



Cincinnati Skeptic

Newsletter of The Association for Rational Thought

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There is no sin but ignorance.

Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593)

In this Issue:

Intelligent Design.....	1
Shrink Hydrinos etc.....	1
Comments Corner.....	2
Letters to the Editor.....	4
Puzzle for Thinkers.....	4
Too Many Books.....	5
Pigs & Spontaneous	
Human Combution.....	9
Medugorje Visionary.....	10
Membership information.....	11

January Meeting

Shrinking Hydrinos, Utron Motors & Other Fantasies

The January meeting featured short presentations on an assortment of topics of skeptical interest. President Roy Auerbach began with a report on Dr. Randall Mills, whose work seems to be neither clearly quackery nor clearly science.

According to *The Village Voice*, Dr. Mills is a Harvard medical graduate who runs a sizable company called Blacklight Power with a staff of 25. He has the backing of large energy companies and large investment firms. Morgan Stanley may back an initial public offering of stock later this year. Sounds pretty good.

But Mills uses an idiosyncratic lingo unknown to scientists to describe his work, which is based on theories also unknown to science. His work centers around allegedly collapsed hydrogen atoms he calls "hydrinos." He claims that hydrinos will, for example, provide enough energy to drive a car 1000 miles on a single charge and that he has produced materials with novel, and valuable, properties: conductive non-magnetic plastics, rocket propellants, and super strong industrial coatings. All of which sounds like quack science.

One thing that makes Roy think that Mills could have his hands on something that is not mere quackery is the fact that he has in fact produced materials which have stumped chemical analysis experts. On the other hand, Roy is convinced that whatever is going on here, Mills' theories will not explain it. Science or pseudoscience? It's hard to tell.

Long a student of the UFO phenomenon, ART member Lance Moody is investigating an obscure and fascinating figure of the UFO scene of the 1950's, Otis T. Carr. Carr has reported that he sat on the steps of the New York Public Library with the aging inventor Nicholas Tesla, while Tesla told him the secrets of his inventions, including

(Cont. Pg 8b)

December Meeting

Intelligent Design: Birth, Death, & Resurrection

"Creation science" is the fundamentalist Christian notion that the world was created in six days 10,000 years ago by a supernatural entity generally known as "God." But if you think "creation science" is the worst weapon religionists could wield against science, think again. "Intelligent design," a much more sophisticated attack than "creation science," is the idea that yes, evolution occurred, but supervised by God to provide humankind with an opportunity to sin and be saved. Steve Schafersman, founding Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal fellow and a knowledgeable and deeply committed skeptic, spoke on this topic at the December meeting. His talk included the birth of intelligent design in the works of William Paley (1743-1805), its death at the hands of scientific critics and its resurrection in the recent work of William Dembski and Michael Behe.

Intelligent design, a branch of creation science, is hugely popular now. Like creation science, intelligent design is unlikely to disappear. Since it's not going away, we as scientists need to understand and deal with this profoundly anti-scientific point of view.

Intelligent design proponents are often highly

(Cont. Pg 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 1st.

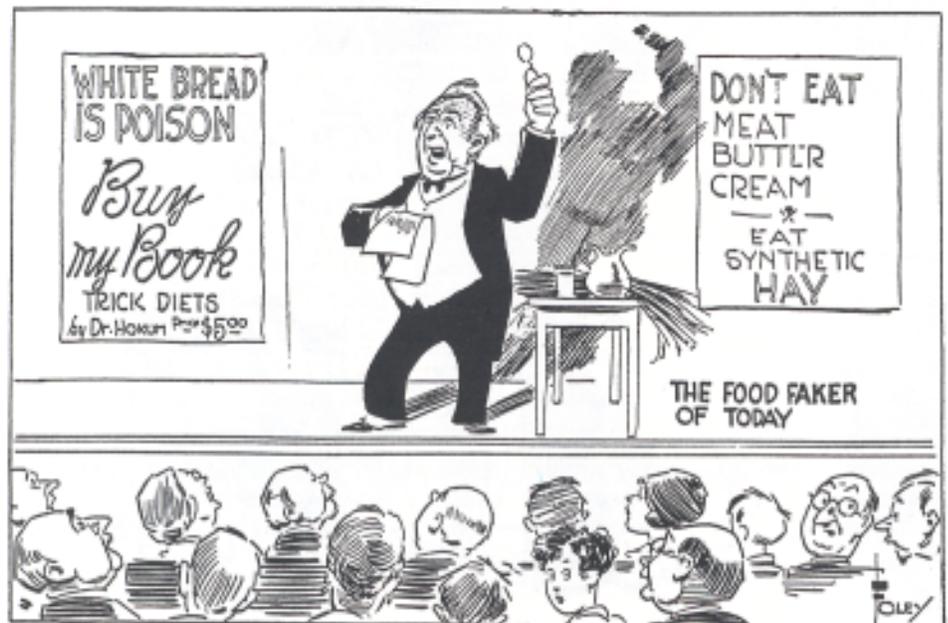
Comments**Corner.....**

Food Supplement Regulations



New regulations have been approved by the FDA to assist the unregulated dietary supplement industry in writing advertising claims that avoid "drug-like claims." The definition of a drug in the 1994 Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act (DSHEA) is terse and direct. Drugs are substances that Diagnose, Treat, Cure, or Prevent any Disease. In DSHEA the maker can claim that their product affects the "structure or function" of the body without the testing for efficacy and safety required of a drug. The 1998 regulations, required by the law, were held up by objections from the "weed and seed" manufacturing association. The new regulations, largely written by the unregulated, will make the current situation even worse. We can look forward to even broader claims which will be indistinguishable from "disease claims." The regulations even provide a language of claims which will allow the marketers to fit the product name into the boiler plate without evidence or proof of any kind.

One way of avoiding problems is to simply avoid mentioning or implying a disease. While a supplement cannot prevent or cure cancer, or alleviate constipation, it would be permissible to claim the improvement of "general well being" from consuming an herb. Examples include: "helps improve urinary tract health," "helps maintain cardiovascular function and a healthy circulatory system," "helps maintain intestinal flora," and "promotes relaxation." You cannot avoid the disease claim by not naming the disease but by replacing it with reference to a characteristic set of signs or symptoms. "lowers cholesterol" and "reduces joint pain" would both imply diseases too closely. You can, however, state that



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eating grass or anything "reduces stress and frustration" or that Lecithin "inhibits platelet aggregation." Does it really? Makes no difference in the 21st century.

As long as the claimed symptoms are characteristic of a number of diseases, the FDA cannot pry, unless of course you die and a lot of others go with you. Even "poison ivy" extract could be claimed to "improve absentmindedness" until the predictable happened. The good words to use in avoiding disease claims include modifiers of a function or organ such as "stimulate, maintain, support, regulate, and promote." They are on the FDA recommended list. You also should avoid including the name of the disease in the product name (eg. Migrainium). The regulations go on for 20 pages with similar do and don'ts. For all I know, some of the examples I quoted were modified because the final wording is not available.

The big change will allow disease claims as long as a claim is limited to symptoms characteristic of particular "age ranges." The new regulations do not require evidence to justify these claims but they do say that symptoms characteristic of both "disease" and "normal aging" will now be considered normal for particular age ranges. Without any proof that a product works, or any evidence that it is safe, a manufacturer can claim that Product X cures baldness if the patient is old but not if the patient is young. Get the difference. Any claim will fly if the symptom is menopause related (hot flashes). Even ineffective or dangerous "cures" can be advertised as long as the symptoms are not too serious but are normal and "age related." Do you feel safer now? I predict an epidemic of strange "age related" conditions.

If you don't feel safer, why not contact your congressperson and request better regulation of dietary supplements. A number of bills have been submitted to bring some sense back to the supplement industry. For example, New Jersey Congressman Pallone has a bill which would give 10 years of exclusive marketing rights to any company that conducts research to establish the safety and effectiveness of its supplements. Since most of the products are neither unsafe (e.g. grass) nor effective, I don't see this helping a lot. Still my cat swears by grass and unlike supplements its free!

Joe Gastright



Dang those fossils.

The Grace Dangberg Foundation was created in 1982 "to improve the quality of history education." Eight months ago, it proudly announced that it was developing a new textbook on the history of Kansas for seventh and eighth graders. The book was to begin with the rich fossil record of the inland sea that once covered the state. That was before the Kansas School Board deleted evolution from the curriculum. "You don't want to offend any group in Kansas," the foundation's director said, explaining why the book will now start with the arrival of native Americans.

— *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 3 September 1999



The Free Electricity Story: -

Dennis Lee, CEO of Better World Technologies, has now launched a 45 city tour. At a meeting in Columbus, Ohio, Lee urged people to sign up to get a free electricity machine installed in their homes and to get disconnected from the grid before the Y2K crisis. He explained that the government plans to deliberately create a crisis so "they can declare martial law and take your guns away." He said their ad had gotten the attention of "just about every attorney general in the country." He wouldn't actually demonstrate the free electricity technology. "If you show a free electricity machine," he explained, "they will shut you down." He said he did that in 1988 and they put him jail. "I'm doing this for one reason only—God said 'do it.'"

— *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 1 October 1999



Maybe ET did it!

In a case about racketeering, a mafia operative obtained a court order to force the government to state whether or not it implanted a radio tracking device in his rear end. "We can confirm that the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration did not insert any tracking device into defendant Vincent 'Gigi Portalla' Marino's buttocks," indicated a prepared statement by U.S. Attorney Donald Stern. Apparently amused by the order, the statement, continued, "we cannot speak, however, for any extraterrestrial aliens." (AP)

Letters to the Editor...



To the Editor:

In his column "Slippery Symptoms Syndrome" (December 1999/January 2000), Joe Gastright states "The symptoms listed above are the classic symptoms of depression and the widely used 'pepper uppers' and tranquilizers used for treatment all have side effects which make their use problematic." He goes on to say "A syndrome like the one described earlier (feeling unwell, insomnia, fatigue, memory loss, inability to concentrate, loss of interest in usual activities) is quite common but not necessarily confirmable or treatable."

Depression is both confirmable and treatable. Mental health professionals reliably diagnose depression. No responsible mental health professional would prescribe tranquilizers for depression, because tranquilizers are themselves depressive. It is not clear what Joe means by "pepper uppers," but he seems to suggest that there are no useful medicines for the treatment of depression.

While it is true that anti-depressants, like most medicines, are often accompanied by side effects, their use is not any more "problematic" than any other class of medicines and they are effective for the vast majority of patients. Depression is a serious, often chronic, and all too often fatal disease. To suggest that it cannot be effectively diagnosed or treated denies the solid progress mental health professionals have made in treating this serious illness.

— Virginia Jergens

Joe Gastright responds:

You correctly seized upon the difference. The causes of "Clinical Depression" are no better understood than the common variety which many people suffer from for periods in their life. Bipolar disease is another matter in that some drugs do appear to directly effect the disease in some cases. Putting clinical as a modifier does not mean that the disease is better understood. Electric and insulin shock were the often successful treatments for severe depression before they became unpopular.

For the large majority of depression sufferers treatment is hap-hazard and increasingly self administered through the supplement industry. My only point was that certain common complaints are called very different illnesses

from different world views. The writer thinks that adding "clinical" makes the disease better understood or more treatable. It certainly means that the patient has better access to treatment for mental symptoms than most ordinary health insurance supplies.

— Joe Gastright

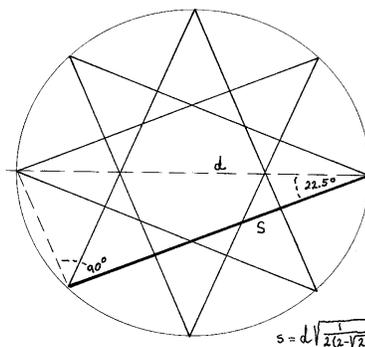
A Puzzle for Thinkers



A Problem in Legal Justice:

Clandigger Ganef has been caught with the goods, specifically four excellent, genuine pieces of jewelry he stole from the bedroom of Lady Gotmore. Clandigger is clearly guilty.

His lawyer, William J. Clinton Jr, claims his client deserves a light sentence. This was a first time, and it was only by chance that he grabbed four good pieces instead of plastic costume jewelry. The prosecutor argues Clandigger is a professional jewel thief, who knew exactly what he was stealing and there is no way he could have picked four of the five and only genuine pieces out of Lady Gotmore's fifty-seven items by chance. Just what is the probability that Clandigger didn't know what he was stealing?



Solutions to last months problem:

Side of an eight pointed star. Note that the side "s" forms a triangle with the diameter from point to opposite point "d"; and this forms a right triangle with the line between the two endpoints of s and d. The angle forming any one point extends 45 degrees, and the diameter cuts that in half. Thus, in the right triangle: s/d = cos 22.5° ; which according to my calculator makes s = .9239 d or the side would be 9.24 inches long. This can also be written thus: s = d sqrt (1/2(1+sqrt(2))/2) which is based on the fact that sin or cos of 45° is one-half the square root of two, which in turn follows from the definition of the sine and cosine functions.

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



What Remains to be Discovered:

*Mapping the Secrets of the Universe,
the Origins of Life, and the Future of the Human Race*

by John Maddox

(New York: The Free Press, 1998)

John Maddox was for many years the editor of the British science journal *Nature*. So we may assume he knows what is the edge of scientific investigation. He almost seems to have written this book to refute John Horgan's *The End of Science* which claims all fundamental discoveries have been made and the future holds only the filling in of details. Another author who argues thus is Milton Rothman, former columnist for *Skeptical Briefs*, who has said, in *The Science Gap* (pp. 39-63), that the precision of our instruments makes certain we have made the fundamental discoveries. This seems a strange argument, since geniuses of the past such as Tycho Brahe, had the then most precise instruments, yet many discoveries were made beyond their time. Maddox certainly doesn't believe all the fundamental discoveries have been made.

In successive chapters, he covers the different fields of knowledge and describes our ignorance in these areas, and what we have yet to learn in each. He mentions in particular a speech made by David Hilbert in 1900 about the then current state of knowledge in mathematics. Maddox comments, since so much was discovered after 1900 in mathematics, --relativity for example--, that was unimagined in 1900, then certainly in the 21st century we will make discoveries of a similar scale in the other sciences. For instance, only a laboratory replication of plausible early living things will be the ultimate test abiogenesis, the investigation of the origin of life (p. 129). Scientists today have some possible theories, but no artificial life has been made as yet.

Maddox provides some good arguments against the strong Anthropic Principle which says we wouldn't exist if the universe wasn't exactly as it is (p. 119-120).

That the existence of humans requires a very particular kind of universe does not prove it was specifically designed for us. Things just happen to be as they are, and we are the consequence. This is not a statement of faith, but an observation of the universe as it is. Anthropic advocates take too great a "leap of faith." Their conclusion of finding a supreme designer doesn't necessarily follow from their premise. Maddox makes the statement that photons, that is particles of light, can spontaneously appear and disappear in the vacuum of space without violating conservation of mass and energy (p. 74). Perhaps so can the entire universe?

A most important issue in science is determinism versus free will. Do we behave as we choose, or are we predetermined by our "internal wiring" and ultimately by our genes? Maddox never gives an explicit opinion on this topic, but seems to lean toward determinism. He talks about a cat's reaction to a mouse or a dog, which is rather automatic, and he implies that psychology will become a subset of physiology. We are our detailed brain structure, plus hormonal reactions outside the brain (pp 277-279).

The book is not without flaws. At one point Maddox confuses Tsar Alexander II with Nicholas II (p. 400). At another he fails to set the record straight about the famous 1919 observations of the solar bending of star light and Mercury's orbital anomalies as confirmations of Einstein's theories. It's well known to historians of science that those observations came nowhere close to confirming Einstein; it was later observations which did that.

This book's test of prophecy will come by how soon what remains to be discovered is discovered. If it remains an up-to-date prediction for decades and no additional fundamental discoveries are made, its continued relevance will, ironically, invalidate its thesis.

— Andrew O. Lutes

A spelling informer indicted
For fudge was before the court cicted.
The judge said: "Enough --
His candle we'll snough,
And his sepulcher shall not be whicted."

*Prometheus Bedeviled:**Science and the Contradictions of Contemporary Culture*

by Norman Levitt

(New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999)

There is pseudo-science among the semi-literate and there is arrant nonsense among the educated, this volume is about irrationalities in academia. Levitt is co-author with Paul R. Gross of *Higher Superstition: The Academic Left and its Quarrels with Science* (1994) which was reviewed in these pages. In one sense he is doing business again at the same stand, but in this book his reach is further. Here he defends the scientific world view against Post-Modernism and the New Age in general, which assert there is no objective truth merely the opinions of powerful elites. Levitt argues for the reality of the insights of positivist science, a view which has also been called materialism or naturalism. It is scientific findings which allow us to reject the paranormal, superstition, the supernatural, and many other sorts of wishful thinking.

The notion on which this essay is predicated is that the teleological view of the universe is an illusion. Bluntly, human existence is an accident, with no ultimate purpose. I believe this, as do most of my close friends. We're reasonably comfortable with this conclusion. But it would be fatuous to pretend that it does not inflict pain and psychic dislocation on millions, possibly billions, of people. (p. 77)

There is much about the scientific world view that is unpleasant. When you are dead, that's it. There is no unlimited earth or unlimited energy, and the good don't always live and succeed. Nor is there anything democratic about science, it is quite elitist, its pronouncements can be quite dogmatic. If you can't follow the math, you have no valid say in the matter. Thus it is not astonishing the materialist view about how the earth came about and how it runs and what it means is rejected by many, and not only the ignorant, the uneducated, or the religious believers. There is a strong element of wishful thinking in the human make-up,

including religious and philosophical views which derogate the authority of science in favor of a messy mysticism, a moral attitude of superiority towards the grubby digging for fact. It is a view deeply entrenched among intellectuals who lack an understanding of science: (p. 104)

It holds that science and technology are refractions of the same basic underlying attitude toward the world, and that technology is not only complicit in a spectrum of great evils, ranging from nuclear weapons to species extinction, but that the very mentality that permits these horrors is a corollary of the scientific frame of mind. Supposedly, scientific thinking is a moral virus that was planted back in the seventeenth century by such miscreants as Bacon and Descartes. The problems that ostensibly plague modern life, from grave to minor to utterly imaginary, can be decoded as evidence of the toxic effects of science on society and human values.

It is utterly astonishing that the scientific view needs any defense in a society as technologically sophisticated as ours. But how many of us have an understanding of scientific principles. After having finished high school or college, how many can explain the principles, not the parts, but the scientific principles of what goes on under the hood of a car, what enables an airplane to fly, or how the picture gets from the studio to the tube. It is no wonder we resent it when experts tell us the limit of the speed of light does not allow a Starship Enterprise; the earth cannot support untold billions of humans; and biology finds not evidence for a soul. I wish every sceptic, and every non-scientist would read this book.

— Wolf Roder



We hope you really loved Friday, 19 November 1999. There will not be another date with only odd digits until Sunday, 1 January 3111.

— bio-astrologer Esmeralda von Löwenzahn-Dentdelion

December Meeting from page 1....

educated, sophisticated thinkers, unlike many creationists, who may have limited educational backgrounds. Leaders in the field hold legitimate doctorates in math, science and philosophy. The current bible of the intelligent design crowd is William A. Dembski's book, *Intelligent Design: The Bridge Between Science and Theology* (1999). An earlier book by Behe, *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution* (1996) is also a highly valued source. Dembski has also edited a volume by many contributors: *Mere Creation: science, faith & intelligent design* (1998).

Dembski and Behe are today's promoters of an old theory, the classic statement of which is found in a textbook Darwin read, and disagreed with, when he was in college. Darwin's textbook was a highly popular book by English theologian William Paley: *Natural Theology: Or, Evidences of the Existence and Attribute of the Deity, Collected from the Appearances of Nature*, first published in 1802. The classic design argument is that nature itself reveals complex designs which could not have happened by natural selection: the human eye, the wings of birds, the fins of fish.

Paley argues that the interdependence of the parts of complexly organized objects like the human eye proves that the eye was divinely designed. Just as the interdependent parts of a watch, which function correctly only when properly assembled, reveal the intent of the human mind that designed it, the interdependent parts of the eye reveal the intent of the divine intelligence that designed it.

Paley's argument is teleological: it claims that if a natural phenomenon appears to have a purpose, it really does have a purpose and was designed with that purpose in mind. He argued that there is order in the natural world, shown by complex objects such as the eye. Order in nature could not occur accidentally, so must have been designed. If there is design, there must be a divine designer. Paley uses the existence of what appears to be goal-directed behavior in nature to prove the existence of God. But the teleological argument is invalid: the mere appearance of purposefulness does not prove that purposefulness exists.

Another more modern teleological argument for intelligent design is the fine-tuning argument. According to this argument, the physical properties of the universe must be very nearly exactly the values that they actually possess for the elements of life to exist. The universe appears to be carefully fine-tuned to support life, because even small

changes in any of these values would prevent the occurrence of life. Such fine-tuning is evidence of an intelligent designer. In short, the argument is made that since the world looks as though it was designed with life in mind, someone must have designed it, a teleological argument and therefore invalid.

The anthropic argument is another teleological attempt to support the notion of intelligent design. This line of argument claims that conditions in the universe are such that intelligent human life can exist, therefore the universe was designed to provide support for intelligent human life.

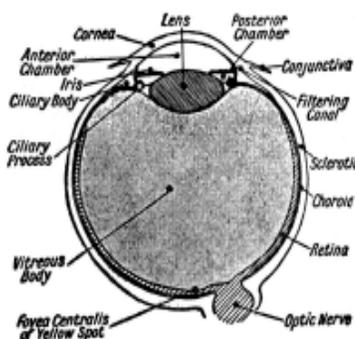
All of these arguments for intelligent design are essentially teleological, and therefore invalid. But these arguments fail in other ways as well. Some modern refutations of these arguments depend on logic for their power; others use scientific methods.

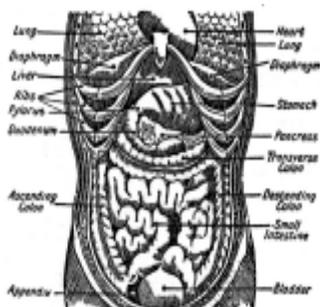
Logic defeats the argument from analogy. Paley's argument that the human eye shows the intention of its designer in the same way that a watch shows the intention of its designer, for example, is also an argument from analogy: design in the eye is like design in a watch. His argument is based on two premises: Watches are intelligently designed, and watches and organisms share many similar attributes, including self-propulsion, complexity, the appearance of contrivance for particular ends, functional interdependence of parts, energy use, adaptations of parts to work perfectly for their tasks, and so on. He concludes that therefore organisms are also intelligently designed.

But argument from analogy is always risky: the analogy compares two objects which are similar in some respects, but always different in others. Because watches and organisms each have many unique properties and differ in many ways, we can't conclude that since watches are designed, organisms are also designed.

Another example of logical error in the intelligent design argument is Behe's irreducible complexity argument, or argument from ignorance. Behe argues that cells are so biochemically complex that they can't be reduced to simpler structures that work independently. Thus they can't have evolved from simpler molecules. This argument is a repeat at the molecular level of Paley's argument that the eye is too complex a structure to have evolved.

The scientific evidence shows that many features of nature are poorly or unintelligently designed. Examples include vestigial organs like the human appendix. Suboptimal designs also show lack of intelligent design. The human eye has a blind spot because of the way the optic nerve





is placed in the eye. In the squid's eye, there is no blind spot, because the optic nerve is better placed.

In addition, design in nature is more apparent than real. Structures that appear to be designed can be shown to be the result of a natural, non-

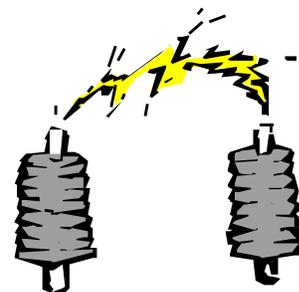
purposive, mechanical principles of causation: evolution by natural selection of genetic frequencies over time. For all practical purposes, Darwin's theory of evolution ended design arguments among scientists 130 years ago.

Intelligent design, brought into this world by Paley in the nineteenth century, laid to rest by scientists and philosophers in the twentieth, has found new life in the sophisticated arguments of Dembski and Behe, but it is no more logical now than it was in its earlier form. Scientists and skeptics need to be aware of these old anti-scientific ideas in new dress.

-- Reported by Virginia Jergens.

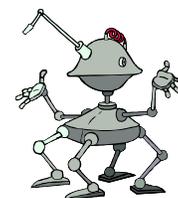
January Meeting from page 1....

perpetual motion machines and free energy contraptions. Carr has said that although Tesla told him about many inventions, he can't remember a single one. Carr invented something he called the utron motor, but he proved better at organizing publicity than at inventing things. He managed to appear on the Long John Neville radio show, a sort of Art Bell predecessor.

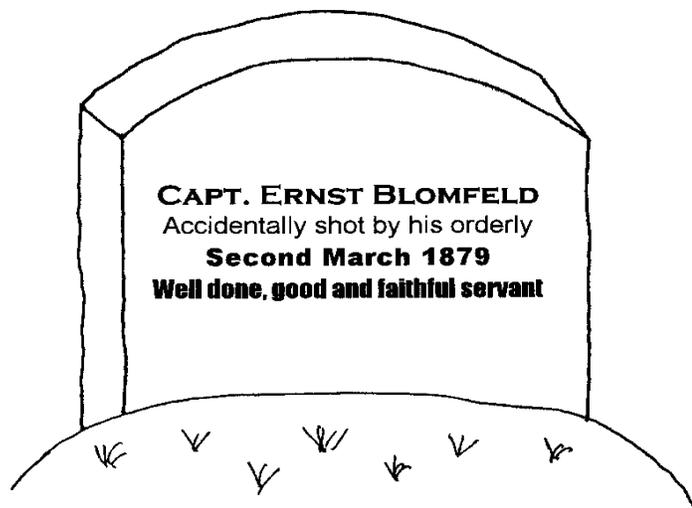


He also promoted his company OTC Enterprises with elaborate brochures suggesting that OTC might make something that looked a lot like a flying saucer. He acquired a patent for an OTC "amusement device," which he claimed could spin faster than the earth. Somehow none of these devices, or the factory in which they were made, was ever available for inspection. His devices all disappeared, including one Carr said had been "lost to the atmosphere." Carr ingratiated himself with one of the many flying saucer groups of that era, and planned to build a center called Space Maryland, which never came to pass. It was replaced by plans for Space Oklahoma and eventually with Space California, also never built. He seems to have carried out a number of frauds, and was indicted by the Securities Commission in Oklahoma City. He may have raised as much as one million dollars talking to groups like Kiwanis Clubs, soliciting money and simply putting it in his pocket. But even those who were robbed by Carr did not think ill of him. Carr died in 1982, a minor mystery of the golden age of UFO's.

Talking about Carr's part in UFO history reminded Lance of a story told about the great science fiction author Arthur C Clarke, who was asked how he knew there were no alien UFO's on earth. Clarke replied that if there were only one sighting of one craft, he would be willing to consider that it might be the product of an extraterrestrial civilization, but that since there were dozens, even hundreds of alleged UFO events, he was confident that the stories were invented by earthlings.



Lance compared Clarke's comments to the red panda story, a perhaps apocryphal tale of a red panda who fell from a moving circus train in some northern country, perhaps Norway. News of the escape circulated among the population, who reported dozens of sightings of the panda in all sorts of places. When the panda's body was found close to where it had fallen off the train, it became clear that all of these stories were the invention of the tellers and had no



He's not talking about dogs or parrots, but about Congressmen!

"Considering the question whether they may be said to have independent intelligence and understanding of language:

In many cases they don't have a clue what they're saying - they simply make the right noises because they've learnt to associate them with reward."

- Thomas Sutcliffe in the *Independent*, as quoted in

The Skeptic, vol. 12, no 3-4, p. 5

basis in reality. Like the many UFO sightings, a splendid example of the human ability to find the expected, hoped for, or feared where there is nothing unusual.

ART member Everett DeJager followed Lance with a description of his theory that predictions of natural disasters which can be prevented only by great effort are always wrong. He said that as fourth grader in 1929 he had read in an issue of *Weekly Reader* that the world would soon run out of oil. Noting today that the world has yet to run out of oil, he believes that many other predictions of disaster will also not come to pass.

He also believes that when self-proclaimed experts predict disaster, they also suggest that the predicted disaster can be averted by great effort. In the example of running out of oil, for example, experts suggest burdensome reductions in the use of fossil fuels, increased use of the bicycle and so on.

The far-reaching effects of the effort to eliminate the chemical Alar from the apple supply is another example. Alar was used to control the ripening of apples until research suggested that it might be carcinogenic. The public response to this report was so strong that all apples tainted with Alar were ordered removed from the market immediately. Many owners of apple farms were driven into bankruptcy before it was discovered that the early research was wrong.

Similarly, when predictions of disease caused by asbestos were made, costly rehabilitation of buildings in which asbestos had been used followed, little of which Everett believes was necessary. He also believes that global warming is not occurring and that we will not need to make great sacrifices, like reducing the use of fossil fuel, to avoid it. Everett's comments definitely won the prize for most controversial. Few, if any, members agreed with him about anything except that Alar was probably not as dangerous as first reported.

-- Reported by Virginia Jergens.



Modern Quackery.

Forget about St. John's Wort and Ginkgo Biloba. In California it has been discovered that the humble Forget-me-not is good for *increasing your awareness of karmic relationships beyond the threshold*. And Mugwort is good for *awareness of dreams and conscious control of one's psychic life*.

Robert Carroll in *The Skeptic*, vol. 12, no. 3-4, p. 25

More from the December Meeting...

Pig Used to Demonstrate "Spontaneous Human Combustion"

At the December meeting, Brad Bonham reported on a Learning Channel program on the phenomenon inaccurately known as "spontaneous human combustion." When a body is found burned very thoroughly, so that almost nothing remains but dust except for extremities, which do not burn, in an area where there is little other fire damage, spontaneous human combustion is said to have occurred. Many explanations, natural and supernatural, have been proposed, but none was able to show the precise mechanisms at work until recently.

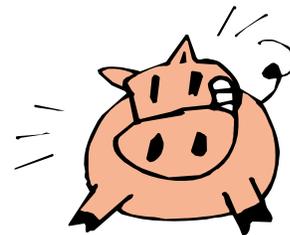


In fact, no one had even witnessed this kind of fire until the burning body of a woman deposited in a hiking area in the Northwest was found by hikers. The flames were not high, and bushes near the body were not singed, typical of "spontaneous human combustion." Photographs were taken, but the murderer refused to share his methods with authorities.

No one was able to replicate this kind of fire until it was understood that the key factor in setting such a fire is the amount of accelerant used. When someone tries to cover up a murder by burning an entire building with the body in it, a generous application of accelerant results in a bad fire, and a partly burned body. But when a small amount of accelerant is used the result can be the thorough burning characteristic of "spontaneous human combustion." The effect of a small amount was demonstrated in a French case in which a murderer tried to cover his crime by starting a fire with 50 to 100 milliliters of Chanel No. 5 Eau de Toilette.

Following this death, investigators wrapped a whole pig body in a blanket, poured a small amount of an accelerant on the blanket, lit the accelerant, and let the cameras roll for seven hours, at which time overtime for the camera operators kicked in, and the filming was stopped.

The demonstration achieved a slow burn at about 800 degrees Fahrenheit (compared to cremation, typically around 1300 degrees Fahrenheit). It was found that the very



thorough nature of the burning depended on this slow burn, which slowly wicked fat from the body of the pig and made tiny cracks in the bones, releasing more fat from the bone marrow, allowing the bones to burn from the inside as well as the outside. The result was a slow, thorough burning of all of the body except for the extremities, where there was not enough fuel to sustain the fire. The bones were reduced to dust, without the chunks of bone that remain when a body is cremated.

The program also included discussion of a variety of supernatural explanations for "spontaneous human combustion." The accumulating evidence has not convinced those who believe there are supernatural or paranormal forces at work in these cases.

-- Reported by Virginia Jergens



Governor not descended from a baboon?

Governor Frank Keating of Oklahoma appointed eleven biblical literalists to the Oklahoma State Textbook Committee. These mandated that stickers be affixed to biology texts warning students that evolution is only a theory, since "No one was present when life first appeared on Earth." We went straight to Genesis to check this assertion. Alas, we were quickly in over our heads. "And out of the ground, Lord God formed every beast of the field and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam..." (Genesis 2:19:25). It sort of sounds like Adam was there first, but we called the Institute for Creation Research for clarification. "We're not biblical scholars," the spokesman explained, "we're scientists, but that's an easy one. The animals and man were all created on the sixth day, but the animals came first." In any case, no sentient beings were present when the textbook committee made its decision. Meanwhile, Gov. Keating declared he doesn't think he is descended from a baboon.

-- *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 3 December 1999



Spoon Bending Psychic sues Nintendo!

The litigious Uri Geller wants \$96 million for suffering he says he has endured as a result of having been parodied as a Pokémon character. Alakazam is described as an evil magician whose brain possesses incredible psychic powers. He is drawn with a spoon in each hand and the character is named Ungeller, at least in Japan. It looked like more than a coincidence.

-- *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 7 January 2000

More from the December Meeting...

Medugorje Visionary Sees Mary in Alabama Cow Pasture

At the December meeting, President Roy Auerbach reported that NPR's Weekend Edition Saturday reported on December 11 that Maria Linetti, a visionary from Medugorje in Bosnia, is attracting huge crowds to a cow pasture outside Birmingham, Alabama.

Maria Linetti is one of six young people near the city of Medugorje who claimed in 1981 to have seen a vision of the Virgin Mary, in the Christian



religion believed to be the mother of Jesus. She claims to have seen a vision of Mary every day of her life since 1985. She now lives in Italy, but has been visiting the United States since 1988, when she came to Birmingham, a highly regarded medical center, to donate a kidney to her brother. During her current

visit, three to four thousand people a day are visiting the cow pasture outside of Birmingham to witness her daily vision and her reports on the Virgin and her messages to the faithful.

These gatherings provide the faithful with opportunities to pray, be inspired, and see "signs." One man who was interviewed said that he had not expected to see anything when he came, but when the vision occurred, he looked up and saw a star in the sky, and then looked to one side and saw a group of cows lying together in the pasture, which to him looked like a scene depicting the birth of Jesus. Then he looked the other direction and saw three crosses in the mountains. He reported that these sights seemed to him to be signs, but he did not say what they were signs of. A woman said she had come to pray for ailing friends and relatives.

Caritas, a Roman Catholic organization, provides a mission to support the visions, and claims a mailing list of 200,000, a powerful reminder of the strength of folk religion among Christians.

-- Reported by Virginia Jergens.

The Association for Rational Thought is an independent, nonprofit, scientific and educational organization. We share the ideas and philosophies of CSICOP, the Skeptics Society, and JREF.

CSICOP : the *Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal* publishes the *Skeptical Inquirer*, a journal of investigations of paranormal claims. PO. Box 703, Amherst, NY 14226-0703, phone: 800-634-1610, fax: 716-636-1733, www.scicop.org

The Skeptics Society, publishes *The Skeptic Magazine*. PO Box 338, Altadena, CA 91001; phone: 626-794-3119; fax 626-794-130; skepticism@aol.com and www.skeptic.com,.

JREF: the James Randi Educational Foundation publishes the *Swift Newsletter*. 201 SE 12th Street Fort Lauderdale, FL 33316-1815; www.randi.org

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@cinci.rr.com

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.

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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 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.

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!

Sixth Meeting of the 1999-2000 Season! Date and Day: 12 February 2000

Topic: "The Reichenbach Affair: A Case Study of Pseudoscience in 19th Century Chemistry"

If you think that pseudoscience is a recent problem or that it is always the product of scientific outsiders dabbling in fields beyond their expertise, then think again. This talk will summarize Dr. Jensen's research on a classic case of pseudoscience that involved some of the most famous names in 19th century chemistry and physics and which shows some striking parallels with the more recent example of cold fusion.

Speaker: Dr. William B. Jensen holds the Oesper Chair in the History of Chemistry and Chemical Education at the University of Cincinnati. He is also curator of the Oesper Collection of Rare Books and Portraits in the History of Chemistry and of the department of chemistry's apparatus museum.

Seventh Meeting of the 1999-2000 Season!

Date and Day: 11 March 2000

Watch Your Mail For a postcard About the Speaker and Topic for this meeting!

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