



The Newsletter of The North Texas Skeptics
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A Skeptic Makes a Ripple in the Dallas Airwaves

Vox Populi

By John Thomas

Don't like what you hear on talk radio? Well, get your own talk show. NTS and I recently had the opportunity to do just that.

Last August, I got a call from Dr. Ann Wildemann, who hosted the morning call-in show on KGBS (1190 AM) in Dallas. Naturally, I volunteered to talk about the North Texas Skeptics. The first show covered faith-healing, psychic powers, astrology and graphology before the clock ran out. Things went so well that Wildemann invited me to appear once a week for a "skeptic's hour." I appeared for two shows, one devoted to astrology and cold reading, and another to creationism. The creationism show provoked a demand from man-tracker Don Patton for equal time, and his appearance was followed by a two-hour rebuttal by Ronnie Hastings, sitting in for me in the prestigious KGBS Skeptic's Chair.

Unfortunately, the Skeptic's Hour lasted but three weeks before Wildemann quit the station. KGBS replaced the local morning show with Morton Downey Jr. in syndication, so my entertainment career ended as quickly as it began. Despite the disgrace of being replaced by Morton Downey, I think the experience was an interesting look into popular culture and how it develops.

If you drive about and scan AM radio you know that talk radio is becoming the format of choice for big-city markets. Talk radio has become a part of the conversation our society has with itself, supplementing the print media and television in propagating cultural norms, expectations and anxieties. The recent presidential election showed that the immediacy of talk radio (and TV) will be a larger part of future political campaigns. The talk hosts switch back and forth between politics and celebrities, diet doctors and medical quacks, health and fitness tips to astrologers and pet psychics. Is it possible for a skeptical view of many popular beliefs to get a word in on this national conversation? I think so, if we understand an important point: There is no clear distinction between news and entertainment, whether the medium is print or electronic.

Light Up Those Phone Lines!

The radio audience certainly tunes in for entertainment. Wildemann told me that radio talk show demographics show the audience is mostly male, and somewhat more affluent and better-educated than average. The daytime TV shows have a mostly female audience. Either audience expects to be challenged, frightened, amazed or reassured; but neither expects to be bored. "Success" in this business is measured mostly by how many listeners are exercised enough to call in.

Talk radio has a place for intelligent debate and critical thinking, but to find it, you must talk about issues listeners care about, in language they can understand. Most people are not interested in the technical reasons why astrology is scientifically implausible, but they do want to know why a lot of people believe in astrology, even though scientists consider it nonsense. I had a call from a salesman who had learned to use cold-reading techniques to great effect in his business. He was pleased to know that what he was doing was what psychics and astrologers were claiming as a special talent, and also that psychologists had studied the practice.

Creationism is a topic that always commands attention, since it deals directly with firmly-held religious beliefs about humankind. This subject especially calls for tact, since you want to treat the callers with respect, while demonstrating that their opinions are unfounded. Still, it's possible to strike the balance. One woman called in to say that she was so excited by my comments on evolution that she had to pull her car off the road and run to a pay phone. Now that's entertainment!

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Conference Report

Special to The Skeptic

By Jim Lippard

Part One of Four Parts *Editor's Note: We are pleased to present this detailed review of the 1992 CSICOP conference prepared by Jim Lippard of The Phoenix Skeptics and reprinted with his kind permission. We will print Jim's article in The Skeptic in four parts beginning with this issue.*

Fairness, Fraud, and Feminism: Culture Confronts Science was the name of this year's annual conference of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, publisher of the Skeptical Inquirer. The conference was hosted by the North Texas Skeptics at the Harvey Hotel near the Dallas-Fort Worth Airport on the weekend of October 16-18. The conference featured five panel sessions on multicultural approaches to science, gender issues in science and pseudoscience, fraud in science, crashed saucers, and the paranormal in China.

The conference began on Friday morning with opening remarks by CSICOP chairman Paul Kurtz, who spoke briefly about various meanings of the term skepticism. He distinguished the total negative skepticism and unbelief of Pyrrho and Sextus Empiricus from the mitigated skepticism of David Hume and the new skepticism which emphasizes inquiry rather than doubt. (Not coincidentally, Kurtz's new book from Prometheus is titled The New Skepticism.) He commented on the fact that this conference, like the Berkeley conference last year and other CSICOP conferences before that, is addressing issues which are not directly connected with pseudoscience and the paranormal. The CSICOP Executive Council has debated how far afield it is appropriate for the conferences to go.

Multicultural Approaches to Science

The first panel of the day, Multicultural Approaches to Science: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly, was moderated by Eugenie Scott of the National Center for Science Education, who began the session by stating that "I believe in objective reality. I believe that you exist even if I never saw you. I believe the nominalist/realist debate is irrelevant outside freshman philosophy." 1 She began with these statements because there are those who disagree, who maintain that consequences of ideas are more important than their content and that any idea is as valid as any other. She gave some examples from some materials criticizing textbooks for lack of an appropriate multicultural stance which have influenced textbook decisions in Berkeley, California. These materials consist of an excerpt from a textbook, followed by a comment, a format which Scott compared to the textbook critiques of fundamentalists Mel and Norma Gabler of Texas. Scott gave two examples from this material. The first criticized a textbook for claiming that the first people in the Americas arrived over a land bridge, characterizing this claim as unsubstantiated theories of white anthropologists and pointing out that Natives believe they have always been here. The second example questioned a textbook's claim that horses were brought to the Americas by the Spanish, arguing that horses may have always been in America or have been brought over by Persians in the 12th century.

The first speaker, Diana Marinez, professor of biochemistry at Michigan State University and member of the National Academy of Science's Committee on Standards, commented on the good. Marinez maintained that multicultural education is important even in science classes because science and what scientists do is influenced by culture. Science is normally taught as something isolated from reality, in such a way that students come away knowing only collections of facts. By learning science from a familiar cultural base, students can recognize the importance of science in their lives, become scientifically literate, and become motivated towards science as a career.

Marinez gave statistics showing the paucity of minorities in scientific fields and argued that this is a problem which multicultural approaches to science education can correct. She then gave some examples of how this might be done using Mayan math and astronomy, American Indian food plants and nutrition, and Diego Rivera murals.

The second speaker, Joseph Dunbar, a professor of endocrinology at Wayne State University, addressed the bad. His talk, titled Myths of Melanin, described the claims of the so-called melanin scholars that dark-skinned humans have special abilities in virtue of magical properties of the melanin in their skin. Dunbar described different kinds of melanin in skin pigment (eumelanin and pheomelanin) and how they differ from melatonin (secreted by the pineal gland) and neuromelanin.

The melanin scholars do not distinguish these things, and use studies relating to the latter two substances to support their claims that melanin improves reaction time, allows communication with plants, protects DNA, converts sunlight into knowledge, and numerous other outrageous claims.2

Bernard Ortiz de Montellano, an anthropologist at Wayne State University (with a Ph.D. in organic chemistry), spoke on the ugly. (Eugenie Scott introduced him with the comment that bringing critical thinking to multiculturalism is the task of de Montellano, with due apologies to Edgar Allan Poe.)

Ortiz de Montellano, who has written two articles on multicultural pseudoscience for the Skeptical Inquirer and one for *Creation/Evolution*, discussed the African-American *Baseline Essays* (also known as the Portland Baseline Essays).3 This collection of essays by promoters of an Afrocentric curriculum was published in 1987 by the Portland, Oregon school district and has been distributed to schools around the country as a resource for setting up a multicultural curriculum. Detroit, Boston, Atlanta, Indianapolis, and other school districts have had seminars on this material, but it is unknown how many are actually using the material in the classroom.

The *Baseline Essays* assert that Egypt is the source of all civilization, that religion and paranormal abilities are important aspects of scientific methodology, that Egyptians flew for travel and recreation, and many other ridiculous claims. The material on science claims that the ancient Egyptians used Maat, religion as a scientific paradigm, according to which (1) there is a supreme consciousness or creator; (2) the universe came into existence via divine self-organization; (3) the universe is alive, all parts of it are related and are living; (4) man and life itself is a mystery; (5) there are material and transmaterial causes and effects.

Ortiz de Montellano looked at some of the specific claims made in the science essay of the Baseline Essays, showing that the purported evidence for each was weak to nonexistent (or, in some cases, actually evidence to the contrary, as was the case with the alleged Egyptian glider model, whose dimensions were such that it could not possibly be flown).

Unofficial Session on Faith Healing

During lunch time, the North Texas Skeptics arranged for Christian critic of televangelists Ole Anthony to speak at the Excel Inn next door to the Harvey Hotel. Anthony was one of the prime movers behind ABC TV's PrimeTime Live's expos, of Robert Tilton, Larry Lea, and W.V. Grant. Anthony recounted the various legal tactics Tilton has been using against him and stated that his group will be filing a lawsuit against the television stations that air Tilton's program around the country.

Tilton has sued Anthony for conspiracy to deprive him of his constitutional rights under the First Amendment. At least one of Tilton's claims was dropped, regarding remarks Anthony made about his faith healing abilities, when the court ruled that, as part of the discovery process, Anthony was entitled to obtain the names and addresses of people Tilton claims to have healed.

Anthony stated that he wants to get FCC rules changed to say that claims made by a living person on a television or radio broadcast must be verifiable. When asked how that fits with the First Amendment, Anthony became angry at the questioner and stated that fraud is not protected by the Constitution. (Anthony did not bother to explain how the FCC would determine what is and what is not verifiable, nor how this would affect broadcast of such things as fiction, opinion, discussions of art, or religious broadcasts of any kind. The proposal seemed to me to be quite ill thought out.)

A fact sheet on Anthony's organization, the Trinity Foundation, Inc. (P.O. Box 33, Dallas, TX 75221, (214) 827-2625) states that the group was founded in 1972 and sponsors several non-denominational home church groups with the goal of recapturing the First-Century Christian experience. The same fact sheet says that the group

assisted in the production of a Canadian television documentary titled Adolph Hitler, The New Age Messiah, which shows how New Age philosophy inevitably leads to fascism. This and the FCC proposal lead me to question the reliability and objectivity of this organization, but it has apparently been effective in getting media scrutiny on a few televangelists. *In next month's issue of The Skeptic: Gender Issues in Science and Richard Dawkins keynote address. Readers may contact The Arizona Skeptics at Box 62792, Phoenix, AZ 85082.*

Notes:

1. I disagree with Scott's last sentence. The nominalist/realist debate is relevant outside freshman philosophy classes for example, in graduate philosophy classes.
2. Dunbar pointed out a couple of cases where there were some studies which bore some resemblance (though quite distant) to the claims of the melanin scholars. For example, a study did find that reaction times of people with brown eyes were faster than those of people with blue eyes for some tasks. The melanin scholars claim that this can be attributed to melanin. What they don't note is that all the participants in this study were white males.
3. Multicultural Pseudoscience, *The Skeptical Inquirer*, 16:46-50; Magic Melanin, *The Skeptical Inquirer*, 16:162-166; Afrocentric Creationism, *Creation/Evolution* vol. 11, no. 2 (issue XXIX), Winter 1991-92, pp. 1-8. These articles address the specifics of the *Baseline Essays*.

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Healthy skepticism

Medical "Pathies"

By Tim Gorski, M.D.

First in a Series

Anyone looking into the mushrooming "alternative medicine" literature is apt to encounter a number of "-pathies" that generally obscure, rather than explain.

Homeopathy, thanks to the tireless efforts of its promoters, is one of these that has been gaining new popularity in recent years. In the Christmas 1992 The Sharper Image catalog, for example, right there on page 56, are "Longevity" products. The ad copy goes so far as to say that it's "medical science" and "clinically proven," both of which claims are simply and utterly false.

Many women have also bought the worthless homeopathic remedy intended to cure vaginal yeast infections, "Yeastgard." And there's a whole line of homeopathic quack products sold under the names "Bioforce," "Hyland's," and "NuAge." Just as effective, though, and lots cheaper, are the doctor kits sold in toy departments that include jelly beans of different colors labeled "heart pills," "kidney pills," and so on.

Invented by Samuel Hahnemann (1755-1843) in the prescientific era of medicine, homeopathy is a self-contained system of theory and practice, which is to say, a pseudoscience. It's based on several fantastic notions which modern quacks, nevertheless, manage to sell to their victims. The first of these ideas is that diseases should be recognized primarily as combinations of symptoms caused by psora, which is to say, an itch. Hahnemann went so far as to argue that in olden times maladies including epilepsy, asthma, and cancer were actually simple skin disorders which, because of their suppression by habits of hygiene, have been driven inside the body, so to speak.

The second is the principle that like cures like, for which homeopathy is named. And the third is that substances which can cause given symptoms can be used to treat those same symptoms by administering them as extreme dilutions. Ipecac, for instance, is an emetic used to induce vomiting in cases of poisoning. A small dose of ipecac, according to the doctrine of homeopathy, can therefore be used to cure nausea and vomiting. Not just a small dose of ipecac can be used, though, and not even a very, very, very small dose.

Rather, according to Hahnemann and the homeopaths, the effective dose is a dilution so extreme that not even one molecule of the substance is likely to be still present! And Hahnemann taught that the more diluted a preparation was, the more effective it was, and that a single dose of a homeopathic remedy could exert therapeutic effects a month or more after being given!

No Scientific Basis

Now in a prescientific era during which effective medical measures were few, using smaller doses instead of larger and waiting patiently to see what would happen probably did give better results. But today the grave logical and scientific problems of homeopathy are obvious. The chief difficulty, of course, is how a substance could exert any effect when it isn't even present in what's given to the patient. The presumably inactive material in which the active agent is diluted (the diluent) would itself become the "medicine." But it would have to somehow transmit the effects of the active agent ... Homeopaths claim that this happens by the diluent being imbued through the process of dilution, which involves a ritual of vigorous shaking which they call "succussion," with "energies" or "vibrations" of the active substance. Never mind that these "energies" and "vibrations" can't be measured and are otherwise scientifically unknown and unnecessary. And never mind that the diluents used can't be shown to be absolutely 100% free of all contaminants whatsoever, even including dissolved atmospheric gases. And especially never mind that whatever diluent is used is unquestionably swarming with the "energies" and "vibrations" of everything that its molecules ever came into contact with.

More importantly, no body of reliable evidence supports the doctrines of homeopathy. One study showed a very small, but statistically significant, effect of homeopathic remedies used to treat arthritis pain. But of course at a statistical significance of $P < .05$ (meaning that the results could have arisen by chance with a probability of 1 in 20), one in twenty clinical trials, on average, can be expected to show a variance with the null hypothesis. One study does not a science make. And, in fact, other clinical trials of homeopathic remedies have shown no benefits compared to placebo.

The "Remembering Water" Caper

In 1988 a French homeopath, Jacques Benveniste, and collaborators at his lab claimed to show that extreme dilutions of an antibody could still cause effects on target cells. A paper appeared in the British journal Nature which was pounced on by homeopathy promoters as the long awaited "proof" that "It works!" and the study is still so cited. But, miraculously, investigators from Nature and the National Institutes of Health joined by James Randi and others caused replications of the experiment to show the expected negative results.

Another investigator using a similar system published negative results soon after and the whole affair died down except in the minds of homeopathy apologists. But an important feature of these events went completely unnoticed. And that is that the effect of an extreme - homeopathic - dilution of an antibody should have been the

opposite of the usual antibody effect on target cells. So, even if the Benveniste claims had panned out, they could not have provided the objective support that homeopathy remains so utterly without. (See the Winter 1989 issue of The Skeptical Inquirer for a report on the Benveniste "remembering water" affair - Ed.)

Unfortunately, homeopathic quackery has enjoyed something of an advantage over other forms of health fraud in that the 1938 legislation which created the U.S. Food and Drug Administration recognized the Homeopathic Pharmacopoeia. Homeopathic "drugs" are not thereby exempted from having to be shown to be safe and effective but the FDA indicated that it wouldn't challenge homeopathic remedies being sold to practitioners to treat "minor" ailments. Presumably someone at the FDA thought that homeopaths would satisfy themselves with using their placebos to treat hypochondriasis. Instead, the promotion of homeopathic remedies has exploded and the FDA has failed to enforce the law.

If homeopathic remedies are nothing but worthless placebos, of course, they might be assumed to be as safe as their diluents, which are often water or grain alcohol. But if, as homeopaths insist, their treatments actually have pharmacologic effects, they should be held to the same standards of safety and efficacy as other drugs. This same stumbling block has been encountered in the European efforts to unite their separate economies since homeopathy is very popular, for example, in France.

Simply put, homeopathy is medical quackery. Now you know why. Next month: Naturopathy, Osteopathy, and Allopathy.

Pro-Quackery Bill Now Law

The marginal political/legal advantage of homeopathic products is passing. Utah Senator Orrin Hatch's Health Freedom Act of 1992 discussed here last month passed both houses of Congress as a rider to an appropriations bill and was signed into law by President Bush. Drafted with the help of a health food industry group, the legislation puts an effective end to the FDA's efforts to protect consumers in the burgeoning marketplace of vitamins, supplements and health foods.

Henceforth, as long as quacks continue to follow their established practices of claiming to have "scientific evidence" to support the wondrous benefits of their "natural and nutritional" products, regulatory authorities will be powerless to stop their deceptive schemes. Those engaged in these scams have indeed gained new freedom. Consumers, on the other hand, are as yet unaware that open season has been declared on them by the nutritional profiteers. Caveat emptor!

This information is provided by the D/FW Council Against Health Fraud. For more information, or to report suspected health fraud, please contact the Council at Box 202577, Arlington, TX, 76006, or call metro 214-263-8989.

Dr. Gorski is a practicing physician, chairman of the D/FW Council Against Health Fraud and an NTS Technical Advisor.

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The third eye

By Pat Reeder

Before we go to the news, I have a confession to make.

Did you notice strange things happening around your house, on or about November 21? Did old broken watches suddenly begin ticking? Did your silverware start curling up like a sheet of fax paper? Well, I must apologize. It's my fault.

You see, on the evening of November 21, I appeared on Glen Mitchell's talk show on KRLD (1080 AM), to discuss a book I'm working on with my friend, George Gimarc of KDGE-FM. It's a book about the most outrageous, awful, and astonishing records ever made. For the amusement of the audience, I brought along an armload of records by such golden throats as Jack Klugman, Sen. Sam Ervin, and Danny Bonaduce. And among the records we played on KRLD was the 1974 Columbia Records album, "Uri Geller." You might even have it in your own collection: the cover depicts Uri walking purposefully through outer space, the Milky Way galaxy far in the background. We know he has special powers because he is not wearing a space suit. Instead, he is dressed in a plum-colored polyester disco shirt, wide belt, burnt orange bell-bottoms, and shiny, patent leather shoes.

If you do own this album (which mostly consists of Uri reading his own incomprehensible poetry in a high-pitched, heavily accented voice, over outrageously overblown orchestral tracks), then you are aware of the strange effects it can have around the house. In one track, entitled "Mood," Uri instructs his listeners to hold a fork in their hands and stroke it, while repeating in their minds, "Bend ... bend ..." (I'll bet Madonna wishes she'd thought of this for her last album!). Uri then urges listeners to pick up old watches and concentrate on them until they start ticking due to the amazing mind power which has been locked into the grooves of this album (the warming of the oil inside the watch and the general jostling around which come from handling it have nothing to do with it).

Now, I could take the coward's way out and blame all the bent silverware and miraculously ticking broken watches in the KRLD listening area on Uri Geller and Columbia Records ... but as usual, the wily Geller is one step ahead of me, legalwise. Among the liner notes in the LP (which includes a reprint of a 1974 Newsweek article about the Putoff-Targ tests of Geller) is the following disclaimer:

"CBS, Hazak Productions, and Uri Geller and all parties that have been hitherto involved, take no responsibility of the experiments herein."

So if your forks curled up on November 21, I guess it is my fault for playing this record on the radio ... and it has to have been me, because I can't imagine anyone else ever playing it on the radio. Therefore, I sincerely apologize. But frankly, I think there is a much greater chance of your brain melting during the playing of this record than of your forks bending.

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And now, on to the news ... the Weekly World News, as a matter of fact, for that politically active space alien was once again on the cover. As you'll recall from our last episode, the alien had changed his allegiances from Bush to Perot to Clinton, then was said to be angling for a cabinet post. According to the latest reports, he buttered up Clinton even more by giving him an election night victory ride from Little Rock to Washington, D.C., in a flying saucer. With the alien at the wheel, or the joystick, or whatever, the trip from Arkansas to Washington took only four minutes ... longer than it would have taken if Ted Kennedy had been driving, but pretty swift nonetheless. The story quotes "UFO expert Nathaniel Dean" as saying that contrary to rumor, Clinton "probably did not" throw up during the flight. Guess it's a good thing Bush wasn't on that UFO!

The alien is allegedly sucking up to the president-elect in a transparent effort to be named head of NASA, although why Clinton needs another space cadet in his administration when he's already got Al Gore is beyond me. Anyway, be looking for even more alien activity in Washington during the next four years. Incidentally, has anyone noticed how much James Carville looks like one of those creatures from the movie, Alien Nation ? Hmmmmmm

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Turning now to the Associated Press ... Having trouble with your office copier? Want to increase your sales? Then don't call Xerox or Anthony Robbins ... phone the Office Witches of Walnut Creek, California!

Witches Zsuzsanna Budapest and Laurel Olson claim that their blessings and talismans will help your business in any number of ways. For example, how do you deal with a cranky copier? If you're the Office Witches, you clean up the copier room, put a plant in it, and bless the copier. You then take black construction paper, cut it up and put it behind the copier, and draw a counterclockwise circle with a glue stick "as a target for the negative empty space." I suppose adding toner is optional. As responsible professionals, however, they do caution that even the best of spells can't replace regular copier maintenance. And Olson warns that "if you believe it's a load of hokum, it's not going to work for you." Now, THAT I believe!

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Colorado City, Arizona, is a town founded and still run by a breakaway sect of fundamentalist, polygamous Mormons. This explains why the principal of the local school recently sent 14-year old James Bateman home from school for wearing a T-shirt depicting Danny DeVito as The Penguin from the movie Batman Returns. The principal said the T-shirt was "a sign of devil worship." James and his family are not members of the dominant sect, and needless to say, they were rather put out.

Hearing of the incident, Danny DeVito sent James a huge box of Penguin merchandise (which I guess he had to unload somehow). In fine satanic fashion, DeVito suggested that James pass the posters, T-shirts, etc. out to all his friends. DeVito also jokingly suggested that the polygamous sect just hates penguins because they're monogamous. That makes more sense than the satanic argument. I don't know about you, but of all the things I associate with the fires of Hell, penguins are pretty far down on the list.

Speaking of birds ... as parrot lovers, my wife and I are longtime subscribers to Birdtalk magazine, which is normally filled with authoritative articles and beautiful photos of parrots and other cage birds. But the October issue contained a real surprise: an article entitled "Telepathic Interview With Three Amazons." It was a long transcript of a "telepathic" conversation conducted by "animal psychic" Penelope Smith with three of the author's pet Amazon parrots. The parrots' side of the interview was remarkably articulate ... and seemed even more so in comparison to all the political interviews that were appearing at the same time.

Naturally, the psychic quoted things that the parrots told her mentally which she could not possibly have known otherwise. And also, naturally, she does traveling seminars on this subject and has an 800- number which you may call to order her books and videos (it's 800-356-9315 ... but frankly, if you want a book or video about talking to the animals, I suggest you pick up Dr. Doolittle).

Reaction to the article was mixed. The next issue contained one letter calling it "a waste of six pages of journalism ... if you can call it that." This writer said that even her parrots had told her it was "Rubbish!," and she ended with an emphatic "Please cancel my subscription." The other letter was a glowing testament to the psychic's powers, and it included a complete rundown of all her products, her address, the price of each item, sales tax, shipping and handling charges.

No one brought up the obvious question: Of all the animals in the world that would require the services of a psychic to talk to their owners, why would a parrot need one?

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The End of Affluence

Paul R. Ehrlich and Anne H. Ehrlich

Ballantine Books, 1974

Reviewed by R. A. Dousette

Those who hesitate to throw away books, no matter how bad, probably have a few old and moldy tomes of the environmental movement left over from the 60s and 70s. Some works can be like cheese; they stink but, somehow, they improve with age. Paul Ehrlich's¹ book is an excellent example of this. A first reading in 1974 led to overwhelming boredom after only a few pages; a second reading in 1992 produced gales of laughter at a comic work that can't be put down.

The book contains Mr. Ehrlich's pessimistic view of the future as seen from 1974. The world contains too many people chasing too few resources, and the consequences will be disastrous. This book is intended to serve as a survivor manual in order to help at least a few survive into the 1990s. Mr. Ehrlich provides advice in a number of areas. He recommends stockpiling tins of tuna "... because periodic protein shortages (or at least sky-high prices) seem certain to occur within the ten-to-twenty year shelf-life of the cans."² He anticipates a "... nutritional disaster that seems likely to overcome humanity in the 1970s (or, at the latest, in the 1980s)." He believes that "... a situation has been created that could lead to a billion or more people starving to death."³

Food shortages will only be one of the problems that the world will face. "... It seems certain that energy shortages will be with us for the rest of the century, and that before 1985 mankind will enter a genuine age of scarcity in which many things besides energy will be in short supply."⁴ Food, fresh water, paper, and needed minerals will disappear as people and industries starve.

Mr. Ehrlich urges his readers to prepare for the coming disasters. He recommends various publications in order to monitor the unwinding of the modern world, while also noting "Our local paper is quite adequate, in combination with radio and TV, to let us know if the world has come to an end." Certain countries are "Miner's Canaries" to watch as harbingers of the environmental doom to come. Japan is "The Dying Giant That May Never Awaken."⁵ Overpopulation, congestion, pollution

and industrial poisoning are seen as inevitable unless they "... completely change and de-industrialize. ..."6

Another canary is Brazil. Mr. Ehrlich's predictions of continuing development and destruction of the Amazon Basin are overblown. "As long as those in control are profiting, the tragedy will be played out -- perhaps before 1985."7 The tragedy that Mr. Ehrlich fears is, unlike his other predictions, never clearly spelt out in the nine pages devoted to Brazil although he seems to expect a decline in living standards combined with agricultural collapse and increasing infant mortality rates.

Predictions spill over into the political realm. Despite the Watergate scandals and the political demise of President Nixon, Mr. Ehrlich foresees "... increased concentration of power in the executive branch and further erosion of power of Congress and the courts."8 He expects that the President will seize power and dissolve Congress during the food riots of the 1980s.

Mr. Ehrlich is clearly an addict of failed predictions. Food prices will escalate and absorb more and more of our budgets. "Without planning and organization on the food front and a rapid decline in world fertility to below replacement level, the prognosis for 1990 and beyond is completely negative. A massive die-off from starvation is unavoidable."9 The future course of the economy is also predicted. "Probably before 1985, a general recognition of the changed economic status of the nation will lead to a stock-market collapse even more severe than the one that preceded the onset of the depression of the 1930s. ... Confidence in the market as a place to make money may be more or less permanently eroded. ..."10

Many solutions are offered. He anticipates modern politicians by advocating industrial policy as a way to avoid the coming collapse. Economic planning will lead us to a steady-state, survival-oriented economy in which we will lead sane and ecologically sound lives as we farm our subsistence gardens. He foresees wind and solar energy as alternatives to petroleum. The public is urged to preserve energy in ways great and small, including "Eat cold meals."11 The author strains to create panic as he asks: "Remember the great toilet paper panic of 1973?" The public is urged to stockpile food, medical supplies and, of course, birth control pills. "A period of social breakdown is a poor time to become pregnant."12

Is it unseemly to make light of the prophetically-impaired? Any reviewer with such feelings will be rescued by a precedent set by Mr. Ehrlich. He attempts to hoist economists on their own petard by portraying them as "... entrapped in their own unnatural love for a growing gross national product. ..." Economists are so limited in knowledge that explaining to them the need for "... no growth in the material sector, or ... that commodities must become expensive ..." is like "... attempting to explain odd-day - even-day gas distribution to a cranberry."13 He suggests a game where, "When economists make predictions, ... clip them and later check how accurate they were ... the inaccuracy of their predictions don't [sic] build confidence in economists."14

Milton Friedman is derided as an arch conservative, but he does receive praise from Mr. Ehrlich for conceiving the idea of a guaranteed income for the poor. This is, remarkably, one economic proposal that has since been discredited by empirical evidence.15

Innumeracies occur throughout the book. He deplores oil company profits, and quotes percentage increases in the first quarter of 1974 that range from 39% to 718%, without ever specifying the base from which they grow.16 The widening gap between the incomes of the rich and poor in Brazil is deplored. "In the 1950s and 1960s, the ratio of the average income of the richest 20% of the population to that of the poorest 20% increased from 15-to-1 to 25-to-1."17 A more accurate picture should, at the very least, include some indication of how the incomes of the poorest 20% have changed over time.

Mr. Ehrlich decries the false nutritional and medical claims of vitamin and diet advocates. "For this, the only defense is knowledge, plus a healthy skepticism for anything that sounds like a far-fetched claim."18 He gives excellent advice, but fails to apply it to his own claims.

The book is an endless catalog of failed predictions. Potential problems are, in the Ehrlich theology, treated as certain to occur and magnified into disasters. There is not even the slightest acknowledgment of human creativity and problem solving as a possible antidote to his dark and pessimistic vision.

Despite the failed predictions in this and other books, Mr. Ehrlich seems to have maintained a certain standing in the media. The June 1992 issue of *Media Watch* details the esteem with which he seems to be held at Cable Network News. CNN's month-long series "The People Bomb" used Paul Ehrlich and Carl Pope of the Sierra Club as the only two on-air sources. The series, as described by Media Watch, is a warmed up version of Mr. Ehrlich's failed vision with, of course, the disasters postponed a decade or two into the future.

His prestige seems to have survived in political circles also. The 1990 book *The Population Explosion* by the same co-authors continues to rehash these same failed predictions. Senator Tim Wirth, D-Colo., notes on the book jacket that "This superb, closely reasoned, and fact-filled book should do much to clear the way for badly needed political action." No less than Senator Al Gore, D-Tenn., adds "The time for action is due, and past due. The Ehrlichs have written the prescription. ..." If these books don't drive you to despair, then surely the jacket blurbs will.

Notes:

1 Both Mr. and Ms. Ehrlich are co-authors of this book. The book's copyright belongs to Mr. Ehrlich alone. The cover and spine of the book are curious as the names of the co-authors are listed as "**Paul R. Ehrlich** and Anne H. Ehrlich." One can only speculate as to the reasons for this. It may be evidence of good marketing on the part of the publisher, as Mr. Ehrlich had a broad following in 1974 as a consequence of the success of *The Population Bomb*, or it may simply be an artifact of a less sensitive age that depreciated the contribution of women. This reviewer suspects that Ms. Ehrlich had a psychic premonition that this work would be an intellectual turkey, and preferred that her contribution be as inconspicuous as possible. This review will respect her (possible) desire and attribute this work's virtues and failings to her husband. This is neither chivalry nor chauvinism on the part of the reviewer, but merely a willingness to give credit where credit seems to be due.

2 Page 10.

3 Page 21.

4 Page 33.

5 Page 119.

6 Pages 124-128.

7 Page 135.

8 Page 147.

9 Page 191.

10 Page 176.

11 Page 230.

12 Page 252. Some people, of course, regard this as an excellent time to become pregnant. Remember the blackouts in New York City a couple of decades ago? And the increase in birth rates nine months later?

13 Pages 158, 159.

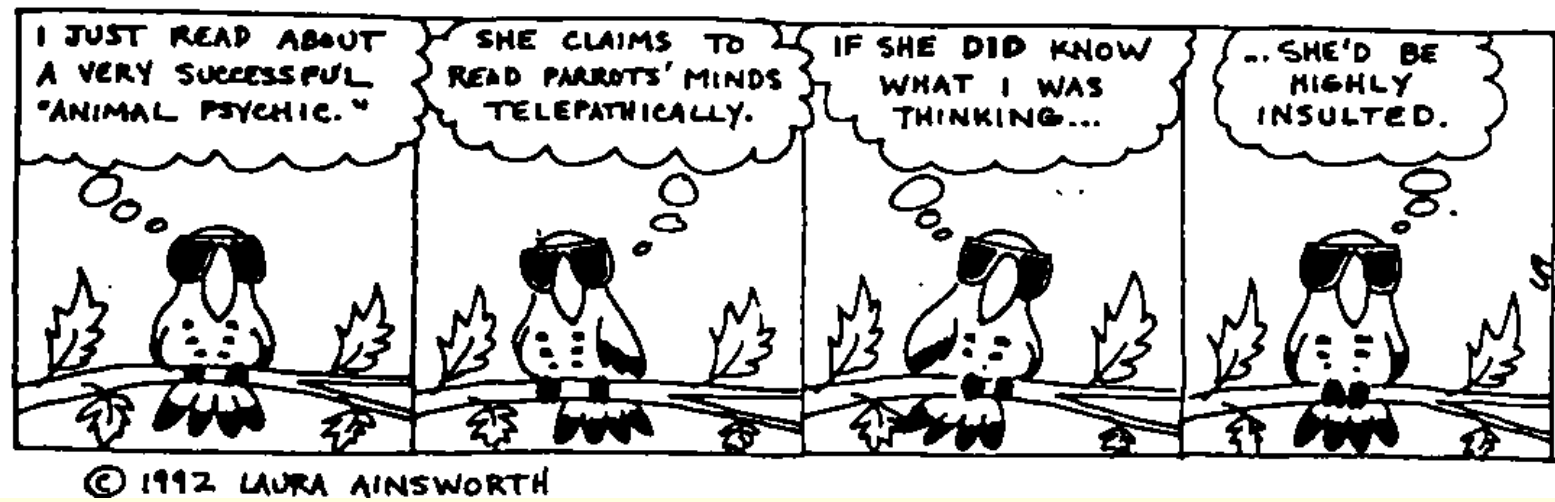
14 Page 162.

15 Page 281. Readers who wish to know more about the deleterious impact of a guaranteed income on the poor should read Chapter 11 of Charles Murray's *Losing Ground: American Social Policy* , 1950-1980; Basic Books, 1984.
16 Page 46.
17 Page 131.
18 Pages 215-216.

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Up a tree: a skeptical cartoon

By Laura Ainsworth



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