



Cincinnati Skeptic

Newsletter of The Association for Rational Thought

Vol. 11 No. 5

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Without the thinner of common sense, the law is a toxic substance.

— Janet Malcolm, *The Crime of Sheila McGough*



© by Spanish artist Pablo

“I’m beginning to feel sick....”

“It’s true, like these days all foods are polluted.”

February Meeting

Undercover Among the Spirits

Joe Nickell, noted skeptic and investigator of the paranormal at the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal in Amherst, New York, spoke to A.R.T. members at the February meeting.

Thirty years of investigating have persuaded Joe that the closed minded skeptic is just as unfortunate as the closed minded believer. Both start with the answer and work backwards to the evidence. Instead of top down, mindless skepticism, Joe promotes ground up skepticism, beginning by visiting crop circles or talking to the abductee, gathering evidence as an interested but not judgmental investigator.

The advantages of this approach are many. Joe does not expect to find ghosts when he investigates a haunting, because he knows of no scientific way that ghosts could exist. But instead of dismissing people who believe in ghosts as fools, he works toward coming to know them, and in talking to them, to discover the optical or auditory illusions that have misled them, and which

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March Meeting

When Good Vaccines Go Bad

Our March speaker, Dr. Elaine Billmire is a practicing pediatrician in Cincinnati. Her talk had two parts. She started by reviewing current thinking about viral and bacterial diseases, and the kinds of vaccines used. The second half of her talk addressed three recent cases which raised questions if vaccines have created serious illness in some recipients. Her review demonstrated that the medical profession takes such possibilities seriously. Investigations in each case have shown the concerns unfounded.

About infectious diseases and vaccines

Infection may be defined as “the multiplication of microorganisms within a host accompanied by local and/or systemic symptoms.” The most common types of infection are caused by bacteria and viruses. Examples of bacterial infections are Diphtheria, Pertussis, Tetanus, and Pneumonia. Viruses are composed of an RNA or DNA strand surrounded by a protein sheath and reproduce by infecting cells and hijacking the cell’s mechanism to reproduce themselves. Examples are Polio, Measles, Mumps, Rubella, Varicella (Chicken Pox), and Hepatitis B.

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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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ART Business

**Executive Council nominations for next year:****President:** Roy Auerbach**Vice-President:** Rick Davis**Secretary:** Virginia Jergens**Treasurer:** Rick Prairie**Recruitment Committee Chair and Membership Secretary:**

Brad Bonham

Investigations Officer: Terry Endres**Newsletter Editor:** Wolf Roder**Publicity Coordinator:** Bryan Sellers**Web Master:** David Wall**Meeting Organizer:** Roy Auerbach.

No Program Committee Chair was nominated.

Program Committee members:

Rick Davis, Roy Auerbach, and Lance Moody.

No Media Coordinator was nominated, but Randy Weaver offered to help the Executive Council plan ways to collect and distribute information to the media.

Bob and Diane Streifthau will become Publicity Committee members, publicize meetings in the Dayton area, and provide transportation from Dayton to meetings.

Lance Moody will design, print, and mail meeting postcards, formerly part of the Meeting Organizer's job.

Further nominations and discussion will be held at the April meeting. Elections will be held at the May meeting.

THE TOP TEN SKEPTIC BOOKS (number of votes)

About a year ago Michael Shermer asked the readers of his *Skeptic Hotline* to suggest the best skeptical books. Here are the top ten recommendations of the about 300 readers who responded, together with the number of votes for each book.

1. The Demon Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark
by Carl Sagan (42)
2. Why People Believe Weird Things by Michael Shermer (29)
3. Flim Flam!: Psychics, ESP, Unicorns and Other Delusions
by James Randi (21)
4. Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science by Martin Gardner (10)
5. How to Think About Weird Things
by Theodore Schick and Lewis Vaughn (10)
6. The Faith Healers by James Randi (8)
7. How We Believe by Michael Shermer (8)
8. The New Age: Notes of a Fringe Watcher by Martin Gardner (6)
9. The Mismeasure of Man by Stephen Jay Gould (4)
10. Voodoo Science: The Road From Foolishness to Fraud
by Robert L. Park (4)

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

*Heavenly Errors: Misconceptions
about
the real Nature of the Universe*
by Neil F. Comins
(New York: Columbia University
Press, 2001)

The author of this volume is an astronomer, who accepts that many of us are misinformed about the universe, and that we persist in harboring all sorts of misconceptions. He considers that much of nature simply does not work to our expectations. Here is an example from his introduction. We fail to appreciate that “objects of differing weights fall at the same speed;” (p. ix). But do they really? They do in the world of Galileo or of a physicist, in space, or in a total vacuum. In the real world however a large object falls more slowly than a small one of the same weight. This is because of atmospheric resistance, which is really friction with the air, of course. Since none of us ever view the world in a vacuum, we are not all that wrong. Other things Comins mentions, that time slows down the faster we travel, or that the bulk of plant matter comes out of the air, are not accessible to our direct sense observation. The author admits that most of our understanding of space, time, matter, and energy do conform to common sense understanding. He comments: “Our brains evolved to help us survive, not to comprehend the cosmos. But as a by-product of that evolution, we have minds that want, or rather, need to understand how the natural world operates.” (p. ix).

Comins introduces us to the world of the astronomer and physicist. His book is an excellent source for learning science and how this differs from “common sense.” Throughout his narrative the author examines the why and how we fail to see, and the logical fallacies we love. Science, to take another example, hasn’t disproved the existence or visits of extra-terrestrial aliens to earth. So does that mean they are here? Wrong, *Occams razor* indicates, don’t believe in something unless there is evidence for it. And there is none for aliens. We mistake logical for physical impossibilities and vice versa. “It is both logically and physically impossible to be a little

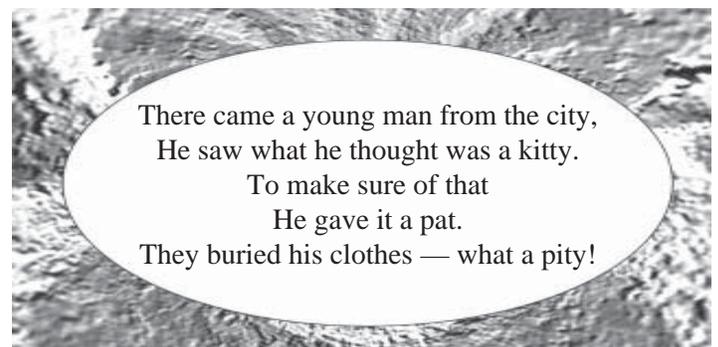
pregnant.” (p. 115) On the other hand to jump directly from New York to Melbourne is merely physically impossible.

There is something to be said for having complete, or at least adequate knowledge. Suppose one hospital or doctor is known to have a significantly higher death rate for heart operations than another. Surely, you would want to check into the hospital with the lesser death rate. That is until you learn the first hospital or doctor gets all the really difficult and dangerous cases and does well by them, while the second bungles even some easy procedures.

Then there is the moon. There are dozens of ways we believe it may affect our behavior. Do we really love more under a full moon? How about an increase of assaults, kidnaping, domestic violence, shootings, stabbings, and accidents, when the moon is full? What about depression or elation, anxiety and suicides, violence and 911 calls under the bright light of the moon. In fact there have been dozens of studies of most of these activities which show no change whatsoever with the waxing or the waning of the moon. But, then there are always a few which do show a correlation between some specific action and the moon. All of which leads Comins into explaining a minimum of statistical reasoning, which is one of the more difficult tools in the scientists lab.

The book is packed with sound knowledge, also diagrams and photographs. It is one of the most enjoyable ways of learning. In fact, it goes down easy.

— Wolf Roder



There came a young man from the city,
He saw what he thought was a kitty.
To make sure of that
He gave it a pat.
They buried his clothes — what a pity!

Getting on Top ...

Work Cover, the employee protection service of New South Wales -- that’s a state in Australia -- has issued new safety guidelines for sex workers. Published as a special report, the instructions warn against loose bed frames, unsanitary conditions, venereal diseases and — yes — repetitive motion injuries. The report’s title: “Getting on Top of Health and Safety”. (AP, Australia)

We Remember Phil Bonham

C. Philip Bonham died on Saturday, January 26th at the age of 74, after a brief and tragic hospitalization. His wife, Jeanne, and daughter, Brad, were at his side as they have been throughout the very good life they shared for so many years. They shared him with many others as well, which together with his forty-year successful career in management at Proctor and Gamble became the hallmark of Phil Bonham's life. If a friend, or even a friend of a friend, had a problem calling for an analytical approach, Phil got a call. He had the mind of a brilliant engineer and a heart with no room for refusal. Generosity defined him. Both his time and resources were given without expectation of anything more than a casual thank you. Never flashy, always quiet and apparently calm, while in reality fervent in support of the causes he believed in, he stood up for his principles even if it meant placing himself in harms way.

Married to Jeanne S. Bonham 48 years ago, at a time when women's careers were typically subordinated to that of their husbands, Phil recognized in Jeanne the passion of a front-line fighter for the causes they both espoused. He made it possible for Jeanne to return to graduate school, and in this way facilitated what became "their" career of community worker and planner, she the more public, he never calling attention to himself but always involved in the effort behind the scenes.

Phil was both a loving parent and best friend to their daughter, J. Bradford Bonham. They shared a daily love of science, computers, nature, music and life's ever changing directions. He served as a member of the Ski Troops during World War II. After moving to Cincinnati, Phil served on the 4C Board at the Community Chest for a number of years. He was a member of the First Unitarian Church for 48 years. At his workplace, Phil could bring the engineers and the merchants together with the skill of one who knew how to enhance the thinking of each of them for a common good result, comfortable subordinating his own ego.

Prominent civil rights attorney Al Gerhardstein said "Phil Bonham was a steadfast supporter of women and a true seeker of justice. He served as an escort at the Planned Parenthood clinic for many years, including the period in the mid-80's when we had hundreds of protestors blocking women from entering the clinic. Phil was always calm and determined. He recently participated in the Collaborative on Police-Community Relations. He was diligent in his work and an articulate advocate for true reconciliation. Cincinnati has lost a great citizen."

Administrative Law Judge Thomas F. Phalen came to know Phil Bonham well over the years the Judge served with Phil's wife, Jeanne, on the Board of Trustees of the University of Cincinnati and came to cherish his company. He said, "while I believe that I never heard him say an unkind word about anyone, he was an artist when it came to raising his point about an issue that could only be defined in terms of one person, by posing a question of befuddlement and saying; 'I wonder if they ever considered doing . . .?' At the end of the question, it usually contained both the answer and at least some suspicion about the identity of the person, without ever an indictable act of defamation!"

Well known Cincinnati photographer, Gordon Baer, was both teacher and student to Phil. "He had a ravenous interest in people, and always an open mind toward a different point of view as well as a great enthusiasm for the way things worked, not just mechanically but also societally. He even expressed an interest in hanging out in Over the Rhine to better understand what the reasons were behind the April demonstrations."

Former Cincinnati Mayor Bobbie Sterne added, "Phil was a tremendously sympathetic and supportive person who had compassion for a wide range of humanity. He was always there when called upon to help out." Phil died too quickly and unexpectedly for his many friends to thank him for all

he had done for them and put into words the love they felt for this caring,
intelligent man who gave of himself so freely.

-- Written by: Bea V. Larsen

Nickell from page 1...

someday might mislead him. When we learn how someone else has been fooled, we learn something about ourselves, because we, too, will be fooled. According to Joe, the person who thinks he can't be fooled has just fooled himself. Joe's goal is to undertake investigation in the spirit of open, friendly inquiry. He has more fun and makes more friends than he would promoting hard-nosed skepticism.

Among other snooping activities, Joe has worked as a professional stage magician at the Houdini Hall of Fame and as a detective for Pinkerton. He has also done undercover work infiltrating grand theft rings, but has become too well known to work undercover anymore. He has even been recognized at Mary sightings, not a good sign for an undercover skeptic.



So his work in spiritualism has not been truly undercover. Instead, Joe relies on friendliness and kindly interest to maintain good

working relationships with the spiritualists he studies. Spiritualism is the belief that we can communicate with the dead. Hauntings are different: chance encounters with ghosts. Spiritualism has a long history, going back at least as far as the time of the Old Testament. The Witch of Endor, consulted by King Saul, claimed to conjure up ghosts.

Modern spiritualism in the United States got its start when sisters Margaret and Catherine Fox decided it would be fun to pretend that they could communicate with a murdered peddler. Forty years later the public learned of their decades of deception when they confessed on stage in New York City that their actions were entirely fraudulent. They were mortified that what had started as a prank had acquired a life of its own, but spiritualism was off and running, spreading across the United States, Europe, Australia and beyond.

The Davenport brothers, like the Fox sisters, made their living demonstrating spirit communication. The brothers claimed to summon spirits who played musical instruments. Their demonstration started with the boys securely tied up, and the instruments in a spirit cabinet. When the lights went down, the instruments could be heard playing in the dark, and when the lights came up again, the brothers would be seen still securely tied.

Their deception surfaced because magician Harry Houdini's interest in the grave of an older Davenport brother, who died in Australia. When Houdini found and restored the neglected grave, the surviving younger brother, touched by Houdini's care, confessed all of their tricks to the famed magician.

Houdini got into spiritualism after his mother died, but

soon decided it was fraudulent, because the spiritualist gave him a message from his mother in English, a language she had never spoken. He learned the tricks of the trade by befriending elderly mediums, especially ones down on their luck, to whom he gave a small pension. This was no problem for him since he was at the time the biggest box office draw in the United States. He became the first investigator of spiritualism.

One trick these mediums used was to completely darken the room in which the consultation with the spirits was held. Then the medium would ask every one to hold hands in order to summon the spirits. While these preliminaries went on, the medium would drop one of the hands he held "to scratch his nose," and quickly put the spirit trumpet on his head. This device said to transmit the voices of the dead was then available for communications, which of course occurred only in the dark. Houdini was able to scotch this trick by loading the trumpet with soot, which revealed the deception when it sifted onto the medium's head.

Other methods have been used by spiritualists, including photographs claimed to be of spirits. While he was teaching at the University of Kentucky at Lexington, Joe was visited by a young man who brought him several "spiritual precipitations on silk," pictures of people on fabric. He told Joe his girlfriend had gone to a medium at Camp Chesterfield, near Chesterfield, Indiana, who had handed her a thumb print sized bit of silk with no picture on it and then in the dark took the silk, summoned the spirits, and returned the fabric to the young woman. When the lights came on, faces were visible on the fabric.

As often happens in paranormal investigation, where standard procedures for evaluating evidence are generally lacking, the next thing Joe did was improvise a means of testing the claim. The pictures resembled photographs: the light all came from one side, and there was a different background in each picture. Guided by a hint from a recipe in a book for making spiritual precipitations, Joe was able to make his own fake pictures, which looked very similar to the faces on the cloth.

The deceit was revealed, and the police alerted. To Joe's great disappointment, the perpetrator could not be charged with a felony, because the pictures had been sold for \$40, one to



each of several buyers. Each sale was considered individually, and did not meet the standard of a felony, even though if all the sales had been considered together, the sales would have been clearly felonious.

Another undercover investigation produced good information about table tipping, the practice of interpreting the comments of the spirits by counting the number of times a spirit allegedly tips a table, in the dark, of course. Table tipping uses a single pedestal table, preferably one balanced on a single spot, so that placing one's hands on the table allows the table to be tipped easily.

One tip means "yes," two tips mean "no." Words can be received from the spirits by spelling the words out laboriously: one tip means A, two tips means B, and so forth. Taking the role of a sympathetic participant, Joe managed to gain entry to a seance held regularly every other week. Over a period of time he received loving messages from assorted aunts and uncles he invented for the occasion and learned a great deal about how table tipping is done. Participants sit holding hands around the table, the room is darkened completely, the medium finds an excuse to let go the hands he is holding and allow the participants on either side of him to hold each other's hands, leaving his free to manipulate the table as necessary.

Joe has also learned a great deal at the Lilydale Assembly, the world's largest center for the religion of spiritualism. Lilydale, about an hour and a half's drive from Buffalo, New York, is a complete village where only bonafide spiritualists are permitted to live. Lilydale's citizens are warm, affectionate people who espouse liberal social and political views and seem entirely normal, except for their habit of talking to the dead.

Joe's initial visits to Lilydale were pretty much undercover, but eventually his cover was blown. Nevertheless he is still accepted there, where he often goes to study in the museum and library, because he nurtured good relationships with the denizens of Lilydale, avoiding unsympathetic remarks, bringing gifts, and carefully cultivating their friendship.

Lilydale is a good place to learn the dynamics of cold readings (in which the medium has no information

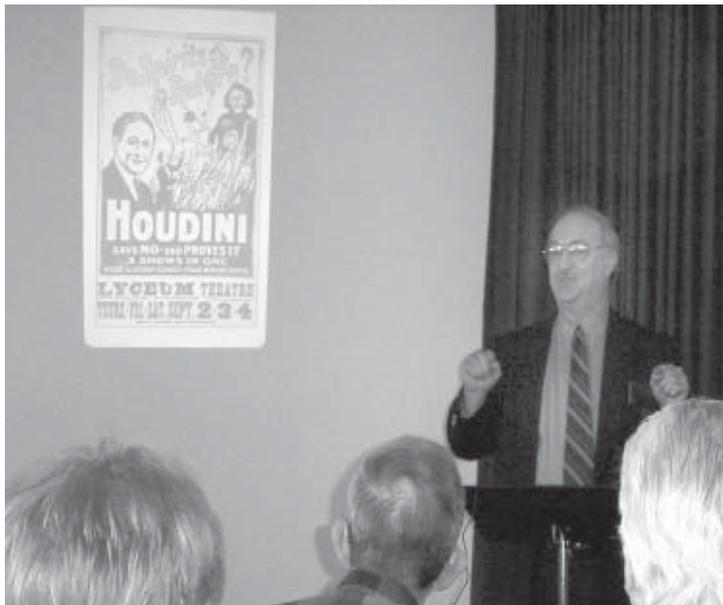
about the person who has requested the reading) and engage in participant observation. Joe has found that while active mediums are unlikely to accept him, just plain spiritualists are more likely to be welcoming.

One participant observation investigation led him to the home of a spiritualist at Lilydale who did not know that in real life Joe is a skeptic. Arriving in the off season, when the locals would be glad to have the business, Joe made an appointment with a woman whose specialty is painting portraits of visitor's spirit guides. Her fee is \$50.

Spirit guides are usually Native Americans, because they are thought to live close to nature, so in the course of chatting with the artist, Joe told her that he thought he had once seen his spirit guide. It was at a time when his life was very troubled, and he had seen a dark skinned man with three yellow feathers who told him that everything would be all right.

The artist told Joe that she was permitted to name the guide, and named him Yellow Bird. Then she proceeded to look into the space over Joe's shoulder, trying to "tune in" Yellow Bird. She said she saw a big, strong man with his hair pulled back, and drew a Native American man, with his hair pulled back and three yellow feathers in his hair. Yellow Bird's portrait now hangs in Joe's office.

Joe's big undercover psychic assignment took him to Camp Chesterfield, an enclave of spiritualists near Chesterfield, Indiana. The



spiritualists at Camp Chesterfield are much more active than those at Lilydale, and much more given to raising money from visitors. The camp offers messages from the dead via spirit trumpets, gifts from the spirit world called apports, spirit precipitations, and billets, another form of message from the dead.

Concerned that he might be recognized, Joe descended on Camp Chesterfield with a complete invented persona. He sacrificed his mustache, put a straw hat on his head, added clip-on dark glasses, the kind that flip up, suspenders, a cane, and white sneakers. He introduced himself as Jim Collins, grieving for his recently deceased mother, who had died of Alzheimer's, to his immense relief, which made him feel very guilty. He limped about Chesterfield, telling everyone his invented story, and visited the museum where although photography is forbidden, some of the spirit paintings in the collection

somehow appeared later on the film in his camera.

Thus prepared, he wandered about the camp, going from house to house signing up for events from the schedules posted at the houses whose owners offered readings, healing seances with apports, spirit writing, and other events featuring communication with those who have gone before. All of these also featured hefty fees, except for the spiritualist church, where billet readings were done for free.

For a billet readings, the inquirer writes the full name of the deceased person they wish to contact, one or two questions, and the inquirer's full name on a piece of paper, and then folds the paper in half. The billets are placed on the podium in the church, where they are mostly hidden from view by the congregation. The medium picks up one billet, and pressing it dramatically to his head, surreptitiously reads another billet, lying open on the podium. His comments, based on the open billet, go something like this: "I have a message for the Collins family. It's from Ella. Is Ella your mother?" and so on.

Joe also signed up for, and paid good money for, a seance promising not only messages but gifts from the great beyond. Participants sat around a table, spirit trumpets lay on the floor, and the room was entirely darkened. Pretty soon

voices were heard emanating from the spirit trumpets, voices that sounded like the mediums trying to imitate an assortment of voices, Black Elk, Miss Poppy, and so on, bringing messages from the garrulous dead to the credulous living. When the lights went up, there was an apport, or gift from the spirit world, on the table for each participant. They were icy cold novelty gem stones,



and came with a warning not to let anybody else touch your stone, because then it would be merely a stone.

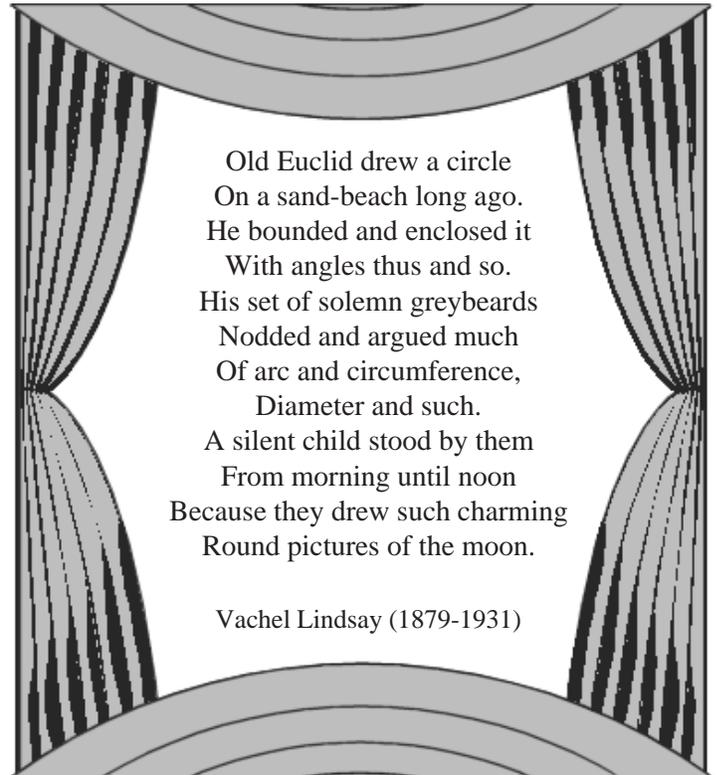
The Camp Chesterfield spiritualists are a hard-nosed but practical bunch, escorting a unmasked reporter firmly off the grounds, but producing only sweetness and light when major donors turned up. They do not belong to the national association of spiritualist churches as Lilydale does, and Lilydale residents roll their eyes at the Chesterfieldians.

In the question period after his talk, Joe said he believed that paranormal beliefs are an enduring part of culture because they fill emotional needs, appealing to people's hopes and fears. Psychological studies have concluded that about four percent of the population is "fantasy prone," a lifelong trait that may first be seen in a belief in imaginary playmates in childhood, as well as belief

in spiritualist practices, visions of Mary, and alien abduction in adulthood. The particular forms of fantasy vary over time. The incubuses and succubuses of the middle ages have been succeeded by the extraterrestrial aliens of today, as enduring psychological needs trump scientific explanation.

-- Reported by Virginia Jergens

Poem In a Box!



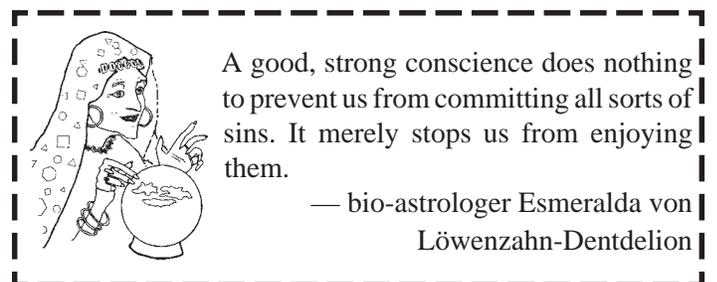
Old Euclid drew a circle
On a sand-beach long ago.
He bounded and enclosed it
With angles thus and so.
His set of solemn greybeards
Nodded and argued much
Of arc and circumference,
Diameter and such.
A silent child stood by them
From morning until noon
Because they drew such charming
Round pictures of the moon.

Vachel Lindsay (1879-1931)

One of the problems I've had with meditation is finding the proper place. My office and home are not ideal, because that's where the phones are. The hospital just up the street has a small, nondenominational chapel, which would be perfect except that I have to share it with people who use the sanctuary to cheat on their diets.

These closet gluttons huddle in the darkest corner of the chapel and painstakingly unwrap their candy bars and Doritos Nacho Cheese Chips. The deafening crinkle of paper drowns out my mantra. Even God cannot hear the prayers of the few devout chapel-goers through all the crackly static from the back of the chapel.

Oscar London, *From Voodoo to Viagra* (2001)



A good, strong conscience does nothing to prevent us from committing all sorts of sins. It merely stops us from enjoying them.

— bio-astrologer Esmeralda von Löwenzahn-Dentdelion

Vaccines from page 1....

Our ability to defend against disease pathogens has improved over the years. Four advances have been the most significant: clean water, improved sanitation, antibiotics, and the topic of this talk, immunization. In advanced countries effective immunization has limited the worst diseases to be known by repute only. Smallpox, an ancient scourge, has been completely eradicated. Polio and measles have decreased worldwide in the last 20 years as vaccination programs spread widely. We hope to eradicate polio completely over the next decades.



Our body responds to infection by trying to develop cell and blood mediated immunities. In a localized infection there is often inflammation. Some processes are not fully understood, but much of our immunity comes from the production of antibodies. These protein molecules bind uniquely to components of the invading microorganisms, called antigens. On infection, our immune system develops unique antibodies to the invaders. Antigenic immunity usually lasts a long time. When the organism invades again, the host's immune system recognizes antigens and generates antibodies to stop reinfection. Babies develop some immunity from the mothers placenta and milk, but immunity to pertussis, diphtheria, and others are not transferred. Vaccine schedules are based on this difference in placental transmission. A child's own immunity will not be stimulated until the mother's immunity wears off.

Vaccines simulate the effects of infectious organisms. For viruses, vaccines can be killed (deactivated) such as the Salk polio and influenza vaccines; live attenuated viruses such as measles and varicella, or protein antigen vaccines created using recombinant technologies like the hepatitis B vaccine created from modified yeast. The attenuated viral type has proven the most effective in bestowing lifelong immunity.

For bacteria, vaccines have used disintegrated whole cells as in the early pertussis vaccine, cell components such as toxins in diphtheria, or membranous coatings such as recent meningitis vaccines. All these cause the body to mount an immune defense.

Doctors have stopped using whole cell vaccines for pertussis. The thousands of antigen components triggered undesirable side effects in a small percentage of children. They now use a specific set of 2-5 pertussis antigens to stimulate immunity. Viral vaccines can produce minor side effects such as rashes and low-grade fever. Immune deficient or damaged individuals sometimes develop the full disease; the medical community tries to screen for this before problems occur.

It is important to immunize Children. They are more susceptible to infectious disease and have higher death and illness rates. Children are more likely to spread infection.

Also, it is easier to guarantee that all individuals are vaccinated, because attendance at schools can be made dependent on proper immunization. There are risks in immunizing young children, as it may be difficult to determine if their immune system is normal. Vaccines are started as early as two months, doctors wait a year or more to give others.

When good vaccines go bad

It is always possible that a medical treatment is approved for use by the public, but turns out to have unintended side effects. One vaccine was developed to immunize against rotavirus. Evidence suggested a causal link to intestinal obstruction in a few cases; so the vaccine was withdrawn from use. Vaccines may reach a threshold condition when use becomes widespread, where the risk from the vaccine

approximates the risk from the disease. Sabin oral polio vaccine experienced this. It was very successful because the oral administration induces immunity along the alimentary tract, the most common route of infection. The vaccine itself is excreted for one to two weeks, essentially "infecting" the local water supply and spreading the immunity to others nearby. The last case of polio in the US was reported 1979. Then, since the mid-eighties there have been eight to nine

Scare: A typical example occurred in the 1970's. An otherwise normal child in England (no drugs, good birth, etc.) after getting a DPT vaccination had a seizure for over 15 minutes (typical seizures are less than two minutes long). When he was a year old, he couldn't sit up. At two years of age, he had a further 30-minute febrile seizure. At age 16, he was having seizures 2-3 times a week and is severely limited in abilities. Did the vaccine cause the seizure or was he going to have them anyway? Did the vaccine trigger an existing condition that would have occurred anyway? The timing convinced the parents that the vaccine was the cause of their son's condition. Such cases spurred concern and two major studies. The first in the Northwest Thames region (1975-1981) was a massive study where roughly 134,000 students were given a diphtheria/tetanus shot and about the same number were given diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus. No convincing evidence indicating a causal relationship between DPT and neurological damage appeared. The other study by NCES (1976-1979) looked at 1182 children for a wide range of neurological diseases. Neurological symptoms arose in 35 within seven days of DPT vaccine. The final conclusion assessed the risk of serious neurological disease within seven days as 1 in 300,000. This can not establish a cause and effect link. Strong public scares in England and also in Japan lead to a marked decrease in infant immunizations. After a few years the rate of pertussis infection increased and vaccination efforts were renewed.

cases per year of vaccine induced polio. This has reduced of use of oral vaccine for injected vaccine. Since 2000 injectable polio vaccine has been used primarily throughout the world.

The biggest vaccine controversies have centered on vaccines triggering non-infectious diseases. Some conditions supposedly caused by vaccines include: Febrile seizures,

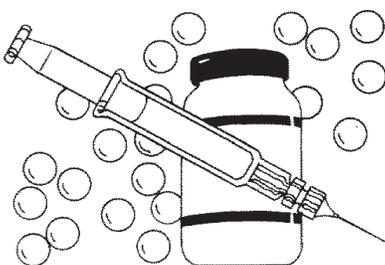


mental retardation, autism and language disorders, attention deficit and learning disorders, cerebral palsy, blindness/deafness, encephalitis and meningitis (including cases where the causative organism was identified!).

Can DPT cause Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)? In 1979 four infants

died in Tennessee over a four months period each within 24 hours of receiving a DPT vaccine. SIDS is the most common cause of infant deaths, affecting 1.5 per thousand live births in the general and 2.82 per thousand in the black population. The cause of SIDS remains unknown, although the incidence rate has been halved recently by insuring infants are left to sleep on their backs not their stomachs. No link between DPT and SIDS can be shown. Merely consider that the peak of SIDS in infants occurs between eight and twelve weeks after birth. DPT vaccine is given at this time. It is easy to observe a statistically correlation suggesting a false cause and effect link.

Measles, mumps, rubella (MMR) vaccine has been accused of causing autism? A 1998 report from the California Department of Development Services showed the number of cases of autism rose 273 percent between 1987 and 1998, suggesting an epidemic. Public concern was triggered by a Dr. Wakefield's 1998 article in the British journal *Lancet*. He reported how parents associated the onset of children's autistic symptoms with the MMR vaccine. Proteins leaking from a chronically inflamed gut into the blood stream could lead to brain inflammation, he speculated, and reported measles like viral particles in gut biopsies of affected children. Subsequent studies by others and by Wakefield himself could not duplicate these results, but public opinion had been affected. Further factors which caused this scare, are a



temporal association as in the past case. A number of autism reports occurred as England was undergoing a "catch up" MMR campaign. Finally, the first signs of autism tend to occur between 15

months and two years as talking begins, that is when MMR vaccine is given.

Other causes have been suggested for the increase of cases of autism. There has been an enhanced awareness of the disease, and the definition for diagnosis has changed in the past decades. Thus, the reported number of cases may have increased without actual increase in incidence. It will take a few years before scientific studies looking for potential causative interactions can be completed. Since 2000 five new studies have examined whether MMR may cause autism. No evidence of a causal relationship and no possible mechanism for a causal relationship could be demonstrated.

— reported by Roy Auerbach

A Puzzle for Thinkers



You will be shot tomorrow:

The dictator informs Charlie he will be executed on the morrow. Charlie begs for his life, he will do anything for a chance to live. So the dictator gives him this chance: "I'll leave you these two bags containing fifty black and fifty white beads. You can mix the beads and fill the bags any way you want. Tomorrow I shall pick a bag, and pick a bead in that bag being blindfolded. If I pick a white bead you'll live, if a black you die."

It has been said that being hanged concentrates the mind wonderfully. What should Charlie do? What distribution of beads into the bags would optimize his chances?

— adapted from © 2000 *Oregonians for Rationality*

Solution to the puzzle in the last issue:

Poetry which mixes languages is known as macaronic verse. Good practice for your career in global commerce.

1. Greek: I lay you down, young woman
3. Latin: I shall love you forever
5. German: Heart's treasure you ask too much
7. French: Isn't it enough that I love you
9. Netherlands: You therefore do not give your love.
11. Spanish: Very large is my heart
13. Italian: You can't put a hole in the water.
15. Hebrew: If you can not rely on me



**Details
of**



Upcoming Events...

Seventh Meeting of the 2001-2002 Season!

Date and Day: Sat. April 13, 2002

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

Topic: Urban Legends

Speaker: Justin Masterson

Eighth Meeting of the 2001-2002 Season!

Date and Day: Sat. May 11, 2002

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

Topic: "Psychic" Readings, Hot & Cold

Speaker: Joe Gastright, EdD, ART member & founder

Last Meeting of the 2001-2002 Season!

Date and Day: Sat. June 8, 2002

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

Topic: "Brew Myths" in words and taste.

Speaker: Ed Westemeier

**Membership Duration
And Dues.....**

All memberships start in August, coordinated 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.

**REMINDER....
IF YOU HAVE NOT
PAID YOUR DUES THEY
ARE LATE!!!
PLEASE PAY/SEND
IN YOUR
MEMBERSHIP DUES
NOW!
SEE THE FORM ON PAGE 11.....**

Science Book-Club Meetings for 2002

All meetings are held at the downtown Cincinnati Public Library in meeting room 3A on the 3rd floor at 2:30 pm on the 4th Sunday of each month unless otherwise specified.

Apr 28 - *The Universal Computer: The Road from Leibniz to Turing* by Martin Davis

May 20 - Monday evening at 5:30 *The Road Since Structure: Philosophical Essays 1970-1993*
by Thomas Kuhn, edited by James Conant and John Haugeland,

June 23 - *Asimov's Chronology Of Science And Discovery* by Isaac Asimov

July 28 - *Animal Minds: Beyond Cognition to Consciousness* by Donald R. Griffin

August 25 - *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: A Medical History of Humanity* by Roy Porter,

Sept 22 - *The Mismeasure of Man* by Stephen Jay Gould,

Oct 27 - *Extinct Humans* by Ian Tattersall and Jeffrey H. Schwartz

Nov 24 - *E=MC²* by David Bodanis

Dec 15 - Sunday at 2:30 *Seven Daughters of Eve* by Bryan Sykes)



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 and publishes *Cincinnati Skeptic* bi-monthly. 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) 336-9834 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>

E-mail: darkon@one.net



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Cincinnati, OH 45212

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What is a skeptic?

Modern skepticism is a response to the torrent of paranormal and pseudoscientific claims that pervade our lives. The stories of ghosts, flying saucers, miracle cures, lake monsters and many other fringe beliefs often go unchallenged. Skeptics provide the challenge.

While many of us are not scientists, we embrace the scientific method as mankind's best invention for seeking knowledge. Skeptics are not cynics. We don't simply reject every unusual idea. We do know extraordinary claims demand extraordinary evidence. We insist on the evidence.

Cincinnati Skeptics, The Association for Rational Thought, meet to discuss such claims. We debate the merits; we skewer dogmatism. We have fun.

The truth is out there. And skeptics are looking for it.

Preview Of Coming Attractions....

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

Next year there will be *Friday 13th* in September, December, and June.

Help the program committee think about a celebration.

Mark your Calendars, Watch your mail & See Inside (p.10) for Details!