

*In their early years children are knowledge junkies,  
questioning everything in their view, though exhibiting  
little skepticism. Most never learn to distinguish between  
inquisitiveness and credulity. Those who do either come to  
a bad end or become professional skeptics.*

**Michael Shermer**

**How to Create False Memories  
Confessions of a Phone Psychic  
Victoria University's Time Line  
Medical Principles**

new zealand  
**Skeptic**

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Letters for the Forum may be edited as space requires - up to 250 words is preferred. Please indicate the publication and date of all clippings for the Newsfront.

Material supplied by email or IBM-compatible disk is appreciated.

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# Back From the Dead?

I'VE just witnessed a miracle. Probably. On January 2 I took part in a trip to the outer Hauraki Gulf to search for a bird that until recently had not been seen since the nineteenth century. Three specimens of the bird, the New Zealand Storm Petrel, sitting in museums in Paris and London, were believed to be the only representatives of yet another of this country's extinct species.

Then in January 2003 a bird matching the New Zealand Storm Petrel's description was photographed off Whitianga. By itself that didn't mean too much; sometimes you get strange individuals of common species, and this bird's resemblance to the lost petrel may have been coincidence. But in November two British birdwatchers saw 10 or 20 birds just north of Little Barrier Island that looked just the same, and took some amazing photos ([www.wrybill-tours.com/idproblems/stormpet3.htm](http://www.wrybill-tours.com/idproblems/stormpet3.htm)). And our trip found at least three in the same area. Needless to say, we were over the moon. Here's one of our pictures; not as good as the ones on the website, but clearly it's the same thing.

So can a species really go more than a century without being recorded, less than 100km from Auckland? That's what we skeptics would call an extraordinary claim, and quite correctly the Ornithological Society's Rare Birds Committee isn't rushing to confirm the bird's continued existence.



But with every week that goes by, the case is looking stronger. Trips are now going out regularly, and amassing considerable documentary evidence. In the latest development, TV3 News has shown film of the bird. It's all developing in a way that's very different from sightings of moa, lake monsters, or Bigfoot, which are invariably isolated events with no follow-up. There's definitely a bird out there in the outer gulf that wasn't there before (at least not in any numbers), it looks just like the museum specimens, and not really like any other known species.

Possibly it's an unexpected dividend of the rat eradication programme on our offshore islands; maybe a tiny population was able to hang on until the rats were gone, and they've bred up in the intervening years to the point where people are starting to see them.

Whatever the explanation, it looks like the biggest thing to happen in New Zealand ornithology since David Crockett rediscovered the Chatham Island Taiko in 1978, a mere 111 years after its last sighting. And it's a reminder that however much we think we know about the world around us, nature can still spring surprises.

Annette.

# Drawing Out False Memories

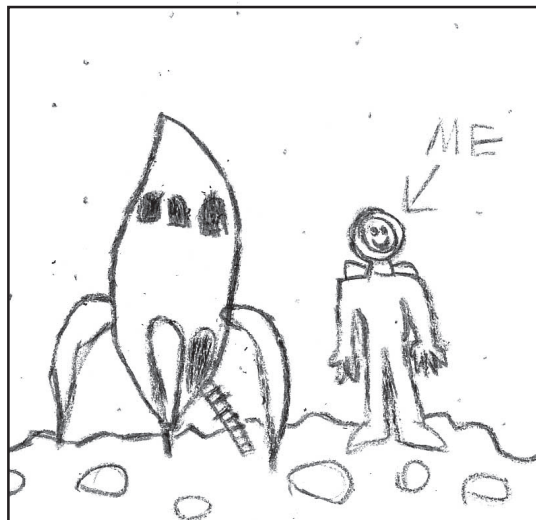
*One possible source of the outlandish reports given by children in cases such as the Christchurch Civic Creche affair was described at the 2003 Skeptics' Conference.*

**Deryn Strange and Maryanne Garry**

**I**N RECENT years the western media has become increasingly cluttered with stories of bizarre goings-on with groups of children. Although nearly 15 years of scientific research has shown us that children can come to report a variety of false experiences, until recently we knew very little about how the more implausible and outlandish reports—of naked Japanese men playing guitars, of secret tunnels and hanging cages—might emerge.

This year, Rachel Sutherland, Maryanne Garry and Deryn Strange published the results of a scientific study designed to investigate whether a seemingly innocuous technique might be promoting these bizarre stories. The purpose of our research was to examine the role of imagination in the “Draw and Tell” interview to try and provide an explanation for how children can come to believe that impossible events have happened to them. We wanted to know if children could come to believe that they had participated in an impossible event just by drawing and imagining that they had. We asked children to answer a list of events on a Life Events Inventory (LEI). The list included typical childhood events as well as unlikely but highly

imaginable events (the target events) such as, “have you ever flown to the moon on a rocket”. Children only had to say “yes” or “no”. One week later a novel



experimenter asked children in the Draw group to draw what it would be like if three of the target events had actually happened to them. One hour after the drawing phase, the original experimenter returned and told the children that their original answers had been lost and asked if they would mind answering the questions in the LEI again.

We found that children in the Draw group were more likely to say that an event had happened. Put another way, the group exposed to the drawing task were much more likely to change their responses

from “no” to “yes” when asked a second time whether the events had actually happened to them. In fact, the effect of drawing was not limited to the target events that children drew. Draw children were more likely to change their answers on all events, not just the ones that they spent time drawing.

The results of this experiment show that drawing might promote reports of events that did not occur. If children are given false event information in the context of an interview and then draw that information, that drawing may then make them more likely to claim that the suggested event has happened. In light of this finding, those in both legal and therapeutic settings should maintain vigilance when asking children to take crayons in hand or run the risk that further false memories will be “drawn out.”

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**Deryn Strange is a PhD student specialising in children's suggestibility. Maryanne Garry is a senior lecturer at the School of Psychology, Victoria University, specialising in memory distortions, especially as they intersect with legal issues.**

# Interview with the Giraffe

*Hokum Locum talks with one of the unsung victims of the Christchurch Civic Crèche*

THE New Zealand Judiciary has consistently refused to face up to that gross miscarriage of justice, the Christchurch Civic Crèche case. There has been a call for “new” evidence. In a sensational development I recently tracked down “Julian” (not his real name) at a secret Christchurch address. Here is his story.



Julian

**HL:** Thank you for talking to us Julian. How have you been over the last few years?

**J:** I’ve certainly missed Peter. It must have been hell for him in prison and I’m really sorry for his co-workers. You know, he was a really gifted childcare worker. The kids loved him.

**HL:** I know. So you *were* living in Peter’s house. Where? In a tunnel?

**J:** Can you see me in a tunnel? No, I was in the laundry chute. With a neck like mine it was the only option.

**HL:** But how come nobody found you? The police searched the house on numerous occasions.

**J:** I was always covered in dirty laundry, something the police are used to, so they always overlooked me. I think they were looking for paedophiles, or werewolves.

**HL:** Weren’t you lonely?

**J:** Oh no. Peter and I used to have some wonderful talks, and there were other pets for company—a cat and a frog.

**HL:** Ah, that must be some of the children, you know, that Peter changed into small animals.

**J:** You must be joking—nobody would believe that would they? *Would* they?

**HL:** I’m afraid so. I think that particular allegation ended up as a charge of unlawful transmogrification on an unknown child in an unknown location.

**J:** Bloody hell! Did they list me as an accomplice?

**HL:** No, you’re lucky. The interviewers, police and jury obviously found that a giraffe could not have been involved. No need at all for you to have been in hiding all of these years.

How’s your health?

**J:** Not good. I’ve been having nightmares, wetting the bed, talking in my sleep and I’ve developed an allergy to hay.

**HL:** I’m sorry to hear that. I hope you’ve been to a vet.

**J:** Yes. She told me that all of my symptoms were consistent with sexual abuse in my early life. In fact, she said that any behaviour of a giraffe could be consistent with sexual abuse.

**HL:** Still, you could have put in a claim for ACC compensation. Lots of parents took the money even when they knew perfectly well that their children hadn’t been abused.

**J:** I have scruples.

**HL:** I’m sorry to hear that—I hope the vet has something for it...

**J:** No, you idiot! I mean I have a conscience.

**HL:** Just kidding. I heard a rumour that you were writing a book about your involvement in the Civic Crèche Case.

**J:** Yes, I was disappointed I only rated a brief mention in Hood’s book. Even so, I think I was being confused with my cousin Gerald who works for the Life Education trust.

**HL:** How’s the book coming along?

**J:** Good thanks. I’ve always been a fan of the Jungle Books so I called it the Bandarlog. I’m going to blow this case wide open; that is, if I can persuade Val Sim and Mr Goff to read it.

**HL:** Make it a comic book then. We all look forward to reading it. Thanks again for talking to us.

**J:** Thank you.



# Confessions of a Telephone Psychic

*An anonymous contributor to the website, [mostembarrassingmoment.com](http://mostembarrassingmoment.com), shares her experiences as a professional tarot card reader.*

I WANTED to make a little extra money with a part-time job, preferably something I could do at home. While looking through the Help Wanted ads in the local paper, I ran across an ad for a psychic network and decided to give them a call.

I left my phone number and within a few hours a woman named Sally returned my call. I explained to her I had no psychic ability whatsoever. She said it did not matter. She told me this was very easy but I would need three things: a deck of Tarot cards, a book called “Tarot in 10 minutes” and a book on astrology. She asked me to call her back as soon as I had them. I was a bit nervous about the whole thing, but she comforted me, explaining that she had been doing this for quite a few years already and all it involved was talking to people.

I really had no idea what to expect, but I did get the two books and the cards the next day. While staring at the cards, I waited for some psychic feeling to come over me. But there was nothing, my mind was blank.

I waited two days before I called Sally back. I asked her how in the world I would be able to do this. She explained that I just had to look at the cards. She lived only a few

blocks away from me, so she decided to come over, help me fill out the employment papers and show me her psychic routine.

We sat down in the kitchen and she spread out the paperwork on the table. Along with the contract there were papers that contained promotional text and disclaimers I had to memorise. I was going to have to say these things before and after every psychic call I took.

It was a lot to remember, but my mind was still on the fact that I had no clue how to read Tarot cards. I asked her if she could please give me a reading, but when she looked at the cards she said, “Oh no... these cards are terrible!”

I was a bit startled. Did Sally feel a bad aura around them? I was just about to ask when she said, “You bought the wrong cards! These are real Tarot cards. I guess it’s my fault. I forgot to mention that you should buy the beginners’ cards. Those are the ones I have. They have the meaning of each card printed right on them.”

Finally I began to understand how this all worked. Sally, the seasoned psychic professional, had no idea how to read Tarot cards either.

I asked her how, after such a long time of giving psychic readings

she could not know what each card meant. She told me the cards are really just a crutch. The whole point is to make up stuff that sounds interesting so that people will stay on the phone for as long as possible. Some so-called psychics make up stuff about diseases to scare the callers. Others just shuffle a bunch of beginners’ Tarot cards and read the text. The trick is to get as much information out of the callers as possible and trying to figure out what they want to hear.

I was starting to get a bad feeling about all this, but I needed the money, and she made the whole thing sound fun, so I signed the contract and told her that I would get the beginners’ deck the following day.

Each card had several meanings written on them. All I had to do was grab a few cards, place them next to each other, and read a couple of words from each card to form sentences. It was like a pre-school grammar game.

The dreaded day came when Sally called to give me my extension number. These psychic networks have a computerised system that forwards calls to the phones of their so-called psychic employees. A “psychic” has to call the automated network system and enter his or her extension number. When

customers call the 900 number, their calls are automatically rerouted to the “psychics” who are currently logged into the system. Sally reminded me if one of my callers asked, I had to pretend to be located in a big psychic office somewhere down in Florida. I was not allowed to tell anyone that I was just sitting at home.

The whole thing was a big money machine. Whenever I called the phone system, I’d get a menu where I could log in, log out, or listen to a motivational message. There was nothing spiritual or psychic about this. He would just yell excitedly about how much money the system had earned the previous day, that we were all doing an excellent job, and that we should try even harder today to keep people on the phone even longer.

All “psychic” employees were paid on a sliding scale. The longer your average calls are, the more you get paid. The phone company had a rule that allowed paid 900 calls to last no longer than 59

minutes. After that time the call would automatically be disconnected. The psychic phone system had a little warning beep after 58 minutes so the psychic would have enough time to rattle down the disclaimer, and to convince the caller to call right back. Sally had told me that for legal reasons I had to finish every call with the words “This was for entertainment purposes only.” What a thing to say after someone had just spent 59 minutes on a 900 number which cost \$4.99 per minute!

### Preparations

I had set up a desk in a quiet room. I had two dogs that barked a lot... It would have been hard to explain to a caller what my dogs were doing with me in an office in Florida. I had picked out a few beginners’ Tarot cards that sounded interesting, and bookmarked my astrology book so I wouldn’t have to search for the correct pages in the middle of a reading. I had the disclaimer and promotional texts stapled on the wall. And right there

in front of me I had a bottle of antacid with a glass of water for my nervous stomach. I was ready for my first call.

The only problem was I was too nervous to log on. I sat there for at least three hours with the biggest knot in my stomach. I would have sat there all day, but my husband stopped home for lunch and asked me how I was doing.

I told him I couldn’t do this and he looked at me like I was crazy. “Just pick up the phone,” he said. “Just do the first call... I didn’t spend all that money on cards and books for nothing. At least give it a try!”

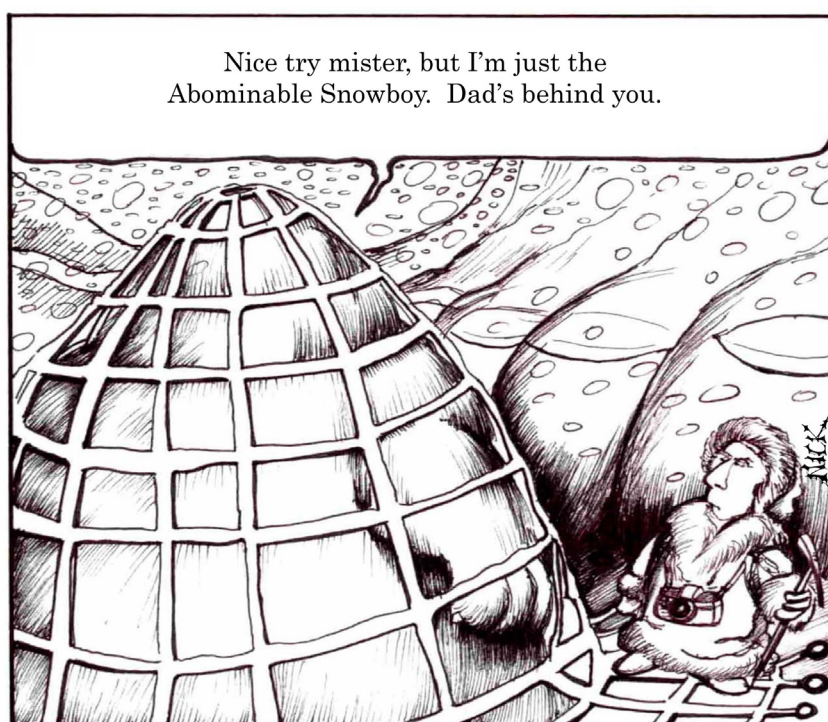
Finally I called and logged myself in. As soon as I hung up from the automated service, the phone rang.

### First Call

I picked up and read my opening speech. Then I had to read the promotional text about the psychic newsletter and try to get the caller’s mailing address. We “psychics” would get bonus money for each mailing address we could get.

Most callers gave me their address. Later I found out the company would randomly stuff five Tarot cards into envelopes and mail them to these addresses. The cards were accompanied by a letter that said something like: “Important! We must speak to you about something big that is going to happen in your life very soon! Call our 900 number and let our trained psychic professionals tell you about the meaning of your five personal Tarot cards.”

The letter sounded important and very urgent. I had a few calls from people near to tears, thinking something terrible was about to happen to them. Even people who



didn't really believe that these five cards had any significance felt compelled to call. When I found out about this cheap trick, I stopped asking people for their addresses.

My first caller was a young guy. I asked if there was a specific topic he had questions about. He said "no." My mind was blank.

I laid out my beginners' cards while explaining to him what I was doing. Sally had told me that you have to keep talking at all times. Silence makes the caller realise how much money the call costs. I gave him a very brief and bad reading by looking at the cards and my astrology book. It was too general. I didn't ask enough questions and basically all I did was read him his horoscope. The only good thing I can say is that the call lasted less than four minutes, so at least the poor guy didn't waste too much money. After he hung up I logged myself out of the system. I just couldn't stomach another call right then.

### Second Call

Hours later I gave it another try. The phone rang and after my opening speech I again asked if there were any topics that she would like to start with. She was a very nice woman and she said, "yes. My love life." For some reason I felt comfortable with her and I started off by asking her if she was married. She said "no," so I replied "but there is someone special you're thinking about."

"Yes," she giggled. I asked her to think of that person as I shuffled the cards. I told her to let everything leave her mind and just concentrate on that one special person. Then as I laid out the cards I started

reading them. The longer the call lasted, the more comfortable I got. As we talked, I found myself moving away from the cards and talking to her like we were old friends. I also found myself telling

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**I guess to her it really seemed like I had some sort of psychic powers, but sometimes when you talk to someone you just know things without being told.**

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her things that she sometimes was surprised to hear because they were true.

### Logic, Not Psychic Powers

I guess to her it really seemed like I had some sort of psychic powers, but sometimes when you talk to someone you just know things without being told. The word is logic! Of course there was "someone in her life." Otherwise she wouldn't have called a psychic hotline to ask questions about her love life!

Anyway, that reading went very well and I lost track of time. We had a nice talk which lasted 59 minutes.

After a few calls I realized how harmful these psychic lines can be. Eighty per cent of the calls I received were not just people calling for fun. They were people with questions concerning their health and other serious problems. And these poor people relied on the advice of so-called psychics like me to make major decisions in their lives.

A few times I felt like I had helped, but I spent a lot of time wondering what happened after

many of my calls. How did things turn out?

### Virus

One day I had a call from a woman who was very afraid because she had just spoken 59 minutes with another psychic and been disconnected. He had told her she had a virus, and had asked her if she had been feeling under the weather, felt tired, and not 100 per cent okay.

Now come on, how often can you say you feel 100 per cent? So of course this so-called psychic had scared the living daylights out of her. I tried to calm her down and told her the truth: "Some psychics will say anything to keep you on the line. No one always feels in tip top shape. And if you really feel bad you should visit a doctor. Don't let a phone call scare you into thinking that you have some terrible disease."

The people working for these psychic hotlines are not psychics. They're out to make money. It's just a job to them. And having this job means you have to throw your conscience away. Anyone who has an ounce of decency in them would never be able to do this to people. You actually get paid to lie to people. And the more interesting the lies are the more money you make. These so-called psychics play with your fears and hopes. They feel if they say something to scare you, you will stay on the phone longer.

I'm not proud of having done this, and of course I quit after a short while. I'm sharing what I have learned to warn you. Don't fall for this nonsense!



## Global Warming - Where Should Skeptics Stand?

Although I have been receiving free email alerts for a long time, I am a (very) new member. Among the goodies which I received a couple of days ago was the Spring, 2003 newsletter, number 69. Obviously, free speech is the first requisite of such an organ, but I was rather taken aback by contribution in Forum from Lance Kennedy of Tantec, an organisation in the biocide industry, on the subject of global warming. Its content is highly selective, and it contravenes all the principles outlined in the Skeptics Guide to Critical Thinking. He writes of a “sound and healthy reluctance to subscribe to anthropogenic greenhouse... warming”. He says that the Scientific American is committed to “greenie (a pejorative term which has no place in a serious discussion) nonsense”.

He believes that criticism of Bjorn Lomborg, author of “The Skeptical Environmentalist” comes into this category. Perhaps it is time to look more carefully at Lomborg. Until recently, this very personable young man held a rather lowly position on the staff of the political “science” department at Aarhus University, Denmark, and since his book was published, he has become the archpriest of the multi-billion dollar greenwashing industry. Although the greenwashers’ hype portrays him as a “brilliant statistician”, the Statistics Department of his own university has publicly disowned (on the university website) his methods as flawed and unacceptable. He writes of many

disciplines, but he has never published a peer-reviewed paper in any of them. In every discipline, his methods, data, and conclusions have been roundly repudiated by a large majority of the scientific establishment of that discipline. Who then is right? - a lonely Don Quixote, tilting at imaginary windmills, or the scientific establishment?

Kennedy deals with three issues; these are:-(1) “Glacial extensions of the polar icecap on Mars are now in retreat. Peninsulas and islands of ice disappearing”. This he naively takes as evidence that solar output must be increasing. However, this is in fact evidence of precisely the opposite! Atmospheric cooling on Mars locks water vapour up as ice in the icecaps, and causes the lower latitude extensions to disappear rapidly. Own goal!

(2) “Meteorologists are adopting a new stance..... many want to move away from ‘anthropogenicity’ and accept that warming happens.” This rather vague statement falls into the category of a paper tiger or, as the “Skeptics Guide to Creation “Science” puts it, a straw man. I am not aware that meteorologists “want” to believe in anthropogenic warming. It is put forward as the most probable explanation of the observed facts. Indeed, most would be delighted to be proved wrong. This is where real science differs from junk science. Greenwashers “know” they are right; scientists try to preserve open minds. Another example of naivety is to suggest that

meteorologists have a vested interest in “preserving the myth”, for fear of losing their research grants. Nothing could be further from the truth. There are a thousand reasons for wishing to learn more about our climate and global warming research is a by-product rather than the primary object. If all such research were to cease immediately, it would make little or no difference to climate research as a whole. What meteorologists and others recommend is the exercise of prudence in the light of current theory. This is opposed both by greenwashers and by many in the pseudoscience of economics as advocated by those of the Friedman school, in whose eyes “sustainable development” is never an oxymoron.

(3) He refers to a paper on the influence of cosmic rays on the atmosphere, though not to the original paper by Fangqun Yu of the State University of New York. It was put forward as a mere hypothesis at this stage, and if subsequent work provides confirmation it will be a useful explanation for the anomalous discrepancy between surface temperatures and those in the atmosphere just above, which will be welcomed by all meteorologists. Kennedy doesn’t mention that Yu also suggests that interaction between greenhouse gases and the ionisation caused by cosmic rays may also be a contributing factor to greenhouse warming. Yu also points out that his hypothesis does not in any way rule out anthropogenic contributions to global warming.

Alan P Ryan  
Retired meteorologist



## Global Warming

In contrast to Lance Kennedy (Forum 69), I regret the failure of *The Skeptics* to recognise the reality of anthropogenic climate change.

The basics are undeniable:

- Atmospheric carbon dioxide warms the atmosphere by blocking outgoing radiation.
- Anthropogenic emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> have been growing for two centuries, and especially in the last half century. Atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> is now a third higher than pre-industrial levels.
- Radiation from the earth into space has been measured directly. A comparison of data for 1990 and 1997 showed the expected fall, with the largest reductions at the predicted wavelengths.

Beyond the basics, climate change is hellishly complex and far from fully understood, but enough is known to show a clear anthropogenic effect. The UN's IPCC have taken a consensus overview of the work being done in a very wide range of fields. Their third assessment report, issued just three years ago, estimated that average temperatures would rise another 1.4–5.8°C between 1990 and 2100. That range looks very uncertain, but about half the uncertainty is in the human response: we can still limit the maximum rise to around 2.5°C if we get our act together. However, global warming will continue for centuries, no matter how quickly we reduce emissions.

Problems with CO<sub>2</sub> and temperature are to be expected, and the details will be debated and cross-checked for many years to come. However, the data is already good

enough to identify minor effects. One such effect was a mysterious warming and cooling over a 1000 year cycle, traceable over 10 000 years. It turned out to be the moon, changing its orbit and hence the strength of the tides and the extent of vertical mixing of the ocean. Higher tides create more mixing, bring up more cold water and cool the atmosphere.

Of course, it is possible that new evidence will show that global warming will soon go away—good science has to be falsifiable. But the evidence produced by Kennedy is not it, and the precautionary principle tells us not to put our shirts on him. There is now enough evidence to allow a great deal of cross-checking: the Greenland ice cores tell the same story as the Atlantic silt cores; the effects of varying solar radiation and changes in the earth's and moon's orbits have been factored in; the cooling caused by the Mt Pinatubo eruption improved understanding of some minor effects; and so on. And on.

With so much evidence already gathered, it is not enough for the global warming contrarians to point to isolated studies; that is like pointing to a back eddy as evidence that the stream is flowing uphill. If there is a serious case against global warming let us hear it—but it will need to be good.

Kerry Wood  
Wanganui

## Science and Morality

Bruce Taylor is a high priest of the anti-human, anti-science, anti-Darwinist religion of Environmentalism. He has no use for science unless it can be used to

support his dogmatic opinions and the “policies” based on them.

On the other hand he is much more tolerant of religion, myth, prejudice, suspicion, custom, fantasy, and old wives' tales.

Alan Hart is quite wrong to claim that “science doesn't necessarily say anything about moral values”. Moral values, which may be defined as the rules which govern societies, are essential for evolutionary survival and progress of every society.

Most societies possess rigidly tyrannical “moral values”. We are, each of us, a society composed of genetically and chemically controlled specialised cells, each derived from a single embryo, only one kind of which participates in reproduction. Any dissident cell becomes a cancer and causes death of the whole organism.

Ants, bees, and termites, are also genetically and chemically controlled fascist dictatorships, and their evolutionary success depends on it. Most animal societies such as monkeys and seals have equally ruthless “moral values”.

Early human societies had similar “moral values” to monkeys, and some, such as approval of murder, rape and slavery, survive today in primitive tribes. “Moral values” of human societies have included wholesale genocide, the burning of heretics and witches, slavery and cannibalism. Torture and slavery are common today, and even genocide is a “moral value” recently practised in several societies.

Progress of human society depends on an improved emphasis

**Continued on page 12**

## Dying is Bad for Business

**A**N AUCKLAND law firm was going to court late last year (Dominion Post, November 1) to block the opening of a funeral parlour opposite it. Death (or dealing with it) offends against the ancient Chinese art of feng shui. Contact with death can lead to bad luck and negative energy could flow from the funeral parlour into the law firm.

The firm was concerned it would lose its Asian clients if the parlour opened. The parlour, meantime, said it had been granted resource consent. Haven't heard the outcome yet...

### Ring in new changes

And while on the subject of feng shui, here's a tip for Telecom. Feng shui specialist Honey Lim says the company should relaunch its new logo in February to capture the powerful energy of a new age in the feng shui calendar. In the Dominion Post (November 26) Ms Lim says she approves of Telecom's new logo, which is in harmony with feng shui. Telecom spent \$140,000 on the logo, and will be happy to learn its green and blue squares underpinning the yellow rectangle have good karma. Ms Lim says the old one featuring three coloured spears stabbing the company name, which told her that, "despite the company's own colourful and innovative efforts, their initiatives were hurting themselves more than spurring them forward." She reckons they really should relaunch themselves in the New Year – an act which would generate "awe-

some feng shui".... February 4 marks the beginning of "period 8" in the feng shui calendar, a period of new energy. And in order to benefit from it, people or organisations need to undertake renewal or change after that date. Now there's an idea...

### ET – Wait a Tick

The mayor of a Brazilian town says he had cancelled a planned landing by aliens during an important soccer match last year (The Press, November 24). Elcio Berti said he cancelled the landing of the alien spaceship because he was worried they may abduct one of the Brazilian footballers. Berti, the mayor of Bocaiuva do Sul, claims to be in regular touch with aliens and is preparing a UFO landing pad for them in town.

### "Con" Man Speaks Out

It was good to see Australian skeptic Richard Lead in the Dominion Post (September 22) following our conference last year. In a small article the "professional cynic" explained how he has tackled cons, from the Nigerian scam to property investment.

"I was living in Samoa in 1994 when I first saw the Nigerian scams. I used to attend a businessmen's lunch and would pass the letters around and we would have a good laugh. I later found one of the guys had got taken for \$90,000."

This and similar scams, he said, work by the "Concorde fallacy" – the only chance you have of getting back the money you've already invested is to put in more. "They just keep sucking you in and the losses keep getting bigger and bigger. I used to say 'how could people be so stupid?'. I don't say that any more. I've seen it happen so often."

He told the paper the hardest part of the job was dealing with people who had lost life savings, something he was not equipped to deal with. "Nothing in my accountant's training prepared me for people with tears in their eyes because they've lost everything."

The best way to avoid being taken in was to exercise common sense and carefully evaluate everything. "...if it sounds too good to be true, it usually is."

### Not a Prayer of a Chance

The biggest scientific experiment on prayer has failed to find any evidence that it helps to heal the sick.

Doctors in the US said that heart patients who were prayed for by groups of stranger recovered from surgery at the same rate as those who were not (Dominion Post, October 17).

The three-year study led by cardiologists from Duke University Medical Centre in North Carolina, involved 750 patients in nine hospitals and 12 prayer groups around the world.

The prayer groups included American Christian mothers, nuns, Sufi Muslims, Buddhist monks in

Nepal and English doctors and students in Manchester. Prayers were emailed to Jerusalem and placed in the Wailing Wall.

Earlier, less extensive, research had suggested prayer could have a beneficial effect.

The news brought swift reactions. The Bishop of Durham, Tom Wright, said "Prayer is not a penny-in-the-slot machine. You can't just put in a coin and get out a chocolate. This is like setting an exam for God to see if God will pass it or not."

### Red Tape for Health Pills

The Herald reports (December 8) that the \$200 million-a-year health supplements business is up in arms over a Government plan to join with Australia to regulate the industry.

Under this plan, all dietary supplements and alternative remedies would be classified as pharmaceuticals and regulated through a new transtasman agency.

New Zealand has about 10,000 complementary and alternative health practitioners. Health Minister Annette King said the move was about quality, public safety and standards. "We require standards about the food we sell... we require standards for pharmaceuticals and medical devices. And one of the hard lessons I learned last year was that the public demanded standards and regulations for complementary healthcare."

Opponents say New Zealand will lose control of decision-making to Australia, Kiwi dietary supplements firms will be hurt, and customers will have less choice.

Green MP Sue Kedgley and NZ First MP Pita Paraone are upset the Government is including alternative medicines and supplements before the health select committee report is out.

### "Slimming Water" the Latest Fad

Forget about cutting out carbs on Atkins or replacing meals with a milkshake - the latest dieting phenomenon to hit the shelves is bottled water which claims to help people lose weight (Rotorua Daily Post, January 13).

### Darwin Day Lecture Thursday, February 12, 2004

#### Biology and Mortality: the Mysterious Fears of our Nature

Dr Simon Pollard, natural  
history writer and  
photographer

8pm, A2 lecture theatre,  
University of Canterbury,  
Christchurch

Contrex is being marketed as Britain's first "cosmetic water", on the basis that it works as a slimming aid. Nestle, its maker, claims that the mineral water contains natural sources of calcium and magnesium which can eliminate toxins, fight fatigue and help people stay in shape. The calcium can also increase the body's metabolism and improve weight loss, according to Nestle.

Health experts dismissed the idea of a "diet water" as ridiculous.

Amanda Wynne of the British Dietetic Association said: "Drinking water will not make you slim, even if it is fortified with calcium and magnesium. It just doesn't work that way."

Despite this criticism, industry insiders are predicting that so-called "aquaceuticals" will be the boom dieting products of 2004. The fad started in Japan and hit America last year, with several brands planned for launch in Britain this year.

A spokeswoman for Nestle said, "It is selling like hot cakes. Contrex has been sold in France for years and women there call it the slimming water. You get the minerals you need without putting on weight."

Other aquaceuticals to go on sale recently include Blue Water, which costs an incredible £11 a litre and claims to improve skin conditions and general wellbeing. It has been developed by an Austrian naturalist, Johann Grander, who says he "removed the negative memories from water and transferred beneficial energy patterns to it".

Some fans say they feel better simply by sleeping next to a glass of Blue Water at night. Other products have celebrity endorsements, such as the Kabbalah Mountain Spring Water favoured by Madonna. It claims to have been transformed into a "living" water through modern technology and the wisdom of ancient texts used by the Cabbala, a Jewish mysticism.

Lakeland Willow has also been launched as an aquaceutical in the UK. According to its marketing blurb, it contains salicin, a natural pain-killing substance found in willow bark.



on human moral values and a priority for human rights, a reduction of war, violence, hunger, disease, prejudice, suspicion and irrationalism, and a continued advance of science and technology.

Environmentalism is opposed to human “moral values” because it

- Regards animals and other organisms as more important than humans.
- Considers evolution to be always harmful, exclusively caused by humans, and capable of being prevented.
- Fundamentally opposes modern technology, such as genetic engineering and nuclear energy.
- Regards science only as a support mechanism for these views.

Our society cannot progress unless we can restore genuine human moral values.

Vincent Gray  
Wellington

### Socialism and Starvation

So, I again find myself in an argument with Jim Ring. I think I preferred it when we were all united against the purveyors of quack medicines and fundamentalist religions.

Jim Ring rightly claims that few people have read the literature on famine. I’m not surprised, it is vast. But I can quote 33 peer reviewed works on the subject, ranging from some by a Nobel laureate economist, to Cambridge historians. When I did a quick Google on those sources that Ring provided for his evidence I found for one no match, and for the other an ideologically

driven American so-called think tank. I must admit that I have read nothing of this type of literature, but then neither do I read the stuff by UFO “researchers”.

Ring is right about one thing, his original letter confused me. If the Oxus Research foundation, whoever they are, suggest you can use the words socialism and starvation without further clarification, they are wrong. It is necessary to know what is meant by socialism because definitions depend more on one’s own position on the political

#### FREE FLYER GIFT!

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spectrum than any objective criteria. I also think it’s necessary to know what Ring meant by people starved under socialism, because by itself it’s a meaningless statement which requires the qualification that people have also starved under capitalism, feudalism and any other –ism you care to name. Although to be honest I could probably make out quite a good case for no famines in Germany under Nazism – does this make them good?

Famine, or starvation if Ring insists on the word, occurs for any number of reasons rather than simple socialism – or capitalism for that matter. Again Ring has jumped into an area where he is out of his depth, to make a political point. For every famine he can quote me under

a Socialist government I can quote him at least one under a capitalist regime. The Indian state with the highest literacy rate and life expectancy has been run by socialists in various coalitions for years. Ring is oversimplifying to make a political point.

Ring also makes generalisations about the anti-globalisation movement. As far as I can see they are not some sort of monolithic anti-capitalist group but consist of a number of quite disparate groupings including trade unions in developed countries who resent exporting jobs, and farmers’ groups in underdeveloped countries who quite like globalisation but resent the fact that the developed countries such as the United States and the European Union don’t apply it to themselves.

I also think that Ring has misunderstood the term green revolution. Perhaps he is confusing it with more recent genetic modification of crops. I can’t see why the green revolution, which largely consisted of improvements in irrigation, fertilization and the development of new strains of rice, should be against socialist principles. For one thing some of the new strains of rice were developed in government laboratories in India under so-called socialist governments. And if the idea was against socialist principles why did Stalin spend so long trying to create a green revolution of his own? In fact many of the new strains of rice were rejected by the very people they were meant to benefit, because they require large amounts of fertiliser and extra water which they could not afford. The earlier strains also tasted bad and were therefore rejected by the market.

I stand by my statement that Ring provides little other than glib generalisations and inaccurate case studies. One thing I have found by reading articles from the new right is that they tend to leave out economic case studies that don't fit the ideological bent. I think Ring does the same. However I will make this offer – I don't think that the pages of the New Zealand Skeptic the correct forum for publishing political tracts, so if he gives up writing them I'll give up criticising them.

Bob Metcalfe

*Yes, enough politics already! This correspondence is now closed - ed.*

### Kinesiology

Dr. Welch's Hokum Locum column in NZ Skeptic 69 contains the words "pseudoscience known as kinesiology". This is incorrect. Kinesiology is a respected, science-based, study of human movement dynamics. Several universities offer degrees in this field - eg University of Waterloo, in Canada. See [www.ahs.uwaterloo.ca/admissions/whykin.html](http://www.ahs.uwaterloo.ca/admissions/whykin.html). Perhaps Dr. Welch is thinking of "Applied Kinesiology" which is indeed crackpot stuff.

Vaso Bovan, P.E.  
Canada

height of the room, and placed tightly together like a loom warped up for weaving.

The birth of the Earth starts in the back top corner, stage right, and time marches to the front, around the podium, and "now is about half way down next to the door, back stage left." The development of different life forms is illustrated by objects hung on the rope in the appropriate places. At the end of this rope, the terminal half centimetre contains all of human history; a length about equal to the height of a person covers the time *Homo sapiens* has existed.

In contemplating this imaginative and instructive creation, I was struck by the large areas of it, corresponding to millions of years, which carried no objects indicating the appearance of something new. A reminder of Gould and Eldridge's "Punctuated Equilibrium"?

\* We count the number of zeroes following 1, and write that as a superscript after ten, eg  $10^{10,000,000} = 10^7$ .

## THE TIME LINE, or, GENESIS AOTEAROA

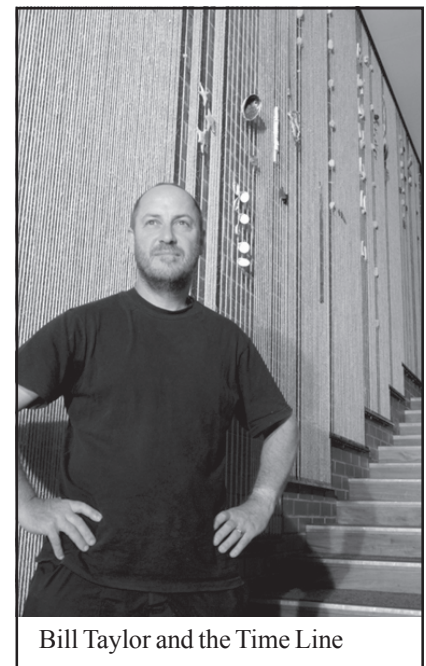
**Bernard Howard**

THE universe we live in is vast, in both space and time, so vast as to be beyond human comprehension. Mathematicians have devised a way in which the large numbers involved can be manipulated, the "exponent"\*, but it can mislead us into thinking we comprehend more than we really do. It can blind us to the true difference between two numbers whose exponents differ by only one unit. Thus, if my bank balance grows from  $10^2$  to  $10^3$ , I am richer by \$900, but if it grows from  $10^6$  to  $10^7$ , I have gained \$9 million.

Books on geology and palaeontology usually display the Earth's history as a vertical column, with the formation at the bottom and "now" at the top. To be at all useful, this column must be exponential, ie  $4.5 \times 10^9$  yr BP at the base, rising in equal steps,  $10^8$ ,  $10^7$ ,  $10^6$ , etc

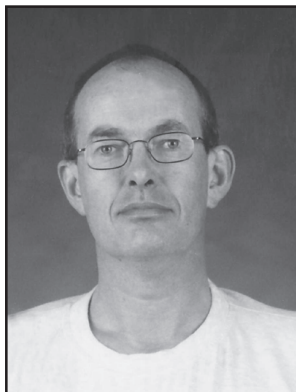
to the present. A linear scale would have the whole of "civilised" human life as a minute fraction of a millimetre, the thickness of a small bacterium.

To emphasise the true relationship between the age of the Earth and the scale of human existence, Mr Bill Taylor has devised an ingenious and impressive work, "The Time Line", or "Genesis Aotearoa" as the Royal Society of New Zealand, the funder of the project, call it. Take a piece of cord, and suppose each millimetre of its length to represent one thousand years. To represent the age of the Earth will need over four and a half kilometres of cord. This lengthy piece of rope hangs in the Cotton lecture theatre of the Victoria University of Wellington, arranged in vertical bits to fit the



Bill Taylor and the Time Line

See page 17 for Bill Taylor's comments on the installation



## Cellulite - Just a Euphemism for Fat

**C**ELLULITE is the term used by women's magazines to describe dimpled fat. It has no scientific or anatomical validity and it is simply ordinary fatty tissue that assumes a waffled appearance because fibrous tissue prevents the skin from fully expanding in areas where fatty tissue accumulates. This has been confirmed by a study where biopsies of fat and cellulite were microscopically indistinguishable by pathologists who were blinded as to the samples' origin. Calling fat "cellulite" is part of the modern trend to seeking alternatives to the (unpalatable) truth, in this case an adipose euphemism.

The latest treatment for Cellulite involves a machine called Cellu-M6. It is described as having "even been approved by the strict American Food and Drugs Administration". I checked the FDA website and although I could not find the machine specifically mentioned it did refer to a "Dermosonic Non-Invasive Subdermal Therapy System", presumably using ultrasonic stimulation of the skin. The FDA "approval" is nothing of the sort, merely an acknowledgement

that the machine is similar to others already on the market. There is nothing in the FDA response indicating any approval or endorsement of the device beyond noting that it "temporarily reduces the appearance of cellulite".

Given that about half of the NZ population are obese, and roughly half of these are women, this makes for a huge and lucrative market. The Cellu-M6 machine is described as "breaking down the cellulite, toxins and abnormal water build-up are expelled and the increased blood flow stimulates enzymes which encourage fat cells to break down." Journalists sometimes inadvertently get close to the truth and the article states in part "While it seems almost too good to be true..." Well, yes, it is.

With all worthless treatments it is essential to get the punters to do something for themselves, which in itself is actually effective, for example: "You'll still need to do some work. Walking, exercise and watching what you eat." The most well-motivated customers will be the ones who actually do exercise and lose weight. They will be thrilled with the results, happy with the cost and completely oblivious as to the real reason for their loss of cellulite (weight).

**New Idea 4/1/03**

### Cannabis

For various legislative and historical reasons, cannabis use is illegal in New Zealand. My feeling is, why legalise cannabis when we already have so much suffering from the abuse of tobacco and alcohol? Nevertheless, on the medical evidence available, moderate indulgence in cannabis has little ill effect on health. Cannabis

has been studied for possible use in various medical conditions but there are problems with drug delivery as most researchers feel that it is unacceptable to administer it through smoking and oral bio-availability is variable.

A recent Lancet study of patients with multiple sclerosis found that cannabis had no measurable effect on muscle stiffness or jerkiness. The patients, however, stated, "it had reduced their symptoms and improved their mobility." I went to the Lancet website and there are problems with this study. Fifty percent of the placebo wing of the trial claimed benefit and because of the psychoactive effect of the cannabis, subjects knew whether they were taking cannabis or placebo. I have written before on the problems of clinical trials becoming "unblinded" through this effect. The researchers should have used an 'active' placebo, something that mimicked the effects of cannabis. It appears that researchers still lack an understanding of this process. Perhaps they should call in James Randi to help them?

Despite the lack of evidence for the medical use of cannabis, "a wealthy Christchurch businessman caught growing cannabis has escaped without a conviction after convincing a High Court judge that he used it medically."

I can just see future headlines at the next sitting of the Dargaville Court: "Unemployed Maori youth of no fixed abode acquitted of growing cannabis after convincing the Judge he used it for a medical condition". Yeah, right.

But wait! The businessman, we are told, suffered from a painful bowel condition diagnosed as



“pyloric sphincter”. That explains everything. We all have a pyloric sphincter. It is a thickened muscular valve at the outlet of the stomach.

All of us can now smoke cannabis with a clear conscience (write or email me for a medical certificate, but only if you are rich, say \$5000 per certificate will be fine).

**Dominion Post, 8/11/03, 14/12/03**

### **Veterinary Homeopathy**

I don't normally concern myself in this area although I did recently correspond with the Veterinary Council and their policy over alternative medicine is very similar to that of the Medical Council with Doctors.

The Press (18/11/03) carried an article, which I thought was unintentionally very funny. A trainer was fined for injecting a horse with a homeopathic remedy. It was further reported, “another horse injected with it had won, been swabbed and tested negative in the past.”

Of course it tested negative! Homeopathic solutions are water and this simple fact seems to have completely escaped notice by the Judicial Control Authority. I thought I would have a bit of fun by writing to them and pointing this out so will keep you posted.

The homeopathic remedy was “Vetradyne” and was easily found by Google. A 50ml bottle costs \$215 but I was unable to find its composition, or any given therapeutic indication, apart from the cryptic comment “no claims made.” It was also detailed as being for “oral” use only so it does seem strange that it was given by injection. An inquiry of the website

was no more forthcoming over composition or dilution factor.

### **Counsellors**

Every time something unpleasant happens we hear the dreaded phrase “counselling has been arranged.” Can we do anything to stop this clichéd response?

Following the illegal viewing of pornography at a school, pupils have been offered counselling. What's wrong with today's teachers? Can't they handle a situation like this in a reasonable and intelligent manner? It seems that our population are willing to hand over all responsibility whenever they can. Is it because they lack confidence or is this a deliberate social policy on the part of the government? It's certainly consistent with Government policies that encourage dependency and allow hundreds of thousands of people to indefinitely remain on welfare payments.

**Dominion Post 27/8/03**

### **Badly Behaved Children**

Readers will know my attitude towards the socially engineered fad diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). ADHD is treated with methylphenidate (Ritalin) and there was a 17% increase in prescriptions over the past year. The drug is being sold by parents on the black market. This does not surprise me but readers may be surprised to know that most street drugs are sourced from legal prescriptions. There are doctors in every part of NZ who over-prescribe a wide range of psychoactive drugs, which are then sold.

To paraphrase a well-known psychiatrist: “any behaviour of a child can be consistent with ADHD.” We must act now and add Ritalin to the drinking water. This will have the dual benefit of removing the need for parents to discipline their children and of destroying the illicit drug trade. The whole population will be happy, well behaved and in no need of counselling.

**Marlborough Express 1/12/03**

### **Multiple Chemical Sensitivity**

This is a pseudoscientific diagnosis where people develop a fixed illness belief about chemical exposures. It is increasingly becoming an employment issue and is a classic example of psychosomatic illness. In a typical case, a radiographer is reported as needing a face mask before leaving home because “when I have a new dose of chemicals I become unreasonably upset about anything and everything, and become ill and extremely tired, plus a host of other physical effects.” Such patients have been studied by Staudenmayer (Environmental Illness: Myth and Reality). He tested 20 patients complaining of universal sensitivity to multiple chemicals and found that “the patients' appraisals were no different from chance performance” (ibid. p. 99). In other words, the patients' beliefs were disproved. There is an urgent need for such testing to be available in Australasia, otherwise there will be an increasing number of these spurious claims, misattributed to employment conditions.

**Marlborough Express 10/10/2003**

**John Welch lives in Picton and is a retired RNZAF medical officer.**

# Medical Principles

*It may be time to expand the principles of the Hippocratic Oath*

**Vicki Hyde**

**F**IRST do no harm. That's the major principle of the doctor's Hippocratic Oath. For the most part, the public are well-served by that principle and by our medical community. It's a principle which any health professional should follow as a matter of course. But I think they could do with an addition to "First do no harm" – how about "Second, do some good".

I'm not convinced, though, that that would have been enough to help the unfortunate patients of Dr Richard Gorringer, the Hamilton GP recently struck off the register after being found guilty of disgraceful conduct. His combination of unorthodox practices appeared to pass neither principle for a number of his patients, and he was found to have caused them "unnecessary suffering".

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of this case was the comment from the Medical Practitioners Disciplinary Tribunal that:

"Dr Gorringer's belief in the accuracy of his diagnoses and in the efficacy of his unusual treatments is such that the tribunal can have no confidence that, were he to continue in practice, his patients would be properly advised of their nature and limitations so as to permit informed choice."

Patient advocates have fought long and hard to get informed choice enshrined as an important principle in medical practice, so it's

worrying to hear that Mr Gorringer intends to continue to offer medical advice and treatment, albeit as a naturopath.

Given the tribunal's caveat, one wonders how informed his next patients will be as to the principles guiding his treatments. And what protection or redress, if any, there will be for future patients who find themselves undergoing "unnecessary suffering".

These are not questions solely for the Gorringer case, however, but ones we all need to consider. After all, we have a Ministerial Advisory Committee for Complementary and Alternative Health currently examining what modalities are to be integrated into the New Zealand health system, and what regulations, if any, this new and lucrative health market is to operate under.

The committee has defined complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) to include "all such practices and ideas self-defined by their users as preventing or treating illness or promoting health and well-being."

I guess this extremely loose definition is understandable, given that five of the eight committee members are self-identified CAM practitioners, with business interests in iridology, naturopathy, natural medicines, traditional Chinese medicine, acupuncture, aromatherapy, massage therapy, counselling, sclerology, osteopathy,

homeopathy, anthroposophy and culturally defined health sectors.

However, such an all-encompassing, self-serving definition doesn't help the patient trying to decide if a recommended practice is safe and effective, and it's a bad look for the CAM industry as a whole. Two CAM practitioners who were members of the White House Commission on CAM Policy, were honest enough to warn that:

"Generic recommendations neither serve the public interest nor protect the public health because they fail to distinguish between approaches, practices and products for which there is some scientific evidence and those that either stretch the realm of logic or are demonstrably unsafe."

And while it's said more Kiwis are turning to alternatives, they also want reassurance that not only are such practices safe, but that they will really work. According to the New Zealand Family Physician journal, 71 per cent of New Zealand patients surveyed wanted regulation of complementary medicine to be on a par with orthodox medicine.

The distinction, of course, is an artificial one. As Marcia Angell, editor of the New England Journal of Medicine, says, there is only medicine that has been adequately tested and medicine that has not, medicine that works and medicine that may or may not work.

Once a treatment has been tested rigorously, it no longer matters whether it was considered alternative at the outset. Everyone would welcome cures for cancer, eczema, multiple sclerosis, arthritis, whatever their origin, so long as they do no harm and, as an equally important requirement, actually do some good.

But if the modality involved has no basic grounding in reality, then it doesn't matter how many doctors take it up, how many products are sold, how well integrated it is in our hospitals, it won't do any good and, as demonstrated, can do a great deal of harm – physical, emotional and economic.

Any health practitioner, whether registered doctor or naturopath, who refuses to acknowledge this, is guilty of disgraceful conduct. You don't need a professional board to tell you that, just simple ethical principles.

**Vicki Hyde is chair-entity of the New Zealand Skeptics**

## 4.6 Billion Years Worth of String

*Bill Taylor explains some of the thinking behind the Time-Line installation, "Genesis Aotearoa", at Victoria University (See also Page 13).*

AS A lay person I entered the world of Earth Science with a sketchy understanding and appreciation of what it entailed. Coming from an arts background there was a substantial degree of culture shock. Once this had been worked through I began to experience a rich interchange of knowledge and understanding; the interface of science and art is an exciting dynamic.

The Royal Society was concerned that while I was on Fellowship I actually learnt something. Over the years I had developed some curiosity about evolution but hadn't pursued this beyond the school's library. Issues such as the Big Bang, 4.6 billion years of Earth history, Chaos Theory and the expanding universe were really out of my zone of appreciation. Continental Drift theory I could appreciate but my knowledge was scant.

This curiosity blended informally and naturally with an appreciation of creation myths, such as the Maori creation myth that I often used to motivate art classes. Parallel to this was a strong sense of scepticism towards Creation Science: I always felt Genesis was yet another myth.

The prime reason for creating something like the Time Line, though, was to prove the point that art and science complement each other and enrich learning at even sophisticated levels of inquiry.

In other words, the connection goes deeper than cosmetic decoration or superficial patronage. This is a mutually worthwhile and purposeful connection, one that is not so obvious with other generic arts.

### Bishop Ussher and Other Fathers of Science

In the mid-sixties, while sitting fidgeting in church, my elder brother pointed to the top of the first page of his Bible and told me knowledgeably that people thought that the world began 6000 years ago. He was referring to the Ussherian date of 4004 BC. News like this fed an already phobic imagination with visions of divine catastrophes.

Later the National Geographic and its articles on Richard Leakey's discoveries (in the late sixties and early seventies), dated in millions of years, led me to relax a bit and see the world and my place in it as a little more tenable.

The Ussherian date provides a good lead-in to the culture of science. His scholarly and scientific use of the Bible was regarded as impeccable, thorough and unreproachable. James the First was so impressed with his approach that he had the dates included at the top of each page in the edition of the Bible that bears his name.

Ussher's work was preceded by that of Dr John Lightfoot, Vice Chancellor of Cambridge University, who in 1644 gave an even more precise time of 9.00 am on 23 October 4004 BC.

Sir Isaac Newton played the same game. By his calculations the world began in 3996 BC. This conclusion caused alarm amongst his colleagues in the Royal Society. Some members' theories that the Chinese Dynasties went back as much as 6000 years were rendered untenable.

Lightfoot, Ussher, and Newton represent through their rigour, and logical sequential inquiry into the evidence they held, the attributes of good scientists. This style of thinking would eventually undermine their original conclusions, as people sought and critiqued new evidence.



# You support quackery!

*Government hypocrisy is rife amid the talk of a “knowledge-based economy”*

**Raymond Richards**

**H**OMEOPATHY does not work. There is no debate about this fact among rational, informed people.

Homeopathy is a sham system of medicine. It is based on two false ideas that were dreamed up by a German, Samuel Hahnemann, around 1800, before the era of scientific medicine. The first of these principles is the notion that a patient can be helped by giving a substance that would cause the symptoms in a healthy person. Thus, a homeopath gives pepper to a patient who has a fever because taking pepper makes a healthy person feel hot. Of course, there is no reason why such a treatment would work. The second idea is that the so-called medicine is made more powerful by diluting it many times – to the point where only water is left. Homeopaths claim the water somehow remembers the original speck of substance that was in it. Of course, this idea is fanciful. In other words, homeopaths give patients ordinary water, perhaps in a sugar cube. Thus, homeopathy can not work.

The danger is that homeopathy plays with people's health, which is a serious subject. As we see too often, quackery can be a matter of life and death. Instead of seeking proper medical advice, people can waste time – which is precious in the case of a worsening illness – and money, on pseudomedicine. The winter 1995 edition of *Mothering* magazine listed supposed homeopathic remedies for such serious childhood diseases as measles and

whooping cough. These “remedies” are as effective as waving a forked stick. In their ignorance, some homeopaths speak against antibiotics and vaccinations. Meanwhile, so-called homeopathic vaccines, which were for sale in an Auckland pharmacy, give nothing but a false sense of security. (Dr Leo Revell's recent statement in his *Waikato Times* column that “vaccination is a form of homeopathy” was inaccurate and unhelpful.) Lots of dangerous nonsense is on show at the Auckland College of Classical Homeopathy's page at [www.nzhomeopath.com/auckland\\_seventh\\_organon.htm](http://www.nzhomeopath.com/auckland_seventh_organon.htm). Inadequate law means homeopaths practice without a medical licence. Even Ricky Gorringer, the disgraced and banned Hamilton doctor who uses homeopathy and other quackery, can continue to see patients as an alternative therapist. Because it is no good and leads to dangers, homeopathy deserves oblivion.

The homeopathic industry is well established in New Zealand. It includes the NZ Council of Homeopaths, insurers, manufacturing pharmacies and health professionals. Caring more for profit than for patients, Southern Cross Healthcare has started selling The Wellbeing Plan, which can cover homeopathy and other nonsense, such as acupuncture and naturopathy. It is also shocking that some chemists have chosen to leave behind their ethics by selling homeopathic “medicines”. A chemist who does not know

homeopathy is useless is incompetent and should be out of the field.

Worse, the Government is using our hard-earned dollars to support this twaddle. Career Services, which is a Crown Entity and reports to the Minister of Education, says it is “New Zealand's leading provider of career information, advice and guidance.” Its government-funded website, [www.careers.co.nz](http://www.careers.co.nz), links to the Bay of Plenty College of Homeopathy and publicises the joke qualifications available there. Indeed, homeopathy is widely taught in New Zealand, with government support. The Wellpark College of Natural Therapies, located in Grey Lynn, is a NZ Qualifications Authority-accredited training institution that teaches homeopathy and other quackery, such as iridology and Ayurvedic medicine. The Waikato Institute of Technology and some other tertiary education facilities teach homeopathy. Three NZQA accredited colleges teach homeopathy: the Auckland College of Classical Homeopathy, the Wellington College of Homeopathy, and the Bay of Plenty College of Homeopathy, which has branches in Tauranga, Auckland and Christchurch. The Tauranga branch, which teaches at the local polytechnic, is the country's largest homeopathic training provider. Because it has NZQA accreditation, the college has approval for student loans and allowances by the Ministry of

Education. A ridiculous course of Homeopathy for Animals is sold at the Auckland University of Technology and by videotape. It, too, is approved by the NZQA and for loans and allowances by the Ministry of Education. Fees and costs for those paying through WINZ/Student Loans for training as homeopaths can be \$10,000. Thus, misguided students are wasting our money to learn quackery, with government approval.

Unless rational and informed people speak up, the situation will get even worse. The Ministerial Advisory Committee on Complementary and Alternative Health, which is dominated by supporters of quackery, is pushing for the integration of homeopathy and other nonsense into our health system. Already, our taxes pay for acupuncture and sacro-cranial massage through ACC. Is homeopathy next? So much for a knowledge-based economy!

IdiotWatch

“I would suggest it takes more blind faith to be an atheist, or a believer in Darwinian evolution, than it does to be a Christian.”

Ian Wishart, letters, *North & South*, November 2003, p. 20.

The editor of *Investigate* magazine shows he is scientifically illiterate.

**Dr Raymond Richards is a Senior Lecturer in History and American Studies at the University of Waikato. He can be reached at [ray@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:ray@waikato.ac.nz)**

Rudolph Steiner’s Advice to Farmers

*Bob Brockie considers the enduring influence of the founder of Anthroposophy*

Down on the farm, Rudolf Steiner taught that our forbears lived on the continents of Atlantis (which sank beneath the Atlantic) and Lemuria (which we shared with lemurs until it sank beneath the Indian Ocean).

Men were supersensible and god-like in those days, their thoughts soaring among the stars. Unfortunately, Lucifer and pernicious scientists like Sir Isaac Newton took away our innocence and filled our heads with poisonous nonsense. We are now the degenerate descendants of those far-off happy people but, if we follow Steiner’s precepts, we can regain our innocence, learn again how to soar among the stars, and speak to the dead in the forthcoming Age of Aquarius.

Steiner had something profound to say about most things – coffee, architecture, the banking system, dancing, and agriculture. In 1923 Steiner explained to some Silesian farmers: “If you want to know how beetroot grows you must understand not only what happens in the Earth but in the whole cosmos, for the sun the moon and the planets contain an inner principle of life which controls chemicals on Earth.”

Steiner had a poor view of scientists “who deal with only the corpse of chemistry and not the living substance.” He said, “Only spiritually prepared people understand the living spirit of chemistry.” In the soil, Steiner told his farmers, carbon bore creative and cosmic

pictures and sublime imaginations; nitrogen sensed whether there is enough water in a district, and limestone was under the power of the moon, Mercury and Venus.

The planets beam astral energies down on the Earth where these forces can be harnessed by cows’ horns buried in the soil. The horns must be filled with quartz crystals to absorb the astro-ethereal energies, which are then rayed out into the living mystical soil.

To get rid of mice, Steiner recommended that farmers catch one when Venus was in Scorpio, burn its skin and sprinkle its ashes over the fields. This will “negate the reproductive power of the mice...”

He explained that farms were like living organisms, where water played the same role as blood in our bodies. If farmers wanted to potentise their water with cosmic energy, they had to pump, pulse and purify it, as did the heart.

You’d think that this claptrap would have died with Steiner, but No! Emigré continentals brought his ideas and practices to New Zealand where they provide the main-spring and scientific underpinning for biodynamic farming!

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### A Poem for Darwin Day

#### “DIES MIRABILIS, 12 February, 1809”

Two baby boys are born today  
In England and the USA  
And fifty years are given each  
Before they're called upon to teach  
The roads to freedom, liberty,  
The ways of knowledge, dignity,  
When Abe said, “Let the people go.”  
And Charles: “And let them also know.”

Dan Dungan

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