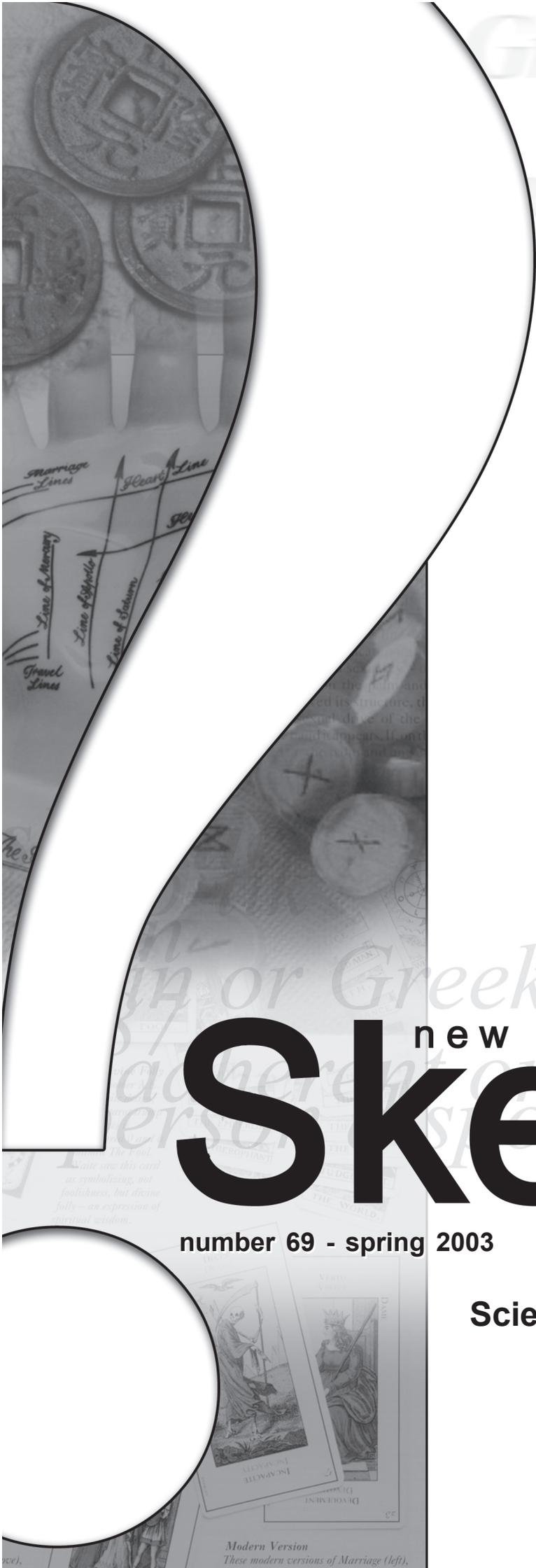


Skeptic

a person in a state of terminal caution

Margaret Mahy



new zealand
Skeptic

number 69 - spring 2003

www.skeptics.org.nz

Science and Environmental Policy
Eugenics in New Zealand
Conference Reports

Modern Version
These modern versions of Marriage (left),

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Deadline for next issue: 10 January 2004

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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Have Your Say

Vicki Hyde

ENVIRONMENTAL issues have played an increasing role in skeptical subject matter over recent years, ranging from calls for biodynamic possum peppering earning Jeanette Fitzsimons the Bent Spoon last year, to skepticism about global warming, from poo-h-pooing of environmental impacts on taniwha habitat to wondering just how much paranoia and hypochondria is at the root of the health issues of moth-ridden Aucklanders in the infamous spray zone.

That's why I was pleased to be able to invite Bruce Taylor from the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment to speak at the conference, as I was aware of their attempt to encourage feedback on the role science should - must! - play in environmental decision-making.

There were certainly some strong feelings expressed, most notably concerning the impression that government organisations appear to bow before political correctness and potential vote-pandering, rather than sticking to scientific facts when making environmental decisions. Having read the document, I had been surprised by just how strong the support was for science at the heart of such decision-making.

As a group, we are very conscious of those times when credible scientific evidence is also all too easily cast aside in favour of a consultative culture — look at the amount of time spent pandering to the Steiner lobby with their proposals re going after painted apple moth, or Jeanette Fitzsimons with her silly support for possum peppering (a stand which made some of the more scientifically literate Greens cringe, but which I suspect was taken for political reasons).

Important as it is to consult, to hear other views, and to take into account factors outside that of the technical or scientific, it's also important not to waste time and energy and resources on the patently incredible, particularly in an area as important as environmental policy or protection.

If I say cosmic astral influences can be used to control possums, is that equally valid to, say, the evidence for supporting 1080 or fertility controls? I'm confident that the Skeptics as a group would give a resounding "no" and argue that part of the responsibility our public servants and elected representatives have is to protect us, our country, our lives and our wallets from these subjective views where they clash with reality.

Yes, science can identify issues and areas of knowledge (and non-knowledge), but ultimately we are making political and social decisions. And we have a chance to flag why we think science needs to be a part of that process and how we can get better public engagement with decision-making that it recognises the importance of the underpinning of good science.

What should trouble us is the public indifference to science, and that this indifference and, in some cases, outright hostility, is a result not of

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Science and Environmental Policy – Challenges and Opportunities

The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment is calling for submissions on the role of science in environmental policy and decision-making. This article is based on a paper presented at the 2003 New Zealand Skeptics' Conference in Wellington.

Bruce Taylor

ARE public policies and decisions that affect the environment adequately informed by science? How important is science relative to other considerations that environmental policy and decision-makers have to consider? How well are uncertainties reflected in policies and decisions and subsequently managed? Are the results expected of policies and decisions being achieved? These are a few of the issues that the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment (PCE) is currently investigating. As part of the project examining the role of science in environmental policy and decision-making, a discussion paper: *Illuminated or Blinded by Science?* was circulated by the PCE in July 2003 for comment. Its purpose was to encourage debate on the role of science in environmental policy and decision-making by elected representatives at central and local government as well as appointed decision-makers such as the Environmental Risk Management Authority and the Environment Court.

As an Officer of Parliament, the PCE is independent of these institutions. The Commissioner's functions under the Environment

Act 1986 enable him to investigate the effectiveness of systems and processes for managing the environment. The PCE's interest in undertaking this study is to explore opportunities and barriers to improving the quality and effectiveness of environmental policies, decisions and outcomes, and the role that science plays in this.

The project was triggered by a number of concerns arising from previous PCE studies and from routine monitoring of environmental management decisions and policies of public authorities. These concerns include:

- Gaps in knowledge and information that make policy and decision-making difficult and controversial, or the environmental outcomes uncertain. Examples include information gaps identified in the Ministry for the Environment's 1997 State of the Environment report, and the controversy surrounding the potential consequences of lifting the moratorium on genetic modification.

- Lessons to be learned about science-policy interface issues highlighted by the handling of the BSE ("mad cow" disease) incident in the UK in the late 1990s.

- Pressures on environmental policy and decision-makers, such as time constraints within which decisions must be made and which are often incompatible with the time needed to undertake appropriate scientific research to guide those decisions.

- The environmental consequences of either rushing into or delaying decisions where there may be significant uncertainties.

- The correct framing of questions for science to attempt to answer.

- Environmental policy and decision-makers' need for and access to independent scientific advice.

- Issues around research funding and science purchaser-provider relationships.

- Transparency of and accountability for decisions that require not only scientific evidence, but also evidence that other viewpoints have been considered.

Policy and decision-making on environmental matters present particular difficulties because of our limited understanding of complex ecological systems, and the wide

range of interests in how natural and physical resources are managed. Problems can be exacerbated when facts are uncertain, values are in dispute, the stakes are high, decisions are urgent, and outcomes are unpredictable.

Policy Realities

The reality for environmental policy and decision-makers is that, under statutes like the Resource Management Act 1991, they have a responsibility to consider a broad range of interests including environmental, economic, social and cultural impacts of a proposed activity or policy. Some of these interests will be supported by scientific evidence or predictions, while others will be expressed in terms of values that are important to a community. It is this combination of “facts” and “values” that presents the greatest challenge for policy and decision-makers—finding environmental solutions that are both scientifically justified and meet the needs and aspirations of the community. In environmental decision-making processes should knowledge that is based on our current scientific understanding prevail over other kinds of knowledge? Are there ways to effectively integrate different kinds of knowledge to help decision-makers achieve good environmental outcomes? Do the merits of each source of knowledge need to be evaluated on some common basis?

The significance of scientific knowledge and other non-scientific viewpoints are assessed in different ways. Scientific evidence and the divergences of views among scientists can be challenged, defended and assessed through well established experimental and peer review processes. On the other

Editorial (Continued from page 2)

ignorance but of a sense of powerlessness.

Some social scientists are now arguing that instead of public education programs aimed at boosting science literacy per se, we should be more concerned with public engagement strategies that get citizens directly involved in science policy-making.

Research has shown that knowledge, trust, efficacy, and deliberation are all closely related. Enhanced knowledge of politics leads to an increased belief among individuals that they can make a difference in politics, and also leads to increased trust in political institutions. Deliberating or discussing politics with others enhances knowledge, and, more vitally, gets people involved.

When members of the public take part in discussions that make them feel they can influence real decisions, lack of scientific knowledge is not necessarily a problem. In many countries around the world, consensus conferences, citizens’ juries, deliberative polls, and hui have all been used to give people a feeling that they will be listened to, as well as told what’s what scientifically.

And these efforts have indicated that people involved in such discussions quickly become adept at quizzing experts, mastering a brief, asking questions and unmasking political assumptions masquerading as scientific conclusions. It’s often very small-scale—in the tens, rather than the thousands, of people involved, but it’s a start.

I know, I’m an optimist, but I think that most of us are in the belief that we can make rational, informed decisions. Or, at the very least, recognise when we are being irrational. Maybe what we should be demanding are announcements which take this tack:

“Yes, this is an irrational decision and we are making it irrationally because we want to, in the face of what evidence we have because the loudest voices say we should do it this way.”

That at least would be intellectually honest and ethical!

Someone at the conference asked what the level of response had been to the report and I think I wasn’t the only one surprised to hear that the majority (over 80% I think) had come from the scientific community. Assumptions that the process would have been captured by the vocal political environmental lobby were unfounded... so let’s test those other assumptions.

I urge you to read Bruce’s piece (Page 3, this issue), better yet take a look at the report (available at: http://www.pce.govt.nz/reports/allreports/1_877274_09_7.shtml)

See what you think, and let Bruce know.

hand, non-scientific considerations may reflect strongly held ethical, cultural and moral values that are usually more subjective in nature and challenged or defended through debate and dialogue rather than by using prescribed assessment procedures or criteria. Both the scientific process and public debate are important in developing environmental policies and decisions that reflect not only what is known (ie what is scientifically verifiable and defensible) but also what is acceptable to society in general. Acceptability may ultimately and legitimately be the basis on which final decisions are made, as is the case with New Zealand's "nuclear-free" policy. Public health policies on smoke-free environments (eg in public buildings and workplaces) stem from improved understanding of the health effects of passive smoking as well as changing attitudes to, and less tolerance of, smoking in enclosed places.

Knowledge has Many Sources

Some regard scientific knowledge as being essential and the primary basis for environmental policies and decisions. Others suggest that, in the politics of decision-making, values are what ultimately matter most. But knowledge needed to make wise decisions is derived from many sources including various scientific facts, theories, disciplines and approaches, philosophical views, and individuals' upbringing and life experiences, to name just a few. The focus of the PCE's discussion paper is on the role of science, but recognises that other viewpoints are also important and it is necessary to consider them in environmental

decision-making processes. The expectation is that environmental policies and decisions are based on sound knowledge. But views differ on what is considered "sound knowledge", as evidenced by the ongoing debate about the causality of global climate change and what

Some regard scientific knowledge as being essential and the primary basis for environmental policies and decisions. Others suggest that, in the politics of decision-making, values are what ultimately matter most.

the appropriate policy responses should be. Scientific knowledge, by its very nature, is continually evolving. Social values may also change over time and can vary among sectors of society. Science clearly has a significant role to play in the development of effective environmental policies and decisions, but should other knowledge that is not regarded as scientifically defensible be labelled as unsound or irrelevant? Should decisions be routinely revised in the light of new knowledge and changing attitudes?

No Certainties

Neither scientific nor other sources of knowledge can guarantee absolute certainties for decision-makers. Science can and does improve our understanding of complex ecological systems and helps to reduce uncertainties. The vacuum created by the absence of full scientific knowledge will inevitably be filled by other assertions and concerns, including moral, ethical and cultural values. The current debate on genetic

modification is a good example of this. Better understanding by decision-makers of the values that are important to communities is also key to promoting inclusiveness in decision-making and improving the public's confidence in the decisions being made on their behalf. Whether decisions are eventually based on science or values (or both), the important point is that the process needs to be transparent and the reasons for the decision made clear.

Our aim in this project is to encourage better quality decision-making that results in good environmental management. This requires sound scientific understanding of environmental risks, and an understanding of the acceptability of those risks and, therefore, how they should be managed. Science has an important and influential role in environmental policy and decision-making. We wish to explore how well it is used and incorporated into decisions that need to consider a wide range of factors. If environmental policies and decisions are based both on what is known and what is acceptable, there may be a greater chance of achieving environmentally sustainable outcomes.

Bruce Taylor works in the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment.

A Close-Run Thing

The Eugenics movement in New Zealand had legislative successes greater than anywhere in the world outside the USA and Nazi Germany

Bob Metcalfe

EUGENICS was a phenomenon that lasted for less than a hundred years, although for some it still exists as a rational stand to take on the population problem, if not as a scientific theory. Of course advances in genetics have reintroduced the idea that we can by our own scientific efforts improve the human race. It was a theory that engaged not only some of the finest scientific, but also the finest philosophical and ethical minds of the day. It was a scientific theory that was brought to a halt less by scientific inquiry than by the moral revulsion produced by the excesses of Nazi Germany. Eugenics is interesting partly at least because New Zealand went further than anywhere else except for Germany and the US in the application of practical Eugenics in certain areas of legislation.

Francis Galton (1822-1911) began an investigation in the 1860s into the inheritance of genius, which was to have profound effects on the way people viewed the poor and the handicapped for almost 100 years. His ideas incorporated those of his cousin Charles Darwin and others who were worried that evolution might be reversed, and the human race become “degenerate” if those regarded as of little worth were allowed to breed unchecked, and the middle classes restricted the size of their families. Galton had

some funny ideas about what might be inherited genetically from one’s forebears. Love of the sea for instance, as he noticed that the sons of ships’ captains often followed their fathers to sea. Galton was joined in his research and beliefs by several famous researchers including Karl Pearson, regarded by some as the founder of modern statistics.

Eugenics remained a concern mainly of a few biologists and statisticians until the first decade of the 20th century when it became very popular with certain sections of the public in particularly Europe and the US, although it did spread almost throughout the world. In Britain the popular movement was begun by Sybil Gotto, a recent widow. Many well-known people either joined or supported the society. Cyril Burt, Havelock Ellis, Julian Huxley, John Maynard Keynes, George Bernard Shaw, all supported eugenics. Winston Churchill represented Britain at the second international congress in 1912. His views on the subject were considered so embarrassing to the government that they were suppressed until 1991. The reasons for the popularity of eugenics are complex but can probably be ascribed to perceived social problems affecting the latter half of the 19th century and the relatively new belief in science as the answer to

the world’s problems. Both the popular and scientific beliefs in eugenics were remarkably resistant to the discovery of evidence refuting them.

Two family case studies came to encapsulate popular eugenics ideas about the results of degeneration. Both of these came from the US. The Jukes were a related group of misfits and criminals traceable to a single couple in New York State. The Kallikaks were a pseudonymous feeble-minded family discovered by H. H. Goddard, a prominent American eugenicist who published his research about the heritability of feeble-mindedness in 1912. Eugenists continued to use these case studies as evidence of the truth of their beliefs long after they had been discredited.

Eugenists were often associated with social darwinists, who saw the solution to the problem of racial degeneration in allowing a high death rate among the lower classes to keep their numbers down. However Eugenists were interested in using social instead of natural selection to increase the proportion of the best “stock” in the racial group. The definition of good and bad stock was entirely predictable. Eugenic worth was seen as incarnate in oneself and one’s associates, and there was general agreement that many of the traits of the lower classes, such as

poverty, disease, mental defect, and unemployment were not only unwanted but inherited. Eugenists generally divided people into three broad groups: “desirables”, “passables”, and “undesirables”. The desirables were almost invariably members of the Eugenists own social grouping, that is members of the academic and professional classes. The passables did change slightly over time but tended to be seen as the upper end of the working class. The undesirables could be people with mental or physical disabilities, the poor, or members of a race lower on the Victorian hierarchy of ethnic groups, the highest of which of course was Anglo-Saxon.

Popular Movement

Eugenics then, became a small popular movement among sections of the middle class responding to what they saw as the major population problems of the 20th century, sparked off by specific events, such as the poor state of health of many of the population shown by medical examinations of troops in the Boer War, and the IQ tests given to American soldiers in World War I.¹ The idea was to promote eugenics as a solution to these problems by either encouraging the worthy to breed (positive eugenics) or somehow discouraging or preventing those of lesser worth from having children (negative eugenics).

The German Society for Race Hygiene was established in 1905, the English Eugenics Education Society in 1907, the American Eugenics Record Office in 1910, and the French Eugenics Society in 1912. Eugenics societies were also established in Latin America. The New Zealand society was established in 1910. In Britain and the

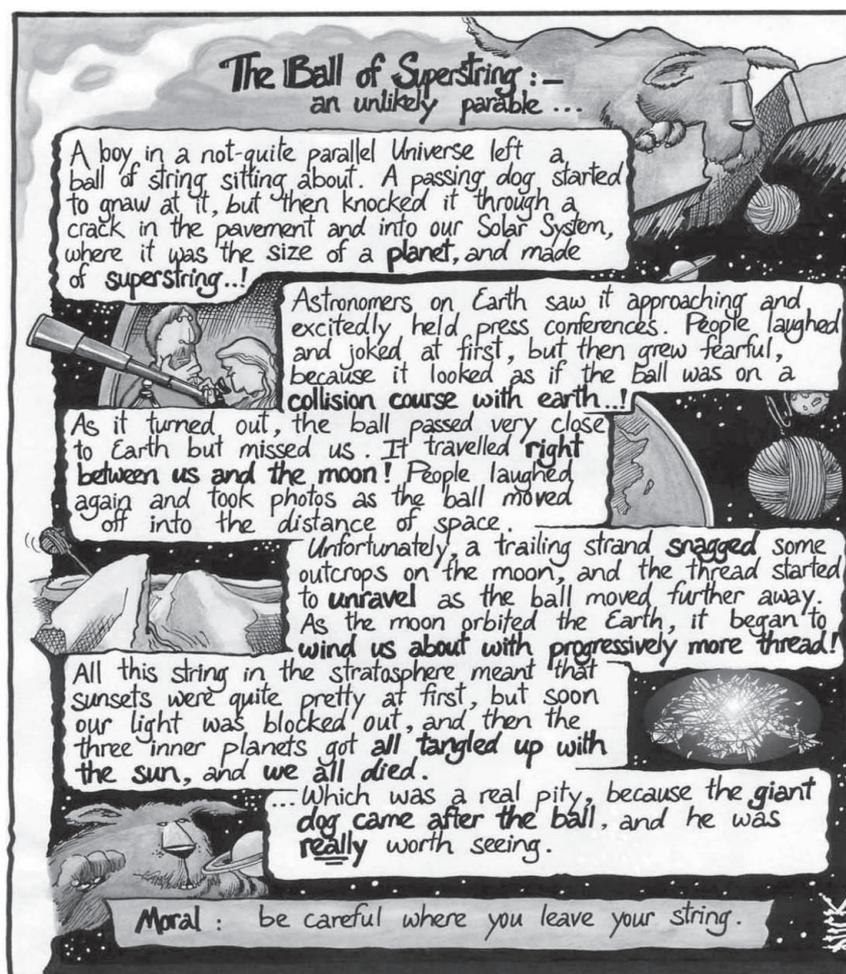
US laboratories were funded to undertake eugenic research. Karl Pearson became the first director of the Galton laboratory for National Eugenics at University College in London, and Charles Davenport founded the Eugenic Record Office at Cold Spring Harbor in the US, which due to its generous funding could employ hundreds of researchers, most of whom were women.²

Legislation

Eugenists agitated for legislation which reflected their beliefs. This could be relatively benign. In France for instance, because Eugenists there remained Lamarckian in their outlook, they agitated for better working and living conditions for the lower classes in the belief that these conditions would produce healthier

people who would pass on their good health to their descendants. In Germany however, because of their obsession with so-called racial hygiene, these beliefs eventually led to the Nazi programme of racial extermination.

Eugenic beliefs changed over time, tending to become more benign. Gradually, very gradually, scientists began to realise that eugenic beliefs simply didn't stack up. However what was more influential was the association with the excesses of the Nazi regime, particularly in the US. Basically eugenics fizzled out from the 1930s onwards, and was regarded with loathing from 1945. Many Eugenists moved into the area of genetic counselling, advising rather than compelling the changes they wished to see. However as late as the 1950s at least one ex-eugenic



researcher was employed by the tobacco industry to produce “re-search” showing that genetic predisposition, rather than smoking, was responsible for lung cancer.

The New Zealand Experience

Interestingly I could find no evidence of eugenic ideas in any of the New Zealand scientific journals in the 19th century. Eugenics in New Zealand was more a popular phenomenon than a scientific one. Those scientists that were interested in eugenics tended to be working in the public service rather than engaging in research.

New Zealanders did embrace eugenics enthusiastically however, when the first society was formed in Dunedin in 1910. As with the overseas experience members of these societies tended to be middle-class people, often medical or academic. Many politicians also accepted eugenics if they did not join the societies. One of the major eugenic publications, *The Fertility of the Unfit* was published by W B Chapple (later a Liberal MP in Britain) while he was resident in New Zealand.

The New Zealand societies agitated for eugenics to be applied to legislation in this country and began an education programme for schools and other interested bodies. As far as I could see eugenics was not as such taught in high schools or universities in this country, but some was certainly taught in training colleges, interestingly enough. (It was taught extensively in US high schools and colleges.)

Eugenists allegedly influenced the passing of the Divorce and

Matrimonial Causes Act Amendment Bill of 1907, which granted divorces to those married to the insane, insanity being fairly broadly defined by Eugenists and regarded as something that could be bred out of the race.

In spite of the fact that the New Zealand eugenics societies lapsed

People of unsound mind, and I might add that epileptics were considered to be in this category, were thought to breed like rabbits.

at the beginning of World War I the fertility of the unfit remained a common cause of many influential New Zealanders. This culminated in the introduction of two bills which were to some extent designed to curb it. Part of the reason for doing this of course was economic, as the unfit were considered to be a huge drain on the finances of the state. Eugenics may have given these bills a certain scientific legitimacy which they may not otherwise have had.

The first of these was the Mental Defectives Bill of 1911. This was a large bill which set out to re-organise care of the “feeble-minded”. Much of it was concerned with classification, and treatment, and much of it was uncontroversial and of benefit to people in institutions. However a substantial proportion of the bill was concerned with the segregation of the allegedly feeble-minded from people of the opposite sex and protecting them from their own “uninhibited and promiscuous sexual nature”. People of unsound mind, and I might add that

epileptics were considered to be in this category, were thought to breed like rabbits. Therefore carnal knowledge of mentally defective females became an offence, with consent of the female not considered to be a valid defence, although ignorance of her mental defect was. This bill passed with very little opposition, although MPs generally es-chewed any drastic solutions to the problem such as sterilisation or contraception. Sterilisation was regarded at this time as both politically dangerous and a problem for doctors who may have been sued.

The next bill, the Mental Defectives Amendment Bill of 1928, was much more problematic, as it did include provisions for sterilisation of the unfit. Indeed a government committee of inquiry, which was set up to investigate the whole question of mental defect and sexual offending, discussed the lethal chamber with some enthusiasm. On the other hand, there was an organised and stout resistance to the bill from various politicians and members of the academic community.

Nationwide Questionnaire

The commission was a particularly thorough and large-scale exercise. A questionnaire was sent to every GP in the country, asking about numbers of mental defectives and suggestions for treatment. There was some discussion of eugenics in general in the *New Zealand Medical Journal*, but little about the actual bill. Very few GPs replied, and those that did tended to be scathing.

Almost everyone with any bureaucratic authority seems to have been solicited for an opinion,

including the Government balneologist.³ The commission's report was sought by a great number of organisations, from women's groups and the major churches to the Theosophical Society. The list of organisations to which the report was sent runs to five pages and the print run for the report was very large. Overseas governments and organisations as far apart as Australia, the US and Germany also showed interest in the report.⁴ There seems to have been a general enthusiasm for sterilisation in the US, Germany and Scandinavia at this time. The first eugenic sterilisation laws in Europe were introduced in 1928 by the Swiss and in 1929 by the Government of Denmark. The Americans were also sterilising quite large numbers of people they judged to be mentally unfit, and had been, both informally and formally, for some years. All of this would have been apparent to the Inspector General of Mental Hospitals, when he was sent overseas to gather information for the bill.

Controversy

The bill itself had a number of uncontroversial clauses relating to the classification and treatment of so-called mental defectives. Like the preceding act of 1911 much of the bill was procedural. However certain clauses relating to sterilisation of mental defectives, the prohibition of their marriage, the new classification of "social defectives", and the classification of children who were two years behind in their school work as mentally defective, caused much controversy. The clause relating to the sterilisation of mental defectives attracted more opposition than anything else in the bill. (Although the trade unions were naturally

opposed to the social defective classification, which they thought might be used against them.)

All this resulted in a remarkably lively debate in Parliament. Although the eugenic societies had been defunct for about 10 years it is obvious that eugenics ideas were very much alive. The opposition debate in particular was both vigorous and informed. Peter Fraser, who was the best informed of the (Labour) opposition members, had obviously done some research into genetics as he quoted some of the best geneticists of the day in support of his argument for dropping the controversial clauses. He also sensibly quoted a number of examples of famous fathers who had had less than perfect sons while refuting the inevitable references to the Jukes and Kallikaks.⁵ On the government side the arguments tended to be less scientific, although the Minister of Health claimed to have "...searched the world's best literature on the subject...". On the whole though, the government arguments tended to be fairly agricultural. The member for Riccarton, for instance, likened human beings to Clydesdales.

The best debate however took place in the daily newspapers. This paralleled the various debates on this topic overseas, with those people involved with the care and control of mental defectives generally being for sterilisation, and academic psychologists being against. This debate mostly took place in the Auckland papers but did spill over into others. It seems to have been between R A Fitt, professor of Education at Auckland University College, with W Anderson, Professor of Philosophy at the same institution on the one hand, and W H Triggs, chairman

of the Committee of Inquiry into Mental Defectives and Sexual Offenders on the other. The general public did not on the whole take part in this debate.

Trenchant Criticisms

Professor Fitt offered some trenchant criticisms of the science that the bill was based on. His main objection was that there was not as yet enough scientific knowledge about the measurement of mental defect, or enough work on interpreting its causes. He also believed that the psychiatrists who were to be put in charge of the classification of mental defectives were not properly competent to do so. He quite rightly stated that scientific testing should be used instead of the intuition of the psychiatrists in charge of the classification board. Triggs' defence of the government's position on the bill was eugenic in nature, stressing typical ideas about the unrestricted multiplication of the unfit and its cost to the taxpayer. This debate went on for some time, in the form of letters and articles from the main protagonists and others, including the Controller of Prisons, B L Dallard, on the government side, and a group of Auckland academics and educationalists including the headmaster of Kings College.⁶ Others who supported Fitt and Anderson were Professor J S Tennant, Professor of Education at Victoria University College, and Professor James Shelly, Professor of Education at Canterbury University College.

Other groups who might have been expected to oppose this of course were the Catholic Church and the unions. Both of these groups, like Fitt and Anderson,

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Your Future is not in the Stars

L LEVEL-HEADED Virgos everywhere will not be surprised, but a 40-year study of astrology has found it doesn't work (Dominion Post, August 19).

More than 2000 people, mostly born within minutes of each other, were tracked through the period of the study. According to astrology, the subjects should have had very similar traits. The researchers looked at more than 100 characteristics, including occupation, aggressiveness, sociability, IQ levels and ability in art, sport, maths and reading, but found the subjects no more similar than a randomly selected sample of the general population.

The babies were originally recruited as part of a medical study begun in London into how the circumstances of birth can affect future health.

Former astrologer Dr Geoffrey Dean, who analysed the results, also found astrologers could do no better than chance in matching birth charts to the personality profile of a person among a random selection. Their success rate did not improve even when they were given all the information they sought. He said the consistency of the findings weighed heavily against astrology.

"It has no acceptable mechanism, its principles are invalid and it has failed hundreds of tests. But no hint of these problems will be found in astrology books which, in effect, are exercises in deception."

Roy Gillett, president of the Astrological Association of Great Britain, said the study's findings should be treated "with extreme caution" and accused Dr Dean of seeking to

"discredit astrology". Frank McGillion, a consultant to the Research Group for the Critical Study of Astrology, said: "It is simplistic and highly selective and does not cover all of the research." He said he would lodge a complaint with the journal's editors.

Ashburton Panther a Big Moggy?

A truck driver's report of a panther not far from Ashburton came as no surprise to many people in the back blocks of the South Island (Rural News, October 20). Richard McNamara, of the Department of Conservation (DoC), says two English tourists reported a "mountain lion" about the size of a labrador at the top of the Lindis Pass, and this was not the first such sighting from the area. Christchurch teacher Marianne Daines also reported a labrador-sized cat, black like the Ashburton beast, from near Twizel.

According to Bendigo Station gamekeeper Steve Brown some of the feral cats in his area are huge—he has one weighing 6kg in his freezer, and says bigger ones are out there. DoC and Otago Regional Council confirm the existence of these big cats, many of which will completely fill a possum trap.

For that matter, this writer and Skeptic editor Annette Taylor saw a cat at Lewis Pass about 20 years ago which, if not as big as a labrador, would have been almost the size of our border collie (who is admittedly not the largest specimen of her breed).

Inaudible "Spooks"

Mysteriously snuffed out candles, weird sensations and shivers down the spine may not be due to ghosts but to low frequency sound inaudible to humans. Dr Richard Lord and his colleagues at the National Physical Laboratory in England have shown that extreme bass sound, known as infrasound, produces a range of bizarre effects in people, including anxiety, extreme sorrow and chills.

The team, who produced infrasound with a seven-metre pipe and tested its impact on 750 people at a concert, said infrasound was also generated by natural phenomena.

Professor Richard Wiseman, a psychologist at the University of Hertfordshire, whose name often crops up in stories like this, says his findings support the idea that this level of sound may be present at some allegedly haunted sites and so cause people to have odd sensations that they attribute to a ghost.

Sex Abuse Counsellor Faces Tribunal

A tribunal in England has heard that John Eastgate, a consultant working mainly with adolescents, used counselling sessions to "lead" a "vulnerable and angry" 13-year-old girl into believing she had been indecently assaulted by a fellow doctor (Daily Telegraph, September 2).

Joanna Glynn, QC, representing the GMC, said it was "dangerous", when dealing with a girl suffering from "adolescent difficulties", to start from the premise that abuse did occur.

She said: "In this case the child was bright, angry and resentful, and it has to be said, a difficult adolescent, and the imposition of such preconceived ideas by the psychiatrist is likely to justify her anger in her own eyes and to colour most of the things she would say afterwards."

The hearing in London was told that Mr Eastgate began treating the girl, known only as Miss A, at the Marlborough House adolescent unit in Swindon, in April 1996 after she was referred by teachers at her boarding school. He dismissed their fears that she was suffering from anorexia and claimed her lack of appetite was due to profound depression. He prescribed her anti-depressants.

During a number of counselling sessions in June and July, he allegedly prompted the girl into believing she had been sexually abused by a doctor who had treated her when she was 9.

Professor X, an endocrinologist, had treated her in London for a growth disorder between January 1993 and August 1995 when she was growing unusually tall. He prescribed oestrogen to induce puberty early and limit her growth and, as part of his treatment, had to monitor her breast and pubic hair growth to assess her development. It was during these sessions that Miss A claimed that Professor X "fondled" her.

Three days later, without informing her parents, he contacted the local child protection team and the police. Miss A, who a month earlier had taken an overdose of anti-depressants, was taken into care. The case against Professor X was dropped almost immediately after it emerged that her mother or

grandmother attended all her visits to him. They did not see anything untoward. Giving evidence, Miss A's mother described her reaction.

"I was completely in shock," she said. "I thought, 'How could anything have happened while I was there?'"

But Miss A was not released from care for three years because during her stay she made further allegations of abuse against three other men, including her father, a businessman. Those charges were later dropped by Miss A, who is now reconciled with her family.

Mr Eastgate, who is in his 50s, denies four charges of misconduct, including failure to keep adequate notes, which if proved amount to serious professional misconduct.

Cell Phones Again

In last issue's Newsfront, a Wellington School of Medicine study showed no link between tumours and cellphones. Now a doctor in Sweden has come up with a new way to scare cellphone users (Dominion Post, September 15).

Professor Leif Salford of Lund University has spent 15 years investigating whether microwaves could open the blood-brain barrier allowing a protein to pass into the brain and cause damage. The voluntary exposure of the brain to microwaves is, he says, "the largest human biological experiment ever." No results from these studies were reported, however.

Doctor Found Guilty

A Hamilton doctor who prayed to cure illnesses diagnosed using

wands and vials of chemicals has been found guilty of misconduct and disgraceful conduct (Dominion Post, August 13).

Richard Gorringe was found guilty by the Medical Practitioners Disciplinary Tribunal in relation to patients Yvonne Short and Ravaani Ghemmagamy whom he treated in 1998. The tribunal found he exploited Mrs Short for money, and knew, or should have known, that the diagnosis and treatments he gave her were wrong. It also found he did not give either woman enough information about their treatments for them to be able to give their informed consent.

The tribunal was told that Mrs Short's eczema worsened under Gorringe's care. Using the peak muscle resistance test, Gorringe asked Mrs Short to touch a metal wand to various vials of chemicals to see how her body "resonated" with them. He then diagnosed her with paraquat poisoning and prescribed homoeopathic injections and other remedies which he sold her.

Dr Gorringe diagnosed Ravaani Ghemmagamy with brucellosis, a rare and notifiable disease most commonly contracted from handling raw meat. After asking if she was open to "spiritual healing", he raised his hands and prayed: "Lord God Almighty, strike the bacteria from this woman's body."

In the weeks since, there have been numerous letters to the Waikato Times from satisfied patients protesting Gorringe's crucifixion by the medical establishment.

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were quite prepared to accept quite a bit of eugenic theory at least as regards to the inheritance of mental defect, but the Church opposed sterilisation for various ethical reasons, including the idea that it was punishing the morally innocent. Neither of these groups put up a particularly vigorous fight, at least in public. Particularly the Church which, if one looks at the amount of space dedicated to these topics in the *Tablet*, seemed much more concerned with the threat of prohibition.

It is fairly clear why the clauses concerning sterilisation were dropped. Public reaction as such was minimal, but the vigorous attack put up by politicians and academics probably had its effect. However, if the clauses had been implemented New Zealand would have been the first country to implement legislation of this type (excluding American states) and this would have been the most extreme eugenic legislation short of Nazi Germany.

There is very little information about eugenics in New Zealand but these two books are both good general reading.

Kevles, D J, 1985: *In the Name of Eugenics*. Knopf, New York.

Paul, D B, 1995: *Controlling Human Heredity, 1865 to the Present*. Humanities Press, New Jersey.

Footnotes

¹ These tests purported to show that recruits who were of Southern and Eastern European stock, and non-Europeans had lower IQs than

Anglo-Saxons. They were later shown to be deeply flawed.

² Eugenists attitudes towards women were contradictory, in that as "race mothers" womens' major role of course was in breeding. Many women however were involved in eugenics research, possibly because they were cheaper, but some took doctorates which was apparently uncommon at the time.

³ The person in charge of public baths.

⁴ It is interesting to note that the German government introduced in 1932 legislation for voluntary sterilisation of various groups. Possibly the reaction in New Zealand to compulsory sterilisation influenced this legislation.

⁵ We find for instance, that Luther's son was insubordinate and violent; William Penn's son was a debauched scoundrel; ... the son of Cicero was a drunkard....

⁶ These divisions reflect some of the debate that took place before the commission, except that two academic biologists who were consulted were both supporters of sterilisation or segregation. Others who gave evidence, including teachers, headmasters, probation officers, doctors, nurses, religious leaders and others were overwhelmingly of the opinion that mental deficiency is hereditary, that it can be easily identified, and that people with this problem should be segregated and/or sterilised if not desexed.

forum**Skeptics Blown It?**

PRIOR to attending the NZ Skeptics conference in Wellington this year, I read the discussion paper on the role of science in environmental policy and decision making, *Illuminated or Blinded by Science*, prepared by the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment. It seemed to me to be a reasonable document. It included a discussion of some of the issues which have to be considered by policy makers in the environmental area and pointed to some of the difficulties, institutional and procedural, in using science to form environmental policy. Following on from the request in the paper for comments from the public on how science could be better incorporated into

environmental policy, the team leader for the discussion paper, Mr Bruce Taylor, gave a presentation to the Skeptics conference in which he introduced the paper and asked for views on it.

I was dismayed by the vehemence of the criticisms of the paper expressed by members of the audience (I regret not being fast enough on my mental feet to contest them at the time). The nature of the criticisms wasn't entirely clear to me. They seemed to be based principally on the fact that science was not the only instrument of environmental policy formation and that the discussion paper had considered other issues such as the role of social values in setting policy.

Science may well be the best system we have developed to describe and understand the physical world but it is naive to think that governments will use it to the exclusion of other issues to form policy in the environmental area. For instance, it's worth remembering that science doesn't necessarily say anything about moral values. The formation of policy is a political process, and if we want science to be part of it, we have to understand how to bring science into the political system.

Mr Taylor asked the Skeptics for help in making science a more effective part of policy formation. He didn't get it. I think the Skeptics blew it. I doubt very much whether the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment will see the Skeptics as a source of rational comment on the effective use of science in the public arena in the future.

Alan Hart

Global Warming

The Skeptics have expressed a sound and healthy reluctance to subscribe to anthropogenic greenhouse gas theories of global warming, for the last several years. There now appears to be a growing amount of evidence proving just how right we were. As a regular subscriber and reader of *New Scientist* and *Scientific American*, I have been following this with interest. While SA has an editor fully committed to "greenie" nonsense (as witness his attack on Bjorn Lomborg), *New Scientist* is more open to new ideas. NZ Skeptic readers may find the following of interest.

1. 23 August 2003: Glacial extensions of the polar ice caps on Mars are now in retreat. Peninsulas and islands of ice disappearing. A little hard to explain in terms of anthropogenic greenhouse gases, but (Occam's Razor) easy in terms of astronomic phenomena such as solar output or cosmic rays. *Scientific American*, while not admitting to be at all wrong, reports in June 2003 that satellite measures of solar output show it is increasing, albeit very slightly.

2. 13 September 2003: Under the title of *Global Warming: the New Battle*, it appears that meteorologists are adopting a new stance. "The priority now is to start preparing for its consequences..." While none of the global warming gurus have admitted fault in describing mechanisms, it appears that many want to move away from anthropogenic greenhouse gases and simply accept that the temperature increase happens. Maybe they are starting to realise they may not have been correct.

3. 20 September 2003: Professor Philip Scott (*Biogeography*) describes recent research (also published in *GSA Today* 13, p 4) describing ancient records in rocks that suggest 75% of changes in global temperature were caused by changes in cosmic ray density. Also a paper (*Nature* 408, p 698) showing real problems trying to relate CO₂ levels with ancient temperatures. Scott also points out that current computer models do not predict why it is that, while surface temperatures rise, the atmosphere just above remains cold.

If these revelations continue, I suspect that the greenhouse gas

theories will soon be quietly dropped.

Lance Kennedy
Tantec

Indian Socialism

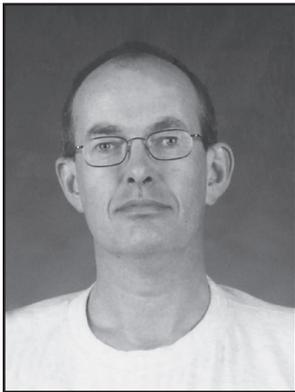
Bob Metcalfe (Forum #68) is confused. My letter (Forum #67) drew attention to the opinions of others on the anti-globalisation movement. The Oxus Research Foundation, New Delhi seems to think that the terms "socialism" and "starvation" can be used without further definition and I would agree.

Why "Socialism" rather than "Communism" or "Marxism" is interesting; perhaps because it seems a more neutral term. But the early Congress party was proud of its Marxist roots, and in the early years of independence India received a large amount of aid from Stalinist Russia.

True, India has not had a nationwide famine since British rule ceased. The terrible event in 1943 caused enormous suffering because during the war, aid was unavailable from outside. The comrades of the Congress party blamed lack of planning—the socialist solution. But once in power they never had to face the same conditions that produced the earlier event. Planning did not prevent frequent local famines in newly independent India. The authorities alleviated suffering with the same measures used in capitalist societies' relief efforts.

True, "people have starved in America"; Bhalla himself points out the coincidence that India and the US launched a "war on poverty" at about the same time, the early 1960s. But then the US had

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Confidence Based Medicine

This is restricted to surgeons.

British homeopath suspended

THE British General Medical Council (GMC) has found family practitioner Michelle Langdon guilty of serious professional misconduct and banned her from practising for three months. According to press reports, Langdon had advised a couple that the gastrointestinal symptoms of their 11-month-old were caused by “geopathic stress patterns” beneath their home and then “dowsed” for a remedy by swinging a crystal attached to a chain over a book of herbal remedies. A hospital emergency department subsequently found that the child had gastroenteritis. The GMC also examined evidence that another patient had been prescribed an herbal remedy for a sore throat after the doctor dowsed for the treatment.

www.homeowatch.org/reg/langdon.html

Bi-Digital O-Ring Test

This is what got Dr Gorringe into trouble with the Medical Practitioners Disciplinary Tribunal (MPDT). This test is part of the

pseudoscience known as kinesiology. Dr Gorringe got the patient to pinch the thumb and forefinger together and then attempted to separate them. By introducing several homeopathic substances into an electrical “circuit” he claimed to be able to demonstrate a weakness of pinch-strength caused by “paraquat poisoning” and other equally ridiculous diagnoses. Dr Gorringe refused an offer to test his diagnostic method. Several patients suffered ill-health as a result of Dr Gorringe’s diagnostic methods and treatments and he has been struck off the Medical Practitioners Register and ordered to pay more than \$100,000 in costs.

The full judgment is at www.mpd.org.nz under Recent Events. It runs to 142 pages but makes fascinating reading. I often wonder how anybody can go through several years at medical school and then fall victim to these foolish and unscientific sidelines. Gulp! I just remembered that I did – acupuncture and spinal manipulation – but I was protected from getting too excited and committed to these modalities by a natural curiosity about how they worked. After all, curiosity or thoughtfulness is what scepticism is all about. Once I looked at the evidence and learned the significance of the placebo effect, I ceased these practices.

Gulf War Syndrome—the Continuing Quest for Compensation

Despite all of the evidence showing that there is no such thing as Gulf War Syndrome (GWS), the alleged victims are now suing the various corporations that

supplied Iraq’s chemical weapons programme. This is to be expected and follows the same pattern that has been followed over nuclear test veterans and those exposed to Agent Orange. GWS is in reality a “post-war” syndrome, formerly called war neurosis or shell shock. The symptoms are presented in a context appropriate to the conflict. In the case of GWS the alleged list of causes includes chemical poisoning, immunisations, pollution, depleted uranium. Every conceivable cause has been investigated and scientists, whose naivety is exceeded only by their ignorance of history, continue to clamour for research funds to investigate ever more ludicrous theories.

For an excellent account read *Hystories*, by Elaine Showalter, Columbia University Press, 1997.

I can also forward by email an electronic copy of a paper I presented to a Military Medicine Conference.

Gulf War Syndrome – A Historical Context, 8th Asia Pacific Military Medicine Conference, 3-8 May 1998, Auckland.

Chemical Phobia?

Firemen had to wear breathing apparatus to clean up a hydrogen peroxide spill. This “toxic chemical” was described as “fizzing and bubbling” as it “reacted with the asphalt”. Of course it was fizzing and bubbling! The hydrogen peroxide was breaking down and releasing “toxic” oxygen and water. These emotively worded reports foster ignorance and hysteria about common chemicals. I recall a similar piece of ignorant journalism where a toxic spill was revealed to be the chemical equivalent of rust!

Dominion Post 6/8/03

Bee Products (Pollen-ate?)

These are currently popular with that segment of the NZ population who would eat sheep dropping sandwiches if they were properly advertised as benefiting health. That reminds me of the cruel jibe by Dame Edna Everidge (aka Barry Humphries) that NZ was a country of 60 million sheep, 3 million of which think they are people.

An advertisement in the Sunday Star Times, (20 July) contains the claim that "BIO BEE" is "the only Potentiated Pollen available that uses Dr Kelly Duncan's (former Dean of Science, Canterbury) patented potentiation process". Refer www.biobee.co.nz

I duly visited the website and some of the claims made for this product appear suspiciously close to health claims. I would welcome readers' opinions.

I subjected Dr Duncan to a "google" which produced a number of interesting hits including him being a party to a complaint to the Advertising Standards Complaints Board. www.asa.co.nz/decisions/FULL/Fd0106.rtf

Does this have anything to do with Dr Duncan being described as "former Dean of Science"? Presumably he started down this road with a misapprehension over the awarding of his "BeeSc"? I look forward to hearing more on this matter from Canterbury academics.

Herbal Medicine

"Kentucky Fried Medicine" is such an easy target but can always be counted on to provide material for your correspondent. As we all know, most, if not all such

preparations are completely useless. The latest ploy is to illegally include effective prescription medicines, particularly in the area of erectile dysfunction. (New Ethical Journal, July 2003) It is perfectly obvious to a consumer when a product has not worked for erectile dysfunction so it makes perfect sense to cheat by adding a drug that does work. Such fraud invites a stiff fine.

Hua Fo VIGORMAX was withdrawn in Canada when it was found to contain tadalafil, marketed as the legitimate drug "Cialis" in NZ.

Likewise in the US, a product called Viga was withdrawn because it contained sildenafil, marketed in NZ as "Viagra".

One possible benefit of these frauds is at least the Chinese might stop trafficking in endangered animal species in the preparation of these products.

An American study of 443 Web sites (reported in Manawatu Evening Standard, 24 September) found that most Web sites marketed herbal remedies with misleading or unproven health claims that violate US Law. I suspect that there would be similar findings in any survey of such sites in NZ.

John Welch lives in Picton and is a doctor with the Royal New Zealand Air Force

forum

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a food surplus and India a food deficit. India now has a food surplus. My opinion is that this owes more to the "Green Revolution", than to political policies.

However the Indian government of the time is to be commended for welcoming the Green Revolution even though it offended socialist ideology. Socialists were generally of the opinion that it would do nothing for the World's poor.

Indeed poor Indian farmers were thought to be those who would suffer most under the new type of agriculture that would benefit only the "big corporations". Fortunately this prediction turned out to be untrue.

Of course the anti-globalisation people are the intellectual heirs of those who opposed the Green revolution (this is where this

correspondence started). Their arguments are nearly identical and their ideology indistinguishable. The failure of those earlier predictions is forgotten or ignored.

Bob Metcalfe quotes Sen to the effect that democracy or dictatorship is a better indicator of possible famine than socialism or capitalism. China, which has adopted capitalism without renouncing dictatorship would seem to provide a counter-example.

This debate has received "something other than glib generalisations and inaccurate case studies". The problem is that few people have bothered to read the literature. My earlier contribution was an attempt to draw peoples attention to an unpopular side of this controversy. I doubt one can do better in a letter.

Jim Ring

Old Rope and Dodgy Memories

Claire Le Couteur reports from the 2003 Skeptics' Conference in Wellington.

THIS year's conference, held at Victoria University, began with a social gathering followed by a presentation by artist and teacher Bill Taylor, who described his "Time Line" installation, which covered three walls of the lecture theatre.

The carefully measured 4.6km of rope were strung in lengths around the room. Articles such as shells, feathers and animal skulls were attached in their appropriate parts of the time line, which provided a visually impressive indication of the time elapsed since the formation of the Earth, with humanity's portion accounting for only a tiny section at the very end. Bill has been a Royal Society Teaching Fellow this year, resident at the School of Earth Sciences at Victoria University.

Speakers on Saturday covered a wide range of topics, but the startling results produced by Maryanne Garry's psychology students in their investigations of human memory formation and fallibility made their presentations a highlight.

It was humbling to note that, when asked to watch a short video segment, around a third of the audience failed to spot a large gorilla walk through a basketball game! Small comfort can be gained by the recognition that this is the typical proportion that fails to do so, a salutary warning against potential smugness....

These presentations complemented other talks on progress on

the Christchurch Civic Crèche case, given by Lynley Hood, and another about the pitfalls that Skeptics member Jonathon Harper has faced in preparing a paper on the same case.

Several speakers covered the problem of how science is communicated, including the influence of the internet. Bruce Taylor, from the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment made a plea for members to read and make submissions on a discussion paper that is part of a project to examine the role of science in environmental policy and decision-making.

The damp, windy Wellington weather marred the planned visit to the Carter Observatory following dinner at the Skyline Restaurant, making star gazing difficult, but this was compensated for by an illustrated presentation by members of the Phoenix Astronomical Society on the origins and structure of Stonehenge. They also outlined their plans to construct a southern hemisphere copy of Stonehenge (Stonehenge-Aotearoa) at a site in the Wairarapa, for astronomical education purposes. They intend to open this to the public for viewing, and have already had some interest expressed from New Zealand-based Druids! The planetarium show on Mars gave a good overview on what sort of ideas people have had about the Red Planet in fact and fiction. Nano-bacteria may not be as romantic as

H G Wells' invaders, but their implications for life in the universe as just as immense.

Australian taxation consultant and skeptic, Richard Lead entertained on Sunday, with his talk on scam artists and snake-oil salesmen. Some of the dodges were well known, such as versions of the Nigerian "bank millions" scam, but the magical "purple plates" were new to most of us. While the Nigerian scam may seem obviously dodgy, it apparently brings in \$US200 million annually in earnings to that country, and the Australian version of the Commerce Commission has had strong responses to its bogus ads for "bluebottle farm" investments, with people happy to send money in to such ludicrous get-rich-quick schemes. Richard's main lesson was to drill into the audience's collective consciousness, the vital ten-word phrase designed to protect anyone from being taken: "Let's pretend it's true. How would the world be different?"

David Rankin, general manager of Health Purchasing for ACC, reassured us that ACC has a firm commitment to identifying effective treatment and funding interventions that work. His session on the commission's support for evidence-based medicine provided some interesting information on what they are and aren't prepared to fund, but ended on a possibly disquieting implication that if there isn't evidence to say a procedure doesn't

work, then it may indeed get the green light. More research is required!

The conference concluded with a panel discussion on consumer rights and protection, involving representatives from the Press Council, Medsafe and the Consumers' Institute. The 120-strong

attendees were armed with flyers on complaints procedures courtesy of a number of organizations and came away with a better understanding of how effective complaints can be made, and what grounds are likely to be ones which work.

Many thanks are due to Conference Convenor, Joanna Wojnar for her sterling work in organising an excellent gathering. We look forward to next year's conference in Palmerston North.

Claire Le Couteur is secretary of the New Zealand Skeptics

Goff Wins Bent Can Opener Award from Skeptics

JUSTICE Minister Phil Goff has won the first-ever Bent Can Opener Award from the New Zealand Skeptics, for "refusing to open the can of worms that is the Christchurch Civic Crèche case".

For the past ten years, the Skeptics have made an annual Bent Spoon Award, in remembrance of spoon-bender Uri Geller, but the group felt that a change in implement was necessary for this year's "winner".

"The Christchurch Civic Creche case raises some very real concerns about a whole raft of justice issues," says Skeptics Chair-entity Vicki Hyde. "We recognise that it is a can of worms for the minister, but it is one that needs to be opened if we are to continue to have confidence in our justice system."

The Skeptics have monitored the Christchurch Civic Crèche since before it happened – six months before Peter Ellis was arrested, the group had predicted that a New Zealand case would follow on from the then-developing US examples of claimed major child abuse incidents involving Satanic overtones at pre-school facilities.

"When the Civic Crèche case broke, the initial allegations seemed reasonable enough — we know, sadly, that child abuse does happen and is something that desperately needs to be addressed," says Hyde. "However, we were concerned to hear of allegations of various classic Satanic ritual abuse elements, including a number of truly bizarre or impossible events. Combined with questionable interview techniques, the then-prevailing belief in recovered memory theories, and the social context of the case, it looked like it was our prediction come true."

Hyde points out that the Skeptics are not suggesting that the children involved in the case are liars. What concerns this group are the underlying processes that were involved in the collection, selection and presentation of evidence that led to the conviction.

"Our official name is the New Zealand Committee for Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, and we consider that the scientific underpinning of the evidence is questionable enough to justify closer scrutiny, so that we can all learn from what happened and be more confident in the future regarding abuse convictions," says Hyde.

The award was officially conferred at the annual Skeptics Conference, which also included an extended session where Victoria University psychology researchers presented their work on memory formation, fallibility and falsification (see next issue).

Females Not Welcome

A female photographer was banned from flying with the Romania soccer team because of superstitions that women bring bad luck, according to Romanian sports daily Gazeta Sporturilor.

Gabriela Arsenie, employed by the paper, was set to fly to a friendly match in the Ukraine. Romanian federation spokesman Sorin Satmari said Arsenie did not request a plane seat in time.

Romanian soccer is reportedly steeped in superstition. Not only are women not allowed to travel on planes with soccer teams, but a soccer team's bus is not allowed to reverse.

Another Year goes By...

Vicki Hyde presents the Chair-entity's report for 2003

IT'S been another busy year, mostly working behind the scenes, with the occasional burst into the public arena.

For the second year running, we celebrated Darwin Day, with a birthday cake and Darwin Day lecture in Christchurch. It would be great to see other areas join in to put February 12 on the calendar as a day to celebrate science and humanity. Anyone interested in doing this should contact me for Darwin Day support material and ideas.

The Darwin Day Collection Volume One was published in the US, with a selection of articles from New Zealand skeptics sitting alongside material from the likes of Richard Dawkins, Steven Pinker and assorted stellar luminaries. There are plans to put a collection out every couple of years as part of the international Darwin Day activities. Copies are still available from the secretary.

Following on from the discussion at last year's AGM, we ran a Teaching Critical Thinking Competition, offering a \$1000 prize for a one-page teaching resource that could be used by teachers and parents. The competition announcements were picked up by a wide range of educational publications and passed on through email groups; we also thank Jonathan Harper who kindly included posters within a mailout he was sending to schools.

Around 30 entries came in from round the country, with the winning entry dealing with assessing the

evidence for the existence of the moa. We are using the entries to develop a kit which we hope to distribute to schools as part of the second competition's promotional activities, and have applied for NZ Post Community Post support to help with that.

The 2002 AGM proposed that "NZSCICOP petition the House of Representatives for the establishment of a Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Civic Crèche Case and the judicial and forensic counselling issues arising therefrom." Moves to do so had got under way when we were contacted regarding what has been termed the "VIPs' petition". The suggestion was that Parliament would find it more difficult to ignore a petition coming from those perceived to be influential members of the community. The committee agreed to put their support behind this initiative, and I signed the VIPs' petition as Chair of NZCSICOP. We also provided information on the petition and its later expansion, via the website and email alert list.

The petition is very similar to the motion as passed at the 2002 AGM:

"We the undersigned petition the House of Representatives to urge the Government to establish a Royal Commission of Inquiry, presided over by a Judge or Judges from outside the New Zealand jurisdiction, to enquire into all aspects of the investigation and legal processes relating to the Christchurch Civic Crèche case. This case is one of great public and professional concern, and

raises serious questions about the administration of justice and the working of existing laws, which must be addressed."

Media contacts continued throughout the year, with requests for television appearances, expert advice and commentary. Among the contacts were Isola Productions, NZ Radio Training School, Bay of Plenty News, Plains FM, Newstalk ZB, and Next magazine. UFOs were a big thing at one stage, with no fewer than four independent contacts in the space of two months.

The National Radio Sunday Supplement provided a useful slot to publicise our concerns. At the beginning of the year I covered problems with homeopathic "vaccines" being sold in Auckland and, interestingly, made contact with the president of the NZ Homeopathic Society, who was equally concerned. Should these vaccines rear their heads again, we've agreed to issue a joint release condemning the practice! Another Sunday Supplement concerned the topical issue of the Pan Pharmaceuticals recall, which dealt an all-too-brief blow to the credibility of the supplement industry.

We had a very intense flurry of activity when discovering by accident that the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Complementary and Alternative Health had apparently called for submissions on introducing, regulating and integrating CAM care in New Zealand. Despite contacting them fairly regularly over the past couple of years, we

hadn't made it on to their notification list. . . . With four days to the dead-line, we managed to pull together comments and material from re-searchers worldwide to produce a 30-page submission, and made this available for viewing online (<http://skeptics.org.nz/cam>).

The website and email alert list continued to be useful in getting information out to members, the media and the general public. As well as the CAM section, we added sections on the Christchurch Civic Crèche petition, magnet therapy, and more information flyers for downloading and printing with more in the pipeline. There is a proposal to provide full sets of the flyers to members for local distribution, and this was discussed at the AGM.

Bravo Awards were distributed as nominations came in, and have been made to Alan Pickmere for sterling work regarding alternative medicine claims in Northland; and Barry Colman for putting his money on the line with his publication of transcripts from the Christchurch Civic Crèche case. I'd encourage you all to keep an eye out for people who deserve a pat on the back as it is good to be able to be positive and, importantly, be seen to be positive.

I'd like to conclude by expressing my strong thanks to Joanna Wojnar, who almost single-handedly pulled the conference together by being our person on the ground. She's a great example of how one person can make a significant contribution.

All the best,
Vicki Hyde
Chair-entity

Kary Mullis and the King of Sweden

Bob Brockie looks at the link between genius and eccentricity

WHEN the Californian surfer Kary Mullis was introduced to the King of Sweden he said, "I believe you're having problems with your daughter, the 16-year-old princess. I wouldn't worry about it. I'm sure she'll grow out of it. In fact I'm so confident that I'm willing to offer my son in marriage, in exchange for a third of your kingdom."

What was the occasion? 1993, Stockholm, and Kary Mullis was being awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry.

Subsequently, Nobelist Mullis has distinguished himself in many ways. He was a specialist adviser in the O J Simpson trial, claims to have been abducted by aliens, communicated by telepathy, and spoken to a talking racoon. At a large and august scientific congress in Europe, Mullis' only slides were of naked women. They did not invite him back.

The colourful behaviour goes along with a brilliant mind, for Mullis it was who discovered how to multiply up molecules of DNA. He had his eureka experience with his girlfriend asleep on his shoulder as he drove along a Californian highway at dusk in 1983. His clever idea and methodology has transformed the worlds of biology, medicine and forensics.

You will know that, these days, a single molecule of DNA from a crime scene can nail a criminal. Put the molecule into one of Kary

Mullis' black boxes and the machine will make 2, 4, 8, 16 ... millions of copies of DNA in a few hours - enough to perform a battery of identity tests.

A local woman was recently shocked and horrified to learn that an out-of-control scientist was making copies of human DNA right here in New Zealand! So shocked that she wrote to the newspaper. Her indignation shows how far apart are scientists and the general public. Madam, local technicians have been multiplying up human DNA here for over 12 years. Throughout New Zealand scores of Mullis black boxes are running at this very minute amplifying human DNA as a matter of course. It has become a standard diagnostic technique in medical laboratories. Mullis' method is also widely used to multiply up the fragmentary DNA remains of mummies, moas, the fossil bones of Easter Islanders and Neandertal people.

The patent rights to Mullis' technique were sold to a Swiss drug firm for \$300 million. Had the King of Sweden known this he might have taken Mullis' offer more seriously.

Most of the \$300 million went to the firm employing Kary Mullis, but he is not exactly a poor man.

Originally published in the Dominion, 17 September 2001

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