



Cincinnati Skeptic

Newsletter of The Association for Rational Thought

Vol. 8 No. 4

December 1998/January 1999

Motto: “*He, who strikes the first blow, admits his ideas have run out.*”

— *Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892)*

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News from the Frontiers of Science & Scholarship.....

Journal of Unconventional History

The *Journal of Unconventional History* publishes original history by independent scholars, freeway fliers, history buffs, and academics. Reviewers call us “irreverent,” “bold,” “quirky.” As you might expect, articles contain solid scholarship without academic rigidity. They break with convention by presenting original material, or by combining existing knowledge in new, thought-provoking configurations, or by offering new interpretations of historical data, or by experimenting with new modes of historical writing, or ... ? Our mission is to publish original, unconventional work by scholars who present new discoveries or new and fruitful syntheses of older ideas, and who make a strong case for positions that don’t conform to current concepts about “known facts” of history.

Past issues of the journal have featured lively discussions of such topics as:

- Mormon polygamy
- History of the apron
- Clothing as an instrument of repression in Puritan New England
- Historical examples of mooning (earliest so far, A.D. 1201)
- Criminal proceedings against animals
- Laurel and Hardy and the FBI
- Pickled fish
- Medieval pottery in modern museums

Comments or questions regarding the *Journal of Unconventional History* should be directed to Ann Elwood at aelwood@coyote.csusm.edu or Aline Hornaday at ahornaday@ucsd.edu.

(more on page 9)

November Meeting

Bio-Magnetism: Science or Quackery?

The November membership meeting featured Joe Gastright, A. R.T.’s Media Resources Coordinator and former Investigations Officer. Joe turned his famously energetic skeptical attention to bio-magnetism, the relief of pain with small permanent magnets.

Joe’s interest in bio-magnetism springs from the fact that 40 percent of the U.S. population now use alternative medical treatments, annually spending more on alternative medicine than they do out of pocket on insurance and co-payments for conventional medical treatments. Spending on alternative medicine now totals about \$60 billion per year, a significant chunk of total spending on health.

Alternative medicine’s progress towards respectability can be seen in its emergence over the last few years from small ethnic shops to prominent display in conventional drugstores. Joe reported that when he visited Vancouver, Canada, several years ago, the only healing magnets to be found were in shops in Chinatown. A recent return trip to Vancouver found magnets for sale in mainstream pharmacies.

Magnets were named by the Greeks, either after a magnetite-rich mountain in Magnesia, or, more poetically, after Magnes, a shepherd from Thessaly whose shoes were (cont. page 7)

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The By-Laws require that officers for the following year be elected annually at the May meeting. They begin their duties on following July 1.

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**Web Master's Comments**

The Skeptical Area Network Effort (SANE) list has been moved to a new site, One List, which offers list service in exchange for a four line ad at the end of each message. I do hope such a small advertisement will disturb us not. Sign up by going to our web site at:

< www.cincinnati-skeptics.org > or by going to < www.onenet.com > .

Of the 50 people on the list before it was moved, about 15 have signed up for the new list so far.

I've long been dissatisfied with the method I've been using to maintain our links page, but now I think I have something that will work well. Take a look at:

<http://www.cincinnati-skeptics.org/rlinks/>

and you'll see the new links page that I plan to use to replace the old one. I haven't finished adding all the links from the old page, and it will take a while. In the meantime, if you have any links you want to add, there's a mechanism in place to submit links for addition to the database. If you want to create new categories and help with the creation and administration of the links database, go to:

<http://www.cincinnati-skeptics.org/rlinks/admin/>

The admin URL is password-protected: username is "art", password "apple314" (without the quotes). Follow the links to Gossamer Threads for info and a working demo that you can experiment with.

Once I have all the old links added, I'll phase out the old links page.

-- David Wall, Webmaster

... and from Brad:

For those of you suffering withdrawal due to the cancellation last winter of the daily airing of Dr. Dean Edell radio program in our local market, relief is here: As of 13 November 1998, you can now keep up with the good doctor's comments and critiques of health news via the internet! Go to:

< www.healthcentral.com >

and you'll find daily postings of the topics discussed on-air, the questions callers asked, the TV Medical Minutes, access to an e-mailed daily digest of Dr. Dean news and more. All this material is an integral part of the extensive HealthCentral site.

While having to get online to get your dose of Dr. Dean is not nearly so much fun as listening to him live on the radio, it sure beats the 2-hours of taped programs that currently run from 6 - 8 AM on Saturday mornings on 1360 AM here in Cincinnati. I bet if enough Dr. Dean fans signed up for the e-mailed daily digest in this radio market (they do ask for your zip code), Jacor *might* reconsider finding a time slot for the radio program. Shall we make it a campaign?



*From the
Un-Easy Chair....*



By the numbers.

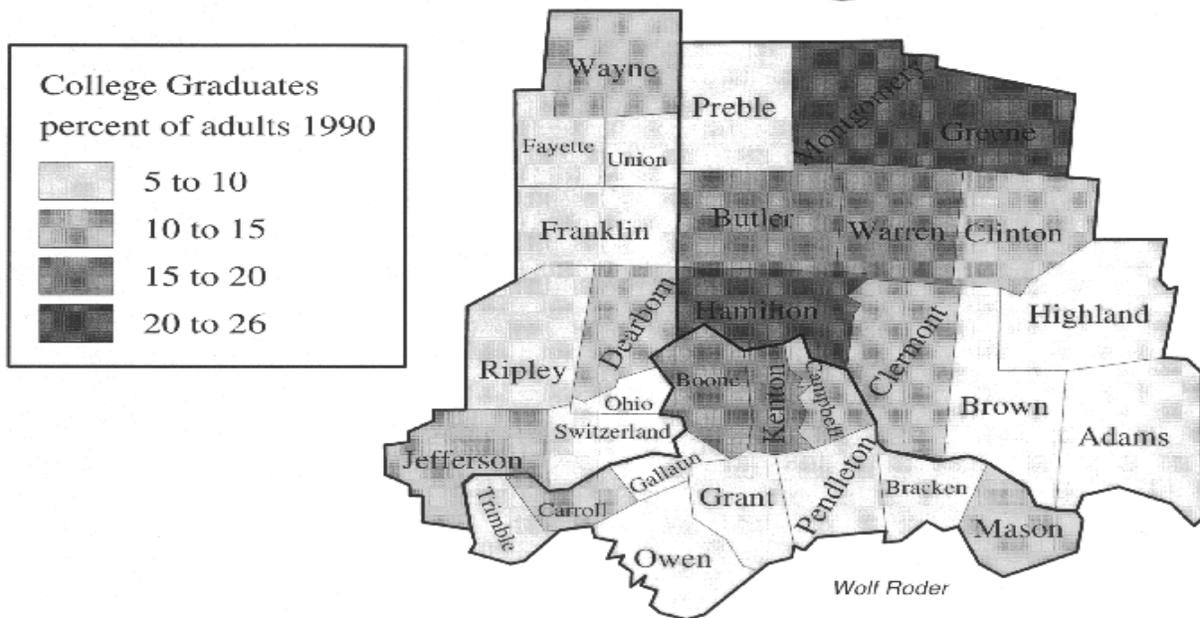
We might ask the question, who is our audience, who are our prospective members, which kind of people may be expected to be or become skeptics. What is our market in other words. This is of course very difficult to say, and though I would argue education and intelligence have something to do with who takes a jaundiced view, the relationship is by no means clear or one to one. Let us assume for the moment the college educated are more likely to be interested in science and in skepticism about pseudo-science, quackery and such. "Assume," somebody has remarked, is scientese for "faith." And you will be quick to observe there are plenty of gullible college graduates, or on the other hand, skeptics who have not received the blessings of an *alma mater*. Nevertheless, I'm determined to publish my map.

We may consider this our "market area," 31 counties which may be said to make up the wider

Cincinnati Region. (Actually, it looks suspiciously like the weather map on Channel 12.) The map shows the proportion of adults who are college graduates, some have more education. Data are from the 1990 *US Census*. The two major cities, Cincinnati and Dayton plus Greene county stand out with the largest proportion of college grads, the lesser counties in the metropolitan area have the second highest proportion of college grads, while the country towns and some suburbs weigh in with around twelve percent college graduates. College grads in the rural counties are relatively rare.

Further estimates of Ohio statistics. We are still the seventh ranked state in population with 11,186,000 or so persons. Of these 52 percent are between the ages of 25 and 64; and 16.5 percent benefit from Social Security payments. Whites make up 86 percent, and 10.5 percent are black; 5.4 percent speak a language other than English at home. Some 24 percent of adults never graduated from high school, while youngsters still drop out at the rate of 8 percent. On the other hand 11 percent hold bachelor's degrees plus another 6 percent have graduate or professional qualifications. There are 179 colleges and universities in Ohio; 81 percent of UC freshmen enrolled with the idea of getting a better job. The per capita (mean) personal income of Ohioans is \$24,700.

Cincinnati Tri-State Region





***Too Many Books....
Too Little Time....***

The Shape of the River: Long-Term Consequences of Considering Race in College and University Admissions

by William G. Bowen and Derek Bok
(Princeton University Press, 1998)

It is the subtitle that describes the topic of this book best. And, be warned, it is full of numbers, tables, and diagrams, in other words data which carry a great deal of conviction but need to be read and analyzed carefully. The authors never say so exactly, but selecting “the best” applicants for college admission is not a simple or straight forward procedure. We can not merely rely on SAT scores or high school grades for this process. Not only high schools, but individual classes or courses vary in difficulty and grading patterns. So it is important where a student went to school, and which courses he took. While SAT scores may well be the single most reliable assessment of a student’s knowledge, they differ by verbal and math scores, and depend heavily on the background and preparation of the student.

The authors focus particularly on highly selective institutions, many of which are private liberal arts colleges and major research universities. Many lesser colleges do not receive enough applications to be particularly selective anyway. Private institutions specifically can draw on a national pool of talent. State institutions, in contrast, are generally obligated to give preferences to applicants from within the state. They may have to admit all or a certain part of every graduating high school class. Such “in state” requirements are probably the single largest bias applied to admissions.

Admission gate keepers do not want to merely pick the academically best students, but have other objectives in assembling a freshman cohort. Diversity of background, ethnicity, wealth, region, and academic objectives (majors) are taken into consideration by admissions personnel. Clearly, it will be quite difficult to weigh these variables against grades. What is more, rather than merely “bright” students, the college wants to admit freshman, who have staying power and will succeed in earning a degree within four to six years. The rate at which a college or university graduates its students has become a major index for judging

the fit between institution and applicant. Even further, the university seeks to admit students who will keep faith with the institution as alumni. Universities depend on their alumni for their long term reputation, for recommendations to future students, and for financial subventions. Trying to weigh these large numbers of variables, and trying to do justice to individual students make the Spring and Summer admissions period one of hectic work and splitting headaches for the personnel involved.

Universities, thus, give advantages to various categories of applicants besides taking race into account. The authors remind us that promising athletes are especially advantaged, not only in admissions, but in financial and academic support as well. Another major bias is in favor of “legacies,” that is students who come from families in which parents and other relatives have attended the institution in question.

Bowen and Bok demolish the impression that disadvantaged students admitted with lower grades can not hack it in selective institutions. Their data show that top colleges generally have a higher graduation rate than less well regarded places, and that this applies to all their admissions. The bottom line is that the number of Blacks is few, and the advantages involved are small. If all students were admitted strictly in order of grades or SAT scores, and all thus freed up places would go to members of the majority, it would affect less than about two percent of the places at top colleges.

— Wolf Roder

AIDS: Virus- or Drug Induced?

edited by Peter H. Duesberg

(Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996)

I don’t intend to review this book. For one thing I am not qualified to decide the scientific dispute about the causes of AIDS. Rather, I want to use the controversy to talk about the question how we can tell pseudo-science from science. As I have said earlier, particularly in regard to the hollow earth and homeopathy, quackeries often start out as reasonable and legitimate scientific hypotheses, which later become the bent obsession of some.

When AIDS first started to kill homosexual men in the late seventies, many hypotheses were put forward to explain this syndrome of varied illnesses. Among them was the hypothesis of Peter H. Duesberg a molecular biology professor at Berkeley, that it represented a breakdown of the immune system as a consequence of the lifestyle of the victims. After Gallo and Montagnier discovered the HIV retrovirus as the causative agent of T-cell breakdown and of the decline of the immune system, Duesberg continued to disagree. He has maintained his theory with some

modification. Duesberg found scientific supporters, and journalistic followers, who find the HIV thesis unacceptable. Some of these come to word in this volume.

The publisher is evidence we are dealing with science. Kluwer is a highly regarded, international science publisher, and this volume appears as number five in their series on *Contemporary Issues in Genetics and Evolution*. Of the 27 papers a full dozen have first appeared in the peer reviewed journal *Genetica*. The authors of the scientific papers without exception have impressive academic, medical, and scientific credentials. The story they tell is coherent in defense of Duesberg's hypothesis which is stated succinctly:

AIDS in the U. S. and Europe is caused by the long-term consumption of recreational drugs and AZT. The remaining AIDS - hemophiliacs, transfusion recipients, and other cases from non-risk groups - reflect the normal incidence of these diseases, simply under a new name. (p. 310)

It must be remembered in this context, that there is no such illness as "AIDS," rather the victims suffer a decline of the immune system, and consequently are attacked by a variety of illnesses. These illnesses may and do occur in non-AIDS sufferers as well.

So why do I think Duesberg and his collaborators may have become obsessive about this dispute? For one thing, the fact that journalistic supporters find their way into a scientific volume will raise eyebrows. There is a defensiveness about some of these writings, which remind me of quacks. There is a tendency to attack the evidence of the HIV scientists, rather than lay out their own. There are too many "might's" and "could be's" for comfort.

Some of the writers in this book have taken to calling the HIV evidence a "dogma" (p. 271). Another speaks about "AIDS as a mirage of modern media;" "totalitarian AIDS science" and a "self-righteous campaign to stamp out debate." (p. 310) A fieldworker is quoted as stating: "There is no AIDS. It is something that has been invented." (p. 354). And another: "To the medical professions this is a heresy, not just a different interpretation of the facts..." (p. 355).

One of the defenders of the drug hypothesis is Phillip E. Johnson, the law professor who is known for supporting a fundamentalist creationism. Another is Serge Lang, a math professor who has attacked political science as such. I know I'm promoting guilt by association, but still it brings out my cynical distrust.

When one author asserts that the lack of response to his case proves it is unanswerable, it is time to be suspicious: (p. 349)

But this time, there was hardly a word of protest, let alone any arguments of rebuttal. No scientific paper to validate the tests. And no comment elsewhere in the media. We were privately "rubbished" by the AIDS experts to whom specialist writers turn in such cases. But it seemed their case was too weak for them to wish to state it publicly.

Or this: "The AIDS-skeptics achieved a critical mass, and spoke with confidence and authority. Those who attempted to defend the official dogmas were confused and defensive; they failed to rebut or even acknowledge the points made by the skeptics; in short, they put on a very poor show. It is clear that the official AIDS experts cannot compete in a free and open debate." (p. 313)

— Wolf Roder



What was the deadliest tornado outbreak in the United States? The infamous Tri-State tornado on March 18, 1925, swept across Missouri, Illinois and into Indiana. The monster funnel destroyed several small cities, killing at least 695 persons. This and other twisters caused a total of 747 fatalities. 2,027 persons were injured.

Numerology made Simple.



Consider this little piece of violent history. It clearly indicates there will be a fatal crash of a 747 model airplane on or before the year 2027. To pick the number 747 can not be meaningless, as it is only one chance in a thousand, there being that many three digit numbers. Some half-gay persons will be involved, we may surmise further, the number 69.5 points to that. It will come to pass thus, I guarantee it.

— bio-astrologer Esmeralda von Löwenzahn-Dentdelion



Art Business



Reports from the ExCom and Membership Meetings:

Announcements of our monthly meetings now appear regularly in local papers and Publicity Coordinator Gary Himes is working on getting the announcements into local college newspapers.

Newsletter Editor Wolf Roder announced that the newsletter schedule for this year has been changed to reduce expenses. The newsletter will be published bimonthly for the rest of the year. Thus issues for Feb./March, April./May, and June/July will complete the 1998/1999 volume.

Program Chair Brad Bonham announced the program for December will be a talk by George Bishop of the University of Cincinnati about multi-national research on the relationship between scientific literacy and belief in creationism. In January a representative of Klein Associates will present a program on intuition as a legitimate and useful aid in decision making.

It's Back Up!!!!

The Skeptical Area Network Effort (SANE) list has been moved to a new site, One List, which offers list service in exchange for a four line ad at the end of each message.

**For current news and exchange
of ideas and information
with other like minded people:**

Sign up now by going to our web site at

< www.cincinnati-skeptics.org >

Or by going to

< www.onenet.com >

The tenacity of superstition in an age of science and rationalism may surprise at first, but insofar as it aims at controlling fate, it beats fatalism. It is a resort of the hapless and incapable in the pursuit of good fortune and the avoidance of bad; also a psychological support for the insecure. Hence persistent recourse to horoscopic readings and fortune telling, even in our own day. Still, one does not expect to find magic used as a tool of business, to learn for example that exploration of coal deposits along the French northern border (the Hainaut) and in the center of the country (Rive-de-Gier) in the eighteenth century was misguided and delayed by reliance on dowsers (*tourneurs de baguettes*).

— Marcel Gillet,

Les charbonnages du nord de la France au XIX^e siècle
(Paris: Mouton, 1973) p. 29

A Puzzle for Thinkers

Measuring the earth.



Some time ago cartoonist Dirk Browne allowed his "Viking" character Hågar the Horrible to sail away on a cubic earth, ie. the spherical earth projected onto the sides of a cube.

Now most people might draw this map of the world on a cube

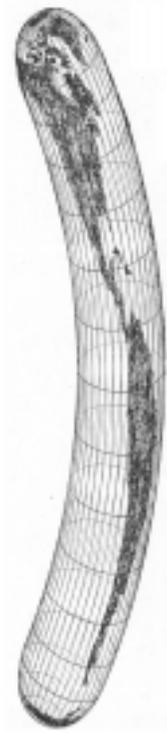
whose sides just touch the earth so that the side of the cube is equal to the diameter of the earth. Since the surface of a sphere is four times its cross section, that is $4r^2$, and the area of the cube is $6(2r)^2$ it is clear the sides of this cube are almost twice as large as the surface of the globe.

($12.57r^2$ versus $24r^2$)

A teacher of cartography recently challenged his students to find the side of a cube which would have the same surface area as a sphere. What is the length of the side of that cube?

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Of course my favorite is the earth projected onto the sides of a curved cylinder with two round ends, an authentic hot dog so to speak. But just try to calculate the surface area of a panting pup. (Source: Agnes Denes, *Isometric Systems in Isotropic Space*, 1979)



Solution to last month's puzzle:

The horse's statements regarding the number of sacks of grain can be modeled as these simultaneous equations, where h is horse and d is donkey: $h + 1 = 2(d - 1)$ and $h - 1 = d + 1$ which can be solved by substitution. The horse carried seven sacks and the donkey five sacks.



Bio-Magnetism (from pg 1)

said to have lost their nails after a surprisingly effective encounter with magnetite. Because of magnetite, the only naturally occurring magnetic substance, many ancient cultures knew about magnetism. Magnetites were called lodestones. Medical and other benefits were attributed to their use. Cleopatra is said to have worn a lodestone to prevent wrinkles. A thirteenth century European writer claimed that magnets restored husbands to wives; cured dropsy, unhealthy spleens, fox mange and burns; protected chaste women and caused adulteresses to scream.

Around 1523, Paracelsus (1493?-1541) opined that when magnets are used for healing, it is the imagination rather than the magnets that produce the healing effect. His opinion, although correct, was more likely the product of chance than scientific understanding, since little was known about magnetism at the time. And a great many of his other ideas were as wrong as this one was right.

But no scientific work on magnetism appeared until 1600, when William Gilbert (1540-1603), a physician and early scientist, wrote *De Magnete, Magneticisque Corboribus*. Gilbert proved that various legends and superstitions about magnets were not true. He showed that garlic rubbed on a magnet does not, as tradition had it, destroy its ability to attract iron. Using magnets hidden in the mattresses of prostitutes, he was able to show that magnets do not drive adulteresses to scream. He discovered that the earth itself is a magnet, using the tendency of a compass needle to point down toward the middle of the earth (declination) as evidence



In 1770, a blacksmith discovered how to make a magnet by beating iron, reducing dependency on lodestones. But many others in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries did not add to the scientific understanding of magnets. Instead they added magnets to their repertoire of unscientifically supported healing techniques. Most of these healers dropped the magnets as they discovered other easier and cheaper ways to treat people. Franz Mesmer began investigating the allegedly curative powers of magnets. Later he abandoned the magnets and claimed that he possessed a curative force of his own, which he called "animal magnetism." Mary Baker Eddy, founder of Christian Science, promoted magnets, but later decided that prayer was sufficient. Daniel David Palmer used magnets but later abandoned them and developed chiropractic.

But the charlatans were not the only ones concerned with magnets. Many great scientists after Gilbert contributed to our understanding of magnets. They include Andre Marie Ampere (1775-1836), Michael Faraday (1791-1867), James Clerk Maxwell (1831-1879), Heinrich Hertz (1857-1894),

Albert Einstein (1879-1955), and Richard Feynman (1918-1988).

Magnetism works through the creation of charged particles. All magnets have two poles. If a single magnet is cut in half, two magnets, each with two poles results. Even a single atom has a north and a south pole. Iron, chrome and nickel make good magnets. Until the 1980's, magnets were fairly bulky, but with the discovery of magnets made of rare earths, very small strong magnets could be made. The availability of these small, strong magnets is thought to have contributed to the current fad for wearing magnets to cure various conditions.

At one time it was believed that lodestones, the natural mineral magnetite, pointed to the place where they were found. Now it is known that magnets point to magnetic north, regardless of where they were found or made. Magnets can be made by stroking iron repeatedly across magnetite in the same direction. At one time ships carried iron cases filled with magnetite on which to stroke the compass needle to remagnetize it.



Magnets have been a focus of superstition and magical belief for centuries. In today's world, they have the attention of those who believe they can be used to attract money as well as iron. In the U.S., multi-level marketing schemes focused around magnets are common. The greatest profit in these businesses is in selling franchises, not in selling the product itself. A nice profit can be made in selling just the magnets, however, because the markup for magnets sold as a health treatment is several times the retail cost of magnets sold from a scientific supply business. In addition to gadgets with magnets in them, like neck braces, many other magnet-bearing items are marketed, including jewelry. Magnets are also sold to veterinarians and pet owners for the treatment of animal health problems.

Alternative medicine magnetic treatments are aimed at relieving a wide variety of ailments. These include stress, insomnia, poor concentration, headache, back pain, sprains, bruises, muscular pain, swelling, hand and wrist pain, inflammation of joints, painful nerves and tendons, wrinkles, impotence, sexual dysfunction, prostate problems, cancer, infections, and heart disease. In addition, many products are sold to prevent magnetic fields from hurting people, although there is no evidence at all that such harm can occur. Products are sold to protect against magnetism produced by neon lights, wall outlets and video display tubes, all judged harmless by research.

There is no reliable research suggesting that any of these products is effective. No magnetic device has ever been submitted to the Federal Drug Administration for approval. This is largely because as long as the magnets are

sold without any medical claims the FDA has no control over them, so approval isn't needed. Only one article on the effects of magnetism, a study of the effect of magnets on post-polio pain, has been published in a peer reviewed journal. The lead author, Carlos Valbona, former chairman of community medicine at Baylor University, is a stock holder in the firm that made the magnets used in the study, a circumstance which casts doubt on the results of the study, which found magnets effective in the treatment of post polio pain.

Conventional medicine also uses magnets, but largely to diagnose rather than treat. CAT (computerized axial tomography) scans, PET scans, and MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) all use magnets. In addition, magnets are used to remove metal objects from the body and concentrate drugs in a small target area. A rarely used technique permits coating harmful bacteria with magnetic antibodies which can be clustered and removed from the body using a magnet. Research has shown that electromagnets help bones heal faster. Other research is looking into the effect of electromagnetism on osteoarthritis.

Joe's conclusion? Although the study of magnetism may yet produce more effective medical uses, the vast contemporary market in magnets for the treatment of health problems is pure profitable quackery. Reported by Virginia Jergens.

-- V. H. Jergens

Now on Video!

James "The Amazing" Randi Live at Lexington

The First Annual KASES Skeptics Lecture
*The Amazing Randi speaks his mind on
science, the paranormal....and cats!*

Two hours, VHS only \$24.99 Visa, Mastercard,
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<http://home1.gte.net/fredbach/index.html/>

FROM: THE KASES FILE
*THE JOURNAL OF THE KENTUCKY ASSOCIATION OF
SCIENCE EDUCATORS AND SKEPTICS*
VOL. 11 No. 1 SPRING 1998

From the Amazing Randi....

DKL Lifeguard: Randi throws down a challenge.

Tom Clancy's hero used the Lifeguard to pinpoint terrorists through 500 feet of concrete and steel in the novel *Rainbow Six*. The devices, at \$14,000 each, are marketed to defense agencies, law enforcement agencies, and rescue organizations. DKL claims LifeGuard detects electrical impulses of the human heart, but in double-blind tests, Sandia Labs reported it did no better than chance. Both Sandia and NIST have been asked to test the device by the National Institute of Justice and the Defense Technology Security Administration, but Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA) reportedly intervened on DKL's behalf. Specter's office refused to divulge the contents of his letters to the agencies. Meanwhile, the James Randi Educational Foundation issued a challenge: The Foundation will pay Howard Sidman, president of DKL Enterprises, or Senator Specter, the sum of one million dollars immediately upon a successful demonstration of the DKL LifeGuard device.

Other heroes:

The astronaut who went into space only once.

As the nation honors John Glenn, it is appropriate to recall another astronaut, Ham, the chimpanzee, who rode a Mercury capsule into space before John Glenn. Both went to Washington, Glenn to the turmoil of the Senate, Ham to the tranquility of the National Zoo. Ham never returned to space.



Be on the look out!!!

Investigations arise from the membership's desire to investigate something in the light of reason and truth. Consequently, **every** member is invited to submit to the Investigations Officer any proposal or item that could be studied together. So far, most investigations have been done by individuals within the Association. If you are doing such now, the whole membership would be delighted to hear from on your research. Please con-

New on the Frontiers of Science & Scholarship... (from pg 1)

Scientists at Clemson University in South Carolina's have made progress in their quest to make chicken manure smell better. Adding garlic powder to the chicken feed, "... makes the poultry house smell like a pizzeria instead of manure," says professor Glenn Birrenkott, "and," he adds, "their eggs taste better too." (AP)

Is Anyone Interested in the Popular Culture of Disaster?

Recently a group of researchers decided to see if there was any current interest in a topic they first discussed two decades ago: the jokes and humor that circulate during disasters. This focus has now broadened to, for want of a better term, the "Popular Culture of Disasters." Tentatively, this includes disaster jokes and humor, board games and puzzles

with disaster themes, folk legends and beliefs about disasters (including Great Flood myths), disaster calendars, songs and poems created at times of disaster, nontraditional predictions (such as the Browning earthquake prediction in 1990), disaster novels and films as well as spoofs of them (e.g. the



"Airplane" series), anniversary newspaper issues, on-site graffiti and survivor buttons, certain common photos and video tapes, memorial services, cartoons and comic strips with disaster themes, World Wide Web chat rooms developed around disaster occasions, etc. This is only a partial list, but it conveys what might be considered under the general rubric of the popular culture of disaster. As an intellectual rationale for this project, it can be argued that humor is a powerful coping mechanism, and that popular culture may be the major way most people learn about disasters.

The group focusing on the topic has concluded that disaster popular culture is a worthwhile topic for more systematic exploration (given the limited publications and information on the phenomena mentioned above), and they are seeking others who might be interested in, or knowledgeable about, this

topic. The group is currently considering next steps in furthering their interests -- including establishing an Internet discussion group and Web site, developing a special issue for a disaster journal, and hosting relevant sessions at professional meetings.

Anyone having an interest, suggestions, contributions, and/or writings on this topic, or who simply wants to be informed of developments, is encouraged to contact E. L. (Henry) Quarantelli, Disaster Research Center, University of Delaware, Newark, DE 19716. Phone: (302) 831-6618; Fax: (302) 831-2091; e-mail: elqdr@udel.edu.

— from: *Natural Hazards Observer* (November 1998) p. 16

A Matter of Great Concern

In connection with our last speaker it is of interest to note that electric power lines and appliances generate electromagnetic fields in their vicinity. There has been particular concern about the health effects of electromagnetic fields generated by high tension overhead power lines. Fear centers on their effects on people living nearby, adults driving by, children playing underneath, and ghosts and gremlins living within them themselves.

Let us compare typical exposure values. The earth itself has a magnetic field of 50 microtesla strength, here are some others:

video display terminal	2
within 50 feet of transmission line	3
copying machine	20
within 6 inches of microwave oven	30
operating a power saw	100
using electric can opener	150

The clear conclusion is, stay away from those electric can openers and worry about the power saw's electromagnetic effect on your brain not on your thumbs.



From the Halls of Medicine...

Alternative Medicine at the American Medical Association.

Americans visited alternative medicine (AM) practitioners more frequently than primary care physicians in 1997 and paid \$21 billion for the privilege. There is, however, a dearth of scientific evidence for either safety or efficacy of AM therapies, prompting the *Journal of the American Medical Association* to put out a special issue on AM research. At a press briefing on five articles selected from that issue, the *JAMA* editor began by observing that the gold standard for medical research is the randomized, double-blind study.

A favorite was “Moxibustion for Correction of Breech Presentation.” Moxibustion is an ancient Chinese practice in which acupuncture points are stimulated by heat rather than needles. Not just any heat — it must be from burning the herb *Artemisia vulgaris* (mugwort) — and not just any acupuncture point — it’s the one beside the outer corner of the woman’s fifth toenail. OK, so the theory needs a little work. The study, done in China, concluded that more fetuses turned head first among the treated women. But was the study blind? Sort of. The women were told which group they were in — besides, it’s pretty easy to tell if you’re getting a Chinese hot foot. The doctors were also told which women were treated, but the fetuses, by all accounts, were in the dark.

In contrast to this rather cynical report, *Newsweek* (23 November 1998, p. 68) was rather upbeat on the same subject. Here is a quote:

The study involved 260 Chinese women, pregnant for the first time, whose babies were still in the breech, or upright position after 33 weeks. Half of the women received daily moxibustion treatments on their little toes for one or two weeks. The others got the same care, minus moxibustion. Though the mechanism is unclear, the fetuses in the treatment group became measurably more active, and 75 percent of them (versus 48 percent of the controls) righted themselves in time for a normal delivery.

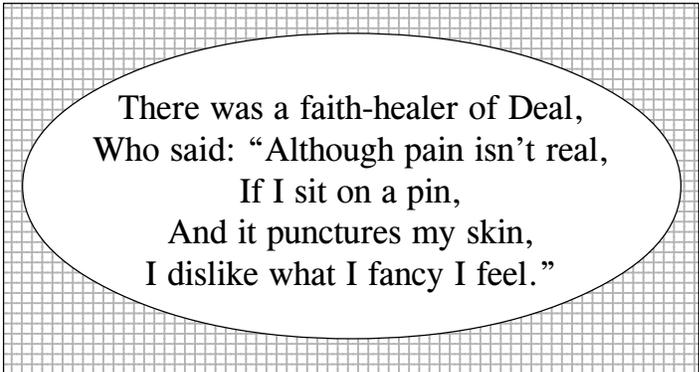
My calculator tells me there is only about a one in 250,000 probability you can get 75 percent in one group and 48 in the other, so *some* cause other than chance was at work. But that does not mean a little burn on the mother’s toe stimulates the fetus to turn. Is it the expectation of the mother, or the expectation of the doctor, or a more careful examination? A statistical relationship merely points to the possibility something is going on. Until and unless we understand the mechanism of cause and effect it is safer to remain skeptical.

Stem cell research re-ignites political controversy.

The announcement yesterday that undifferentiated embryonic cells have been isolated and cultivated has enormous implications for medical science. But four years ago, anti-abortionists pushed a bill through Congress banning the use of federal funds for human embryo research. This has National Institutes of Health lawyers trying to figure out if the ban applies to laboratory-reared embryonic cells, grown with private funds. Anti-abortion activists have made it clear that they regard cultivated embryonic cells as human life. On the other hand, to have no scientists involved in the stem cell research who are detached from its commercial possibilities is an uncomfortable prospect.

Learning as medicine?

Education is a critical factor in quality of life in old age, new research suggests. In a study in this month’s issue of the journal *Psychosomatic Medicine*, Harvard and University of Southern California researchers report they found that elderly men and women with higher levels of education were more physically active, smoked less, were less obese, and expressed a greater sense of control over their lives than their less educated peers. (UPI, 23 September 1998)



There was a faith-healer of Deal,
Who said: “Although pain isn’t real,
If I sit on a pin,
And it punctures my skin,
I dislike what I fancy I feel.”

The Association for Rational Thought is an independent, nonprofit, scientific and educational organization. We share the philosophy of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP), an international organization which investigates allegedly paranormal events, sponsors workshops and publishes *Skeptical Inquirer*, a journal of investigations of paranormal claims.

A.R.T. meets on the second Saturday of each month September through June, 10:00 AM at James Tavern in Blue Ash and publishes *Cincinnati Skeptic* each month. A.R.T. meetings are open to the public. A.R.T. also maintains a database of information on paranormal claims for local new media to consult and investigates local paranormal claims. A.R.T. was founded by Cincinnati area skeptics in 1991. Annual dues are \$15.00 and include a subscription to the *Cincinnati Skeptic*.

For more information call: President Roy Auerbach (513)731-2774 or Nurit Bowman, (513) 731-0642 or visit our website. **Address Changes and Corrections, Membership Questions:** Roy Auerbach (513) 731-2774 E-mail: raa@one.net

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Make your check payable to the **Association for Rational Thought** and mail to A.R.T., P.O. Box 12896, Cincinnati OH 45212. *Contributions are not at present tax deductible, but we are working on it.*

Request subjects for future meetings _____

Please do *not* include my name and address in mailing lists exchanged with other groups.



Skepticism and ART on the Electronic Media

For the latest in skeptical news via e-mail, join SANE, the Skeptical Area Network Effort. You will find cheerful, rational messages from CSICOP, James "The Amazing" Randi, your fellow local skeptics and ART in your e-mail box every week. This is our means of staying in touch between issues of the *Cincinnati Skeptic*.

Be sure to check out our **NEW & IMPROVED** skeptical website at <http://www.cincinnati-skeptics.org> --- It contains: our **BLURBS** on various subjects; lots of nifty links to skeptical thinking around the world; the information for joining SANE; the basic definition of who we are, what we do, and our bylaws. In addition, you'll find such things as how to get to our meetings held at James Tavern; other ways to reach us; and how to send sample copies of the newsletter to potential members.

—David Wall, Web Site Manager

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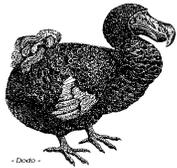
The Association for Rational Thought is an organization committed to encouraging rational, well-informed evaluation of fringe-science, pseudoscience, and paranormal claims. A.R.T. encourages the investigation of paranormal and pseudoscientific claims from a responsible, scientific viewpoint and the distribution of the results of such investigations to the public. You are cordially invited to become a member of A.R.T. Membership information is included elsewhere in this issue.

Preview Of Coming Attractions....

Place: James Tavern at Cooper Road and Reed Hartman Highway. It is a great place to gather and then have the lunch/social portion of each meeting. This location is very accessible for folks wielding walkers, wheel-chairs and the like. Coffee is available with a small donation during the meeting.

Forth Meeting of the 1998-1999 Season! Please mark your calendar and plan to attend!

Date and Day: 12 December 1998 -- Saturday **Time:** 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM -- program
 12:00PM - 20:00 PM -- lunch



Topic: Science Literacy vs. the Bible Literally

Speaker: George F. Bishop, PhD; Professor of Political Science, University of Cincinnati

Strength of belief in biblical creation and science literacy are inversely related in industrialized nations. George's recent work on this topic, plus some new info on the beliefs of scientists will highlight this presentation.

Fifth Meeting of the 1998-1999 Season! Please mark your calendar and plan to attend!

Date and Day: 10 January 1999 -- Saturday **Time:** 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM -- program
 12:00PM - 20:00 PM -- lunch

Topic: *ESP*...or Intuition?

Speaker: a representative from Klein Associates, Inc., Fairborn, OH

Intuition or expertise? Rational or not? Classic, laboratory-bound studies of decision-making had no place for gut feelings. Seeing a gap between the lab and real-life, Gary Klein, PhD began probing and demystifying intuition nearly 30 years ago. He (and others) have since established the powerful role it plays when experts make decisions under emergency or high-stakes settings (including masters-level chess). Klein Associates now provides consulting services to military, corporate, health care and other clients seeking to redesign their organizations around these newer models of decision-making (including some here in Cincinnati).