

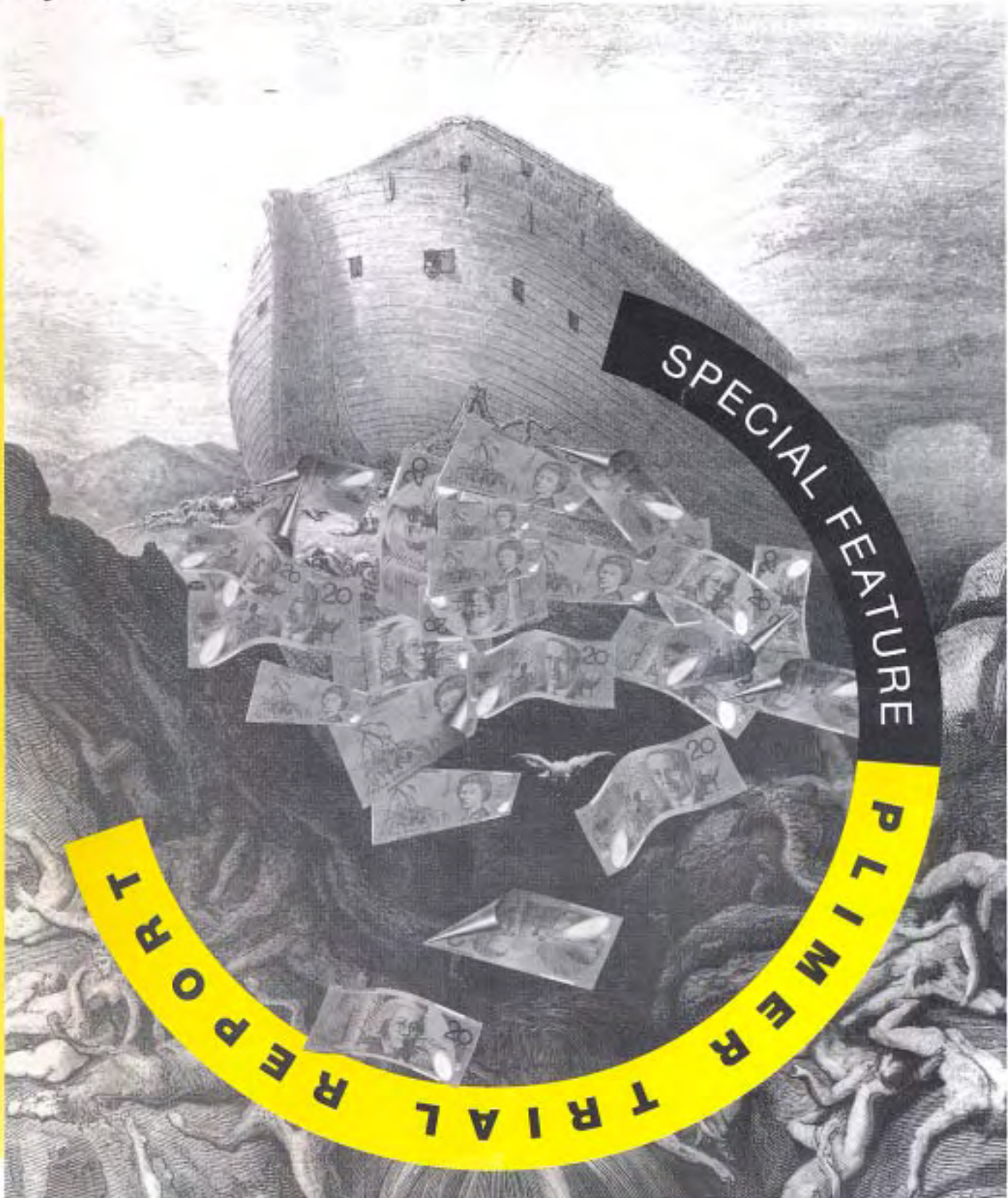
# the skeptic



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A journal of fact and opinion



SPECIAL FEATURE

PLIMMER TRIAL REPORT

# *the Skeptic*

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## An apology

We apologise to our readers for the delay in publishing this issue. The first cause of delay was by the time it took to receive the judgement in the Plimer court case. We deliberately delayed publication for one week so we would not be in the position of giving the details of the case and excluding the verdict. We saw this as being analogous to publishing a detective story and leaving out the last page.

Then, when the judgement had been handed down, and the magazine was in its final stages of laying-out, we experienced something we had never previously experienced - the file became corrupted, and no amount of diagnosis, nor treatment, could retrieve it. We had to begin the laying-out

process all over again. This was being carried out, amid much use of foul and obscene expletives, when the editor found himself the victim of a particularly virulent strain of influenza. The final straw came when *the Skeptic's* phone suddenly developed a constant musical note that drowned out the voices of callers. As one of our friends said, "That'll teach you to support the Son of Satan".

It would have been even later, if it hadn't been for the sterling proof-reading efforts of Victorian Skeptics stalwart, Dr Steve Roberts, who sat by his fax, day and night, as the pages poured in. We are supremely grateful to Steve for this and wish to say so publicly. Any remaining errors are our fault, and not Steve's. **Ed**

## Some Changes

Readers will note some changes in the addresses and contact numbers of the state Skeptics organisations in the column to the left.

The most significant change is the new address for the Victorian Skeptics. Please note the new one in your diary.

This change is a matter of some nostalgic regret to those of us who have been with the Skeptics since its inception. The old address, PO Box 1555P, was the first address of any Skeptics organisation in Australia and it has been in use for 16 or more years.

**Australian Skeptics (Vic) Inc**  
**GPO Box 5166AA**  
**Melbourne VIC 3001**

## Matters of law

Barry Williams

As most readers will now be aware, the Ian Plimer / Allen Roberts court case has been adjudicated, and the results for Ian were not as he had hoped. The case was brought under federal Trade Practices legislation and state Fair Trading legislation and concerned two issues. The first was a breach of copyright action, where Ian's co-applicant, David Fasold, alleged that Roberts had used a diagram, Fasold's intellectual property, without permission. The second issue alleged that, in his lectures and sale of tapes, etc, Roberts had engaged in misleading and deceptive conduct in pursuit of trade.

In the first matter, the judge found that Roberts *had* breached Fasold's copyright and awarded the latter damages of \$2,500. In the other matter, the judge found that Roberts and his co-respondent, Ark Search Inc, had *not* been engaged in trade or commerce, within the meaning of the act. He *did* find that statements made by Roberts in his lectures, and in preparation of brochures were false and misleading, but, as he had already found that the respondents were not engaged in trade or commerce, then no law had been infringed. At the time of going to press, it is expected that Ian Plimer will appeal the findings.

Interviewed on TV after the judgement, Roberts claimed that he had been completely vindicated and that it was a victory for freedom of speech. On the first point, it is surely a strange interpretation of the result, which found that he had used another person's property without permission and that he had made false and misleading statements, for him to claim complete vindication.

On the second, and more serious point, we wonder that the words did not choke him. There have always been elements of "freedom of speech" in this case and it is an issue that greatly concerns Australian Skeptics. The case developed precisely because those who arranged Roberts' meeting denied that freedom to people who attended the meetings, and who wished to ask questions. In at least one of the meetings in question, armed guards were employed to ensure that people wishing to ask questions were bodily removed. This was further compounded by a writ taken out against Ian Plimer, accusing him of defamation, as a result of comments made after one of the meetings. So much for the commitment of Roberts and his organisation to free speech.

Freedom of speech is one of the fundamental rights that underpin any democracy, but that freedom always incorporates the freedom of others to

question one's statements. It is not an infringement of anyone's freedom of speech to require them to justify what they say.

Since the conclusion of the case, we have received an unprecedented number of calls offering support to Ian Plimer and to the Skeptics for backing him. We were particularly heartened to find that this support came, not just from scientists and members of the sceptical public, but also from members of the Christian clergy and laity, who objected to their beliefs being tainted by association with fundamentalism. At the post-judgement press conference, every member of the Australian Museum's professional scientific staff crowded into the Skeleton Gallery to support Ian Plimer and we must thank the Museum Director, Dr Des Griffin, for his words of encouragement and support. Among the witnesses who offered their support to Ian's case were an elder of the Presbyterian church and an Anglican Archdeacon.

Whether or not it was wise of Ian Plimer to take the action he did, is a question that only he can answer - it has certainly proved to be an extremely expensive course of action, and one from which he is unlikely ever to recover financially. However, his was an extremely courageous action, and he deserves our strongest support. It was brought about by his perception of his duty, as a publicly funded scientist and educator, to challenge pseudoscientific and anti-intellectual dogma wherever it is being foisted upon the public. It is an attitude we can only commend, and it is one that other prominent public figures might well consider emulating, though arguably not through the courts. A writer in this issue has asked, "Is it wise to debate fools in public?" to which we can only reply with the words attributed to Edmund Burke, "It is necessary only for good men to say nothing for evil to triumph".

Are we over-stepping the mark in describing fundamentalist creationism as an evil? Is it, of itself, no more evil than any other basically silly belief? That is true, but it is not the belief that we regard as evil, it is the consequence of acting on that belief - the public dissemination of ignorance; in particular, the dissemination of ignorance to children. And that is precisely what organisations promoting creation 'science' do; they promote ignorance because knowledge comes into conflict with their beliefs; beliefs which are neither scientifically nor theologically sustainable. Worse, they exhibit no sense of shame at their ignorance; rather, they flaunt it like a badge of honour.

In fact, there is no such thing as creation science - all of its efforts are aimed at discrediting the fact of evolution and, by extension, biological, and all other science. One will find little or no creation 'science' in creationist texts; at best one will find sophistic arguments that seek to force the scientific facts to fit in with a narrow religious dogma. A few scientific terms are attached to make it seem respectable, at least to a scientifically unsophisticated audience. Creation science has as much to do with science as Donald Duck has to do with the care and maintenance of domestic poultry.

Ironically, while Ian Plimer is seen to have lost his case, its result may well have served to advance his cause of confronting and exposing pseudoscience wherever it crops up. Resulting media coverage, domestically and internationally, has thrown a great deal of critical light into some very dark places indeed. The public is now much more aware of the vacuous underpinnings of literalist creationism than it ever had been before. The evidence suggests that the promoters of this nonsense have found the unwanted glare of publicity most unwelcome, and it is up to organisations like Australian Skeptics and professional scientific and educational bodies to maintain that scrutiny.

It is no longer enough for Skeptics, scientists or educators to sweep this pernicious dogma under the carpet; to rely on the fact that its incompatibility with observed facts makes it self-evidently ridiculous. On the ABC TV 7.30 Report, on June 3, it was revealed that up to 60,000 Australian children are now enrolled in 300 schools in the "Bible-based schools" system. In the programme, Mr Bob Frisken, a leader of this movement, said "We would encourage children not to trust what they read, whether they are reading that in an encyclopaedia, or in a text book written by a Christian. We believe that God has revealed himself in the Bible and that therefore they can trust the Bible as a safe source of what God has said." In the same programme, a child at one of the schools said "Christians ... need to know that science supports creation ... because of the evidence for design"

We would hardly argue with the idea that people should be sceptical of what they read, but Frisken is not saying that. What he is saying, is that they should be sceptical of everything *except the Bible*, because he *believes* that God has revealed himself in that book and that he *knows* what it is that God has said. The child has been told that science supports creation, when quite clearly science does no such thing. Science has nothing at all to say about 'creation' in this sense, but, because the child has had propaganda fed to him under the guise of creation 'science', he has been misled as to what science is about.

New government regulations allow such schools to attract state funding and, the programme claimed, their numbers are expanding by 10% per year. We can therefore expect that increasing numbers of our children will be subjected to this form of intellectual child abuse. It is just not good enough.

## Other issues

This case has highlighted, again, that the law is a tool of doubtful value in support of rational thinking. In several articles in this issue this point is made even clearer. Harry Edwards describes his frustration in trying to get regulatory authorities interested in investigating even the *possibility* that Tele-psychics may be breaking consumer laws. In this instance we are not contending that people have no right to believe in psychics - everyone has the right to believe what they want. What we do contend is that one's beliefs, whether or not they are sincerely held, should not allow one to achieve a privileged position in the eyes of the law.


Similar points are made in relation to the acceptance of untested pseudo-medical devices, in articles by Dr Stephen Basser and Dr Colin Keay.

Beliefs, and the right to hold them, are, properly, of no concern to the law. Actions taken in pursuit of those beliefs may well be, and the sincerity with which the belief is held should be no excuse for failure to obey the law. This is hardly a radical position. The law is, belatedly, taking notice of cases of female genital mutilation, carried out in the name of a cultural belief, and so it should. We could not complain if the law ignored a citizen who sincerely believed in the religion of the Aztecs? But we would surely expect the law of the land to be enforced if he enacted that belief by sacrificing people on the steps of the Cenotaph.

Just as disturbing are the issues raised by Dr Andrew Gibbs in his article on repressed memories and the claim that certain 'therapies' allow these memories to be recovered. He argues that, at best, these therapeutic techniques are seriously flawed and, at worst, they are entirely spurious. They certainly have not been proven to be effective by any recognised testing procedure. Yet he shows that courts in this country have accepted uncorroborated 'recovered memories' as evidence in cases of childhood sexual and physical abuse.

There can scarcely be a more heinous crime than the abuse of children and we are shocked to hear of more and more cases being made public, through such agencies as the Royal Commission into the NSW Police Service. The emotionally damaged witnesses at that inquiry, however, did not claim to have repressed their memories of the abuse - indeed, many said that they wished they could have.

But the horror of that crime, and the prevalence of it that is now being exposed, gives no excuse to rely on a dangerously flawed forensic technique; one for which there is scant evidence for its validity. It does nothing to help the victims of abuse to have others falsely accused, and convicted, of that hideous crime. Yet it seems that the law may well be doing just that.

The Rule of Law is one more of the fundamental rights that distinguishes a democratic society. That being so, is it too much to expect that our laws should bear some relationship to the real world? 

# Around the traps

## Bunyip

We have been delighted to read comments by 1997 Australian of the Year, and 1996 Nobel laureate in Medicine, Professor **Peter Doherty**, on a number of subjects of interest to Skeptics.

His views on the "shallow" reporting in the Australian media of science matters, and particularly of the immunisation debate, carry the weight of one of the world's leaders in the field. Commenting on the ABC *Quantum* report last year in which much weight was given to the anti-immunisation argument, he said, (*SMH*, Jan 27) "Giving equal time to largely irrational activists as to medical experts was like giving equal time to murderers".

At a National Press Club lunch in April, during Science Week, Prof Doherty described creation science as "an absolute scam". On the same topic he told science writer **Leigh Dayton** (*SMH*, May 3), "I have always been outspoken about some things, like creation science; I truly detest it. It's contemptible".

\* \* \*

We were intrigued to see reports that our 1996 Bent Spoon winner, American new age author **Marlo Morgan**, has been in the news again.

Morgan wrote a best seller entitled *Mutant Message Down Under*, in which she catalogued the time she allegedly spent with a mysterious band of Aborigines in Western Australia and all the secret rituals they supposedly taught her.

Not surprisingly, Western Australian Aboriginal groups, particularly the Dumbartung Association, were incensed by her fanciful rendition of their culture and sent representatives to the US to

### A collation of news items and oddities from the fringes

let Americans know that her work is entirely without validity.

Recently, Morgan went to Japan to launch a Japanese version of her book, to be greeted by two Dumbartung representatives, **Robert Eggington** and **Paul Sampi**, who accused her of fraud and cultural theft. According to press reports, Morgan pleaded with the men to "stop the hurt", which is a bit rich coming from a representative of the New Age, which seems to regard all of the cultural traditions of the world's indigenous peoples as grist to its mill.

We have contacted Mr Eggington and he has agreed to provide us with a report of his association's campaign against Morgan's continuing cultural denigration. We will publish this in our next issue.

\* \* \*

We are sorry to have missed out on the recent conference in Sydney sponsored by *Nexus* magazine. Readers of that worthy journal will be left unflabbergasted to learn that every conspiracy theory ever circulated (and no doubt some brand new ones devised especially for the conference) were given a run.

Although we weren't in attendance, we are prepared to bet that if we had a dollar for every time the phrases "one world government", "multinational cartels" and "international bankers" was used, we could retire to an expensive villa by the sea.

\* \* \*

Cheryl Jones, science reporter at the *Canberra Times* did attend a public meeting of the *Nexus* conference and she has filed this report.

There are three famous pyramids at Gizain Egypt which, with the exception of one, all lie in a straight line.

To many, that is unremarkable, being, as it is, true of any group of three objects which are not lined up. But to United States film producer, Bill Cote, it is a mystery of some significance. The configuration of the pyramids, he says, is identical to that of the three stars forming the belt of Orion. Could the ancient Egyptians' knowledge of astronomy have been so advanced? Mr Cote has produced several "documentaries" including *The Age of the Sphinx* and the *Mysterious Origins of Man* series. He was in Australia last month to address the *Nexus* conference in Sydney. In a public lecture, he told of the suppression by the scientific community of crucial "evidence" challenging prevailing models of human origin. He also complained about being attacked by scientists over his productions, some of which he had managed to sell to NBC.

"They (scientists) want to censor what people like us are doing," he said indignantly. "Science education throughout the world has really diminished. Only 10 per cent of adults can define what a molecule is or give any kind of definition of DNA," he said. And many adults in the United States did not know that the Earth revolved around the sun. "There is a crisis in science education but they're saying it's our fault."

Earlier, he described some of the material at the heart of the controversy. It included "evidence"

suggesting that human beings had coexisted with dinosaurs, and rumours (as yet unconfirmed), that pterodactyls existed in Namibia to this day. One of the works was narrated by Charlton Heston, whose *Planet of the Apes* experience apparently lent the "documentaries" considerable authority. Mr Cote also revealed some of his research methodology. He once checked a hunch with eight psychics, all of whom confirmed his analysis. Yet despite this high level of inter-psychic reliability, it seems, many scientists sent him hate mail via the internet. One person even accused the production team of being either morons or liars, he said in disbelief. But he defended the productions, which have elevated the device of the rhetorical question to high art: "We didn't say anything was real or false. We said 'what if...'" And after all, it was entertainment...

"Science cannot explain some of the phenomena in this world - phenomena like extraterrestrials, psychic healing, evidence of ancient civilisations - things that defy our current theories," Mr Cote concluded.

Tickets to the public lecture, held on May 26, sold for \$18 each. Perhaps the price was set at a level designed to keep the scientists out.

\* \* \*

We are grateful to **Pascal Forget** of the Quebec Skeptics for bringing to our attention the news that Canada has nominated a homoeopath as the person to approve drugs and medications in that country. This is a curious appointment because we understand that homoeopaths are not in favour of any conventional drugs unless they are diluted out of existence. It does raise, however, an interesting thought on how to solve the problem with illicit drugs.

Take one grain of heroin (or cocaine or whatever); dilute with distilled water; shake rattle and roll in the homoeopathically approved manner; dilute and redilute to taste; sell the resultant 'potentised' water to addicts at

cost. Distilled water is inexpensive, you can even make your own, so the cost would be minimal. If homoeopathy is even vaguely valid, the addict should still get the 'benefits' of the heroin, but, assuming they use clean needles, the injection is only distilled water, which should do no harm.

We expect no rewards from a grateful nation for this idea, however, the Nobel Committee may care to take note.

\* \* \*

Recently we donated copies of some of our books to various municipal libraries around the country. Wishing to check how long it took a donated book to get into the system, we visited our local library and made use of its computer catalogue.

Selecting "authors", we typed in **Edwards, Harry** and, much to our surprise, we found that it not only listed *A Skeptics Guide to the New Age* and *A Skeptics Casebook*, but also three other books. One was *Developing the Psychic Personality* and another was *The Psychic Abilities of Daniel X* (we are not too certain of these latter titles, such was our state of shock).

Our immediate thought was to convene a General Court Martial in the Supreme Headquarters of Skeptics High Command to deal with this viper in our bosom.

However, being Skeptics, we decided that further investigation was required and discovered that the Harry Edwards who authored the latter books was an English 'psychic and healer', who died in the 1940s (as opposed to our own Harry, who only looks as though he did).

The final book in the catalogue was the one that really intrigued us. It was entitled *The Morris Motor Car from 1913 to 1983*, but it was out on loan so we couldn't investigate it any further. Harry denies responsibility for it, but then he would, wouldn't he?

\* \* \*

Our thanks to the *Hawaii Rational Inquirer*, organ of the Hawaii

Skeptics, for the following news item.

"A request for a zoning variance to build a creation 'science' museum in Florence, Kentucky four miles from a famous palaeontological site in Big Bone Lick State Park has been denied by Boone county authorities. The museum, which was to be called Genesis Park, was opposed by members of the local religious community and University of Kentucky anthropologists."

Skeptic readers will note an Australian connection in the story, as the park was the brainchild (if such it can be designated) of expatriate Australian creation 'scientist' Ken Ham, who has been spreading his particular brand of creationist disinformation in the US for some years.

Talk about taking coals to Newcastle!

\* \* \*

As the 19s trickle off the bottom of the calendar and the 20s loom ever larger, an increasing catalogue of prognostications of doom emerge from divers sources.

We must, therefore, express our profound gratitude to Adelaide subscriber, **Brian Miller**, who drew our attention to the earth-shattering events that accompanied the last millennial transition.

"Olaf of Norway killed by Sveyn of Denmark, Venetians conquered Istria, foundation of the archbishopric of Gneizno, and the vaulting of Cluny II began."

That's it. The totality of the events of the year 1000 CE that made it into the *World History Factfinder*. Pretty earth-shattering if you happened to be Olaf of Norway or a citizen of Istria, no doubt, but hardly events that have left their echoes ringing down the centuries that followed.

Unless you are a mediaeval historian, the name Cluny II probably doesn't mean much, but it was an abbey church and it was the first structure to be built in Europe, since Roman times, with a vaulted stone roof.

How can 2000 possibly top this for revolutionary changes?

## Notice

A curious claim we found on the Internet:

"The Prayer list is a forum for anyone who understands the power of prayer and wishes to use this power for themselves and others. Whether you are Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Moslem, etc or agnostic does not matter... as long as you understand that 'prayer' or positive thought energy produces results—this has been documented at the quantum level in physics."

We are not sure if the reverse applies: "Our quark which art in proton, charmed be thy name... Give us this day our daily gluon..." doesn't seem to have the right ring to it somehow. However, we might be prepared to print any common prayer translated into the language of the quantum if any reader cared to try it.


\* \* \*

Prior to the recent British election, newspapers reported that astrologers in Britain agreed with the polls in predicting a Labour victory. Tarot card readers, psychics and other clairvoyants disagreed, predicting that the Conservatives would snatch a surprise victory.

One prominent psychic even claimed, "If we're wrong I'll eat my hat. In fact, I'll eat my crystal ball." We haven't heard if he carried out this threat.

Based on their remarkable ability to predict the bleeding obvious (opinion polls have had Labour ahead by up to 20% for months), we have no doubt that astrologers will now claim precedence in matters mystical over all their confreres.

\* \* \*

A further point of interest in the British election is that the Natural Law Party, with a couple of hundred votes per seat, managed, for once, to outpoll Screaming Lord Such's Monster Raving Loony Party. Of course, this may be accounted for by the fact that the latter worthy group did not field any candidates for the first time in decades. 

# Australian Skeptics 1997 National Convention

**Western Suburbs Leagues Club  
Newcastle  
9/10 August**

### Accommodation

High-class motel adjoining the venue  
Two cheap pubs within walking distance  
Beach-side high-rise motels, 10 min by car

### Parking

Free on-site 4-storey parking station

### On-Site Food

Top-rated Hobarts Restuarant  
Excellent Chinese Restuarant  
Convenient Inexpensive Bistro

**Registration Saturday 9th commencing 9.30 am  
Opening Ceremony at 11.00 am. Adjourn 5.30 pm  
Conference Dinner: 7 - 11 pm with Entertainment  
Sunday sessions 9 am until close at 4 pm**

### Main Speakers

ARK-angel Ian Plimer (University of Melbourne)  
Professor Vic Stenger (University of Hawaii)  
Mr P P McGuinness (*Sydney Morning Herald*)  
Professor John Dwyer (Prince of Wales Hospital)

### Call For Papers

A few 15, 20 and 30 min. slots are still available  
Contact: Colin Keay, PO Box 166, Waratah 2298  
FAX: (049) 52 6442

### Tickets

Skeptic Subscribers \$45 for two days  
Public \$25 per day  
Public - Both days plus 1-yr Subscription - \$75  
Dinner \$30 per person

All ticketing by cheque or money order only through our Booking Agent

**Helen Duncan Promotions  
450 Hunter Street  
Newcastle, NSW 2300  
Phone (049) 26 4600**



# Victorian attitudes

Kathy Butler & Bob Nixon

Therapeutic touch has raised its ugly head, this time just a little too close to home.

Your humble reporter was disappointed to see an advertisement offering nurses the opportunity to throw nearly \$400 away and learn to stroke people (actually, just wave their hands about in a convincing manner) to achieve all manner of unsupported benefits for their patients - and at my own place of work, a major Melbourne hospital!

Serious phone calls to the powers-that-be, including one to the CEO, reminding him of the lack of defence against malpractice in this case (hip-pocket works, usually) achieved: zero. Not a response. Nothing.

Well, ladies, if you are having a baby, or some gynaecological work done in a maternity hospital in this town, be aware that your ailment may be subject to treatment by the laying on of hands. Leeches, incantations or eye-of-newt don't seem to be on the curriculum just yet.

\* \* \*

The Vic branch held its inaugural Science Symposium at Science-works on May 28th. What a treat it turned out to be.

Ticket holders heard (and saw) Harry Gardner doing science for preschoolers, repairing the President's deprived childhood by teaching him "Little Peter Rabbit Had a Cold in His Nose". Catie Morrison from Discovery, Bendigo, showed how a hands-on science centre works, generally blowing things up, pushing things around and dunking them. (Question: will a can of Coke float or sink? What about diet Coke? Try it!) Graeme O'Neill showed

how hard it is to get good science in the news these days.

The audience was spellbound by Ian Plimer's story - beginning with Allen Roberts' lecture tour, the David Fasold story, through three lawyers to the trial.

Ian Anderson from *New Scientist* led our speakers in a discussion panel. If you'd like to hear Ian Plimer's and Graeme O'Neill's talks, you can buy an audio cassette for \$5.00. Check the back page for details.

\* \* \*

Just another example of the new age "interconnectedness of all things": your correspondent achieved her 15 minutes of fame by getting a job as a telephone psychic last year.

Doing more mundane things (the supermarket shopping) she selected a trolley at random, only to find a fridge magnet discarded in it, advertising that same psychic hot-line. It now adorns the Butler fridge nestled beside a Skeptics fridge magnet (well, some days you never can decide which one you'll call for advice.)

\* \* \*

The 1997 Bendigo Easter Fair saw yet another batch of people risking life and limb over the glowing remains of a really nice fire. In conjunction with the Bendigo Discovery Centre, the Victorian Branch ran two fire-walks to let the people of Bendigo in on the secret of this ancient feat. Although there was time for only about 40 people to actually try it for themselves, as many as two thousand people looked on and heard the explanation of the physics behind this strange but fascinating ritual.

Roland Seidel, Peter Hogan,

Steve Colebrook, Adam Santilli, James Gerrand, Shane Delphine and Bob Nixon made the trek to Bendigo for the weekend. Most of us had the opportunity to see the "Up in Flames" show at the Discovery Centre, a series of bangs, pops and flashes presented by Catie Morrison.

Anyone who has taken part in a fire-walk, or has even seen one, will know there is no magic behind it, but will be equally aware that there is an element of danger. Those most at risk are the poor fools at the front of the queue. On Saturday, Roland Seidel was the first to walk followed closely but gingerly by Bob Nixon. On Sunday Steve Colebrook and Adam Santilli took the lead, testing the coals for safety.

There's something about a fire. As we unloaded the wood from the truck a few people asked what we were doing and a few more looked into the pit and wondered what it was all about. As we stacked the wood even more of the curious asked questions. As the kerosene was poured a little cluster of people gathered. Then we lit the fire and a crowd appeared, not a mere throng, but a multitude.

It was the same on Sunday night, but with the added oddity of our pile of wood being built in the middle of a road and surrounded by fire engines preparing to take part in the Torchlight Parade.

Once again, as soon as the CFA had moved off and the fire was lit, a crowd emerged from the gloom. There's a message there for someone. If you need a crowd in a hurry, light a fire.

A couple of special mentions. The business of conducting a fire-walk safely is time consuming and often heavy work. Our thanks go

**continued on p 12...**

# Southerly aspect

Allan Lang

Everybody complains about the weather, but nobody does anything about it. Are the weather bureau four-day forecasts pseudoscience? Some people over here think so, and some don't - this could be one of those topics, like hypnotism, that Skeptics vigorously differ on.

A Letter to the Editor of the *Advertiser* wondered why the 4 day forecasts were rarely accurate. This attracted the attention of a SA Skeptic who also wrote to the paper. His letter attracted the attention of a local community FM radio station which telephoned him about the subject, and asked would he be interested in being interviewed about it.

I agreed to do it after some extensive research, ie comparing that day's weather map with the weather. I also found out that the Weather Bureau considers the next day forecast as being 90% accurate, two days as 80%, three days as 70%, and four days as only 60% accurate.

Even though 60% is not all that good, it is adequate for the purpose for which it was originally introduced: as a service to farmers - bless 'em, salt of the earth. (Funny saying that, salted soil is usually considered degraded.)

It is an advantage to know four days early if the weather will be suitable for certain activity, even if the accuracy isn't all that good. You can get ready, and if it turns out wrong, you can do something else.

An analogy might be knowing with 60% accuracy if the wheel at the casino will come up red or black. You wouldn't want to bet the farm on a single spin, but in the long term such accuracy would be acceptable.

As I tried to point out during the

interview, it's knowing the accuracy which gives the forecast its scientific validity. But the way it is presented on TV: "On Saturday it will become fine", may well be as useful as reading your daily horoscope.

The weather bureau is under pressure to give even more extended forecasts. This will mean predicting what will be produced from the weather patterns before they've even been formed.

I wish I could be confident that this is not going to happen.

\* \* \*

Why would the name "Skeptics" attract bizarre correspondence?

The latest is a 21 page longhand document from NSW. It was unsigned, but I think that was an inadvertent omission - as the writer included his address, and a photocopy of a postcard to him from Stephen Hawking. If I have understood the postcard, Hawking didn't understand the thesis either.

A puzzling feature is that letters of this style come from interstate (and even international) addresses. What is it with these people? Don't they have their own sceptical groups to puzzle and confuse?

Then there are the ones which, while I can understand what they want, I again wonder; why us? They are usually addressed to the Office Manager, Managing Director, CEO, etc of the Skeptics, detailing major business opportunities. And not all of them involve the transferring of huge amounts of oil money from Nigeria through our bank account.

The most recent missive to The Manager Skeptics SA was to inform us of the opportunity to tender for purchase of the former City

of Enfield Council Chambers (2000 sq m of buildings, ample parking, etc). Tempting as the opportunity was, a discussion with our treasurer established that this opportunity was one we would have to let slide.


Given the similar correspondence our Office Manager has had to deal with, he sometimes wonders: Is it possible that people out there think we are something like an advertising agency (Skeptics? - no sillier than some others I suppose) - or perhaps a German engineering firm, as was suggested in the last *Skeptic*.

\* \* \*

On the first Wednesday of even numbered months we hold a Super Special Skeptical Saracen Soiree at the Saracen's Head, 82 Carrington St.

The August dinner will be at 7:30 PM on August 6, with guest speaker/s talking/debating on the subject of (contact me in July to get more info).

Do ring us (8277 6427) and tell us you'll be there.

If you haven't been because you think you won't know anyone, don't worry - neither do the rest of us. We all wear name tags, there is lively conversation and debate on many, many subjects and rarely is any blood shed. 

**Convention 97**  
**Newcastle**  
**August 9-10**

# Hunter gatherings

Michael Creech

The Hunter region is full of newsworthy articles requiring a sceptical investigation and I have volunteered to put together 'Hunter Highlights'. Being a geologist working in the local coal mines, I spend a lot of time searching for fossilised fence posts and anchors underground, despite the derision I get from other members.

\* \* \*

Organisational work is well underway for the National Convention to be held 9-10 August. Following on from the excellent 1992 Convention it will be held again at the excellent facilities available at the Wests League Club. Those interested in attending should search out the ad in this magazine - ; those psychics amongst us can go straight to the relevant page. Colin Keay is still keen to hear from presenters of papers.

\* \* \*

The local branch of the Cancer Council will hold a 'single & sexy' ball in May and one of the Hunter's leading psychics, the Amazing Valda, will assist in match making. She will check auras and draw on the energies of the universe to ensure people find the right match, and perform palm readings to ensure prospective partners are indeed single in body and spirit. The same event last year earned the Cancer Council \$25000. Some members have suggested she try the Australian Skeptics Challenge and earn a quick and easy \$30000 which she could also donate to the Council.

This should be easy for the Amazing Valda as she claims her powers have been verified by the "Sydney University of Psychics".

Is this a new department of the Sydney Uni? Is it true that UTS is offering a course in Ancient Chinese Medicine?

\* \* \*

Apparently these events have inspired Southern Cross University (Lismore) to establish their School of Natural and Alternative Medicine, with a four year course in Naturopathy. Our extensive network of moles in our local University will endeavour to deflect this institution away from such frightening developments. Can we claim these treatments on Medicare now?

\* \* \*

Local astronomical members Col Maybury and Colin Keay have been keeping a keen eye on comet Hale-Bopp, but have to date not identified any spaceship lurking in its wake. Interested star gazers or early risers can continue the search in June, in the predawn sky low to the west-south-west. A good vantage point, binoculars and a full hipflask will be required to spot those pesky aliens.


\* \* \*

On a recent trip to Queensland my wife and I spotted a bright light above Brisbane on Sat, 11 April about 9:30pm from the Gateway Expressway.

We were not the only ones 'seeing things' as we passed a motorist on the side of the road with binoculars out, and the lady at the tollgate confirmed other motorists had spotted the same object. It appeared to be blimp-sized and some 200m above ground but, perspective was hazy as I was trying to avoid Qld drivers at 100km/hr. Local radio stations the next morning were silent on the topic and

my wife concluded it must be a UFO. Can anyone identify the object?

\* \* \*


I have been informed that the Pope has recently pardoned Darwin and I was wondering if any members kept an article confirming this. If so I would be grateful if I could receive a copy by mail (PO BOX 220 Budgewoi 2262) or fax (043 902340). The Amazing Valda may know if Darwin has actually accepted this apology? 

## ...Vic attitudes from p10

to the Discovery Centre, particularly Peter Cominski and Catie Morrison. The whole thing was their idea and they put in a lot of work to make it a success. Catie, was be among the speakers at our science symposium on May 28.

The Bendigo Discovery Centre is a great day out for the entire family. With more than 100 hands-on exhibits, a regular shows like "Up in Flames", there's plenty to do. Subscribers in the Bendigo area might be interested to know that the Centre is always on the look out for volunteer "explainers".

\* \* \*

A very important component of this firewalk was insurance. We could easily find insurers to indemnify us against burning down Bendigo but it was almost impossible to find anyone who would give us cover for the walkers. You just can't get insurance for voluntarily doing something stupid. We finally succeeded. Branches considering firewalks, insurance is a *very* good idea - contact us for info. 

# The Plimer/Noah case: a daily log

Barry Williams

This article will present a running log of the activities that took place during the seven days of court time the trial consumed. It is based on notes taken during the trial, on a reading of the transcript of evidence and on conversations during adjournments. Its purpose is to give readers some of the flavour of what went on, some of the highlights of the evidence and some subjective observations of proceedings. It is, by no means, a comprehensive catalogue of events.

Federal Court 23C in the Supreme Court Building in Queens Square, Sydney, is a small room. When the judge, the court officials, the barristers and solicitors and the two Applicants and the Respondent are all seated, there remain about 40-50 seats for the public.

On the first day of the trial, every seat is filled, as are the aisles, the doorway and a large part of the foyer, as interested spectators try to get a view of what is occurring. The media are very much in evidence, with TV crews from all networks patrolling the footpaths outside the court building, and representatives of most of the print and radio outlets crowding into the court. It is not just the regular court reporters who are here, but also the cream of Australia's science scribes, local stringers for overseas newspapers, a prominent religion broadcaster and a number of well known columnists. This case is big news all round the world and the coverage in the local newspapers and TV has been spectacular.

In this case, the Applicants are David Fasold, a retired US marine salvage operator, who is alleging a breach of copyright and Ian Plimer, Professor of Geology from Melbourne University, who is taking action for "Deceptive and Misleading Conduct" under Federal Trade Practices law and state Fair Trading laws. Counsel for the applicants are Mr Stephen Walmsley and Mr Mark Vincent

The Respondent is Allen Roberts, described in the press as a "pastoral elder of a Sydney church". There are two respondents listed for the case, the second being Ark Search Inc, an incorporated association, but, as the trial begins, information is provided that this body had recently met and had gone into voluntary liquidation. Counsel for the respondents are Mr Alex Radojev and Mr Malcolm Duncan.

The judge is Justice Ronald Sackville, a former Dean of the Law School at the University of NSW.

## Day One

Monday, April 7, the 102nd birthday of PT Barnum, whose dictum "there's a sucker born every minute"

seems particularly appropriate to any discussion of creation 'science'.

The judge enters and asks, "Where shall we begin?", to which Mr Walmsley responds "In the beginning." The judge informs the court that despite the references in the media to "Monkey Trial No 2", this is not a case about science v religion, nor about the truth of the *Genesis* flood myth, but a case under commercial law.

After that auspicious start, the remainder of the day is taken up with the presentation of the statements of claim and the admission of affidavits from the various parties and witnesses.

For those not familiar with court proceedings, this is an extremely time consuming exercise, with counsel for the various parties seeking to have the affidavits admitted and the counsel for the opposing parties objecting to various parts of them. This has all been done in advance in written submissions and the barristers and the judge deciding what should go and what should stay. To the spectator, who doesn't know what is written down, it is entirely mystifying.

During this procedure, Dr Eugenie Scott, director of the (US) National Center for Science and Education finds her evidence on non-accredited educational institutions in the USA declared to be not relevant to the case. She accepts this with stoicism, and goes on over the next two weeks to give a series of excellent lectures on the degradation of the US education system caused by the inter-ference of religious fundamentalists and creation 'scientists'.

The arcana of the law leads to some parts of documents being excluded and others being "not read". Somehow, the five volumes of submissions, totalling nearly 30 cm when stacked up, are cleansed in this way. The lawyers may understand what is happening, but the lay observer is left in the dark. At the end of the day, the judge asks counsel how long they expect the case to last and they agree "into the third week".

## Day Two

Day two follows much the same course as day one, until late in the day when David Fasold takes the stand. He describes how he had been fascinated by the structure in the Turkish hinterland and had conducted several surveys of the site between 1985 and 1991 and had written a book about it. It is a diagram from this book that is the subject of his action for breach of copyright.

There are a good many Skeptics in the audience and as many people who are supporters of the creationist position. The latter were described by Sally Loane in next day's *SMH* as "mostly older men with 50s haircuts and suits that looked as though they got an airing once a week, at church on Sunday."

This scribe is pleased to see himself mentioned in a Melbourne *Herald Sun* article by Doug Conway in the following passage:

"Figures on both sides carry a physical presence that could be described as biblical. One is the luxuriantly bearded Barry Williams, of the group Australian Skeptics, which is helping to finance the action. Another is the moustachioed, bearded and silver haired Dr Roberts himself." [see separate story]

The case has attracted extensive media coverage, with major stories in all main newspapers and on TV and radio current affairs programmes. The action in the court is nowhere near as dramatic. One reason is possibly because it is being heard by a judge alone, without a jury.

Examination of the witnesses tends to focus on small points. Had there been a jury, then no doubt every piece would have to be explicated in detail, but not in this instance. It therefore makes it difficult for the lay observer to see where anything is heading. Anyone whose perceptions of legal action is coloured by *Rumpole* or *LA Law* would be gravely disappointed at the lack of drama in the real thing.

### Day Three

On the third day, Mr Fasold comes under cross examination from the counsel for the first respondent. This takes up all of the morning and half the afternoon session.

Mr Fasold describes how he had made nine expeditions to the site in the Ararat mountains region of Turkey, beginning in 1985, to investigate a formation that had first been noted in 1948. This forma-

tion had the appearance of a large boat-shaped structure covered in mud. He had surveyed the site, taken a large number of measurements and had drawn a diagram of the formation. It is this diagram, reproduced in his book, that Mr Fasold claims was used by the respondent, Roberts, without his permission. Evidence is given regarding Mr Fasold's financial affairs and his beliefs or lack of belief that the structure is indeed Noah's Ark.

One piece of information emerged that seems to surprise everyone. Mr Fasold tells of his waiting for a royalty payment from his British publisher. His publisher had been taken over during that year and shortly before Mr Fasold should have received his

cheque "the owner, Mr Maxwell, jumped off his yacht off the coast of Spain and I never did get that check." Mr Fasold gives a great deal of information about his activities in Turkey and has to spell out all the names of Turkish individuals and locations for the transcript.

Asked about the term "ark-ologists", Mr Fasold says that those who regarded the site under discussion (about 17 miles from Mt Ararat) described themselves by that term, in a rather light-hearted way and described another group who believed that they had a candidate for the Ark on Mt Ararat itself as "ark-oholics", who "spent their time

running up and down the mountain".

Professor Plimer takes the stand near the end of day three and is taken through some of his evidence by his counsel. Cross examination, by Mr Alex Radojev, for the first respondent, starts late and seems to concentrate on what Prof Plimer means by "scientific method" and why he thinks deception had occurred. The opposing counsel seems to think he has made a good point when he asks Plimer why he thinks "mud" is a geological term. He suggests that mud is a common English word, to which the witness responds "I teach geology in English, so most of the words are common English words". Of course,

## Dubious advice

During this case, some newspapers received a Press Release from a body styling itself the Religious Freedom Institute, which sought to draw a rather long bow on the consequences for freedom of speech if Ian Plimer had achieved a successful outcome in the case.

It quoted the president of the RFI, one John Heining, who claimed that ministers of religion and science teachers may be at risk of abrogating the law of trade practices if "Humanist professor Ian Plimer, with the support of fellow Skeptics" succeeds in the action against Allen Roberts. This is plainly silly, but at least two newspapers quoted it.

Mr Heining first came to our attention as the initiator of the famous Plimer/Gish debate at UNSW several years ago. At that time he was president of the Evangelical Apologetics Association.

He later, in one of the Creation Science Foundation's publications, wrote an 'expose' of Australian

Skeptics which was notorious for the number of easily checkable and uncontroversial 'facts' it contained which were demonstrably wrong. When advised of these errors, the CSF refused to publish our rebuttal, confining themselves to correcting a couple of minor errors. This is a measure of the commitment that that organisation has to truth and freedom of speech.

A few days after the press release, Mr Heining cropped up again, this time on the ABCTV programme *First Wednesday*, discussing a renewal in social conservatism, in which Senator Brian Harradine was in the hot seat. This time Mr Heining was introduced as representing the "Christian Leadership" organisation.

Clearly the ranks of fundamentalism is suffering from a paucity of leadership talent if one unfortunate individual has to preside over so many of its different fronts. We think he should demand more money.



“mud” is a geological term, just as “rock” or “soil” are.

Items often cited by believers as evidence for the Ark are the so-called “drogue stones” which were used as a sort of sea anchor by ancient mariners to keep a vessel’s head into the wind. Large, shaped, stones had been found at this site and it became a matter of faith that these were drogue stones from the Ark. Plimer points out that they are vesicular basalt, identical to the basalt in a local quarry.

One answer that causes some hopeful chuckles among the fundamentalist part of the audience is in response to a question from counsel that if the structure is in fact Noah’s Ark, won’t that cause a grave crisis for evolution? Prof Plimer replies “I don’t see how”. Titters from one section of the audience suggests that that is a telling blow. In reality, it merely betrays the utter paucity of knowledge that “informs” the creationist side of the debate. If the structure is a boat, and even if, by the discovery of some dramatic historical evidence, it could be shown to be a ship that was once sailed by an individual named Noah (an unlikely circumstance in itself) it will have precisely no effect on the evidence for evolution. It may have some serious effects on the study of history or theology, but it would not undermine biology by one iota.

#### Day Four

Prof Plimer re-enters the witness box. Cross examination begins with discussions of the four public meetings Roberts had addressed in Melbourne, Hobart (April 1992) and Sydney (May 1992). At each of these meetings Plimer had attempted to ask questions of the speaker and had been removed from the first two. He had been abused by other attendees and called such names as “Son of Satan”. Freedom of speech, which the respondent claims is under threat in this case, does not appear to include the freedom to ask questions.

He says that it is his duty as a senior scientist and educator, and the holder of a chair at a university, to protect the public (who pay for the position he holds) from deceptive and misleading conduct in fields that are within his expertise. He also maintains that he suffered personal affront that the title of “Dr” which had been granted him as the result of a great deal of his scholarship and hard work, could be assumed by someone doing a correspondence course at an unaccredited institution. He mentions that, apart from his legitimate qualifications, he also has a degree from a “degree mill” but that he wouldn’t have the gall to use that as an inducement to attract people to a lecture. Some discussion ensues on “degree mills” and the ability to purchase “qualifications” for various sums, but without any scholarship.

The topic moves to the claims Roberts had made in his lectures and literature. Plimer says that there were huge numbers of errors in the presentations and that there is no evidence that Roberts had done any research to justify the claims he was making.

Part of the “evidence” had been described in the meetings as a piece of petrified wood (the so-called “gopher wood” described in *Genesis*), which showed that it had been laminated. Plimer describes the petrification process and says that after this, the suggestion of “glue” remaining in the sample are preposterous. In fact, he says, the sample was a common rock.

The “metal rivet”, much touted by Roberts, was in fact “the most common iron mineral on Earth, a Limonite concretion, not native to that area”.

The judge interposes a question on “Popperian falsification”, asking Plimer what would be needed to falsify the claims about the site. He responds that a single hole drilled horizontally through the structure, a geological survey or sampling of various elements would be sufficient.

Cross examination moves on to a visit that Prof Plimer and Mr Fasold made to the Turkish site in August 1994, accompanied by and ABC *Four Corners* TV crew and some journalists from *Stern* magazine, which paid Mr Fasold’s expenses. Prior to the visit, the ABC had sought and obtained permission from the director of the site, Dr Salih Bayraktutan. Dr Bayraktutan, a geophysicist, was an associate professor at Ataturk University in Turkey and has control of the site. His name has been mentioned several times during the trial and he is often quoted as an authority in publications about the site.

When the party arrived at the site and was preparing to do some excavations, Dr Bayraktutan withdrew permission. Plimer asked why? “He pointed out to me that the universities in Turkey are very poor and he’s using this site to get money from Christian fundamentalists. He said he doesn’t believe in Noah’s Ark and this is his equivalent of Loch Ness”, Plimer says. While he is sympathetic to the financial conditions, he can not countenance scientific fraud and wrote a formal letter of complaint to Ataturk University. He has never spoken nor corresponded with Dr Bayraktutan since.

The barrister winds up his cross examination by suggesting that Ian Plimer is a fanatic who is opposed to creationism and wishes to censor creationist views. Plimer steadfastly maintains the position he has put throughout. As a senior scientist and educator, it is his duty to protect people, particularly young and unsophisticated people, from misrepresentations and misleading conduct couched in scientific terms. He asserts that there is a place for creationism in studies of comparative religion and he defends its right to be there.

The next witness, Prof Neil Archbold, a palaeontologist from Deakin University (and, incidentally, an elder of the Presbyterian church), is sworn, gives his name, address and profession. The court is then told that there are no questions for him in cross examination. The judge makes some comments about counsel not doing their homework and then apologises to Prof Archbold for the waste of his time.

The day ends with an appearance in the witness

box of Dr Alex Ritchie, research fellow at the Australian Museum and a palaeontologist. He dispatches the few questions he receives to the boundary and cross examination of witnesses for the Applicants concludes.

### Day Five

Monday, April 14 (coincidentally the 22nd anniversary of the death of actor Frederick March, who portrayed the William Jennings Bryan based character in the film *Inherit the Wind*, which was loosely based on the famous Scopes "Monkey Trial" in Dayton, Tennessee in 1925).

The first witness for the respondent is Walter Bruce Midgely, a retired pattern maker.

Mr Midgely chooses to make an affirmation that he will tell the truth, though he does so while holding a Bible and ends with the words "so help me God". His Honour points out that the affirmation requires only the reading of the words on the card handed to him by the court attendant and that he is not allowed to add anything to it. Mr Midgely then affirms in the normal manner.

Much of Mr Midgely's evidence addresses the copyright section of the case, for it is his drawing, he claims, that was used on brochures promoting Robert's lecture series. (Mr David Fasold, the First Applicant, is alleging breach of copyright of this drawing of the geological formation in Turkey, as published in his book *The Ark of Noah*.) Mr Midgely denies he had copied Mr Fasold's drawing and says he "had a laugh" when he learned of the allegation.

Mr Midgely says that his drawing was based on photographs of the formation and on measurements of various features described "in the literature". He says that he had never seen the formation itself and agrees that the photographs had no scale on them. Questioned, he agrees that the most definitive description of the dimensions of the feature are in Mr

Fasold's book. He admits that it was from that book that he had taken the dimensions, however he denies that he had been influenced by Mr Fasold's drawing in the same book.

Further examination centres on certain marks on both diagrams described as "anchor points". Mr Midgely says that he had three more of them in his drawing than were shown in Mr Fasold's, though he didn't say why. Also, because he had had a discussion with the captain of the *Bounty* (presumably he meant the replica *Bounty*, not the original) about where sea anchors should be streamed from a vessel, he had "moved them closer to the bulwarks", this making more nautical sense. (In a private conversation with Mr Fasold, he told this correspondent that his "anchor points" referred to points within the structure for the attachment (or anchoring) of internal structural members or ropes, and had nothing to do with sea anchors.) Why Mr Midgely chose, of his own accord, to increase the numbers and to move these points from where evidence showed they were located, just to conform with the nautical opinions of the master of a vastly different and more modern vessel, was not discussed.

The next witness is the first respondent, Allen Stewart Roberts. He gives his occupation as pastor and elder of the Hills Bible Church. He makes an affirmation, not on the Bible, and begins his evidence.

He graduated from teacher's college in 1951 and taught English and history in various places for 11 years until he became a lecturer at a teacher's college until 1980. He then resigned and set up a Bible college, to train post-school students for missionary work. He obtained a BA degree from the University of New England in which he majored in English and History and also completed units in geography, psychology and education. In 1977 he had taken leave of absence from his teacher's college to undergo a course at Freedom University, a Bible college in

## Media bias?

An interesting side-note on the case emerged in advertisements appearing in metropolitan dailies in all states on May 10.


Placed by the "Creation Science Foundation Ltd (non-denominational)" and headed "Phony Ark Wars?", the ad leads off with "Leading creation group says: 'Thank you Dr Plimer!'", then goes on to claim that "our support is increasing dramatically" which, the ad suggests, is because people are "seeing through" the "pretence" that the creationists involved in the case had anything to do with 'scientific' creationism.

A waste of several thousand dollars, one would be tempted to think, but the real purpose of the advertisement became clear towards the end. "By-pass media bias" it proclaims, inviting the reader to visit their Website for some "Fascinating Facts".

This is the nub of the matter - the media is perceived as being biased in its presentation of the trial

facts, because media reports did not distinguish between the "official" creationists and the "provisional" creationists. The media can hardly be faulted for this. Without conducting considerable in-depth research, it is difficult for anyone to understand the trivial splits and schisms that exist within fringe religious groupings.

There is strong a tendency in all extremist organisations, be they political, religious or other, to fracture along fault-lines that are apparent only to insiders.. The objective observer, including media commentators, can hardly be blamed if they all appear to be tarred with the same brush.

The advertisement concludes on the interesting point that "pond slime was *not* your ancestor", which appears to be the latest slogan of the creationists to frighten people to their cause. Could it be that the thought of being related to apes is no longer sufficiently unpalatable to the faithful? 

Florida, USA. From 22 months of work, he had graduated with a Doctorate in Christian Education. He denies that his doctorate could be confused with a doctorate in philosophy (PhD).

Cross examination follows on the setting up of an unincorporated association under the name of Noah's Ark Research Project (NARP). He denies that he was a member of the organisation or that he was instrumental in setting it up. He agrees that one of the main purposes of this organisation was the raising of funds. He agrees that one of the main purposes of these fund raising activities was to allow more research into the site in Turkey. He can't recall having had any input into the establishment of the association. He says that he was later appointed as an archaeological consultant to, but not a member of, NARP. He admits that he has no scientific nor archaeological training.

Asked if he knows the postal address of the Noah's Ark Research Project, he responds that he has no idea. Mr Walmsley then draws his attention to a document in an affidavit presented by a member of Ark Search Inc (the name of an incorporated association that took over the activities of NARP). This is a note, written on the letterhead of the Noah's Ark Research Foundation. He is asked to read the address printed on the letterhead and asked if it is his home address. He agrees that it is and says that he has never seen it before. Other letters, including some seeking donations for the foundation on the letterhead are later shown with the same address.

Cross examination turns to his series of lectures around Australia, in April and May, 1992. He says that he provided information to the organisers of the meetings but that he had had no further part in the production of literature, nor publicity for the lecture series. He agrees that he knew that people would be charged an entry fee. He agrees that a brochure offering certain items for sale (including video and audio tapes) carried the date March 31 and that the video tape was of his first lecture, in Adelaide, on April 1, 1992.

Questioned, he says that he had arrived at the venue "shortly before" the scheduled start of the talk at 7.30pm. In later questioning, he says that he was in the auditorium "long before people were in the foyer" and that he had spent a lot of time helping to make the TV equipment work. The items for sale were in the foyer, not the auditorium.

He is asked how many people had been in the audience and responds that there had been many hundreds and it could have been up to 1000. He is then asked if he knew how much money had been made and replies that he did not, nor had anyone mentioned it to him. He says that he never made any enquiries about takings on any occasion.

His Honour asks what is his understanding of where any money was to go and he responds that one of the main purposes of fund raising was to pay for his expenses for a return trip to Turkey, via the USA and the UK.

## Day Six

Tuesday, April 15. (The 85th anniversary of the sinking of the Titanic, another large vessel that did not live up to expectations.)

Mr Walmsley, advises Justice Sackville that he thinks cross-examination will conclude this day and if opposing counsel and His Honour agree, next day should be sitting free to allow counsel to prepare written submissions to assist His Honour with his deliberations. All parties agree with this submission. Allen Roberts re-enters the witness box. He is asked if he had been paid a consultant's fee of \$10,000. He agrees that such a sum had been paid to him personally by a man associated with Ark Search and that the money had been paid to the Hills Bible College on Mr Roberts' account.

Certain letters to Turkish consular, embassy and ministry officials are drawn to his attention, all on NARP or Ark Search letterhead, in his handwriting and using his address as the return address. He is asked if he had been involved in paying any expenses during his lecture tour and he denies it. He is asked if he had participated in any advertising and other publicity for the tour and says that he did not. Did he know that the tour would be publicised? Yes, but he didn't discuss it with anyone. Asked if he had told American Ark searcher, Ron Wyatt, that he had been involved in founding an organisation, he says he doesn't recall. Did he ask Wyatt if he wanted to head an expedition to the site? Don't recall, but may have passed on a message from Ark Search Inc. Did he seek legal advice about copyright matters in regard to Ark Search? Can't remember.

Questioned by His Honour as to why he, and not Ark Search, wrote to Mr Fasold after he heard that Fasold was angry at what he saw as a breach of his copyright, he indicates that time had been of the essence. He agrees that he phoned Mr Fasold but denies that he had appealed to him not to sue as "we are all Christian brethren and all the material from the Ark belonged to the Lord".

Cross-examination then focuses on his understanding of the word "we" which appeared in much of the tour publicity and the lectures given. In a series of questions, he agrees that he had never done any scientific research at the site, had not used scientific instruments and had not found any artifacts at the site. Told that much of this work had been carried out by Messrs Fasold and Wyatt at least three years before he had visited the site, he says that "we" used in his presentations meant "we, the team, the fraternity of Ark researchers".

He says that an article about his visit to the site, published in *Nexus* magazine, had been riddled with inaccuracies and that the journalist from that magazine who interviewed him had been "on his first assignment", had promised to provide him with a copy before publication, but had not done so.

Asked about interviews with Clive Robertson on TV about his doctorate, he says he had replied it was



“basically in education, history, English and a whole range of subjects”.

It is suggested to him that his use of the title Dr suggests a higher academic qualification than he actually has; that his use of geological and other scientific terms in public lectures suggested he had skills in those areas; that his use of the term “we”, when referring to work done at the site suggested that he had been involved in the work. He disagrees with all of these interpretations.

Questioning turns to claims he made in lectures about a meeting he had had with a senior executive of British Aerospace. He is shown several letters he had written to this executive, indicating that he had been told that the company “very, very possibly” would give money to fund research into the site. He agrees that he has never had a response from British Aerospace.

Finally he is asked if he had, while in Cirencester, UK in August 1992, used solicitors to transfer his share in his home to his wife. He agrees that he had done that on legal advice. Asked if the sum involved was \$1, he can’t remember.

Three further witnesses are cross examined on activities concerning the establishment of NARP. At this point, counsel for the applicants says he has concluded cross-examination and it is agreed by counsel that one further day will be required to complete the proceedings.

#### Day Seven

April 17 (The 117th birthday of Sir Leonard Wooley, a real archaeologist, whose name has been mentioned during this case.)

The evidence has all been collected, tested for relevance, argued over, cross-examined and now is the time for the barristers to make their final submissions. The judge mentions that he has received a communication from Italy, from a body named (as


this correspondent heard it ) Arco di Noah, and reminds the assembly that the case will be adjudged only on the evidence presented in court.

His Honour wonders aloud if the courts were the proper place for disputes such as this to be settled and invites counsel for the litigants to present arguments that might assist him in his deliberations.

Mr Walmsley, his quiet and undemonstrative oratory in sharp contrast to his scalpel-keen cross-examination, puts the case for the applicants. He claims that the case for breach of copyright brought by Mr Fasold had been clearly demonstrated by the evidence and that the respondents had both been pursuing trade and had acted in a deceptive or misleading manner in that pursuit, contrary to the Trades Practices Act and the Fair Trading laws, as asserted by Prof Plimer.

Mr Malcolm Duncan’s reply for the respondents takes on a much more theatrical flavour (which may, or may not, be related to the fact that he bears the names of two of the characters of Shakespeare’s famous “Scottish Play”). He suggests that there is a certain “lunatic quality” to this case, a sentiment which may well have struck a chord with many in the audience, though for diverse reasons. He asserts that the case had not been proven.

It looks so easy when written like that, but the sub-mission is interspersed with the exchange of many arcane legalisms between counsel and judge, precedents mentioned, points disputed, histrionic flourishes flourished. How much of this is relevant to the case, it is impossible for someone unlearned in the law to judge.

Finally the proceedings come to an end, with His Honour reserving his judgement, noting that the case had taken almost exactly the same time as the original Monkey Trial. The judgement, after six weeks delay, is referred to elsewhere in this issue. 




## A tale of two faces

This court case achieved an unprecedented level of coverage in the world’s media and many indeed were the words and images that greeted the reader and viewer.

The photograph on the left is that of Allen Roberts, the respondent in the case and the man who claimed that a rock formation in Anatolia may well have been the remains of Noah’s Ark.

However, readers of the *Gold Coast Bulletin*, the *Northern Territory News*, the (London) *Daily Telegraph* and the *South China Morning Post* (among, we have no doubt, others) were greeted with the image on the right, labelled “Ark finder, Roberts”.

Keen-eyed observers will recognise this image as that of the esteemed editor of *the Skeptic*, one who has never made any claims about Arks of any description, nor one who has been closer to Anatolia than Singapore.

Friendly journalists point out that the mistake was quite natural, given that our Ed, in his wild-eyed and wind-blown guise, makes a much more plausible “Biblical prophet” than Roberts. He demurs and ascribes his appearance to the photograph being taken while he was breasting a howling gale, funnelled down Macquarie St, on day one of the trial. 



Photographs courtesy of Mirror Australian Telegraph Publicationms

# In search of the real Noah

Margaret Kittson

This is a search which takes us on journey back in time. It is in essence a quest. Sometimes quests don't achieve their purpose but that may not really matter. It's often what's found along the way that makes the journey worthwhile rather than what is found at journey's end. So where do we begin in our search for the real Noah? Probably the most appropriate place to start is with Noah's story as recounted in *Genesis 6 - 9:17*.

## The Biblical Deluge

God is fed up with human wickedness. He regrets having made human beings and decides to rid the surface of the earth of all living things with one important exception. Noah has won God's favour so he gets told to build the ark. The building materials are an incongruous combination - resinous wood and reeds caulked with pitch, with the ark's dimensions as follows: length 300 cubits, breadth 50 cubits and height 30 cubits. Noah takes on board a pair of all living creatures. The ensuing storm and flood come and last forty days and nights.

John Sladek in *The New Apocrypha* gives his own vision of the kinds of duties Noah and his family would need to perform during this time and the time it took the flood to subside.

Caring for the animals would involve much more than live mice for the snakes, fresh eucalyptus leaves for the koala and fresh bamboo shoots for the panda. Over this period (a hundred and fifty days or more) it would mean fetching over three tonnes of water per day, and more Augean chores. It would mean blowing the husks off the budgie's seed dish, cutting fresh roses for a perverse breed of ant that refuses to eat anything else, spending time with the gorillas so they won't literally die of boredom, and bathing the hippo. No wonder Noah got drunk when he came out.<sup>1</sup>

Finally the ark comes to rest on the mountains of Ararat. Noah sends out a dove. On its first trip it returns with nothing. On its second it returns with an olive leaf. It doesn't return from its third trip. After disembarking, Noah makes an altar and offers a sacrifice of burnt offerings. God finds the smell pleasing. The rainbow appears as a sign of the covenant - a deal between Noah and his people and God.

## Who wrote the Bible?

The hypothesis commonly accepted by scholars is that the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) are a collection of four traditions - Yahwistic, Elohist,

Deuteronomistic and Priestly - and were finished in their written form about 400 BCE. There are two traditions in Genesis, the Yahwistic, which dates from the time of Solomon about 950 BCE, and the Priestly, which was a product of the Babylonian exile from 587 - 538 BCE.<sup>2</sup>

## Who were the Hebrews?

They were a Semitic people. Abraham is presumed to have left Ur of the Chaldees in Sumer about 2000 BCE, moving from Mesopotamia to settle in Canaan.<sup>3</sup> They were a pastoral people with their oral history and traditions being put into written form much later, when they settled in cities especially Jerusalem.

## The Epic of Gilgamesh

On December 3 1862 George Smith of the British Museum read a paper to the Society of Biblical Archaeology. It caused a sensation.<sup>4</sup> He'd been working on materials brought to the museum from the library of Assurbanipal, King of Assyria, at Nineveh. Assurbanipal had put together this library in the 7th century BCE - between 660 - 630. What was on these twelve clay tablets was the *Epic of Gilgamesh*.

Gilgamesh was a hero king of the city state of Erech (Uruk) who has many adventures. After the death of his best friend, he seeks out his ancestor, Utnapishtim, who was granted immortality by the gods. Gilgamesh, concerned with his own mortality, wants this secret. Utnapishtim tells him this story which appears on the 11th tablet.

The gods decide to destroy humanity, but one has second thoughts and advises Utnapishtim of the steps to take to avoid the impending calamity. The god does not speak to him directly. The implication is the god can't do this so as a subterfuge he speaks to a reed wall which Utnapistim just happens to be in hearing distance of.

'Reed wall....  
....build an ark....  
load the seed of every living thing...  
the boat that you will build  
let her measure be measured  
let her breadth and length be equal  
cover it with a roof as the abyss is covered'

More detailed instructions follow.

'10 dozen cubits the heights of each wall  
10 dozen cubits its deck

on the seventh day the ark was completed ... ’

After the ark is finished the storm comes.

‘For one day the south wind blew...  
for six days and seven nights  
the wind shrieked, the stormflood rolled through the  
land.....’  
until ‘the mountain Nisir seized the boat ... ’

Utnapishtim describes what happens next.

‘I sent out a dove ...  
The dove went out and returned  
I sent out a swallow ...  
The swallow went out and returned  
I sent out my crow ...  
The crow went out and seeing that the waters had  
receded  
it ate, circled around, turned, and did not come back..’

Utnapishtim offers sacrifice - the gods smell the fragrance. At least one of them must have been impressed with this because “The lady of the gods laid a fly made of lapis lazuli on Utnapishtim’s neck.” He and his wife were made “like the gods” and taken away to live far away, at “the source of all rivers”.<sup>5</sup> I won’t bother listing the parallels with the story of Noah in *Genesis*, this would be labouring the obvious.

Other copies of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* have since been found in many different locations, written in various languages and at various times. The Epic must date from before 1800 BCE because there is no mention of Marduk, the god of Babylon. Once Babylon became supreme in Mesopotamia, Marduk was given the prime place in the pantheon of the gods and their stories.<sup>6</sup>

It’s likely that there was a historical Gilgamesh. He is mentioned in the King Lists<sup>7</sup> which were compiled about 2120 BCE<sup>7</sup> and other sources<sup>8</sup>. So we’re left with the question - where did the story of Utnapishtim come from and was there any such person?

### Zuisudra

In 1914 Arno Poebel published a translation of what he could retrieve from the lower third of a badly damaged Sumerian tablet.<sup>9</sup> This tablet has been dated to the late 3rd Millennium BCE and remains unique and unduplicated. (The Sumerians settled the lands around the mouths of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers from about 3500 BCE. They were a non-Semitic people who can lay claim to a number of firsts in the civilization stakes, arguably the most significant being the invention of writing.) Because of the parts which are missing from the tablet it is difficult to piece this version of the flood story together.

We don’t know why the gods decide to bring the flood and destroy mankind but some are obviously unhappy with this decision. Zuisudra is a pious, god-fearing king who spends his time looking for signs from the gods. He stations himself near a wall

and is warned of the impending flood. The instructions on how to build a giant boat are missing and the story resumes with detail on the duration of the flood - seven days and nights. After it is over, Zuisudra offers sacrifice and is given “life like a god”.

We don’t have any evidence that Zuisudra was an historical character. There is nobody by that name mentioned in the King Lists but another source describes him as the son of Ubartutu who does appear in the list as the ruler of Shuruppak, the last king before the flood.<sup>10</sup> There is a significant division in the King Lists marked by the phrase - ‘the flood came’ - which seemingly separates mythological kings from historical ones. The number of years pre flood add up to 241,000<sup>11</sup> with these eight kings being credited with incredibly long reigns.

Zuisudra can obviously lay claim to being the first Noah in literary terms at least. By this criterion he is the closest thing we’ve got to the real Noah, even though he probably didn’t exist. But even if the person cannot be proved to have existed, what about the event? What other evidence is there that supports the occurrence of a flood of the kind of proportions described in these stories?

### Archaeological evidence

Sir Leonard Woolley at Ur in 1929 thought he’d found evidence of just such an event which appeared to have destroyed the city some time prior to 3000 BCE. He’d dug a shaft which contained a thick stratum of clay which must have once been silt carried by water. There was evidence of human settlement above and below this stratum.<sup>12</sup> However, more extensive investigation since then has tended to prove that only one section of the city was badly damaged. No evidence of one great, disastrous flood has come to light.<sup>13</sup> Great floods are commonplace in Mesopotamian history, with many Sumerian sites showing clean strata of waterborne sand and clay.<sup>14</sup>

### Conclusion and speculation

One obvious conclusion which can be drawn from all this is that there is not a lot that is original in the story of Noah’s flood in the Bible. It is a later manifestation of something which has its origins - whatever they might be - at a much earlier time. I wonder how those fundamentalist Christians who regard the Bible as literally true go about reconciling their belief with the existence of the stories of Utnapishtim and Zuisudra? I’d guess that in the fashion of the White Queen in *Through the Looking Glass*,<sup>15</sup> who was sometimes able to believe as many as six impossible things before breakfast, that they would continue their usual pattern of fudging the facts to fit what they need to believe to stay in their comfort zones.

### Bibliography and Notes on p 41...

# The reality of recovered memories

Andrew Gibbs

*Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past. George Orwell, 1984*

To question the reality of "repression" is not to question the reality of child abuse. It is to examine the reliability and validity of this concept and the effect this may have on persons who undergo such methods. Given that the assumptions and practises associated with repressed memories have been either widely advocated and used, or form the philosophy within government and private services over the past decade, the repressed/ recovered memory phenomenon requires an urgent public inquiry.

In cases of "repressed/recovered memory" an individual may enter therapy with minor problems in everyday living, or common treatable psychological disorders. The diagnosis of their current psychological state is causally attributed to a single aetiology - repressed memories of past child abuse. While retractors of such memories have reported this process to occur spontaneously, outside of therapy, a majority develop this belief following a variety of therapy techniques. These methods include; journal writing, dream analysis, imagery methods, flashbacks, bodywork (ie diagnosis via physical symptoms), hypnosis, drug abreaction, inner child work, religious and new age therapies, self-help books, or highly suggestive individual or group counselling. Each method attaches meaning to the individual's current vague emotional and somatic feelings in different ways.

While some individuals may be more suggestible, these methods rely on the usual processes of reasoning and memory, present in all individuals. Given a degree of emotional vulnerability, acceptance of the scientifically unfounded assumptions regarding memory, and a reduction in critical judgement and reasoning, all are potentially susceptible. Individuals are placed in a position where their current symptomatology and distress is labelled a "memory". Various methods are then used which either elaborate upon this present distress, or induce an extremely intense emotional or somatic state. The individual is then placed in a psychological position where there is no logical alternative but to accept such current distress they are experiencing, as causally related to a memory of past abuse. It is a matter of accept, flee therapy, psychologically disintegrate further, or suicide. Following acceptance of the initial "memory", the recovery of further "memories" is encouraged, with a process of rehearsal and elabo-

ration of these recovered memories integrated into one's narrative memory of self. Paradoxically, acceptance of this new narrative, based upon "repressed/recovered memories", leads to the identity of being a "survivor".

A variety of social mechanisms and processes assists in the perpetuation and maintenance of the phenomena. Following the recovery of a repressed memory, the allegation enters the social system where it destroys relationships within the generations of a family, and the lives of, often elderly, parents. The "repressed memory" survivor avoids and mistrusts anyone who may place their "remembering experience" into even the slightest doubt, including family members with whom they may have previously had a close relationship. One mechanism which serves to reinforce and maintain the induced belief is the severing of relationships, and total restriction of free communication. This isolates the individual from previously trusted people, resulting in dependency upon those who reinforce the repressed memory belief. With the assistance of the group, such induced beliefs (or delusions) may then come to be shared within a variety of social institutions including welfare, and law, and politics, and be incorporated into the social reality presented by the mass media.

Given the widespread and unregulated advocacy of these methods, it is now possible for any person (usually elderly) to have their family and personal lives destroyed, and if they survive this, to be accused and jailed, based on uncorroborated allegations solely arising from such "repressed memories". The individual who has undergone such therapy, and those who have been abused, are subjected to a unvalidated methodology with dubious therapeutic benefits. Repressed memories are associated with a particularly totalitarian form of methodology and logic; if you have memories, you were abused; if you don't have memories, they were repressed. Contrary to what is suggested within the political and therapeutic double-speak, there do not appear to be any repressed memory survivors - only victims.

**Traumatic memory & mechanisms for delayed recall**  
The terms "recovered" and "repressed" memory are used synonymously, and refer to the situation where "adults come to report memories of childhood events having previously been in a state of total amnesia for such events." (British Psychological Society-Recovered Memory, January 1995). However, the

delayed reporting of memories of abuse may occur through a variety of reasons;

1. **Repression:** an “unconscious” defense mechanism, derived from classical psychoanalytic theory, where this is a postulated act to keep unconscious memories, wishes, emotions and conflicts from conscious awareness. Failure to repress is held to result in psychological or even physical symptoms. Repression is held to be relaxed under certain conditions: dreams, slips of the tongue, everyday memory lapses, and via the psychoanalysis of “free associations”.
2. **Suppression:** The conscious attempt to avoid or forget memories. In so doing, individuals may be avoiding embarrassment and threats.
3. **Forgetting and Cuing:** The usual processes of forgetting and remembering associated with the storage of memories and their subsequent decay and recall over time. Individuals remember events when their attention is directed towards them, via the action of cues.
4. **Unconscious fabrication:** Individuals may incorporate contaminating information into their recall via exposure to external information. Confabulation due to organic brain impairment, and the impact of certain psychological disorders.
5. **Conscious fabrication:** This includes the potential for malicious allegations, allegations for gain or profit, and blackmail.

Contrary to what has been proposed by therapists and individuals advocating “recovered memory”, trauma invariably results in the opposite phenomenon - being unable to forget. This is supported by studies of children who have been subjected to severe traumas, such as witnessing the murder or rape of a family member, finding the body of a parent who committed suicide, or who have been kidnapped. Characteristically, traumatised children and adults are disturbed by intrusive memories associated with such events which they wish to rid themselves of.

While Freud claimed to uncover one or two episodes of a repressed memory per individual case, modern therapists claim the ability to uncover graphic “memories” of hundreds of episodes of abuse, with some reporting forms of extremely sadistic and repeated abuse of which they were not previously aware. Such views have been presented within government sexual assault and child protection services within Australia and overseas (see, Guilliatt, R. 1996), and have formed the philosophy for the provision of certain services.

Such “repression” of repeated abuse is contrary to what has been observed, replicated and reported countless times within the scientific literature over the past century: repeated exposure leads to increased recall (ie learning) and not forgetting of similar experiences. In addition, atypical and novel events, and those with a high degree of emotional content, have an increased likelihood of being re-

membered (see Conway, 1992), although the concept of “flashbulb” (ie photograph-like) memories for such events does not imply accuracy in terms of the event’s detail or circumstances (Neisser).

Despite these reported facts, there has been the widespread claim that such repetition of trauma actually leads to greater repressed forgetting than for single incidents. US psychiatrist, Dr Lenore Terr, has developed the concepts of Type I and Type II trauma. Terr’s theory was developed during the course of the trial in California of George Franklin for murder, for which she provided evidence. She proposed that Type II trauma (ie repeated) is considered to produce greater repression than Type I (non-repeated). However, this is contrary to what is reported in trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder, where individuals have highly intrusive memories of these events, and become extremely avoidant of situations which are likely to produce reminders.

It is worth considering therapists’ knowledge about the nature of memory and the nature of their practises, let alone their knowledge of emotional disorder and psychopathology. Michael Yapko presented the details of a survey conducted in 1992 of 860 psychotherapists who attended national conventions, and published in his book *Suggestions of Abuse* (1994). Forty percent agreed with the statement that: “I believe that early memories, even from the first years of life, are accurately stored and retrievable”. Approximately, 40% considered that if an individual does not remember it is because of traumatic events, with 60% agreeing that any events an individual could not remember must have been repressed.

Eighty four percent considered hypnotic age regression a useful technique, with 47% believing that “psychotherapists can have greater faith in details of a traumatic event when obtained hypnotically than otherwise”, with 31% agreeing that when an individual has a memory of a trauma under hypnosis it “objectively must have occurred”. Gail Goodman conducted a survey of nearly 7000 US therapists, in a national US study which failed to substantiate close to 16,000 claims of satanic abuse, although 13% of these therapists reported having recovered memories of such ritual abuse. A more limited survey by Stephen Lindsay found that 25% of the sample were “memory focussed”, employed two or more memory recovery techniques, thought they could identify an abuse victim after one session, and it was therapeutically important to believe the memory: These individuals saw an average of 50 clients, with over 60% of those they suspected of having repressed memories eventually coming to remember abuse.

A survey of 810 British Psychological Society members found approximately 25% as being memory focussed, with 97% believing in the essential accuracy of satanic abuse memories (53% sometimes, 38% usually, 6% always), and 23% having clients recalling memories from “total amnesia” within the previous year.

To estimate the extent of the phenomenon, reliable and generalisable estimates of the percentages of individuals employing such methods need to be considered in relation to their total caseloads, the percentage of persons recovering memories from amnesia, with this multiplied as a per annum figure. The overseas surveys are cause for concern, with Australian data currently unpublished. None-the-less, similar views regarding the nature of memory have been widely advocated within government and private services Australia-wide, and have constituted their philosophy of service.

### **The psychoanalytic origins of repressed memory**

The assumptions underlying the present day "recovered memory movement" have their historical origins with Sigmund Freud and classical psychoanalysis. Examination of the historical origins and methodology reveals much about the dubious origins of the concept of repression, the central underlying assumption of classical psychoanalysis. Many are unaware that the concept of unconscious repression and the Oedipal Complex are historically derived from Freud's reconstructed memories of putative events from within his own period of infantile amnesia, via the self-analysis of his own memories and dreams. This followed the abandonment of his "Seduction Theory", where suggestive methods were used to derive the view that all neuroses were caused by actual childhood trauma, with Freud deducing that such ideas did not reflect his methods but the wishful fantasies of the individual. Consequently, this is also the historical root for an ongoing variety of intellectual movements within twentieth century Western thought.

Freud was first exposed to the concept of "traumatic memory" (or "traumatic hysteria") in 1895, through his studies at the Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris under the originator of the term, Jean-Martin Charcot. Charcot was a leading neurologist of his time, and his use of hypnotic methods in relation to traumatic hysteria may tend to minimise his many achievements. While Charcot proposed a psychological, (or non-organic) origin for such physical symptoms, it appears that this was unlikely to have been the case. His patients consisted predominantly of persons with epilepsy and possible "pseudo-seizures", and individuals involved in traumatic accidents.

Both groups of patients, are at risk of neuropsychological impairment liable to result in increased suggestibility. In the case of the patient "LeLog", there is reference to a "momentary" loss of consciousness following an accident: The "moment" was recorded as actually being for five days, indicating the highly probable occurrence of a severe head injury. Many of the modern procedures (eg electroencephalogram, brain neuro-imaging, lumbar puncture) used to diagnose organic disorder were simply not available in his time. The symptoms elicited by Charcot in his patients disappeared when he left the hospi-

tal, and his antics were later criticised as being "a circus" and the work of a charlatan. Freud was impressed, and wrote of the experience to his fiancée, "My brain is sated, it is as if I spent an evening at the theatre".

Following his studies with Charcot, Freud published *Studies in Hysteria* with Joseph Breuer. It was with Breuer that the "cathartic method" was derived. Catharsis refers to the release of emotion which occurs following the "reliving" or recollection of events (ie abreaction) which are postulated to have occurred at the time when the psychological or physical symptoms were produced. Upon the "recall" of such events, there was said to be the release of "strangled affect", and the disappearance of symptoms. Freud was to contend that such release of emotion (catharsis) was necessary for a cure, and that simply recalling the event (abreaction) in the absence of emotional release was not sufficient. This view is consistent with the mantra of modern recovered memory therapists that, "one must get worse before they get better". The collaboration between Breuer and Freud was uneasy, and ended with differences in opinion regarding the aetiology of hysteria. Breuer considered biological and genetic pre-dispositions to the "hypnotic state", while Freud went on to consider psychological origins in terms of repression and the unconscious.

The link between sexuality and repression was influenced by Freud's association and friendship with the ear, nose and throat surgeon, Wilhelm Fleiss. Prior to their association, both Freud and Fleiss were separately interested in the action of cocaine. In the case of Fleiss, he proposed a bizarre notion of the "nasal genital reflex", based on the observation that the application of cocaine to the nose reduced menstrual pain. A direct reflex-arc relationship between the nose and genitals was assumed, with the indirect pharmacological action of cocaine via its absorption into the bloodstream and neuropharmacological action within the brain being unknown at the time.

Fleiss was interested in disorders of the nose, which he related to onanistic abuse (or put more simply, masturbation), and treated via the use of nasal surgery. In a now controversial case, Freud referred one of his patients (Emma Eckstein) to Fleiss for such surgery, whereupon she almost died from haemorrhage five weeks later in Freud's consulting room, with Freud analyzing this event in terms of her emotional transference towards himself.

In 1896, Freud proposed his Seduction Theory, that "all neuroses" were a consequence of "precocious" childhood event, most likely of a sexual abuse. However, Freud wrote that none of the women who came to him had any spontaneous recollections of child abuse. Freud wrote:

One only succeeds in awakening the psychical trace of a precocious sexual event under the most energetic pressure of the analytic technique, and against an enor-

mous resistance. Moreover, the memory must be extracted from them piece by piece, and while it is being awakened in consciousness they become prey to an emotion which it would be hard to counterfeit. Conviction will follow in the end, if one is not influenced by the patient's behaviour. (Freud, S. Standard Edition, Vol. 3. p. 153.)

Freud uncovered these "memory traces" through the use of a number of highly suggestive methods, such as hypnosis, and his "pressure technique" (which today may be regarded as a form of body-work). The pressure technique was a laying on of hands, where Freud would place his hands on the patient's head and ask for the first thought which came to mind. If the first thought revealed little of significance, he would persist via this process. Freud wrote of his "pressure technique" that it was the most "convenient" way of providing "suggestion". In performing such work, Freud once likened himself to an archaeologist mining thorough the strata of the mind. (It is a matter of opinion whether Freud was an evolutionist or creationist, although his own writings, and recent revelations concerning the methodological origins of his Seduction Theory, indicate the latter.)

Following the poor reception of the Seduction Theory within the medical and scientific establishment, Freud spent a year developing his theory of the unconscious, developed through the self-analysis of his own memories and dreams. While briefly considering the possibility of his iatrogenic creation of these scenes of seduction, Freud concluded that these represented repressed wishes and fantasies. The historical origin of unconscious repression and the Oedipal Theory was derived from a "memory" of an overnight train journey, which Freud wrote had occurred when he was two and a half years of age. Although this memory was recalled from Freud's own period of infantile amnesia, he belatedly deduced that he must have seen his comparatively young mother naked, as she changed into her night-clothes in a single compartment. At the same time, Freud was also writing to Fleiss, who recounted a similar incident in relation to his own son. An entire intellectual edifice was founded upon the insights Freud gained from such self-analysis.

Repression was considered by Freud to be "the cornerstone on which the whole structure of psychoanalysis rests" (Freud, S. Vol IX, p 16). All of his other "defense mechanisms" were predicated upon this, with its related philosophy of mind and the "unconscious". It was posited that repression keeps from conscious awareness the contents of the unconscious, including wishes, emotions, conflicts, and memories. A failure to repress was held to pose a threat to the individual's psyche, resulting in the production of psychological, or physical symptoms. Within classical psychoanalytic theory, the repressed contents of the unconscious may become manifest under certain conditions: slips of the tongue, the forgetting of everyday objects, via Freud's "royal road" of the inter-

pretation of dreams, or the talking cure of "free association". These experiences are all a matter for analysis and interpretation.

In Freud's view, there are not one, but two forms of memory. While "normal forgetting" is subject to the usual ravages of decay over time, "repressed forgetting" leaves the memory preserved and intact, and that under suitable circumstances this can be recalled. While the process of normal forgetting conforms to what is scientifically known about the nature of memory, repressed forgetting does not. Some who may simply dismiss this view of memory as an early Freudian view, may need to be reminded that as late as 1930, Freud wrote:

Since we overcame the error of supposing that the forgetting that we are familiar with signified the destruction of the memory trace - that is, its annihilation - we have been inclined to take the opposite view, that in mental life nothing which has once been formed can perish - that everything is somehow preserved and that in suitable circumstances...it can once more be brought back to life. (Freud, S. 1930 p. 69.)

With such timelessness, the psychoanalytic faith finds the eternal. It is now just a matter of the nature of the "suitable circumstances" which produce the "return of the repressed."

Freud regarded the period of infantile amnesia as reflecting unconscious repression. Similar to modern day therapists, there was the view of the essential accuracy of the individual's memory recall, with the view that this accuracy can be clinically deduced by the emotional state of the individual. In 1897, Freud wrote to Wilhelm Fleiss:

The early period before the age of one and a half is becoming even more significant. ... This, I was able to trace back, with certainty, a hysteria that developed for the first time at eleven months, and hear again the words which were exchanged between two adults at that time. It was though it comes from a phonograph. (Freud, September 21, 1897).

Freud's particular view about nature of memory reflects the "associationist" psychology of the time. Memory was erroneously considered to be stored as a separate "engram", where potentially lawful connections (or associations) existed between such entities. There was the view that these separate engrams (or ideas) were stored in an unaltered state, potentially in single brain cells, with discrete links between cells resulting in associations between such infallible concepts. Freud's psychoanalysis contended that the analysis of free associations could be interpreted in terms of lawful regularities as defined by the various defense mechanisms, although Freud's approach has been subject to trenchant philosophical (Grunebaum, 1984), biological (Sulloway, 1979), and historical critique (Crewes, 1996; Webster, 1996). For those aspects of Freud's free association method which can be scientifically tested, the methodology is also philosophically flawed (see Grunebaum).

Such associationist views of memory were discredited as early as 1932, through the empirically-based work of psychologists such as Frederick Bartlett who proposed memory was a “reconstructive process” (Bartlett, 1932). He proposed that the previous view of memory as a fixed trace required abandoning, and he also considered the role of context on remembering. Bartlett observed that the longer the delay between exposure to information and its subsequent recall, the greater the reliance on a reconstructive process. It is not a memory trace which is reactivated, but a “schema” of meaning within which the detail is reconstructed. He coined the notion of “effort after meaning”, where, after meaning is provided, attempts are made to fill in the details. His subjects could not distinguish between what was reconstructed and what the information was that they had originally been exposed to. This research has relevance to present-day “recovered memory therapy”, as individuals may be placed within a particular context (ie a memory “priming” effect) prior to “remembering”.

In a 1990 review of over sixty years of empirical research by David Holmes reported no empirical evidence in support of the concept of repression. Similarly, Hudson and Pope made a review of the evidence for the action of repression in children, and finding no such evidence stipulated the requirements to examine for this. Consequently, despite the concept of repression originating a century ago, there is no empirical evidence for it. While single anecdotal cases are reported, these have been the subject of criticism, with devastating exposure of the dubious methods and “cures” claimed by Sigmund Freud which were used to educate generations of analysts. Quite apart from this, one does not need to invoke the mystical concept of repression to account for such “remembering”. After one hundred years, repression essentially remains merely a belief.

The current “recovered memory” debate, together with the coinciding exposure of the unsound nature of Freud’s methods and concepts, potentially delivers the fatal blow to a cornerstone of classical psychoanalysis. However, predictions of such a demise should be cautious, as such internally confirmed theories and beliefs have a remarkable capacity for self-preservation and re-invention. Another protection has been to consider external criticism as a form of psychopathology, most commonly “resistance”, which the critic has not overcome if they haven’t undergone analysis.

One such critic, Frederick Crewes, in his recent essays, *The Unknown Freud* and, *The Revenge of the Repressed*, argues a critical point which may go unnoticed: that it would be a tragedy to discount the current repressed memory phenomenon as simply an aberration, and fail to identify its links with mainstream views about psychopathology. He claims that modern recovered memories share a kinship with any other therapy which claims therapeutic benefits through the reconstruction of an individual’s past.

Other critics have been far more scathing, with the biologist Peter Medawar writing in *The New York Review of Books* in 1975 that psychoanalysis was “the most stupendous intellectual confidence trick of the twentieth century”. Frederick Webster in his recent book, *Why Freud was Wrong*, claims this charge is unfair, as Freud did not set out to intentionally deceive, but demonstrated an over-zealous belief in his own theories based on dubious or misguided information. Such comment remind me of an ironic conversation with a colleague: “They say your analysis has ended when you have accepted the delusion.”

### **The reasoning of recovered memory**

Apart from the issue of the existence of repression itself, there is the question of the validity and reliability of the methodology by which repressed “memories” are recovered. Examination of these processes reveal they have much in common with the formation of delusions, where vague affective (ie emotional) and somatic (ie physical) feelings eventually come to be linked to a demonstrably false meaning as to the significance of the experience. In the case of recovered memories, the distressed individual is placed in a psychological state where there is no logical alternative but to accept their current distress as “memories of abuse”. Under such circumstances the individual has the option of accept the suggestion, psychologically disintegrate further, conform to the demands of the setting, flee therapy, or suicide.

Recovered memories can occur via a variety of techniques. All of these techniques postulate how meaning is attached to one’s current psychological state. These techniques either induce, or elaborate upon, the perception and experience of a current emotional state or physical sensation. Meaning is then attached to this state via the use of suggestion, or “double bind” logic. While the process may involve the use of a range of “psychotherapies”, it is possible in some persons to form such meaningful attachments spontaneously outside of formal therapy. Some techniques include

- Self Help Books
- Hypnosis
- Guided Imagery
- Inner Child Work
- Dream Analysis
- Bodywork (ie suggestion via physical therapy, and “body memories”).
- Spiritual Therapies (New Age; Christian...)
- Individual and Group Therapy
- Drug Abreaction (sodium amytal)
- Use of Unvalidated Symptom Checklists
- Writing and Art Exercises
- Eye Movement
- Desensitisation
- Reprocessing
- Contagion via exposure to films, books, etc
- Spontaneous.



### *The Courage to Heal*

This is a "self-help" text which requires particular mention, as it reveals something of the general nature of the methods associated with "recovered memory". It has sold over 750,000 copies, has an associated *Workbook to the Courage to Heal*, and is now in its third edition. Over the last decade, it has been used within government and non-government sexual assault services Australia-wide (and internationally), although it is only one of a number of similar books. Australian services are listed within its appendices, with a larger list occurring within its second edition. These organisations have provided advice to Australian governments and churches in relation to the issue of child sexual abuse within the last decade.

The authors of *The Courage to Heal* report no formal psychological qualifications. They previously taught creative writing, with Laura Davis being a student of Ellen Bass. In an introductory chapter, they write that, "none of what is presented here is based on psychological theories" (p.14). It is one of the few statements within the book with which I would fully agree. Despite the lack of scientific references regarding the theoretical basis for their approach, the authors make clear that it is a self-help text intended for females without memories of abuse.

In the book, Laura Davis describes the support of Ellen Bass "a few months" (p.15) after she had first "remembered the incest", and months before the writing of *The Courage to Heal*. Ms. Davis wrote of Ellen repeating "over and over... those simple phrases: 'It wasn't your fault. I believe you. Healing is possible. You're going to make it. You're going to be okay'." Immediately after this she wrote, "I expressed every doubt I could think of. Then I made up some new ones. I knew other survivors didn't make up this sort of thing, but I was the exception. I'd always been the exception, all my life." The book provides many revealing personal (and possibly less exceptional) accounts of persons who have recovered memories.

The language within the book is highly suggestive, albeit caring. In the first chapter, "What reading this book will be like?", the authors immediately provide the lead;

"If you have unfamiliar or uncomfortable feelings as you read this book, don't be alarmed. Strong feelings are part of the healing process. On the other hand, if you breeze through these chapters, you probably aren't safe enough to confront these issues. Or you may be coping with the book the same way you coped with the abuse- by separating your intellect from your feelings."

The structure and logic of the language within this passage is typical of many other sections within it. Firstly, the individual is placed in a double bind, where the possibility of past child abuse occurs irrespective of whether you feel comfortable or not. The fact that you may be comfortable is considered a potential indication of past abuse. It is then a matter of how the intellect deals with such feelings, which

is important to note, as the recovery of memories depends on how individuals rationalise their current emotional state. The authors then direct you to examine your life and to get in touch with your feelings.

One method of getting in touch with your feelings is to examine your life via the use of unvalidated symptom checklists. An early chapter lists a series of over-inclusive checklists of current life problems which anyone could admit to. There is even a short checklist with the heading "How do I know if I was sexually abused?" Following this checklist, the authors write "If you are unable to remember any specific instances like the ones mentioned above but still have a *feeling* (italics added) that something abusive happened to you, it probably did (see But I don't have any memories, p 81)."

For those who do not take the suggested shortcut to the chapter entitled "Remembering", the next chapter provides a large number of checklists concerning such areas as self-esteem, personal relationships, intimacy, feelings, your body, sexuality, children and parenting, and families of origin. On page 34, they suggest; "As you read this chapter, you may find yourself nodding your head- Uh-huh me too-recognising, perhaps for the first time, the ways in which the abuse affects your life. Look at the lists and ask yourself how you have been affected. Such recognition will probably be painful, but is, in fact, part of the healing process." The items in these checklists can be answered "yes" by anyone, and are not discriminative for the sexually abused. Confusion may also be a potential sign. At the end of the checklist chapter Bass and Davis write "If you feel overwhelmed reading this chapter, remember you have already lived through the hardest part-the abuse itself." It is then a matter of committing oneself to the "decision to heal".

Some individuals may undergo an "emergency stage" prior to "remembering". This is a stage where there is the development of a state of crisis, individual change their usual lifestyle patterns, and there is encouragement to become obsessed about incest and abuse. Sleep may become disturbed, or worsen. The creation of obsession is important with the authors writing; "Total obsession with sexual abuse is more likely if you've forgotten you abuse". (p.67). In terms of the literature concerning memory, this process may be considered as a "priming effect", where the content of recall is influenced by exposure to previous information. This emergency stage appears to result in the creation of extreme psychological distress prior to the conversion experience. One "survivor" writes, "I was shattered all over it, and I had to go through and pick up the pieces and put them back together". There is even reference to suicidal thoughts at this stage by some "survivors". For those who experience this, Bass and Davis provide the following comforting words, "The nature of the crisis is that it overwhelms you: while you are in it, it is all you can see. But there will be a time when you will not

think, eat, and dream sexual abuse twenty-four hours a day. And if you are in the emergency stage, that time will come not a moment too soon" (p68). The individual is now ready to "remember".

The chapter on remembering provides a range of methods. One may begin with a method with which one feel comfortable in order to get in touch with your feelings. Essentially, these are "induction" techniques, or methods which enlarge upon an individual's current distress. These methods get the individual to concentrate on a vague current emotional state or physical sensation. Imagery techniques may be used. In some instances individual may develop graphic visualised images, or even "pseudo-hallucinations". Physical symptoms of anxiety may worsen, with the individual having distressing "panic attacks" where they feel they may pass out or die. These true current experiences are then subtly labelled a "memory", rather than being diagnosed as a current (and treatable) psychological disorder. It is how meaning is attached to this experience which is critical. (One is reminded here of Freud's "cathartic method" where emotional distress is an essential component for the "return of the repressed".) The distressed individual is now ready to "believe".

The chapter following "Remembering" is entitled, "Believing it happened". The means by which the belief is "induced" is through the management of doubt via the use of "double binds". Simply stated, the individual is placed in a situation where they have no logical alternative but to accept their current distress as representing a recovered/repressed "memory" of abuse. This is an "induced belief". When the belief is false (with the individual maintaining this despite positive evidence to the contrary), it is an "induced delusion". Secondary beliefs are developed into a narrative through the repetition of such techniques, and the narrative "memory" which develops from this. Paradoxically, the individual now has the new identity of a "survivor", with a narrative "memory" to accompany this.

There are social means by which the belief in the recovered memory is reinforced, with the principle means being the restriction of communication, and the breakdown of families. Persons who "validate the memory" become closer, while those who express doubt or disbelief are avoided, treated with suspicion and hostility, and alienated. Dependency may develop upon the therapist and support group. Individuals may confront their elderly family members, and break off all contact. *The Courage to Heal* provides rules on how to treat a "survivor". In the case of government sexual assault services within Australia, there is a policy to not have contact with accused persons. Such restriction of communication is one method by which the reality of "recovered memories" remains unchallenged. The challenging of such beliefs also places some individuals at further personal risk of "decompensation", when they realise the basis for their allegations.

Finally, while other aspects of the individual's life are considered (eg sexuality, relationships...), it is important to note that anger is considered by Bass and Davis to be the "Backbone of healing". In this chapter they advise hostility towards one's mother. Minor resentments are enlarged into hate. The authors encourage the individual to fantasise about murdering their abuser (the identity of whom they may have also "recovered"). There is a brief caution about carrying out such fantasies, with the suggestion that such anger can be managed via the taking of legal action through civil compensation or criminal litigation. Alternatively, there are suggestions to take political action. The most recent edition of *The Courage to Heal* includes a chapter entitled "Honoring the truth" in order to deal with the "backlash". This additional chapter includes reference to the issue of doubt, the need to maintain social support, and the taking of public and political action.

After examining its contents, it remains of serious concern that government and non-government agencies have advocated, or have been using, *The Courage to Heal*. In one of the first studies of "retractors" of recovered memories, seventy-five per cent of persons who now recognise their memories as false, reported using this particular text (Lief & Fetkewicz, 1995). However, this one of a raft of books which have advocated similar untested notions over the past decade, which currently occupy much of the space within the library shelves of educational institutions.

**The legal impact of recovered/repressed memories**  
Repressed memories manifest a Kafkaesque quality, when individuals are placed on trial solely based upon uncorroborated evidence derived from such methods.

The defense is effectively required to disprove such induced beliefs, (and when these beliefs are clearly demonstrated as false, induced delusions). The (often elderly) individual on trial is placed in a double bind: a plea of innocence may be considered a lack of remorse, or being "in denial". At present, anyone in Australia can be accused and jailed because of uncorroborated allegations arising from repressed memories, their ultimate fate depending on who the jury decides to believe. Many individuals who serve on juries may not conceive why an individual would make such allegations, and place themselves under the stress of legal proceedings, if their allegations were not true. Consequently, there can be tremendous pressure for persons accused as a sole consequence of repressed memories to plead guilty, as this will attract a lesser sentence. In some states (eg Qld), if the individual is found guilty, and the defence have placed the complainant on the witness stand, this attracts a maximum mandatory sentence. For some charges, this can be twenty years, with each "recovered memory" potentially resulting in a conviction.

There has been a professional and financial link

between therapists and the legal system, which in some states has potentially fuelled both civil and criminal litigation. Compensation schemes have allowed persons to receive up to \$50,000 for unsubstantiated claims of past child abuse, with the therapist also claiming ongoing fees. On making such application, the individual is required to file a criminal affidavit with police (unless exempted). Such a financial conflict of interest is of serious concern, as this financial mechanism has potentially fuelled both criminal investigations and prosecutions. In States such as Victoria, there have been moves to remedy this situation, with 40% of approximately 7000 claims in 1995-1996 being by young women for sexual assault. Many have been directed towards such compensation by government organisations that are listed in the back of books such as *The Courage to Heal* (Second Edition). Alternatively, there have been direct demands for therapy fees from the persons accused via recovered memories.

The past difficulty in gaining convictions due to the lack of corroborative evidence requires careful examination. Due to the secretive and manipulative nature of the crime, this previous lack of a requirement for corroboration has resulted in true offenders remaining unconvicted, and presumably undeterred in the continuation of their criminal behaviour. However, the extremely widespread and unregulated advocacy of dubious recovered memory methods (with possible financial conflicts of interest in some cases), together with the reduction of this legal threshold, has potentially increased the risk of wrongful convictions. It has been the case that individuals have been subject to trial based upon uncorroborated recovered/repressed memories in Australia (and overseas), and have been convicted and jailed. Presumably, the risk of wrongful conviction would be minimised if "repressed memory therapy" and other psychological practises were not so legally unregulated, and so readily advocated by mainstream services. The impact of such practises on individuals and families is severe, irrespective of whether they are subject to criminal trial (and jailing) based solely upon allegations arising from such methods.

At present, the legal system appears unable to detect the "repressed memory" nature of such cases. Only since mid 1996 has it been possible to enter expert evidence regarding repressed memory evidence into trials. However, in cases of persons wishing to appeal convictions, it is extremely difficult to enter such new evidence if this is not within the original trial. Appeals may also result in the occurrence of further allegations. The ability to mount a defense or appeal may be further compromised for those accused based upon repressed memories via proposed changes in access to counsellor's notes. In March 1997, there was a process of consultation by the Australian Federal and State Attorneys-General, proposing to limit lawyer's ability to seek such counselling notes. This process is associated with the

jailing of a counsellor from the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre for four hours for refusing to provide non-privileged case notes. There are cases in Australia and overseas where persons were successfully prevented from going to jail only after the defense had access to such materials (eg: Bunbury, WA: Case cited in Guilliat, 1996), with one UK case recently reporting the obtaining of such information by chance (*Daily Telegraph*, London, 30.11.96.).

Repressed memory is also an issue occurring within the context of the current reviews of sentencing procedures in a number of states, and the nation-wide reduction of legal aid funding. In Victoria, a public "survey" was conducted via the *Herald Sun* newspaper, and juxtaposed amongst stories of crime and brutality. While this has been criticised for being a potentially unrepresentative sample, it seems its methodology has assisted with the formation of policy. Following community consultation, a Sentencing Bill is to enter the Victorian Parliament, calling for increased mandatory sentences for a variety of offenses, including sexual assault. At present, it is possible to be jailed in Victoria based upon uncorroborated "repressed memories", where there has been widespread advocacy or use of such methods within government and private services, with psychological practises effectively deregulated from December 1995, and where financial conflicts of interests via compensation schemes have been linked to the filing of criminal affidavits. If this is were to be further associated with a restriction of access to counsellor's notes for the defense, such mandatory sentencing may result in a most inflexible state of affairs. One may question whether the judiciary are being provided with straitjackets.

It is within the present climate that there is currently a process of development for a model criminal code by the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General, including a discussion paper, "Sexual Offenses against the Person" (Chapter 5, November 1996). While the judge is no longer required to comment on the issue of convicting based upon uncorroborated evidence, the committee recommends that a rule (similar to that in NSW) be adopted, where the judge is required to warn that absence of complaint, or delay in complaining, does not necessarily imply that the allegation is false. Quite rightly, there may be valid reasons for delayed complaint. The discussion paper makes claim to research on children's memory recall and their ability to distinguish fact and fantasy, as well as the adult cases where "the trauma associated with reporting and proceeding to trial made it less likely that such evidence would be unreliable" (p 177). Virtually all "repressed memory cases" would fall into the proposed category of "persistent child abuse", with the recommended maximum penalty being 25 years jail. Persistent abuse refers to the situation where three alleged acts occur on three separate days (for which there is no requirement to establish the date, or circumstances, and the nature of the acts may differ.): No corroboration is

required. Increased additional penalties are also proposed for “aggravated offences”: For example, abuse by a person in a “position of trust” (10 years), and offence against a child under 10 years old (10 years), amongst others. In providing for these provisions and penalties, the current discussion paper does not distinguish between long-delayed versus recent allegations, or even make reference to the issue of repressed/ recovered memory. There appears to be little appreciation or understanding of how widely repressed memory methods have been used and advocated.

The debate which over-rides the recovered memory issue concerns the degree to which psychiatry and psychology are bound by science versus anecdotal “clinical experience”. Certainly, in the US Federal legal system there has been general concern about expert evidence (not just psychological/ psychiatric) and the entrance of pseudoscience into the courtroom. In the US, the recent “Daubert” decision stipulated that expert testimony should be based upon testable and falsifiable information, be replicable, and be generally accepted by the scientific community. By this test, the notion of “repressed or recovered memory” would certainly fail.

## Conclusions


At the individual level, the issue of “repressed memories” raises serious questions about the methods and procedures which have been widely advocated and used on the behalf of abused persons. There is need for public examination and discussion of current impact of such assumptions and methods upon individuals and society at large, in order to limit the effects of the controversy upon abused persons (whether this be as a child, or as an adult in therapy). Again, to deny the reality of repression is not to deny the reality of child abuse.

Finally, in Frederick Crewes’ *The Memory Wars: Freud’s legacy in dispute*, Professor Paul McHugh cites the over-riding debate associated with the “recovered memory” issue - the extent to which professionals are bound by science. Such comments provide a reminder of Karl Popper’s falsification principle, and his book published in 1945, *The Open Society*. Certainly, it appears that the scientific method not only provides a proven method for rational decision making, and prevention of what Popper termed “tribalism”, it may also be a means of external reality testing. In the absence of such examination and test, the social processes of society may effectively be dictated by delusion. Or in the words of Professor Harold Merskey, “It seems that once the critical faculty is loosened even slightly (and the notion of one or two personalities accepted), there is no end to the developments that may occur”.

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**Editor’s Note:** A second article by Dr Gibbs, concerning Multiple Personality Disorder (now Dissociative Identity Disorder) and bizarre claims of a worldwide cult conspiracy and mind-control programming is to appear in a future issue. 

## New Book

Bloody but unbowed, Ian Plimer has not let the grass grow under his feet. In August, Reed Books will release his new book, *A Journey through Stone*, which uses the Chillagoe mineral field in North Queensland to give a definitive potted 4,500 year history of planet Earth.. It contains all the catastrophic highlights of our planet’s turbulent history, colour plates of beautiful minerals, diagrams and clear text.

He was stimulated to write this book, which is designed to help the lay reader understand the basic processes of our planet, by the lively correspondence he received regarding the last few pages of his best seller, *Telling Lies for God*, in which he gave a brief summary of his geological views of the history of Earth. In the earlier book, he exposed the idiocy that is creation ‘science’; in the new volume, he brings an understanding of his subject to the general public. Readers are encouraged to keep an eye out for it. 

# Anecdotal Evidence and Observational Criteria

David E. Gower

It is anathema to critical thinking, it is the fuel of pseudoscience. Its existence can reduce an attempt at constructive argument to a mere playground exchange:

Dick: "Flying saucers are real."

Jane: "There is no evidence for the existence of flying saucers."

Dick: "Thousands of people have seen flying saucers."

Jane: "Thousands of people *say* they have seen flying saucers. How do you know they did?"

Dick: "Why would they make something like that up? Besides, my brother told me he saw a flying saucer. I trust him."

Jane: "But, you must admit, he may have been wrong."

Dick: "No, and besides, I *also* saw a flying saucer."

Jane: "Are you sure it wasn't something else?"

Dick: "No, it was a flying saucer."

Jane: "Maybe it was a light from some other source."

Dick: "Don't tell me what I saw."

Jane: "It's easy to be mistaken."

Dick: "Skeptical kneejerk."

Jane: "Credulous puppet."

Dick: "**Moron!**"

Jane: "**Cretin!**"

I am speaking, of course, of the ultimate oxymoron- Anecdotal Evidence.

Anecdotal Evidence (or simply "anecdotal") is any statement which cannot be substantiated but is nonetheless proffered as contributing toward proof of an assertion. Most often this statement takes the form of an anecdote that lacks any inherent or accompanying evidence to determine its truth or accuracy and provides no investigative path to follow which might yield corroboration of its content. It is, in essence, a statement with nothing to support itself other than the fact that it was uttered.

In science, such a statement does not qualify as evidence and correspondingly has zero weight as evidence. The latter is an important concept because it speaks to the non-cumulative nature of seemingly similar anecdotal evidence. Anecdotal statements are without weight as evidence individually and thus have no weight in combination. A thousand anecdotal reports of "flying saucers" contain the same evidential weight as one anecdotal report of flying saucers and that weight is zero. This is certainly counter-intuitive. How can a thousand similar reports *all* be wrong?

Let's begin by examining the reasons why anecdotal evidence should be so deeply discounted as to have zero value.

The evidentiary problems begin with the instrument that is delivering the anecdotal statement. Humans are demonstrably unreliable as general observers. That humans unreliably interpret and inaccurately report what they experience is well documented and supported by clinical trial. Take N number of people, subject them to an event, and you will get nearly N number of different versions of what happened. Factor in the embellishments that experiences acquire in the retelling, then add any number of psychological factors and it becomes undeniable that humans are "observationally challenged". When humans record a correct observation, it seemingly occurs by chance.

This means that the human as a general instrument of observation is like a piece of lab equipment that reads correctly only on unknowable occasions. Imagine a thermometer or infrared detector that is reliable only intermittently and there exists no way of determining whether any particular reading is accurate or not. Would the data gathered from such an instrument be considered as evidence in establishing proof for the existence of some phenomenon? Or would, in fact, the readings of such an instrument be discarded in their entirety as not being evidence?

Surely no instrument of such inconstancy is to be tolerated in scientific inquiry. And though we have not previously raised the issue, we must also factor in the very real possibility that our human instrument may deliberately choose to deceive.

It would seem at this point that we must make the decision to never give the weight of scientific evidence to any report of an experience by any human. This is not only impractical but also certainly in error for we do, in fact, recognize certain reports of human experience as observations and give them weight as observational evidence.

On the surface, the human would seem to be a marvellous candidate for a versatile universal observer. It can detect a variety of inputs including visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, etc, but the spectrum in all cases is limited and seems mainly concerned with ranges that effect its immediate survival. One of the largest single liabilities of the human as an observing instrument is the recording device (brain) which is, again, principally concerned with survival, easily confused by multiple input, has incomplete and random recall, and can be unpredictably effected by emotional and physical states of the body.

All is not lost, however, because like the best lab equipment, a human is capable of being "calibrated"

for a specific observational use. By keeping a cautious ledger of the aforementioned human limitations, it is possible to train an individual human instrument for specific observation over a very narrow latitude of input. The resultant output can then be examined for evidentiary value.

### The Observational Criteria

A qualitative assessment of the success in calibrating a human instrument for scientific observation and weighting the value of any subsequent output as scientific evidence is accomplished through the employment of a six point observational criteria.

In association with a specific account and in order to qualify as observation, the criteria demands that the observer be:

1. Knowledgeable - The person making the account must be fully learned, either through education or exposure, about the nature of what is reportedly observed.
2. Experienced - The person must be trained and practiced in the techniques of witnessing what is being reported.
3. Properly Equipped - The person must utilize and be familiar with any technology necessary in making the observation.
4. Trustworthy - The person have must have reason to report accurately and factually what was experienced.
5. Sober - The person must be free of any debilitating effects of psycho-actives, emotional stress, mental or physical limitations.
6. Skeptical - The person must be familiar with the possibility and techniques of subterfuge, perceptual errors, problems in experimental design, proper adherence to scientific method, etc.

Failure to qualify in any one of those areas critical to making a particular report can render an account anecdotal. The higher the qualifications in areas critical to a report, the greater the weight of the report as observational evidence. I point out that while formalized here, these criteria are assessments we use unconsciously everyday in determining the veracity of statements made to us.

The first three criteria would seem to be given. How a lack of knowledge, experience, or necessary equipment could easily lead to erroneous reporting of experience is obvious. It should be noted that the knowledge demanded is of the "nature" of what is reportedly observed. This eliminates the demand for an exact match between what is known and what is observed. It allows for discovery while still requiring a thorough comprehension of any reported subject's essential attributes.

The next two criteria are necessarily the most difficult to verify. Trustworthiness in particular is a thorny issue that all too often is addressed by merely posing the question "but why would they lie?" Of much stronger value is a relationship between the alleged observer and those who receive reports that would be diminished should it be shown that there was deceit.

For sobriety, there are of course, tests to verify the absence of psycho-actives. However, humans can be particularly adept at hiding the outward indications of emotional and physical stress. The existence of these states often must be deduced from conditions prevalent at the time of the observation in conjunction with aspects of the reporter's personal history.

That the observer be sceptical may be the most important criteria of all as it sets the standard for how vigorously the first five criteria must be applied. Scepticism demands that there be verification in any area where there is even the most delicate indication of doubt and assumes error in the absence of any but the most rigorous proof.

While often definitive, the application of the criteria doubtless cannot render a universally agreeable verdict on all reports of human experience. It does however provide a common ground for consideration and argument on the specific points that determine veracity.


And certainly it must be admitted that what the criteria finds as anecdotal today may be converted to evidence tomorrow by the revelation of new data. The opposite might also be the case and this recognition is but part of the process that is science.

These criteria can certainly be effective when arguing with someone about a body of submitted reports, but it will be of little comfort in the situation where a purported observer's freshly presented personal account must be declared anecdotal. The refusal to recognize someone's experience as observation invariably invites strong reaction. What can be offered by way of compensation is the assurance that the one who declares the account not to be evidence rigorously applies the same criteria even to their own experiences.

And indisputably this should be the case, that we should constantly subject our own experiences to the same unrelenting scrutiny that the criteria provide.

In doing so, we come to understand fully that it is not a matter of the extremes of human condition which explain mis-perception but that it is accounted for by normal human factors.

This in fact is the real similarity in reports of flying saucers, that they are all the product of the completely human quality to misinterpret experience. The rest is just fashion. Once these misinterpretations were "gods riding chariots of fire", a hundred years ago they were "airships". Today they are "flying saucers". And tomorrow.....well, perhaps there will be no tomorrow for this fashion.

For while humans have severe limitations as observers, they have other attributes to employ in compensation. What humans excel at is their ability to build tools and to be aware of process. Humans have constructed marvellous mechanisms for observation and recall. And they have painstakingly developed the process of scientific investigation. In one important sense, the entire purpose of scientific inquiry is to overcome the human limitations of observation and to ensure that the quest for knowledge is not to merely follow fashion. 

# Disclaimer disclaimed

Barry Williams

Many readers will have seen the documentary *The Guru Busters*, which was shown on ABC TV in April. The show, which originated on Britain's Channel Four, showed the activities of the Indian Rationalists Association, seeking to counter the influence of charlatans in Indian society.

It was an excellent programme, although it contained items that may have been more than a little unsettling for some of us. One was a scene in which a man who claimed to be able to cure snakebite by mystical means was given the chance to cure a dog that had been deliberately bitten by a cobra. Not surprisingly, he failed and the dog died, gruesomely, on screen. The initiator of the event explained that 20,000 people died from snakebite in India every year and that part of the reason was that people placed trust in the claims of those who peddle quack cures.

Among the gurus the programme exposed was the extremely influential Sai Baba who has a following among some of the most powerful people in India, including senior politicians. He was shown performing his famous "miraculous materialisation" of a gold chain and presenting it to an official. In the clip, which we understand has been banned from viewing in India, it was clear that this trick owed more to his prestidigitational skills than to any ability to perform miracles.

More disturbing to Australian Skeptics was the "disclaimer" run as a voice-over during the end titles of the programme. It proclaimed:

We wish to advise that *The Guru Busters* is a purchased documentary and does not represent the beliefs and attitudes of the ABC.

What an extraordinary statement; that the ABC does not take editorial responsibility for programmes it broadcasts; that the ABC, a publicly owned corporation, has "beliefs and attitudes".

For good legal reasons, many broadcasters and publications (including *the Skeptic*) publish a disclaimer, "that views and opinions expressed are not necessarily those of [the publishers]", but the wording of this disclaimer left no doubt that the views expressed in this programme were definitely *not* those of the ABC.

In 40 years of viewing, we have never heard a disclaimer of this nature. Our immediate response was to contact Stuart Littlemore's *Media Watch* programme to register our complaint. We were clearly not alone, as the reply from the researcher on hear-

ing our complaint reveals: "You'll have to join the queue", she said.

And Mr Littlemore did not let us down. On the next Monday, he said that following broadcast promotions for the show, "looney devotees of the gurus phoned the ABC to protest" and asked for the programme to be taken off. His summary was that the disclaimer was a "meaningless and pointless piece of cowardice" which could not be allowed to stand.


Melbourne subscriber, Peter Miller, went further - he wrote to the ABC Documentary unit and voiced his concerns. As Peter pointed out to us:

I feel that the initial decision to use the voice-over, made on the strength of a vigorous telephone campaign from fanatics, should be highlighted for all to see so that we all may be aware that this kind of lobbying exists and is acted upon by broadcasters. In this case the mistake was public and visible, but it is conceivable that these kinds of things happen all the time without our knowledge; if, for example, the show had been taken off air on the strength of the complaints, we would never have known about it.

He received a courteous response from Mike Rubbo, Head of ABC TV Documentaries. Mr Rubbo conceded, *inter alia*, that:

It was an error of judgment to include a disclaimer at the end of the program ... the disclaimer was an over-reaction ...the ABC accepts editorial responsibility for all programs it broadcasts, regardless of their source. We have reviewed Guidelines for the use of Disclaimers, strengthened the requirement for senior editorial staff to be involved in any decision for their use, and circulated these Guidelines to key staff.

This is encouraging, as we should be able to rely on the ABC as a reliable reporter of a wide variety of subjects, especially those not normally covered by the commercial media. The ABC should also be wary of giving free platforms to all sorts of "alternative" practitioners as has been the tendency of late on ABC Radio. Not that such people should not be heard, but, when listeners are invited to phone-in to them, it may appear to some that they have the endorsement of an Australian cultural institution.

However, to give "Aunty" her due, the ABC does acknowledge its errors and does provide air time for programmes such as *Media Watch*. Mr Littlemore is equally sceptical about in-house blunders as he is about those of the commercial media, and more power to his elbow for that. 

# Passing the buck

Harry Edwards

In a response to Dr Neil Burry (Vol16, No 4, p62) Barry Williams said, "Unfortunately, our success in alerting authorities to take steps to correct illegalities is not overwhelming, as I am sure Harry Edwards will be the first to attest. In the areas we deal with, the authorities show a distressing tendency to 'not want to know'." To enlarge on Barry's observation I will try to give some inkling of the frustration experienced dealing with the apathy and buck-passing endemic to the bureaucracy.

As the principal investigator for Australian Skeptics, I spend a considerable amount of time investigating charlatans and snake-oil salesmen claiming extraordinary abilities, promoting miraculous devices and generally ripping off the public. Although the results of these investigations have received publicity in the media, any positive action to curtail them invariably meets a brick wall. My recent exposure of the Tele-psycho scam is a typical example.

Sufficient information was gathered to show that the Tele-psycho hotline services are a multi-million dollar business, employing operators with no counselling or 'psychic' abilities, and whose apparent sole aim is to fleece the public through false and misleading advertising and abuse of the telephone service. There was widespread coverage by both the electronic and print media, and a general consensus among the lawyers we consulted that the operations being conducted constituted fraud. So to whom do we turn to implement some action? The NSW Minister for Fair Trading? The Federal Minister for Communications and the Arts? The Australian Competition & Consumer Commission? The Federal Bureau of Consumer Affairs? The Telephone Information Services Standards Council? I wrote to them all, drawing attention to the indisputable fact that the services in question were in breach of numerous rules, regulations, codes and laws. The result?

The Hon Faye Lo Po', Minister for Fair Trading, who, one could be forgiven for assuming from her title, is there to ensure that breaches of 'fair trading' are dealt with accordingly, had this to say.

Whilst I appreciate your concerns about the possibility [my emphasis] of consumers being misled, it is essentially a matter for the individual whether to believe in the psychic phenomena or not. The complaint rate to my Department is insignificant, however, and the issue is not within the Department's current or proposed investigative priorities. In view of this, no investigative action will be taken in relation to it...

While there is no doubt that consumers *are* being misled, whether people believe in psychic phenomena or not has absolutely nothing to do with it. Further, while the Minister can assume from the lack of complaints that the matter is of no great concern to the public, that is not the only criterion by which its priority should be measured. The majority of people using the hotlines would be oblivious to the fact that they were being ripped off in more ways than one, and therefore, would not register a complaint.

Other correspondence with the Minister has proved equally fruitless. My complaint concerning the activities of necromancer Bridget Pluis for example. Ms Pluis who in one demonstration of her 'powers' collected \$4000 in two hours for supposedly passing on messages from the dead, was investigated and exposed in *the Skeptic* (Vol 15, No 2, p53) and on Channel 7's *Today Tonight*. The Minister advised however, that, "... there is nothing to suggest that consumers are being misled or disadvantaged by this particular practice."

For goodness sake, this woman *is* misleading people and disadvantaging them by taking money from aged and vulnerable widows, by making the claim that she can communicate with their deceased partners. What does one have to do to convince the Minister that a person is in contravention of the *Fair Trading Act* (1987)?

Then there was the matter of a health fraud being advertised under the heading of 'Naturopathic Blood Analysis' – a pseudo-medical scam. (see "Blood Money" Vol 17, No 1.)

This time there was movement at the Department of Fair Trading – my letter was passed on to 'the appropriate authority', the Minister of Health, Dr A J Refshauge MP. Six months later, there has been no comment. Faye Lo Po's letter incidentally, was addressed to me at, PO Box A2324, Sydney South NSW 6436! They can't even get the post code right! However, I digress.

In a reply to my letter to Senator Richard Alston, the Federal Minister for Communications and the Arts, I was advised that the provisions of *The Telecommunication Act* (1991), "does not regulate content issues". This despite the fact that the contents may mislead, deceive, be false or designed to disadvantage the consumer financially.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, the body which investigates infringements of the *Trade Practices Act* (1974), was equally

continued p 37 ...



# It may be natural - but does it work?

Stephen Bassler

The term 'alternative medicine' has been used to describe a great many therapies and medical procedures, including well known therapies such as homeopathy, naturopathy, and herbal medicine as well as lesser known therapies such as catalyst altered water, shark cartilage and reiki. More recently these have been referred to as 'natural' or 'complementary' therapies, in an attempt at improving public and professional acceptance.

Historically most 'orthodox' health practitioners and organisations have turned a blind eye to these therapies, believing them to be harmless and of novelty value only. This may have been true when the potions were predominantly bust developers and baldness cures, but with an increasing number of therapies being targeted at patients with diseases as serious as cancer and AIDS this complacency is not justified.

A good example of the danger of this kind of complacency is the alternative cancer treatment laetrile.

Laetrile is the trade name for a synthetic derivative of amygdalin, a cyanide containing chemical present in the kernels of apricot pits, bitter almonds and some other stone fruits and nuts. Promoters of laetrile referred to it as 'vitamin B<sub>17</sub>' and claimed that cancer was a vitamin deficiency that could be cured by giving laetrile. The cyanide, it was claimed, would specifically target the cancer cells, thus curing the disease without any side effects.

An important component of the promotion of laetrile was the claim that this safe effective cancer cure would be helping more patients if not for a coordinated program of suppression by government and the aforementioned 'orthodox' medicine. It was claimed this suppression effort was designed to protect the profits of the cancer research and treatment industries.

Unfortunately for the promoters of laetrile, and the patients who received it, the scientific research did not support the claims being made. Many studies on animals failed to detect any effect on cancer growth, and a controlled study on cancer patients found no anti-cancer effect, and dangerously high levels of cyanide in the blood of many patients. Of 178 patients studied none were cured or stabilised, and none experienced a reduction in their symptoms.

In 1979 the US Supreme Court ruled against a decision of a lower court that had allowed cancer patients access to laetrile as long as they had been assessed as 'terminal'. In the judgement the court supported the view that a drug can be said to be ef-

fective "if there is general recognition among experts, founded on substantial evidence, that the drug in fact produces the results claimed for it under prescribed conditions". The court also expressed a strong opinion regarding the importance of consumer protection, *even in the case of patients with terminal conditions:*

Since the turn of the century, resourceful entrepreneurs have advertised a wide variety of purportedly simple and painless cures for cancer, including liniments of turpentine, mustard, oil, eggs and ammonia; peat moss; arrangements of colored floodlamps; pastes made from glycerin and limburger cheese; mineral tablets; and 'Fountain of Youth' mixtures of spices, oil and suet...this historical experience does suggest why Congress could reasonably have determined to protect the terminally ill, no less than other patients, from the vast range of self-styled panaceas that inventive minds can devise.

Clearly, not all legally qualified practitioners practice rational or scientific medicine, and not all 'alternative' practices are quackery. What is needed is a system that as far as possible protects the public from unproven therapies, and dangerous practitioners, regardless of how these are labelled.

There are a number of ways this protection may be conferred. The most important is legislation covering who may practice, and what therapeutic substances or devices may be used.

Registration is the statutory regulation of a professional group, governed by an Act of Parliament, and a set of regulations administered by a Registration Board.

In Australia, medical practitioners must be registered in the state or territory where they work. In most states registration also covers other health professionals such as chiropractors and osteopaths, dentists and dental technicians, dietitians, nurses, optometrists, pharmacists, physiotherapists, and psychologists.

Registration has become a key issue for supporters of alternative therapies who have generated a significant (and astute) shift in emphasis from efficacy to training. They know only too well that a university based course in something, no matter how scientifically untenable, combined with a system of registering practitioners confers considerable public credibility regarding efficacy.

By focusing on this issue, the question of whether the therapies actually work is conveniently bypassed. Mr Geoff Henry of the Australian Natural Therapies

Association, for example, recently commented that anybody practicing alternative medicine without appropriate training posed a threat to patient health. There was no mention of whether the use of scientifically unproven treatments, regardless of the status of the practitioner, also posed a threat to patient health!

There is a problem, though, for supporters of these therapies. Whilst most are obviously keen to obtain all the benefits of registration and 'formal training' many are wary of excessive regulation, particularly by government. This is viewed as an infringement on personal liberty.

In other words, an important argument in favor of the on-going availability of alternative therapies is that patients want them - they are 'voting with their feet'.

If we accept this premise - that appropriate health care is merely a matter of choice - then how should a practitioner respond to a request for a medication that is not clinically indicated, or a surgical procedure that is felt to be unnecessary? How can we ever speak of things such as the overuse of antibiotics, or the rate of unnecessary surgery, if we have no objective evidence based guide as to clinical appropriateness?

Should the guiding principle of practice in health care be patient demand or clinical effectiveness? Why do we care so much about whether our children are taught that dinosaurs roamed the earth with man, or that the world is flat, but turn a blind eye to whether our health care is scientifically based?

In addition the freedom of choice approach ignores the degree to which demand may be driven by the practitioner? Patients do not have the same level of knowledge as their practitioner and rely upon information provided to them in deciding whether to be treated, or what treatment to have. Surely, if the practitioner strongly recommends a particular treatment the patient is more likely to decide to accept it.

In the case of a patient who accepts the recommended treatment, and feels this has harmed them, how is a professional body, or a court of law, to decide whether the practitioner has erred? In the absence of some process of objectively assessing treatment options, how can a determination be made about whether this patient has received appropriate care?

In addition, without such a system how does a practitioner decide what advice to give when faced with a particular problem? Whilst direct clinical experience is certainly important, it is by no means objective, and it is unwise to extrapolate on the basis of even a few apparently successful individual cases.

This is why clinical trials are so important. By reference to published studies involving large numbers of patients, practitioners may base their practice on scientifically sound data, and provide objective information for their patients regarding the

risk/benefit balance associated with different treatment options.

Obviously the reality of day to day practice is less than the ideal. There are many situations in which scientific data is scanty or absent, and a decision is made to try a scientifically unproven approach. In such a setting, though, ethics dictate that the patient be informed that the treatment is unproven, and consent must be based upon an understanding of this fact. In addition they must have been given or offered those treatments known to have some clinical effectiveness prior to the use of the unproven approach.

In the case of the alternative therapies it is not at all clear that this is what occurs. Patients who attend say a homoeopath, a naturopath, or an iridologist are in most instances not advised that the therapy is scientifically unproven, and are almost certainly not told that there may be a more scientifically valid therapy available elsewhere.

Now many of the patients who attend these practitioners may still be happy to part with their time and money after the unproven nature of the therapy is explained to them, but some may not.

It seems extraordinary that those who argue so vociferously for the right of patients to have access to all manner of therapies are so silent on the question of the right of these same patients to receive full information regarding efficacy. This is the point at which we are usually told that patients can make up their own mind according to whether they feel better. Apparently symptomatic improvement is no defence against a charge of unnecessary hysterectomy, but is a valid justification for the on-going use of herbals and homoeopathics.

Australia has already partly rejected the freedom of choice approach to health care, by having legislation covering therapeutic goods and devices - the *Therapeutic Goods Act 1989 (TGA)*. Unfortunately as it currently exists this legislation is seriously flawed.

The TGA has three principal elements - the licensing of manufacturers, the setting of standards for therapeutic goods, and the creation of a Register of Therapeutic Goods. The Act defines therapeutic goods as goods:

...that are represented in any way to be or that are, whether because of the way in which the goods are presented or for any other reason likely to be taken to be:-

- (i) for therapeutic use; or
- (ii) for use as an ingredient or component in the manufacture of therapeutic goods; or
- (iii) for use as a container or part of a container for goods of the kind referred to in sub-paragraph (i) or (ii)

and therapeutic use as:

(a) prevention, diagnosing, curing or alleviating a disease, ailment defect or injury in persons or animals; or

(b) influencing, inhibiting or modifying a physiological process in persons or animals; or

(c) testing the susceptibility of persons or animals to a disease or ailment

The Register of Therapeutic Goods created by the Act consists of two parts, "one relating to goods to be known as registered goods and the other relating to goods to be known as listed goods".

Application must be made for registration or listing of a therapeutic good, and the Act outlines the procedures to be followed for application. In the case of registered goods an evaluation must be performed to determine "whether the quality, safety and efficacy of the goods for the purposes for which they are to be used have been satisfactorily established" (emphasis added). All pharmaceutical products that are pharmaceutical benefits under the *National Health Act 1953* (Commonwealth), and all devices that are inserted into the body, are registered goods.

Evaluation of the evidence relating to the quality, safety and efficacy of registered goods is carried out by a number of bodies, including the Australian Drug Evaluation Committee.

Listed goods are most of the other medical devices, as well as those goods set out in Schedule Four of the Regulations, including vitamin and mineral preparations, most herbal preparations, and most amino acids that are for therapeutic use. These are *not* evaluated for efficacy, and *cannot be refused listing* except where it can be shown, amongst other criteria, that "the goods are not safe for the purposes for which they are used".

This component of the Act bears reflecting upon. Having defined therapeutic use as being the "prevention, diagnosing, curing or alleviating" of a "disease, ailment, defect or injury", the Act then creates a class of goods that do not have to prove they possess any therapeutic usefulness prior to being listed. It would seem far more logical to propose that *any* substance, or device that is proposed for therapeutic use, as defined by the Act, should have its efficacy established before it is accepted for use in humans.

One other group is created by the Act - exempt goods. These do not appear in the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods, but can make certain therapeutic claims consistent with the guidelines of the Therapeutic Goods Advertising Code. This group includes certain anti-perspirants and insect repellents, and also most homoeopathic preparations.

Presumably the regulation of registered goods is designed to minimise harm and maximise consumer benefit. The principle underlying this part of the legislation appears to be that there must be a body of independent evidence confirming a product's efficacy prior to its release, and this body of evidence must include information about likely adverse effects.

Once a registered good is accepted for release, only those therapeutic claims that can be supported by evidence may be made by the manufacturer in advertisements and accompanying literature. Hefty penalties can be imposed on companies or individuals who make unsupported claims.

Why do we bother with such a scheme if freedom of choice is the overriding concern? I assume the primary reason is the belief that patients have a right to be protected from ineffective and/or toxic substances. Do supporters of alternative therapies feel we should abandon this approach, and allow patients to decide for themselves which therapeutic goods are effective?

Listed goods are not treated in the same way as registered goods, and it is difficult to understand how the listed goods classification serves the consumer protection principle. It is probably no coincidence that part of the reason for the creation of the listed goods category in the first place was intense lobbying on the part of those who had the most to lose from having all therapeutic goods treated the same way.

A good example of the danger of this part of the TGA is the literature recently sent to my own practice for a product called Nouss-Ade.

Nouss-Ade comes in a capsule formulation, and consists of 100mg of powdered mushroom. In the letter and leaflet forwarded the following 'facts' were communicated:

The product was developed to operate through the immune system to the point that good health is maintained... It has come to our attention that people with illness such as diabetes, dyslexia, gout, sclerosis, chronic fatigue, arthritis amongst other, have reported dramatic improvement to their health. Expected health benefits to the body relate to enhancement of the body maintaining good health or improving the body's well being... Another noticeable effect, is that food requirements may be reduced up to 2/3 of what we used to eat... Another noticeable change is that food you eat is digested much faster.

Towards the end of the leaflet we are assured in bold letters that Nouss-Ade is "...listed under the *Therapeutic Goods Act* - Aust. L 58838."

As a scientifically trained practitioner who strongly supports evidence based health care I consider the listed goods category to be a national disgrace. How can we claim to have world leading therapeutic goods legislation when the TGA allows pseudoscientific products such as Nouss-Ade to be distributed with no proof of efficacy, and promoted with an apparent government imprimatur? When the next laetrile comes along it will probably be classed as a listed good. Is this the level of protection the public deserves?

There is currently a review of the TGA underway, but it appears there is little, if any, chance of substantial change. The same forces that fought so hard in the first place for the creation of the advantageous

'loophole' (and who criticise pharmaceutical companies for being profit driven!) are not going to stand by and have their gravy train derailed.

Without a serious attempt at addressing the flaws in the TGA the battle against the spread of unproven therapies is probably all but lost. Many orthodox trained practitioners are adopting alternative therapies as a means of increasing their income, and this use by 'real' doctors is seen by patients as proof of their value.

Major organisations such as the AMA will occasionally speak out, but appear cautious lest they antagonise members who use these therapies, and who may then withdraw their membership funds. Some AMA publications (eg, the *Victorian Branch News*) also advertise courses and conferences that promote a range of alternative therapies.

The President of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners recently spoke at a conference at which one of the workshops dealt with "several vital energetic procedures useful for harmonising the whole person. These procedures have proven useful for patients experiencing post-traumatic stress, TMJ pain/dysfunction and immune deficiency".

The brochure for this conference informed us that

...GP's and health professionals need to acquaint themselves with other therapeutic approaches and integrate various ethical non-pharmaceutical modalities into their clinical practice to help their patients move towards a wellness orientation.

One of the sponsors of the conference was an organisation whose co-founder has previously advocated megadose vitamins and minerals as a treatment for AIDS and cancer patients, and recommended the removal of amalgam dental fillings.

Just as I was finishing this article I received the latest *Australian Adverse Drug Reactions Bulletin*. There is a 'natural' remedy doing the rounds called Kombucha tea, a concoction brewed from the Kombucha mushroom. This tea is claimed to have therapeutic benefit, including the relief of arthritis, stimulation of the immune system (an old favorite of mine!), and prevention of cancer. The mushrooms are allegedly sold or distributed by naturopaths and "other alternative practitioners".

In the last year the Adverse Drug Reactions Advisory Committee has received two reports of liver toxicity in association with Kombucha tea, and there have been similar reports from overseas.

In spite of reports such as this those who profit from the sale of such substances continue to peddle the 'natural means safe' lie, and patients are paying with their health. Though the means exist to prevent many of these cases, the will apparently does not. Most alternative therapies will continue to be exempt from demonstrating efficacy, and the patients who use them will continue to be unwitting guinea pigs.

When will we learn?

### ...Passing the buck, from p33

accommodating. A nine page copy of their Code of Practice Relating to Live, Data and Fax Services, revealed, at least to my lay mind, six breaches of the Code by tele-psychics. A reply to my letter pointing them out was received nine weeks later, and I was advised *inter alia*, that, "the services are clearly designed to 'entertain';" "that people make a free choice in calling psychic services", and deliberately prolonging calls "does not constitute a breach of the Code".

But what about deliberate fraud? The only positive thing to emerge was that "some of the information supplied can be used as a resource by this office in future investigations of these services".

The buck then passed to the Strategic Policy Section of the Federal Bureau of Consumer Affairs, from whom there has been no response.

As an aside, on the bottom of the letter from the Department of Communications and the Arts was stamped the logo of the Commonwealth Public Servants Union and the following message. "This reply was prepared for you by a professional public servant whose job is now at risk." All I can respond is, "I'm not surprised!"

As a constituent, I recently received the *Bishop Report* detailing the functions attended by my Federal Member, Bronwyn Bishop MP, Minister for Defence Industry, Science and Personnel. Included was a questionnaire asking what were my principal concerns. In addition to listing them and returning the questionnaire, I also enclosed a letter outlining Australian Skeptics' concerns about the proliferation of anti-science, pseudoscience and paranormal claims, with emphasis on the deleterious effects of pseudo-medical practices. I also opined that the tightening up of legislation against the promotion of useless therapeutic potions and apparatus was overdue, and that if Mrs Bishop concurred with those sentiments I would be pleased to discuss the matter further.

By return post, I received a form letter which thanked me for my response and stated, *inter alia*, "...it might take some time to collate the information as responses have been numerous and varied".

Premature, to say the least, as the letter was obviously drafted prior to the sending of the questionnaire anticipating the replies. My letter outlining Australian Skeptics' concerns elicited no response.

Not only are we frustrated by the bureaucracy, but in some cases by those on whom we depend. My mole in the Sydney tele-psychic camp was not interested in being a witness in any court case. The two reporters from Channels 7 and 9 who infiltrated the Melbourne tele-psychic hotlines did not respond to my enquiry regarding their willingness to testify, and only Kathy Butler was prepared to stand by her guns.

Perhaps Dr Burry can now appreciate what we are up against. Ethics, morals, ideologies, and democracy aside, our lack of progress when it comes to energising politicians and bureaucrats is certainly not for the want of trying.

# Dubious chiropractic claims

Harry Edwards

Two almost identical reports appeared in the May 6, 1996 *Philippine Star* and the May 10, 1996, *Manila Bulletin*, headed respectively, "Baby crib deaths mystery explained" and "US doctor finds cause of 'baby crib' deaths." The reports give the impression that an American chiropractor by the name of Thomas Wiltse, can prevent 'cot deaths' (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome [SIDS]) by chiropractic manipulation. The following is a synopsis of the reports.

Millions of new-born babies die in their sleep each year for reasons autopsies only vaguely label as natural causes, either by suffocation or stoppage of the heart and lungs. Scientific explanation has been lacking, but now the mystery has been adequately explained in a report written by an American chiropractor, Dr Thomas Wiltse. The *Anatomy Review*: "How to Stop Baby Crib Deaths by Chiropractic Manipulation" is the product of a 20 year study and practice - tracings the root cause of this phenomenon to the misalignment of the backbone and spinal nerves or what is called subluxation. The abnormal position of the spinal column bones causes swelling in the surrounding tissues that consequently creates pressure on the spinal nerves, and blocks off blood flow and nerve transmission to the heart and lungs. The report says the displacement of the spine in infants usually occurs in infants during the birth process, caused by pulling the child's head by hand or forceps. The problem could be aggravated later by the incorrect angling of the baby's head when he lies on his side or on his stomach.

Wiltse says the deaths could be prevented by applying scientific means to correct cervical spinal displacements in new-born babies by natural chiropractic manipulation. Wiltse, a US licensed chiropractor who graduated from the Los Angeles Chiropractic College in Glendale, California, now continues his research and practice in the Philippines for personal reasons. He left behind a 20-year chiropractic practice in San Diego, California.

Apart from wondering what kind of 'personal reasons' would induce a person to give up a 20 year practice to start a less lucrative one in the Philippines, I wrote to Dr Wiltse asking for a copy of his report, and was informed that it would cost 1000 pesos or US\$40. A second request, this time querying the ethics of charging for information of vital interest to the medical profession, and in particular, mothers of infants, solicited a copy of his report by return mail. More on the report later.

In the meantime, I obtained some information on SIDS from the Sudden Infant Death Association in Sydney, to see if there was any mention of chiropractic manipulation. I also sought professional medical

opinions and that of the Chiropractors' Association of Australia.

Omitting the highly technical stuff such as references to "Decreased Muscarinic Receptor Binding in the Arcuate Nucleus in Sudden Infant Death Syndrome", "Gastro-esophageal reflux/aspiration" and the "Differences in Diaphragm Fiber Types in SIDS Infants - a clue as to the pathogenesis of sudden infant death syndrome", the following is a condensed and edited version in my lay terms of an article by Rodger W. Byard, MD, CCFP, FRCPC. (1996).

SIDS is the most common cause of death in infants aged between 1 week and 1 year in Western countries with an average of 1 to 4 per 1000 live births. Highest at risk are boys aged between 2 and 4 months who were premature with low birth rates. Environmental factors play a role as do a large number of infants in the same family, in families where there are smokers, and during winter months. Other features include families with a lower socioeconomic status and young unmarried mothers with a low level of formal education. Asian populations have an extremely low rate compared with Caucasians. High risk groups include certain North American Indian groups and New Zealand Maoris. Of the high risk groups only 1% will die of SIDS. Other infants will die who don't have any of the known risk factors. It can be seen, therefore, that predicting SIDS deaths with any accuracy is an elusive goal. An autopsy or post mortem examination is an essential component in establishing the 'diagnosis' of SIDS as there are many disorders and diseases that can cause sudden and unexpected death in apparently well infants with few warning signs. These include congenital heart defects, metabolic disorders, tumors and non-accidental injury. It is now appreciated that SIDS is not a disease entity with an identifiable cause in the same way that bacterial pneumonia or peptic ulcer disease is: instead it appears to be a loosely cohesive amalgam of risk factors and inadequate physiological responses that result in a lethal outcome. The strongest evidence is that certain infants have some form of neurophysiological imbalance resulting in defective breathing. This manifests itself in the form of prolonged periods where the infant fails to breathe. Many hundreds of studies have been undertaken to confirm or refute the various theories, but in one respect there appears to be a consensus - infants who have died from SIDS have been exposed to low oxygen concentrations for some time. One of the most significant factors appears to be the prone sleeping position. When this was identified in Holland in the late 1980s as a possible factor linked to an increased risk of SIDS, the rate of prone sleeping fell by almost 30% over the next year paralleled by a fall in SIDS numbers of 40%.

There were ten references, and reprints of the full article can be obtained from Dr Rodger W Byard, Department of Histopathology, Women's and Children's Hospital, 72 King William Road, North Adelaide, SA 5006.

I wrote to Dr Sue Rutkowski, Director of the Spinal Injuries Unit, Royal North Shore Hospital, Sydney, and in her reply, noted that she was singularly unimpressed with Dr Wiltse's claim saying:

There is certainly no place for chiropractic intervention as management. Dr Wiltse may have something talking about twisting of the neck of babies in prone lying but the only management should be to position babies with head and body in line either on the side or on the back.

Fred Stevenson, DC, President of the Chiropractors' Association of Australia, was also unimpressed, and had this to say about Dr Wiltse's report:

...sounds as if it is made up of anecdotal evidence and opinion, which should never be alleged as scientific fact, unless backed up by appropriate randomised controlled studies.

Dr Steven Basser of the Victorian Skeptics was less polite, summing up Dr Wiltse's claim as "crap".

Dr Wiltse's report now being to hand, I sent copies to Drs Basser and Rutkowski and Mr Stevenson for further comment. The first three pages of the six page report consisted of anatomical diagrams of the spinal column, and a description of the body's nervous system. The conclusion being, that a review of the foregoing...

...reveals spinal nerves directly relate to ganglia in (the) lungs and heart which scientifically proves breathing mechanism and heart pulse rate is affected by cervical vertebral displacement (subluxation).

The report then goes on to describe chiropractic manipulation, and how pressure on a nerve caused by a vertebral displacement (subluxation) can slow down heart rate, pulse, and respiratory pathways. The primary problem creating infant mortality being "the swelling of tissues, ligaments of occiput that emerge from the base of the skull (foramina magnum) including cervical one (atlas) and cervical two (axis)."

Now to a layman, whose medical qualifications do not go beyond a Boy Scout's First Aid badge, and illegible hand writing, all this seems quite plausible. But allowing that Dr Wiltse may be on the right track how does he suggest we prevent cot deaths? Simply by applying cryo-chiropractic to all new-born infants throughout the world and sending data and statistics to his headquarters in the Philippines. What is cryo-chiropractic? The application of a cold compress to the new-born infant's posterior neck for forty-eight hours!

Dr Rutkowski and Mr Stevenson did not respond after receiving the report, evidently feeling no fur-

ther comment was necessary. Dr Basser however, remained convinced that there is no scientific evidence to support Dr Wiltse's claims, but was nonetheless pleased to hear that the Australian Chiropractor's Association responded in a positive way. He reaffirmed his original observation adding that the SIDS Foundation and affiliated groups work hard to educate the public and raise funds for research, and every time publicity is given to yet another crank theory about SIDS, their efforts are undermined.

### Science at work

In complete contrast to Dr Wiltse's claim, Jim Sprott OBE, MSc, PhD, FNZIC, consulting chemist and forensic scientist of Auckland, New Zealand, puts forward a more persuasive hypothesis in his book, *The Cot Death Cover-up*. Cot deaths, according to Mr Sprott, are caused by the inhalation of poisonous gases. While he admits that his book has not been peer reviewed, he stresses that it has been aimed at parents who can't understand why avoiding risk factors doesn't stop cot death.

In 1986, Jim Sprott arrived at the conclusion that cot deaths are the result of inadvertent and unsuspected gaseous poisoning by an extremely toxic nerve gas generated by microbiological action on something within the baby's cot. In 1989, a leading British forensic scientist, Barry Richardson, working independently in Britain, came to the same conclusion after identifying the gases.

The gas is formed by the action of a common household fungus, *Scopulariopsis bevicaulis* and related species, acting on any of the chemicals phosphorus, arsenic or antimony which may be present in the mattress on which the baby sleeps. The gases are respectively, phosphine, arsine and stibine.

This is not a new discovery. The generation of arsine (and its homologues) by fungal activity on compounds of arsenic was demonstrated conclusively by the Italian chemist Gosio in 1892. This discovery explained the deaths of thousands of children in Europe during the 1800s. At that time arsenic was used in the manufacture of wallpaper, carpet and tapestry.

Sheepskins contain far more arsenic than is necessary to poison a child by this same mechanism, and more than half of all cot deaths annually in New Zealand occur on sheepskins. Since Richardson's findings were made public in Britain in 1989, the British cot death rate has plummeted.

Jim Sprott advises that babies should not be put down to sleep on sheepskins, unless the sheepskins are covered with a gas-impermeable sheet such as polythene (not PVC) or surgical rubber.

### Conclusion

While Dr Sprott's conclusions are scientifically based and empirically supported, there appears to be no evidence to support Dr Wiltse's claim and much

continued p 41 ...

# A fat lot of good

Kathy Butler

Dr Rudi Villani, senior lecturer in anatomy & physiology at RMIT in Melbourne, is seriously grumpy at his colleagues in his former profession of pharmacy. Sick of seeing pharmacies promoting fad "health supplements" with outrageous and scientifically unsupported claims, he and his research team have done exactly what the health food company should have done: a clinical trial to test its effectiveness. Dr Rudi Villani and his team, Honours student Jenelle Gannon and Masters student Megan Self have released preliminary results of a clinical trial of L-Carnitine, a supplement which is claimed to "burn fat" with no need for exercise. The results will probably not surprise you, but the behaviour of the health food companies has been very strange indeed. Dr Villani enthusiastically gave this interview for *the Skeptic*.

Dr Villani's primary interest is in nutrition, and he lectures in that subject, and his students were the ones who led him to choose L-Carnitine to study. "My students and friends kept telling me about this magical substance they were taking called L-Carnitine", he said. "Body builders are especially interested in getting rid of subcutaneous fat so that the striations of the muscle show clearly. They had great belief in L-Carnitine and spoke enthusiastically of its ability to strip away fat, so we chose this to study."

Such a study costs money to undertake and Dr Villani approached Musashi, the leading marketer of L-Carnitine, to donate either funding or the test substance for the trial. "L-Carnitine is quite expensive to buy" he said, "at \$77.00 per 100g, each of our subjects would consume over \$200.00 worth of product." At first the Musashi manager was enthusiastic about the trial. "Although he said he was unable to help financially, he could certainly supply L-Carnitine for the trial. He sent me a letter to this effect." As time wore on, however, he became very elusive. "When I followed up on this with phone calls he never seemed to be in his office", says Dr Villani "I probably phoned or faxed him twice a day for three weeks and he was always in a meeting, or had just stepped out ..." An ungracious reader might at this stage think that he was not as confident in his product as he should be.

Tiring of hunting the elusive Musashi manager, Dr Villani approached RMIT for a grant and was able to fund his study this way. The trial itself was quite simple: advertise for overweight volunteers (36 suitable subjects were chosen. Coincidentally, only women answered the advertisement); give them

either a placebo or L-Carnitine (make sure neither of you knows which it is!); have them do some prescribed aerobic exercise; compare weight loss of paired, randomly assorted subjects at the end of eight weeks. Easy!

However at the end of the eight weeks, only 28 of the original 36 people remained in the trial. Many had dropped out due to side effects of the L-Carnitine. Half of the test group complained of nausea and diarrhoea. Dr Villani notes that it is ironic that a so-called "safe, natural substance" can cause debilitating side effects. The result of this self-imposed torture for the subjects was ... Nothing! All subjects became a little fitter from the exercise but the results between the groups were no different for body fat, fat metabolism and lean body mass.

So how could the makers of L-Carnitine claim spectacular weight loss results when in a proper trial it simply doesn't work? Are they simply lying? Dr Villani says they have some reason to think it may work. "There is an enzyme related to L-Carnitine which, by a complex association with other enzymes, helps ferry fatty acids into the mitochondria, the tiny energy-producers in your cells." It is a vast leap, however, to claim that ingesting more L-Carnitine will burn more fat. First, there are hundreds of other enzymes working in balance and to raise the level of just one is unlikely to have any effect. Second, this is a simplistic view of the way enzymes work. Raising the level of L-Carnitine may even have a negative effect on its activity, if a negative feedback system exists.

I rang a large dietary supplement manufacturer to get a reply to this study. Bullivant's Health Products in Queensland sells the Nature's Own range of supplements, and, like most other supplement producers, sells L-Carnitine as a "fat metaboliser". (I chose this company only as it is large: this controversy could easily apply to any other manufacturer.) The representative from the company was amused to hear that I was writing for Australian Skeptics (at least I think that was what that snuff on the other end of the phone meant).

My questions were simple:

Me: "What studies were done to support L-Carnitine as a weight loss substance?"

Answer: "L-Carnitine is not promoted as a weight loss substance, it burns dietary fat."

Me: "Very well, in that case, do you have studies to show that this is the case?"

Answer: "ummm... could I fax you something ..."

Me: "Dr Rudi Villani in a study has shown that there was *no weight loss* in a group of women taking this supplement".

Answer: "We'd have to see if it was taken the right way..."

Me: "It was taken in accordance with the directions."

She: "... Well L-Carnitine isn't claimed to burn fat ..." (She'd forgotten that for a minute!).

So you can see the everdiminishing circle we were travelling in. The claims made by all of the manufacturers of these products clearly imply that they are a weight loss aid. The same slippery sort-of claims manufacturers make which *imply* heavily, but which don't explicitly *state*, are exactly what Dr Villani warned me I'd find on investigating supplements. They allow manufacturers to slip quietly out of the responsibility to actually testing their own claims.

As an interesting aside, I noticed that RMIT in Bundoora has acquired a department of natural medicine, right next door to Rudi Villani's building. I asked him how he felt about this, and he was very happy about it. It will, he says, force them to do research and to test their methods and treatments. "What if they all turn out to be useless?" I asked. He was ambivalent. That's how science is. Sometimes the result you get isn't the one you were hoping for. The dietary supplement manufacturers would rather not even take the chance.

Acknowledgement: I am indebted to Dr Rudi Villani, Megan Self and Jenelle Gannon for helping me with the interview and allowing me free access to their study. The team hope to publish their findings in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. ↻

### ...Chiropractic from p 39

evidence to the contrary, unfortunately, statistics may lend false credence to it. According to Dr Wiltse's report:

... cot deaths could be prevented by applying scientific means to correct cervical spinal displacements in newborn babies by 'natural chiropractic manipulation'.

Let's consider the facts:

1. Asian populations have an extremely low rate of cot deaths compared with Caucasians.
2. The incidence of SIDS in Western countries averages between 1 to 4 deaths per 1000, to many of which no specific cause of death can be attributed.
3. Only 1% of those in the high risk group will die of SIDS.

It follows therefore, given the odds *against* dying of SIDS, that any form of 'preventive' management, whether it be 'natural chiropractic manipulation', holy water or incantations, will of course meet with a perceived, albeit erroneous, high rate of success. But how many concerned mothers of new born infants in the Philippines will be lulled into complacency and relieved of their precious pesos, in the mistaken belief that following Dr Wiltse's treatment, their babies will then be immune from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome?

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### ...the real Noah, from p 20

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#### Notes

- 1 Sladek, John, *The New Apocrypha*, p 92
- 2 Introduction to *The New Jerusalem Bible*
- 3 Odiijk, Pamela, *The Hebrews*
- 4 Kramer, Samuel Noah, *History Begins at Sumer*, p 181
- 5 I have used as the basis for this summary the translation given in Gardner, John and Maier, John, *Gilgamesh*, Tablet XI
- 6 *Encyclopedia of World Mythology* p 121
- 7 The Sumerian King List in Kagan, Donald, *Problems in Ancient History Volume One*
- 8 Richardson, M. E. J., 'Mesopotamia', p 90
- 9 Kramer, Samuel Noah, *History Begins at Sumer*, p 20
- 10 Lloyd, Seton, *The Archaeology of Mesopotamia*, p 90
- 11 Barrett, Bryce, Kanowski, *Threshold of Time*, p 52. Their arithmetic, not mine.
- 12 Roberts, *The Ancient World*, 'Using the evidence: a mystery at Ur', pp 52 - 55
- 13 Caldwell and Gyles, *The Ancient World*, p 35
- 14 Lloyd, Seton, *The Archaeology of Mesopotamia*, p 92
- 15 Carroll, Lewis, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland / Through the Looking-Glass*, London,



# Battling the alternatives

Colin Keay

At the end of a quiet street in the Newcastle suburb of Dudley, on a headland jutting out into the Tasman Sea, lives a lady who has devoted the past decade to exposing the quacks and charlatans who rely on the heartless trickery of those practising alternative medicine. Her name is Cheryl Freeman, well known to medical authorities throughout Australia, and even overseas, for drawing their attention to the unscrupulous tactics and devices employed to prey upon the sick and elderly.

From her earliest years, Cheryl always wanted to be a nurse and relieve the pain and suffering of others. In one of those unpredictable turns of fate she became a sufferer herself. She began nursing training at the Wallsend Hospital in outer Newcastle when she was 19 years old.

After graduation she undertook further training in midwifery and her dream of becoming a mission nurse came true in 1972 when she was selected to be one of four Australian nursing sisters on secondment by the Australian Government to the highlands of Papua New Guinea. The death and distress she encountered there made her deeply conscious of the inner strength of the human spirit but it hardly prepared her for the horrors to come five years later when she was offered a place in a volunteer medical group setting out on a humanitarian mission to the Lebanon.

Cheryl was only in the Lebanon for four months. During that brief span of duty at the American University Hospital in Beirut the country slipped into chaos. She had set out for, she was told, a relatively safe country pacified by Syrian troops, but she found herself in the middle of a vigorous civil war. Her very first night was one of terror as shells and rockets screamed and roared over the hospital complex. Day by day the situation worsened but she had too much to do to be worried and in the end it wasn't a shell or bullet that got her.

Instead it was the literally back-breaking duties she had to perform in a grossly under-staffed intensive-care unit of the hospital. Most of the former medical staff had already fled the country. The body of a slim 29 year-old nurse can stand only so much physical abuse. Hefting the heavy bodies of corpulent patients, those who could afford the hospital fees, from stretcher to operating table and then to bed took its toll and broke her back. Later she told a reporter "I treated my body like nurses do, like a hydraulic lift." It was a terrible price she paid. Four weeks

later she was flown back to Australia on a stretcher, with her career destroyed and little money.

She was too sick to fight for compensation and a year later she underwent a spinal fusion operation to walk again without pain. Her troubles were not over. During the next five years the metal pins strengthening her back must have caused a spur of bone to grow into her spinal cord. There were times when it was too painful to stand up, let alone walk.

At this stage in her life, in her mid-thirties, she had begun to use her limited mobility to help other disabled people. Assisted by a team of volunteers she helped teach them how to use knitting machines for occupational therapy. She became "the knitting machine lady" to dozens of immobilised sufferers. As she was bedridden for much of the time, her father made her a special tray so she could sit up in bed and repair the machines. Under their modest home there were piles of the machines awaiting refurbishment. Some jobs were beyond her capabilities and a local handyman, Mr B (no name - hopefully no legal action), came to help out. Cheryl later found out that he was also a practitioner of alternative medicine, marketing a plug-in anti electromagnetic radiation device and another type of "anti-cancer" device which has attracted official warnings against its promotion.

Mr B, concerned for the pain Cheryl was suffering, strongly recommended the services of "Dr" D, a former labourer who took the title and claimed complete cures for his clients. Cheryl's own doctors were baffled by her condition. It was later discovered that the metal pins were masking the spur of bone in her x-rays and other scans. More modern equipment located the problem. Before that, however, Cheryl had become so desperate she went against her medical training, yielded to Mr B's advice, and visited Dr D.

As a former nurse she was appalled at Dr D's methodology. He took a sample of her saliva on a filter paper and placed it on a plastic tray on top of a "diagnostic computer", an invention of his with many knobs and switches. A cord from the console ran to a metal pen which he applied to an "acupuncture point" at the base of his thumb. Dr D claimed that through his machine the energy from Cheryl's saliva cells was recognised by the mind-energy radiated to him by the Indian holy man Sai Baba, under whose metre-high photo Dr D sat.

From a combination of twiddling the knobs on the machine and receiving guidances from Sai Baba,

Dr D, as he worked his way down Cheryl's body from head to foot, pronounced that she was suffering from between thirty and forty serious conditions.

These included "diabetes, tuberculosis, gastric ulcers, underactive thyroid, malfunctioning liver, non-functioning hypothalamus and a host of infections of virtually every organ in her body including her heart. Her brain had toxic levels of mercury as well as a serious fungal infection. There were toxic residues of drugs in her spleen and residual damage from x-rays." All this from a saliva sample on a piece of filter paper resting on a plastic plate on a machine which, I understand, Dr D marketed to other registered therapists in the Hunter region at least. He also presented each patient with small 25mm glass rod with seven turns of silvery wire to wear around their neck as an "anti-electromagnetic radiation" device. He explained that "all the electrons in a sick person's body cells rotate in the wrong direction around the cell nucleus and that has to be corrected for them to be cured".

When Dr D finished his amazing diagnostic tour-de-force, he wrote on her patient record card the words "Diabetes and TB".

At that time Cheryl did not know that it was illegal for a medically unqualified person to make such a diagnosis (partly due to Cheryl's efforts, the list of such diseases has since been expanded).

At the time of Cheryl's one and only visit to Dr D, there was no medical complaints unit in New South Wales; only the police had power to investigate. Cheryl went to her local politician, Richard Face MLA, and he called in the police, notified the Ministries of Health and Consumer Affairs and for good measure the Australian Taxation Office.

The police sent a plain clothes officer to Dr D's premises at a time when, unfortunately, only his assistant was present. He was caught red-handed making diagnoses with the "diagnostic computer". The assistant was taken to court and fined \$300.

When news of this reached Mr B, he went to Cheryl's home and physically threatened her and her family. It was just one of many times she has been threatened by those she has upset.

Dr D escaped penalty. In a subsequent *Willesee* TV show Dr D was asked why there were seven turns of silvery wire around each trinket he gave his patients. Why not six or eight? He replied that it was because seven is the number of Christ. Dr D has moved on to other dubious enterprises, some of which have also attracted the attention of TV shows. There was, for example, the "non-chemical" swimming-pool purifier, which upset pool owners by turning their pool water a vivid green.

There are few alternative medicine practitioners in the Hunter region who have not been upset by Cheryl's many attempts to warn the public against their quackery. One such was "Dr" F who advertised and falsely promoted himself as a medical doctor and

cancer specialist "curing 95% of his patients". As a result of Cheryl's efforts he was exposed on national TV and then investigated by health authorities. His diagnostic technique made use of that old ally of alternative medicine, iridology.

Cheryl's interest in Dr F arose from a 49-year-old woman diagnosed with breast cancer, and surgery had been recommended. At the urging of a friend she went to Dr F who told her her lump was due to a blocked lymph gland. He would cure her. The lump remained and three months later, as a result of Cheryl's media exposure, she returned to her real doctor, who managed to book her in for urgent surgery. Cheryl can relate many similar cases, some with more unhappy outcomes. Even in her local cemetery she can point to the headstones of many who might not have been there but for the intervention of the practitioners of alternative medicine.

Although Cheryl's health is still not good, and she has parents in their seventies to look after, she has continued her fight to curb the practices of those who exploit sick and dying people for their own monetary gain. She has struggled to persuade health authorities to bring in more effective legislation to outlaw or at least restrict the advertisement and use of unproven and often dangerous diagnostic and therapeutic devices.

She has seen some successes, such as the major review now under way of the Therapeutic Goods Act, and has been promised by the authorities that regulations applying to pseudo-medical devices will be drastically overhauled. Cheryl considers there is an urgent need for updated legislation because the operators of these devices are diagnosing serious infective diseases such as AIDS and hepatitis, with accompanying claims of curative techniques.

Other major investigations are under way by Australian and British governments because of evidence patiently accumulated by Cheryl Freeman. An Australian cancer treatment device described as an "Audio Frequency Therapy Unit" is currently under critical examination by the Medical Services Agency of the British Department of Health. The company marketing this device formally threatened Cheryl with legal action for defamation because she reported on its use. However the threat has now been withdrawn because Cheryl informed the media who in turn threatened the company with nation-wide media exposure.

Cheryl's valiant work has been costly in time and money and its stress is now having an adverse affect on her health. She has reached the point where she has been medically advised to think of herself and limit her efforts to protect the public from the depredations of the medical charlatans who abound in our midst. I consider Cheryl Freeman is a rare heroine, who deserves the thanks of every honest Australian.



# The new intellectual elite

Karl H. Wolf

*The Third Culture*, John Brockman, A Touchstone Book, Simon & Schuster, New York, 413pp., A\$24.95.

Skeptics, like so many others, may well have wondered about the long-standing division of the 'Two Cultures' (science/technology vs humanities/literary) (see CP Snow, 1959. *The Two Cultures* and his 1963 expansion *The Two Cultures: a Second Look*). Brockman discusses an emerging 'Third Culture' as exemplified by ideas of 23 world-renown researchers. Space allows only a brief review, but a few quotations and paraphrases ought to whet the intellectual appetite.

As Snow pointed out: on one hand, there were the literary intellectuals; on the other, the scientists; the former, while no one was looking, took to referring to themselves as '*the intellectuals*', as though there were no others. This new definition by the men of letters excluded scientists, because scientists did not make an effective case for the implications of their work, or their works were ignored by the self-proclaimed intellectuals. In 1963, Snow then optimistically suggested a new third culture which would close the communication gap between the literary intellectuals and the scientists, ie the humanities would be on speaking terms with the sciences. This did not happen: literary intellectuals are still not communicating with scientists. Instead, scientists are communicating directly with the general public - and this constitutes the third culture.


Traditionally, intellectual media played a vertical game: journalists wrote up and professors wrote down. Today, third-culture thinkers tend to avoid the middleman addressing the public directly as there is a great intellectual hunger for new and important ideas out there. Science is the only new stuff whereas the general newspaper or magazine articles mainly (with exceptions) comprise human interest stuff of the same old he-said-she-said kind, the politics and economics, the same sorry cyclical dramas. Human nature doesn't change much; science does. Science has become the big story - just consider the numerous new concepts being described in the media, like AI, chaos theory, fractals, nano-technology, fuzzy logic, Gaia hypothesis, etc. It is a context in which disalignments are tolerated.

Here the third-culture intellectual communicates and shapes the thoughts of their generation; he/she is a synthesizer, and a publicist. The third-culture intellectuals are exemplified by certain physicists, evolutionary biologists, some philosophers and psychologists, and computer scientists, among others.

Following the battle between the scientists and creationists, highlighted by Ian Plimer's recent court case, the present book ought to be appealing to biological evolutionists. In this context, I like the 'meme concept' proposed by Richard Dawkins (and deliberated by Brockman), which may at least partly explain the tenacity of the creationists. To paraphrase, a meme comprises structured units of knowledge that are able, more or less, to reproduce themselves by making copies of themselves from one mind to another. It is a cultural replicator: the unit of cultural inheritance; it refers to cultural information that influences peoples' behaviour; an idea that replicates, mutates, and differentially spreads in the medium of brains in the same way that genes replicates, mutate, and differentially spread in the medium of bodies - this puts cognition in the context of evolution, being essentially ideas which, too, are operated on by natural selection. This interesting (and important?) meme concept contrasts with the usually accepted research approach that starts with a question or problem and then proceeds to an answer, in the form of a hypothesis/theory, through various testing stages.

For Skeptics desiring to have an explanation as to why people believe in creationism, the book *The Lucifer Principle: a Scientific Expedition into Forces of History* by Howard Bloom (1955) offers some enlightening insights based on the meme phenomenon (cf. chapter From Genes to Meme).

Returning to Brockman's book - space does not permit discussing the individual contributions; let me merely list the authors and titles: GC Williams - A Package of Information; SJ Gould - The Pattern of Life's History; R Dawkins - A Survival Machine; B Goodwin - Biology is Just a Dance; S Jones - Why is There So Much Genetic Diversity?; N Eldredge - A Battle of Words; L Margulis - Gaia Is a Tough Bitch; M Minsky - Smart Machines; R Schank - Information is Surprising; DC Dennett - Intuition Pumps; N Humphrey - The Thick Moment; F Varela - The Emergent Self; S Pinker - Language is a Human Instinct; R Penrose - Consciousness Involves Noncomputable Ingredients; M Rees - An Ensemble of Universes; A Guth - A Universe in Your Backyard; L Smolin - A Theory of the Whole Universe; P Davies - The Synthetic Path; M Gell-Mann - Plectics; S Kaufman - Order for Free; CG Langton - A Dynamical Pattern; JD Farmer - The Second Law of Organisation; and WD Hillis - Close to the Singularity.

to the Singularity. 

# Anatomy of a cruel cult

Nigel H. Sinnott

*Unseen Unheard Unknown*, Sarah Hamilton-Byrne, Penguin 220pp 1995 ppbk \$14.95

Earlier this century, engineers in Victoria dammed the Goulburn River where it is joined by the Delatite to form a large artificial lake. Beside the dam is the town of Eildon and between this and the Fraser National Park a small settlement emerged by the lake at Taylor's Bay. The area around the lake appealed to retired people, artists, fishing and boating enthusiasts, bushwalkers, trail-bike riders and holiday makers. It was also secluded enough to attract a wealthy, secretive and sinister sect called The Family.

One of the founders of The Family (sometimes called the Great White Brotherhood) was Dr Raynor Johnson, a physicist and Master of Queen's College at the University of Melbourne. He was interested in Eastern mysticism and became "a world authority on religion".

The cult's doctrines were a syncretism or mixture of ideas from Hinduism, yoga, Zen, Christianity and other sources, combined with an uncritical adoration of the movement's female leader. Initiation involved the use of drugs - usually LSD but, if this was in short supply, psilocybin-rich toadstools would do. Secrecy and a low profile were encouraged by the motto "Unseen, unheard, unknown".

The co-founder was Anne Hamilton-Byrne, who claimed descent from the French royal family and the Biblical House of David. Her detractors believe she was the daughter of a railway engine cleaner and they further allege that her claims to have a pilot's license and qualifications in psychiatric nursing, homoeopathy and physiotherapy are groundless.

Anne became the Master of the cult and sought a wealthy, middle-class following. In the late 1960s she decided, as a 'scientific experiment' (warmly accepted by Dr Johnson), to collect a group of young children and indoctrinate them to continue her movement. They were supposed to become an elite leadership group after - she believed - most of the world had been destroyed by a massive explosion.

Children were acquired either direct from Family members or through adoptions arranged by cult doctors and social workers. The children's names were changed, their identities falsified and they were sometimes provided with multiple false birth certificates. On one occasion they were baptised, *en bloc*, as Catholics, presumably so that Anne could acquire a swag of baptismal certificates.

For most of the time the children were kept at Taylors Bay, in strict isolation on a property called Kai Lama ("Uptop" to the children). They were dressed alike and often had their hair dyed blond to make them look alike. When Anne Hamilton-Byrne and her husband Bill were not around - which was most of the time - the children were looked after by rostered cult members called Aunties who had agreed to donate half their time to *guruseva* (Sanskrit for "service to the Master").

The children were rigidly controlled during their waking hours and had to speak in affected English middle-class accents. They were viciously punished - with beatings, lashings, starvation, vast numbers of lines to write and public humiliation - for the slightest infraction of Anne's rules. Children were routinely beaten for bed-wetting and even for fouling their nappies. The cult's maxims were "You can't murder a bum" and "A belting a day keeps evil away". On one occasion Anne asked someone to hold up the telephone while a child was being beaten "so I can hear the screams". She once held up a boy, less than two years old, by his ankles to show followers "the best way to belt a child". Cruelty to animals, on the other hand, was strongly denounced. The children received restricted and barely adequate food but vast amounts of vitamin tablets. They were routinely dosed with tranquillisers to keep them docile.

Anne had a horror of fatness and any child she reckoned was overweight, was put on even more restricted rations. The Master did not, of course, practise what she preached. She maintained her preferred body image with regular plastic surgery and liposuction.

If the children were ill, they were ignored or else punished for "attention seeking" or making undue noise. Anne, on the other hand, doled out homoeopathic remedies for "disobedience" and "thinking wrongly".

The children received a limited education of sorts and had regular Hatha yoga and meditation sessions. The youngsters were occasionally taken to the cult's other properties in Victoria, England and the United States. As they got older, the boys were sent off to a private boarding school in England (Stoneyhurst). Anne was, apparently, not too fussy about formal education for the girls, though in 1984 the Kai Lama property was granted recognition as a school, Aquinel College.

The children were, in other words, brought up in an atmosphere which was callous, oppressive and

manipulative. They were denied the features of childhood most youngsters take for granted ; freedom consistent with safety, unconditional affection, emotional security and opportunities to acquire coping skills in the outside world.

The misery and deprivation to which the children were subjected were conveniently rationalised by Anne Hamilton-Byrne's belief in reincarnation and karma. The Aunties, by the way, claimed that Anne was Jesus Christ reincarnated. Suffering according to The Family, acquired merit (good karma) in this life and helped redeem sins in supposed former lives.

The children were trained to be afraid of outsiders in general and of the police in particular. But in 1987 a private investigator who had been watching The Family for some time, persuaded three teenage girls - who had broken away from the cult or were trying to do so - to meet two women officers of the Victoria Police. Further meetings took place and, after the girls had made detailed statements, the police planned a dawn raid on Kai Lama.

The cult's daily timetable was, for once, convenient. Three busloads of police struck at 6.30 am when the children were in one part of the building, doing yoga, and the adults upstairs. The raid went well and, once they had been reassured by the three older girls, the rest of the children started talking freely about their experiences. They had discovered that someone in the world was more powerful than Anne and Bill Hamilton-Byrne!

Sarah Hamilton-Byrne was one of the girls who went to the police and accompanied the raid. She has written this book describing her experiences as one of Anne's children and her own efforts to break away and adjust to the outside world.

Sarah discovered, incidentally, that she was not Anne's real daughter as she had been led to suppose. Her real mother had been browbeaten while dosed with tranquillisers to sign adoption papers. The baby had been surreptitiously adopted by the family doctor, a cult member, and handed over to Anne. Coercion and subterfuge were the norm in most other cases as well.

After the raid at Lake Eildon the children were taken to the Victorian government's Allambie reception centre in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. Sarah formed a high opinion of the staff there and of several police officers who continued to offer help and support. She gives a moving account of a little boy called David who, after looking at the refrigerator, was told he could help himself to anything he fancied. "I will never forget the look on David's face as he gazed into that fridge and realised he was free." A girl named Cassandra, who was much shorter than most children of her age, grew eleven centimetres in her first year of freedom. Another child received a vicious telephone call from an Auntie. She told him she was his real mother, reviled him, and then disowned him. Once again, as Sarah points out "the cruelty of the regime we had left was amply demonstrated".

The cult even obtained the services of a compliant journalist who claimed that Anne and Bill were the innocent victims of a witch-hunt and that they had taken in children who were retarded and "unwanted by anyone else".

The children's move to St John's Homes for Boys and Girls, an Anglican institution, brought problems. Unlike the people at Allambie, Sarah relates:

... the hierarchy at St John's believed it was important that staff remained aloof. The few staff who tried to befriend or comfort us were encouraged to leave. No affection was allowed; that was interpreted as a risk to 'professional boundaries'. At the same time, the St John's hierarchy actively tried to stop us making outside friends; new people were discredited ... The staff were rude to the few people who had befriended us ... Some ... were especially vitriolic ... The philosophy seemed to be 'Don't talk about it and it will all go away'. Whenever we tried to explain our background to them, they accused us of being self-indulgent and wanting sympathy.

Eventually the children decided to go their separate ways, though they still see each other frequently to celebrate anniversaries of the raid at Taylors Bay. A disappointment they had to bear was being told that the authorities were unable to prosecute members of The Family for cruelty, as more than 12 months had elapsed from the last date of abuse. Four of the Aunties were sentenced to a few months' jail for social security frauds; these sentences were later reduced on appeal.

And The Master herself? She was finally extradited from the United States to Australia to face charges involving false registration of births. She was fined \$5,000 for making a false declaration. Sarah estimates Anne's assets as being at least \$150 million.

Sarah is, if anything, a little too ready to absolve the Aunties. "Most of them were not intrinsically evil people" she writes. "They had merely subjugated all moral standards to the goal of obeying the Master's will ... They were told to discipline us to within an inch of our lives and that is what they did." Elsewhere Sarah describes the Aunties' chorus of "Good on you Anne, they need to be taught from an early age!" I may not be alone in regarding "only obeying orders" as a poor excuse for gross cruelty.

One of the more appalling features of The Family - apart from Anne's egomania and double-talk - was the way in which its evil activities were furthered by a seedy coterie of morally defective professionals. The brutal Aunties were nurses or nursing students; then there were the doctors who provided the Aunties with prescription drugs (to sedate the children) or who supervised the abuse of LSD; psychiatrists who committed patients to a hospital run by a cult member; lawyers who fixed up the deed polls for bogus passports and birth certificates; and social workers who helped bypass normal adoption pro-

continued p 48 ...

# Regarding reincarnation

Laurie Eddie

***Reincarnation: A Critical Examination*, Paul Edwards, Prometheus Books, New York, 1996.**

*"To explain the unknown by the known is a logical procedure; to explain the known by the unknown is a form of theological lunacy."* David Brooks, *The Necessity of Atheism*.

This book sets out to critically examine the various claims associated with the concept of Reincarnation. It appears to have achieved its objectives, although there is little doubt that no matter how much evidence to the contrary, believers will continue to believe in the fanciful creations.

The concept of Reincarnation is quite ancient. It appears to have evolved out of that most ancient of beliefs, upon which all religions were established, the idea of the survival of the soul after death. It seems likely that reincarnation evolved from the idea that humans should have a second chance at rectifying sins committed during their time on Earth. With the original concept, of a single life and death, salvation was not possible. It was widely practiced in Greece amongst certain cults, especially the Brotherhood of Pythagoras, where it was known as Transmigration.

It was to have its greatest influence in the Indian sub-continent, where it became an essential part of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Whereas the Greeks and the Gauls had conceived of several lifetimes before reaching the Isle of the Blessed, the Hindus originated the idea of an endless stream of births, and, as a result, a universe of infinite age, and future.

Edwards examines the "evidence" which is claimed to support Reincarnation in great depth, and concludes that they are lacking in substance. The many "classic" reports are found to be divergent in that there are serious discrepancies between the first time they are reported and when they are repeated years later. He also points out that many of the famous people in the past who are often touted as advocates of these philosophies, based upon statements they made apparently supporting these ideas, either never said what they are claimed to have said, or else, their statements were so ambiguous that they can be interpreted in any way that one desires.

Of special interest was his examination of the infamous Bridey Murphy where American housewife Virginia Tighe, born 1923, reported her former existence as an Irish woman in the 19th century. This case, which is still claimed by many believers in reincar-

nation to be one of the strongest pieces of evidence in support of their beliefs, and features in almost every new book on the subject,

The author completely demolishes the claim that it was a genuine demonstration of the existence of reincarnation by referring to numerous articles which appeared soon after the initial claims were made. The various articles revealed that the details which Tighe provided concerning her former life were easily explained. Her ability to adopt an Irish brogue had probably more to do with the fact that her natural parents were part-Irish, while there were many discrepancies in her accounts, where she used modern American expressions

The idea of reincarnation, especially in the context of the idea of a scheme of cosmic progression is extremely widespread, and finds expression in such diverse religious and quasireligious teachings as Hinduism, Mormonism, Scientology and in many of the New-Age teachings.

To be able therefore, to fully understand the arguments refuting the concept of reincarnation, one must first understand what is involved in the concept of reincarnation, for the fact is that reincarnation has quite different meanings to different groups.

While the basic premise of reincarnation is that after their physical death, some inextinguishable portion of each human being leaves the Earth for a period of time, but that it always returns again to earth, in the physical body of a new being, human or otherwise, where it once again lives its life, and upon its death, once again repeats the same cycle of death and rebirth. Depending upon the particular belief system, this endless repetition of life and death may go on continuously, or according to some faiths, the endless cycle can eventually be broken.

The reincarnation myth is quite common it has emerged in various forms throughout the ages, emerging within a wide diversity of cultures and faiths. The origins of the myth go back a long time in history; among its earliest champions were the ancestors of the present-day Hindus, where for some inexplicable reason it emerged from within a faith which had formerly believed in the idea of a single life and death.

It emerged in the mystical teachings of the Hellenic races, reaching its peak amongst the followers of Pythagoras. Amongst the many mystical ideas of the Greek philosophers was the concept of a universe which was in a permanent state of balance. This idea is reflected in the theory of the four elements or

humours. These four elements were believed to compose all the matter in the universe, including human beings, and it was believed that provided the four humours were in balance, nature and humans would remain in a condition of good health. If there was imbalance, sickness and disorder would result.

When the Greek philosophers looked at the world they saw disharmony, where the wealthy and powerful took advantage of the poor. On the Earth there was apparently no remedy for the poor; lacking power they were subject to the disorder of war and pillage inflicted upon them by the powerful warlords. It was natural to assume, then, that in a balanced universe those who suffered during their lifetime must be compensated and those who caused suffering must be punished. In a world where the pre-Christian concept of Heaven and Hell had not yet developed there evolved a belief in transmigration, the idea that after death the spirit would return in another body. Those who had been the victims in their previous life received human bodies, while those who had inflicted pain and suffering upon others came back as animals, of a type befitting their punishment. There appears to be a similar belief amongst the many believers in reincarnation, and this seems to have been the origins of the "law of Karma" that if humans are resurrected to another life-time, their station in the new life must depend upon their the quality of their former life !

As the author points out quite clearly there is no such thing as a "law" of Karma, unlike most natural, or scientific laws, it cannot be applied to predict possible eventualities. He compares it to the pseudo-scientific Social Darwinism. It is an empty theory which seems to be based more upon a human need for some form of eternal justice, a means whereby those who appear to have escaped punishment upon earth are subject to a higher form of justice. Such an idea is hardly exclusive to Eastern religions, indeed it is an integral part of most religions, past and present.

An important aspect of many forms of the reincarnation belief is the theory of advancement, the idea that each time a human soul returns to Earth, the physical individual into which it returns is given the opportunity to advance itself, so that like ascending the rungs of an infinitely high ladder, each life enables it to move one or two rungs higher towards its final goal.

This final goal for most of the believers in reincarnation is a release from the recurring cycle of birth and death; to the Buddhists it is Nirvana, a state of nothingness, while to the Mormons and the Scientologists, it is to reach the state of a god. The idea of a universe populated with numerous gods who were once human is not new, it found its origins in Gnosticism, and other mystical teachings of the past. Realistically, such an idea, along with reincarnation itself, appears to be nothing more than a wish-fulfilment principle, essentially the idea that the universe was created to accommodate the wishes of

individual humans. Unfortunately, the more we learn about the principles behind the operation of the universe the more we realize that it is not constrained by such puny motivations.

The author makes a convincing argument against the various claims for reincarnation, exposing them as nothing more than shams. Unfortunately, despite the fact that the so-called "evidence" in support of reincarnation has been debunked time-and-time again, one still hears those who refuse to disbelieve trotting out the same tired arguments in support of reincarnation. This book is useful as a source of material to point out to them that the material which they use as evidence, such as the Bridey Murphy story, has been exposed as nothing more than a sham.



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### ...Cult, from p 46

cedures. "Without their support and participation" Sarah comments "Anne Hamilton-Byrne would never have become what she is today. It was their names that gave her the credibility and social power she needed ... They looked respectable, therefore people thought they must be respectable."

When reading Sarah's book I found I could cope tolerably well with her descriptions of incessant beatings and humiliations; but when she came to describe the aftermath of the raid and her efforts to overcome her self-doubts, depression and fear of inadequacy, it became impossible to be objective or detached. No-one should be put in a position where he or she has to write a first-hand account like this but it needed to be done and has been written well. It has the ring of painful sincerity and a dogged concern for compassion, decency and honesty.

As far as Sarah is concerned, the worst thing The Family did to the children - as it had the most lasting effect - was the withholding of love. "I believe to deny a child love is to deny its existence as a human being." Elsewhere she says 'Destroying life and liveliness in people is perhaps the true definition of evil'.

Thanks to a combination of luck, the help of loyal, perceptive friends and her innate intelligence and stubborn courage, Sarah has survived The Family's efforts to suborn her to its designs and she is well on the way to being something that the Master could only bluster about - a real healer.

Dr Sarah Hamilton-Byrne has rendered a valuable public service by shedding a bright light on the dark secrets of The Family and by exposing it for the cruel, parasitic monstrosity it was.

#### Editor's note:

Readers who attended the Australian Skeptics 1995 Convention in Melbourne would have had the privilege of hearing Dr Sarah Hamilton-Byrne speaking about her horrifying childhood experiences. It was a presentation not to be forgotten.



# A global conspiracy revealed

Geoffrey Guilfoyle

*Prince of Darkness: Antichrist and the New World Order*, Grant R. Jeffrey, Bantam Books 1995.

I'm not a big reader of fiction but occasionally, usually after finishing something like an 800 page scholarly account (closely typed, no pictures) on the role of the Anglicanism in religious reform in 17th century Ireland, I like to turn to some light relief. In this instance I chose what I thought was a horror story of Satanic possession in the mould of *Rosemary's Baby* and *The Exorcist*, called *Prince of Darkness*

The sub-title, *Antichrist and the New World Order*, saw my hopes of a ripping read plummet. Oh dear, I sighed, another book filled with the standard ramblings of the paranoid religious Right (as opposed to the paranoid non-religious Left which spouts equally spurious but opposite nonsense). Opinion dressed up as fact; diatribe disguised as portent. However the small print beneath this announced "Startling Bible prophecies uncovering the secret globalist conspiracy behind current events".

Well, I thought to myself, I've always felt that a powerful worldwide conspiracy has prevented me from assuming my natural role as King of Australia. At last I've found an author willing to stand up and tell all. Curiously, my belief that Sir Jim Wallaby (my main rival for the royal title) is behind it all is not correct. Mr Jeffrey names Satan as the one in charge.

Yes, folks, the Horned One himself (also, according to Mr Jeffrey, known as the Idol Shepherd, the Prince of Tyre [not Mr Dunlop or Mr Beaurepaire, surely?], the King of Babylon, the Assyrian, and by a slew of other euphemisms). Satan controls or manipulates most politicians, bureaucrats, plutocrats (which no doubt explains the rise of Rupert Murdoch), and more generally the media, the law, and most vitally, the economy.

He is behind the drive for the revival of the Roman Empire (now to be known as the European Union), big government (presumably one led by Mal Colston, Kim Beasley and Amanda Vanstone), plans for a national identification system, the move to a cashless society, the coming stock market crash, and so on.

It is round-up-the-usual-suspects time (and a few I had never thought to include) as Mr Jeffrey names those organizations and individuals who are spearheading this Satanic attack: the Club of Rome, the International Monetary Fund, Ted Turner and his CNN (what, no Rupert Murdoch?), the European Common Market, NATO, Mikhail Gorbachev, the Vatican, the New Age Movement, the North American Free Trade Association and other lesser move-

ments. Curiously, he doesn't mention atheists, agnostics, feminists, or humanists. Presumably they fall into that all-purpose New Age label.

Oh yes, the United Nations is also highlighted as a prime instrument in the hands of Satan. Anyone who considers that this financially bankrupt and politically tottering and increasingly irrelevant body is capable of any sustained and coherent political or military action is deluding themselves.

But wait. The blurb on the back cover of the book promised "incontrovertible proof that the final prophesied battle between the forces of good and evil is at hand — and how we can escape the coming catastrophe". Proof and escape. That sounded good.

That is where I encountered the main problem with this book. Mr Jeffrey holds that there are five main principles to bear in mind when evaluating Bible prophecy. It is only the fifth rule which gives me real trouble:

Humility is required. Dogmatism should be avoided. The nature of Bible prophecy is such that some predictions will only be understood when they have been fulfilled. (p 10)

So you ask, in what way does this worry me? Certainly not the first two sentences. After all, Billy Graham, Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson and their ilk are famous for their humility, and fundamentalists generally are renowned for their lack of dogmatism. It is the third point. As fans of Nostradamus will tell you, making predictions about, or fitting those already made to, past events is the best sort of prophecy. Accuracy guaranteed.

This is exactly what Mr Jeffrey does, taking snippets of the Bible and twisting them to mean whatever he wants. Take this line from *Genesis 3:15* for instance: "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." This, believe it or not, Mr Jeffrey sees as the first mention of the Antichrist and the virgin birth.

The word seed normally occurs in scripture in connection with 'the seed of the father'. This is the only place in the Hebrew scriptures that the phrase 'her seed' occurs. This unusual phrase predicts the unique virgin birth of Jesus; that He would be the Seed of the woman, not the natural seed of the father. The verse also reveals the future conflict between the coming Antichrist, the seed of Satan and Jesus Christ, 'her seed'. Just as Jesus, the son of Mary, was uniquely the seed of the woman, the Antichrist will in some mysterious way be the seed of Satan. The vision foresaw the crucifixion of Jesus when Satan was able to 'bruise his heel'. Finally, Jesus Christ's ultimate defeat of Satan was prefigured in the expression 'her seed...shall bruise your head' (p 15)



All this from a single sentence! And notice the tortuous twisting at the end, the 'heel' and 'head' bit.

I have a more rational explanation. It is in fact a premonition of the infamous 'bodyline' test series in the 1930s.

And I will put enmity between you [Australia] and the woman [Britannia], and between your seed [our test team] and her seed [Jardine's lads]; He [bowler, Larwood] shall bruise your head [bouncers directed at the body], and you [primarily Bradman] shall bruise his heel [meaning that the fielders will have to chase the ball all over the ground and suffer weary feet because of this].

Still not convinced? Try this. Mr Jeffrey holds that the "kings of the east" as mentioned in *Revelation* 16:12 who come to the defence of Israel during Armageddon refers to the Chinese and Japanese (page 165-166). Why China and Japan? Because *Revelation* 9:16 holds that: "Now the number of the army of the horsemen was two hundred million, and I heard the number of them."

Mr Jeffrey takes this literally. Come Armageddon and 200 million Chinese and Japanese (as the only nations capable of providing that many troops) will march across Asia and into Palestine. Just how this vast host is to be housed and fed along the route is not mentioned. Perhaps God will provide. I hope He also remembers to widen the roads as well, otherwise the first troops will reach the borders of Israel just as the last soldiers are leaving China.

Mr Jeffrey's history is as elastic as his Bible interpretation. Try this from page 192 for instance:

The empires of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome have each fought in their turn to capture the Holy Land as a key step in their plans for world conquest.

By Greece I assume he means the Macedonian Empire of Alexander the Great. Notice he fails to mention later states with territories in the region, most notably, the Abbasid, Mameluke, Ottoman and British Empires. And did Alexander the Great and the Romans really see the Holy Land as a key step in their plans? Hardly. Alexander wanted Egypt and Persia. Palestine meant little to him. It concerned the Romans more but only because of the trouble the Jews gave them and that it formed a border province with the Parthian Empire.

A further example of this special pleading is found on page 197:

Many biblical scholars agree with the identification of Magog as the ancient Scythians, the Russians.

Many biblical scholars might; most historians don't. The name Russia derives from the Rus, a Scandinavian people also known as the Varangians who came as traders and settlers in the 9th century and gradually merged with the local Slavic population. The Scythians, in the broadest sense, were a nomadic people who inhabited the lands between what became Hungary and the mountains of Turkestan and spoke a form of Iranian. Part of the

population was gradually absorbed by the Sarmatians, who in turn were overpowered by the Goths and later the Huns. The remainder stayed in Afghanistan and also in western India. The Scythians may be Magog but don't call them Russians.

In a book of this sort you expect the focus to be on the Middle East and the USA. Mr Jeffrey varies this slightly, spending two chapters discussing post-communist Russia which, as the author correctly points out, is in many respects still communist. He also wonders why the world has ignored communist genocide while, whether the medium be film, television, newspapers or magazines, it is impossible to avoid that committed by the Nazis.

There are many reasons for this, the primary one being that Hitler lost. Stalin, Pol Pot, Mao, and the lesser genocidal communist regimes won and therefore covered up their crimes. Their political descendants and apologists continue to deny or downplay these crimes, often by ignoring them entirely.

Unfortunately Mr Jeffrey sees only one possibility: satanic repression and conspiracy. Russia is the 'Magog' of Revelations and a main player on the side of evil at Armageddon. Hence his insistence that the Russians are Scythians. To aid this thesis he wildly overstates Russia's current imperial ambitions and capabilities.

"But wait!" you cry. What happened to the 'incontrovertible proof' you mentioned earlier that the final prophesied battle between the forces of good and evil is at hand?

Ah yes. Mr Jeffrey list 38 specific Bible prophecies that have never been fulfilled in any other generation but which have come to fruition in the current one (meaning the end of the world is nigh, presumably). These 'prophecies' include:

"An increase in false messiahs." (No 20); and "Explosion of false prophets and heresies." (No 21) Excuse me, Mr Jeffrey, but every century has had a multitude of prophets, messiahs and heresies. Before mass communications they remained regional figures and most were quickly eradicated by the orthodox.

"Men's hearts failing them in fear." (No 23) Ah, yes. This was certainly unknown before the current generation.

"Russia rises as a military power." (No 8) As shown by its splendid victory over the armed might of the Chechens, its inability to pay its troops, an increasing suicide rate among the army officer corps, and the slow rusting in port of most of its navy.

If the above is debatable, the actual Bible quotes given to support some of his assertions are so obscure or malleable as to be ridiculous.

*Revelation* 11:9,10 And they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations shall see their dead bodies three days and an half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves. And they that dwelt upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts to one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth.

continued p54 ...

# Inspired predictions: or just trend analysis by another name?

Bernard Kellerman

Chinese New Year celebrations in February 1997 and talk of *feng shui* in building the Sydney and Melbourne casinos reminded me of a report I had read about predictions made last year by a Mr Hon Cheung. He was described as "one of Chinatown's best known soothsayers".

I had filed this clipping, from *The Sydney Morning Herald* of 17 February 1996, with a view to testing it at a later date. Its time had come.

My university and post-graduate training (accounting, law, finance) had always stressed that I should check my information. Working as an auditor has only served to reinforce this approach. I looked forward to applying my training, aided by the exact science of hindsight, to his predictions.

His thought processes and the assumptions used were not disclosed, so a qualitative analysis was out. This left purely objective measurements: he was going to be either right or wrong. I decided to test his predictions against the *Herald's* reports over the 12 months from February 1996 - the Year of the Rat.

I warmed to his opening comment, that rat years were good ones for politicians, particularly those born in rat years. The pollies he named in this regard were Democrats leader Cheryl Kernot and - joy of joys - Senator Jim Short.

To refresh your memories, Senator Short was previously known as Assistant Treasurer Short. In October last year he was forced to resign after an "oversight" in his interpretation of the Liberals' ministerial code of conduct. He had approved an operating licence for an ANZ subsidiary, ANZ Grindlays Bank Ltd., while holding about \$50,000 worth of ANZ shares. He thereby became the Howard Government's first ministerial casualty after just seven months in the job. It may have been a memorable year for him, but not a good one.

Still on politics, Mr Cheung went the wrong way and predicted a Labor victory in the [then] looming election. For those of you who've been in a place other than the third rock from the sun, the Liberals were elected with a massive majority in the House of Reps.

The Senate wasn't so kind to any of the major parties, with the balance of power now held by independents, rather than Cheryl's Democrats. Not a bad year, nor has it been a good one for her, either, with highlights including not being invited to meet Hilary Clinton, and being called "bumptious" [*Macquarie Dictionary*: "adj: offensively self-assertive"] by Conrad Black as he quit Fairfax and Australia.

"It will be a good year for Labor, real estate, gold and the electrical industry", Mr Cheung had predicted, as well as more "burglaries and viruses".

We already know about Labor. What about the other predictions?

Try real estate. In mid-February buyers were holding off, reluctant to commit until after the election, a month away. The vacancy rate in the Sydney rental market stood at a very low 1.3%. Estate agents were busy talking the market up. For anyone reading the *Herald* at this time, "up" seemed less of a prediction than a conclusion. By September it was clear the boom wasn't going to come, and low inflation had put the brake on the housing market. No capital gains = no reason to sell. By the end of January 1997, most real estate agents were describing their year as "patchy", rather than "good".

On February 5, 1996 gold hit \$US415 an ounce, its highest closing price since February 20, 1990, prompting talk among some brokers of it hitting the magic \$US500 by year's end. Gold looked a good bet, if you read the paper in February 1996. By mid-year "a price band of about \$US380 to \$US400 appeared to have been established" (*SMH* 22/6). A stronger \$A pushed the price of gold down even further, down to February 1997 forward selling price of \$US355. This delivered a capital loss of about 14% for the year to those brave enough to take Mr Cheung's advice (I wonder if he's registered with the Securities Institute as an investment adviser?)

The electrical industry - how do you define that? A key to good predicting is to keep it ambiguous - you get more chances to be right. If he meant the electrical generation part of it - as opposed to, say, sales of electrical appliances - results were questionable. Victoria continued to sell off its power generation infrastructure, at unexpectedly high prices - while good for the Victorian Government in the short term, its final benefits remain to be seen. The staff in the industry certainly wouldn't have called it a good year with some thousands subjected to "shedding" from June 1996.

As for viruses, the press was full all year of hopeful advances against the most high profile human one of all, HIV. Things like "HIV blitz may cure the cold: the war on viruses" and "AIDS hope". Maybe he was worried about the [then] recently escaped rabbit calicivirus. Or the link between a mystery virus and large numbers of dying frogs (*SMH* 9/5/96). Or computer viruses, which also seemed to be on the rise in 1996, at least in terms of the number of

# And now, the new New Age

Aaron Birch

The difficulties involved in fighting against pseudoscience have been mentioned on many occasions within this journal. But imagine if some of the current brands of pseudoscience merged to form new organisations pushing even stranger beliefs in order to attract more believers (read revenue). Following this thought, below is a list of what the future may have in store for us.

**Creation Scientology:** the Institute for Creation Research finally does some actual research and finds that their god is actually the scientologists' Thetan Galactic Emperor, Xenu. Due to the huge disparity in dates (10,000 years versus trillions of years) an internal religious war ensues. The creation scientologists become so occupied with their internal squabbling that they never bother anyone again.

**Psychic Iridology:** after all, the eyes are the windows to the soul.

**Von Daniken/Alien abduction:** finally, the mystery of what happened to all those "lost" civilisations is solved - they were abducted. Revealed to the public, of course, in a series of books with the word "god" somewhere in the title.

**Crystal Homoeopathy:** realising that less is more, believers of crystal healing begin to dissolve their prettily coloured minerals in concentrated acid solutions. They then follow this procedure with several, million-fold dilution steps (let's just hope that they know to add acid to water and not vice versa) before drinking the resultant solution in an attempt to get the magic healing powers of the crystals throughout their entire bodies. As homoeopathy re-


quires vigorous shaking of a solution to "spread the goodness", pogo sticks receive an unprecedented revival.

**Aura Astrology:** a profound revelation occurs when an astrologer realises that the coronas of stars are actually auras. Thus, astrologers are able to use aura readers to analyse the personalities, temperament (and health?) of individual stars and constellations to support the astrologers' classifications of certain stars with certain characteristics.

**Cold fusion/Water divining:** Cold fusion requires the deuterium in heavy water to fuse together to form helium or tritium with a release of energy. As this energy was never reliably observed, diviners reasoned that the only explanation was that the energy produced was one unknown to science. Water diviners claim to be able to find water using otherwise undetectable energies, therefore they should be perfect for detecting the missing energies involved in cold fusion.

**Faith healing/Pyramidology:** Some observant person notices how a church spire resembles an elongated pyramid. The rest is obvious.

**Psychic surgery/Acupuncture:** in an effort to increase their art's effectiveness, acupuncturists decide to get at those elusive meridians from the inside.

**Transcendental Postmodernist Meditation:** with TM's levitational abilities and the postmodernists' beliefs that one idea is as good as another, they join together to form Cargo Cult airlines. Unfortunately the business never gets off the ground. 

## ...Predictions, from previous page

references in the *Herald*. By my criteria - lack of reported epidemics, or even a worse than average winter, like we're getting now - this one's a fail, too.

Finally, burglaries. Could Mr Cheung have been extrapolating from a report in May 1995 headlined "Boom in burglaries" ? Anyway, I'll mark this, at last, a winner. A phone call to the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research established that in the 1996 calendar year (the latest available) break-and-enters of dwellings were up by 21% on 1995, which was up by 5% on 1994. A successful prediction, viewed in isolation. The cynical economist in me knows that an improving economy brings with it an increasing crime rate, as there's a stronger market for hot property. Reporting rates were on the rise, too, which of course will bump up the apparent rate, without increasing actual crimes.

In carrying out this comparison between what was said and what was, I kept an open mind. Nothing would have pleased me more than to have provided objective proof that such an unlikely system could actually work, even for part of the time. I'm not convinced: too many of the predictions had clear underlying trends. Once I started researching each topic, each "prediction" - other than the Labor victory clearly had its beginnings in news reports during the previous months. On the balance of probabilities some of these predictions would have proved accurate, as indeed it was with burglaries. I guess the subjective items can still be defended by a true believer: what kind of year does Cheryl Kernot herself think she's had ?

Certainly on the clearest objective measure, the gold price, he missed the mark. Maybe the Year of the Ox will be kinder to him. 

# Bad writing contest winners

Denis Dutton

We are pleased to announce winners of the third Bad Writing Contest, sponsored by the scholarly journal *Philosophy and Literature* (Johns Hopkins University Press) and its Internet discussion group, *PHIL-LIT*.

The Bad Writing Contest attempts to locate the ugliest, most stylistically awful passage found in a scholarly book or article published in the last few years. Ordinary journalism, fiction, etc are not eligible, nor are parodies: entries must be non-ironic, from actual serious academic journals or books. In a field where unintended self-parody is so widespread, deliberate sendups are hardly necessary.

This year's winning passages include prose published by established, successful scholars, experts who have doubtless labored for years to write like this. Obscurity, after all, can be a notable achievement. The fame and influence of writers such as Hegel, Heidegger, or Derrida rests in part on their mysterious impenetrability. On the other hand, as a cynic once remarked, John Stuart Mill never attained Hegel's prestige because people found out what he meant. This is a mistake the authors of our prize-winning passages seem determined to avoid.

The first prize goes to a sentence by the distinguished scholar Fredric Jameson, a man who on the evidence of his many admired books finds it difficult to write intelligibly and impossible to write well. Whether this is because of the deep complexity of Professor Jameson's ideas or their patent absurdity is something readers must decide for themselves. Here, spotted for us by Dave Roden of Central Queensland University in Australia, is the very first sentence of Professor Jameson's book, *Signatures of the Visible* (Routledge, 1990, p. 1):

The visual is \_essentially\_ pornographic, which is to say that it has its end in rapt, mindless fascination; thinking about its attributes becomes an adjunct to that, if it is unwilling to betray its object; while the most austere films necessarily draw their energy from the attempt to repress their own excess (rather than from the more thankless effort to discipline the viewer).

The appreciative Mr Roden says it is "good of Jameson to let readers know so soon what they're up against." We cannot see what the second "that" in the sentence refers to. And imagine if that uncertain "it" were willing to betray its object? The reader may be baffled, but then any author who thinks visual experience is essentially pornographic suffers confusions no lessons in English composition are going to fix.

If reading Fredric Jameson is like swimming

through cold porridge, there are writers who strive for incoherence of a more bombastic kind. Here is our next winner, which was found for us by Professor Cynthia Freeland of the University of Houston. The writer is Professor Rob Wilson:

If such a sublime cyborg would insinuate the future as post-Fordist subject, his palpably masochistic locations as ecstatic agent of the sublime superstate need to be decoded as the 'now-all-but-unreadable DNA' of a fast deindustrializing Detroit, just as his Robocop-like strategy of carceral negotiation and street control remains the tirelessly American one of inflicting regeneration through violence upon the racially heteroglossic wilds and others of the inner city.

This colorful gem appears in a collection called *The Administration of Aesthetics: Censorship, Political Criticism, and the Public Sphere*, edited by Richard Burt "for the Social Text Collective" (University of Minnesota Press, 1994). *Social Text* is the cultural studies journal made famous by publishing physicist Alan Sokal's jargon-ridden parody of postmodernist writing. If this essay is *Social Text's* idea of scholarship, little wonder it fell for Sokal's hoax. (And precisely what are "racially heteroglossic wilds and others"?) Dr Wilson is an English professor, of course.

That incomprehensibility need not be long-winded is proven by our third-place winner, sent in by Richard Collier, who teaches at Mt Royal College in Canada. It's a sentence from *Making Monstrous: Frankenstein, Criticism, Theory*, by Fred Botting (Manchester University Press, 1991):

The lure of imaginary totality is momentarily frozen before the dialectic of desire hastens on within symbolic chains.

Still, prolixity is often a feature of bad writing, as demonstrated by our next winner, a passage submitted by Mindy Michels, a graduate anthropology student at the American University in Washington, DC. It's written by Stephen Tyler, and appears in *Writing Culture*, edited (it says) by James Clifford and George E. Marcus (University of California Press, 1986). Of what he calls "post-modern ethnography," Professor Tyler says:

It thus relativizes discourse not just to form - that familiar perversion of the modernist; nor to authorial intention—that conceit of the romantics; nor to a foundational world beyond discourse—that desperate grasping for a separate reality of the mystic and scientist alike; nor even to history and ideology—those refuges of the hermeneuticist; nor even less to lan-

guage—that hypostasized abstraction of the linguist; nor, ultimately, even to discourse—that Nietzschean playground of world-lost signifiers of the structuralist and grammatologist, but to all or none of these, for it is anarchic, though not for the sake of anarchy but because it refuses to become a fetishized object among objects—to be dismantled, compared, classified, and neutered in that parody of scientific scrutiny known as criticism.

A bemused Dr Tim van Gelder of the University of Melbourne sent us the following sentence:

Since thought is seen to be ‘rhizomatic’ rather than ‘arboreal,’ the movement of differentiation and becoming is already imbued with its own positive trajectory.

It’s from *The Continental Philosophy Reader*, edited by Richard Kearney and Mara Rainwater (Routledge, 1996), part of an editors’ introduction intended to help students understand a chapter. Dr van Gelder says, “No undergraduate student I’ve given this introduction to has been able to make the slightest sense of it. Neither has any faculty member.”


An assistant professor of English at a US university (she prefers to remain anonymous) entered this choice morsel from *The Cultures of United States Imperialism*, by Donald Pease (Duke University Press, 1993):

When interpreted from within the ideal space of the myth-symbol school, Americanist masterworks legitimized hegemonic understanding of American history expressively totalized in the metanarrative that had been reconstructed out of (or more accurately read into) these masterworks.

While the entrant says she enjoys the Bad Writing Contest, she’s fearful her career prospects would suffer were she to be identified as hostile to the turn by English departments toward movies and soap operas. We quite understand: these days the worst writers in universities are English professors who ignore “the canon” in order to apply tepid, vaguely Marxist gobbledygook to popular culture. Young academics who’d like a career had best go along.

But it’s not just the English department where jargon and incoherence are increasingly the fashion. Susan Katz Karp, a graduate student at Queens College in New York City, found this splendid nugget showing that forward-thinking art historians are doing their desperate best to import postmodern style into their discipline. It’s from an article by Professor Anna C Chave, writing in *Art Bulletin* (December 1994):

To this end, I must underline the phallicism endemic to the dialectics of penetration routinely deployed in descriptions of pictorial space and the operations of spectatorship.

The next round of the Bad Writing Contest, results to be announced in 1998, is now open with a deadline of Dec 31, 1997. There is an endless ocean of pretentious, turgid academic prose being added to daily, and we’ll continue to celebrate it. 

## ...Conspiracy, from p50

Obvious, isn’t it.  
Worldwide television communications.  
(No15)

*Jeremiah* 50:19;51:27 The word that the Lord spoke against Babylon and against the land of the Chaldeans by Jeremiah the prophet ... For, lo, I will raise and cause to come up against Babylon an assembly of great nations from the north country; and they shall set themselves in array against her; from thence she shall be taken: their arrows shall be as of a mighty expert man; none shall return in vain ... Set ye up a standard in the land, blow the trumpet among the nations, prepare the nations against her, call together against her the kingdoms of Ararat, Minni, and Ashchenaz; appoint a captain against her; cause the horses to come up as rough caterpillars.


Yep, no prizes for guessing that this refers to Iraq’s defeat in the Gulf War. Of course, it could just as equally be applied to many of the innumerable military campaigns that have taken place in the region in the past 2,000 years. For example, the battle at Edessa in 1098 CE in which Baldwin of Boulogne (the future King Baldwin of Jerusalem) defeated the forces of Kerbogha of Mosul during the First Crusade.

In summary, should we Skeptics be concerned with books such as these? Yes, and no.

This manner of Bible exegesis is primarily an American phenomenon and the term ‘Antichrist’ meaningless to a majority of the world’s population. You don’t find many Buddhists or Hindus warning of the coming of Satan. The role of the Antichrist has also been bestowed by contemporaries on such luminaries as Mohammed, Saladin, Martin Luther, Napoleon, Hitler and Saddam Hussein (who must surely be the most lightweight candidate for the coveted role of Prince of Darkness ever put forward. Stalin and Mao Zedong must be wondering what they did or didn’t do to be so ignored).

On the other hand, the approach of the new millennium and the concomitant upsurge of ‘end of the world’ prophecy, of which this tome is part, has proved a godsend [joke intended] to the Bible literalists. The certainties of the past fifty years are no more. Unemployment is high; underemployment higher still. Technology is advancing faster than our laws; environmental catastrophe is just around the corner. Every tinpot dictatorship or democracy with money has, or soon will have, or can obtain nuclear and/or biological and/or chemical weapons. That terrorists might be striving to do the same is an even more frightening thought.

Simplistic books like this appeal precisely because they are simplistic: the good will prevail; the evil will be punished; there is no need to worry about pollution and war because the Kingdom of God is at hand and there will be paradise on Earth. Just close your mind and follow the Bible.

Unfortunately too many people are doing just that. 

## Whither the Skeptic?

**At the Skeptic, we often receive comments about what we do, some critical, some full of praise and some downright offensive. In this Forum, we publish two thoughtfully critical items, edited slightly for brevity's sake, from readers who would like to see us do things a little differently, and also a selection of comments that Harry has gleaned from our fan mail over the past couple of years. The Editor will respond at the end of this section.**

I have wanted to write this letter for some time, but have refrained from doing so in the fear of insulting or upsetting our very hard working and very well intentioned editor of *the Skeptic*. But the time has now come when the I feel the image and profile of *the Skeptic* are at stake, and this takes precedence.

Let me start by saying I have been a loyal supporter of the Australian Skeptics and subscriber of *the Skeptic* for some ten years now - and I shall always continue to be so. I look forward to every new issue of *the Skeptic*, especially since I came to Fiji some six years ago. If you hanker for both overt and covert racism in all aspects of daily life, institutionalised dogmatism, unquestioning belief in ghosts, sorcery, fire-walking, and prophecy, and unquestioning faith in creationism, then Fiji is the place to be. So in this ocean of irrationality *the Skeptic* is a very welcome island of succour.

However, over the past year or so I have become increasingly irritated by the frequent use of in-jokes, humorous asides, sarcasm, irrelevancies, and emotionally charged adjectives, adverbs and nouns. Some examples from the most recent issue (Vol 17, 1) will suffice:

From the Editorial - The task before us (p.4):

"(unless the new editorial beagle pup has eaten it in the meantime)."

"On that topic (contributors, not pups) may make a plea that comes from the depths of the editorial heart." "(not to mention the editor)"

From the Editorial - Your very good health (p. 5):

"... is arrant nonsense, ..." "... in seeking to overcome the disgracefully low level of immunisation ...."

From News - Around the Traps (p.6):

"The reason for this latest foray into unreason by the intellectually vapid was ..."

From Review - Harry does it again (p.35):

"... or insulting the editor thereof ....", "... fruitless search for some gold dust among the dross of psychic ratbagery that infests the world."

There are many more examples to be found.

Now I happen to agree with many of the sentiments expressed in these comments, and sometimes even get a chuckle out of the occasional humorous aside, but overall, I find them all a bit off-putting, to

say the least. They detract from the serious nature of the topics under discussion and, in the end, do nothing for the case being presented. In-jokes and humorous asides maybe have a place in a club news letter, not in what is purported to be a serious, rational, objective and didactic publication. No half decent secondary teacher or university lecturer would accept students' essays that contained humorous asides, sarcasm, and the use of emotionally charged words. These are irrelevant and antithetic to a rational, objective and unbiased discussion or exposé.

Sometimes comments in *the Skeptic* become so over-charged with emotion that they smack of verbal violence, eg "... the dross of psychic ratbagery that infests the world." Such displays of unfettered emotion bring *the Skeptic* down to the levels of subjectivity displayed in most of the publications of the proponents of Creation Science, the New Age and the paranormal.

Thanks to the tireless work of Barry, Harry and many others, *the Skeptic* and the organisation of Australian Skeptics is gaining a higher public profile and acceptability than ever before. The plan to sell *the Skeptic* at newsagents (16, 4:5) is an excellent one, but one that will only help in continuing to advance our cause if the quality of its content and presentation is improved. The editor's call to improve the content of the magazine (17, 1:4) should include firstly the eradication of all forms of in-jokes (that are usually only comprehensible to select "insiders" anyway), humorous asides (that distract and detract from the line of argument being presented), sarcasm and emotionally charged words (all of which diminish the objectivity of *the Skeptic*).

Secondly, there is a need for much more stringent editorial policy. If we want *the Skeptic* to be seen as an objective, unbiased and rational publication, and make it available to a wider reading audience in the hope of enlightening people, the quality of many of the articles needs to improve. Many articles are of high quality, eg Stephen Basser's Feature "Anti-immunisation scare: the inconvenient facts" (17, 1:18-25). This is an objective, well documented and referenced exposé.

Sydney Brockner's Feature "Hypnosis: the facts" (17, 1:34-35), on the other hand, is just the type of article *the Skeptic* should refuse to publish. Although very interesting and enlightening, Brockner's claims are not substantiated by proper referencing and bibliographic details. Some examples include:

The lack of any proper bibliographic details for his references to Franz Mesmer and James Braid.

"Experimental evidence obtained under scientific conditions ...", "Claims of major surgery under hyp-

notic anaesthesia alone have not been scientifically confirmed, and in most observed cases drugs, sedation and chemical anaesthesia have been used in addition.", and many more.

The lack of proper referencing and bibliographic details only ensures Brockner's article lacks credibility. If I were handed such a piece of work by one of my first year undergraduates I'd fail it.

If we are to maintain and increase our credibility, we should ensure that (wherever and whenever appropriate) all articles published in *the Skeptic* are properly documented and referenced. All articles submitted for publication need, therefore, to be reviewed, just like they are in any half decent journal. I feel we need to make *the Skeptic* more like a proper scholarly journal, and refrain from calling it "a magazine" (17, 1:4), which tends to lower it to the ranks of other "magazines" like perhaps the *New Idea*, the *Women's Weekly* etc.

I'm not advocating *the Skeptic* become an exclusive scholarly or academic journal; on the contrary. This would alienate many of its readers (and potential readers). What I am proposing is we lift our standards a bit to a more professional level, otherwise we risk alienating many other readers (and potential subscribers) and opening ourselves up to adverse (and probably justified) criticism, especially from those whose dubious practices we wish to expose.

**Jan Tent**  
**The University of the South Pacific**  
**Suva FIJI**

## Another view

As a recent subscriber let me first say how inspiring it is to find a publication dedicated to rigorous thought and the underrning of idiocracy.

But, firstly, I must comment on the aesthetic style of the magazine. To put it bluntly, *the Skeptic* at first glance appears to be a clinical journal perpetrated by a corduroy trousered, facially follicled, leather elbow patched Old Boy's club. (Pretty blunt eh?) And indeed a glance through the list of contributors proved a haven for many an old boy. Not that I wish to appear old boyist in any way. (Some of my best friends are both old and boy) But I should point out that a visiting acquaintance of mine (both young and girl) pointed to my coffee table copy of *the Skeptic* and declared with a grimace, - "What's that?"

I presume that would not be your desired response. "Hmm, that looks interesting" would be more to the point. Particularly if you do manage to make it to the hallowed racks of the news-stand. My youthful acquaintance then flicked through the pages and declared that it looked like one of those obsessive publications from some tub thumping, humourless, conspiratorially theoretic, soap boxing cult! Disdainfully, the treasures within *the Skeptic* were cast across the room. Several hours later I found her

curled on the couch totally engrossed in Richard Buchhorn's article "Owning Our History".

Basically the content deserves better. It seems important to me that *the Skeptic* must not simply preach to the converted, but actively compete with the tackier tomes of opinion that lay in the doctors' waiting rooms of a nation. Surely there is a youthful, beardless, inquiring minded, female graphic designer out there somewhere?

Secondly. I was just a little disturbed to find no comment (correct me if I'm mistaken) from *the Skeptic* concerning the *New Scientist* editorial of 30 Nov 96, which rebukes Ian Plimer's court action in regard to the creationist debate. Being a true sceptic I found myself becoming sceptical of the Skeptics themselves for not only ignoring the editorial in the very magazine from which I subscribed, but further went on to ask readers for contributions to Plimer's fund. Now surely *the Skeptic* should be open to debate crucial points brought up by the *New Scientist* article, ie:

Is it wise to debate fools in public? Does the creationist cause pose any real threat to society? What are the consequences of reactive stunts like Plimer's backfiring? Are Skeptics to truly believe that the world is on the brink of a new dark age? (Personally I believe there have never been so many critically thinking humans on the planet).

It concerns me that any witch hunt by the Skeptics to expose obvious fools is little more than playing the same games as the very groups they are wishing to expose. The 'great hordes of creationists lurking in the closet' smells to me of a conspiracy theory par excellence. Should not the true Skeptic be self-skepticising?

My *Thesaurus* provided two descriptions when I looked up sceptic: "Agnostic, non-believer." "Cynic, detractor, hatchet man, naysayer, pessimist."

The popularising of science should involve fearless thought, a sense of humour and inspiration. Skepticism must never fall into the abyss of cynicism. (Carl Sagan came to me in a dream and revealed this last paragraph)

**Paul Livingston**  
**Bondi NSW**

## In reply

Feedback is an essential component in in deciding what the format and content of a magazine should be. We receive many comments on our performance and, as a general rule, they are complementary.

Here is just a small selection of unsolicited testimonials from our mailbag. Of course, like the testimonials you often see in advertisements, extolling the virtues of dubious products, we may have just made them up. We could ask you to trust us, but, as you are Skeptics, we won't. However, if asked, we can provide evidence that they are genuine comments and not taken out of context.

"Whenever I look at my issues of *the Skeptic* I am always amazed at how much work you put into it in producing and editing, and the articles and editorials you write for it."

"Your quarterly *Skeptic* is great. I sometimes copy articles for my friends. One of whom was so impressed he would like to become one of us in the search 'for the truth'. I would like to sign him up for the first year."

"I would like say how much I enjoy reading the magazine, it is an intellectual bright spot in an increasingly intellectually barren world. Keep up the good work and the good humour."

"To my mind, any group or organisation that can laugh at itself, or has a sense of humour, deserves support."

"I've developed an unexpected taste for our American counterpart. It does however, lack one quality which makes *the Skeptic* a such a joy - humour."

"The Australian *Skeptic* is excellent. Diversity and growth is a good sign for scepticism, science, and critical thinking."

"*The Skeptic* is the only magazine I read from cover to cover. Australian Sceptics you are fascinating, erudite and brutally funny. If science never had a soul we have one now."

"I would like to congratulate the editors and contributors to *the Skeptic* for intellectual stimulation that is totally lacking in the general media. To be able to read such a variety of opinions and reach my own conclusions rather than the sanitised and often inaccurate pap served up by the media is refreshing."

"I am interested by the articles, their topicality and the humorous way many are presented. It represents the best \$25 I have ever invested."

We would like to thank all those who have taken the trouble to write to us with comments, be they critical or complimentary, about our efforts over the years. We do take notice and we hope the magazine reflects it.

**Harry Edwards**  
Contributing Editor

## Editor's response

Anyone who claims that they welcome criticism, even of the constructive variety, is either a masochist or is dealing with the truth lightly. But, if one is to survive in the field of providing a public service, then one ignores it at one's peril.

The readership of *the Skeptic* is about as eclectic a group of individuals as one can imagine; they range across a broad cross-section of our society; from academia, the professions, business, trades, and all manner of other livelihoods. Their political and religious convictions run the gamut and their interests are as diverse and varied as it is possible to contem-

plate. Providing a publication that satisfies everyone is one of the great challenges, and one which certainly adds spice to an editor's life.

What we have tried to achieve is to continually improve the quality of our publication, while, at the same time, keeping it accessible to the widest possible audience. In doing this, we strive to maintain a balance between the needs of those who would like to see *the Skeptic* as a more scholarly journal and those who would see it as a means of keeping in touch with diverse issues and with like-minded people. So far we seem to be succeeding, as our regular 85% plus re-subscription rate attests.

*The Skeptic* is not like other magazines; it is, as the masthead proclaims, a "journal of fact and opinion", and the range of issues it addresses is as varied as is its readership. We have tried, with some success, to improve the quality of our more serious contributions, and we will work hard to continue that trend. Most such items are now fully referenced, but some items remain opinions, as we believe they should. The *Letters* and *Forum* pages are open to those who would contest those opinions and these are very well supported. But we need to improve the quality without losing the sense of humour (perhaps sense of fun) that meets with the approval of so many of our readers.

A part of our task lies in ensuring that we aren't seen as taking ourselves too seriously, lest we become, as many of our detractors assert, cold and joyless naysayers. A vital part of a sceptic's makeup, in addition to a sense of humour, should be a finely tuned sense of the ridiculous.

Speaking personally, I confess that, while this may lead to the occasional editorial excess in overdoing the jocular aside; the emotive word, I can't help feeling that there should be a place in a journal of this nature for a little polemic; a little emotion. Sometimes, somebody needs to "Warn the Tsar". We occasionally waste too much time on cool and clinical arguments to counter irrational claims, when a more appropriate response would be to say, bluntly, "That's bullshit". We need the arguments *and* we need the method of delivery - and which to use depends on the circumstances.

As Editor, I have always thought it important, and I have no doubt that Harry agrees, to make it clear that *the Skeptic* has people sitting in the editorial chair and not some software programme (Editor 97, perhaps, with the mandatory three typos per story). And people have their idiosyncracies; their pet peeves; and probably their pet blind-spots.

As always, we rely on our contributors to provide the stories, and, with the support of our growing list of editorial consultants, we should continue to produce a result that is satisfactory to most of our readers. We value your input and we hope you continue to like our output.

We will try to get better, but we will try even harder not to get boring.

**Barry Williams**



## Geological Simulacra

A comment on Laurie Eddie's article "Simulacrum" (17, 1, p. 41-42), especially regarding a type of visual illusion an abstract pattern which produces the impression to people viewing it, of some recognised shape found in or on both natural and artificial structures, where patterns of light and shadow combine to produce a recognisable figure or face.

These simulacra are quite common and can be 'seen' in a diverse range of locations, such as patterned tiles or wallpaper, in clouds, on hillsides, or in rock formations, concrete slabs, carpets, trees, clouds, among others. These are the results from a complex mental process.

Let me illustrate how I and some former friends developed simulacra. As undergraduate geology students in Canada we had to take paleontology that entailed drawing of many fossils.

Unable to do all the drawings during normal laboratory hours, we continued after laboratory sessions for several weeks (maybe some of us were too meticulous attempting to do an 'artistic' job beyond actual requirements). And for examinations we had to memorise these dozens of fossils.

Some of us noticed, and mentioned it in casual conversations, that we began in our private time to 'see' trilobite-, brachiopod-, cephalopod-like patterns in various settings, objects, or materials as, for instance, in complexly-textured carpets, roughly-surfaced concrete, and so forth — just as described above. Those persons not 'indoctrinated/brainwashed' through intensive fossil-sketching did not 'see' any patterns, but would call the texture chaotic or meaningless perhaps.

Only weeks later, after the course and after the examinations, did we gradually lose this ability to see patterns, because our intensive mental attention or concentration changed to other subject matter not involving mentally-absorbing/memorizing subtle textures, fabrics and microstructures.

Having studied and taught in universities and as a consultant for three decades geological microscopic textures, I noticed a related phenomenon. For instance, when one is exposed to a new set of rock thin-sections, the first results in describing the textures *appeared* to be quite good to one's own satisfaction. Usually one then consulted the literature to compare/contrast the observations and to find concepts/hypotheses to allow a plausible genetic interpretation. If one returned to the thin-sections, we often found that certain features were overlooked. If this literature survey was repeated several times, we gradually achieved a fuller description. This phenomenon of 'learning' is a general widely recognised one, in particular from experiences of people enter-

ing a new field of research, being exposed to new patterns, and who gradually accumulate experience and knowledge.

So, what happened mentally? During the multi-stage investigation one gradually 'developed an eye' - to put it more succinctly: with an increase of information stored in one's brain, the eye can 'see' more! In the case of rock textures, the data observed was a physical entity, was 'factual' and testable - one was able to repeat the observation and demonstrate the textures' existence to others. Contrast this with the following.

The other type of 'information' we are dealing with daily in our lives is purely abstract or conceptual, and if not linked to any physical matter or process may consequently be purely mind-concocted - thus not testable or falsifiable, not necessarily factual, not truthful. It could be purely based on hearsay, illogical nonsense, yet the person involved may *believe* it to be true.

To extrapolate: there is a good chance that the person does *not* even have to believe the information to be true, because as long as some idea preoccupies them, the brain may be affected sufficiently to cause 'visions'. This can be the result after a long time of being submerged in a cult-like belief-system. Cult-based bunkum, falsehood, nonsense - whatever it is called - is likewise 'information'. When someone is brain-washed, the mind stores the 'negative information' which then allows one to 'see' more.

For instance, years of religious 'indoctrination' may then result in the ability to see the Virgin Mary in a cloud pattern, resulting in a 'miracle'. (This is not an irreligious comment, as devoted, open-minded believers have admitted to that.)

Instead of 'brain-washing', one could consider other terms like mental immersion, programming, mesmerisation, auto-hypnosis, etc, in both the conscious and unconscious state - all beyond the present purpose of this deliberation. Where do dreams come in that produce over a longer period similar or identical visions?

Now, why mention *that* in the present context? The above outline demonstrates that certain physical and social/psychological conditions can teach or program an individual to 'see' patterns, which may either exist in reality or merely in one's imagination - and thus can (in the latter situation) explain many of the pseudo-scientific nonsense (nay, 'none-sense'). Even 'desires' are aroused. Isn't that well-known by certain sections of society, eg advertising specialists who have gone as far as concocting some very devious techniques to 'compel' us to buy items against our will, eg subliminal TV advertisements?

A recent book by Aaron Lynch, (*Thought Contagion*. Basic Books, New York, 1997) deals with the idea of a kind of sociocultural 'gene' that would carry information about cultural artefacts from one brain to another, much as biological genes carry information about physical structure of an organism from one body to another. This hypothetical gene is called 'meme' — beliefs, coded as memes, can spread through society via the medium of the human mind! The book describes how ideas acquire people, which is different from the traditional sociological / psychological focus on how people acquire ideas. Many varieties of social, economic, cultural, political, etc, concepts are dealt with in terms of memes: e.g crucifixion, astrology, fetishes, folklore, love, faith, jihads, jingoism, among others. The idea of meme has been borrowed, it seems, from linguistics. However, the absence of a theoretical framework and experimental data forbids one to speak as yet of a *New Science of Memes* (the subtitle of the book).

Nevertheless, from the history of humanity it is a well-known phenomenon that ideas acquire, even overpower, people - sometimes against their will? The spread of communism decades ago is 'explained' by this concept. (See Review: The meme is the message, by John Casti, *New Scientist*, v.153, No.2072, p. 42-43; and my book-review on *The New Intellectual Elite* in this issue of *the Skeptic*.)

Karl H Wolf  
Epping NSW

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## Missing species

Geoff Sherrington (*Forum* 16,4) states it is difficult to contemplate statements about the extent of animal extinctions in Australia due to lack of information. He therefore uses the little information he located to construct, what must appear to him, as a logical extrapolation of the facts combined with biological insight to form a reasonable evaluation of the subject. I can only presume the intention of Geoff's letter was to determine whether the extent of extinctions in Australia since white settlement is in fact the worst in the world. He does not answer this question, nor does he offer any insight into the facts around it.

Instead of immediately attacking the methodology of the determination Geoff should ask himself what the fundamental premise of the statement is.

The statement is a comparison and so must use the same methodology as those with which the comparison is being done. If he wants to question the validity of the statement he first needs to compare the Australian statistics with those gathered in other countries and then determine if the comparison is valid based upon equal collection methodologies. Not to do so and comment in the way he does is meaningless. A comparison cannot be viewed from one side. Put simply, if three extinctions occurred in Australia and only two in any other country then

our record would be the worst. Not to compare, however, is not to know.

I rather think Geoff is actually more interested with the actual number of extinctions rather than a relative amount. If this is in fact his major cause for concern then he is merely stating a personal opinion which has nothing whatsoever to do with a rational critique of the subject. His effort to put across his viewpoint involves some unusual criticisms.

He is right to suggest difficulties exist with definitions which seek to explain phenomena which cross theoretical, spatial and temporal boundaries. However, in order to answer such difficult questions, such as the status of a taxa, a tool for measurement must be used which does its best to quantify the phenomenon. The rules used in the Act referred to, though arbitrary, provide a reasonable methodology for quantifying something which can never be known definitely. It is easy to show something exists. It is far more difficult to show that it does not.

Geoff disapproves of these rules on taxonomic grounds. Contrary to his contention that missing taxa could simply be variants of extant species, experience has shown that biodiversity is far greater than that previously recorded and so a minimalist approach is not warranted. This can be confirmed by referring to the original collection data housed at the various state museums. This is public information available to anyone who cares to look. To suggest, as Geoff does, that scientific information is hard to find and the authors are therefore concealing something, reveals nothing of the quality of the information or those who gathered it, rather the ignorance and bias of the person who is not prepared to look for it.

A competent scientist achieves success partially through the ability to research information. This is somewhat more involved than 'a ring around over a couple of days'. He is also wrong to base his argument of possible variants upon a definition of a species as those individuals which are able to interbreed. The biological species concept describes an entity which is not found in nature. The living world does not easily allow the description of delineated entities because life is a continuum. I recommend the reading of some taxonomic texts to understand this idea.

I must commend him on his critical approach to taxonomy and encourage him in his understanding that taxonomy based on too few characters is bad taxonomy. The next step in his understanding of this subject should definitely be the comprehension of Linnaen binomial nomenclature. He will be pleased to see the wealth of knowledge contained within this naming system. Revealing relationships to both extant and extinct taxa going far beyond the simple reference to any simple external characteristic.

His concept of a species peak however, is one of his own and new to science. The concept of species as used by 'reformist zoologists' (whatever they are) is more one of a continuum, from and into, other species which is not singularly involved with popu-

lation levels. I must agree that all species are indeed ultimately doomed but not necessarily by extinction of the line.

I also have some difficulty in accepting Geoff's presumption that we all share the same ethical view as to which species are more or less important.

The exclusion of Australia's territories from the discussion, as Geoff does, is also to misinterpret the subject entirely. The question of the extent of extinction caused by Europeans is foremost a political subject which has as its bounds all land and water held under Australian sovereignty. The statement Geoff is objecting to is not qualified and his exclusion of particular areas is due entirely to his own political viewpoint, not one of biology. He makes a confused argument referring to both political and biological aspects with the intention of proving that Australia's record of extinctions is not that bad because it is spread over more than one landmass. He may find it enlightening to take a look at the geological and biological evolution of the areas under consideration and then ponder how easy it is to separate earth history and biology. Biological systems do not end at borders or coastlines and are not separated from their long and complex histories.

Geoff then states that too many questions can be asked of an unfamiliar discipline. I presume this means incorrect conclusions can be drawn when discussing a topic with which one is a novice. Conversely, correct assumptions can be drawn by those who are expert at the topic. This sudden shift into rationalism is confusing when one considers that Geoff spends five paragraphs ridiculing the people upon whom he presumably confers this expertise - an expertise he previously disagreed with in favour of his own zoology, which has no relationship to that practiced by those in the biological community.

It is comforting though to think that there are people in the community who think that interviewees have the power to control the content, time and editing of a '10 second grab'. At least there is someone who still retains an honest, childlike naiveté. Geoff also has difficulty in accepting the terms used to qualify the status of taxa. Before deriding them he may wish to read the definitions and then attempt to understand why his alternative is meaningless. In summing up, Geoff is not able to claim doubt about the reality of long unseen taxa because he has not established a case for this. To doubt the validity of a species because it has not been seen for 50 years is to denigrate the work of all biologists previous to this date. In making such a claim he may wish to remember the nineteenth century biologist who had the capital city of the Northern Territory named after him.

A useful place to start researching the topic is: *Threatened Species in Australia. A select bibliography.* Slattery K., Wallis R. and Williams C., Deakin University, Vic. College Library 1991

**Graeme Armstrong**  
**Richmond, VIC**

# A teaching tool

John Crowley

**Thinking Logically: A Study of Common Fallacies**  
**Brant Abrahamson and Fred C. Smith (The Teachers Press)**

This is actually a training package containing a two book Teacher's Manual and the Student Text and is intended to be used to teach high school students, and above, to use critical thinking skills. 'Thinking Logically' is designed to be a starting point for humanities, sciences or social sciences.

The structure of the course revolves around thirteen logical fallacies and presents a variety of exercises, at different skill levels, to be carried out by the student under the teacher's guidance. The thirteen 'logical fallacies' addressed are:

- |                        |                     |
|------------------------|---------------------|
| Wise Men               | Overgeneralization  |
| False Cause and Effect | Crowd Appeal        |
| Self-evident Truth     | Thin-entering Wedge |
| Getting Personal       | You're Another      |
| Guilt by Association   | Black/White         |
| False Analogy          | Arguing in Circles  |
| Facts and Figures      |                     |

The titles of the above are enough to whet the appetite of Skeptics. The fallacies are clearly defined and the examples and exercises presented support the process of the student learning how to identify a fallacy and categorise the fallacy such that it can be addressed in a logically structured thinking process. The text clearly indicates that it is not exhaustive on the subjects but it is intended to encourage further thinking and this package will continually improve over ensuing years as further inputs are received. References to further reading are also given to help the teacher and student to further expand their thoughts.

The fallacy descriptions in the student text are subsectioned into three areas, these being Definition, Description and Examples, and Questions to Ask.

The teacher's manual also covers 'extended learning' under the titles:

- Thinking Logically in Group Situations
- Thinking Logically and Morality
- Thinking Logically and Human Emotions
- Reification (overgeneralisation)
- Thin entering Wedge Fallacy
- Naturalistic and Anti-naturalistic Fallacies "Believing In" and "Not Believing In"
- Fallacies, Tradition and Change
- How to Think About Weird Things

continued p 62 ...

# Owning history

Richard Buchhorn's article "Owning Our History" (Vol 17, No 1), which dealt with Aboriginal and colonial history, ranged over so much ground that I was rather lost at first to see what his main point was.

He seemed to be arguing, notwithstanding some distracting paragraphs about cannibalism among the Aztecs, that dependence on (presumed) myths about Australia's colonial history is as unhealthy and entrenched as belief in creationism, astrology or numerology.

Ah, but is it?

First of all, one has to ask: who believes the presumed myths? Surely it can't be highly educated, city-based liberals like Mr Buchhorn, myself, or the esteemed editor of *the Skeptic*. Of course not. We are far too well read, and, well, just too damn liberal. Only poor whites still living at the frontier, or the perhaps not-so-poor battlers like Mr Buchhorn's *bete noire*, the Mayor of Goondiwindi, can be truly deceived.

The next sceptical question would be: whose myths? For Buchhorn writes as if nothing had been published since he first took a dependence on the myth of Liberation Theology to Boggabilla in 1980 (cf Buchhorn 1982).

Plainly, in objecting to the black armband view of history, sometime professor Geoffrey Blainey, sometime senator Peter Walsh and more recently the present Prime Minister have been complaining that almost too much has been written since 1980 about frontier violence. Not that this is the historian's fault; only that the propagandising classes have tried to make events 150 years ago an occasion of present-day shame.

Blainey, Walsh and Howard consider that not enough has been said about how, by 1900, Australia had achieved the world's highest standard of living. It was achieved in very large measure by white rural workers and their employers, and 99% of them, obviously, never once lifted a gun against an Aborigine. (Of course many Aborigines too contributed to the capitalist development of Australia.)

Equally we in the chattering classes have not publicised, for example, that in NSW Aborigines always had the right to vote, even before 1901. That is because we (most of us) wrongly believe the counter-myth that citizenship fell from liberal heaven onto all Aborigines only in 1967.

A third sceptical question is: which myths? To bring it back to Toomelah, Boggabilla and Goondiwindi (where Mr Buchhorn found himself thrust in 1980), we see the Aborigines, the city fa-

thers of the Goondiwindi Council and the local high school teachers all equally ignorant of Australian history. Well, perhaps not equally - one guesses that only the left-liberal Buchhorn and the left-liberal teachers started out as completely ignorant.

Mr Buchhorn wished to bring the teachers at Goondiwindi to know that there had been massacres early last century (as if even the city fathers would deny that!). What he did not wish to reveal to the teachers, or perhaps did not even know, was that any plausible rate of killing of Aborigines was largely irrelevant to the process of depopulation (Butlin 1993: 132). It is entirely symptomatic that Mr Buchhorn never once mentions the ravages of smallpox and other imported diseases, on which Butlin so relies (and which incidentally also did so much to destroy the Aztecs).

Turning to the detail, let me conclude by making a point about Mr Buchhorn's *cause celebre*, the killing of an 11 year old white boy by the Peichambul or Bigambal people of the Goodar district in 1847 (north of Goondiwindi, as it now is). He mentioned that the boy's father became a hater of Aborigines and would kill any he met, yet omitted to mention how the boy had died. The decapitated body was either, according to Jacob Lowe 1861: 8, cut up in pieces and put into the hollow parts of the trees, or, according to William Telfer 1900/1980: 39, put in the hollow stump of [one] tree, [and] later that night the boy's head was placed on a limb of a tree just in front of the house.

We shall have an end to mythologising when this side of the story too is understood in the left-liberal strongholds of Balmain NSW, Fitzroy Vic and Griffith ACT.

**Michael O'Rourke  
Griffith ACT.**

(e-mail: mjour@u030.aone.net.au.)

## References:

- Buchhorn, R[1982], Speech at the funeral of Ronald McIntosh, Moree NSW, 11.11.1982, at pp 754-756 in Roger Milliss Waterloo Creek. Ringwood, Vic, McPhee Gribble, 1992.
- Butlin, N G, Economics and the Dreamtime: a Hypothetical History. Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1993.
- Lowe, Jacob, Testimony to the Queensland Select Committee on the Native Police, Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly [Brisbane], 1861.
- Telfer, William, The Wallabadah Manuscript: Recollections of the Early Days. [Written c. 1900]. Edited by Roger Milliss. Sydney University Press, 1980.

## Readers in search of properly sceptical treatments of frontier history can consult:

- Fels, Marie, Good Men and True: The Aboriginal Police of the Port Phillip District 1837-53. Melbourne University Press, 1988.
- McGrath, Ann, Born in the Cattle: Aborigines in Cattle Country. Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1987.
- O'Rourke, Michael, Raw Possum and Salted Pork: Major Mitchell and the Kamilaroi Aborigines. The author, Kambah ACT, 1995.

## A reply

The devil is in the detail. I'm not sure why Michael thought it relevant to recount some of the versions of the disposal of the body of James Mark's son. He missed the *SMH* (Oct 15, 1847) account which gives his age as nine years, has him transfixed with spears, and roasted alive over a fire before the body was cut up, the pieces left on the spot. This version resurfaced in the *Dalby Herald* in 1963. A McLeay River squatter (*SMH* Oct 30, 1852) had the boy quartered.

Michael also missed John Watts' personal reminiscences (manuscript, Oxley Library) which doesn't mention the roasting, but the pieces of the dismembered bodies being left all along the log on which he had been seated when attacked.

None of the above, nor the accounts cited by Michael, mention Mark's reputation prior to the death of his son as "a hater of all Aborigines who would shoot any seen approaching his property". Nor do they mention the immediate trigger for the death of Mark's son, viz. the killing by Mark of a "native boy" sent by a neighbour with fresh meat for him. From an Aboriginal perspective, the messenger should have enjoyed diplomatic immunity. I am delighted to have contributed to *the Skeptic's* well deserved reputation for ground-breaking research by choosing to have those details make their first appearance in print in its columns.

The accounts cited by Michael to present one side of the story exemplify one of the main points of my article. Partial and fabricated accounts of events which entrench the perception of Aboriginal people as savage, barbaric, heartless, etc persist. Historians and anthropologists - whether traditionalist, post colonialist, revisionist, conservative, liberal, or left liberal - have fallen for them at times. Of old, they helped justify the process of colonisation and its brutality. For many, they continue to underpin attitudes of superiority and hostility, and to be dredged up from the dark recesses of minds when a need is felt to belittle Aboriginal people.

Michael's letter was written before Pauline Hanson's *The Truth* hit the news. Having declared that "dredging up the past serves no end", she proceeded to dredge up from our colonial past the discredited myth of Aboriginal cannibalism. My article on the subject (*the Skeptic*, Autumn 1994) would have prepared readers to handle this. Feature articles by Graeme Leech (*The Australian*, 23 April) and Patrick Wolfe (*Age*, 29 April) reflected current research on the subject. Graham Maddock (*SMH* 23 April) demonstrated the persistence of myth, citing pre-1978 sources only, suggesting the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies had endorsed statements in one of those sources, but ignoring the very different entry in the Institute's recently published *Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia*.

The debate on talk-back radio and letters columns was something else. Graphic stories of cannibalism from all sorts of sources were advanced to support

the Hanson thesis. Digressionary statements about all races having done it at some time, and there being nothing shameful in the practice, got good runs.

For many, any research which explodes those myths, especially local ones, is too much history. The smallpox factor, and the idea that only 10% of the frontier did the shooting (an optimistic estimate for the Macintyre!) are convenient diversions from the challenge of owning our history. And rather than focusing on inculcating shame about massacres, I am more interested in what that history reveals about the dynamics of early relationships, and white perceptions and attitudes. It also enables us to take pride and admire people from that era who, against the current and the odds showed humanity, courage, and a sense of justice in their concern for Aboriginal people.

Michael and others may be interested in reading a concise history of events of the late 1840's on the Macintyre, and their relevance to perceptions, attitudes and relations in the area today, in my recently published booklet *Boobera Lagoon: a Focus for Reconciliation*. I'm sure Skeptics won't be deterred by the fact that it is published by the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council.

**Richard Buchhorn**  
West End QLD

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### ...Teaching tool, from p 60

The title of the package probably would be better as 'Thinking Critically' as the training clearly sets the student on to the path of identifying and categorising of fallacies. The package includes suggested overheads and exercises to be performed by the students along with appropriate guidance for the teacher.

The covering letter that the Australian Skeptics received with the package explains the authors' concessions for copyright as:

"Our major selling point is that when a school purchases a master copy for each teacher using it, the materials including the readings can be freely reproduced for students. The idea is to plug into and utilize current technology and not try in a Luddite way to fight it. We encourage teacher to use their computer scanners and, thereby, to modify our materials to meet local needs. We encourage students to do the same as individual credit projects active and scientificlike thinking being a major goal."

The RRP on this package from the Australian Skeptics is expected to be \$30 incl. p&p. I consider this to be good value for money, particularly as a reproducible teaching package. Also good for positively influencing your friends who need to objectively view so called facts in this world but who can't quite grasp what the indicators of a fallacy are. 🌀

## Notice

# 1997 Eureka Prizes - bigger and better

Nominations are now open for the 1997 Eureka Prizes, established in 1990 to acknowledge and reward excellence in Australian science and science communication. This year sees significant growth in the Prizes, with the addition of 4 new categories and a growth in total prize money to \$78,000. This continuing vitality in the Eureka Prizes underlines their importance as Australia's pre-eminent national science award scheme.

Following discussions between the office of the Minister for Science and Technology, the Hon Peter McGauran MP, and the Australian Museum which administers the Eureka Prizes on behalf of all sponsors, it has been agreed that the Michael Daley Awards for science, technology and engineering journalism will in future be incorporated into the annual Eureka Prizes. This move is designed to rationalise science award schemes, and to provide increased financial rewards for journalists involved in the public communication of science, technology and engineering. Three new Michael Daley Eureka Prizes for print, television and radio journalism, each worth \$7,000, will be sponsored by the Department of Industry, Science and Tourism.

In addition the Department of Industry, Science and Tourism has agreed to pick up sponsorship of the Eureka Prize for the Promotion of Science, following the regrettable decision by the ABC to withdraw support due to funding cuts. The criteria for the Promotion of Science Prize has been expanded to include editors and news organisations, in recognition that the effective communication of the achievements and discoveries of Australian science and technology requires the active support of media organisations.

The NSW state government, through the Environment Protection Authority, has also agreed to sponsor a new Eureka Prize for Environmental Education, designed to encourage and reward research which contributes to the effective design of environ-

mental education programs. Petaluma Limited has also joined The Observatory Hotel, Sydney and Ansett Airlines in providing support for the 1997 Eureka Prize award ceremony, to be held at the Australian Museum on 26 November.

Nominations are invited from *Skeptic* readers for the following 1997 Eureka Prizes:

The *POL* Eureka Prize for Environmental Research: \$10,000

The Australian Museum Eureka Prize for Industry: (not a monetary Prize)

The Australian Skeptics Eureka Prize for Critical Thinking: \$10,000

The Environment Protection Authority Eureka Prize for Environmental Education: \$10,000

The *New Scientist* / Reed Books Eureka Science Book Prize: \$10,000

The Environment Australia Peter Hunt Eureka Prize for Environmental Journalism: \$10,000

The Department of Industry, Science and Tourism Michael Daley Eureka Prizes:

Promotion of Science: \$7,000

Science, Technology and Engineering Print Journalism: \$7,000

Science, Technology and Engineering Television Journalism: \$7,000

Science, Technology and Engineering Radio Journalism: \$7,000

Further information and nomination forms can be obtained from:

Roger Muller  
Associate Director's Office  
Australian Museum  
6 College St, Sydney 2000  
Tel 02 9320 6230 Fax 02 9320 6015  
email: rogerm@amsg.austmus.gov.au.

## Have you considered remembering the Skeptics in your will?

The Australian Skeptics Science and Education Foundation, a non-profit trust, established by a bequest from the late Stanley Whalley, supports scientific and educational programmes, including the Eureka Prizes, Young Scientists Awards, operations of the Australian Skeptics branches, and makes grants to worthwhile scientific and educational projects and to individuals.

If you would like to help this work continue you may consider naming the Foundation, or any other Skeptics organisation, as a beneficiary in your will.

The address of the Foundation is:

PO Box 331  
Newport Beach NSW 2106.

## Pigeontoed Skeptics

In *the Skeptic* (16, 4) Trevor Case described some proposed experimental work in the psychology of superstition. The work will obviously be an improvement on those silly behaviourist experiments years ago with "superstitious" pigeons.

I do not want to be seen to be putting doubts into the minds of Skeptics, but when Trevor gets around to scientifically defining "superstition" I hope he takes into account the fact that in the anthropological literature there is at least one report of behaviour that is both superstitious and rational (*Rationality* edited by Bryan Wilson, Basil Blackwell, 1970). This might be too much for some Skeptics.

To add insult to injury, the American sociologist Andrew Creeley recently reported studies of praying behaviour that showed almost one fifth of Skeptics and atheists in the sample engaged in prayer, some quite frequently. Similar facts were uncovered in the United Kingdom. Another oddity was a correlation between praying and a good sex life. I do not know what god some atheists pray to. Athena, perhaps? One can only wonder what the folk from the *Skeptical Inquirer* get up to behind closed doors.

Of course you would never get any Skeptic to publicly admit to such behaviour. To borrow from Konrad Lorenz, that would be less likely than pigeons learning to copulate upside down.

I hope Trevor impartially includes Skeptics amongst his experimental subjects. Meanwhile readers who would like to progress beyond the archaic, transcendental concept of reason given to us by philosophy (and still endemic amongst Reason-adoring Humanists) could benefit from the following books: *Descartes's Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain* by Damasio, *The Rationality of Emotion* by De

**An opportunity for readers to present their views on matters that have appeared in the magazine, or anything else that takes their Skeptical fancy.**

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Sousa, *The Challenge of Anthropology* by Fox, *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things* by Lakoff, *The Body In The Mind: The Bodily Basis Of Meaning, Imagination and Reason* by Johnson.

**John Snowden  
Tarragindi QLD**

## Where are we going?

Austudy for training in unproven alternative therapies? The frustration reflected in the article "Alternative? What alternative?" by John Foley (Vol 17, No 1), where John wrote of seeking a satisfactory response from government on Austudy funding policy, reflected my own experience.

The office of the federal Minister for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs replied to me in April 1996, "Your view that it is not appropriate for courses in fields such as homoeopathy and kinesiology to be approved under Austudy has been noted. However, where a course meets the requirements for registration and accreditation with the relevant State or Territory authority and is otherwise consistent with requirements, then Austudy coverage will be granted." In other words, so long as the Office of Training and Further Education here in Victoria accredit the course, the Commonwealth pays Austudy. There was no response to my plea that the criteria and processes which qualify training courses for Austudy need to be reviewed. This surprised me, coming from a government and minister with a record of squeezing to save money in most portfolios.

With governments giving the nod to funding training in what many regard as snake-oil therapies, how long before they are funding the delivery of these services? The recent SBS screening of the series *The Nature of Healing* informed the viewer that in France and Germany the cost of treatment for homoeopathy is reimbursed by health insurance. An Australian health fund has also been advertising its benefits for part reimbursement for alternative treatments. If the counter-science cultural shift continues, then it won't be *if*, but *when* they are on Medicare.

And now to our national broadcaster the ABC. I watched a screening of the documentary *The Guru Busters*, which documented the campaign by the Indian Rationalist Association to counter the embrace of irrationalism and superstition. Then, as many of those who watched will have noticed, the programme was followed by a disclaimer "... a purchased documentary which does not reflect the attitudes and beliefs of the ABC". The following morning, while listening to ABC Radio National, I nearly fell out of bed upon hearing a quite serious discussion of the irrational and fatuous study of graphology, the claimed link between handwriting and character. No disclaimer here, of course.

I wrote to the ABC expressing my dismay at the (unprecedented?) disclaimer following *The Guru Busters*. The reply said, in part, that "It was an error of judgement to include the disclaimer at the end of the programme. The ABC accepts editorial responsibility for all programmes it broadcasts ... The decision to include the disclaimer was made in response to a vigorous telephone campaign following on-air promotions for the programme. In hindsight the disclaimer was an over-reaction. ... We have reviewed ABC guidelines for the use of disclaimers ..."

I felt better to read that and not read that the ABC was now a captive of over-the-top cultural relativists.

On a lighter note, I can report that Ian Plimer's book *Telling Lies for God* has not only been infuriating the believers, but has materialised in an art piece in a recent (November 1996) exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney. It was one of a pile of books in a piece entitled *Large One Bedroom Apartment*, by Canadian artist Liz Magor.

**Evan Gellert  
Essendon VIC**

## Doctor who?

I found John Foley's feature "Alternative? What alternative?" (the *Skeptic*, Vol 17, No 1, p28) a bit smug and exhibiting the sort of flawed reasoning that is deplored in other features in the same issue.

The sections that are problematic are those that refer to chiropractic and chiropractors. The attacks include anecdotes, guilt by association and straw man arguments. The anecdotes are worth what anecdotes are ever worth. The guilt by association comes in attacking chiropractic practice because many chiropractors "use other practices that are dubious".

The editorial in the same issue by Richard Gordon and Barry Williams (p5) expresses concern that there is a report that about 20 percent "of registered medical practitioners offered one or more alternative therapies in addition to their regular medical services". Is scientific medicine itself diminished because of this association?

No, and neither is chiropractic practice. The practitioners are, of course, another story. The straw man that is attacked is the adoption of the honorific 'Doctor' by chiropractors. So what? Ask your GP which of the pieces of paper on the surgery wall entitle she/he to the title 'Doctor'.

My intent here is not to defend chiropractors or chiropractic, but to ask Skeptics not to carelessly use the sloppy rhetoric Skeptics are quick to deride when others use it, otherwise we run the risk

(as this feature did) of applying double standards.

Disclaimer: My father is a chiropractor and his father was before him. I'm just a pain in the neck with a PhD (in chemical physics) who believes 'Doctor' should be reserved for people with doctorates or are teachers (the original meaning of the word).

**Andrew Rock  
Upper Mt Gravatt QLD**

## Vaccination

With reference to John Foley's article "Alternative? What alternative?", the impression may be given that Edward Jenner originated the technique of vaccination. Although the name is derived from a treatise by Jenner "An inquiry into the cause and effects of the variolae vaccinae, a disease discovered in some of the western counties of England, particularly Gloucester, and known by the name of the Cow-pox." (1798) - the technique (immunising against disease by inoculating with a suspension of infectious material) is much older. Using immunisation with smallpox to protect against smallpox apparently originated in China before the tenth century CE. It then spread to other parts of the world. It was introduced from Turkey to England (1721) by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (wife of the British ambassador to Turkey) and from Africa to the American colonies by Onesimus (a slave) and given the name "variolation". Unfortunately, although variolation was very successful, it would occasionally lead to outbreaks of severe smallpox. Jenner's breakthrough was to immunise against smallpox by inoculating with a closely related, but relatively harmless (to humans and cattle) disease called cow-pox. Despite the valiant efforts of the Anti-Vaccine Society, the procedure spread rapidly and the death-rate from smallpox plummeted.

Variolation illustrates that, con-

currently with unsound medical practices, practitioners of centuries past were also practicing sound medicine. Other examples from the past are the use of some "natural" pharmaceuticals (Butler, 1996). Most probably those medical practitioners rarely differentiated between these practices, but considered both to be "evidence based". However, not all evidence is equally valid. There are several reasons why a treatment may appear to work, only one of which is that it actually does work. A distinguishing feature of scientifically based medical practice is not that it is "evidence based", but the care with which such evidence is evaluated (much to the frustration of patients, desperate to try out the latest 'miracle' drug). For example, anecdotal evidence has no role in medical practice, outside of medical malpractice law suits.

**Chris Vermaak  
Tea Tree Gully SA**

### Refs

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Dobson, A. People and disease. (1992) In S Jones et al (eds) *The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of Human Evolution* pp 411-420. Cambridge UP.  
*Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1990) under the entries "Mather, Cotton" and "variolation".

## Ask your grandmother

Do you remember the little girl next door being rushed to hospital choking with diphtheria? Or the boy at school who recovered from poliomyelitis but wore special boots and splints for years (he still shambles round with a stick)? Or your cousin who died with tetanus convulsions after he cut his foot on the beach? Of course you don't- but *ask your grandmother*.

We are all now immunised in infancy, thank God, and anyone who raises doubts and disbeliefs in the minds of young parents must bear a heavy responsibility.

I grew up and later worked at the Coast Hospital (now Prince



Henry). Every year we received about 1000 cases of diphtheria with peak periods of 2000. Of these one in fifty died. Outside hospital the death rate was as high as 7%. The story was the same at Camperdown Childrens', North Shore and world-wide.

These children, they were mostly children, arrived in various stages of asphyxia; you could smell them as soon as you climbed into the ambulance. If the infection spread to the larynx they could completely obstruct it, so that instruments were always kept sterile and ready to cut open the windpipe to insert a tube before they suffocated. The "tracheostomy" bell was a signal for the nearest doctors to drop everything and run to the ward to perform this operation. These gasping infants were the most miserable of creatures; occasionally they died suddenly from acute heart stoppage. Another complication was paralysis of the palate and everything they drank came back through the nose. Sometimes there was temporary paralysis of the eye muscles; they squinted and saw double.

Diphtheria immunisation was begun world-wide on a communal scale about 1936 and as long as it is not neglected or sabotaged by such know-alls as Dr Scheibner, it will continue to protect today's children from these horrors.

Who now remembers the infant with measles? - a miserable sight: they often died. And the poliomyelitis outbreaks of the 1930s and 1950s. The battles for breath in the "iron lung" and the sequels of crippling and deformity. These are all killers and will surely reappear if we allow our population to grow up unprotected.

I once asked a young children's specialist when he had last seen a case of diphtheria. "I have *never* seen a case of diphtheria"!!!

As for the link between immunisation and cot-death, I am assured by the paediatricians that there is nothing beyond purely anecdotal evidence to suggest such a link. The bare possibility is

surely outweighed by the necessity of keeping our population 100% immunised.

**P T Millard MB FRCSE  
Narrabeen NSW**

## Hypnosis

In your last issue, Sydney Bockner argued that the imaginative claims often made about hypnosis do not stand up to vigorous scientific testing and critical evaluation. He is rightly sceptical about the reality of the multiple personalities and I would agree with him wholehearted on these points.

However, I am considerably more sceptical on this subject than Sydney and I hold the view that hypnosis is all a lot of rubbish. Apparently Sydney uses hypnosis in his own medical practice and believes that it is useful in producing analgesia.

I would, therefore, challenge Sydney to produce any objective evidence that hypnosis can produce analgesia and indeed to produce any objective evidence that hypnosis is not all make believe.

**(Dr) Allen Christophers  
Brighton VIC**

## Uranium I

I hope Colin Keay ("Lost opportunities, Australian style", *Review 17*, 1) will join with me in thanking those neo-Luddite anti-nuclear zealots for their efforts to keep Australian uranium in the ground.

Rex Connor's vision of cheap processed uranium could have lead to the 'profligate' consumption of our finite uranium resources, a situation that would surely be 'regarded as plunder by future generations'.

Much wiser to leave the uranium in the ground for the time being, as I understand it will be quite safe there for many years to come and may even increase in value over time.

The intervening period could be used to increase the 'noisy non-sense' preferring public's confidence in the nuclear industry through actions such as;

a. Finally closing the Chernobyl reactors and all similar models still in operation around the world;

b. Clearly explaining how highly radioactive waste can be securely immobilised for the lengthy periods required until it is benign; and

c. Assuring us all once again that those new reactors planned for Indonesia really aren't going to be sited near seismic fault lines or dormant volcanoes.

But surely the sweetest moment would be when those currently laughing Canadians have exhausted their 10% of the world's known uranium reserves and our 40% is still largely intact. With one less supplier to satisfy the demand from all those 'Asian dynamos' we will be able to name our price for Australian uranium. Leaving uranium in the ground will preserve opportunities, Australian style.

**Michael Ward  
Darwin NT**

## Uranium II

May I reply paragraph-by-paragraph to Michael Ward's letter about my book review.

1. Sorry, not on.

2. Depends which resource you wish to plunder. Coal has far too many other uses. Uranium has few. Mr Ward might have a different perspective if he lived in the Hunter Region where we have 10.4 Gw of coal-fired power generation pouring tens of thousands of tonnes of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere every day, making it totally impossible for Australia to meet the Greenhouse 2000 targets. And they also consume as much uranium as nuclear power stations of equal capacity. The coal they burn has between 1.3 and 1.8 parts per million of uranium (and about double that proportion of thorium). Nuclear reactions release a million times more energy than chemical reactions. Hence the

near equality of uranium consumption between the two. The big difference is that the waste from nuclear reactors is about a million times less in volume and can be kept in cooling ponds before final disposal, whereas the uranium from coal is unburnt and spewed back out in fly-ash or smoke (together with the radioactive thorium).

3. If uranium in the ground is "quite safe there" surely immobilised nuclear waste would be just as safe. Value? Time alone will tell.

4a. Couldn't agree more. RBMK reactors are a poor design, especially when badly managed.

4b. Mr Ward partially answered that himself (see 3). The Australian invention of SYNROC is near perfect for immobilising nuclear waste and the level of residual activity depends on how long it is stored prior to the process and the degree to which it is diluted. And it decays about a million times faster than unconsumed uranium.

4c. A properly designed reactor containment vessel ought to be sufficient. The San Onofre power reactor has sat right on top of the San Andreas fault for decades.

5. Unless there is an enormous surge in demand for nuclear fuel I doubt if I'll be around for long enough to get to enjoy the prophesied "sweetest moment".

6. Purely a matter of opinion.

I thank Mr Ward for his courteous letter. Much more temperate than many I have received from the negative side of the nuclear power debate.

**Colin Keay  
New Lambton NSW**

## Coriolis

I would like to relate an experience on the topic of Coriolis.

In 1988 I was in Nanyuki in Kenya. Nanyuki is situated on the Equator and the locals use this fact to advantage with the passing tourists. I was present at a demonstration that appeared to show that when water was allowed to drain from a container, its direc-

tion of rotation depended upon which side of the equator the container of water was placed. I don't remember if the water didn't swirl when placed on the equator.

The container was placed about 3(?) metres away from the equator for each test. The water had a small piece of straw in it and was allowed to become still before a plug was removed. At the time there did not appear to be any trickery involved, but as I am now a Skeptic I would like to see the test done again under controlled conditions before drawing any conclusions.

Without wanting to comment on the merit of Sydney Bockner's argument on the topic (Vol 17 No. 1), I would like to point out that there is no such thing as centrifugal force.

Centripetal force is the force that makes objects travel in a circle, and it acts radially inwards. There is no force acting radially outward (so called centrifugal).

If you take away the centripetal force, objects travel in a straight line tangential to point where the centripetal force stopped. They do not travel radially outwards, although they appear to because the tangent path takes the object further away from the centre of rotation.

**Rod Bennett  
Somerville VIC**

## Misquotes

The Chief Executive Officer of the Creation Science Foundation, Dr Carl Wieland, in a letter published in *The Australian* on April 10, referred once again to the committee, set up by themselves, which allegedly found that the CSF behaved ethically in all its doings.

The CSF is well-known for quoting the writings of scientists out of context. Since this seems to be acceptable to their own committee, one assumes that they can have no objection to being quoted

out of context themselves. The same letter concludes with the words "... we are nothing but rearranged pond scum."

It is nice to know that the CEO of the CSF now accepts evolution. But I wonder what his supporters might think of this?

**Ken Smith  
University of Queensland.**

## Koch I

Alan Towsey (17, 1) offers "two very sound logical reasons" why the perimeter of a Koch snowflake is not infinite. He is mistaken, as I shall attempt to explain:

Alan says that "if you select any point on a Koch curve and then follow the line round, you must come back to the point you started from, just as you would on the circumference of a circle." Well, consider what is happening on a circle when you "follow the line round". Any point you reach has to be a finite distance, measured along the line, from your starting point (otherwise you could not have reached it). Let's see what happens when we try to do this on a Koch curve:

Start with the original triangle and select one of its corners as your starting point. Then choose any (non-zero) finite distance and follow the line round for that distance. Note how far away you are (in a straight line) from your starting point.

Then add the first layer of smaller triangles. With the same starting point and the same distance as before, follow the line round. Once again, note how far away you are (in a straight line) from your starting point. You are a little closer to it than last time.

Repeat the above process indefinitely with successive layers of triangles. As you add each layer and follow the line round, notice what is happening to your straight-line distance from your starting point. It keeps getting smaller. When all the triangles have been added (i.e. when the curve you are dealing with is the Koch curve), that

straight-line distance has decreased to zero!!! In other words, travelling any finite distance along the Koch curve corresponds to travelling zero distance in a straight line. Two points which are zero distance apart, are in fact the same point. This means that you have travelled no distance at all along the curve! This is a contradiction. It follows that, on a Koch curve, it is impossible to travel any finite distance. That is, you cannot "follow the line round"!

I am not entirely clear what Alan's second argument is. In part, he is questioning the validity of "trying to substitute the infinity sign for the index  $n$ ", presumably because of the dangers involved in attempting to carry out arithmetic operations on infinite quantities. Fortunately, we don't need to do this. Mathematicians are well aware of those dangers and have devised a way around them called "taking limits". For an explanation of this procedure I refer Alan to any book on sequences and series, or any introductory book on calculus.

If the Koch curve is not infinite, then it must be finite, so how long is it? Could Alan please enlighten us as to its actual length?

**Chris Manning**  
Darling VIC.

## Koch II

Alan Towsey is wrong again (Vol 17, No1). It is not the case that generations of mathematicians have been wrong about the Koch curve. It is not the case that a closed curve must be of finite length, the Koch curve is a counter-example to that proposition. Alan may like to define a curve as being of finite length, but he won't convince very many people that this is a sensible way to define a curve. (Incidentally, how does Alan define the 'length' of a curve?)

His second point, that the length of the curve at any stage is finite, is true. But the Koch curve is the *limiting curve* formed by continu-

ing the construction indefinitely. We say that the length of the limiting curve is infinite because given any number, however large, at some stage of its construction, the length of the *constructed curve* will be greater than the given number. Alan may not like the idea of a limiting curve or of the definition of infinite length; but mathematicians are generally pretty happy with them and they have proved pretty useful.

Might I therefore encourage Alan to move to finite mathematics? There is plenty to be done in such well-behaved fields as number theory - a good, solid area, no infinities or imaginary bits there. The world is still waiting for the one page proof of Fermat's Last Theorem.

**Joe Goozeff**  
Randwick NSW

**Editor's Note: If there is anything left to say about Koch and his snowflake, we are happy to put the disputants in touch with each other. We would prefer to keep our *Letters* column as a Kock-free zone in future.**

## Pulp predictions

I was waiting in a checkout, my blood pressure rising as the elderly matron with the tinted hair argues the price of cat's milk, when my eye was caught by the headline "Psychic's Warning to Pauline: Chilling Prediction".

I am not sure if my Karma was having a bad day, or if my body rhythms were out of whack, or if I was stewing about the speeding ticket I had just received, but I parted with \$2.60 and became the proud possessor of New Idea dated May 24.

I hoped I might get some predictions about a person in the news so I could check them for veracity; the headline suggested a feature article plotting the future of Ms Hanson.

What I did get was:  
"Pauline Hanson

The controversial independent MP is in extreme danger, the psychic warns. She needs to be extremely watchful. Scott believes she may already be acquainted with the person who poses the serious threat to her - and who could be a woman." (p21)

The psychic is Mr Scott Russell Hill and most of the rest of the two pages are devoted to telling how well Mr Hill can predict the future, based on his past performances. He does trot out one or two sentence predictions for six (I presume) well-known people. I haven't heard of half of them, but that may be my age showing.

I assume Mr Jason Donovan is not in favour because the headline does not refer to him. Mr Hill's prediction is "His highs and lows will continue - only because he's letting them". From the little I know of Mr Donovan's career, he has shown these "ups and downs" and it is quite likely that they will continue.

As for Ms Hanson, anyone who has had any access to media outlets knows the passions she is generating and when emotions get aroused, violence often follows. With the attention she is getting she will meet lots of people and, dare I say it, with the extreme attitudes of some of the people she attracts, their propensity for paranoia and the changing allegiances that happen among extremists, I suppose there is an element of danger to her. And with 51 percent of the population being women, there is a good chance that it "could be" a woman who poses a threat.

Given the people involved I fail to see how these easily deduced guesses could ever be described as a "Chilling Prediction" and I do not think that Mr Hill has made his case. I find it hard to believe that this mind-blowing sort of stuff is used to attract readers and hold them.

**Jim Robinson**  
Long Valley VIC

## Cycles

I refer to John Wilson's letter in Vol16 No 4 regarding menstrual cycles and grandfather clocks.

As one lay-Skeptic to another, John, I suggest that these "phenomena" are the result of poor observation. And, surprisingly, the explanation as to what is really happening may be the same for both issues.

I should preface my explanation by saying that although I have no evidence one way or the other, I suspect that if two women live together long enough, or if two grandfather clocks are left together for long enough, their cycles *will* coincide eventually. I also suspect that neither menstrual cycles nor grandfather clocks will remain in synchronisation in the long term.

Let's start with the clocks. The period of oscillation of each pendulum will be very similar, but they will not be identical. This means that one is oscillating faster than the other. So, even if they are put together when they are out of synch, they will eventually be in synch. (The faster one catches up with the slower one.) And the smaller the difference between their periods, the longer they will appear to be in synch. Eventually however, they will become clearly out of synch again. Many Engineers will recognise this phenomenon as "beating".

The same logic may apply to menstrual cycles. While they are similar in length they will not be exactly the same length (ignoring any possible implications of the pill) and therefore the cycles will coincide if the women live together long enough. And they may coincide for some time due to the small difference in the cycle time. Two women on opposite sides of the planet comparing notes on a daily basis would notice the same effect. (Do pheromones travel along phone lines?)

It is easy to see that the coincidence of cycles or clocks would make an interesting topic of conversation when first detected. The

fact that the cycles no longer coincide after a time would not rate a mention and the myth would therefore propagate!

So, it may be true that mother's and daughter's menstrual cycles and grandfather clocks do coincide if left together long enough. But if, as I suspect, that is only part of the story, the "phenomena" can be explained without resorting to pheromones or the Earth's rotation!

**Rod Bennett.**  
Somerville VIC

## UFO encounter

Following Barry Williams's frissonic revelations in the Skeptic (16,3) I might relate my interesting experience of an intimidating UFO some years ago on a car journey from Melbourne to Adelaide.

I decided to do the trip overnight and was driving alone on the deserted road westward, the countryside very dark. It must have been around 2am when I became aware that a bright object was in travelling beside my car; a flattened elliptical object, about roof-height was "hovering" along about fifty feet away in the bush.

After a time of rational thought and being unable to identify the object, I began to vary my speed and swerve a little, however the object kept pace with my car, matching my manoeuvres and I became rather unsettled, not wishing to stop.

The time seemed to drag and I, now speeding with one eye on the road and the other in the bush, was getting quite nervous when I noticed another light far ahead. This rapidly increased in size and brightness, heading straight down the road towards me while the bright "sliver" beside me remained in formation with my car. Now I was worried, yet also fascinated that I might see a - what?

But a happy, and rational ending. The bright light racing at me was a train, and the mysterious

"sliver" turned out to be moonlight on the railway line, which ran parallel to the road and was raised on an embankment. Although I could not see any of these objects, in the instant that I associated the approaching light with a train, everything else fell into place.

Yes, we must "keep the fires of reasoning burning" however I often think what my tale would be if the train had not appeared so fortuitously. Perception doesn't mean fact!

**Warwick Kelly**  
Canberra ACT

### Editor's note:

Steve Roberts, the Keeper of the Skeptics Hotline, in Melbourne tells of a concerned caller who rang to report a similar incident. The caller said he had been followed by a UFO while driving at night from Cressy to Gelong and added "that stretch of road is well known for UFO sightings." As Steve observed, "It's not surprising, as the railway line runs parallel to the road along that stretch".

## Ozone

For some time now I have wondered about the "hole in the ozone layer"; is there convincing evidence that this phenomenon is of recent origin? Is it possible that this is a cyclic event and has been a feature of the atmosphere over the poles for a long time past? I don't dispute that man made chemicals may have aggravated the situation in modern times but it seems unwise to me to believe it is a wholly modern event. Do we have a meteorological expert who give me an answer. Best for the New Year; congratulations on your new appointment, I have no doubt the committee made a wise choice!!

**Jim Alexander**  
Broadbeach Waters QLD

## I Want to Know

### Ancient Hebrew Cosmography

*Investigator* magazine's "Anonymous" and I are currently engaged in a discussion concerning the correct interpretation of "the circle of the earth", a phrase that occurs in *Isaiah* 40:22. This discussion has resulted from the publication of my article "Creationism: Fact or Fallacy?", which appeared on page 10 of *Investigator* No 52

In my opinion the word "earth" in *Isaiah* 40:22 refers to the entire planet which the ancient Hebrews thought was a flat disc overarched by a solid hemispherical sky. This opinion was formed as a result of my original research.

I have since undertaken further research which seems to confirm my initial interpretation and have replied to Anonymous, and given the reasons why I am unable to agree with him.

I am writing to you because it is difficult for me to assess the validity of Anonymous' point of view - according to him the Bible does not indicate that the Earth is flat and that the "circle of the earth" refers to the circle of dry land a person sees at ground level. In other words, if I have understood him correctly, the circle of the earth refers to the circle of the horizon only, and not the entire world.

I am also concerned that both of us are falling into the trap of arguing over the meaning of words rather than discussing the facts. If this is the case, then what are the facts?

I would greatly appreciate any assistance members of Australian Skeptics can offer.

**Kirk Straughen**  
Clontarf QLD

## About our authors

**Stephen Bassor** is a member of Vic Skeptics and is an editorial consultant to the Skeptic on medical matters.

**Aaron Birch** is a student from Victoria who stumbled across on the Web Site.

**Kathy Butler** is a hospital geneticist and is both vice president of, and correspondent for, Vic Skeptics.

**Michael Creech** is a geologist and member of, and correspondent for, the Hunter Skeptics.

**John Crowley** is a member of the NSW Skeptics and is a quality control manager.

**Denis Dutton** is Senior Lecturer in the Philosophy of Art at the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand and editor of *Philosophy and Literature*

**Laurie Eddie** is a member of Skeptics SA committee and is a psychologist, which must be a help on that committee.

**Harry Edwards** is Harry Edwards. Need we say any more?

**Andrew Gibbs** is a neuropsychologist at the Royal Melbourne Hospital who is often called as an expert witness in repressed memory cases. His paper follows a talk he gave on the topic at the 1996 Convention.

**David Gower** is from Canada and thinks it's time the persistent existence of paranormal beliefs were declared a mere component of human consciousness. Unlike other Commonwealth David Gowers, he has never seen a cricket pitch (or a bee bat for that matter) and doubts that they can.

**Geoff Guilfoyle** is an irreverent (though never irrelevant) surveyor of human fallibility. As a Melburnian, he has plenty of practice.

**Cheryl Jones** writes about science for the *Canberra Times*. Despite this, she lives in Sydney.

**Colin Keay** is president of Hunter Skeptics, mine host of the 1997 Convention and the only contributor to have an asteroid named after him.

**Bernard Kellerman** is an accountant who lives in Sydney.

**Margaret Kittson** is a librarian and a member of the Darwin Skeptics.

**Bob Nixon** is a member of the Vic Skeptics committee who can't wait for the day when he can say "You won't have Nixon to kick around any more".

**Nigel Sinnott** is a writer and general observer of the world and its idiosyncrasies.

**Barry Williams**, despite newspaper items to the contrary, has never claimed to find an Ark. He thinks that court reporters deserve more money.

**Karl H. Wolf** is a retired Professor of Geology, researcher, explorationist, editor, author, science analyst, journalist, and consultant, with worldwide experience. He lives in Sydney.



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Graeme O'Neill, Science Editor for the Sunday Herald-Sun (Skeptical science: why it's so hard to get good science in the newspaper. A science writer laments) are available from the Victorian Branch. Send your cheque for \$5.00 (includes postage) to:

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