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Demonology for an Age of Science

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This article is abridged from a paper prepared for the "Day of Contrition-Revisited Convocation," convened by The Justice Committee, Salem, Massachusetts, January 13-14, 1997.

THIS TRICENTENNIAL OBSERVANCE of the Massachusetts Day of Contrition cannot fail to provoke sombre and resolute thoughts in everyone who sees a parallel between the judicial horrors of the 1690s and those of the 1980s and 90s. Although Salem has a positive resonance for those who love American literature, the town inevitably calls to mind the aura of demented legalism that made the execution of so-called witches appear to be the only available course of action in 1692. Salem's own Nathaniel Hawthorne, for one, could not escape that theme, and it helped colour his imagination and make him a lifelong brooder about irreparable wrongs.

In his years as a struggling young author, Hawthorne frequently dwelt upon his Puritan ancestors, the authorised persecutors of heretics, and specu-

lated about their less than noble motives. Was it simply religious fanaticism, he asked himself, or was it also prurience and sadism that impelled his great-great-grandfather, Major William Hathorne (1607-1681), to sentence a possibly psychotic Quaker woman to be stripped to the waist, bound to a cart, and whipped through the streets? "Feeling [the] symptoms [of sin] within the breast," Hawthorne wrote with scorn for manifest pretensions, "men

concealed it with fear and shame, and were only the more cruel to those unfortunates whose pestiferous sores were flagrant to the common eye" (Hawthorne, 1882-83, 2:287).

Any number of Hawthorne's sentences sound as if they had been plucked from the less technical, more Dostoevskian pronouncements of Freud. And the Viennese witch doctor, as Vladimir Nabokov maliciously but (as we will see) presciently called him, could only have applauded the idea that the judicial severity of John and William Hathorne must have taken its impetus from unconscious guilt, reaction formation, and projection. That was just what Hawthorne and Freud had most in common: a penchant for discounting altruistic motives and regarding consequential deeds as stemming from discomfort with the sordid con- ⇒ p3

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Editorial

THE OTHER NIGHT, after a particularly fine feed of nachos, my friend pulled out her numerology book and proceeded to do my chart. I'd done some things wrong in a past life, and there were a number of lessons I hadn't picked up on — but generally I was happy to learn my soul was a fairly evolved one.

Thankfully I was also well-suited to my husband of 12 years, David. We were different, yes, but strangely compatible. Whether or not he is my Soul Mate, I'm not sure, but he does cook a fine pasta dish. Now, my friend knows we are both paid-up and card carrying members of the Skeptics. I suspect it amuses her. We have even, fairly recently, lived together in the same house for about a year. Two skeptics and a woman who believes in reincarnation, numerology, homeopathy and a score of other things that go bump in the night. We have had some good discussions, some frustrating and neither have been converted to the other side. An almost-truce has been reached, and a certain amount of respect.

Another friend returned from Africa with the news that not only had she developed a nasty tropical disease, but she'd discovered she was a powerful channeller, who in past turns of the wheel had lived in Atlantis. I don't think she said she was Queen Cleopatra but by this time I couldn't hear over my teeth grinding.

As a skeptic, there are times when I feel like an endangered species. Last weekend another good friend went merrily off to a medium — with strict instructions that I wasn't allowed to sneer, laugh, comment or raise an eyebrow. It's a bit wearisome having to go over my position. I believe we are duty-bound to challenge these people, to ask the questions they prefer not to and keep at them. But I also feel that sometimes we have to walk gently. It's too easy to waddle in with bazookas and blitz the person into a corner — more entrenched than ever.

Toleration and respect for other people's beliefs are important — my friend who visited the medium told me she would have committed suicide 15 years ago if it wasn't for something a medium told her back then, and I don't doubt her. The generalised comments of a good cold reader may provide just the right focus to restore balance to a life gone off the rails, but casting a life-shaping experience in this light may not be appreciated. There will also be times, when someone demands "How do you explain that?" that it is necessary to acknowledge you don't have a ready answer. The irony is that when the proffered supernatural explanation is refused you are accused of closed-mindedness. I get very tired of that. Seizing on the first plausible-sounding explanation that comes along sounds to me like the very opposite of open-mindedness.

I've been a member of the NZ Skeptics for some ten years now and it's been very reassuring to know there are people out there with similar views. As skeptics we tend not to "do" much, we gather at our conference once a year but for most members the main contact with the society is through this magazine. Over the last decade it has developed markedly and while still modest, has an important role to play, educating us on such disparate subjects as alien abductions and Papua New Guinean penis sheaths. The last issue led with an article by Dr Bob Mann, in which he stated a case for Christianity as a basis for an ethical society. Going by the letters this has generated, (p16) not too many members agree with Mann's views, but the article fitted well with what I see as the magazine's main *raison d'être*, which is to stimulate thought and debate.

This is my first issue as editor, after nearly ten years in journalism writing for a range of publications. While several of these were for specialist readerships and assumed a degree of intelligence in their readers, at least one of the papers I wrote for had an unwritten rule to write for a reading age of twelve. The dumbing down of the print media and the five-second



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Please indicate publication and date of any clippings.

Next issue deadline: **10 May**

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Opinions expressed in the *New Zealand Skeptic* are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily represent the views of NZCSICOP or its officers.

TV news soundbite do nothing for the standards of critical thinking which the Skeptics seek to promote. Consequently, I look forward to being involved in a publication which does not consider its readers to be cranially challenged. This is your magazine. Be involved — write a letter, clip pieces from the newspapers. If you have an idea for an article, drop us a line. There aren't many of us around, let's keep in touch.

tents of one's own mind. And, of course, we cannot deny that they both may have been right.

The issue before us is a practical one: how to right a public wrong that keeps recurring in new forms. And it is precisely the problem of recurrence that will occupy me here. If we are to take an effective stand not only against the current madness but against future versions of it as well, analytic understanding — but not necessarily psychoanalytic understanding — of episodes like the 1692 witch hunt is imperative. Indeed, I want to suggest that Freud's and Hawthorne's emphasis on twisted personalities is exactly what we least need, because it obscures factors that we can satisfactorily grasp and control. All we need is the right set of precautions, so that when a certain style of volatile illogic makes a renewed appearance, we can say, "No; here is the mistake you're making, and we won't allow you to break up families and send people to prison on such a faulty basis."

In the wonderful new film *The Crucible*, none other than John Hathorne himself makes an appearance at one of those riveting, anguished moments when the whole hoax of demonic possession seems ready to unravel. Young Mary Warren has decided to confess that the bewitched girls have been faking it. Very well, then, says Hathorne, let's see you fall into a fit here and now. Mary tries and tries, but can't manage to swoon—and so Hathorne and the other examiners are reinforced in their belief that demons have taken charge of Salem, and the awful farce continues.

Trance States

Any private fantasies that Hathorne may be entertaining about Mary Warren are making no difference to the outcome. What matters is that Hathorne lacks familiarity with the psychology of trance states, which can be easily induced in suggestible people by social contagion but which are recalcitrant to the kind of tense effort Mary is making here. Let us be fair to the Puritan judges: surely they wouldn't have gone forward with their persecution if they had been able to realise that nothing in the events engulfing them was mysterious enough to call for a transcendent explanation.

The question, however, is whether even today we have a sufficient understanding of popular delusions to reach agreement about the cognitive mistakes that allow them to flourish. Precisely because our culture is now predominantly secular and scientific, our latest witch hunts are couched in professional idioms that tend to lull our skepticism—the idioms, namely, of therapeutic concern, of deterministic depth-psychological forces, of social-scientific

objectivity, and even of data-laden laboratory research.

In order to become sufficiently alert, it is not enough that we recognise the outlandishness of certain kinds of claims, such as Mom and Dad's ritual barbecuing of babies on the grill. When patently ridiculous charges are made against parents or caregivers accused of sexual crimes, those charges are typically peeled away by shrewd prosecutors so that they can't devalue the "evidence" for other and more plausible-looking crimes by the same defendant. If we can't demonstrate the fallacies riddling all testimony that has been contaminated by the illegitimate way in which reputed memories were formed, we will go on allowing innocent people to be railroaded into prison.

Two Kinds of Rashness

Clarity on this point may be impeded by the fact that we are here to consider two kinds of rashness whose kinship is not immediately obvious. Most closely allied to the events of 1692 are the Little Rascals- or Wenatchee-style "sex ring" frenzies, with their uncontrolled propagation of rumour and their ever-widening net of accused parties. Rather different in appearance are the accusations made by one adult against another based on "recall" of childhood memories that were supposedly repressed or dissociated until they emerged in therapy.

I will be giving most of my attention to this second category of dubious charges, not because they are more destructive — far from it! — but because it is harder to reach consensus about the reforms they call for. We can all agree that coercive and unvideotaped in-

terrogation of children must stop. But when it comes to memory therapy, does the problem lie with ill-trained and impetuous practitioners, or, as I suspect, is the most "scientific" training in this art — such as we find, for example, in Kenneth S. Pope's and Laura S. Brown's high-toned *Recovered Memories of Abuse* (1996) — scarcely better than the worst?

We could say that both kinds of cases batten on the fallibility of memory, but in fact, there is only a distant resemblance between so-called recovered memory twenty years after the fact and a child's coerced consent to insinuations about what happened in the daycare centre or church basement weeks before. We must look to theoretical understanding of the real common denominator here — namely, suggestion, or the unremarked flow of ideas, feelings, or "recollections" from a dominant to a subordinate party, so the latter has the impression of having arrived at those ideas, feelings, or recollections independently.

Right away I want to head off a likely misapprehension. It is wrong to think of suggestion as a phenomenon that operates

completely apart from the consent of the influenced person. There is always a proffered benefit for going along with the suggester's notion. We cannot always establish a clear border between an effect of suggestion and an outright dissimulation. Even a faked panic attack can become a real one in the acting, and a falsehood can acquire the strength of a conviction once the consequences of being found out have escalated.

Agents of Suggestion

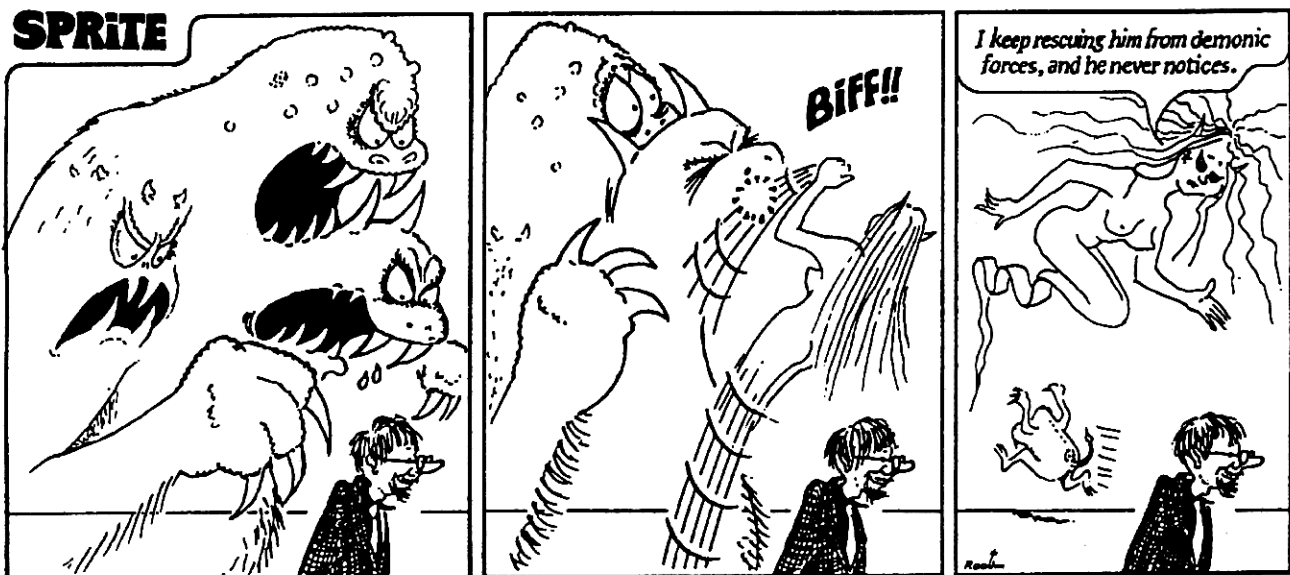
As in *The Crucible*, the whole community, or that part of it that fixes rewards and penalties, can become an agent of suggestion, transmitting the message that persistence in an already consequential pretence is *de rigueur*; and those who get the message can be self-aware to a degree yet increasingly "sincere" as their options narrow and their expected role is delineated more urgently.

That pattern is as common today as it was in 1692. Thus a child, learning from an interrogator that freedom from more grilling will be forthcoming only when certain alleged incidents are agreed to, may be conscious of fibbing when he or she first assents to the interro-

gator's demand; but soon thereafter the stakes will be raised, and the child's reality-testing criteria for recalling what did or didn't happen will be an early casualty (Ceci & Bruck, 1995).

The same confusion doomed Paul Ingram in Olympia, Washington, when he was assured by fellow sheriffs that the relevant memories of his crimes against his daughter would come flooding back as soon as he signed a confession (Wright, 1994). And of course there is the far more usual case of the young adult whose therapist has convinced her that surcease from her worsening depression, disorientation, nightmares, and hallucinations will come only after she has recalled the identity of the "perpetrator" ultimately responsible for them. That promise of relief is rarely fulfilled, but meanwhile, the patient gets sucked into a vortex of paranoid survivorhood, and further "memories" are sure to follow.

Whether it was Freud or Janet who bequeathed us our psychodynamic version of haunted consciousness is debatable. The distance separating psychoanalysis from recovered memory therapy has recently begun to narrow. Although



Donald Rooum, *Skeptic* (UK)

some Freudians deny it, it's no longer a secret that American psychoanalysis harbors a thriving branch of recovered memory practice, differing in no essential respect from Freud's quest for "seductions" in the mid-1890s.

Nor is this the first such reversion in psychoanalytic history. It happened before when Sandor Ferenczi decided around 1930 that Freud had been right the first time about his patients' childhood abuse (Masson, 1992; Harris & Aron, 1993). As both Ferenczi and the new recovered-memory Freudians could attest, to move from "psychoanalysis proper" back to the seduction theory requires only a minor adjustment of perspective—the same adjustment Freud made in the opposite direction when he decided his patients were repressing their sexual fantasies rather than their memories of violation.

Repression Revisited

Thus contemporary recovered memory therapy draws upon tenets Freud promulgated both before and after 1897, using the name "psychoanalysis" for both states of his discipline. Those tenets are that repression is the normal human response to trauma; that experiences in infancy produce long-term memories that can be accurately retrieved decades later; that adult psychological difficulties can be reliably ascribed to certain forgotten events...; that sexual traumas are incomparably more susceptible to repression and the formation of neurosis than any other kind; that symptoms are themselves "memories" that can yield up the story of their origin; that dream interpretation, too, can disclose the repressed past; that memory retrieval is necessary for symptom removal; and that

Free to Good Home

The NZ Skeptic recently received the following missive:

I have copies of two theses on skeptical topics. An MA on *Fate, Fortune and Flying Saucers* by Rowan Taylor, Canterbury 1983 and an MA on *The Resurgence of Creationism and its Implications for New Zealand* by Margaret Scott, 1987. Both of these works are useful in establishing a baseline of belief and activity in New Zealand and I have no further use for them. Do you know of anyone who might like them?

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psychotherapists can confidently trace their clinical findings to the patient's unconscious without allowing for the contaminating influence of their own diagnostic system, imparted directly or through suggestion.

Missed Opportunities

Historians now understand that the Freudian idea of the repressed unconscious arose from a series of missed opportunities to take proper note of suggestion. First there was Jean-Martin Charcot's mistaken inference that his hypnotized patients, when they suffered temporary paralyses of their limbs, were showing their underlying medical conditions rather than the effects of coaching and hypnosis itself. Freud's witnessing of those specious demonstrations in 1885-86, and his acceptance of the dubious idea that Charcot's resident "hysterics" (more aptly, his inadvertently trained actresses) retained no posthypnotic awareness of the "traumas" that had allegedly triggered their paralyses (Borch-Jacobsen, 1997), became the unshakeable core of his faith in the mind's capacity to will itself into ignorance of its own traumatic past.

Second, Freud extended the applicability of Charcot's faulty insight by adopting Hippolyte

Bernheim's use of posthypnotic suggestion in psychotherapy while overriding Bernheim's salutary insistence on the inutility of hypnosis as a biographical investigative aid.

Thirdly, Freud regarded Breuer's Anna O. (Bertha Pappenheim) as someone whose hysterical symptoms had been banished through memory retrieval. On the contrary, we now understand Pappenheim's "cure" as yet another case of hypnotic suggestion and auto-suggestion—a case in which the disease itself was largely an artifact of the proffered treatment and the patient's own hypochondriacal fertility of imagination.

Before long Freud dispensed with hypnosis as an overt clinical tool. But the outlines of his theory of mind were largely settled by this time, and suggestion-based "clinical validations" of his patients' reconstructed childhood vicissitudes continued. Furthermore, his subsequently developed doctrine of transference—perhaps the one aspect of his system still endorsed in name by all schools of psychoanalysis—functioned effectively to smooth the path for suggestion. When patients showed ingratiating or hostile responses to Freud's overbearing manner and wild construc-

tions, transference allowed him to maintain that he was just acting as a neutral screen for the projection of early oedipal conflicts.

His assertion that he was not the real object of the patient's feelings served at once to "prove" the hardihood of early neurotic patterns and the need for more therapy; to make the patient doubt her very capacity to say what she meant; and to delegitimize any efforts to criticize Freud himself or to redress the drastic inequality between the two parties.

Witch Hunter as Analyst

It is precisely a theoretical kinship, a shared conception of mental self-division, that links our contemporary hunt for "perpetrators" both to Freud's nineteenth-century effort and to the campaign against bewitchment in 1692. On this point I can summon an impressive witness, Freud himself. It is a little-known but significant fact that Freud was an avid student of witchcraft and its detection. In 1897 he bought a copy of the *Malleus Maleficarum* [*Hammer of Witches*], the fifteenth-century persecution manual and was an admirer of Johann Weyer, the sixteenth-century Dutch author of *De Praestigiis Daemonum et Incantationibus ac Veneficiis* [*On the Deceptions of Demons and the Incantations of Poisoners*], a book credited with having slowly taught civil and religious authorities to disbelieve in witchcraft.

Freud's regard for Weyer appears to comport well with his famous secular rationalism, but nothing is simple when dealing with the founder of psychoanalysis. Like Weyer, Freud was intrigued that a number of accused witches came to admit they were witches.

In Weyer's sensible judgment, torture was causing some to hallucinate and others to agree to charges they knew to be false. The crafty Freud begged to differ. During his "seduction theory" period he hypothesized the "witches" were victims of sexual abuse whose repressed unconscious retained a sense of devilish goings-on. Once he had decided his patients hadn't been raped in childhood, he changed his mind about the witches as well. Now their references to demons stood not for molesters but for "bad and reprehensible wishes, derivatives of instinctual impulses that have been repudiated and repressed" (Freud, 1953-1974, 19: 72).

These seemingly opposite views on Freud's part are alike in one chilling and critically important respect: they take no account of the circumstances in which confessions were exacted. As Freud told the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society in 1909, speaking about visions of flying through the air and consorting sexually with the Devil, "We find unmistakably infantile elements in those fantasies that were not created under torture but merely squeezed out by it" (Vienna Psychoanalytic Society, 1967, II: 123).

Which is to say, "witches" were guilty, not of sorcery but of lewd and twisted thoughts rattling about in their heads. Confessions of witchcraft, properly interpreted, were just a matter of getting in touch with the repressed. And Freud didn't shrink from the further implication that the torturing inquisitors were psychoanalysts before their time, employing stern measures to tease the unconscious into surrendering its shameful contents. As he wrote

to Wilhelm Fliess in 1897, he now understand "the harsh therapy of the witches' judges" (Freud, 1985, p. 227; emphasis added). That statement, discounting the influence of the rack and the thumbscrew on the ravings and lies they elicited, marked a gruesome ne plus ultra of Freud's lifelong indifference to the problem of suggestion.

The reason that Freud couldn't withhold a measure of professional recognition from the witchcraft inquisitors is that he himself, in the mid-1890s, was prodding his patients into concocting trance "scenes," not of witchcraft but of forced sexual initiations purporting to have set in motion the workings of neurosis. Consider the following passage from a letter; the patient is Emma Eckstein, whose nose Fliess surgically disfigured with Freud's connivance two years earlier.

"Imagine," writes Freud, "I obtained a scene about the circumcision of a girl. The cutting off of a piece of the labium minor (which is even shorter today), sucking up the blood, after which the child was given a piece of the skin to eat" (Freud, 1985, p. 227).

Lunatic Fringe

Do we not find ourselves at the lunatic fringe of "Satanic ritual abuse" here? Thanks to his Lamarckian assumptions about the hereditary transmission of memory traces, Freud suspected the fantasies he was extracting from Eckstein pointed to the existence of dark cults and sordid practices near the dawn of civilization. "I am beginning to grasp an idea," he wrote in the same letter: "it is as though in the perversions, of which hysteria is the negative, we have before us a remnant of a primeval sexual cult, which

once was—perhaps still is—a religion in the Semitic East (Moloch, Astarte). . . . I dream, therefore, of a primeval devil religion with rites that are carried on secretly . . .” (Freud, 1985, p. 227). It is at this moment Freud expresses solidarity with the witch interrogators. They may have been wrong about their victims’ connection to diabolical cults just then, he seems to say, but they were only off by a few thousand years. Here is Freud approximating the role of Hawthorne’s zaniest monomaniac, Ethan Brand.

Of course, no social harm can come from attempts to peer into pre-antiquity on the basis of one’s patients’ imagery; it is just gnostic folly pure and simple. But plenty of harm attached to Freud’s taking the “scenes” as proof of childhood sexual abuse. A representative passage from the letters to Fliess shows how callously he went about the business of bullying a patient and setting her against her astonished father:

When I thrust the explanation at her, she was at first won over; then she commit-

ted the folly of questioning the old man himself, who at the very first intimation exclaimed indignantly, “Are you implying that I was the one?” and swore a holy oath to his innocence.

She is now in the throes of the most vehement resistance, claims to believe him, but attests to her identification with him by having become dishonest and swearing false oaths. I have threatened to send her away and in the process convinced myself that she has already

Ten Years of Skepticism

Britain’s The Skeptic magazine celebrated its tenth anniversary with a Top-Ten survey of paranormal phenomena of the decade.

In reverse order:

10. *Most irrelevant use of astrology:* Sky Sports hiring Mystic Meg during the semi-finals and finals of the 1996 US Open Tennis Championships to tell us about the players what anyone who had been watching the previous day’s coverage would have known.

9. *Most useful lesson the Duchess of York could learn from Hillary Clinton:* make sure your psychic counsellors are dead. (Late in 1996, the Duchess’s psychic published a confide-and-tell book about their relationship; Hillary Clinton revealed early in the year that she was in the habit of calling up the spirit of Eleanor Roosevelt when she wanted advice.)

8. *New British pseudoscience most likely to endure:* cereology, the study of crop circles. Admissions by hoaxers have not deflected the UFOlogists, dowsers, healers, and weather cranks from continuing to believe that the universe is trying to tell us something.

7. *Most wasted opportunity for psychics to get rich quick:* magician and paranormal investigator James Randi’s \$1 million prize on offer to anyone who can demonstrate paranormal powers under proper observing conditions.

6. *Government programme that has done the most to undermine public understanding of statistics:* the National Lottery.

5. *Most inventive Creationist explanation of why the Earth appears to be billions of years old, instead of the 6,000 years they believe the Bible states:* the speed of light is slowing down.

4. *Most unproductive use of the Internet:* Uri Geller’s \$1 million challenge to Internet users to bend the spoon in the transparent safe in his home. Users logged on to Geller’s Web site to watch the spoon via a digital camera. If it bent, they got to do it all over again by telephone and then in person in front of Geller and a representative of his insurance company. Prediction: the primary beneficiaries of this exercise will have been the phone companies and Geller’s insurance company.

3. *Most unwanted US import:* belief in alien abductions.

2. *Most unwilling control group:* Transcendental Meditation, whose members claim to lower the crime rate in areas where they have established permanent settlements. Although the TMers have been established in Iowa for many years, the safest place to live in America, (according to CNN) is Amherst, New York, home of the Committee for Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP), the world’s largest and oldest skeptical organisation.

1. *Resurrection, the proof:* the reappearance of belief in angels.

gained a good deal of certainty which she is reluctant to acknowledge.

She has never felt as well as on the day when I made the disclosure to her. In order to facilitate the work, I am hoping she will feel miserable again.

(Freud, 1985, pp. 220-221)

If Freud had enjoyed a wider and more sympathetic audience in the 1890s, it seems that he could have ended the decade by writing not *The Interpretation of Dreams* but a macho version of *The Courage to Heal*.

Molesters' Alibi

The founding gesture of "psychoanalysis proper" was a step back from wild forensic efforts toward inconsequentiality; no one could be held criminally accountable for the fact that neurotics were suffering from their own fantasies. In its social effects, however, Freud's eventual psychology was far from inconsequential. As the feminists who founded our recovered memory movement correctly alleged, classical psychoanalysis gave child molesters an alibi by ascribing seductive designs to small children themselves and by dismissing accounts of always remembered rape as mere "screen memories" defending against those oedipal wishes (Simon, 1992). We are paying dearly, today, for the understandable anger generated by such quackery.

Should we at least be grateful that psychoanalytic theory as it is usually understood produces more introspection than litigation? Obviously not, since that theory lends itself so readily to new therapeutic fads purporting to find evidence of past crimes in "the repressed." Three times thus far, from

Freud's "seduction" phase through Ferenczi's own to our present crisis, we have seen outbreaks of inquisitorial mania based on the same premises about the hidden unconscious mind and its preeminently sexual concerns; and the last of these eruptions has become what the others might well have been, a mass delusion.

If we persist in regarding classical psychoanalysis and its tamer offshoots as "science," while condemning seduction theories as perversions of an otherwise well-founded doctrine, then we can count on the emergence of new recovered memory movements ad infinitum.

Freud's Final Word

Let us give the final word on this topic to Freud himself. In his 1893 obituary of Charcot, Freud expressed gratitude to his early master for having put him onto the "splitting of consciousness," whereby a subject's body acts out what he can't consciously remember. Freud reminds us this principle—the very heart of his own hermeneutic for the remainder of his career—took its precedent from an earlier time: "by pronouncing possession by a demon to be the cause of hysterical phenomena, the Middle Ages in fact chose this solution; it would only have been a matter of exchanging the religious terminology of that dark and superstitious age for the scientific language of today" (Freud, 1953-74: 3: 20). Or, as he put it thirty years later, "The demonological theory of those dark times has won in the end against all the somatic views of the period of 'exact' science" (Freud, 1953-1974, 19:72). Freud was quite right for once. He had taken us all back to a time of unchecked irrational-

ism; and the demons he unleashed are up to their old mischief once again.

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Researcher looks at alien tales for answer

□ Tall tales. *Evening Post* 31 Dec 96
UFO author Michael Craft has been searching the sky for answers to things alien.

SOME watch the skies for strange lights and alien ships. Michael Craft has been watching the watchers.

His new book, *Alien Impact*, tells their wild tales: UFO abductions, subterranean alien bases, mutilated cattle, government conspiracies, crop circles, magic fairies. The book is a primer of UFO tales that asks the age-old question: What are people seeing in the sky?

Reader's expecting an answer will be disappointed because Craft doesn't pretend to know. But after years of research and travel, he rounds up some unusual suspects. Yes, he says, there could be alien visitors out there. But he also explores the possibility of prankster spirits, electromagnetic phenomenon, hoaxes and higher consciousness.

Craft wants to put the UFO phenomenon in context by giving a wide sample of claims, and then allowing readers to consider the causes. Sceptics need not pick up the book; Craft's intention is not to debunk the many theories he presents.

"I definitely feel that this is not going away. Every day it's getting bigger," Craft said from his home in Ojai, California. "We need to find some way to cope with it, and denial is not an effective way of coping with anything, and blind belief is not effective either."

Alien tales have been around as long as recorded history, with ancient cultures referring to heavenly visitors as gods. In medieval times, strange lights in the skies were chalked up to evil spirits.

The first mention of the now-common term "flying saucer" dates to a 1947 Associated Press dispatch out of Pendleton, Oregon, about a strange object streaking through the afternoon sky, according to Craft's research. Since that time there's been an explosion of alleged alien encounters. Craft is intrigued by their breadth - and their similarities.

Time and again alien visitors are described as gray with big eyes. Witnesses often describe strange ammonia smells accompanying the sighting, with a resultant loss of time afterward.

For those witnesses abducted by aliens - and supermarket tabloids attest this happens often - they too report similar experiences: psychic messages and

fumbling sorts of bodily examinations, many of which focus on reproductive organs.

Sound crazy? Maybe, Craft says, but he says he can "hear some wild stories ... completely unbelievable ... and at the same time you hear these commonalities."

Craft, 38, spent years researching his book.

The book is a tapestry of Crafts' inner travels along with exhaustive document research and interviews. In *Alien Impact*, Craft explores:

□ Small towns in the English countryside, where farmers are mystified by the exacting circular patterns in their grain crops.

□ A remote Ohio farm, where a family was terrorised by a group of red-eyed, hairy giants.

□ Ancient claims of spirits, fairies and mermaids.

□ Bolivia, where a farmer claimed he had sex with a barking red-headed alien because the far-flung race needed stock from a "good stallion".

□ Research that suggests early civilisations were given technical know-how by aliens.

□ A conference of UFOlogists who reveal details of the Government's secret time control experiments and a treaty between FDR and the aliens.

The conceivable and ridiculous are infused throughout *Alien Impact*. Part of the reason is to give a non-judgmental picture. But Craft believes it's also impossible to divorce UFOs from other unexplained phenomena.

"You cannot study ghosts, the UFO field, or cults or any of these things without connecting to all these other fields," he said. "It's almost like there's all these different camps out there exploring the same thing with a different language."

In other words, maybe the aliens aren't from out there after all. Craft explores the possibility of strange lights being Earth-based, maybe electromagnetic anomalies or signals from the spirit world. He said modern reports of alien encounters often bear a striking similarity to traditional accounts of fairies, goblins and elves, even down to appearance, speech and mode of travel.

Maybe what's lacking, Craft says, is a belief system that takes that into account and tries to make sense of it.

He wants his book to be a start. "I do believe that there is some sort of phenomenon that we can't explain with our science, and it is not just psychological." - AP

Penis claim leads to beating

Click Press 25 Jan '97

KUMASI, GHANA - An angry mob beat up a man who falsely accused a stranger of using magic to make his penis disappear, police sources said yesterday.

Over the last 10 days 11 people have been killed by angry crowds convinced the victims of their anger had the power to shrivel penises and breasts simply by touching their "victims".

No confirmed cases of organ reduction have been reported, and more than a

dozen people have been arrested for making false accusations that led to lynchings.

In the Kumasi episode, a crowd forcibly stripped unemployed Moro Anaba, 31, after he accused a man of making his penis shrivel by elbowing him.

On discovering his organ to be intact, the crowd began to beat Mr Anaba, who was eventually rescued and taken to a police station to be prosecuted. -AFP

◆ OFFBEAT

German police said today they had arrested a man posing as a spiritual medium who was paid 15,000 marks (\$NZ14,600) by a woman to pay off gambling debts he said her dead husband had contracted in heaven. The man also demanded 100,000 marks on behalf of her husband for the purchase of a plot of land in heaven. *WILKARO TIMES* 1 FEB 97

Healers' claims attract cure

Bangladeshis with problems from obesity to premature ejaculation are being lured by a range of cures that doctors dismiss as nonsense, writes ANIS AHMED, in Dhaka.

No erection? Premature ejaculation? Nothing to worry about ... we can help, with a 100 per cent guarantee," a healer promises in one of hundreds of Bangladeshi newspaper advertisements.

Many advertisements also guarantee fast results for all types of health problems. "A 70-year-old man will feel young again within days and will feel like a stallion. His wife will be more than happy ..." says another.

Cures cover diseases from cancer to AIDS, diabetes to piles. Costs are low, and claimed success rates high. The healers print testimonials from former patients happy with the results, along with their photographs.

One Dhaka-based firm offering a cure for obesity claims its clients can slim down to a "fine-tuned body" without any physical exercise or even without changing diet.

"Why worry? Eat, drink and be merry. Leave the rest to us," one firm's official said. He says patients come from abroad, especially India, where thousands of Bangladeshis also head for treatment every month. "Our people go to India because they are still ignorant of the tremendous power of our medicine and treatment."

Other healers include one who can "guide your future with direction received through dreams". Some use the power of stones.

"What do you want? I can give you wealth, a happy soul, financial prosperity, great success and the solution to any problem you may have," says healer Dewan Golam Sarwar.

Healer Sufia Begum promises in her advertisement in "Ittefaq" newspaper: "My



A streetside healer in Dhaka explains the power of his herbal medicine.

challenge ... healing or cure is available through believing only." She says she cures the "hardest of problems, including pains from broken love, simply by the power of meditation".

At shops called dawakhana, practitioners of herbal medicine treat patients who are mostly unable to afford hospital care.

Patients often undergo an initial psychological session, where they are told by hakims

(physicians) that the main healer is "We just deliver the cures offered by creator," one hakim said.

"I have a cooling feeling inside me, good and a little relieved too," a patient dawakhana said after his session.

The medicines are cheap and easy to though some taste bad, a patient said. reliable are they? Conventional doctors most are ineffective, apart from some

Sorcerers ate 35 people

WAIRAKO TIMES 5 FEB 97

ABIDJAN — Three sorcerers in Ivory Coast had been jailed for three years after they admitted eating 35 people they had first transformed into edible rodents, the Abidjan press reported.

Yaoua Agninoua, her younger sister Kossia Mize and Koffi Mouroufie, a customary chief, told a tribunal in Bondoukou 340km north-

east of Abidjan they had transformed Marthe Yaoua into a grasscutter, a large rodent much appreciated by gourmets here, as she lay in her hospital bed. They then cooked her in a pot and ate her, according to Soir Info. The tribunal said they were jailed because sorcery was an offence.

— AFP

Economics by the stars

THE COROMANDEL-BASED Anti Economist League has welcomed news reports that at least four banks in London use "astro-economists" to predict prices according to planetary cycles. "Since the scientific basis for astrology is sounder than that used for economics, this advance should result in some improvements in economic forecasts," the league's latest newsletter says.



Vitamin supplements can harm, report says

An Australian public health report says well-known antioxidants, mineral and vitamin food supplements have not been proved to be beneficial, and can be harmful.

State director of public health Dr Chris Brook said the study showed there was no credible evidence for claims that pills can compensate for poor diet or an unhealthy lifestyle.

Five of the most commonly promoted supplements — beta carotene, vitamin C, vitamin E, selenium and coenzyme Q10 — were studied by pharmacologist Dr Ross Bury for the human services department's public health division.

He said in his report that for years Australians had been bombarded with advertising saying supplements protect against illness, improve health and increase longevity.

But there was no convincing evidence that any single antioxidant, or combination antioxidant supplement was effective in treating or preventing cancer, heart disease, cataracts or other serious illnesses, he said.

"Studies with supplements have not provided clear indication of benefit and some detrimental effects have been observed when given in amounts in excess of normal dietary intake," Dr Bury said. Increased mortality due to lung cancer, coronary heart disease

and stroke associated with beta carotene supplements emphasised the chance that antioxidant supplements might be harmful, he said.

There had been a tendency towards increased mortality among people taking vitamin E supplements, particularly in high doses, because they believed the promotion of vitamin E was reducing the incidence of heart attack, Dr Bury said.

"Recognition of links between vitamin C and prevention of serious diseases should be restricted to consumption of generous amounts of fruit and vegetables with this vitamin."

He said studies of links between selenium levels and cancer or cardiovascular disorders had produced inconsistent findings.

There was also little convincing evidence to support therapeutic claims for coenzyme

Q10. Dr Bury said it was necessary to continue research into antioxidants, to clarify the situation for consumers.

"In the meantime, the media and industry should report responsibly and not leap onto every new medical finding as if it were the last word on the matter," Dr Bury said.

He called for a review of regulations, which did not require proof of effectiveness of some products, including most antioxidant supplements. —AAP

There is no credible clinical evidence for claims that a pill can compensate for poor diet or an unhealthy lifestyle.

lah. medicines. "Homeopathy is the only reliable alternative to allopathy (orthodox medicine)," Dr Mamoon Ahmed said. "Herbal medicines sometimes work, only if the disease can be properly diagnosed. But it's not possible without advanced scientific research."

Doctors dismissed healers who lecture by megaphone, and offer money-back guarantees if the medicines do not work. "They simply cheat people," one said. —Reuter

Weight-loss products under scrutiny

PRESS 3 MAR 97

WELLINGTON — The Commerce Commission is cracking down on advertisements for weight-loss products that promise dramatic results without hard work.

It has warned consumers that if a product that promises to help them lose weight seems too good to be true, then it probably is.

"Claims that all you need to do to lose weight is to buy this product and, if you don't get instant results, then buy more of it are almost certainly too good to be true," said the commission's fair trading manager Rachel Leamy.

She issued a stern warning that the commission would consider prosecuting anyone guilty of promising weight loss that their product could not deliver.

Retailers, pharmacies, and health food shops selling such products also risked prosecution, Ms Leamy said yesterday.

One of the biggest concerns was about products promising people they would lose

weight without needing to exercise or change their diet. "Weight loss is a highly emotive issue — many people are desperate to lose weight — and false or misleading promotions can easily take advantage of that."

Weight loss advertisements checked by the commission had revealed some for products endorsed by people who called themselves doctors, but had no medical qualifications and others that made claims supported by research at institutions that did not exist.

The commission was investigating advertisements for several products and would take action if the Fair Trading Act had been breached.

Warnings, settlements, or court action could result.

Weight-loss product promoters would get most attention, but the commission would also talk to pharmacists and health shops, explaining the act applied to them. —NZPA

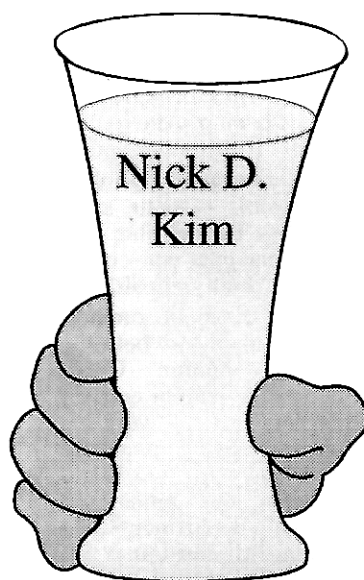
Home Water Treatment and the Sceptical Consumer

HOME WATER TREATMENT SYSTEMS are often promoted on the basis of the purported health (rather than aesthetic) benefits of using them. This is particularly in relation to urban drinking water given the full treatment — coagulation, sedimentation, filtration and disinfection — where such claims usually constitute misleading advertising. In this review I will focus on a number of misconceptions about the health benefits of water treatment, examining each assertion in its wider context. The ensuing discussion applies less to rural water supplies, where valid reasons often exist for use of treatments — eg removing nitrate or protecting against giardia.

Recently it has been emphasised that water purification systems require a degree of periodic maintenance which the modern householder is not very good at delivering. Over time, poorly maintained systems can become health hazards in their own right, as bacteria start to flourish, and contaminants previously retained may leach back into the water. This issue has already been exposed to the full glare of the New Zealand media's 40-watt bulb, and I will side-step it by assuming (in what follows) that the treatment systems involved always function according to ideal specifications.

Fallacy No. 1: Filtered water is Pure

There is a range of home water-purification systems



available on the market, each good at a particular job (eg, filters based on activated carbon are good at removing small organic compounds but poor at removing heavy metals; by contrast, cation exchange resins will remove metals, but allow most organic compounds to pass through). In addition, no system could be regarded as completely efficient, even at jobs it does well. Therefore, the assertion that use of a given system will result in water being transformed from "dirty" to "clean" is just another of those oversimplifications which dwell in ad-world.

In a cosmos without hyperbole, a typical advertising slogan would read more like this:

*"Buy the ZX500 water-filter.
It makes dirty water somewhat less dirty."*

Cleaner water is required at a number of institutions around New Zealand, for applications as diverse as culturing bacteria and undertaking trace-level chemical analyses. The capital outlay required for a single system which delivers reasonably "clean" water (ie. for research)

is sufficient to buy 30-40 typical home water treatment systems.

Another point is even the "cleanest" natural systems can be found to contain most of the elements in the Periodic Table, given sufficiently sensitive analytical instrumentation.

Fallacy No. 2: Drinking Water Should be Pure

I was amused to find an advert for home water filters which stated:

"Our bodies are made up of some 65 per cent water, so the water we drink needs to be pure and free of chemicals."

Apart from the obvious point that water is a chemical, critical readers will notice the assertion made in the second half of the sentence doesn't actually follow from the opening statement. For instance, using similar abstruse reasoning techniques, it could be argued because our bodies are about 18% carbon, all the food we eat should be cooked until thoroughly black. Toast should only be eaten after flames have been seen to emerge from the toaster, and steaks grilled until they resemble small lumps of coal.

In reality, even the "major" nutrient constituents of normal drinking water (sodium, calcium, potassium, and magnesium) are present at concentrations many times lower than levels required by our bodies.

Swallowing normal drinking water already acts in the direction of diluting what's already there, and your body adjusts the amounts of the major ions excreted to maintain a pre-set homeostatic balance.

However, if a person drinks enough water (8-9 litres) within a short-enough period, homeostatic mechanisms can be overcome, and dilution can occur to such an extent that cells all over the body simultaneously experience osmotic shock, resulting in death. The toxic dose of pure water is actually *lower* than the toxic dose of normal drinking water, because pure water leads to more effective dilution.

Fallacy No. 3: Aluminium in Drinking Water will give you Alzheimer's Disease

Aluminium does show a correlation with Alzheimer's disease, just as the reduction in the number of storks sighted in Copenhagen over the years correlates with the declining birth-rate; yet neither are enough evidence to ascribe cause. However, I can leave aside the question of whether or not aluminium is implicated in the pathogenesis of Alzheimer's disease, because it's not actually relevant to the issue of water treatment.

Assume for the sake of argument that aluminium *is* involved.

If you drink 2.5 litres of water a day, your daily intake of aluminium from drinking water (city supply) will be about 68 millionths of a gram. This corresponds to one gram swallowed in 40 years of hard drinking, and represents only 0.07-0.7% of your daily intake from food sources (typically 10-100 thousandths of a gram

per day). Thus, even if you have a perfect filter which removes all the aluminium from your drinking water, you are still only affecting the last 1% of your daily intake. It is stretching things a little to suggest it just happens to be this final 1% which is critical in causing a person to develop Alzheimer's disease.

Fallacy No. 4: Filtering heavy metals from drinking water will significantly reduce daily intakes

The error in this idea once again becomes obvious when exposure via drinking water is set in its proper context, which is total exposure from all sources (food, water, air, cosmetics, etc). For most people, the main exposure route is eating, and the main source is food. This low-level background intake of heavy metals — and nutrient metals also — is a simple consequence of their natural presence in soil and the wider environment. "Clean" soil contains about 0.2 parts per million (ppm) cadmium and mercury, 15 ppm lead, 30 ppm copper, 60 ppm zinc, and over 50,000 ppm iron. Plants take a portion of each of these up, and they enter the food chain, eventually making it to your breakfast.

Your average daily intake of the heavy metal lead from all sources (mainly food) is about 220 millionths of a gram. Your daily intake from water is responsible for no more than 1% of this. It seems unreasonable to assert that anyone on a city supply will derive significant health benefits by reducing the amount of lead in their drinking water. Figures for other heavy metals are similar: drinking water is responsible for only

3% and 0.7% of your daily mercury and cadmium intakes, respectively. It accounts for less than 1% of daily intake of copper, manganese, iron, zinc, bismuth, and selenium (five of which are essential elements), and less than 10% of daily intake of silver, molybdenum, nickel, gallium, chromium, beryllium, antimony and thallium (four of which are essential anyway).

Fallacy No. 5: Filtering organic compounds from drinking water will significantly reduce daily pesticide intakes

Some 49 natural pesticides have been identified in cabbage, and many of these are indistinguishable in their action from synthetic ("man-made") pesticides. In some cases, natural and synthetic are the same thing — the compound known as 1080 naturally occurs in some Australian plants. It's estimated we eat about 1.5 grams of natural pesticides daily, a figure 10,000 times higher than synthetic pesticide residue intake. Levels of synthetic pesticide residues in city water are extremely low, if present at all. Even if drinking water accounted for a generous 10% of synthetic pesticide intake, this represents 0.001% of total pesticide exposure.

Fallacy No. 6: "Chlorine" in drinking water is both unnecessary and bad for health

With a pH value of 2, the hydrochloric acid in your stomach already has a concentration of chlorine about 1025 times greater than average levels in treated water.

This comparison may represent an over-simplification, be-

cause the active ingredient in chlorinated water is really something called the hypochlorite ion; however, very few toxic (rather than aesthetic) effects have been associated with water containing high chlorine concentrations, despite it having been used in disinfection since 1896, where chloride-of-lime stopped a typhoid epidemic. Indeed, the general modern lack of typhoid epidemics and other deadly water-borne diseases in developed countries is testimony to the effectiveness of ongoing chlorine disinfection.

The only health issues currently considered to be realistic with regard to chlorination are (a) reports of asthma being triggered in susceptible individuals on exposure to highly chlorinated waters, and (b) generation of chlorinated organic compounds during treatment itself, which is a facet that is therefore routinely monitored in city supplies (also, see point 5).

Summary

Home-water treatment systems can be used to effectuate pleasing aesthetic improvements — removal of the 'chlorine' taste — and it's reasonable to promote such systems on this basis. However, overall, for municipal water supplies, it's not valid to argue genuine health benefits will ensue as a result of removing selected chemical constituents from drinking water. Removal of worries and stress caused by the advertising itself could be regarded as a health benefit, but it is clearly one which is generated artificially. One wonders about the ethics of creating consumer need like this.

Nick Kim is a Waikato chemist and cartoonist

Fridges Help Chill Out Christmas Gloom

by David Riddell

ABOUT THE TIME this issue makes it to the letterbox, those Americans not glued to chat-shows or the latest update on alien abductions will be treated to a documentary on recreations of ancient monuments, in which New Zealand's infamous Fridgehenge features.

The summer before last, Fridgehenge was held on our Gordonton farm, a recreation of Salisbury's Stonehenge made from 41 clapped-out fridges. The artists responsible (Graeme Cairns, Sean Burke and Andrew McGovern) wanted to make a comment on the way that the summer solstice has changed over the past 4000 years, from a time of religious observance to a festival of material acquisition. And to have a party. Originally intending to stage it in Hamilton's own Garden Place, talk of permits and engineer's reports soon had them seeking a more user friendly venue.

Commemorating pagan festivals may seem strange behaviour for Skeptics, but it struck us as a sound idea, with a large helping of fun, and also made a valid point. My brother John, who also farms here, (and is also a Skeptic), had been to Britain earlier in the year and was struck by the many Neolithic monuments he saw there and felt it would be nice to have a stone circle of our own. We could align stones with significant sunrises and sunsets and keep track of important dates in the farming year. When to put

the bull out, when to plant the summer crop, when to go to the Agricultural Fieldays, that sort of thing. I was quite taken with the idea as well, and mentioned it to Graeme a few months previously. He'd had some thoughts of his own on the subject, and had at one time considered building a Stonehenge out of Anglias, but it was when Sean came up with the idea of fridges that the whole thing fell into place.

At first they thought it would be hard acquiring so many fridges, but a trip to the dump showed there was no shortage of the old beasts. The consumer society which Fridgehenge was lampooning worked in the artist's favour on this occasion.

Each fridge corresponded to one of the major Sarsen stones of the original; fallen stones were represented by toppled fridges. An avenue was mown in the grass pointing towards the midsummer sunrise, and two fridges corresponding to the Heel Stone and Slaughter Stone were positioned along it.

The original plan was to have a ceremony to mark the solstice at 3.24 pm on December 22, at which time the sun stood directly over the Tropic of Capricorn, but since the *Waikato Times* and TVNZ both reported a dawn event (and if you can't believe the media, who *can* you trust?) we had to attend for the sunrise as well. About 14 people turned up; we just outnumbered a group of 13 (don't know if the number's

significant...) fundamentalist Christians from a nearby community, who'd missed the point entirely; presumably they thought we were going to perform satanic rituals or something. They stood on the other side of the road for a bit and prayed for our souls, then sang half a verse of a hymn before deciding that 14 people standing around in a paddock sharing a single bottle of Australian bubbly weren't going to bring about the end of civilisation as we know it. Graeme thanked them for coming and they went home.

The afternoon's event was altogether livelier. The wind had got up and a warm drizzle was driving horizontally (had we established a cosmic link with the Salisbury Plains?) which added to the atmosphere, if not the comfort levels, then, with everyone (about 100) assembled at the Heel Fridge, the sun broke through for the only time that day, precisely at 3.24 pm.

The resulting improvisational, audience-participation "ceremony" was a bit like a kid's party and worked very well overall. We thanked the rain for coming (we were having the driest summer for at least ten years) and three guys who turned up in loincloths and white body paint were ritually "sacrificed" (we were skeptical about them being virgins.) Sean then did a live-to-air interview with the BBC World Service — media interest was amazingly high; this was the silly season. Newspaper reports appeared in Britain, Australia, the US, Australia and Hong Kong.

In the evening the rain cleared and we had a fire in the middle of the fridges and sang songs to musical accompani-

ment provided by Graeme, who plays rhythm ukulele with the Big Muffin Serious Band which featured at last year's conference. Fridge racks make fine percussion instruments.

Fridgehenge was a great success, but, sadly, is no more. Fridges don't last too long these days, especially out in the weather, and we needed our paddock back for the cows. We are determined however, once

we get the time (or energy) to have a permanent stone circle one day. We did take some video footage of the event, and this is what was sent to a Californian documentary crew late last year. We just hope that we don't get American cosmic types sending us fridges in the post — one new model would, however, be welcome.

David Riddell is a Waikato freelance journalist and soon-to-be-ex-dairy farmer.

Book Review

NEW ZEALAND MYSTERIES, by Robyn Gosset; Bush Press, 1996; 208 pages; \$29.95

There are a great many books on mysteries of the breathless "believe it or not" variety — this is *not* one of them. Gosset takes a sensible, considered view of the surprisingly varied stories that have become a part of our national folklore over the years, from the Lake Tarawera phantom canoe to the Bealey moa sighting of a few years ago.

Along the way, she is not averse to discussing the equally varied hoaxes and mistakes that have often accompanied such stories, a useful and often-avoided aspect of the mystery "trade". Gosset does not come down on either side of the truly mysterious, preferring instead to present what is (and, in some cases, is not) known about the events, leaving it up to the reader to decide. Her careful approach and generally thorough research means this does not feel like fence-sitting.

It's been 25 years since the first edition and, with the ever-increasing number of badly researched mystery documentaries and articles available, this book provides a refreshingly solid look at some of the things which have contributed to our cultural mythology.

Vicki Hyde

First published in the New Zealand Science Monthly.

Christchurch Mum Battles Disembodied Head!!!

See Next Issue



Forum

Evolution of God

THE concepts of God and evolution are inextricable. In the beginning God created the Universe. The series of events that followed produced man. This imperfect product needed a higher authority (scapegoat, infallible architect, benevolent headmaster, king of quiz) so before long the concept of God evolved. This God created the Universe. The series of events that followed produced man. This imperfect product needed a higher authority etc, etc.

Peter Lange

Christianity and Values

TEN years ago, I spent some time in a small town in Kentucky. I've forgotten the exact number of churches there but, as the result of schism after schism, there was one for every 18 citizens. Some few were boarded up as their congregations died off or left town, but most were still attended by tiny hair-splitting groups. Like Christians all over the world, they could not decide quite what Christianity was.

But Dr Mann seems to have embraced the whole amorphous mass on the Road to Damascus and to have decided the future of world civility depends on us joining him in this enthusiasm to take us back to the 1950s and 1960s. Trouble is, Jim Bolger is as devout a Christian as were Walter Nash and Jack Marshall, and old Walter was one of the most sophisticated dissemblers I ever reported. Also, I would guess there are more self-declared and fervent lay Christians involved in politics and business now than there were in

Walter's time. And in business, their record for integrity over the years has been appalling.

But yes, standards of civility and the sense of community have declined and the GNP has gone up. Why? I don't know. Is the decline of standards related to GNP? Are the declining sense of community and a concomitant increase in self-obsession causes or symptoms? Again I don't know. But I'm not going to reach for a hand-me-down set of beliefs to save me thinking it through.

Because it is Dr Mann's next step that offends me — that only Christians have true values and that non-Christians and materialism are inevitably companions. He must walk around with his eyes closed if he thinks that. I am agnostic mainly because my life experience suggests most forms of Christianity become an ideology — a set of beliefs that blots out all others. Communism was like that, as are the beliefs of neo-conservatives and, I might add, those of rabid anti-God rationalists.

Arthur Koestler, near the end of his life, suggested that mankind's problems were not so much the result of mindless, innate aggression or the deep stain of selfishness but the desire of ideologues to force everyone else to believe as they do. Evangelism, in all its forms, is the ultimate arrogance.

Sorry, Dr Mann, life is difficult but don't just grasp at any old belief system simply because you took a lot longer than most people, apparently, to understand that science may give us knowledge but not necessarily wisdom. Every one of us has

to make millions of decisions and judgements as we grow up and mature. These have to be made with a strong sense of other people of the present and future generations if we and our descendants are to have any sort of freedom from violence, which is the defining evil.

I don't know how to achieve this on a global scale but maybe it's a start to try personally to build up a genial tolerance of other people, particularly those you don't like, a difficult task given the propensity for me, like other humans, to be selfish. I do know, though, that Christianity, like other belief systems, has historically done more harm than good.

Oh, and did you ever look into Jack Marshall's eyes? Like blue chips of ice, they were.

Gordon McLauchlan

Cosmic Harmonies

NEVILLE Ritchie [*Skeptic* 41] writes, "[Captain Bruce] Cathie is the author of several books on harmonics and related topics".

So far as I can make out from Cathie's books, "harmonic" as he uses it (but never defines it) means "if we move the decimal point an arbitrary number of places to the left or right...". In other words, $n \times 10^x$, where n is any whole number. Cathie never mentions what x is, or why a particular value of x is used.

I have heard many nice people say "I don't know anything about mathematics, but he seems to have something". I wish someone who *does* know something about mathematics

would point out that what Cathie does is a variety of numerology, where any combination of mathematical operations in any order (culminating in “harmonic” to line up the decimals) may be performed to bring two numbers into correspondence.

Cathie ignores dimensional analysis, and the final “correspondence” may be between, say, the sine of the square of the reciprocal of the natural log of one number of miles, and the cosec of the root of another number in degrees. (The speed of light in units per second often gets a look in, too.)

Cathie is a good illustration of what I modestly call Young’s Law: “Pseudoscientists who formulate Theories Of Everything often base them on something peripheral to their former career”. Cathie’s theories have a lot to do with aeronautical navigation and books of three-figure tables.

In Whangarei in the early 1970s, a retired marine engineer claimed to have invented a new electric motor, which — he mentioned in passing — produced more energy than it used. This nonchalant (but never demonstrated) perpetual motion machine was, it almost goes without saying, reciprocating.

Another example is retired dentist Dr Ron Every and his theory that Everything is based on tooth-grinding — bruxism or, as he prefers to call it, the-gosis. Some of his views are pretty nifty: humans once bit chunks off each other; we shortened our jaws to give them more leverage; we no longer needed jaw muscles that met over the crown of the head; as a result our brains could expand. Our shorter jaw somehow en-

abled the tongue to free up, enabling articulate speech. We have since repressed this biting, but it emerges with toothgrinding in sleep.

This theory also illustrates Martin Gardner’s point that pseudoscientists often reverse the conventional wisdom — when you know that conventional Freudian wisdom is/was that aggression resides in the anus, and Dr Every began training as a neo-Freudian therapist with Dr Maurice Bevan-Brown.

His theories seem to have gained a degree of respectability through the Zoology Department of Canterbury University. The last I heard of him was that he was refusing to return some archaic skulls to Canterbury Museum — after 20 years. I don’t know what fines the museum charges for overdue skulls, but perhaps it should threaten to collect.

Hugh Young

Christian Science?

L.R.B. MANN (*NZ Skeptic* 42) writes: “It is not widely known that science has never thrived except in Christian societies — with the minor exception of a couple of centuries in some Islamic centres”, and again “The only known basis for a decent society, and in particular the only ethical system under which science is known to flourish, is Christianity.”

Are a couple of centuries of Islam, pagan Syracuse and the enormous contribution to science from Western Judaism the exceptions which, Popperwise, disprove Mann’s rule?

Given that there is an association between Christianity and the flowering of science, is it more than coincidental. If it is, was science nurtured by Christian ethics, or was it

spawned by rational revolt against Christian dogma? Should we ask Mann, the Inquisition or Galileo?

Despite my efforts, plants which I do not sow, and which do not flourish in the wilderness, become established and flourish in my garden. Are both science and Christianity fortuitous adventives in the garden of civilisation.

Pat Palmer

Decline? What Decline?

DR MANN in his article “On the Decline and Possible Resurgence of the Decent Society” mounts a full frontal attack on scientific method. His main technique is *dogmatism*, the assertive stating of a hypothesis, belief, or dogma without evidence or analysis.

His first paragraph starts with the dogmatic statement:

“The social vision associated with the name of Walter Nash, or for the present purposes Jack Marshall, has crumbled”.

The only supporting evidence for such a sweeping claim is a reference to a book *Destroying New Zealand* by J.L. Robinson whose “readers need no convincing of these facts”.

The book contains the following assertions:

“By 2020 New Zealand will be a fascist dictatorship”.

“New Right policies lead inexorably to increased income differences, depression, poverty, crime and health problems”.

“New Zealand is within another long depression”.

“New Zealand, together with the rest of the developed world, is in a long term decay phase”.

Is it true that your readers need no convincing of these "facts"?

Dr Mann states:

"The most secure and decent high culture which has flowered for some decades, is now in almost every measure except GNP in rapid decline".

In a recent BBC *Horizon* programme "Dodging Doomsday", the guru of gloom, Paul Ehrlich intoned his dogmas of doom, which were refuted one by one by the evidence. World population is not "exploding", it is approaching a stable level. Food supplies increase faster than population. Famine and poverty are the result of bad government, or war, not population increase. "Resources are not running out. A participant in the programme, Professor Julian Simon, bet Ehrlich in 1980 \$200 for each of five world commodities, chosen by Ehrlich, that would increase in price. In 1990 he collected \$1000; all chosen commodities were cheaper.

Professor Simon also challenged all comers to bet with him that they could not find any indicator of general human welfare that is not continuously increasing. If Dr Mann has such an indicator, he could win money.

Dr Mann, who is presumably a trained scientist, sets up an Aunt Sally called "scientism", a belief that science can solve all problems. No responsible scientist would agree to this doctrine. Science just happens to be the best way of studying problems; but there are some which remain unsolved. It does not help to pretend they are solved by ascribing them to God.

Dr Mann attacks Dawkins but refrains from reading him. *The Blind Watchmaker* explains very clearly that the belief of Bishop Paley that a living organism resembles a watch, and therefore must have a creator, is false. A living organism derives from a *recipe*, coded in our genes, not from a *blueprint*. Evidence of its evolution from earlier forms is everywhere present.

Mann calls the genetic code "a pathetically inadequate idol". Yet in contrast to all the other idols it explains heredity and evolution, and enables us to cure disease and provide improved crops.

Do we have to believe in Christianity just because Newton did? After all, he also believed in alchemy and astrology.

Vincent Gray

"Decent Society" Debated

I WOULD like to see less about religion in our journal — can we not confine ourselves to supernatural claims which are testable? However L.R.B. Mann's confused and overlong article needs a reply. Why should he think his view of "the downward slide of Kiwi civilisation" is shared by many of us? A skeptic faces an unending task in countering nonsense, but there is more nonsense in Mann's article than in his targets.

"Science never thrived except in Christian societies". As science in the modern sense arose once, coincidence is as good an explanation as any. Certainly Christianity fought science in every possible way. Obviously Mann has never read Andrew D. White's *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*.

Before we revert to "religiously-based ethics" let us remind ourselves what life was like in Christian countries before the the "Enlightenment" produced a change in moral values. Gregory of Nyassa and Pacian both had a list of the three most serious sins. These were apostasy, adultery, and murder in that order.

Anti-Semitism was a virtue for Christians. True, Luther was a moderating influence; he urged his followers not to kill Jews, instead their houses should be burned and if they were encountered in the street, pig-shit should be thrown at them.

Free speech was the most heinous sin and crime. For this Bruno was burned alive in 1600. Christians knew that the final speech of a man at the stake could be damaging so he was "silenced with an iron gag". Bruno was taken from prison to the stake with a nail driven in under his chin, through his tongue into the roof of his mouth.

Newton was a Christian according to Mann, but if his contemporary Christians had learned of Newton's religious views, more than 99% would have denounced him as a heretic. He was a sort of Unitarian as he discovered that the verse 1 John 5.7. "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one." was a Christian forgery designed and inserted to support the doctrine of the trinity. This had been discovered before, by Erasmus for example, but Christians had managed to suppress the information. If you try to look this verse up in *The New English Bible* you will not find

it because this work of modern scholarship rightly omits it.

This century the Catholic church has only treated one sin (or crime) with severity, the questioning of official doctrine. Hitler was not excommunicated (nor any other Catholic war criminal). Hans Kung was, simply for publishing work of which the Pope disapproved. Others such as Teilhard du Chardin were disciplined for similar offences.

We do not need a return to Christian ethical standards. Those standards were disgusting and repugnant to any person of sensibility. In so far as Christianity is morally acceptable today it is because it was civilised by Voltaire and those other heroes of the enlightenment.

Jim Ring

Poor Logic

I AM a recent member of NZCSICOP and recipient of NZ

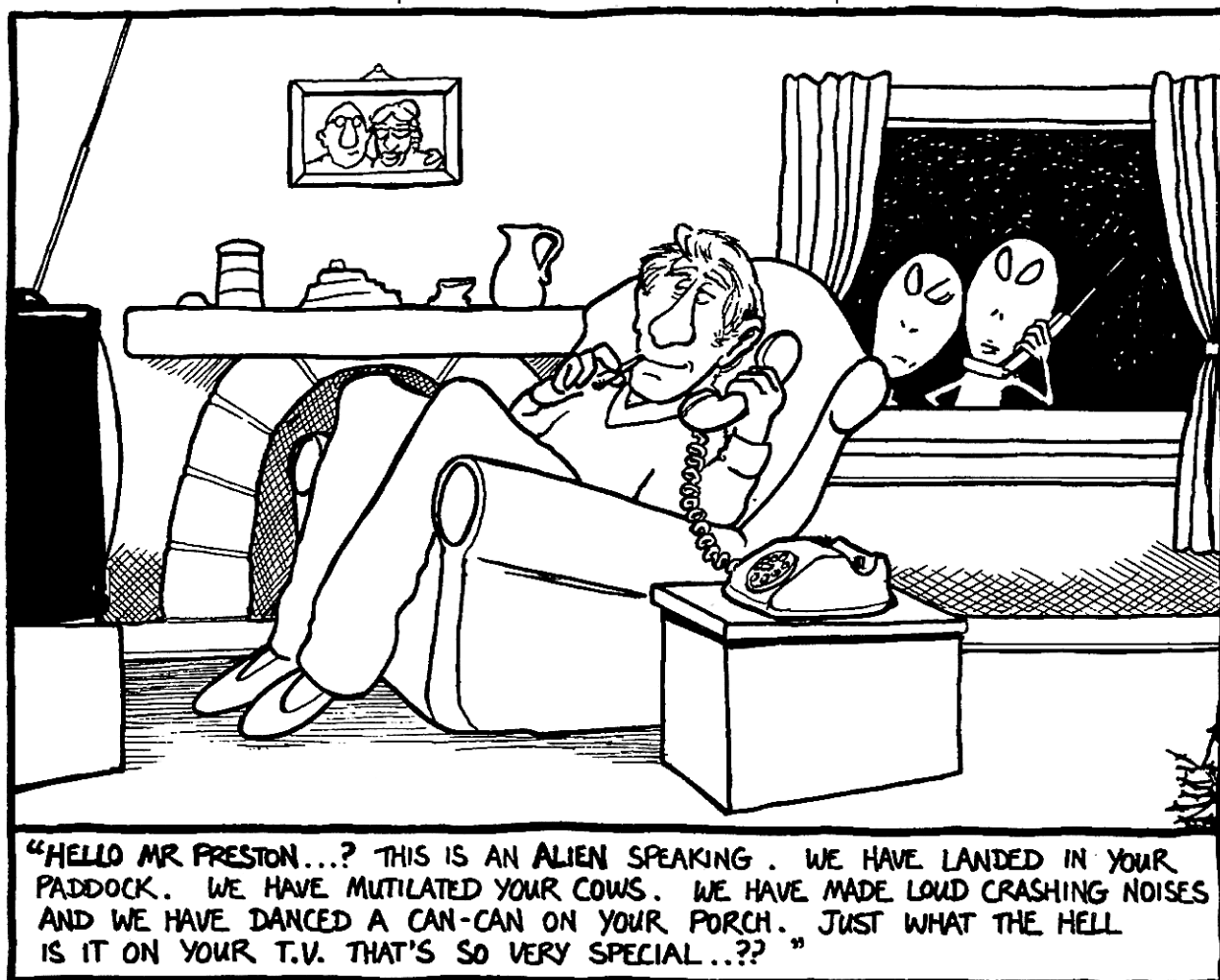
Skeptic, and so still assessing the stance and philosophy of the organisation. I must say I was very surprised to see that you devoted some 4 pages of the Summer 1996/97 edition to the views Dr Robert Mann. My knowledge of the history and philosophy of science is not that of a life long academic, but I have read many books on the subject. Religion, and particularly Christianity, has impeded science; Galileo's recantation to the Inquisition of Rome being one example.

I want to critique one specific section of Dr Mann's article. His logic goes thus: Newton was one of the three greatest scientists, (no references, so this is presumably his view). Newton was also one of the three greatest mathematicians, (no references again). Newton was a Christian. Faraday was another of the three greatest scientists, (unsubstantiated). Fara-

day was a Christian. The implication is that being Christian is essential to being a great scientist, ie, non-Christians are not great scientists or mathematicians. It seems to me that Dr Mann is indulging in faulty logic and special pleading. Would any of the great scientists, mathematicians or philosophers, by anybody's estimation, approve of such logic? Would Dr Mann teach this form of reasoning to students? What really disturbs me about this is that it reminds me of so much of the faulty logic used by Christian creationists.

I support NZ *Skeptic* publishing articles which deal with key debates of our time. But please, let the quality of that argument be higher than that shown by Dr L.R.B Mann.

Peter Graham



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