



Cincinnati Skeptic

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"It is not disbelief that is dangerous to our society; it is belief."

– G. B. Shaw

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Is it time to put the Aether to sleep?

by Joseph Gastright

Is the aether still a valid scientific concept or is it a scientific curiosity eliminated by Einstein's theory of relativity and buried by quantum field theory? An article in the *Times Science* section on February 2nd, 1999 suggested that the aether was not only alive but making a comeback. I was skeptical of the claim and I decided to look into the matter further.

The origins of the concept are sometimes ascribed to the Pythagorean School because they supported the atomic theory of matter which allowed atoms to exist in the void of space. Certainly Aristotle denied the existence of a vacuum and supported the aether as the fifth element, or quintessence, that filled the universe beyond the planetary spheres. He described it as unchanging with almost divine properties appropriate in a region populated only by the fixed stars. His famous claim that "Nature abhors a vacuum" was supported by a number of curious thought experiments. For example matter traveling through a vacuum would meet no resistance and hence would travel at infinite velocity. In fact he explained motion by the fact that an arrow continues to move only because the vacuum behind it is filled by air moving from in front. The Greek word is sometimes given as aither. The Romans appear to have used the spelling aether for the first time. In medieval Scholastic Philosophy the avoidance of a void became a moral issue and in 1277 belief in the void was briefly declared a heresy. The term *plenum* was used to describe the fullness of the universe presumably with ether, which became another spelling.

Descartes described a universe filled with whirlpools of undetectable ether, and Newton speculated that the pressure of ether particles could explain the force of gravity but he never went on record with any measurable properties of it. After Thomas Young discovered the phenomenon of Interference, and proposed the wave theory

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June Meeting

**Feng Shui: Answer to Life's Problems
Or Interior Designer's Bonanza?**

Retirement has not brought an end to Dick McGrath's perpetual curiosity about exotic belief systems. The professor emeritus of theology and founding member of ART has recently been digging into the arcane mysteries of feng shui (pronounced "fong schway"). He shared what he has unearthed with ART members at the June meeting.

Feng shui translated literally means "wind water." Unheard of in the United States until just a few years ago, this ancient Chinese practice is now well-entrenched in new age culture and making headway wherever wealthy Chinese are buying real estate. Amazon Books is at present offering 185 books on feng shui, each of which claims to be able to solve your life problems through the correct placement of your windows, doors, furniture and houseplants.

Practiced in China for four thousand years, traditionally as an aid to the propitious placement of temples and graves, feng shui is an approach to nature based on the notion that energy flows through features of the natural landscape and through objects and structures built by human beings. The practice aims at optimizing good fortune by enhancing the flow of good energy and deflecting the flow of bad energy at a business, residence or other site. Once the

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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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**Skeptic's
Archives...**

R. Buchanan, *The Origin and Nature of Ghosts, Demons and Spectral Illusions Generally. Fully and Familiarly Explained and Illustrated* Manchester: Heywood: [c. 1840]. 64 pp.



The author of this small booklet, Robert Buchanan (1813-1866), was a Scottish-born journalist and socialist who spent much of his career in Manchester England promoting and defending the teachings of Robert Owen. The booklet is one of a series of pamphlets published by Buchanan during his Manchester period, all of them dealing with either overt attacks on religion and superstition or with the defense of Owen's brand of socialism. Though there is no publication date on the title page, the *Dictionary of National Biography* gives a date of 1840.

The author's major thesis is clearly stated on the first page of the text:

"The subject of spectral illusions resolves itself into three divisions: First - those illusions which arise from disordered states of body and mind, and defective organization. Second - Those produced by natural and artificial optical causes. Third - Those resulting from ignorance, fraud, and imposture."

After a brief review of the physiology of the human eye and its visual limitations, especially under conditions of low illumination, Buchanan summarizes ten ghost stories which he feels are due to the first of his three causes: i.e., either to limitations of human vision or to mental hallucinations induced by sickness or brain tumors. The author next summarizes the facts concerning common meteorological phenomena that can give rise to optical illusions or mirages in nature. He illustrates this second cause with five examples, including the well-known "Spectre of the Brocken" (a shadow on a cloud) and the "Fata Morgana" (mirror image on a thin hot surface layer of air.) Finally, the author illustrates his third cause with six examples of hauntings in which fraud was either suspected at the time, but not proven, or in which the perpetrators of the fraud afterwards confessed.

In his introduction, the author makes no claim to originality, indicating that the material on optical illusions in nature was largely taken from the book *Letters on Natural Magic*, published by the Scottish physicist, Sir David Brewster, in 1832, and that most of the example hauntings (which have a distinct literary flavor) were taken from the volume *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*, published by Sir Walter Scott in 1830. In keeping with his socialist philosophy, Buchanan further states that his motivation in writing such a short work was to make it affordable to the average working man:

"The price places it in the reach of everyone, being the cheapest treatise ever published on the soul-harrowing subjects of Ghosts and Demons, in which the light of philosophy is made use of to illustrate the dark visitors of the spectral and demoniacal world."

-- William B. Jensen



From the Un-Easy Chair...

With this new volume the newsletter begins a section entitled *The Skeptic's Archive*, a look at skeptical writings from the past. The column is original, and as far as I know unique. It is written for the *CS* by Professor William B. Jensen of the University of Cincinnati. Bill is a chemist by profession, and a historian of science by study and teaching. Here is what he has to say about his new departure:

Writing in 1872, Sir Henry Holland complained of the unending parade of superstitious enthusiasms and pseudoscientific fads that seemed to grip the public's attention periodically:

"Mesmeric visions and prophecies, clairvoyance, spirit-rappings, table turnings and liftings, etc. succeed one another in popular fashion; with certain intervals between to allow prior detections to be forgotten, and to catch the credulous of a new generation."

Just as irrationality repeats every generation, so too must the literature of skepticism which serves to combat it. Each generation must fight the battle anew. Apart from the academic history of skepticism as a movement within western philosophy, very little has been done to historically document the many books and pamphlets written by past skeptics to combat the specific irrationalities of their time. The intent of this column is to recover some of this older literature by highlighting each month a book or pamphlet from the author's personal collection of historic skeptical literature.

A rocket designer named Wright
Could travel much faster than light.
He set out one day
In a relative way,
And returned the previous night.

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



Eat the Rich

by P. J. O'Rourke

(New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1998)

O'Rourke is at it again. A funny man and satirist asks the question: "Why are some countries so indecently rich, while in others people barely scratch a living?" He uses his foreign correspondent experiences to profile a number of countries he has visited. He says he knows nothing about economics, and in that he is perfectly correct and accurate. Then he goes on to explain economics to us, since it is all very simple and everyone knows it. This is a fairly humorous book with an occasional shrewd insight or observation. It is fun to read, but don't expect to learn anything, unless you have the knowledge of global geography to sort sense from nonsense. And nonsense is scattered throughout these pages like chicken droppings in an African farm yard.

Let me pronounce some truths: nobody knows why some countries are poor and others rich. If we knew that, no people would remain poor. Neither does anyone know if the world is overpopulated, or shortly to be overpopulated. In fact, nobody has defined "overpopulation" as a clearly measurable concept. Nor does anyone know, if the world's environment can withstand the human population, or if technology is destroying the globe in one way or another. The answers, whatever they may be, are sure not to be simple. It is not that some peoples are smart and others too stupid to get rich. President Bonzo's simple recipe to follow the free market isn't guaranteed to make you rich either. Nor can you blame it on "culture," with some people having just the wrong culture to prosper. We really, truly don't know, any more than we know a cure for cancer or the common cold. Frankly, I think these are easier to find than a cure for world poverty.

O'Rourke takes us on a trip to countries of good capitalism, the US, and bad capitalism, Albania, trying to contrast the two. Both have absolutely free markets, but in Albania their recent introduction has led to a complete break down of the economy. But, then, Albania's earlier repressive socialist economy did not bring any prosperity either. Nor is it very precise claim the US has a fully free market. There are many and necessary restraints on trade. Drugs, both legal and illegal, alcohol, and many other things are subject to major limits.

O'Rourke also takes us on a journey to good socialism, Sweden, and bad socialism, Cuba. Sweden is really a capitalist or free market society, with a very extensive social welfare system. O'Rourke thinks they've overdone it and are on a downhill slide. Cuba, of course, lived under a capitalist system until 1959 in which prosperity for the rich depended on the country having half of the US sugar import quota. When Castro didn't do as we wanted him to, we cut the sugar subsidies. Socialist Cuba depended on Russian largesse, till that nation decided to install the free market system and they cut the subsidies. Capitalist Russia fell on bad times in short order.

O'Rourke is a conservative, who clearly believes the solution to the world's poverty problems are simple. If everyone just worked hard, acted responsibly, and were allowed to do their own thing we'd all become rich. He is also remarkably optimistic about the world's future. Of course for a foreign correspondent, who can afford to stay in the best hotels no matter in which third world country, and hire help and interpreters without asking the cost, the world does look a great place to roam.

— Wolf Roder

Atlantis, the Andes Solution: The Discovery of South America as the Legendary Continent of Atlantis

by James M. Allen

(New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998)

Allen finds the much searched after continent of Atlantis in South America, and makes the *altiplano* (high alpine plain) of Bolivia the site of the fabled city. I don't think he got it right anymore than earlier writers. For that matter I don't think later writers will find the location of Atlantis either. Let me explain at length.

The story of Atlantis is not really a legend, but a story told by Plato in his minor dialogues *Critias* and *Timaicos*. Plato wrote about a wide range of topics, including politics, ethics, mathematics, theology, and the arts, but he was not in the habit of transmitting history, or historical legends. He did ascribe this story to Solon who, so he says, brought it from the Egyptians a hundred years earlier. Plato is the only source for this rather complex tale. No other source exists. In consequence, there is reason to believe Plato invented the entire Atlantis story to make a point about the nature of a good civilization and just government. If the Atlantis story is as much fiction as Plato's Cave, there is no sense in looking for this place in the real world.

Allen identifies the island Atlantis as the whole of South America, and locates the City of Atlantis at 12,000 feet elevation near Lake Poopo and the ruins of Tiahuanaco.

He identifies the Atlanteans with the invasion of the sea-peoples around 1200 BCE during the rule of Egyptian King Rameses III. Their immediate descendants are the Phoenicians, so Allen looks for American features among the them, and for Phoenician aspects of American civilizations. To find these correspondences he shuffles facts and data rather freely, a hallmark of the historical pseudo-scientist. He draws on features of the North American Aztec and Maya societies as well as on the South American Inca. Aztec words like "atl" is put together with "andes" to get Atlantis (p. 10), when scholars take it for granted the word comes from the mythological giant Atlas who carries the world on his shoulders. Plato's nine thousand years time line is transformed into 9000 lunar months (p. 13) to make it fit with the sea peoples invasion. The ancient unit of measurement, the stadion, becomes in the hands of Allen a half-stadion (p. 22); never mind there was a Greek, Roman, and Egyptian stadion, each different. The plumed headgear of a Mayan nobleman resembles the image of a Prince of Cnossos on the Mediterranean island of Crete (Plates pp. 70-71). And, yes, the sea-peoples wore feather head-dresses (Fig. pp. 14, 67) as did presumably the Atlanteans.

Allen draws on Biblical stories to locate the land of Ophir in Atlantis, i.e. in South America. Gold, silver, copper and *orichalcum* were carried from the highlands of Bolivia down the Rio de la Plata, across the Atlantic, around Africa to Judea. The ancestors of the Phoenicians thus supposedly carried on a very active, annual trade between South America, the eastern Mediterranean, and the Red Sea. Allen has us believe that western South America was this well known to classical civilization. Surely, such history would have left more traces in the archaeological and historical records than the two short descriptions by the great philosopher.

Allen has read a lot about classical antiquity, and he has searched in the literature of American civilizations. Like so many pseudo-scientists he has no understanding of modern archaeology, about the painstaking search for evidence and the need for logical coherence, the need to fit events into definite times and places. My encyclopedia, for instance, provides dates for Tiahuanaco from 300 to 900 AD, a little late for Phoenicians. It simply does not do to wander all over the map and draw from any which time.

— Wolf Roder



Some true skeptics will not believe anything they read. It gets them into real trouble where the city has posted "NO PARKING" signs.

— bio-astrologer Esmeralda von Löwenzahn-Dentdelion

From AETHER pg. 1

of light, the ether became a hot topic again in nineteenth century physics. What exactly was it out there in space which carried those light waves. This time the Luminiferous Ether became a scientific concept which James Clerk Maxwell found fit in perfectly with the wave equations that he used to describe the properties of his new electromagnetic field. Even Helena Blavatsky discoursed on the ether which she felt was a part of the Akasa. The ether was a marvelous hypotheses, but still one based on zero confirmatory evidence. Michelson and Morley two American physicists designed a famous experiment which showed that the ether had no effect on the speed of light. This is exactly what Einstein proposed in the Theory of Relativity and the space time universe he described had no need for ether.

The discovery of the quantum effect and its application by Erwin Schrödinger to electron waves with his wave mechanics produced a probability based universe far removed from the highly determined particle universe of Newton. In this new world empty space became a very complex place filled not with a form of matter, but with a variety of interacting fields with a number of counterintuitive properties. The new quantum electrodynamics proposed a space filled with virtual waves which can interact to form virtual particles. Where the fields are strong matter exists and where energy is available the virtual particles can become permanent. In 1948, Hendrik Casimir, a Dutch Physicist, proposed that if metal plates were brought very close together, they would exclude any virtual waves shorter than the distance between the plates. With waves on the outside and no waves on the inside, the plates should be pulled together by a very tiny force. A recent experimental test of this hypothesis not only found the predicted force, but measured it to within one percent of the force predicted by quantum electrodynamics.

But does this mean that physics has decided that the old ether hypothesis adds something to what we know of virtual waves? Well one antiquarian does. Dr. Frank Wilczek wrote an article in *Physics Today* proposing that modern quantum field theory is a direct descendant of the ether. If the ether referred to was the one reflected in Maxwell's equations, then no harm done as long as the issue rests there. All of those other ethers before Maxwell were forms of matter, not force fields. Some were fluid and continuous others were atomistic and particulate.

A quick check of the internet will show that ether is a very popular pseudoscientific concept popular in the fields of New Energy, Alternative Physics, Theosophy, and numerous other forms of speculative science and scientific metaphysics. You will find Unified Field Theories based on Greek Aither, explanations of Crop Circles, Homeopathy, and other important real world mysteries. Does Physics really need all

of the baggage carried by the ether? Quantum Field Theory should forget about its ill-defined ancestor and leave it in the hands of Aethro-Kinematics and the other New Sciences. For further research take a look at http://www.aethro-kinematics.com/wc_sites.html.



**"There are 3 kinds of Lies:
Lies, Damned Lies.
.....& Statistics."**

Point/Counterpoint:

"A new British study suggests the children of men exposed to radiation while working at nuclear plants are twice as likely to develop leukemia." (*New Scientist*, May 29)

"Children of workers in the nuclear industry are at no higher risk of leukemia and other cancers than the general population, according to the results of a large UK study." (*The Lancet*, Jun. 5)

These contradictory leads covered the same study published in the May 29 *British Medical Journal*. Researchers did find an increased rate of leukemia in children whose fathers worked in the nuclear industry. However, the total number of leukemia cases was very low, and the researchers concluded, "Overall, the findings suggest that the incidence of cancer and leukaemia among children of nuclear industry employees is similar to that in the general population." *Statistical Assessment Service*

Time for Crime?

"Poll: 61% Favor Juvenile Crime Prevention" ran a Chicago Tribune headline on May 20. The implication is that 39% do not favor juvenile crime prevention. Perhaps we should expect a sharp upturn in the crime figures in the coming months?

Statistical Assessment Service

Stats Quote:-

Brian Marsden, director of Harvard University's Minor Planet Center, on the chances of asteroid 1999AN10 hitting the Earth in 2027.

"As likely as shooting an arrow through the keyhole of your front door that then travels through the front-door keyhole of the house across the street and out through its back-door keyhole."

Statistical Assessment Service

Feng Shui (from pg 1)

exclusive province of Chinese practitioners who devoted their lives to its study, feng shui has now become the latest gimmick in the armamentarium of Western interior designers.

Feng shui began as a minor aspect of Taoist and Buddhist philosophy based on the belief that energy (qi, pronounced "chee") comes from the earth. Health, wealth, and general good fortune could be acquired through the proper management of this energy. Proper relationships with nature's elements (earth, fire, wind, water and metal) and with one's family, oneself, and other people were thought to promote good fortune. The principal modern Chinese use of feng shui appears to be as an aid to making auspicious choices in the selection and design of buildings.

The practice was limited to the Chinese until Lin Yun, a Taiwanese, founded a group called the Black Sect. Lin Yun used bits and pieces of various Asian philosophies including feng shui as a basis for his own philosophy. Although many view Lin Yun as the guru of the feng shui movement, he himself has downplayed that notion. In a speech he made two years ago in Taiwan, he said that his followers were better off listening to themselves than to him. He even called himself The Great Impostor, saying that 99% of everything he had ever said was wrong. Nevertheless, practitioners in the United States often view Lin Yun as an authority in the field.

Serious scholars of feng shui believe that it deals with relationships with others and with nature: when those relationships are good, good fortune will follow. The natural environment is seen as characterized by powerful, invisible energy, both positive and negative. If you are able to arrange your life and your stuff so that good energy flows around you harmoniously and the "poison arrows" of bad energy are deflected, good fortune will come your way and misfortune may be avoided.

Feng shui is deeply influenced by the ancient Chinese notion of balance between the cosmic principles of Yin and Yang. Yin represents the energy of femininity, darkness, and passivity; yang the energy of masculinity, light, and action. The goal is not to eliminate either one, but to arrive at an appropriate balance between the two. Feng shui views a stream that meanders here and there down a valley as good energy, and a harsh landscape like the Badlands as bad energy. Positive and negative energy must be kept in balance by human action.

The practical suggestions of feng shui are aimed at creating this balance. They include placing a house with its back toward a hill, so that the back of the house is protected. Ideally the house should face a stream or lake. When

choosing the site of a house, areas once used for graveyards or for religious buildings of any kind should be avoided. Such places are thought to be subject to negative energy. Negative mourning energy is associated with graveyards, for example. Similarly, one would not want to place a house near an existing graveyard, church, or temple. Steeples on churches are to be avoided because they are sharply pointed, associated with bad energy. In general, points and sharp edges are considered to bring misfortune. Power transmitters and factories are also to be avoided, because they produce bad energy.

A dwelling's main door should not face a tall building or large tree, because that would block good energy from coming into the house. A shotgun house, several rooms all lined up so you could fire a shotgun in the front door and out the back door, is to be avoided. Since good energy coming in the front door will flow in a straight line through all the rooms and out the back door. Chimes near the front door will help prevent that, since they keep good energy in the house.

There are two main schools of feng shui.

One originated in southern China, where the landscape is quite varied. This school is based on the influence of natural objects in the landscape on energy flow. Later feng shui was taken up by people living farther north, where the landscape is flatter. Here feng shui practitioners depended on compasses said to determine where the good energy lay.

Today compasses are used to determine propitious placement of beds, mirrors, bathrooms, and other household objects. Using date of birth, the owner's "direction" is established, and then the direction is used to determine other placements. A person with an eastern direction, for example, is advised to sleep with his or her head toward the east. Magic numbers are also used. If the owner's number is determined to be four, for example, he should do things in fours. The date the building was built also is included in feng shui calculations.

Feng shui divides all of nature into five elements, water, wood, fire, earth and metal (bells and chimes). The elements are associated with colors. Fire's color is red, earth's color is black. Some colors are more positive than others. Green is positive, but blue is negative. Feng shui requires that a balance be kept between the positive and negative colors in order to control the flow of good energy. Black and white is an especially fortuitous combination because it allows the balancing of dark and light.

Rules, which vary from practitioner to practitioner, direct the placing and size of furniture and other household objects. Mirrors are considered especially potent because



they can reflect bad energy, warding off "poison arrows." Because they reflect bad energy, they are not placed where you will see them too closely. A mirror should not be placed where you will see your reflection when you get up in the morning for fear of scaring the wits out of you for the rest of the day.

Books must not be kept on open bookshelves where the bad energy in them can flow out of them into the house. Keeping books in an area that can be closed off to keep the bad energy inside is advised.

Two tools are being used now to help diagnose and correct placement problems. One is a feng shui tape measure, a fancy version of a normal tape measure with inches down one side and decorated with Chinese characters. The Ba Gua is a plastic polygon with edges that represent the major areas of life: career, knowledge, family, wealth, fame, marriage, children, and benefactors. Dick's Ba Gua dangles from a round crystal on red (a lucky color) cord. The Ba Gua itself is claimed to bring good fortune, by attracting good energy and dissipating bad. It is aligned with a drawing of the house under inspection for energy problems and used to divide the house into areas related to each of the major problems. Then when a problem needs to be addressed, changes can be made the the area of the house corresponding to the problem.

Suppose that you are having financial difficulties, and a feng shui survey of your house shows that the laundry is in the "wealth" area. You might be advised to put green pot plants in the laundry, to bring the energy of growth to your financial affairs. Happily, if there is not enough light for living plants in the laundry, artificial silk ones will work just as well.

Feng shui can be applied to many areas of life, including major feasts. Here are suggestions for a auspicious Thanksgiving dinner. Use a red cloth and napkins. Balance the dishes on the table, instead of crowding them all at one end. Use an arrangement of fresh flowers. Use candles, ideally one candle for each person at the table. Table mats should be square, not rectangular, since squares represent earth. Plates placed on the mats should be round, to represent heaven. The turkey, should go on a yellow platter, because yellow is a lucky color. The meal should consist of nine courses including rice, emblem of prosperity. In addition, place a dish of water handy for your guests to throw coins into. Stand back and watch the good energy and small change pour in! This mixture of reasonable common sense ideas, arbitrary suggestions and lucky numbers is typical of feng shui advice.

Feng shui in its modern version is also helpful with

the selection and care of pets. The number of pets, the kind of pet, where you keep it is all determined by the owner's direction and number. A dog subjected to a feng shui analysis because of bolting its food was brought in out of the garage where it had been fed (right next to an automobile, powerful source of bad energy) and given new crockery bowls, potted plants, and a mirror in a pleasant corner inside the house. It is reported to have corrected its eating habits.

Pets can be chosen to enhance one's fortune. Fish, the fruit of the ocean, are a symbol of money and bring prosperity. Healthy, good pets increase good energy; sick, bad animals decrease good energy.

There are two basic ways in which houses can be improved using feng shui. The first is making physical rearrangements: moving doors, windows, cutting down trees that block the front door. The second is placing smaller objects to help dissipate the bad energy if the architecture and landscape can't be changed. If the tree can't be cut down, a mirror can be placed to reflect its energy so that it won't block your life. Or crystals or lights could be used to

balance the energy flow. Crystal balls are thought to break up concentrations of bad energy and disperse it evenly.

Heavy objects like rocks and statues can be used to weigh down high energy areas so that the energy is stabilized. Or, if there is not enough energy in an area, moving objects like mobiles, windsocks and decorative flags can be used to activate good energy and push out bad energy. So to improve a shaky marital relationship, one

might put rocks the area of the house representing the marriage, to stabilize the relationship. And then add house plants to help the relationship grow. Hanging a chime in the same area would attract good energy to the marriage.

The effect of all these efforts can be greatly enhanced by reinforcing them. Reinforcement can include spoken prayers or mantras repeated nine times each. It can also include use of the body: holding your hands in a prayerful position while saying the nine prayers. Putting green plants in the wealth area of your house will help, but the effect will be greatly increased if you use your mind to reinforce the effect, "visualizing" money coming in to you. According to one feng shui expert, putting a solution to a problem in place will be about 10% effective. But if you use reinforcement, effectiveness will be increased 120%.

Dick concludes that a great deal of common sense advice is handed out clothed in the esoteric garb of feng shui. Feng shui suggestions may help a believer because of a placebo effect and because they are good every day advice. Even an unbeliever may profit from the latter. Like many



ancient systems of propitiation adopted for modern use, feng shui is a potpourri of good advice, nonsense, and pseudoscience.

For an Internet-based introduction to feng shui, visit the Skeptic's Dictionary at <http://skepdic.com/fengshui.html>. There you will find links to both skeptical and credulous appraisals of feng shui, as well as evidence of conflicting approaches among feng shui adherents. --

Reported by Virginia Jergens, with help from Brad Bonham.



ART Business



**The Association for Rational Thought
Annual Report, 1998 - 1999**

Prepared by Virginia Jergens, Secretary

This year's annual report omits reports from our Investigations Officer, Richard McGrath, and our Media Resources Coordinator Joe Gastright, both of whom suffered health problems during the year. I am happy to report that both are mending.

Total volunteer hours reported by A.R.T. officers for 1998 - 1999 was 358. This figure vastly underestimates the time donated to A.R.T. by its hardworking officers during the year.

President's Report

The 1998-99 year of A.R.T. was comfortably more of the same. We continued to issue an excellent newsletter both informative and humorous. Our program hit a couple of rough spots through last minute cancellations, but the range of topics was extremely interesting and educational, including Feng Shui, biomagnetism, Bigfoot in Ohio, and even a talk on the "alar in apples" scare of ten years ago. I look forward to an equally interesting list in the next year.

Our web site continues to evolve as a polished professional emissary for critical thought and our organization. It is a challenge to live up to its image of us.

The year has run smoothly through the actions and efforts of all the officers of the organization, and I thank them. While we didn't necessarily break any new ground this year, we took care of the main business of the organization with style. Hours worked on behalf of A.R.T. unavailable. -Roy Auerbach, President.

Vice-President's Report

As vice-president, I filled in for our illustrious President at one regular membership meeting. One of the real perks of being on the executive council is attending those bimonthly meetings, being involved in the workings and machinations of our venerable organization and reaping the benefits of having computer experts to interrogate about various computer problems, which I took full advantage of. But probably the most important thing I did as vice president this year was to learn how A.R.T. works and what our needs as an organization are. I look forward to doing more of the same in the coming year. Hours worked on behalf of A.R.T. unavailable -Nurit Bowman, Vice-President.

Treasurer's Report

As of June 30, 1998 the checkbook balance was \$644.43 with no outstanding bills. This year's balance is \$1594.38, again with no unpaid bills.

Income:

Membership Dues	\$1,260.00
Cash Donations	1,235.00
In-Kind Donations	557.14
Web Donations	600.00
Total Income	<u>3,652.14</u>

Expenses:

Membership	
Postage	241.25
Printing of Notices	30.71
Printing of Flyers	86.50
P.O. Box Rental	58.00

A Puzzle for Thinkers

Always thought marriage was foolishness.



When first the marriage knot was tied
between my wife and me,
Her age did mine as far exceed, as
three plus three exceeds three;
But when three years and half three
years we man and wife had been
Our ages were in ratio then as twelve
is to thirteen.

Brian Bolt in *A Mathematical Pandora's Box* calls this an ancient riddle. How old were they on their wedding day?

Solution to last month's puzzle:

The number of students who took the exam must be divisible by 3, by 4, by 6, and by 8 to have the fractions of the class be whole numbers. The only number which fulfills that requirement and is 30 or less is 24. Thus 8 students got a B, 6 a C, 4 a D, and 3 an F. Which leaves three students to get an A.



Mark your calendars for
Saturday August 28.



Food! Fun! Talk!

The annual picnic will be held at the home of
Roy Auerbach

Invitations with maps
will be mailed shortly.



**Watch your mail box
for your Invitation!!**



Newsletter	
Bulk Mail	230.00
Postage	115.51
Printing	1,074.07
Labels	25.43
Programs	
Coffee	75.56
Guest Meals	75.16
Other	
Web Expenses	685.00
Miscellaneous	5.00
<hr/>	
Total Expenses	2,702.19
Net Income	949.95

Compared with last year's income and expenses, dues were unchanged, cash donations excluding the web increased about \$400, and in-kind donations decreased by about \$200. Membership expenses decreased about \$500 due to fewer flyers, newsletter expenses decreased about \$500 due to fewer issues and programs increased by about \$100. Web expenses exceeded donations by about \$100. I spent about twenty hours keeping the books, plus my time at executive meetings. -Rick Prairie, Treasurer

Secretary's Report

As secretary, I took minutes at executive council and membership meetings and entered them in A. R. T. 's official records. I distributed copies of executive council minutes and action lists to council members. I collected reports from officers on their activities for the past year and prepared the annual report required by our by-laws. I maintained and distributed an executive council member address list and sent meeting reminders to members of the council.

In addition, I wrote articles for the newsletter summarizing the talks of the speakers at A.R.T. meetings this year. I wrote several articles for the newsletter summarizing executive council and membership meeting business. I obtained and reviewed documents required to file for tax exempt recognition status with the Internal Revenue Service. I prepared a list of what we need to do and how much it will cost to be recognized. I prepared four issues of the newsletter (published when I was editor) for placement on the web site. I have six more issues to prepare. I also helped set up for regular membership meetings. My volunteer hours for the past A.R.T. year, July 1, 1998 - June 30, 1999 were 130 -Virginia Jergens, Secretary.

Membership Secretary's Report

The past year saw an increase in membership from about 80 members to 92 at the time of this report. This occurred with a loss of about 10 members during the same period. A.R.T. has maintained an annual membership fee of \$15, but also asks for donations beyond this fee.

At our current spending level we need a membership of over a hundred members to support the organization from membership fees alone. The donations above the \$15 are very important to our survival and I especially thank everyone for their generosity. Hours worked on behalf of A.R.T. unavailable. -Roy Auerbach, Membership Secretary.

Meeting Organizer and Program Chair's Report

We staggered a bit in this third year of 10 monthly programs. A couple of scheduling problems at the start of the year created a tail-spin that cast a definite hard-to-mouth feeling over the second half of the year. Under the circumstances, production and distribution of an Annual Program flyer wasn't possible. Information available for inclusion in the newsletter and for use in press releases was also scarce to nonexistent. Apologies all around.

Nevertheless, we presented nine interesting and varied programs (one rescheduled due to weather). Attendance was strong (especially in light of little advance information for some meetings), running in the range of 15 - 24 members plus one to four visitors at every meeting. This level of visitorship is a new development - thanks to those of you who are doing the recruitment word-of-mouth thing!

Participation in the meeting-after-the-meeting (lunch!) was also strong - which is good 'cause it's an essential part of how we pay for the space at James Tavern. All but one of our speakers was able to join us and, as always, the conversations were lively and entertaining. If you're a new member, this is a good way to get to know other folks, their quirks and their passions. Hours worked on behalf of A.R.T. unavailable. -Brad Bonham, Meeting Organizer and Program Chair.

Newsletter Editor's Report

Issues of the Newsletter appeared for Aug./Sept., Oct./Nov., Dec./Jan., Feb./Mar., Apr./May and June/July, altogether seven issues. I anticipate six bimonthly issues for the year 1999-2000.

Each issue generally consisted of these parts:

- (1) Certain short pieces in all or most issues: a motto, comments by bio-astrologer Esmeralda, a limerick, a puzzle.
- (2) Longer regular pieces: a report on the meeting presentations (all written by Dinny Jergens), a thoughtful column, an editorial.
- (3) Various, mostly short, but some longer pieces: news drawn mostly from the Internet.
- (4) Reports on executive committee meetings, election results, etc.
- (5) Announcements of the next two upcoming meeting programs or topics.
- (6) A membership application and contribution form.

Missing are local news and comments on idiocies committed by the local news media. Your editor simply is not sufficiently hooked into the local scene. Any help would be appreciated.

Recent newsletter costs have totaled about \$205.91 per issue, including: Printing 250 copies at UDS (including \$8.72 tax) \$154.12. Postage, about \$36.50 Each issue's share of bulk mail fee \$12.14, (Next year this will be \$14.17.) Mailing two dozen copies of each issue to CSICOP for their newsletter exchange program (They send us newsletters from other skeptics groups in return) \$3.15

I spent about 138 hours on the newsletter during the year, plus executive council meetings. Donna Loughry worked about 70 hours, plus executive council meetings. -Wolf Roder, Newsletter Editor.

Web Site and SANE E-Mail List Manager's Report

At the beginning of last year, the web site and e-mail list were not in good shape, as neither had a home. But several A.R.T. members pooled their resources and bought space on One Net for a year, which is where our web site is now. The e-mail list SANE (Skeptical Area Network Effort) is maintained in exchange for advertising on One List.

The basic structure of the web site has remained the same, with a few additions. Many of the newsletters are now available online, with more on the way. The links section has been expanded. It is maintained with a suite of programs that I obtained free from the net. With these programs I can add, modify, and remove links and categories of links, and rebuild the pages from any remote location. (The programs themselves are protected by a password to keep other people from modifying the pages.) Various minor changes have also been made.

Accesses to the web site have grown tremendously. Last year summer's report indicates about 7300 total accesses for 1997-1998; total accesses for 1998-1999 are around 30,000!

Here are some tables showing monthly figures:

Visits to the Web Site by Month

Month Year	Unique Sites	Unique Docs.	Total Visits Served	Overall Served
Oct. 1998	47	88	76	516
Nov. 1998	306	109	540	3,880
Dec. 1998	373	112	604	3,304
Jan. 1999	302	114	520	2,956
Mar. 1999	844	124	1,930	3,367
Apr. 1999	1,057	127	2,622	4,191
May 1999	2,210	123	3,824	6,163
June 1999	1,668	126	2,942	4,923
Total Oct. -June	8,563	1,048	16,455	35,157

Notes: Unique Sites Served refers to the unique Internet addresses that were observed to access our site. It is a crude estimate of the number of people who visited our site. Unique Documents Served refers to the number of unique documents retrieved from the server. Total visits is an attempt to estimate the number of times our site was visited, including repeat visits on different days. Overall is a simple count of the number of accesses (hits).

The monthly breakdown of the number of accesses for various sections of the site is as follows:

Visits to Selected Sections of the Site by Month

Month	Overall	Home Page	Blurbs	Links	Meetings:
Oct. 1998	444	39	218	0	26
Nov. 1998	1,635	277	699	57	41
Dec. 1998	1,600	265	671	153	31
Jan. 1999	1,466	23	590	111	42
Feb. 1999	5,564	451	3,705	192	78
Mar. 1999	3,611	524	1,635	343	97
Apr. 1999	4,128	689	1,884	336	102
May 1999	6,158	481	3,919	385	81
June 1999	4,886	442	2,828	458	85
Total	29,492	3,441	16,149	2,035	583

You may notice that the figures for total hits in the first and second tables don't match. This is because the first table is counting all accesses, including times where people tried to access documents that did not exist and other sorts of errors. These hits were excluded from the second table.

Top Twenty Documents, by Number of Visits for Year

1. Home Page	3,441
2. Loch Ness Monster Blurbs	2,150
3. Blurbs Index	2,051
4. Bermuda Triangle Blurbs	1,775
5. /robots.txt (used by search engines)	976
6. Link Index	773
7. Crop Circle Blurbs	753
8. Meeting Information	554
9. Repressed Memories Blurbs	475
10. Spontaneous Human Combustion Blurbs	450
11. Search the Web Site Page	434
12. Alien Abductions Blurbs	400
13. Faith Healing Blurbs	393
14. Snake Handling blurbs	376
15. Newsletter (Back Issues) Page	349
16. African Pseudo History Blurbs	320
17. Piltown Man Blurbs	317
18. Scientology Links	315
19. Velikovsky Blurbs	313
20. Psychic Detectives Blurbs	267

Unsurprisingly, the most common Internet domain for our visitors was AOL (3738 hits), followed by dec.net (1069), one.net (606), and uu.net (374).

The number of subscribers to the SANE list is now at 32, down from a high of 48 last year. We lost several subscribers when the list moved from Cyberwarped.com to Onelist.com. I attempted to contact all the people that were on the list when I moved it to Onelist, but not all of them resubscribed. Most of the people who did not resubscribe were from other states or continents. As best I can tell, most of our subscribers are still A.R.T. members, and all the rest seem to be somewhere in the U.S. (It's often impossible to tell where someone is located simply by their e-mail address.)

SANE continues to consist mostly of announcements of skeptical interest that I select and pass along. What little managing the list needs is done via the Web, using forms on the Onelist site. I added all the A.R.T. officers who have Internet access to the moderators' list so that in case I get struck by a meteor or lightning from a wrathful god the list can still be managed by someone. Hours worked on behalf of A.R.T. unavailable. -David Wall, Web Site and SANE E-Mail List Manager.

Membership Committee Chair Report

Membership continues to climb [See Membership Secretary's Report]. Membership increased by 25 members in 1997 - 1998 but by only 8 members in 1998 - 1999. There are probably two reasons growth this year didn't match that seen last year:

1. There was no solicitation of "Skeptical Inquirer" subscribers. This has always been a good source of new blood for us, but it's not a task that we undertake annually (and this was an "off" year).
2. Scheduling problems precluded production of an Annual Program flyer, so we missed whatever value that has as a recruitment tool. The great news is that it appears all but one of the new members picked up during 1997 - 1998 has renewed! Thanks everybody!

Given that the coming year will bring another round of "known skeptic" solicitations, and that our renewal process is now running smoothly, look for us to break the "100 barrier" this year. (Should we throw a party?)

When our web site was reactivated, requests for sample newsletters resumed. As in the past, responses were handled by the membership chair. Once we were able to post back issues of "Cincinnati Skeptic" at the web site, we removed the "request for sample newsletter" form from the web site. Hours worked on behalf of A.R.T. unavailable. -Brad Bonham, Membership Committee Chair.

Publicity Coordinator's Report

I continued to place meeting notices in the "Cincinnati Enquirer," "Cincinnati Post," "Eastern Hills Journal," and "City Beat." Also, the Community Press out of Montgomery has also started to note our monthly meetings in their events calendar.

About four meetings this season went without announcement, however, due to the unavailability of topic/speaker information prior to the date of the meetings.

We have yet to add any of the local college papers to our list of announcers. I will continue to work on this issue. Hours worked on behalf of A.R.T. unavailable. -Gary Himes, Publicity Coordinator.



Way to go,
A.R.T.!



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

Mailing Label Information: "00/00/00 Member": You are a member in good standing; your membership will expire on the date on the label. "Lapsed": (*highlighted*) - your membership has expired. Please send your dues as soon as possible.

Yes! — I want to support the important work of **The Association for Rational Thought** and receive *Cincinnati Skeptic* and meeting notices. I have enclosed funds for:

New Member Renewing Member Contribution Gift membership for/by:

Name: _____

Street Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone Work: _____ Home: _____ E-mail: _____

We have kept dues low and will continue to do so in spite of rising costs. However, if you are able to, your additional contributions are very much appreciated. Please give generously, if possible. Thank you very much!

I would like to make a contribution in addition to my dues to further the important work of the Association:

Contribution Amount: \$ _____ Dues: \$ _____ Total Enclosed: _____

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

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

E-mail: darkon@one.net



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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, wheelchairs and the like. Coffee is available with a small donation during the meeting.

Time: 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM -- program -->12:00PM - 2:00 PM -- lunch

Please mark your calendar and plan to attend!..See you there!

First Meeting of the 1999-2000 Season! Date and Day: 11 September, 1999 -- Saturday

Watch your mail For a postcard About the Speaker and Topic for the next meeting.



Second Meeting of the 1999-2000 Season! Date and Day: 9 October, 1999 -- Saturday

Speaker & Topic: Bob Baker will give a talk on ghosts at this meeting. His talk will be accompanied by appearances at local book stores. ***Are you ready a Ghostly talk?***

Third Meeting of the 1999-2000 Season! Date and Day: 13 November, 1999 -- Saturday

Watch your mail For a postcard About the Speaker and Topic for the next meeting.

Join us....to find out what's real and what's not!