



Cincinnati Skeptic

Newsletter of The Association for Rational Thought

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Television: the word is half Greek, half Latin. No good can come of it.

— C. P. Scott

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November Meeting

Roots of Rationality or Did the Chinese Invent Rationality?

At the November membership meeting, A.R.T. members became cheerful guinea pigs for Michael Barnes, long time A.R.T. member and professor of religious studies at the University of Dayton. The experiment was a lecture based on Michael's recent book, *The Stages of Thought*, which he urged listeners not to buy because it costs \$45 and is larded front to back with academic argument and footnotes. He suggests instead his textbook, *In the Presence of Mystery: An Introduction to the Story of Human Religiousness*, a paperback written in much more accessible language.

The goal of *Stages of Thought* is to defend rationality and its modern version, the scientific method, as the best method to use to discover which ideas about reality are true. Michael is also concerned to show that Western Europe is not the only place rational thinking developed. He presents evidence supporting the notion that rational thinking has been developed by many civilizations. He concedes that his thesis is "ambitious," an opinion shared by many of his colleagues and critics, and happily looks forward to the accumulation of evidence, whether it supports his theory or not.

One reason his theory meets resistance, he says, is that many people are really irritated by science. Many academic and professional religious people are irritated that most religious beliefs can be called into question from the scientific perspective. People dedicated to new age beliefs of all sorts also are likely to be irritated by the success of science in explaining the real world. Claiming that there are two kinds of people, those who think scientifically and those who don't is too easy. Most religious people apply rational thinking methods to everyday problems. And philosophers, who think rationally, but don't bother to check their conclusions against the evidence, don't fit in either category.

(Cont. Pg 8)

October Meeting

**REPORT ON FIRST ANNUAL
SUPERSTITION BASH
AN UNIQUE COMMUNITY EVENT
CONDUCTED BY:
THE ASSOCIATION FOR RATIONAL
THOUGHT (ART)
AND THE FREE INQUIRY GROUP, INC. (FIG)**

This year, 2000 C.E., in the month of October, Friday the 13th occurred on Friday. It doesn't always work that way. Sometimes Friday the 13th happens on Thursdays, Saturdays, or some such, but in the month that contained Halloween 2000, Friday the 13th obligingly decided to be on Friday. This was done so we could have our First Annual "Superstition Bash."

Our first what?

Superstition: any belief, based on fear or ignorance, that is inconsistent with the known laws of science or with what is generally considered in the particular society as true and rational; esp., such a belief in charms, omens, the supernatural, etc. Webster.

Bash: to attack or abuse, as with blows or with words; [Slang] a gala event or party Webster.

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President

Roy Auerbach (513) 731-2774
E-mail: raa@cinci.rr.com

Vice President:

Lance Moody (513) 336-9835
E-mail: lancemoody@cinci.rr.com

Membership Secretary:

Nurit Bowman (513) 731-0642
E-mail: nuritb@netscape.net

Media Coordinator:

Bob & Diane Streifthau
Phone: (937) 433-4212
E-mail: rbstreifthau@juno.com

Program & Membership Chairman:

Brad Bonham (513) 761-5613
E-mail: bonham@compuserve.com

Newsletter Editor:

Wolf Roder (513) 556-3424
E-mail: wolf.roder@uc.edu

Treasurer:

Rick Prairie (513) 681-8444
E-mail: Richard.Prairie@uc.edu

Investigations Officer:

Terry Endres (513) 941-6912
E-mail: kibeteen@fuse.net

Recording Secretary :

Virginia Jergens (513) 871-4876
E-mail: vjh@one.net

Publicity Coordinator:

Your Help is needed!!!

**Web Site Manager/SANE Manager:
(Skeptical Area Network Effort)**

David Wall (513) 321-3381
E-mail: darkon@one.net

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.

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**Comments Corner.....****Pass the NERVAURA, please.**

Joseph Rodes Buchanan was already an author when he took up his teaching of Physiology, Medicine, and Jurisprudence at the Eclectic Medical Institute in 1846. His *Out Lines of Lectures on the Neurological System of Anthropology...* had been published in Louisville in 1842 when graduated from medical school. From 1842 to 1846 he traveled giving lectures on his new system "Anthropology," and giving demonstrations of "Psychometry," one of the sciences included in the system. Buchanan's discoveries bore no relation to the later fields which picked up the terms Anthropology, and Psychometry to describe the "study of man" and mental testing.

Buchanan exhibited a stage act designed "not to present theories but to deliver facts." So he claimed, and "I yield to everyone the privilege of reasoning upon the facts according to his own philosophy..." He acknowledged that some "denied the newer and profounder truths and even claimed that the experiments were fanciful or even deceptive." His audience was usually a committee of journalists, leading citizens, and others who would give him maximum publicity and credibility. This was an accepted way of dealing with new claims in America during the first half of the 19th century.

Lets look at the facts as Buchanan presents them in his *Psychometry*. Buchanan stumbled on the idea in conversation with Bishop Polk, later a Confederate general. Polk stated that his sensibilities were so acute that he could recognize different metals by their taste, as he held them in his hand. He tasted different offensive metallic flavors when he touched brass, iron, gold, silver. Phrenology showed that the bump over his organ of external sensibilities was uncommonly well developed. Buchanan tested many people "experimentally" to see if this ability was widely shared. These experiments showed the power was quite common. Every substance possessing a decided taste was able to transmit its influence to the system. Sugar, salt, pepper, acids, made so distinct an impression that they could be named. The flavor was recognized as if small quantities had been gradually introduced into the mouth instead of being held in the hand.

"The number of individuals with this acute sensibility is variable, greater in warm climates than cold, but one fourth to one half of the whole population display this new power. In the best places mental cultivation, refinement, a nervo-sanguineous temperament showed, and a general predominance of moral and intellectual organs." Well it's clear, that Buchanan was not trying to suggest or prod any cooperation from his objects. I'll bet that even the uncultivated, the immoral and the unrefined remembered getting all of the answers correct.

"I have proved, by experiment, that the passage of nervous influence, or "Nervaura", or galvanic, or electric current, or other imponderable fluids, passing through a substance will transmit its influence into the constitution."

Such are the "facts" that Dr. Buchanan presents. His claims are always positive and highly detailed, in a way that reminds me of the messages that psychics get from the deceased. Miracles are confirmed in testimonial after testimonial. Curious isn't it? Could there be sensory clues or leakage? Surely observers wouldn't use the difference in density to distinguish metals? Could salt, pepper and sugar "feel" different in their paper envelopes? Further tales of other phrenomagnetic experiments will be presented next month.

— Joe Gastright



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

*Earth Report 2000: Revisiting
the True State of the Planet*

edited by Ronald Bailey

(New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000)

The soft cover of this volume assures us that we shall be "Revisiting the True State of the Planet" and that this is a project of the "Competitive Enterprise Institute." The back cover promises to debunk many of the scientific and statistical myths regarding the planet's fitness for future generations. In other words, not to worry, the earth environment is in good shape. Bailey himself and the other writers are for the most part science journalists, though some are working scientists.

This is clearly an optimistic view of the global environment, a book that downplays the problems of overpopulation, global warming, environmental pollution and toxins, depletion of marine fisheries resources, energy production, soil and land degradation, and species extinctions. The writers see the solutions to all remaining problems as free enterprise, open markets, and private property, which were, no doubt, directly endowed by God. Take these descriptions as caveats, not as an attempt to deride the book. It is a thoughtful book, an alternate view of the environmental dilemmas confronting us, well worth reading for its reasoned dissent.

Let me look at the subject of climatic warming, a chapter written by a working meteorologist. Some facts of climate are agreed by all observers. Average global temperatures have increased by one degree Fahrenheit in the course of this century. Most of this increase came between 1910 and 1940 and again after 1960. Between 1940 and 1960 global temperatures decreased. The nineties were the warmest decade since the beginning of records. Since monitoring began in 1958, the CO₂ concentrations in the atmosphere have increased from about 320 to 360 ppm. This gas is, however, responsible for only about 22 percent of the surface warming effect of the atmosphere. The largest effect, 62 percent, comes from water vapor; the rest from minor constituent atmospheric gases.

It is by no means clear that all the increase in CO₂ is human induced, and even then how much comes from burning fossil fuels and how much from destruction of forests, mostly in the tropics. In either case the total CO₂ released by human activities is a very small part, less than one percent of carbon circulating in the atmosphere. Not all

of the carbon cycle has been accounted for in research, which means we don't know where some of the carbon went.

The dire predictions of extreme climate warming depend on computer simulations of global climate, and on the values assigned to feedback effects. If temperatures increase, more water vapor will enter the air. But that also means more rainfall and more clouds, both of which can have cooling effects. So the answers are not final. The book makes much of the fact that computer estimates of future climate warming have decreased over the past decade as more precise models became available. Nor, if the book is to be believed, does climate warming guarantee worse rather than better conditions for most of the planet. Some parts of Canada and Russia will benefit from a warming climate. The United States, however, will almost certainly will receive less rainfall and become dryer.

The chapter on world fisheries admits that many of the world's marine fish stocks are depleted, and worse show no signs of recovery. Despite this deterioration of the resource, global fish production has increased and is now about six times what it was in 1950. Further, per capita fish consumption of a much larger human population has been and is increasing. All of which does not sound really possible. Two things make it reality. The catch and use of fish species not hunted in the past, and which consequently are not yet depleted. Most of the change, however, comes from aquaculture, the raising of animals under farm and ranch conditions, either in cages in the ocean or in inland ponds. The authors see this as the shape of the future, i.e. just let free enterprise take its way, and we need not worry about adequate supplies of fish for human consumption.

It is a book well worth reading, but keep the shaker handy for that skeptical grain of salt.

— Wolf Roder

Ancient Mysteries

by Peter James and Nick Thorpe
(New York: Ballantine Books, 1999)

This volume is very much like our *Book of Blurbs* writ large. By this I mean it is a list or encyclopedia of mystical topics, each examined rationally and explained as a natural phenomenon. It is by no means exhaustive, which I doubt would be possible in any case. No single book, no single life time, can contemplate or treat all the silly, wrong, misguided stories people tell each other. The book is divided into eight chapters or topics, each with an introduction and four or five individual stories. It is distinguished from our *Blurbs* in that some of these stories, or at least parts of them, prove to be true.

James and Thorpe write of lost lands or places which were struck in catastrophes. Here they retell the ever popular story of Atlantis, review the myth of Sodom, and examine the rise and fall of the Maya civilization of Central America. In astronomy they consider various megalithic monuments including Stonehenge, and don't forget the Star of Bethlehem. The pyramids, the Sphinx, the South American ruins of Tiahuanaco, and the Easter Island stone heads fall under the rubric of architectural wonders. Under earth patterns the authors consider such imponderables as the Glastonbury Spiral, the Somerset Zodiac, and of course the Nazca Lines.

History is full of marvelous journeys and voyages, especially those of the Phoenicians around Africa. But the strangest are all the arrivals in America, not least that of the ancestors of American Indians. Also considered are the travels of the Vikings, of the Welsh, of Africans, and who ever else came before Columbus. Weird figures of mystical history include King Arthur and of course Robin Hood, and many others. Many finds were considered hoaxes, Schliemann's Troy, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and even the recent man in the ice of the European Alps. The final chapter deals with some questions of the supernatural, Here Edgar Cayce is examined and the Curse of Tutankhamun is considered.

Each one of the specific topics is examined from many sides, and the authors endeavor to peel away the confusing and legendary to lay bare the true, or the perhaps or possibly true kernel of the story. On the whole, or as far as my knowledge reaches, the authors appear to have stuck to the factual. At times they have perhaps given more credence to the possible or doubtful than I would have, but they do make the uncertainties clear. The introduction to each of the sections provide an overview and a wealth of facts on the topic over all, as well as mentioning many mysteries which could not be treated at length.

The authors acknowledge a list of experts who have answered their questions and helped them find facts and explanations. Another indication of the seriousness of the research are many pages of bibliography on each topic. While these will not guarantee accuracy of the authors, they enable the skeptic to follow up on any subject not adequately covered.

The book is generously illustrated with black and white photographs and pen drawings. These pictures are of great help to the reader, because they are generally to the point, show the thing under discussion, and thus help our understanding how reality could be misinterpreted.

This is definitely a book worth keeping on any skeptic's reference shelf.

— Wolf Roder

Letters to the Editor...



TO: Karen Samples,
samples@enquirer.com (11 October 2000)

Karen —

Thanks for the great column. So often, media coverage of skeptics is leaden—probably because, as with good scientists, good skeptics are cautious when interviewed and conscientious about getting the facts straight (yeah, details, details). As a result we find ourselves depicted as humor-impaired, dismissive, dis-believers. Your wise-cracking style is actually more characteristic of what we're like when not worried about offending anybody.

How the heck did you hear about us? In my role as membership chair, I'm always real curious and delighted when people outside the general circle of friends-of-friends-of-friends pop up with an interest in what we're up to.

How the *heck* did you land and keep a job at the Enquirer? Columns about mush parading as a refutation of evolution; comments that Adams County school yards are beginning to resemble graveyards in the name of education; devastatingly accurate observations about Dr. Laura's fans—you're terrific! But *sooo* out of character for the Enquirer! I suppose limiting your identity to that of "KY columnist", helps dampen your impact.

Thanks again,

-- Brad Bonham, ART Membership Chair

Karen Samples Answer:

Thanks for writing! I knew the skeptics would take my wisecracking in the spirit it was intended.

I know about your groups through Ed Kagin's run for the state Senate here. I wrote a column about that, and then I suddenly was receiving the FIG newsletters. On Monday night I was scrambling for a Wednesday column and happened to read about the bash.

Thanks again for writing. It's always good to hear feedback on columns. The Enquirer editors seem to enjoy what I'm doing lately—our executive editor arrived here last year from California, and he's loving it.

-- Karen Samples

I remember Steve Allen

In addition to the *Tonight Show*, novels, plays, poetry, and hundreds of songs, Steve Allen (1921-2000) was one of the World's leading skeptics, humanists, and advocates of critical thinking. He served us as Co-Chair of the Council for Media Integrity, and gave generously from his achievement and good fortune. He has been described as a true Renaissance man, who not only could do everything but do it well and make it look easy.

Back in the fifties when Steve Allen invented the night show I didn't own a television. I was in the service and later a student and graduate student when money did not run to TV nor did interest. My strongest television memory of Steve Allen is the *Meeting of the Minds* program on PBS in 1976. Here Saint Thomas Aquinas met Galileo to thrash out whether knowledge must be pursued independently of theological strictures and whether it was possible for science to contradict religion. These and many more issues were debated by historical figures on the program. All was said in the actual written words of the protagonists. I remember thinking what an enormous research project that must have been, and astonished that Steve had done most of it himself.

I met Steve Allen at the inauguration of the Center for Inquiry building, where he was an honored and leading guest. One of the high points of the ceremonies was a performance by Steve Allen. He entertained us by answering questions we had submitted on cards. All his replies were completely without preparation, ad lib, full of humor, and replete of wisdom as well. This man seemed to know everything.

Steve Allen published more than 50 books. He wrote on a great variety of topics, on education, on China, on the farmworkers' strike, on sleaze and violence in the media, and on the Bible. His titles run the alphabet from songs *Around the World* to poetry *Wry on the Rocks*. He also wrote mysteries. I think I have read all five of Steve's *whodunits*. They are well written, they turn on his own life and experiences on stage and screen, are full of surprises and can hold their own with the current masters of suspense. I would recommend them to all mystery fans.

Wolf Roder

Superstition Bash From page 1...

Yes, it was decided to have a gala event, a party, to attack or abuse—not with blows really, more with words and cute behavior—some of the beliefs based on fear or ignorance that are inconsistent with the known laws of science or with what is generally considered as true and rational.

Whose beliefs? Superstitious people's superstitious beliefs, that's what. Like Friday the 13th. Many people think 13 is an "unlucky" number. And they think Friday is a generally unlucky day. Put them together, and you get Friday the 13th, and they see that particular combination as making for an extra unlucky day. Here's why. Friday was the day Jesus was crucified, and 13 is the number of Jesus' apostles (12) plus Judas (1) who betrayed Jesus and caused him to be crucified on Friday. Hence, Friday the 13th has, for centuries, been considered by some as an unlucky day. Many buildings don't have rooms, or even floors, that bare the number 13. Don't believe it? Check out office, hospital, and hotel buildings. You will observe that many of them do not have rooms or suites, or floors, numbered 13. The numbers go from 12 to 14. And now you know why.

So that's why we chose Friday the 13th for our Superstition Bash. The fact that it was so close to Halloween, when lots and lots of superstitious things are believed, or done, or acted out in fun, only made it a better time for us to do it.

For who to do it? Oh, yes. This first ever event of its type in the Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky area was also the historic first ever collaborative joint project by and between the members of the Association for Rational Thought (ART), a skeptic organization, and the members of the Free Inquiry Group, Inc. (FIG), a secular humanist organization. And a wonderful success it was indeed! So many people did such hard and good work on the event, and so many fine creative costumes and exhibits were presented that, for fear of overlooking someone, only one person will be herein named. And that person is Donna Loughry, who served as chairperson of this Fall Happening. Donna is a member of both groups, and she must be credited for the skill employed in whipping the whole thing together with creativity, hard work, and determinism.

It should be noted that a number of the folks who contributed their time and energy to become involved in making this affair the success it was are members of both groups, whereas others are members of only one or the other of the two groups. What is important is that members of both of these two groups worked together on the planning committee for the Bash, the doing of the project itself making it irrelevant if one was from ART or FIG or paid the membership dues to both.

The event was held at St. John's Unitarian Church in

Cincinnati. For our first experimental year, only adults were invited. The poor eager, curious little children were left home this time. But we wanted to see how things would go, and whether it would be suitable for young people. Perhaps next year they can attend, for it was indeed educational and it was indeed fun. And there was lots of good food to eat, all arranged by members of our joint bash committee.

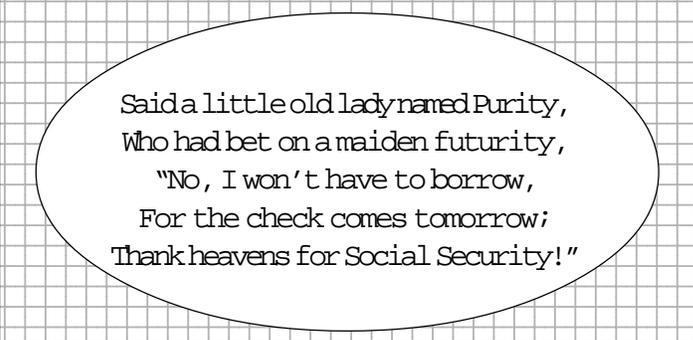
There were displays and a skit, and scary Halloween type things and other generally silly superstitious stuff, like witches crashing into doors, and a bat whose little eyes lit up flying around in circles in the room. And there were crystal balls, and Ouija boards, and black cats crossing people's paths, and ladders to walk under, and mirrors to break, and salt to throw over one's left shoulder, and wood to knock on, and Tarot cards to read, and fortune telling, and scary sounds of hauntings and such playing, and talking skulls, and severed heads and hands, and gravestones, and lots of printed explanations of various superstitions. And there was a splendid witch's brew punch that boiled and bubbled and sent foggy stuff cascading down the table, while fog crept in on little cat feet across the room and scuttled off into the trees.

The aforementioned Donna gave a learned talk on the origins and history of many various superstitions. Her scholarship generated a lively question and answer discussion.

Did we speak of the costumes? Ah, the costumes. There was a tooth fairy (female), and an Aladdin, and a black cat, and a gypsy, and a fortuneteller, and even the horrifying apparition of a person disguised as Edwin Kagin, in native outdoor garb with spear and war paint, holding with satisfaction a canned "Ham."

Some attendees were not aware of some of the superstitions represented, and that may be a good thing. People no longer believe, or even know of, certain beliefs that once terrified our ancestors. But let us not feel so smug. Buildings are still being built without floors numbered 13.

And guess what? This year's Friday the 13th actually proved quite lucky for the members of ART and FIG. If Friday the 13th is really an unlucky day, shouldn't it be unlucky for everyone?
-- Edwin Kagin



Said a little old lady named Purity,
Who had bet on a maiden futurity,
"No, I won't have to borrow,
For the check comes tomorrow;
Thank heavens for Social Security!"

Pictures from the Superstition Bash!



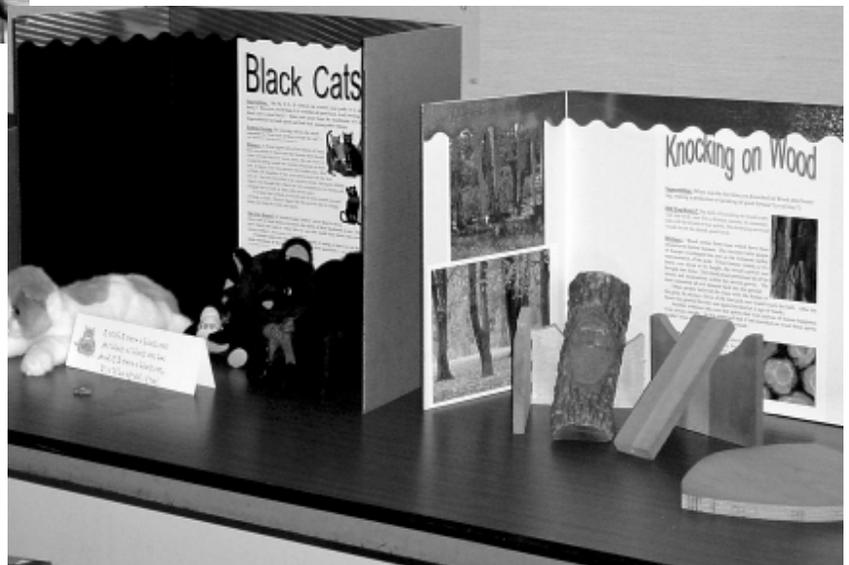
Our "Black Cat!"



Lots to see & eat!



The Magician!



Origins of Superstitions



Forty Fortunes

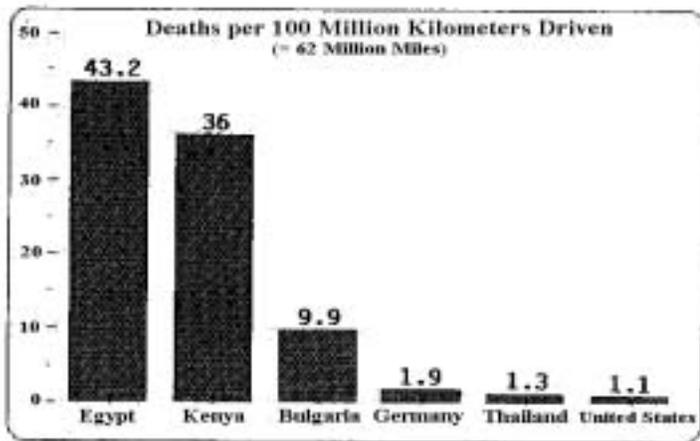


**Many Thanks to Edwin Kagin
for these and many other digital pictures!**

In De-Nile of Death?

(From: www.Stats.org)

The Ford/Firestone vehicle debacle, leading to congressional hearings and shaken consumer confidence, raises legitimate concerns over US highway safety. Americans suffer about forty to fifty thousand traffic fatalities per year, half of them involving alcohol. Notwithstanding the tragedy of avoidable traffic deaths from product failure, it is still worth noting the relative standing of the US when it comes to the issue of highway safety. Below is a graph from the most recent issue of *State* the magazine of the US State Department:



Roots of Rationality From page 1...

There are many current criticisms of scientific methods. Philosophers claim that scientific methods are so open-ended and full of alternatives that they are useless. Others say science is a set of practices based on local prejudices, or that the classification methods used by science are arbitrary and do not reflect reality. Another criticism is that although science can test evidence, the evidence chosen depends on the culture of the scientist, thus distorting the conclusions drawn from the evidence. Some claim that science uses objective logic to the exclusion of subjective insight. Others attack methods of funding science and its application to other areas. It is also argued that science is not the only valid method of discovering truth.

Even the century which gave birth to the scientific method has fallen into disrepute. The eighteenth century European Enlightenment has in academic circles become anathema. Science and ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity have been forgotten in a rush to view the Enlightenment as a time that gave rise to colonialism, cold objectivity and the belief that Western culture is superior to other cultures.

One thing certainly true about science is that although it is pretty good at proving fact or instrumental claims, it is poor at proving value claims. Also, science makes sense only to those who are willing to operate on the assumption that you

and I and the rest of the world really do exist. The strongest defense of science is its stunning effectiveness in producing ideas that might as well be true because they work so well in predicting, explaining, and managing the natural world.

The idea that Michael would like most to swamp is the notion that only the Western enlightenment produced rational thinking. His contention is that it occurred also in China, India, Greece, and other places and is possible wherever cultural developments provide the groundwork for its growth.

Certainly rational thought was not an easy, natural development for human beings. Our foraging forebears out on the trail 35,000 years ago may have brought logic to bear on signs of their prey, judging how long ago an animal had passed by observing how fresh recent droppings seemed to be. But it was not until much later, after human beings had developed agriculture and trade, that they began to enumerate rules for how to think logically and began to think about thinking. Although individuals may have done so on their own before, it was not until about the sixth century BCE that this kind of thinking became institutionalized and highly valued by human cultures. The philosopher Karl Jaspers called this period the "axial age" because he thought it was best understood as the axis around which all of history revolved.

Recent archeological work describes the evolution of writing, a key element required for logical thought. Unlike language, which all cultures seem to develop, writing is a rare development, apparently very difficult for human beings. Its development among the Sumer, ancient Middle Eastern traders, took about 600 years.

The archeological evidence suggests that in the case of writing, necessity was once again the mother of invention. Sumerian traders needed a secure way to record trading contracts so they could tell when some rascal was shorting them. It appears that they hit on the idea of putting small clay figurines of their cattle in small bags sealed with wax. Years and years later, they found a better method, sealing the figurines inside a clay box which could be broken to verify the contract.

Once the clay boxes were sealed, they began to look a lot alike. Eventually this problem was solved by putting marks on the outside of the box to indicate what was in it. Years later the Sumerians decided they could dispense with the figurines and the boxes and use only the marks on the outside of the boxes. Six long centuries after the development of the wax-sealed bags, clay tablets appeared and the first writing, the earliest abstract information storage device. Human beings were no longer limited by their memory to short folk tales, but could store long epics with wildly involved plots. Once writing had appeared, it spread rapidly to Egypt and other Middle Eastern cultures

in just a few hundred years. China may have developed writing separately.

The ability to store words and thus ideas was a major leap for thinking, but it was a long time before human beings began to use writing for rational thinking. Human beings were able to read and write two thousand years before the axial age. Recent archeological research suggests that long epics once thought to have been memorized and handed down as oral traditions now appear to have been handed down in written form. Once it was thought that the Icelandic epics were oral traditions, but evidence of the use of writing for other purposes during the time the epics were developing suggests that they may have been written. Homeric myths developed during the eighth century BCE, when writing was available.

The development of writing is one of the major turning points in culture that contribute to the development of rational thinking. Understanding such developments is a major focus of Michael's work. He is also interested in what the study of cognitive development in the individual can tell him about the development of rational thinking. The Swiss psychologist Piaget's stages of cognitive development provide a useful framework. Up to about age two, according to Piaget, who observed children and recorded their actions meticulously, children give evidence of what Piaget calls sensory motor thinking. From two to six, children are in a pre-operational period characterized by an inability to distinguish fact from fancy, or truth from falsehood. Between seven and eleven, children begin to use concrete operational thought, and after eleven gradually acquire formal operational, rational thought. It is only after age 20 that human beings acquire late formal operational

thought, the ability to check one's own thinking and think critically.

Normal adults use the methods of thinking in all of Piaget's stages at once, but it is worth noting that while adequate parenting is enough to propel a child through the first three stages, the last two require formal schooling. So the individual's cognitive development is to some extent dependent upon the development of her culture.

When language was first developed, human beings began telling tales and were able to use concrete operational thought, everyday common sense. When the ability to read and write developed, complicated plots followed. Eventually more elaborate formal schooling was required, structuring people's thought through written records, elaborate systems of classifications, charts, maps, instructions, laws and math. One of the essential things learned in such schooling is the ability to think abstractly. Research asking competent unschooled and competent schooled individuals to arrange tools and materials found that the unschooled arranged the items as they are used, the saw and axe with the wood. Schooled subjects arranged the items in abstract categories, putting the saw and axe together in a tools category, and wood with other materials.

One way to look at cultural development is to divide cultures by major changes in the culture. The oldest foraging or hunting and gathering cultures are called primitive or paleolithic. They developed about 35,000 years ago. Groups that have achieved agriculture but not writing are called archaic or neolithic. Classic cultures achieved trade, literacy and bureaucracy, beginning about 5000 BCE. The modern scientific-industrial age, when the scientific thinking and the development of industry occurred began about 1600 CE.

Once a culture has reached the classic stage, with language, literacy and education, people become able to think in terms of one single ultimate something that would give the universe unity. No one knows why this occurred at this stage. At this stage classic

WANTED!!!

Urgently Needed!

Member willing to give A.R.T. about one hour a month from September to June. The job is to get information about upcoming meetings from Brad Bonham and send the information to the *Enquirer*, the *Post*, and *City Beat*. These meeting announcements are our only local publicity. They may be sent by mail, e-mail or fax. The method for doing this is already set up and ready to go, in the Publicity Coordinator's notebook.

Volunteer now!

Call or e-mail Roy Auerbach, 731-2774, or raa@cinci.rr.com.

Great thoughts from and about our leaders.

Democracy used to be a good thing, but now it has gotten into the wrong hands.

— Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC)

logic developed, in China and India as well as Greece, and other places. In China and India as well as in the west there were also schools of skeptics who insisted arriving at rational truth is impossible. Gradually the goal became the supported hypotheses of scientific thinking rather than the classic search for truth. In Western Europe, beginning about 1600, thinkers who stole a great deal of their material from the Greeks began the arduous task of developing scientific thinking as the modern scientific-industrial age began.

Michael believes that all cultures can develop scientific thinking. Cultural relativists are irritated at the claim that every group is capable of classic logic, and modern science. They believe that people should be allowed to live in accordance with their own cultural rules, regardless of how well or poorly those rules fit with the real world. The core of the scientific method developed over the last 400 years is that claims must be tested against the evidence, and that claims, evidence and underlying theories must be made available for public criticism. If we want the reliability and productivity of western science, then the developments of the last two stages, classic and late modern, must be employed.

—Reported by Virginia Jergens.



It's a communist plot

Digital watches were invented to make us daft, so the kids don't have to learn to read a clock anymore. So we're soft in the head and will accept communist rule when they come.

—bio-astrologer Esmeralda
von Löwenzahn-Dentdelion

Dr. Fredrick Fasehun, MD on spirits:

But Dr. Fasehun said that he had seen people protected with charms who were struck with machetes but suffered no wounds. "You may have no belief in it but that does not rule out its existence."

"I'm an orthodox doctor, so I don't practice it myself," he said with a laugh. "But yes, I have seen it work. I was standing in a demonstration, and the police were shooting at this young girl. The bullets just fell to the ground, and the girl picked them up and with her outstretched hand offered them back to the police. I saw it with my own eyes!"

—Karl Maier, *This House has Fallen* (2000) pp. 228, 236



A Puzzle for Thinkers

Statistociulation?

Two sophomore students are charged with finding the average entry fee of the six public swimming pools in the city. They inquire to learn that for each \$ 100 the following number of visitors will be admitted:

Pool A, 20 persons
Pool B, 25 persons
Pool C, 10 persons
Pool D, 20 persons
Pool E, 40 persons
Pool F, 50 persons

hence, 165 persons will be admitted to all pools for \$ 600 which averages out $600/165 = \$ 3.64$. Is their reasoning correct, or did they get the average cost of admission per visitor?

—adapted from *Mathematische Denkspele* (1997) p. 16

Solution for last issues puzzle:

Pocket money for three students. If Richard gets twice as much as Tom, and Helen one-and-a-half as much as Richard, then Helen gets three times as much as Tom. The distribution is Tom's, plus twice Tom's for Richard, and three times Tom's for Helen. That means the total is divided into six parts, i.e. \$4.80 for Tom, twice that for Richard (\$9.60) and three times that for Helen (\$14.40).

The Flying Pig of Philadelphia?

The two women had a doctor's certificate that their pet was a kind of seeing eye pig. So the ladies were allowed to take the pig on a flight from Philadelphia to Seattle. The women claimed the pig weighed only 13 pounds. At check in it weighed 300 pounds in fact. The airline consequently made them put the pig in first class. The pig slept through most of the flight, but on landing it went "hog wild" and tried to smash its way into the cockpit. So now the Federal Aviation Administration is investigating the affair as a possible safety violation. (Philadelphia Daily News)

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 626-794-1300; skepticmag@aol.com and www.skeptic.com.

JREF: the James Randi Educational Foundation publishes the *Swift Newsletter*. 201 SE Davie Blvd. Fort Lauderdale, FL 33316-1815. phone: (954) 467-1112, fax: (954)467-1660, 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

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Request subjects for future meetings _____

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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

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

E-mail: darkon@one.net



Association for Rational Thought
P.O. Box 12896
Cincinnati, OH 45212

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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....

Fourth Meeting of the 2000-2001 Season! Date and Day: Sat. Dec. 9 2000



Topic: The Newark, Ohio, *Holy Stones*—unholy frauds for a "holy" purpose?

Speaker: Bradley T. Lepper, PhD. Archeologist, Ohio Historical Society; Columbus, OH

Did ancient Hebrews travel through Ohio ten centuries before Columbus found his way to American shores? This extraordinary claim persists based on nineteenth century "finds" at excavations of ancient Indian mounds. In their historic context however, these stones, curiously engraved with Hebrew letters, tell a different but nonetheless intriguing story. Join us as Brad shares his investigation of these purposeful scientific forgeries.

Fifth Meeting of the 2000-2001 Season! Date and Day: Sat. Jan. 13, 2001



Topic: Dinosaur Discourse

Speaker: David Meyer, PhD. Department of Geology; University of Cincinnati

Your elementary school paleontology may now amount to woefully inadequate history. Hear the latest dino news? How do you interpret that big old asteroid claim? David's mission is to bring you up to speed in the world of dinosaur discoveries.

Place: NEW LOCATION!! Bonham Branch Library; 500 Springfield Pike, Wyoming at NE corner of "the pike" & Wyoming Ave. Parking is limited at library & for nearby businesses, so if at all possible, park on Wyoming Ave. (toward Sturkey's). Coffee & doughnuts can be had nearby.

Time: 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM -- program --> 12:15PM - 2:00 PM -- lunch at Sturkeys

Sturkey's Restaurant; 400 Wyoming Ave.; to preview the menu, or get a good map: <http://www.sturkeys.com>

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