, when younger investigators identified an glacial ice dam which had blocked ice age Lake Missoula in present western Montana. Lake Pend Oreille in northern Idaho is the remnant of this ice lobe. Repeated rapid melting and breakdown of this blockage allowed the whole of dammed Lake Missoula to wash over the scablands carving the present landscape. The Lake Missoula floods are today considered an established fact. This research was perhaps the first which indicated that nature does not always work only gradually but sometimes proceeds by catastrophes.

Gilluly eventually was able to visit the landscapes in question himself, and has been quoted as admitting: "How could anyone have been so wrong?" And in the old USGS Pick and Hammer Club this doggerel appeared.

A glacier once 'neath its collar got hot
And out o'er the scablands a mighty flood shot.
Now truly, Gilluly, t'will fool ye,
For Bretz has been there and he says there is not
A shadow of doubt what occurred on that spot.
'Tis true, it has Jim Gilluly's goat got.
But speaks he not truly, Gilluly?

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Therapeutic Touch: What's it all about?

May Meeting, 1996

Joe Gastright

Last September I signed up for a Level I workshop on Therapeutic Touch offered by the Edgar Cayce group, ARE, on the Ohio State Campus in Columbus. The weekend training session offered 20 contact hours as well as continuing education credit for registered nurses. For those interested in practicing Therapeutic Touch as part of the alternative health system, or teaching Therapeutic Touch, the course was the first in a series that could continue for up to four years. Although sponsored by ARE, the course was presented under the auspices of the Colorado Center for Healing Touch Inc. Thirty-three women and five men enrolled in the course. I kept track of the comments during the "sit in a circle and tell us who you are session," and found that 17 of the participants were nurses or other medical personnel. Massage Therapists, ARE members, Homeopathy, and various healers were other participants. I was one of six people indicating they attended for personal reasons. By 2:00 PM Sunday our leader made sure the group spent a full 20 hours learning the ballet like rituals that make up Therapeutic Touch. The sessions reminded me vaguely of sensitivity training workshops I attended in the early seventies. Instant intimacy was established by the many activities that involved working in two's or three's. By Sunday there was a "definite group identity" established and we all shared addresses and had our picture taken. These were very nice people who worked hard at developing their intuitive and clairvoyant side.

Dora Kunz, a co-founder of Therapeutic Touch, was born in the Far East about the turn of the century. She was a fifth generation clairvoyant, and took up meditation at the age of five. Her interest in Eastern Religion led her parents to send her to Australia for instruction by Charles Leadbeater, a leader in the theosophical movement founded by Helena Blavatsky. Dora served as Leadbeater's secretary and later as a psychic healer, clairvoyant, and President of the US Theosophical Society, and as editor of the Theosophical Journal. She met and recruited Delores Krieger who was working on her doctorate in Nursing at NYU. In 1972 Krieger obtained her degree with Kunz' help by "proving" that

"In-vivo human hemoglobin" was increased by the laying on of hands. Krieger and Kunz began teaching their method first at summer workshops of the New York Theosophical Society and later to nurses. "Research" by Janet Quinn in 1982 showed that Therapeutic Hand-Waving (without touch) worked just as well as the touching method. We were told that touch was permissible if the healee agreed to it in advance.

I learned that Healing Touch is a philosophy, a way of caring, and a sacred healing art. In practice Healing Touch is one of many energy-claimed therapies in the alternative health armada. Therapeutic Touch differs from Reichi and Reflexology in that it is an official nursing method, the Krieger/Kunz therapy. We all have four layers of "energy" called auras of different sizes and colors which extend beyond our physical body (the etheric, emotional, mental, and spiritual). Health exists when the energy is flowing freely and these auras show no tears, clogs, or imbalances. Problems in the auras lead inevitably to disease, which can be prevented by clearing the energy fields, patching them in advance. The body also has Energy Centers, which resemble small tornadoes. These chakras are described by the Britannica as imaginary elements of Hindu or Yogic physiology. Clogged chakras are the second disease causing element in Therapeutic Touch. Each chakra is associated with a color, an emotion, a focus, a psychological function, a gland and an area of the body. For example the last of the body's seven chakras points due south from the base of the spine. It covers "survival", the color red, the key of C, the adrenal gland, the spine, knees, feet, legs, ankles, kidneys, and fatigue.

The healer is instructed in centering, diagnosing, "unruffling" the energy field, transferring, or modulating energy into and through the healee, evaluating, and stopping. The centering precedes each session and requires you, the healer, to close the eyes, go within, breathe deeply, inhale calming energy, exhale tension, and feel yourself in your heart chakra. Thus purified and meditated, you will be able to turn on your intuition, your subjectivity, and your diagnosing hand or finger tip chakras. The healee is then "scanned" by moving your paired hands till you feel the "field", then down the back and then the front of the body. Any difference in sensation between one hand and the other (heat, pressure, tingling, etc.) are noted. At the end the patients feet are gripped near the ankles to move excess energy into the ground. The sensations are then shared with the healee who is encouraged to interpret them in health terms. The leader asks for "hits" and they come in floods. Tingling near the ears elicits headaches, ear aches, and cavities. The knees and base of the spine are fruitful tinglers, cool spots, or tears. Those who missed the "field" receive condolences and advice from alcoholics anonymous to "fake it until you make it."

The aura smoothing as it was called in another psychic healing class at Crystal's Gem Shop, involves moving the hands over the body from head to toe and from center line to beyond the edge with finger tips wiggling as an option. As you pass the edge the pain and congestion are flicked away with a graceful swoop. This works great with depression. All treatment is done with lights lowered and repetitive new age tapes playing in the background. It was wonderfully relaxing and Herbert Benson would have approved.

The chakras, I should say Energy Centers, are diagnosed using a pendulum, for example a heavy ring on a string. Lets say that if your pendulum moves counter-clockwise all is well and energy is moving. If it just hangs there, moves from side to side, or in another direction -well the chakra is clogged and in need of healing. I learned that a pendulum will do what you intuit it to do. The manual describes replacing the pendulum with a dowsing rod which is equally accurate.

The final step is to add additional energy to the places or chakras with problems. Placing a hand on one chakra and the other on another will balance the energy between them. One elaborate ritual, "the chakra connection", requires two people to follow a complicated plan of cross-handed chakra moves that takes up to 30 minutes. By the time each team member plays healee, a lot of time has passed and the relaxation is epidemic. I doubt that any monastery enforces the rule of silence as effectively as did my workshop colleagues. The slow ballet like movements of thirty persons in a dimly lit room has a deeply mesmeric look to it. The healees often needed several minutes to unlash and get back on their feet.

Additional energy can be added to single problem areas by using the "laser" technique. The right hand pointer finger is extended, the three adjacent fingers are folded into the hand chakra and the thumb is coiled next to the pointer. The well centered healer then wills the flow of energy out of the ground and through the pointer finger thus not depleting the healers own energy fields. If the problem is really severe the "four finger Laser" can be deployed by extending the other three fingers. Space precludes detailed description of the seven or eight other healing techniques we covered but I think that your imagination can fill the gap.

There is no evidence that energy fields or Energy Centers exist beyond the finger tingling suggestions reinforced by the trainer. The pendulums, dowsing rods, and Kirlian auras discussed as evidential are well known psychic scams and it's a shame that these intelligent, well meaning people are believers and users. Indeed the literature of Therapeutic Touch is unacceptable as scientific research. Several major hospitals in Cincinnati appear to support the teaching and use of Therapeutic Touch. The State of Ohio accepts what you read above as continuing education credit required to maintain a nursing degree. I think this is a problem that deserves attention from the educated public.
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President's Corner

Getting Informed and Staying That Way
[Wizard holding up a candle]

Where do you go to get information on some new alternative health scheme? The library is a possibility and yet on a topic as well developed as Therapeutic Touch, there are only a handful of titles listed under the name itself. Many of the key texts sold at Touch workshops and recommended as central to understanding the field would be impossible to find without a bibliography. For example the introductory Healing Touch: Workbook (Level 1) credits the section on Energy Centers to Alice Bailey's book Esoteric Healing and the section on Energy Fields to Barbara Brennan's book Hands of Light. Neither book mentions Therapeutic Touch, Ms. Bailey because she died well before 1972, and Ms. Brennan because she is a competitor of TT in the healer training business. Next Fall I will publish an annotated bibliography so that you will be able to explore in depth the TT literature.

There are some places that you could plan to consult in the meantime. The National Council Against Health Fraud (NCAHF) is an all volunteer, non-profit, tax-exempt organization which does a heroic job of providing information on all levels of quackery and wishful thinking. For \$20 you can support the organization and receive the bi-monthly NCAHF newsletter, which will make you one of the best informed opponents of misuse of health funds in the country. The NCAHF has produced almost a hundred, short, referenced, information sheets on all active, questionable health practices. They sell these for 50 cents or so and I distributed their comments on TT at my talk. I would also recommend that you acquire the sheets on Energy Medicine, Ayurvedic Medicine, and Magnetic Wellness while you are at it. For information on joining the NCAHF, write P.O. Box 1276, Loma Linda, CA 92354.

The work of the Rocky Mountain Skeptic organization under Bela Scheiber in questioning the right of the Colorado Nursing Board to offer continuing education credits for TT courses and the right of the University of Colorado's Health Science Center to offer course work in TT is well documented in three publications available from RMS for a mere \$5.00. To order the complete 3 volume historical text of the three year RMS expose of the Pseudoscience of Therapeutic Touch send your check to Rocky Mountain Skeptics, attn: TT, PO Box 7277, Boulder, CO 80306. For another \$15.00, you can join the RMS and receive their excellent bi-monthly newsletter! Now that you have enough to read, have a great summer.

-- Joe Gastright, president

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From the Un-easy Chair

Taking over the un-easy chair of editor of the Cincinnati Skeptic fills me with high hopes and ambitions, and with uneasy forebodings about all that can (and will) go wrong. Obviously I want to make this, our most important and most regular communications medium the best it can possibly be. I would like to see the CS replete with the latest news, sage articles, insightful observations, hilarious cartoons, perceptive book reviews, discerning letters, and funny fillers. Clearly, I will not be able to write all that myself. If there are no letters to the editor, we can't publish any, and that goes for all other material as well. I need you, the membership to feed me news of what is happening on the fringe, in notes, reviews, letters, cartoons, and fillers. The editorial offices of the CS can be reached at Wolf.Roder@uc.edu (preferred), or more slowly at PO Box 12896, Cincinnati, OH 45212.

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E-mail from the Amazing Randi

Randi comments: Typical nut stuff.... And you thought that I got dull mail....! This arrived this morning. What a way to start the day. This is a perfect example of a faulty argument that goes in circles and proves itself by what it is trying to establish.

An Unshakable Explanation of Para-psychology....

First, I appreciate what you are doing. Like yourself I am interested in the supernatural. I am a strong adherent of the belief in demonic possession. As you are well aware, the belief is that the earth is infested with numerous superintelligent and superpowerful invisible entities intent on undermining the will of God. Their goals are to remain invisible and at the same time cunningly promote the belief that they do not exist.

They may appear at times to lead others astray. For example at the parapsychological research institutes there is good scientific evidence of supernatural powers including ESP. However, when James Randi shows up these demons will not exhibit their powers under conditions which would cause them wide spread publicity. These super demonic forces would never manifest themselves to expose their powers to widespread scientific inquiry. This would force people to accept psychic powers as fact from a scientific perspective.

So don't worry, the cash you offered for proof is safe. I have seen demonic possession and men thrown twenty feet across the room and have heard of men who have experienced levitations of the supposedly demonically possessed. However, if you are an incredibly intelligent entity and knew James Randi was going to expose you would you demonically possess an individual? Remember, we are talking about superintelligent creatures here who know things days, months if not years ahead of when they occur.

If you keep that mindset in place, then you will find alot of things start to make sense. A lot of events which appear mysterious can be explained rationally. However, if you investigate every angle and bias the parapsychological will not become evident to your scientific methodology. The demons are simply too smart for you.

-- unsigned and semiliterate, hence heavily edited

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Defective Quarks

Note: mini-AIR is "a free newsletter of tidbits too tiny to fit in the Annals of Improbable Research (AIR), the journal of inflated research and personalities."

Extracted from mini-AIR, April, 1996

We have received word that defective quarks* (our informant calls them Joycean, not Gell-Mannian) are being distributed in Switzerland. Until and unless the report is verified, and until someone figures out what this means, we urge caution and discourage panic.

* smallest elementary subatomic particle, discovered by Murray Gell-Mann (Nobel prize 1969) and named after a word in James Joyce's Finnegans Wake.

Letter to mini-AIR on the subject of DEFECTIVE QUARKS

...these are surely neither Joycean nor Gell-Mannian, but genuine Swiss quarks. Quark in German (and I must assume this is German speaking Switzerland) literally refers to milkcurds or Cottage Cheese. However, it is not credible that Swiss (of all people) could distribute defective Swiss or any other kind of cheese.

Figuratively, quark means nonsense, as in "Quatsch doch keinen Quark". How anyone can have defective nonsense, much less distribute it, much less in tidy, rational Switzerland is beyond the understanding of science, -- physical, social, improbable or otherwise.

Could it be said that the Annals of Improbable Research specializes in quark, is so to speak the Journal of Quark?

Yours, Wolf.

On the news there may be yet smaller particles than quarks:

If big quarks have little quarks
Within them causing scatter,
And little quarks have lesser quarks
And so on; then what is matter?

-- Stephen Baird with apologies to Jonathan Swift, Science News, 149 (4 May 1996) p. 275

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Book Reviews
No Turning Back

No Turning Back:
Dismantling the Fantasies of Environmental Thinking
by Wallace Kaufman
(New York: Basic Books, 1994)

For many years now I have been unable to read Sierra comfortably. The magazine of the Sierra Club has become untrustworthy, often exaggerating environmental hazards or advocating actions which are counterproductive. The Sierra Club and other environmental groups do not stand on the side of the angels or promote righteousness, no matter how much they so pretend. Environmental organizations are political advocacy groups, subject to the same myopia as other lobbies. They will bend the truth as much in the name of what they consider right as defenders of commerce, religion, industry, or what have you in the political arena.

This in a nutshell is the thesis of Wallace Kaufman's book. Environmentalist groups are not the same as the sciences of ecology. They are advocates of courses of action, and apt to vilify business and industry as villains in defiance of the truth. Kaufman thinks environmental groups have in some respects made nature a substitute for god, and made their beliefs into a religion with principles. Ideas of nature as religion harken back to Rousseau, Thoreau, and to Wordsworth and other nineteenth century romantic poets. In the name of preserving the "balance" of nature, environmentalists may fantasize about pristine, untouched, healthy environments of the past which never existed. To reestablish such wildness environmental organizations have been known to advocate hands off policies, which in specific instances have led to out of control forest fires, increased air pollution, or children taken by mountain lions. To make a point an environmental advocate may demonize business and industry, or to idealize the thoughts, religions, and activities of primitive people, especially native Americans, as models for a new age. They may allow their prescriptions for society to edge into a socialism where private property and its use are evil. Ranchers, hunters, miners, lumbermen, and other users of natural resource may be seen as scoundrels. Kaufman provides instances to illustrate his thesis.

There never was a pristine, unchanged natural environment, nor is it balanced. Nature is change, and species become extinct. Even if there was, and we wanted to return to some prior age, it is not possible. The present population of the United States or the world could not be fed by primitive means of hunting, gathering, or farming. Moreover, few people really have any intention of living in the wilderness, unless on an occasional hike with all the equipment and preserved food provided by modern industry catering to the outdoors crowd. It is modern industry and science that make an intelligent management and exploitation of the environment possible. It is not in wildness, but through science and technology that preservation of a world to our liking is made possible.

-- Wolf Roder
Past Imperfect

Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies
edited by Mark C. Carnes, Ted Mico,
John Miller-Monzon, and David Rubel
(New York: Henry Holt and Co. 1995)
A Society of American Historians Book

For someone who has always been interested in quakeries and pseudo-science in the social sciences this is a fascinating book. The editors examine the historical accuracy of some sixty films produced over the past eighty years. Each movie is discussed by an expert on the period and evaluated for its historical meaning and teaching. Well known historians have contributed, among them Antonia Fraser (Anne of the Thousand Days), Dee Brown (Fort Apache), David L. Lewis (Khartoum), and Arthur Schlesinger Jr. (The Front Page). Although I read it front to back, it is a book for browsing, a reference book.

Each of these movies is set in a real place and time, but only some intend to depict specific events, Mutiny on the Bounty, The Alamo, All the President's Men for instance. Others may be based on biographies or other narratives which are themselves flawed. Many are based on historical fiction, among which Birth of a Nation and Gone with the Wind are perhaps the most famous. Some refer to no specific historical events, but merely convey the idea of a historical period, The Front Page and The Grapes of Wrath fall into this category. The task of the writers is made both interesting and difficult by the need to consider the sources of their movie.

Because the films are fiction and do not intend to convey accurate history, the writers are surprisingly gentle. They find much to praise in evaluating the narrative and ideas. Few movies are panned outright as worthless. The authors in particular accept the need of the film to tell a coherent story, which necessitates selecting and telescoping events. As one comments it is not "useful to quibble about inaccuracies, simplifications, invented characters, imagined dialogue, anachronisms and various other improbabilities." (p. 278) The important thing is that the constructed image is true to the historical perspective. Thus Dr. Strangelove truly depicts our nuclear fears and concerns at the time, although the film's characters are mere caricatures of their subjects. The Long Walk Home about the Montgomery bus boycott depicts a believable interaction between a white patrician woman and her black maid, although there is no evidence that any real white woman did learn to become involved in this way.

Most of the movies, however, are unacceptable to the historian because they point a lesson, teach a moral, or make a point. In the real world few persons are either wholly good or wholly bad, few sides completely in the right or the wrong. In contrast the movies are almost without exception morality plays or parables with an almost Manichaeian vision of good and evil. For the good to win, always, the complexities of character and the ambiguities of events are misinterpreted. More than anything the movies support the popular attitudes and prejudices of their time. Whether they extol the Ku Klux Klan, support racism, praise the good housewife, or hype the independent woman, ennoble war, or decry it, the movies always bend facts to the service of popular morality. The true complexity of events and the moral ambiguity of human character require a book. Yet, for most Americans the movies are likely the only historical truth they know.

-- Wolf Roder
The Myth of Scientific Literacy

The Myth of Scientific Literacy
by Morris H. Shamos
New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995) xx + 263 pp.

A short book note:

The author is a professor of physics, who also has had experience as school teacher and in industry. He does not believe we can teach this ill defined thing called "scientific literacy". A person can either study science with all the difficult and demanding work in math, logic, and lab procedure this requires, or else he can learn about the outcomes and results of technology. Without the first, especially the math, no students will understand the factual and rational methods of

scientific thought. Shamos is blunt, makes us uncomfortable, and leaves a bitter taste of ashes.
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Tales from the Paranormal

From the mini-Annals of Improbable Research ("mini-AIR"). The Annals of Improbable Research is a journal devoted to humor in the sciences.

January / February, 1996 (ISSN 1076-500X)
Free Paranormal Ability Testing Service

As reported in the popular press, both the CIA and the KGB are hiring psychics. And they pay well.

If you are interested in whether or not you have paranormal powers, just sit down in a quiet corner and mentally send your name and address to Wojtek Bourbaki, AIR's resident ESP expert. If you don't receive notification from us within three days you have no powers.

In the name of national security (any nation, any form of security) and economic growth (in either direction), The Annals of Improbable Research is offering this service free of charge.

Paranormal Spoon Incident

In the last issue of mini-AIR, we offered, free of charge, to test any reader who wished to know if he or she has paranormal powers. Testees were instructed to sit in a quiet corner and mentally send us their names and addresses. Alas, we had to terminate the testing program after readers in England and Israel reported a rash of bent spoons and then mentally lodged police complaints against us. We are now engaged in extra-cognitively presenting evidence to demonstrate that, whatever is bent or twisted, it is not the spoons.

PGP-Y

Our paranormal testing program has already had one commercial spin-off. Our engineers have developed a truly foolproof data security protocol. It is called PGP-Y -- "Pretty Good Parapsychology." The mechanism is simple. You imagine that you have transmitted data to someone; that person then imagines that he has received them. Using PGP-Y, any type of information can be transmitted over the Internet with complete security. The key is that the data are transmitted high over the net -- so high that the data actually travel above the net rather than within it. The data are transmitted telepathically (and for those who distrust electronic funds, we also have a scheme for transmitting cash and gold plate telekinetically.)

AIR owns the copyright on their material. However, this web page is ART's. (Just don't want to give the impression that we're trying to claim something that isn't ours.)

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Bits and Pieces

Defending His Seat and House

Before he was elected to a seat in the Duma (Russia's parliament), Anatoly Kashpirovsky worked as a psychic, hypnotist and faith-healer. Since he lost his seat in the elections of last December, Kashpirovsky has refused to vacate his government-provided Moscow apartment. He says he does and will use his psychic powers to fight off anyone trying to evict him and will render him impotent. No indication what he will do if female officials try to evict him. Russian government officials have not yet announced what they will do about the problem. (AP)

A memo from the National Center for Science Education, regarding brilliance in the area of legislative grasp of science.

Molleen Matsumura, Network Project Director [NCSE@crl.com]

Tennessee Bill on Evolution

14 February 1996

Tennessee State Representative Zane Whitson has introduced a bill that would make it a crime to teach evolution in Tennessee. The bill, HB2972 in the house, and SB 3229 in the Senate, adds the following section to the Tennessee Code: Section 49-6-1012.

"No teacher or administrator in a local education agency shall teach the theory of evolution except as a scientific theory. Any teacher or administrator teaching such theory as fact commits insubordination, as defined in Section 49-5-501(s)(6), and shall be dismissed or suspended as provided in Section 49-5-511."

This legislation is scheduled for consideration by the House Education Committee, and the K-12 Subcommittee of the Senate Education Committee, on the morning of February 21 -- just a few days from now!

23 February 1996

The bill was voted out of committee in both houses, only one vote against in one house. It will probably pass.
An Interchange on The Freethought News Group

A bill sponsored by Ohio State Rep. Ron Hood.

"Whenever a theory of the origin of humans, other living things, or the universe, that might commonly be referred to as 'evolution' is included in the instructional program provided by any school district or educational service center, both scientific evidence and arguments supporting or consistent with the theory and scientific evidence and arguments problematic for, inconsistent with, or not supporting the theory shall be included."

-- from Molleen Matsumura

Caveats first, I'm neither a lawyer nor a scientist. I realize I may be missing something between the lines but, on the surface, I don't think I have a problem with this sentiment. I think all science should be taught in this way. I guess I'd remove words four thru 22 making it read "Whenever a theory is included in the instructional program ...".

On the other hand it's probably a poor idea to try to legislate good teaching techniques.

-- my \$0.02 - Dick Duggan

What's between the lines is that "evidence and arguments" includes arguments that have nothing to do with evidence, and the "evidence and arguments" "inconsistent" with evolution aren't even qualified (however spuriously) by the adjective "scientific"! So why not an argument unsupported by evidence? For example, the argument that evolution is a bad idea because (supposedly) people who think they are "just animals" will not behave morally. Or the claim that evolution and creationism are both equally scientific, and both equally religious?

-- Molleen Matsumura

If anyone would like to let Representative Hood know your feelings about his questionable legislation his address at the state house is:

State Representative Ron Hood
Riffe Center
77 South High Street
Columbus, Ohio 43266-0603
Phone (in Columbus): 614-466-1464
House fax no.: 614-644-8744

Mr. Hood is a republican from the Youngstown area.

Here is a quote from the Cleveland Plain Dealer:

"I thought we had already been through the Scopes monkey trial", said Rep. Robert Hagan of Youngstown, the top Democrat on the House Education Committee, who said he would oppose the bill. Hood "doesn't understand that creation is an article of faith and that evolution is an article of science."

Frank Fire (frankf@imperium.net)

Belief and unbelief?

Are skeptics, that is people who endeavor to rely on science rather than superstition, also unbelievers or agnostics in regard to the God hypothesis? Undoubtedly many have no belief in the divine. The Skeptics Society recently polled its members, that is they sent out 5072 questionnaires and had twenty percent or 1019 returned. Here are the answers to the question: "Do you think there is a God, a purposeful higher intelligence that created the universe?" (in percent).

Very likely 20.7

Possibly 14.4

Not very likely 8.6

Very unlikely 26.4

Definitely not 33.3

Accordingly, slightly more than a third of skeptics share a belief in the possibility of God, while about sixty percent think Him or Her very unlikely. The fact that the percents add up to 103.4 makes me skeptical.

These results appeared in the journal *Skeptic* (vol. 3, no. 3, 1995, p. 10.) *Skeptic* is the major rival to the *Skeptical Inquirer*, it is published quarterly on the west coast by the Skeptics Society. Membership is \$35.00 per year to: Skeptics Society, PO Box 338, Altadena, CA 91001.

The Skeptics Society sponsors a lecture series at Caltech (California Institute of Technology in Pasadena, CA). Their journal appears more willing than the SI to talk about religion or to take an anti-religious stance. It also appears willing to enter into argument about a legitimate scientific controversy, something I would advise against.

-- editor

Daguerre Story

This story is told about the inventor of an early photographic process, Louis Daguerre.

Investor: "So how does this new picture making process of yours work?"

LD: "I expose this prepared plate in this little black box for about thirty minutes."

Investor: "And then you get a picture?"

LD: "Not exactly, I then take the plate into a dark side room and work on it with the developer."

Investor: "And then we see the picture?"

LD: "Not quite, it takes some time and more chemicals have to be applied until the picture appears."

Investor: "Now look here, making pictures in a black box and having them appear in a dark room, any second rate psychic charlatan can do that."

In The News: The Patriots

This menace is driven by paranoia and error. By patriots I do not mean the soldiers who freed the American colonies

from Britain, nor even the guerrillas who freed African colonies from Portuguese rule. The people who call themselves patriots in the United States at this time see the Federal Government as their enemy; they are best called False Patriots. I refer to the Militia movements, the Freeman-Sovereign Citizens, Identity believers, Posse Comitatus, and rolled in with them the Klansmen, the Skinheads, and neo-Nazis of all stripes. The murder of Denver talk show host Alan Berg, the explosion of the Federal Office Building in Oklahoma City, a string of bank robberies to finance the Patriot groups, and the derailment of the Amtrak train in Arizona are merely the best known of hate crime activity.

Their catalog of irrational beliefs is long, and not every group or individual shares all. In general, the government is the enemy, with focus on President Clinton, Attorney General Reno, the FBI, BATF, FEMA, IRS, EPA, Federal Reserve Bank, UN, NAFTA, and GATT. The government is evil and plotting to impose a New World Order abridging constitutional rights, especially the second amendment, with the help of the UN. Evidence for this plot is the shooting of the Weavers at Ruby Ridge and the disastrous fire of the Branch Davidians at Waco. Foreign troops and black, unmarked helicopters are operating on US soil, and are used to spy on us. An ID biochip will be implanted in your hand, and into new babies. Concentration camps are being readied to house Patriot resisters. Markings on the backs of road signs are directions to guide invading troops.

Most groups are restricted to white, adult, males and share some racist delusions against Blacks, Jews, Asians, or Hispanics. A large literature including old standbys and new fictions circulate. The patriot groups are skilled users of the internet, of radio talk shows, of short wave broadcast, and multiple fax communications.

Identity Church believers draw their ideas from the Anglo-Israel cult of the last century, which maintains the English speaking peoples are the ten lost tribes of Israel. Only they, white Christian men are the true Israel, the Jews are the spawn of Satan, while non-whites are Mud People. This leads them to the fantasy they are "sovereign citizens", not required to obey the (illegitimate) laws of the US or pay taxes. Many do not consider any government above the County level as legitimate. Some may establish their own "common law" courts. Patriots take it for granted, contrary to Supreme Court decisions, that the Second Amendment to the Constitution permits everyone to own weapons and to form private militias to defend against police and public officials.

Para-military armed groups in the Greater Cincinnati region are listed to exist in these counties, Dearborn, Ripley, and Switzerland, Indiana; Boone, Kentucky; and in Brown, Clermont, Hamilton, Montgomery, and Warren in Ohio. It is not known how big or how active any of these militias are, or how dangerous to the peace of the community.

1. The information for this article comes mainly from False Patriots, a report of the Southern Poverty Law Center, 1996, 72 pp. Their Klanwatch has been monitoring white supremacy and hate crime activity since 1979. (SPLC, 400 Washington Ave. Montgomery, AL 36104)
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Letters to the Editor

From the Wall Street Journal, Tuesday April 2, 1996 pA-6

Please Send in Photos of Alien Abductors

Thomas M. Olsen, in his March 15 Letter to the Editor, published in the Wall Street Journal, "Alien Abductions," compares the skeptical attitude of a Journal columnist to the French Academy of Science's insistence in 1803 that meteorites could not exist. Actually, the academy had good reason for disbelief until meteorites had been witnessed by reliable observers and authentic specimens had been examined. When the burdens of proof were met, the academy changed its position and accepted the existence of meteorites.

Those who believe in alien abductions have not met their burden of proof. No authentically identified alien artifacts exists, and there are no reliable objective observers of this phenomenon. Only the word of the alleged abductees and their "therapists" is given, and for something of this magnitude that isn't enough. In past centuries, people spoke of abductions by fairies and demons. We should no more believe in alien abductions than in abductions by fairies and demons. The "abductees" have been led on by the suggestive questioning of their "therapists." For objective background

information on this phenomenon, read the books of Robert A. Baker and Philip Klass.

-- Andrew O. Lutes (a member of ART)

From The News-Journal of Mansfield, Ohio, May 11, 1996 p8A.

Contrary to a letter published on April 19, 1996, evolution is not a tool of racism. Evolution was used at various times to promote racism, but so were Christianity and the Bible. The Curse of Ham in Genesis 9:25-27 was used to justify slavery and segregation. Certainly, this was misuse, and in no way supports racism. But if you say Christianity and the Bible are still valid despite the misuses of them, then why not be fair and say evolution is still valid even though it has been misused?

What evolution says is that life has common ancestry and changed over the long existence of the world. By showing our common heritage, this explicitly refutes racism. How can you hate one race when all races are from the same source? And if evolutionary charts show early hominids dark, this shows that all people descended from an original black race. Hence we are all blacks in ancestry. If one is racist, one is belittling one's parentage. Only an already committed racist--or someone already committed to opposing evolution--could see these charts as promoting black inferiority!

The reconstruction of appearances from bone fragments is not wizardry or voodoo, but a recognized science called forensic anthropology. A whole body can be reconstructed from a few fragments, since they were part of a body with a pattern. This is commonly done in criminal investigation and is admitted as evidence in courts of law. Why should this be invalid in field archeology?

There are no deep seated racial overtones in the fact of evolution. Scratching an evolutionist will not produce a racist. Many pro-evolution writers, including Stephen Jay Gould and Carl Sagan, explicitly condemn racism in their writings about evolution. The existence of millions of superior black men and women upholds evolution and debunks racism.

And, evolution does not necessarily remove God from the equation. The mainline religious denominations of America have passed resolutions upholding both belief in God and belief in evolution. See Voices for Evolution published by the National Center for Science Education.

-- Andrew O. Lutes (a member of ART)

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