



Cincinnati Skeptic

Newsletter of The Association for Rational Thought

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The aim of science is not to open the door to everlasting wisdom, but to set a limit on everlasting error.
— Bertholt Brecht

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January Meeting

Are We Alone in the Universe? Playing with the Drake Equation

Some years ago, the researchers running the Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence program (SETI) decided they needed a way to calculate or at least make informed guesses about whether there is life elsewhere in the galaxy. The Drake equation, the focus of the March meeting, was developed for the SETI program to fill this need. The Drake equation does not provide a clear cut, absolute answer, but it is a good framework for thinking about this question.

Investigations Officer Terry Endres walked A.R.T. members through the Drake equation at the March meeting. The equation solves for the number of advanced civilizations in the galaxy with the capability of contacting Earth through radio or some other medium.

Assuming that advanced civilizations flourish on planets revolving around a star, the first thing we need to know is how many stars there are in the galaxy. This number has been estimated at anywhere between 100 and 500 billion stars. Remember, this is our galaxy only. The rest of the universe has been excluded. Taking a conservative stance, we decided to estimate the number of stars in the galaxy at 100 billion.

Not all of these 100 billion stars are suns likely to have planets accompanying them through space. The older stars in the center of the galaxy lack sufficient heavy elements to form planets. This is because the stars themselves are made up largely of light elements. Heavier elements did not form until these stars grew large enough for their mass and therefore their gravity to increase. When gravity becomes strong enough, the star's core tightens,
(Cont. Pg 8)

December Meeting

Our Annual Free-For-All

Members were invited to talk about their favorite pseudoscientific topics at the February meeting. President Roy Auerbach threw the first handful into the potpourri of nonsense that resulted.

Feng Shui in a Can

Gazing into his computer terminal at a long list of technical specifications for the oxidation of polymers stressed by luminescence, he was startled by the sudden appearance of an ad for house paint. Not just any paint, but “unique” colors selected to match his very own feng shui astrology and to maximize the feng shui of the space in and around his house, bringing him and his family health, wealth, and long life, or whatever it is that “correct” feng shui is supposed to bring.

Feng shui is a group of principles used by the Chinese to arrange ouses and their contents to draw “good energy” to the house, and direct bad energy” away. Like astrology and other prescientific systems, exactly hich principles are used and how they are used depends on the ractitioner. Roy was, of course, much relieved to know that even in the idst of technical research, house paint is available to assure his rosperty and longevity.
(Cont. Pg 6)

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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.

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**Comments Corner.....****The Neurological Demonstration**

How exactly did Joseph Rhodes Buchanan spread the news of his amazing new Sciences? When he first visited New York City in 1842 he seized upon the technique which had been popularized by the traveling mesmerists in the 1830's, the public lecture and demonstration. The mesmerists had a far showier set of phenomena to exhibit. Their assistants would be rendered insensitive to fire and needles, made stiff as iron rods, or when necessary, able to lecture on highly philosophical subjects. Buchanan found that his lower key demonstration of phrenological organs did not have the carrying power in a large hall and instead he turned to private demonstrations before committees of leading citizens, which were later described in long written reports printed in the newspapers of the day.

On December 6th, 1842, the New York Evening Post published the minutes of "A Committee appointed by the Public to investigate the claims of Dr. Buchanan relating to the Science of Neurology." The committee included the editor of the paper, a noted minister, a medical doctor, a lawyer, and a certain writer by the name of William Cullen Bryant. The report stated that the committee met at the residence of a Mrs. R- a lady of intelligence and respectability residing near Poughkeepsie, who would assist Dr. Buchanan in the demonstration. Mrs. R, aged about forty, and the mother of a large family was of course a complete stranger to Dr. Buchanan. She declared entire ignorance of the principles of phrenology, as well as the locality of any cerebral organs. Lest some doubts might be started on this point, a certificate of the gentleman who accompanied her was appended to the report.

When the committee arrived:

"we found her complaining of some chilly and uncomfortable sensations. Dr. Buchanan began by holding his hand for some time on the organ of 'calorification' and silently placing his hands on various portions of her head, which he thought might have a restorative effect. In the course of three or four minutes her chilliness was removed. Dr. Buchanan then remarked aloud that he would endeavor to excite the organ which is the cause of perspiration. In three or four minutes we found that her hands were perceptibly moist."

"It is a part of Dr. Buchanan's theory that each finger is the conductor of a particular influence, such as the galvanic, electric, nervauric, &c.; and accordingly she described the sensation of touching the ends of his fingers with her own, as very different with each one. Her descriptions correspond somewhat (sic) with the effects attributed to each of these agents. In the ring finger she says there is a 'jerking motion' which may be compared to the successive thrills caused by electric agency. On touching the middle

finger, she avers there is produced a 'stiffening sensation of the wrist.' The index finger caused an effect, which she described as 'stimulating and warming to the arm.'

"It was now proposed that Dr. Buchanan stimulate the organ of 'language', but in attempting to do so, his finger touched the adjoining organ of 'calculation,' when suddenly Mrs. R arose from her chair and commenced counting the flowers on the wall paper. Counting the numbers in a horizontal line, and then in a perpendicular one of a side of the room, she would immediately announce the sum total Her mind seemed entirely abstracted, as it were in a monomania of calculation. One time she wished to count the threads in a flower of the carpet."

Next month Buchanan moves on to stimulate the organs of 'self-esteem,' 'combativeness,' and 'firmness'. In the process we get a glimpse of what 'feminism' might have looked like in 1842! — Joe Gastright



An important double anniversary.

On 23 March 1983, President Ronald Reagan announced the Strategic Defense Initiative. He called on scientists, "those who gave us the atomic bomb," to turn their great talents to developing a missile defense that would render nuclear weapons "impotent and obsolete." Six years later, on 23 March 1989, the discovery of "cold fusion" was announced. Coincidence? Either that or Nancy Reagan and Stanley Pons used the same astrologer. Remarkably, there has been equal progress on missile defense and cold fusion.

-- *What 's New* by Robert L. Park, 23 March 2001

MIT study calculates the odds on climate change.

The MIT Joint Program on the Science and Policy of Global Change has released an "Uncertainty Analysis of Global Climate Change Projections." The study is meant to improve public understanding of the climate issue. It assumes that the public can grasp a prediction given in terms of the odds. For example: "the median projection shows a global mean surface temperature rise from 1900 to 2100 of 2.5C with a 95% confidence interval of 0.9C to 4.8C." Just how this will fly with a public that is willing to stand in line for hours to buy lottery tickets is yet to be seen.

-- *What 's New* by Robert L. Park, 23 March 2001

India: A Message from God Ganesh

Pallavi Sharma, who calls herself a "Seer", had a message from elephant god Ganesh to deliver. After speaking in trance to the traditional Hindu deity, she called the Airport Authority of India (AAI) and informed that on February 10, exactly at 7.40 p.m. a passenger plane coming from Canada was going to crash over India. The plane, painted red and white, had the number I 298. AAI officials lodged a formal complaint with the police against the caller. Damn sure about the veracity of her prediction, the "Seer" offered herself to be arrested if it did not come true. The AAI officials reacted reasonably and responsibly. Considering the possibility that sabotage might be involved, they did not take any chances and checked the flight manifests. But there was no flight from Canada scheduled to fly in Indian air space at the given time. With greatest discretion, not to cause any unnecessary panic, they passed their information to the senior most officials in all possibly concerned airlines. 7.40 p.m. passed and no air crash was reported. "Canadian time, of course," said the "Seer". 7.40 p.m. Canadian time passed, still nothing happened. Never mind, to err is divine, Ganesh.

Rationalist International, *Bulletin* #65 (14 February 2001)

Quackwatch - some URLS

Stephen Barrett, M.D. Board Chairman
Vice President and Director of Internet Operations,
NCAHF
(National Council Against Health Fraud)

sbinfo@quackwatch.com (Stephen Barrett, M.D.)

Newsletter subscription information is at
<http://www.ncahf.org/digest/chd.html>

The archives are at
<http://www.ncahf.org/digest/index.html>

other web sites:

URL#1: <http://www.quackwatch.com>

URL#2: <http://www.chirobase.org>

URL#3: <http://www.mlmwatch.org>

URL#4: <http://www.nutriwatch.org>

URL#5: <http://www.ncahf.org>

Editor, Consumer Health Digest <http://www.ncahf.org/digest/chd.html>

Weekly column: <http://www.canoe.ca/HealthAlternative/home.html>



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

The Piri Reis Map of 1513

by Gregory McIntosh

(Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000)

The Piri Reis manuscript world map is famous for showing accurate coast lines in the Caribbean, of eastern South America, and even the northern coasts of the Antarctic. In 1513 Ferdinand Magellan had not yet set out on his journey around South America and the Globe. Columbus completed his last voyage to the Caribbean in 1504. Pedro Álvares Cabral had returned from his discovery of Brazil in 1501. The narrative of Amerigo Vespucci about South America appeared in 1507, and neither he nor any other explorer had traveled south of 25° south latitude. The very first world map which included the new continent was prepared by Juan de la Cosa in 1500. Consider also that news spread no faster than a man could travel, and that it took Piri Reis years to compile his map.

How could a man in a remote and backward country like Turkey compile a more accurate map than anything possibly known at the time. Surely he must have had help from magic or clairvoyance, from ancient civilizations, or perhaps from extraterrestrials. A long list of authors have drawn on this map to prove their pet theories. Charles Berlitz, Erich von Däniken, Rupert T. Gould, Charles Hapgood, and Donald E. Keyhoe are among the many. Graham Hancock used the map to support his claim for an ancient Antarctic civilization in *Fingerprints of the Gods*. He and Ivan van Sertima on *They came before Columbus* were reviewed in these pages.

In this book Gregory McIntosh shows that there is absolutely nothing on the Piri Reis map which was not possible in 1513. The miracle and mystery mongers are all mistaken.

Far from a backward country Turkey was a major power in the sixteenth century. The Ottoman Empire dominated the Mediterranean and controlled the sea route to India via the Red and Arabian Seas. Only after

the battle of Lepanto against the Christian Holy League in 1571 did the Turks lose control of the Mediterranean.

The map compiler was named Muhiddin Piri, and he was a Reis, that is an admiral in the Turkish fleet. He commanded ships, and fought in several battles throughout the Mediterranean. He was well aware of the exploration of the western Christian powers. In a book Piri describes the capture of Spanish ships in a sea battle in 1501. It is on this occasion that he obtained a map of Columbus from a prisoner. Thus there was nothing supernatural or extra-terrestrial in his collection of information. No obscure pre-ice age civilization or ancient astronauts need be posited, nor did Piri collect data from Atlantis.

McIntosh compares the Piri Reis map section for section and coast for coast not only with modern maps, but also with contemporary maps of the early sixteenth century. It is very easy to identify squiggles on old maps with modern headlands and peninsulas. By examining also the achievements of other cartographers of the period, McIntosh shows the Piri Reis map to be a good example of its type, but no different from comparable efforts.

Specifically, McIntosh is able to document Piri's sources for coast lines south of 25°S latitude from similar contemporary maps. He also shows that what enthusiasts have called the Antarctic represents nothing more than the Great Southern Continent drawn on maps since Ptolemy in the second century. Geographic scientists hypothesized there must be this great continent in the southern hemisphere, for how else could the rotating Earth stay in balance. A gyroscope which has all its weight in the northern hemisphere land masses, would soon begin to tumble.

None of the coasts south of 25° drawn by Piri are either accurate or in the right place. The so-called Antarctic on the Piri Reis map extends north of forty degrees south latitude, the real Antarctic does not extend beyond seventy. McIntosh has redrawn many parts and sections of the Piri Reis map to the scale and projection of other maps for comparison. The book is clearly a labor of love, which took the author many years to complete. Sources are profusely footnoted. This volume is invaluable for dealing with a whole host of mistaken notions in history.

— Wolf Roder

*As Nature Made Him:
The Boy Who Was Raised as a Girl*
by John Colapinto
(New York: HarperCollins, 2000)

This book is a shocker. Everything you have heard from the post-modern, radical feminist cultural studies people about how science is merely another set of opinions of white males, with no more truth value than any other human opinion, in this instance it is all true. Here medicine and psychology combined to force innocent infants and their unwitting parents into a mold just because scientists were sure it was so.

David Reimer suffered a terrible accident as a baby. His penis was burned off in a bungled circumcision by cauterization. John Money, an international psychological expert on gender health talked the parents into reassigning the infant to the female sex and raising him as a girl. This was the style of the time in the sixties, when popular wisdom and women's liberation argued sex is a mere matter of socialization. The idea that upbringing alone mattered was pervasive, so that bringing a perfectly normal boy up as a girl seemed the clinching experiment. Just to make sure that testosterone would not turn the boy into a man, the doctors cut off what was left of the penis and castrated him to boot.

It did not work. From the time he developed consciousness and could talk the "little girl" knew something wasn't right. The older he became, the less right it was, and the more he resisted returning to John's Hopkins University, the Gender Identity Clinic, and injections of estrogen. The moment at age fourteen when he was finally told the truth about his sex and accident, he insisted on returning to being a boy, and did so.

It is not as if there were no cautious voices, solid research which indicated a penis and testicles alone do not a man make. The shocking thing is that Dr. John Money and the gender identity people at Johns Hopkins insisted all was well with the "little girl" despite the fact his parents, his twin brother, his classmates, and all the relatives knew things were not going at all well. Even his local doctors in Winnipeg were dubious about this surgical and hormonal sex change, but were outvoted by the "experts" in Baltimore. John Money simply ignored the facts and insisted all was well, not only with this boy, but with the many ambiguous children he had sex assigned by surgery. The book's author gives the impression Money is more interested in arguing with his

adversaries and settling scores with his academic enemies than discovering reality.

Colapinto discusses other victims of sex assignment. These were boys born with ambiguous sex organs, generally with a very tiny penis. Now adults, many of them have started a protest movement against gender surgery. Don't mutilate them, let the babies grow up and make their own decision on which sex they are more comfortable with. The medical scene in general has shifted, but Dr. Money remains adamant he was right.

I came away with a great respect for the Reimer family. The Reimers are not sophisticated people, but members of the hard working, god fearing salt of the earth class. The initial accident, the pain of decision, the strain on the marriage make the mother doubt God. But the family struggles on to cope against adversity with spirit, with love, and with good sense. David Reimer today is a steady worker, who is married to a loving woman, and has adopted her three children as his own. As he says, "what makes you a man is you treat your wife well, you put a roof over your family's head, you're a good father." (P. 271)

— Wolf Roder



Of course we psychics know exactly where the stock market is going, but it would be unethical to make use of that.

— bio-astrologer Esmeralda von Löwenzahn-Dentdelion

No same sex marriage in Dubya land:



In the State of Texas gay marriages are definitely not legal. Clerks are required by law to issue marriage licenses only to couples of one genetic male and one genetic female! That's no problem to Jessica Wicks and Robin Manhart. Although Robin was born male she is a transsexual who now considers herself female. But because Robin remains genetically a male, the Bexar County Clerk had no choice but to issue the couple a marriage license. With protesters marching around outside, they were married at the Metropolitan Community Church in San Antonio. One state legislator shrugged, "You can't make laws to cover every little detail." (AP)

*Free for all..... from page 1**Every Ground Hog Has His or Her Day*

Treasurer Rick Prairie followed with Ground Hog's Day traditions, beginning with a description of hardy members of St. John's Unitarian Church who meet at dawn at the gazebo in Mt. Storm Park to determine whether the ground hog can see her shadow. Usually this is obvious enough, but on occasion the group has had to resort to voting to tell when spring will come. Voting on the Ground Hog's weather forecast seems a particularly democratic approach to reading oracles.

Ground Hog's day is celebrated on February 2, the cross quarter day that marks the half way point between the Winter Solstice and the Spring Equinox. This is the day ground hogs are believed (by the gullible and those who believe a ground hog is a useful marketing tool) to come out of their burrows to check on their shadows.

A shadow sighting means six more weeks of ground hog hibernation, and six more weeks of winter. No shadow, and spring is on its way, will be here in about six weeks. The difference between these two predictions may be a bit difficult for some to discern, but is clear enough to the susceptible.

February, 2 was once celebrated by European pagans, who passed the custom to Christians, some of whom still celebrate it as Candlemas. Now the major celebrants are those promoting tourism. Who would ever have heard of Punxsutawney PA if it weren't for the promotional talents of the alleged local ground hog, Punxsutawney Phil.

"Golden" Ears, Tin Brains

Roy then treated us to a summary of an article in *The Audio Critic*, the only audio magazine battling the tides of audiophilic pseudoscience in the world of high fidelity, which is plagued by a great deal of flawed thinking, not to mention out and out fraud. Among the ten biggest lies in audio, *Audio Critic* included the notion that the more expensive the cable, the better the sound produced. The most egregious example of this are the Monster cables, which cost a bundle, but like other expensive cables, do no better job than your run of the mill inexpensive cable.

Audiophiles have also been quite capable of convincing themselves that vacuum tubes definitely make better sounding amplifiers than do transistors. There is even a gadget which makes ugly transistor

amplifiers sound like beautiful vacuum tube amplifiers, by adding a soup on of vacuum tube noise.

Other audiophiles rely on amplifiers wired with silver wire to produce truly beautiful sound. This is mainly the sound of money, since such wire makes no detectable difference in the sound produced, but does cost something like \$7000.

Audiophiles seem to be obsessed with cables, even believing that cables take weeks or months to "burn in," and do not produce good sound until they are properly "burned in." There is no known evidence or theory to support this claim.

Some of these audio myths come close to magical thinking. Marking the edge of a CD with green marker does not, alas, improve the sound anymore than waving a fairy wand at it. And playing music backwards does not produce intelligible speech.

Fanny Wright or Wrong, but Always Heard

A.R.T. member Randy Weaver described the life of Fanny Wright, an extraordinary and unconventional woman who promoted scientific thinking, and indeed free thinking, among many other social causes she espoused. Born in Scotland in a time of intellectual ferment and skepticism, Fanny decided early that Christianity was unworthy of belief..

She and her sister, independently wealthy, came to the United States early in the 19th century. They met, lived and worked with many of the major thinkers of the day, including Jeremy Bentham, Lafayette, and Thomas Jefferson, and Andrew Jackson and Frances Trollope.

Fanny undertook a utopian anti-slavery effort, establishing a commune in Tennessee to shelter slaves and move them to freedom. This effort fell flat on its face, and ended with Fanny's taking the slaves to Haiti, and releasing them to freedom there.

She also gave public lectures, an extremely unusual activity for a woman of that time. Opposed to slavery, in favor of education, opposed to religion, in favor of rational thinking, she made her often unpopular views known far and wide. For about a decade she was easily the best known as well as the most reviled woman in the United States. She died in the 1850's, and was buried at Spring Grove Cemetery in Cincinnati.

Synchronicities Out of Sync?

A.R.T. member Charles Hughes presented

evidence that he felt showed that he had experienced psychic experiences called “synchronicities.” Synchronicities are unusual coincidences that appear meaningful to the person experiencing them. For example, his records were lost during World War II, insuring that he was not sent to the front. He believes that there is special meaning attached to this event, making it a synchronicity. Other members argued that coincidences happen all the time, but that we remember only the unusual ones, ones that are meaningful to us, and that the synchronicity is just a normal coincidence that is memorable.

-- Reported by Virginia Jergens.



Anne-Sophie ate nothing and took three sips of champagne.

“The thing is,” she said to her friends Victoire and Céline, “everyone in America has a private automobile because there are no trains. It is so vast, there is almost no way of getting from here to there. They had to get rid of trains because of a buffalo problem, something like that, the corpses of the buffaloes on the tracks — but this was a long time ago of course, and they just got out of the habit of trains. Hence it is nearly impossible to get to certain places in America. One is called South Dakota — it is romantic, no?”

—Diane Johnson, *Le Mariage* p. 280

Details of Upcoming Events...

14 April 2001

Topic: Oliver Wendell Holmes as Skeptic

Speaker: William B. Jensen, PhD; Oesper Professor of History of Chemistry; Dept. of Chemistry, University of Cincinnati



Most people are aware of Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. as a minor, mid-19th century, New England author, best known for his humorous poems, his famous “Breakfast” collections of pithy sayings and witty commentaries, and the fact that he was the father of Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. of Supreme Court Fame. However, Holmes was also a trained medical doctor who served as Professor of Anatomy and Physiology at Harvard for more than 35 years and pioneered the study of puerperal (child-birth) fever. Even less known is the fact that he also wrote several exposés of the crank medical and psychological practices of his day. The talk will review Holmes’ activities as a skeptic, as reflected in both his serious medical essays and in his more popular humorous writings.

12 May 2001

Topic: Quack Use of Standardized Tests

Speaker: Joe Gastright, EdD; ART member & past president

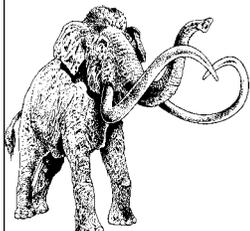
The current political rush to evaluate students, teachers and schools using norm-referenced tests, or worse, so called “Mastery Tests” built with discriminating test items, will fail to produce improvements in learning. Learn why these tests will fail!



09 June 2001

Field trip?

How 'bout a visit to Big Bone Lick State Park in KY? And then a picnic? Maybe invite the folks from KASES? BBLSP is 22 miles SW of Covington, KY and is recognized as the “birthplace of American vertebrate paleontology.”



Drake Equation...from page 1

nuclear fusion occurs, and heavier elements are formed. It takes about two billion years for a star to grow heavy enough to explode. When a star explodes, it scatters the heavy elements that have formed in its center, providing material to form planets

Roughly 50 billion of our original 100 billion stars are older stars at the core of the galaxy with little of the heavy elements needed to form planets. They must be eliminated from our count. The center of the galaxy also

star population. So we can take 10% of 50 billion stars, or 5 billion, as the number of stars that may have planets revolving around them.

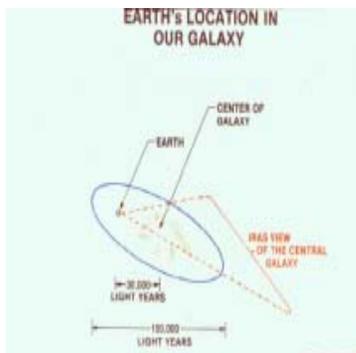
There are other configurations that are not conducive to the establishment of life which we must also subtract from our total: binary stars, which would heat the planets too much. Planets with elliptical orbits must also be eliminated, because they travel too far from their star to receive the heat necessary for life. Planets must be located within the "life zone," near enough to their star to be warm enough, but not too

The Drake Equation: $N =$ the number of civilized planets in this galaxy

$$N_{\text{stars}} \times f_{\text{planets}} \times n_{\text{earthlike}} \times f_{\text{withlife}} \times f_{\text{intelligence}} \times f_{\text{civilization}} \times f_{\text{lifetime}} = N$$

includes globular clusters of stars 20,000 to 30,000 light years across which rotate around the center core of old stars. These clusters are also old stars, unlikely to have enough heavy elements to form planets. So we must subtract these cluster stars from our total number of stars. About half of the remaining stars are cluster stars, which reduces our total number of stars to about 25 billion.

Next we need to find how many of the remaining stars are likely to have planets. We could estimate the number of stars that might have planets by estimating how many other stars there are in the galaxy that are like our Sun. The Sun is a class G star. G stars are younger than the old core and cluster stars that we eliminated.



Since they are younger and include materials from older, exploded stars, they include more heavy elements from which planets can form. G stars also make up about 4% of the younger stars, so we could conclude that 4% of our remaining 25 billion stars

might have planets.

But recent research suggests that the number of stars in the galaxy with planets may be larger than this 4%. Stars found to have "Doppler wobble" are thought to wobble because they have planets rotating around them. These wobbling stars make up about 10% of the younger

warm, to support life. Only planets rotating on a stable axis can support life, because an unstable axis means unending, rapid changes in climate. When all of these are taken into consideration, about five out of every 10,000 stars are likely to have planets that likely to be able to support life.

Beyond estimating the number of planets that might support life, there are a number of other imponderables. How many of these might support intelligent life? How many would develop radio? How many years would they take to develop radio? How long do civilizations last? Long enough to overlap with other, distant civilizations? Are intelligent civilizations likely to develop and maintain science? Or is science sometimes lost, as it was on Earth during the Dark Ages?

We arrived at the end of the meeting without a number for N , but with a better grasp of how tiny the possibility of other intelligent life in the galaxy is. As Terry said, this exercise is likely to diminish the probability that we will see a flash of light in the sky and immediately decide it is certainly extraterrestrials spying on Earth.



--Reported by Virginia Jergens.

Healthy Holy Water

by Alice Shirrell Kaswell,

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(AIR)

Holy water is a simple variant of a chemical compound composed of two parts hydrogen to one part oxygen that has long fascinated scientists. A report by Doug Payne of Dublin, Ireland, in the January 27, 2001 issue (vol. 322, p. 190) of the *British Medical Journal*



brings new information as to the health effects of this remarkable fluid. Payne found that: Three 14 year old girls from County Kildare were the latest to examine fonts at local churches after one of them developed a rash on her forehead after blessing herself with holy water. Tiny green worms about half a centimetre long turned up in one font they tested while large quantities of dirt showed up in others.

This is, of course, but the latest in a series of such investigations by the scientific community. Payne describes other recent work. The earlier work, though is ignored only at one's peril. We at the *Annals of Improbable Research* recommend several of the more pungent reports.

Holy Tlacote

First up is "Amebiasis from the 'Miraculous water of Tlacote,'" Sharon L. Reed, Charles E. Davis, and Horacio Jinich, *The New England Journal of Medicine*, (vol. 332, no. 10, March 1995, pp. 687-88.) The author warns pilgrims not to drink holy water at the religious shrine in Tlacote, Mexico, lest they suffer a disease-causing amoebal infection.

Holy Hospital

Next is the classic "Holy water—a risk factor for hospital-acquired infection," J.C. Rees and K.D. Allen, *Journal of Hospital Infection*, (vol. 32, no. 1, January 1996, pp. 51-5) The authors, who are at Whiston Hospital, Prescot, Merseyside, UK, explain:

A case of hospital-acquired infection due to *Acinetobacter baumannii* in a burns patient after exposure to holy water is described. In order to assess the infection risk, 13 samples of holy water were cultured for bacteria, (including *legionellae*) and yeasts. Viable bacterial counts ranged from 1.3×10^3 — 3.8×10^8 cfu/L (mean 3.1×10^7 cfu/

L). A wide range of bacterial species was isolated including *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, *Enterobacter* spp. *Escherichia coli* and *Aeromonas hydrophila*. *Candida* spp. were isolated from two samples, but *legionellae* from none.

Holy water would, therefore, seem to be a potential risk factor for hospital-acquired infection.

Holy Radishes

Finally (for now), may we recommend the seminal work that can and must be described as "inspirational": "Effects of Holy Water on the Growth of Radish Plants," Sandra Lenington, *Psychological Reports*, (vol. 45, 1979, pp. 381-2) The author states that she undertook this research to disprove prior claims that Holy Water has an effect on the growth of radish plants. She reports success in doing so.

***A Puzzle for Thinkers*****How many sides?**

Consider a regular polygon with interior angles of 165° ; how many sides would such a polygon have?

Solution to last months problem:

Professors to be paid five percent per year, or 22 percent over five years?

Use a calculator with a natural logarithm (ln) button. The basic formula for compound interest, i.e exponential increase is: $N_t = N_0 e^{rt}$ where N_0 is original income N_t is income after t years, and r is the rate of increase. Solving for $r = .05$ shows the professors would make 128 percent of their present salary, while solving for $N_t = 1.22$ shows r to be just under 4 percent.

For a student whose name is Kathleen,
With a mind that's not overly keen,
Graduation is sure,
As she's hardly demure
And has often been seen with the Dean.



A.R.T. Business



Executive Council News

Every other month A.R.T.'s officers devote an entire Saturday morning to keeping A.R.T. organized and on course. These productive, noisy meetings are open to all A.R.T. members.

At the January meeting, the Council decided to authorize Program Chairman Brad Bonham to pay modest travel expenses and honoraria to speakers who require them. Brad believes this will greatly increase our ability to attract good speakers.

Vice-President Lance Moody suggested that we consider saving postage and printing costs by e-mailing the newsletter as a PDF file to members who would prefer to receive it in that form. A PDF file is a standard format which would allow most computers to receive and print out the newsletter as it appears originally on paper. At the March membership meeting, three members indicated interest in this alternative.

The March council meeting produced a new record: Membership Secretary Nurit Bowman reported that we have 105 members, the most ever. Program Chair Brad Bonham has reserved a picnic shelter at Big Bone Lick for our June meeting, a field trip to the park which will include a 90 minute guided walking tour of the site, known since the early 19th century for its mammalian fossils.

According to Web Master David Wall 48 people are now subscribed to SANE, our skeptics's news e-mail list. You can subscribe to the list at our web site, www.cincinnati-skeptics.org. Recently about 230 visits a day have been made to the web site. The most visited page

is Skeptical Blurbs, brief skeptical statements on a variety of topics. The most requested blurbs are "The Vindication of Edwin Stanton" and "Spontaneous Human Combustion."

We also tidied up our by-laws. After years of confusing the Membership Chairperson with the Membership Secretary, we renamed the Membership Committee the Recruitment Committee. Recruitment Chair Brad Bonham will continue to recruit members, and Membership Secretary Nurit Bowman will continue to maintain membership records as before. The By-Laws are available at www.cincinnati-skeptics.org. or from Secretary Virginia Jergens.

The council also made plans to send Newsletter Editor Wolf Roder to a meeting of representatives of many local skeptics's groups loosely associated with CSICOP. CSICOP is providing a \$200 stipend, which the Council will supplement. The meeting will be held April 21 and 22 at CSICOP headquarters in Amherst, New York.

The goal is to find ways to increase the impact of the local groups through working together and with CSICOP.

The next meeting will be held Saturday, May 5, 10:00 A.M. - 12:00

Noon, at the Bethesda Blue Ash Medical Building on the corner of Cooper Road and Reid Hartman Highway. All members welcome!

-- Reported by Virginia Jergens.

Membership Duration

The ART Executive Council approved a proposal to have all memberships start in late Summer, in order to coordinate membership with our fiscal year, from 1 August to 31 July of the next year. This will allow us to mail renewal requests only once a year in the Fall.



Charlton Heston, president of the National Rifle Association, presented a talk at Carleton College. The student audience laid out 178 pairs of shoes to represent the number of Minnesotans killed by gun violence in 1999. Heston spoke for fewer than 15 minutes and left without answering questions.

— AP, 20 September 2000

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. P.O. 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; skepticismag@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 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 Lance Moody (513) 336-9835 or visit our website. **Address Changes and Corrections, Membership Questions:** Nurit Bowman (513) 731-0642 E-mail: nuritb@netscape.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 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; 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>

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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....

Eighth Meeting of the 2000-2001 Season! *Date and Day: Sat. Apr 14, 2001*

Topic: Oliver Wendell Holmes as Skeptic

Speaker: William B. Jensen, PhD; Oesper Professor of History of Chemistry
Dept. of Chemistry, University of Cincinnati

Place: Vernon Manor -- watch your mail for details to follow!

See page 7 for Details --

Ninth Meeting of the 2000-2001 Season! *Date and Day: Sat. May 12, 2001*

Topic: Quack Use of Standardized Tests

Speaker: Joe Gastright, EdD; ART member & past president

See page 7 for Details --

Tenth Meeting of the 2000-2001 Season! *Date and Day: Sat. June 9, 2001*

Field trip to Big Bone Lick State Park??.....

Mark your Calendars, watch for Details!

Time: 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM -- program -->12:15PM - 2:00 PM Lunch.

WATCH YOUR MAIL FOR DETAILS ON WHERE AND LUNCH

Please mark your calendar and plan to attend!

See you there!