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Georgia Skeptics is a non-profit local group which shares a common philosophy with the national organization CSICOP (Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal), and seeks to promote critical thinking and scientific inquiry as the most reliable means to gather knowledge of the world and universe. Like CSICOP, Georgia Skeptics encourages the investigation of paranormal and fringe-science claims from a responsible, scientific point of view, and helps disseminate the results of such inquiries.

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Joining the Georgia Skeptics organization is encouraged because membership dues help us to disseminate the results of skeptical inquiries to the public and to hold educational events. Yearly dues are \$17.50 for individual memberships, \$21.00 for families, and \$12.50 for full time students.

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## ON THE ASTRAL PLANE

by Larry F. Johnson, Georgia Skeptics

At the February meeting of Georgia Skeptics, there was a conversation about a claim by some of the UFO enthusiasts that UFOs are from the "astral plane". Someone asked what the "astral plane" was supposed to be, and I chimed in that I thought the concept arose primarily out of the "I AM" (Ascended Masters) cult, and represented some sort of netherworld outside of physical reality. I decided to research the subject.

The I AM Religious Activity and the Saint Germain Foundation (its corporate arm) were founded by Guy Ballard, a mining superintendant, and his wife Edna, a concert harpist, in the early 1930's. Both were deeply involved in theosophical and occult circles. These circles had as one of their standard tenets the belief in a supernatural group of beings known variously as the "Ascended Masters" or the "Great White Brotherhood". These beings were supposedly once human, but ascended into some higher plane, where they basically run the universe.

Ballard claimed to have met Saint Germain, who was an eighteenth century mystic, while hiking around Mt. Shasta in 1930. St. Germain allegedly gave Ballard a sip of a magical fluid, and certified him as an Accredited Messenger of the Ascended Masters. St. Germain bestowed the same title on Edna and their son Donald.

The I AM group's theology contains many of the occult movement's standard beliefs. In addition to the Ascended Masters, which is central to their beliefs, I AM incorporates "auras", and the repetition of sacred chants, or "decrees". I AM was intensely persecuted during the 1930's, culminating in the conviction of the Ballards for mail fraud in the early 40's. This caused the group to adopt a low key approach which continues to this day. While I AM draws from the same pool of converts as New Age groups, they don't advertise or openly promote themselves.

J. Gordon Melton's book Encyclopedic Handbook of Cults in America had two references to the "astral plane" which pre-date the "I AM" cult.

The first is from the Theosophy movement, a nineteenth century occult movement founded by Helen Blavatsky, Henry Steel Olcott, and William Q. Judge. In Theosophical lore the "astral plane" fits into a hierarchy of planes of existence which descend as follows: Divine, Monadic, Atomic, Buddhic, Upper and Lower Mental, Astral (emotional), and Physical. Since the I AM cult grew out of Theosophy, it probably borrowed some variant of this cosmology.

Melton's second reference to the "astral Plane" is from the American groups which grew out of the SAN MAT religious movement in India. ECKANKAR, an American group almost wholly derivative of SAN MAT (although this is never acknowledged in their literature) has a list similar to Theosophy's hierarchy of "planes of existence" but even more elaborate. The astral plane in ECKANKAR's worldview is a rather low-rent plane full of ghosts and

psychic phenomena. To give you an idea of how mundane the astral plane is in ECKANKAR's bumping order, there are ten levels above it.

My guess is that the New Age types borrowed the term primarily from Theosophy, and threw it into their bag of concepts along with karma, auras, and alchemy.

One problem when a skeptic tries to analyze the claims of some of these groups and movements is that many of those claims are nearly totally non-falsifiable in the sense that the scientific method demands.

In other words, if one of these folks would say "levitation is possible, I can do it, and I intend to do it for you now", this claim of theirs is falsifiable. Either they levitate or they don't. This is a circumstance under which the claim can be disproven.

On the other hand, if they say "Our leader was given a drink of the magic elixir by the Ascended Master Saint Germain, who then levitated to a higher plane of existence", I can believe it or not believe it, but the claim makes it difficult for me to respond except by saying that nothing in my experience leads me to give credence to this claim.

At least the Saint Germain claim puts forward a specific event to evaluate. In New Age circles the argument often boils down to something like this: "There are things beyond the current understanding of science as we know, and I believe that we are being visited by non-corporeal creatures from the astral plane."

Another problem in analyzing these groups, while maintaining a measure of fairness, is that the claims of the occult groups are sometimes no more scientifically extreme than the claims of more standard religions. Yet Guy Ballard, who made the above claim that Saint Germain gave him the magic elixir, was indicted and convicted of mail fraud for popularizing his claim, while mainstream Christianity contains a number of claims of levitation, higher planes of existence, out-of-body experiences, demon possession, and dozens of other claims and concepts very similar to the NEW AGE bag of tenets.

I'm not saying that we should either cut slack for the nonsensical specific claims of the more cultish occult groups, or that we should pick apart mainstream religions. All I'm saying is that many religions and cults have suffered very real persecution, including, in their early days, jailing and lynching. Our critique of these belief systems should be based on the validity of their claims, not the fact that they are weird, unfamiliar, and engage in rituals outside the mainstream.

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## SCIENCE AND THE CREATIONISTS: THERE IS LABORATORY PROOF OF EVOLUTION!

By Al Martin, Midwest Center for Rational Inquiry  
(Reprinted with Permission from MCRI)

Creationists routinely cry foul whenever evolution is presented as a factual process, vociferously telling their benighted audiences that evolution is "only a theory" (a "guess" in creationist parlance) yet to be proven. Of course, any decent college biology text describes several categories of evidence for evolution. These include an orderly fossil record marked by a series of transitional fossils (e.g. the reptile to mammal series) or fossils of strange animals unlike any forms living today (e.g. jawless fishes or Archaeopteryx, a species intermediate between reptiles and birds). Texts also include evidence from homology (similarity in structural plan reflecting common genetic ancestry), such as tails and pharyngeal grooves ("gills") in mammalian embryos, and the striking biochemical and genetic similarities between animals such as humans and chimpanzees; and biogeography (the study of the distribution of organisms within isolating barriers). Unfortunately, these lines of evidence are not always adequately presented by the teacher or the text, so their significance is not always fully appreciated.

Creationists dismiss, distort, and ignore standard textbook evidence for evolution, and most of the body of "evidence" offered in support of creation consists of little more than attacks on the actual physical evidence. (The book *Of Pandas and People*, reviewed earlier in this column, was a clever attempt to discredit textbook evidence. There was virtually no "positive" evidence for creation.) When pressed, most creationists posit insurmountable and unrealistic conditions for what they would accept as proof for evolution. They would likely acknowledge nothing short of finding cellular slime crawling out of a test tube containing a mixture of chemicals, or finding one day that one's pet lizard had turned into a bird in its cage. Anyone who demands such absurd "proofs" displays a vast ignorance of evolution and of biology in general.

There is, however, a dramatic laboratory proof of evolution that was published over a decade ago but that has never been mentioned in any general textbook with which I am familiar. Working with a phenomenon called "embryonic induction", Kollar and Fisher (*Science*, February 29th, 1980) were able to demonstrate that modern birds possess the genes for making teeth! The various tissues of any developing organ communicate with each other, each tissue often signaling another when and into what to develop. Thus, the outer layer of a tooth or enamel develops from an embryonic tissue called epithelium, which lines the surface of the gum, and the deeper, bone-like dentin of the tooth derives from an underlying embryonic tissue called mesenchyme. (See diagram) Each of these tissues, the epithelium and the mesenchyme, is influenced by the other (embryonic induction). In the bird, the outer epithelial layer normally develops into hard beak material. In a mammal such as a mouse, the same layer develops into the upper portion of the tooth (the enamel). Kollar and Fisher transplanted the deeper mesenchyme tissue from the tooth-forming region of a mouse embryo beneath the beak-forming epithelial layer of an embryonic chick. As a result, the chick epithelium secreted tooth-enamel proteins and induced the mesenchyme to form several tooth parts, such as dentin and odontoblasts (dentin-forming cells). That is, the chick tissue made part of the tooth and participated in synthesis of the mesenchymal portions of the tooth, something which it would have been totally unable to accomplish unless its DNA contained tooth-forming genes!

This experiment proves that modern birds (specifically the domestic chicken) possess the genes for making teeth. However, birds never make teeth in nature, so one must ask where they got these genes and why they have them. The only possibly conclusion is that birds have retained genes from an earlier stage of evolution (inherited as "genetic junk") from progenitors which themselves had and used teeth. This finding is consistent with the fossil record, which indicated that birds evolved from reptiles (in particular a branch of small dinosaurs). Fossils of Archaeopteryx indicate that this 150-million-year-old animal was a "blend" of reptilian and avian (bird-like) characteristics. For example, Archaeopteryx had feathers and a furcula ("wishbone") for attachment of flight muscles like a bird, but possessed many skeletal features and teeth like a reptile. Biologists consider Archaeopteryx to be intermediate between reptiles and birds.

Some creationists, when confronted with solid evidence that animals change (evolve), have responded by fabricating a "theory of devolution". This "theory" maintains that all animal forms were created in a state of blissful perfection, and that modern animals are their degenerate progeny resulting from the accumulated mutations caused by ultraviolet and cosmic radiation that bombarded the earth after loss of the "vapor canopy" that caused the Noachian deluge. So, might not some creationists insist that the "original" birds had teeth that were subsequently lost? This experiment proves that the genes for bird teeth are fully capable of being functional rather than being degenerated "mutants". Also, a change from a toothed mouth to an untoothed mouth would necessarily indicate dietary changes in birds and modification of flight efficiency. Flight would, in fact, become more efficient rather than "devolving" with loss of teeth, since teeth are heavy baggage for a flying animal. This is evolution. Applied to the "Case of the Birds' Teeth", the "theory of devolution" fails miserably.

So, can laboratory scientists actually prove an instance of evolution? Kollar and Fisher have done precisely that!

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## EVERYDAY DEMONS

By Mary A. Long, Georgia Skeptics

In his book, Nasty People--How to Stop Being Hurt by Them Without Becoming One of Them, Jay Carter describes individuals who employ a suppressive mechanism which he calls invalidation to injure another person by chipping away at that person's self esteem and causing him to examine himself to see where he or she "has gone wrong."

Some invalidators, according to Carter, have developed into what he has termed a "demonic archetype" and assume this role consciously. A nice person, who is apparently a true friend, a loving spouse, or a mild-mannered boss suddenly becomes a ranting maniac, seemingly totally out of control. He exudes anger, outrage and righteousness, and makes it clear that you deserve his disapproval and that you have surely done something to set him off in this manner. He can't think of enough ways to degrade you and may even threaten to do outlandish things to you. He has become a true

monster.

Carter states that when someone is in this state, the demonic personality is complete and has its own thoughts, ideas, ethics and behavior. This behavior may be entered into consciously or, more frequently, unconsciously when it is triggered by something in the environment. This unpredictable and irrational personality makes this type of invalidator most difficult to understand.

Those who are conscious of their invalidation of others never experience genuine remorse for having hurt another person and may even work at perfecting the technique of invalidation. Conscious invalidators justify their behavior by assuring themselves that the "victim" somehow deserved it, or "had it coming:". Carter states that he himself observed a practiced invalidator drive his wife of 40 years to commit suicide.

\_Nasty\_People\_ is available from Contemporary Books, Inc. The author is a psychological counselor and professional speaker in the Philadelphia area.

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## URBAN LEGENDS

By Rip Strautman, Georgia Skeptics

Most of us have heard the story about the couple parked on Lover's Lane who hear a report on the radio about an escaped convict with a hook for a hand. The couple decide to leave the lane and when they return to her house the boy discovers a hook attached to the passenger side door. Its a popular story among teenagers and has been told for the last thirty years.

Maybe you know the story about the woman who returns home to discover that her doberman is having trouble breathing. She takes him to her veterinarian who can not find anything wrong but tells her to return home while he performs additional tests. Upon her return she answers the phone and the vet says for her to get out of the house immediately. As she leaves the house the police arrive and rush inside to arrest a criminal hiding in a closet. You see, the vet discovered the dog's breathing problem was caused by the fact that the dog had three of the burglar's fingers caught in it's throat.

Both of these stories are examples of what are generally called urban legends. Urban legends are those bizarre but believable stories that get passed around by word of mouth as being the truth. Most of us have probably heard a dozen of them while growing up and may have passed them on to family, friends, or co-workers as true incidents.

Jan Harold Brunvand is one of America's leading folklorists. He is a professor of English at the University of Utah and has published four books on the subject of urban legends: *The Vanishing Hitchhiker*, copyright 1981, *The Choking Doberman*, copyright 1984, *The Mexican Pet*, copyright 1986, and *Curses! Broiled Again*, copyright 1989. In addition he also writes a syndicated national newspaper column "Urban Legends".

In each of his books Brunvand traces the origin and spread of some of America's most popular legends. Included are stories on famous recipes, automobile legends, nudity, food contamination, the Proctor and Gamble logo, celebrities, modern technology, and pets. Readers will recognize many of these legends and perhaps be surprised to discover the truth behind some of their own widely held beliefs.

If you enjoy a good story, but like the facts to be straight, I recommend any of these four books. Perhaps when you finish reading you will be able to say to someone after hearing them tell an unusual story "that's just an urban legend".

ADDED NOTE: I have written to Mr. Brunvand several times over the past five years relaying to him variations on several of the legends presented in his books. I have had occasion to write to him twice in the last four months regarding urban legends making the rounds in the Atlanta area. In each instance he has responded by providing me with additional information on these subjects.

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## UFO SIGHTINGS IN VIDALIA, GEORGIA

By Larry F. Johnson, Georgia Skeptics

Yes folks, they are here, and threatening our onion crops and consumer goods facilities. On February 16, 1991, UFOs were sighted over the Walmart in Vidalia, Ga. Here are some of the preliminaries, gleaned from the Eleven O'Clock News on Atlanta's Channel 5. (For some reason, the Atlanta Constitution didn't pick up the story the next morning. Maybe the coverup has already begun.)

A local radio station reported receiving thirty calls describing low flying objects over the Walmart. The people observing them included police Lieutenant P. McNeese.

The UFOs were described as "silver disks with red and white lights" (brake and headlights?) "flying from Vidalia to Hazelhurst". One man said that one of the four UFOs hovered over his car which then stalled, and wouldn't restart until the objects flew away.

Lt. McNeese stated that there were no missing persons or livestock. But what about onions? Kitchenware? Maybe someone with connections to the "astral plane" can explain why these creatures have suddenly developed an interest in onion-producing areas.

In the meantime, if anyone gets any more information, either logical explanation or wild claim, I'd be interested in hearing it.

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BOOK REVIEW: EVOLUTION AND THE MYTH OF CREATIONISM by Tim M. Berra, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 198 pp., paperback).

Reviewed by Keith M. Parsons, Georgia Skeptics

Creationists haven't been in the news so much lately. They seem to have dropped out of view since the 1987 Supreme Court decision overturning Louisiana's "Creation Science" law. However, though they are less visible, the creationists remain as active as ever. Setbacks such as legislative and judicial defeats only serve to fan the flames of zealotry. Hence, scientists, educators, and others interested in the quality of science education in this country should remain on guard.

Tim M. Berra's *Evolution and the Myth of Creationism* is the latest of a number of excellent works critical of creationism (e.g. Arthur Strahler's exhaustive *Science and Earth History*, Douglas Futuyma's *Science on Trial*, and Philip Kitcher's *Abusing Science*). Like those earlier works, Berra's book presents concise refutations of salient creationist claims. Written very clearly and well-illustrated, Berra's book is perhaps the most accessible of its kind for laypersons. Berra presents the basics of evolutionary biology in an effective manner and non-technical style. One thing he makes very clear is that there is no scientific debate over the occurrence of evolution, and, indeed, that differences have been greatly exaggerated between those who do disagree over the rate or mechanisms of evolution. Berra is particularly strong in his presentation of human evolution. I especially enjoyed his description of *Homo Sapiens Neanderthalensis*, who were shorter, more muscular, and more barrel-chested than modern humans, but who, with a shave, haircut, and business suit, says Berra, could probably pass for television evangelists.

The sub-title of Berra's book is "A Basic Guide to the Facts in the Evolution Debate," and, as I have indicated, I think it serves such a purpose admirably. This is just the problem, though. The facts, however, well presented, are not all that are needed to combat creationism. The essential point about "creation science" is not just that it is not genuine science, but that it cannot be. Creationism is a classic pseudoscience: It lacks a coherent theory, and hence is explanatorily vacuous; its claims are either untestable or demonstrably false; it has not provided a single puzzle-solving strategy that can be taken up by the scientific community. Indeed, it is entirely parasitic upon genuine science since, having nothing of its own to offer, it can only grow by raising specious objections against real science.

These are philosophical rather than scientific points which have more to do with the logic and methodology of science than with its factual content. Hence, it is a shame that, with the exception of Kitcher's book, the replies to creationism have been written by scientists

rather than philosophers. Since the creationists have transgressed as much against philology as science, I wish that philosophers would take a more active hand in their prosecution.

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BOOK REVIEW: THE MASK OF NOSTRADAMUS, By James Randi (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1990, 256 pages, \$19.95)

Reviewed by Hugh H. Trotti

James (The Amazing) Randi has again produced something well worth the reader's consideration: a serious study of the sixteenth century "prophet" whose latinized name was Nostradamus. The subject is a fit one for Randi's no-nonsense style, which is concise and logical--and impatient with foggy notions and far-reaching speculations masquerading as some sort of "science" of foreseeing future events. Such impatience may apply (and is applied by Randi) even more to Nostradamus's later "interpreters" than to the original figure. Randi makes a good case for taking hostile views of prophets, and offers explanations of what they do and how they produce material convincing to some.

But the book is not a simple attack, for Randi has approached the subject in a serious way. He has enlisted the aid of historians and historical documents, and has himself actually travelled to the places in France frequented by Nostradamus. Such care on his part has resulted in revealing insights as to the meaning of some of the written efforts produced by the seer.

Randi's translations from his French text are straightforward and well justified, and seem reasonable. Take for example quatrain 4-68 (Randi's Example Number 9, op. cit., page 215), which is translated by him thusly:

In the year very near, not far from Venus,  
The two greatest of Asia and Africa  
From the Rhine and Lower Danube, which will be said to have come,  
Cries, tears at Malta and the Ligurian coast.

In our age, followers of Nostradamus have taken the allusions to "The two greatest of Asia and Africa" to mean Japan and Mussolini (Randi citing James Laver's interpretation). Hitler enters through the name "Hister", based on the ancient name "Ister" for the "Lower Danube". According to Randi, the quatrain actually predicts trouble for perhaps Venice and Genoa, as well as Malta.

Here, I should like to say that the literate men of the time of Nostradamus read the rediscovered classics of the Greeks and Romans. In the works they read, "Asia" is to be taken to be Asia Minor; and the "greatest" of Asia Minor at that time was, obviously, Turkey, which had already captured Constantinople and marched on Europe. The "greatest" of Africa we might take to be Egypt, where the Mamlukes were once part of the Ottoman Empire. The Turks were the real menace during the time of Nostradamus. Randi noted this point elsewhere in his book, but I, myself, think it might also bear

upon quatrain 4-68. Turkey might menace parts of Europe, as well as such islands as Malta.

In any event, those with any fascination for the works of Nostradamus--as well as those suspicious of them--will find this volume well worth their time.

As a matter of interest, I would add to Randi's opinion that as a physician, Nostradamus's use of remedies from roses was fallacious, the note that such usage was traditional: see Moses Maimonides' recipes, for instance. That twelfth-century physician/philosopher/author mentioned the medical use of rose products extensively in his work *The Preservation of Youth*; he had begun in Spain but ended his days in Cairo, an older man at the time of Richard Lion-Heart's crusade. The use of the rose shows that the medieval views and "ancient knowledge" were still being taught at the time of the northern Renaissance in Europe. The rose itself, whether used for medicinal or aesthetic reasons, goes back to the ancient world--see the photograph of a coin of Rhodes of c. 80 BC following page 42 of Michael Grant's *The Visible Past*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1990, illus., 4.4.b. This coin shows an opened rose face on one side, with the head of the sun god Helios on the other (the god of the huge bronze "Wonder of the World" statue).

Finally, I should like to remark that if one finds the writings of Nostradamus to be difficult, they are yet considerably clearer than the so-called "Prophecies of Merlin", which are marvels of obscurity. The interested reader can find these latter in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *The History of the Kings of Britain* (available from Penguin Paperback Books, pp. 170-1850).

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Editor's Note: For further reading on this subject, the book *Nostradamus and His Prophecies*, by Edgar Leoni, has been highly recommended by Larry Kitsch, Vice President of the Midwest Committee for Rational Inquiry, who has also extensively researched Nostradamus.

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## THE HUNDREDTH MONKEY

By Rick Moen, Bay Area Skeptics

Have you heard of the "Hundredth-Monkey Phenomenon"? It approaches the status of holy writ among some New Agers.

According to Lyall Watson's widely-quoted (1) book "Lifetide" (2), around the year 1952, young monkeys on the Japanese island of Koshima figured out how to make sweet potatoes (provided by primatologists) more edible by washing them. They then taught their peers and parents, until by 1958, this behaviour was found among widely-spread members of the troop.

So far, so good. Then in that year, a sort of group consciousness developed among the monkeys, when, say, the \*hundredth\* monkey began washing potatoes. Suddenly, almost \*all\* the monkeys began doing so. Further, "the habit seems to have jumped natural barriers and to have appeared spontaneously ... in colonies on other islands and on the mainland in a troop at Takasakiyama."

This anecdote has been used to provide ideological support to such diverse notions as telepathy and nuclear disarmament -- you, the reader, could be the "hundredth monkey" necessary for global transformation. What gets lost in the shuffle is the evidence for Watson's factual claim. Like many New Agers, Watson voices the sentiment that "when a myth is shared by large numbers of people, it becomes a reality". Ron Amundson of the Hawaii Skeptics, who investigated Watson's claim (3), suggested that this latter statement could be rephrased as "Convince enough people of a lie, and it becomes the truth". (Amundson found that ALL of Watson's claimed documentation was grossly misrepresented, and in fact contradicted the - now famous - claim.)

Whether one buys this philosophical stance or not, the notion that this alleged mass consciousness is somehow politically progressive is a curious one. Per Watson's vision, "Peace, love, and a taste for brown rice and tofu", as commentator Tim Farrington (4) put it, "will at a given point instantly envelope the planet, and humanity will live happily ever after.... Neuroses, bad habits, ignorance will all be dissolved in a flash, without effort on the part of the rest of us." Let's savour, for a moment, this balmy image, before allowing ourselves to think about it.

Back in 1933 there must have been some hundredth German monkey who joined the Nazi party, mustn't there? The mass consciousness of the society was transformed. As the "Herrenrace" myth became shared by large numbers of people, it transformed the reality of Europe.

Farrington continues: "There is no guarantee that the hundredth monkey will be any wiser than the first, and no assurance that the first will be wise at all. The myth of critical mass, and its magic, is double-edged."

Farrington suggests that, rather than admire the hundredth monkey, brainlessly falling in tune with the mass consciousness of the other 99, we instead take our hats off to the one-hundred- first monkey's "individual acts of conscience and reason, acts not effortless, nor particularly inspired, acts not necessarily validated by the herd nor telepathically obvious; but acts simply that are steps, one by one, on the difficult, intricate, sometimes ambiguous, rewarding path of a single human life."

References:

(1) "The Hundredth Monkey" by Ken Keyes, Jr., 1982, Vision Books, Coos Bay, Oregon; Article: "The Hundredth Monkey" in "Updated Special Issue: `A New Science of Life'" of "Brain/Mind Bulletin", 1982; Film and videotape: "The

"Hundredth Monkey", Elda Hartley, producer, 1982, Hartley Film Foundation, Inc., Cos Cob, Conn.

(2)"Lifetide" by Lyall Watson, 1979. Simon and Schuster, NY.

(3)Article: "The Hundredth Monkey Phenomenon" by Ron Amundson, in "Skeptical Inquirer", Summer 1985, pp.348-56. Follow-up in Spring 1987 issue, pp. 303-4. Watson had alleged, in "Whole Earth Review", Fall 1986 (the "Fringes of Reason" issue) that his citations weren't really citations, and that the whole story, although contradicted by his supposed evidence, is nonetheless true. See also article "Spud-Dunking Monkey Theory Debunked" by Boyce Rensberger, "Washington Post", July 6, 1989).

(4) Article "The 101st Monkey" by Tim Farrington, in "The Node" magazine, Winter 1987, San Francisco.

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### UPCOMING MEETING

The next regular meeting of the Georgia Skeptics will be held on March 17, 1991, at the Steak and Ale on Savoy Drive in NE Atlanta.

The speaker will be Dr. Robert Almeder, Professor of Philosophy at Georgia State University. Dr. Almeder will speak on "Pseudoscience and the Limits of Science." He will address such issues as the distinctions between science and pseudoscience, and degree to which scientific knowledge provides structures for understanding the real world, and whether non-scientific questions are meaningful.

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### RECENT MEETINGS

The last regular meeting of the Georgia Skeptics was held on January 20, 1991, at the Steak and Ale Restaurant on Savoy Dr. After an informal discussion of current topics of interest, Dr. Georgie Ganaway, Program Director of the Ridgeview Center for Dissociative Disorders, spoke on multiple personalities as the condition related to unverified trauma memories, such as claims of UFO abductions or ritualistic abuse by Satanic cults. Dr. Ganaway discussed numerous issues of interest to the group, and showed a videotape which featured actual case studies. This was Dr. Ganaway's second presentation on this subject to our group, and his willingness to share his experience and expertise has been greatly appreciated!

A special meeting of the Georgia Skeptics was held on February 24, 1991, at the home of Becky Long. Dr. William Bagnuolo, Research Scientist with Georgia State University's Center for High Angular Resolution Astronomy (CHARA), and member of Georgia Skeptics, presented his response to the television series "The Astronomers" in a talk

entitled "The Real Astronomers: Everyday Life in Science." The talk addressed applications of scientific methodology in a field of science which is unique in that it is purely observational rather than experimental. Known for his pioneering research in innovative telescope designs, Dr. Bagnuolo also discussed his work with "CHARA to develop a 400-meter array of mirrors with capabilities equivalent to the resolution of a nickel at the distance of the Great Wall of China. Those of us who know Bill personally have also enjoyed and benefitted from his efforts to foster cooperation between local professional and amateur astronomers, and his application of skepticism and scientific inquiry to everything from political and social issues to sports!

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THE END