
Skeptical Adversaria

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The Quarterly Newsletter of the Association for Skeptical Enquiry



FROM THE ASKE CHAIRMAN

Michael Heap

The 6th World Skeptics Congress was held in Berlin from 18th to 20th May, 2012 (preceded by two days of pre-congress activities and meetings). The conference was jointly sponsored by the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry (CSI), the Gesellschaft zur wissenschaftlichen Untersuchung von Parawissenschaften (GWUP, Germany), and the European Council of Skeptical Organisations (ECSO) of which ASKE is a constituent member.

The congress theme was 'Promoting Science in an Age of Uncertainty'. The event was a huge success, due to the efforts of a large group of organisers and speakers too numerous to list here. However, special congratulations should be offered to **Amardeo Sarma**, the founder and chairman of GWUP and the chairman of ECSO and to **Martin Mahner**, also of GWUP and the ECSO treasurer.

Details of the programme and *some* of the abstracts are to be found at <http://www.ecso.org/>.

Some photos are available at <http://blog.esowatch.com/?p=7867> and at other sites mentioned in the list of media reports, which is extensive, though mainly confined to Germany (as one would expect).

Presentations were consistently of a very high standard. The star of the congress was – inevitably – James ('the amazing') Randi. Now aged 83, and having had, in the last 6 years, major surgery and chemotherapy, naturally he appears physically frailer, but intellectually he remains as sound as bell and, as ever, the real gentleman. He appeared twice on the programme, regaling his audience with just a sample

of his endless catalogue of experiences assessing applicants for the JREF prize and exposing the more disreputable claimants of paranormal ability, including some notorious 'psychic healers'.

Newsflash

Your action is urgently required concerning the potential registration of unproven and disproven therapies. Please go to <http://www.nightingale-collaboration.org/>.

From the UK, Chris French gave a talk on the recent controversial experiments of Darryl Bem on retroactive precognitive ability (see Summer 2011 Newsletter) and Simon Parry, who received thunderous applause for his presentation 'Fighting nonsense with technology: a guide to highly productive skeptical activism'. Simon first informed his audience of his campaign against misleading and unfounded claims that chiropractors make on their websites. He then announced his website 'FishBarrel', a facility for making rapid online complaints to the ASA or Trading Standards about misleading health claims on the web.

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For the first time, ECSO presented 'Outstanding Skeptic' awards of to two members of European skeptic societies, namely Luigi Garlaschelli and Willem Betz. Luigi Garlaschelli teaches chemistry at the Università di Pavia (Italy) and is research director of CICAP, the Italian skeptics group. He has done major investigative work on claims of miracles. Willem Betz is a

Flemish physician and emeritus professor at the Free University of Brussels. He is a founding member and present chairman of the Belgian skeptical organization SKEPP and prominent in campaigning against the legitimization of unproven 'alternative' medical practices, particularly within the European Union.

Also at the congress, 'Distinguished Skeptic' awards were presented by the CRI to Simon Singh and Edzard Ernst, both from the UK.

All speakers and chairpersons were given a congress mug and a homeopathic remedy based on the Berlin Wall. Seriously - this is actually on the market. There was some confusion as to what it is supposed to treat. Someone mentioned 'blockages' but I believe the targeted problems are conditions such as claustrophobia and feelings of oppression. The only thing you *can* be certain of is that if it says 'Berlin Wall' on the wrapping, whatever is inside will contain no trace of the Berlin Wall

whatsoever. (Could I have my money back please?)

The date and venue of the next world congress (presumably in 2014) has yet to be decided, but see 'The European Scene' in this Newsletter for exciting details of future European Skeptics Congresses in Stockholm (2013) and London (2015). See also the resolution on standards of scientific practice adopted at the Berlin congress by CSI, ECSO and GWUP.

SIXTH WORLD SKEPTICS CONGRESS RESOLUTION

At the occasion of the 6th World Skeptics Congress in Berlin, CSI, ECSO and GWUP adopted a resolution calling for high standards of scientific practice in scientific institutions and in science education.

Scientists and skeptics from around the world are deeply concerned with the growing tolerance, acceptance, and even promotion of pseudoscientific and occult ideas and practices within scientific, academic and educational institutions. Students worldwide are in danger of being instructed in the unsubstantiated claims of ideologues and purveyors of pseudoscience, rather than learning to base conclusions on dependable, scientific knowledge. Scientists and academics may be reluctant or afraid to speak up, even when scientific principles and criteria are blatantly violated, fearful of antagonizing colleagues or those on whom their own careers may depend.

At the occasion of the Sixth World Skeptics Congress in Berlin, CSI, ECSO and GWUP call for high standards of scientific practice in scientific institutions and in science education. They call on scientists and academics worldwide to raise their voices when pseudoscience is being established within academic and instructional institutions. When such institutions are publicly funded, it is additionally of crucial importance that taxes not be used to promote pseudoscience or ideologies.

Specifically, we call on all those responsible to:

- Ensure that universities, medical institutions, and colleges teach dependable, scientific knowledge and resist the temptation to let unproven claims enter professional education; such institutions are obliged to assist students to clearly distinguish between science-based and unscientific methodologies within the context of science and evidence-based medicine; and
- Ensure that scientific standards of evidence-based medicine are applied without compromise, resisting attempts to grant exemptions for ideological or commercial reasons to some forms of therapy that potentially risk patient welfare; and
- Ensure that schools base the science curriculum on accepted science, rejecting attempts to influence the curriculum on ideological, political or religious grounds, such as has occurred with the teaching of evolution and climate change;

We also call upon our sister skeptical organisations from around the world in the spirit of consumer protection to commit themselves to ensuring good science within academia and schools, in addition to continuing their efforts to promote science and critical thinking to the public.

LOGIC AND INTUITION

The puzzle I featured in the Winter 2011 newsletter was the subject of further discussion in the Spring 2012 Newsletter in response to a question concerning the validity of the answer I gave. This discussion generated another query, this time from Ian Keeling. Again I am very grateful for the opportunity to think more deeply about the puzzle.

Recall that the puzzle is as follows: You are rushing to catch a flight at an airport. On part of your journey there is a moving walkway. One of your shoelaces is undone so you're going to have to stop at some point to do it up. Should you do this when you are on the moving walkway or when you are not on the walkway, or does it not matter?

The answer is that your journey time will be shorter if you tie your shoelaces on the walkway. Ian was initially

sceptical about this and questioned whether this answer is only valid 'only supposing that you stop to tie your shoelace on the walkway AND that you would have stopped anyway'. However, after further discussion Ian agreed with my original answer and came up with another argument in favour of this:

'Obviously if I stop to tie my laces for 10 seconds when not on the walkway the total delay to my journey is 10 seconds. If I ask myself what I have to

do to delay my journey by 10 seconds if I stop on the walkway, I think it's fairly obvious that I would have to freeze the action for 10 seconds (i.e. stop for 10 seconds to tie my laces AND stop the walkway). Since I cannot stop the walkway the time delay will be less than 10 seconds. Seems reasonable?'

Ian also raised the issue of an algebraic solution. I have had a go at this myself and my efforts can be found on page 19.

SKEPTICS' CORNER

A Discussion of 'The Burt Affair'

Sir Cyril Burt (1883-1971) was an influential British educational psychologist who is best known for his work on the heritability of human intelligence as measured by IQ tests. Some of his most influential research involved testing the IQs of twins.

Shortly after his death, concerns were voiced that Burt had fabricated some of his findings in a manner that supported his theories, and even that he fabricated certain individuals who were supposed to have collaborated with him in his work.

'The Burt Affair' was referred to in a paper by Jon Scaife in the 2011 (Vol 14) issue of the *Skeptical Intelligencer* ('When Scepticism is Radical', pp. 3-7). He states, 'While at the keyboard, Google Cyril Burt; Burt was so committed to the idea that people had knowable limits to their intelligence that he appears to have generated his own fictitious data to reinforce the point. Despite this, Burt's influence on British schooling has been significant.'

ASKE member Ray Ward takes issue with this statement and he and Jon

Scaife subsequently engaged in an email discussion which both of them have given permission to be reprinted here.

From Ray Ward

I was sorry to see in Jon Scaife's otherwise very interesting article 'When scepticism is radical' (*The Skeptical Intelligencer*, vol. 14, 2011) the assertion that Sir Cyril Burt 'appears to have generated his own fictitious data'. It is very depressing that people are still saying this well over 20 years after the publication of Robert B. Joynson's book *The Burt Affair* (1989), which leaves little doubt that, while Burt may have been open to criticism, he was almost certainly innocent of the extensive and spectacular misdeeds of which he was accused. I would also refer anyone interested to the book *Science, Ideology and the Media: the Cyril Burt Scandal* by Ronald Fletcher (1991) and my own article, 'The Cyril Burt affair' in *The Skeptic*, March-April 1993, pp. 9-10.

Reply by Jon Scaife

Thanks for these comments on my paper in Mike's journal. I'm aware of

Joynson's and Fletcher's role in the 'Burt affair', and also Leslie Hearnshaw's contributions and the robust critique by Leon Kamin. My position is that Burt's impact on education in Britain and in areas that were, for one reason or another, influenced by or beholden to Britain (Singapore, for instance, where I'm writing this) was both deep and destructive. Whether Burt strategically manipulated his data or, as his apologists may argue, was only careless and methodologically sloppy, he is responsible for propagating and legitimising the view that intelligence, ability, IQ or equivalent 'measures of man' (Stephen Jay Gould's term) is knowable. The consequence in the educational community has been the establishment of the belief that teachers and others do actually know students' intelligence (or etc.). I argue that this is conceptually and methodologically unjustifiable, and further that it is morally dubious at the very least. I want to make clear that my main argument is with the position Burt and others took

on knowable and fixed intelligence. Whether his position was based on conspiracy or cock up is secondary for the position I have outlined in the 'SI' paper.

Thanks for your interest.

Reply by Ray Ward

Saying you disagree with Burt is of course perfectly acceptable, but saying he generated fictitious data as if it were established fact is not. The overwhelming evidence is that he didn't.

Why is Gould considered so infallible? Whenever he is mentioned in these contexts there always seems to be a kind of 'Oh well, if he says it's wrong it must be wrong' attitude. I heard him speak once, and was deeply unimpressed: he was pompous and conceited. And, of course, he wasn't a psychologist!

It is very largely accepted in the world of psychometrics that general intelligence (what ... Charles Spearman economically abbreviated to g) is real.

The parts of Hearnshaw's biography dealing with Burt's alleged frauds are, as Joynson clearly demonstrates, a ghastly mess of misunderstandings, misquotations, apparently deliberately incomplete quotations intended to give a misleading impression, wrong and misunderstood references, etc., etc. As for Kamin, it is utterly baffling that someone like him can become not merely a psychologist, not merely a professor of psychology, but a professor at one of the best universities in the world. He (like others in the field) is utterly blinded by ideological prejudice. Saying that as soon as he began one of Burt's papers it was obvious he was reading the words of a liar and fraud tells us, as Joynson says, much more about him than about Burt. And he made much of Burt's 'invariant correlations' as if Burt thought they would strengthen his case when in fact, of course, as Joynson also makes clear, they are so

unlikely that they would have the opposite effect.

It is very largely accepted in the world of psychometrics that general intelligence (what the great British psychologist Charles Spearman economically abbreviated to g) is real, that it varies from person to person, that each individual's level of intelligence is indeed more or less fixed, that it can be measured accurately and fairly by intelligence tests, and that such tests are not biased against social, economic or ethnic groups. If you dispute that you are disputing the overwhelming scientific consensus.

Reply by Jon Scaife

Thanks for your paper which I read and found interesting. A few points about which I'd be interested in your thoughts. First a question: in your paper you say that 'There now seems no doubt that the "missing ladies" existed.' What argument do you have for this assertion? I could find no support for it in your paper.

Secondly, about the g-factor and related notions, I differ from you about the existence of an 'overwhelming scientific consensus' supporting the idea that such measures indicate a fixed general 'ability'. Just a few sources that also disagree with this view are Michael Howe (1997) 'IQ in question: the truth about intelligence'; Carol Dweck (2008) 'Mindset: the new psychology of success'; Susan Hart et al (2004) 'Learning without limits'; Michael Shayer and Philip Adey (2002) 'Learning intelligence'. I could add more. There's also the 'Flynn effect'.

I wonder if you agree with me that the result of all testing is necessarily a statement of attainment on the tests? And that it follows from this that all claims about ability, as opposed to attainment, are necessarily inferential, not factual.

Reply by Ray Ward

I have decided to respond now and, having consulted various sources, mainly:

- Robert B. Joynson, *The Burt Affair* (London: Routledge, 1989), ISBN 041501039X
- Ronald Fletcher, *Science, Ideology and the Media: the Cyril Burt Scandal* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1991), ISBN 0887383769

both of which I commend to you, and would say:

Professor John Cohen remembered Conway.

A student remembered being tested by Howard and a woman whose name began with C around 1943.

Burt first referred to Conway at about the same time, saying she had tested foster children, in a brief footnote buried at the end of an article. That alone would seem to be virtually certain evidence that she was real: the idea that Burt invented her then, anticipating that he might, long afterwards, wish to fabricate work using her name, is patently ludicrous.

Someone else remembered a Miss Howard delivering proofs of an article by Burt around 1949-50 and, indeed, still had the proofs.

The reason why Howard and Conway couldn't be traced in University of London records is probably because they were social workers or 'care committee' workers.

The reason why Howard and Conway couldn't be traced in University of London records is probably because they were social workers or 'care committee' workers. Much was lost during the war when Burt's department was evacuated to Aberystwyth, and University College London, where some of his papers remained, was bombed. However, when, after the war and Burt's retirement, a great deal was recovered, including material which the helpers had collected, Burt put their names to it, usually along with his own, even though he was no longer in touch with them.

This is normal practice: papers in academic journals often bear many names, and they obviously didn't all actually contribute to the writing but only took part in the research, and may well have moved on by the time the paper was written. Indeed, Hans Eysenck wrote a paper using data collected by a research assistant who was dead, perfectly properly putting her name to it along with his own.

There are, however, two papers bearing the name Conway alone which were in fact almost certainly written by Burt, and that is no doubt open to criticism, but does not seem too reprehensible when the person named did the research.

I don't know the works you refer to and wonder how many of their authors are psychologists. Most well-known critics of intelligence tests are non-psychologists, like the late Stephen Jay Gould. I rely on *The Bell Curve*, co-written by the late Richard J. Herrnstein who, as Professor of Psychology at Harvard, regarded as one of the best universities in the world, might be assumed to know what he was talking

about. Intelligence, it says, is a well-established concept, regarded as a real, fundamental and very significant property of the human mind and measured accurately and fairly by a large range of tests which are not biased against social, economic, ethnic or racial groups.

Most well-known critics of intelligence tests are non-psychologists, like the late Stephen Jay Gould.

Obviously all testing is a statement of attainment on the tests, but when the tests measure something real which correlates very closely with achievements requiring what most people would consider intelligence - acquiring high academic and professional qualifications, performing well in mentally demanding occupations, etc. - then it seems reasonable to conclude they are valid. Of course the ability to do the exercises in intelligence tests themselves is of little or no practical use: it's what they

indicate that matters. Someone put it well when he said that to say intelligence tests measure only the ability to do intelligence tests is like saying that army assault courses measure only the ability to do army assault courses and has no relevance to health, strength, fitness, athletic ability, etc.!

The question of whether intelligence tests really do measure something real and significant was settled long ago by Lewis Terman's Gifted Group study. In the 1920s he chose a group of Californian schoolchildren who performed in the top range on intelligence tests, and followed them throughout their lives. Their success in attaining high educational qualifications, entering the top professional groups, remaining employed during periods of high unemployment, getting their writings published, and obtaining patents were far above average and, contrary to the image of the 'weedy intellectual', they were even taller, heavier and healthier than average!

FROM THE BOOKSHELF

Attack of the Unsinkable Rubber Ducks by Christopher Brookmyre, Hatchette Digital, 2007. ISBN 978-0-748-13199-0.

Reviewed by Peter Lucy

Christopher Brookmyre is a bestselling crime author, having penned a series of gritty novels set in modern Scotland - 'Tartan Noir' is the term, I believe. His work was unknown to me and this (his eleventh book in a loose series?) was recommended by a friend who knows my interest in skepticism.

I simply haven't read a book like it - a modern, youth-orientated popular page-turner of a crime novel that is directed squarely at woo in many of its forms. In the author's note, Brookmyre mentions his debt to many skeptical classics including 'Flim-Flam' and 'The

Psychic Mafia'. (Indeed, the book is dedicated to James Randi and Richard Dawkins and, according to Wikipedia, Mr Brookmyre is President of the Humanist Society of Scotland.)

Brookmyre pulls no punches when showing how nasty psychics can be.

'Attack of the Unsinkable Rubber Ducks' is a crime novel set around a Scottish University where a bunch of naïve students, idiotic Daily Mail

columnists, and Xtian-fundi businessmen are ensnared by a nefarious alliance of money-grubbing evil woo-meisters and sinister right-wing Creationists. A skeptical student, and one Jack Parlabane, a recurring investigative hero in Mr Brookmyre's work, brave death and delusion to expose the scams.

These psychic scams are well described and explained (an ASKE member may catch many of them first) and the uncompromising attitude to the strength and perversity of woo is excellent. The final denouement - how did the psychics record the

businessman's wife's voice from the beyond the grave - fooled me completely though. Brookmyre pulls no punches when showing how nasty psychics can be.

If some of the radicalism and jokes did not exactly match my (50+-year-old

:)) taste, and the US right-wing baddies (even the domino theory is briefly mentioned) are a bit all-encompassing, these are very minor quibbles set against a wonderful, appealing, modern crime novel that entertains, explains, debunks and sympathises. Highly recommended,

educational, amusing and excellent for the beach!

(A bit hipper than Hilary Mantel's 'Beyond Black', which is better written but far less punchy. Any other good anti-woo fiction?)

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On Tolerance: A Defence of Moral Independence by Frank Furedi. London & New York: Continuum, 2011; pp viii + 216. ISBN 978-1-4411-2010-6 (HB)

Reviewed by Mark Newbrook

Frank Furedi, a sociologist at the University of Kent, has issued this strongly-worded and closely-argued treatise in support of the essentially 'modernist' view (shared by most skeptics but currently disfavoured by much of the 'intellectual establishment') that the belief-systems of groups (or 'groups') of human beings do not necessarily warrant positive endorsement as is apparently now held, but merely passive tolerance. He laments the fact that tolerance (which has been a key feature of modern liberal/secular societies which accept the possibility of a range of viewpoints and the uncertainty of many 'conclusions' on a variety of intellectual fronts) is now often portrayed as 'wishy-washy', patronising, paternalistic and insufficiently supportive of minority viewpoints.

In Furedi's view, tolerance should in general be seen instead as the **preferred** default community response to group-specific ideas. On his view, people of all kinds and persuasions (including members of unpopular minorities) **can** expect tolerance, if indeed their ideas and practices are not themselves so illiberal as not to deserve even this; but they must **not** expect these ideas and practices to be 'celebrated' or treated as if valid/incorrigible by those who do not share them. However, of late they have been invited to expect this response by the trenchant and often powerful advocates of 'strong' versions of 'multiculturalism' and other such currents of thought. Assisted by the

prevalence of popular versions of 'radical scepticism' (the view that nothing can be reliably known and that all viewpoints are thus equally valid), this has discouraged even careful and respectful comparison of world-views in respect of scientific accuracy, philosophical coherence and moral desirability; and this in turn has generated the 'my truth, your truth' syndrome, and also the danger – always present in a culturally diverse liberal society – of tolerating and indeed implicitly endorsing (and thereby encouraging) ideas which truly **are** illiberal or clearly mistaken and which thereby threaten the society. In fact, the entire notion of 'free speech' is now often portrayed as elitist and damaging in so far as it involves the criticism of minority world-views.

In Furedi's view, tolerance should in general be seen instead as the preferred default community response to group-specific ideas.

Indeed, the currently popular 'celebration' of a widely diverse range of ideas or of diversity *per se*, if taken seriously, readily slides into unsustainably relativistic positions – which many contemporary post-modernist stances closely resemble. (I recently viewed a display of historic maps at the World Museum, Liverpool; the overtly post-modernist caption

expressed the clearly exaggerated view that maps are thoroughly culture-specific, cannot reveal any objective truth about the terrain they represent, and thus can in no way be compared with respect to relative accuracy.) In many cases – for instance, that involving the contrasts between different religions and the views of unbelievers – the key ideas in question actually contradict each other. Thus, if Christians and Muslims are right, in general terms, about how the metaphysical universe works, Hindus (with their belief in repeated reincarnation) and atheists must be wrong – and *vice versa*. As a species, we may not be able to decide definitively **which** such groups are right and which wrong (this applies both to the metaphysical and to the often even thornier associated ethical issues); but it is disingenuous to proceed as if the world-views in question could **all** somehow be equally valid. Some, indeed, may be demonstrably less valid than others in some respects. And the fact that some group unequivocally embraces a given religion or world-view (even a group which was formerly culturally dominant, or for that matter one which has suffered from unfair discrimination in the past) cannot exempt such a group from negative comment on their beliefs. Along with most skeptics, Furedi holds that groups (like individuals) must be free to adopt any non-harmful lifestyle, but in turn must accept the possibility of being offended or upset by public non-endorsement/criticism of their cherished

ideas (now itself often considered 'harmful'); and they must not be supported by the law in seeking to censor such comments. As the apostate Salman Rushdie pointed out when fiercely condemned by some Muslims for what he wrote in *The Satanic Verses*, anyone who does not like what someone else says about such matters is free to ignore it, or to respond with reasoned criticism and with exposition of their own views.

It perhaps needs to be stressed that, on Furedi's viewpoint, even in the relatively rare cases where people or groups really are demonstrably mistaken about an issue they still have the **right** to be mistaken and to be tolerated; but such people certainly cannot expect their views to be respected or 'celebrated', or to have any influence.

More generally, a focus upon the rights of individuals is now often portrayed as elitist (like the concept of 'free speech')

Another important point made by Furedi in this context involves the increasing emphasis upon groups rather than individuals. It now seems to be held that 'membership' of groups – on the basis of ethnicity, religion, gender and such – is much more important than individual thinking in shaping a person's ideas and world-view. Individuals do not choose to belong to most such groups but are born or reared into them, and on this account the socio-psychological concomitants of group-membership are themselves immutable or nearly so (individual choice is not usually involved). This has various unfortunate consequences, notably the favouring of viewpoints associated with easily defined groups rather than with individuals. This applies most notably to ethnically-based religions, and often leads to a degree of discrimination, for instance in the context of comparative

religion classes for schoolchildren, against non-ethnically-based stances such as atheism; most atheists have arrived at their views by way of individual thinking. (Religious leaders are often willing to have other religions discussed in class, albeit only as the views of other groups – but **not** unbelief.) It also encourages the notion (seldom made explicit but often, apparently, covertly present) that those who do find themselves in disagreement with 'their' groups and may therefore seek to secede from them (whether or not they succeed in doing so) are less worthy of respect and protection than the groups themselves. More generally, a focus upon the rights of individuals is now often portrayed as elitist (like the concept of 'free speech'; see above).

In some countries, indeed, libel laws hinder and discourage intelligent and well-reasoned critical comment upon the views of some groups (or indeed those of some individual thinkers); see for instance the case brought against Simon Singh for his critiques of chiropractic. In addition, a broadened definition of the notion of 'harm', perpetrated upon self or others, has led to the increasing tendency of governments to restrain individuals – but typically **not** 'groups' – from making their own life-decisions.

As noted, Furedi argues that the downgrading of tolerance and the perception that all viewpoints (especially those associated with ethnic or religious groups) should be accorded equal status are associated with a decline in the respectability of open, honest debate and the exchange of opinions. Among other cases, he cites here the hostile reactions of mainstream scholars to minority alternative positions, such as 'Holocaust denial' and 'climate-change denial', identifying many of these reactions as excessively dogmatic. Now it is true that some mainstream scholars adopt a 'debunking' or 'bad-skeptic' approach to such matters, antagonising not only the proponents of minority

views (some of whom are themselves often highly qualified) but also observers coming to consideration of these matters with open minds and expecting fairness. One such case involved the sometimes less than fair attacks of scientists such as the young Carl Sagan upon non-mainstream major-planet catastrophists such as Immanuel Velikovsky. (Velikovsky's own ideas were admittedly highly dubious to say the least; but assessment of these ideas could and should have been more fairly conducted.) But in this context Furedi arguably downplays the significance of cases where 'fringe' positions **can** reasonably be dismissed in strong terms, for fear that the untutored will be misled. If Furedi's view is valid, mainstream scholars should be free to critique their opponents' ideas (undogmatically, fairly and with whatever degree of respect is genuinely warranted) – especially where there is a well-argued scholarly consensus that these ideas are apparently suspect or worse and possibly damaging, as indeed in cases such as 'climate-change denial'. This is a point which Furedi himself soft-pedals.

Velikovsky's own ideas were admittedly highly dubious to say the least; but assessment of these ideas could and should have been more fairly conducted.

There are a number of other points at which Furedi's approach, as presented in this book, might invite criticism. For instance, he hints in places that comment on religious ideas which is actually judged 'blasphemous' by the adherents of those ideas (as opposed to carefully stated critiques) **might** reasonably be discouraged – though he does not make himself wholly clear on this point. More generally, many who broadly agree with Furedi (including some earlier reviewers of the book)

would locate the point at which reactions to any standpoint become genuinely unacceptable at different specific places on the continuum stretching from actual threats against a minority, through abuse or mockery (of various degrees of vehemence), to reasoned criticism. This itself is an issue

to be debated. And, in the context of his not unreasonable attacks on the 'fetish' which has often been made of diversity for its own sake, Furedi seems to downplay the genuine cultural-evolutionary value of diversity in 'throwing up' different world-views – the best aspects of which can be adopted

and used even by those who regard some particular world-views as implausible or indeed damaging in overall terms.

However, it will be clear from the above that in general terms I enthusiastically (though of course not uncritically) recommend this book.

MEDICINE ON THE FRINGE

Michael Heap

If the mass media (including the internet) are to be believed, it seems that so many things that happen in daily life are 'mysteries'. But what is a mystery? I looked up the word in my Chambers Dictionary and found a number of definitions, several with historical and religious allusions. The one that appears to refer to the everyday usage of the term is 'a phenomenon, circumstance or happening that cannot be explained'. So it follows that many everyday events that are considered worth reporting as news are 'mysteries' – they cannot be explained. I have just read about one such mystery: 'A runaway piglet has been discovered in an alpaca pen at a theme park, but how he ended up there remains a mystery' (Sky News, 26.6.12).

It seems to me that there could be a range of explanations for how Al, the piglet in question, came to be in the alpaca pen. So is it a mystery? Perhaps what is intended by the writer is, 'We don't know what the true explanation is yet'. Given the evidence, there may be several contenders, some more plausible than others. It may turn out that at the end of the day there is insufficient evidence to decide on the correct or most likely explanation. So we are left with uncertainty – we are not sure. But that is not the same as having a 'mystery' on our hands according to the earlier definition.

All this may be unduly pedantic: we all apply the term 'mystery' to any

happening for which we are unsure of the explanation. And 'we all love a good mystery'. But sometimes it is relevant to ask the question, 'Do you really mean this is a *mystery*'?

In October 2011, pupils at Le Roy Junior/Senior High School Buffalo, New York, began complaining of a variety of bizarre symptoms, most notably Tourette-like behaviour (involuntary twitches and vocalisations). Eventually 20 people were affected, 19 of them female and only one of them being an adult. A number of possible explanations were proposed (e.g. pollutants and vaccinations) and appropriate tests were carried out. By June 2012 it was concluded that the most likely diagnosis was *conversion disorder* and many of those affected had recovered in time for graduation.

Sometimes it is relevant to ask the question, 'Do you really mean this is a mystery?'

It is well established that the experience and expression of physical symptoms of a disease, and the limitations they impose on the patient by are often only partially related to the underlying organic pathology. Indeed a considerable range of physical symptoms that have no immediate organic cause can arise through a

combination of psychological factors and context. This may happen in groups of people, when the appearance of symptoms is potentiated by social influence and suggestion. The term *mass hysteria* is popularly used to describe this phenomenon. The individuals affected are not in control of their symptoms. There are treatments, but excessive attention is often counter-productive. (Incidentally, it is not 'a mystery illness' in the sense of the term 'mystery' as defined earlier. It is, to use an overworked expression, 'not fully understood'.)

To begin with, once word got around about what was going on in Buffalo, a multitude of celebrity doctors and other 'experts' descended on the school or appeared in the media eager to promote their own explanations for the symptoms. As the problem spiralled, some of the youngsters appeared on national and local television and in the press with headlines about their 'mystery illness'. The girls posted updates on their condition to Facebook and videos of their symptoms to YouTube.

'We noticed that the kids who were not in the media were getting better; the kids who were in the media were still very symptomatic', said Dr Laszlo Mechtler, who eventually successfully treated 15 of the girls at Dent Neurologic Institute. 'One thing we've learned is how social media and

mainstream media can worsen the symptoms. The mass hysteria was really fuelled by the national media, social media - all this promoted the worsening of symptoms by putting these people at the national forefront’.

So that’s it. ‘Mystery’ solved. Yes? I imagine not! I would predict that at least some of the individuals affected (particularly those who had their 15 minutes of fame) as well as their families will not be happy with a ‘psychological’ diagnosis’. This is a normal human reaction and should not be interpreted pejoratively. I imagine too that some experts who publicly committed themselves to other explanations (e.g. pollutants) will be psychologically incapable of accepting the conversion disorder explanation. (I also have a vision of compensation lawyers circling overhead with their collective eye on the main chance.)

If the image of a troupe of drum majorettes toppling over like ninepins causes you some hilarity you are not alone.

What makes me say all this? Well, there many previous cases of ‘mass hysteria’ on record, as a Google search will testify (the Mad Gasser of Mattoon, the French Meowing Nuns, the Tanganyika Laughing Epidemic, and the West Bank Fainting Epidemic, to name

but four; at the time of writing, 16 people have been arrested in Afghanistan over the alleged poisoning of schoolgirls, which some believe to be a case of ‘mass hysteria’). But for me, the Buffalo case stirred memories of an event in England that was in the news over 30 years ago. A Google search brought me quickly to the details of this case and I recommend the account in the *Fortean Times*, August 2010 (see *Note 1*). On a sunny morning in July 1980 the annual Hollinwell Show was taking place in fields near Kirkby-in-Ashfield in Nottinghamshire. One of the events was a competition involving around 500 children in marching bands. According to the *Fortean Times* account, ‘Just after 10:30, the children and some adults began collapsing. They were ferried by dozens of ambulances to four local hospitals, where about 259 children were examined and nine were detained overnight. Symptoms included fainting, running eyes, sore throats, dizziness, vomiting, trembling, weakness, numbness and a metallic taste in the mouth... but neither all at once nor all felt by the same person’. (If the image of a troupe of drum majorettes toppling over like ninepins causes you some hilarity you are not alone.)

The suggestion of ‘mass hysteria’ was greeted with outrage by parents and organisers alike. But why? A more mature understanding of the nature of illness should not provoke this kind of

reaction. Nor would this explanation be considered so unreasonable and demeaning by the individuals affected. Someone who didn’t help matters was the MP Mr Dennis Skinner (‘the Beast of Bolsover’) who declared the verdict to be ‘an insult to the intelligence and another cover-up by the Establishment’. Why do we have such awful politicians?

‘All human life is there’, as they say - but no mystery, only some uncertainty.

Well, I shall leave you to read the aforementioned account for the full details and the re-examinations, recriminations, ‘mystery-solved-at-last’ announcements, and so on that reverberate to this day. ‘All human life is there’, as they say - but no mystery, only some uncertainty.

Real mysteries rarely happen. But I wouldn’t be at all surprised if, in the years to come, we shall still be hearing about ‘the mystery illness’ that struck down 19 children in Buffalo NY. Will Hollywood get in on the act I wonder?

Note

1. http://www.forteantimes.com/features/articles/4237/all_fall_down.html

Call for Contributions

If you have attended a conference or presentation, watched a programme, or read an article or book that would be of interest to readers, why not write a review of this, however brief, for the *Sceptical Adversaria* or the *Skeptical Intelligencer*? Would you like to contribute a regular column in your specialty or area of interest – e.g. an ‘On the Fringe’ feature? Or would you like to take over one of the regular features in the *Adversaria*?

LANGUAGE ON THE FRINGE

Mark Newbrook

More from the Celtic Fringe

Last time, I discussed Ronald Hutton's theories regarding European paganism, which is especially associated with the 'Celtic' lands on the fringes of western Europe. As I noted, the term *Celtic* is more legitimately used of a sub-family of the Indo-European languages; the surviving Celtic languages are Irish Gaelic, Scots Gaelic, Manx Gaelic (recently revived), Cornish (ditto), Breton, and Welsh (see below on how these languages can be divided into two more specific groups). According to the standard interpretation of the history of these tongues, the language used by the post-Roman Germanic invaders – Old English – pushed Celtic out of the heartlands of Britain so successfully that in what became England and the southern parts of Scotland the earlier languages had completely vanished by medieval times.

Celtic is more legitimately used of a sub-family of the Indo-European languages.

One scholar who regards this view as exaggerated is Peter Berresford Ellis, a keen supporter of the revival of Celtic cultural identity which occurred in the 20th Century (its most obvious linguistic manifestations involve the contemporary official status of Gaelic in the Republic of Ireland and of Welsh in Wales). For example, he has supported claims from various sources to the effect that spoken Cornish did not die out around 1800 as is usually maintained but survived in patches as late as the early 20th Century. More particularly, he holds that Gaelic was widely used into early modern times in the southern areas of Scotland, and that the popular notional division of the country into the Gaelic-speaking Highlands & Islands and the Scots/English-speaking Lowlands is

accurate only for very recent times. The distribution and the forms of some Gaelic-derived place-names provide some support for these claims.

The ideas of Berresford Ellis are naturally embraced by historically-informed Gaelic speakers who seek to link their language – now studied by increasing numbers of young Scots outside the Highlands – with Scottish national identity (at a time when the Scottish Parliament has been re-established and outright independence is being mooted). They are less welcome in circles where a somewhat artificial Scots 'language' (largely based on older and/or non-standard Scottish English usage) has itself come to be regarded as a distinctive national language with norms distinct from those which apply in England, and as a vehicle for serious writing. (Almost all Gaelic-users but a far smaller percentage of Lowland Scots are effectively bilingual in Gaelic and Scots/English.) The specific facts of the case are complex and often obscure; and – with feelings on both sides clouding the factual issues – this debate will not be resolved easily or quickly.

And the (Possibly) Non-Celtic Fringe!

On the ASKE web site (*see note 1*) I discuss recent claims regarding Pictish writing. The Picts were an Iron Age society which existed in Scotland – latterly only in the far north – from around 300 to 850 CE. There is a good measure of agreement on the phonetics of many characters in written Pictish, since the script is one which was also used in Ireland and later in Scotland to write the well-known 'Q-Celtic' (Gaelic) languages. (This terminology relates to the varied reflexes in Celtic of key Indo-European consonants.) It probably originated in the Q-Celtic world; it appears to have been designed for writing Gaelic, and there is no trace of Pictish in Ireland.

On the other hand, the Pictish texts are not extensively **understood**, and the language itself (which is clearly **not** Gaelic) is unidentified. The two main views are a) that it is 'P-Celtic' (related to early Welsh; varieties of P-Celtic were in use in Strathclyde, further south in Scotland), and b) that it is a non-Celtic (and quite possibly non-IE) language, probably representing a very early settlement population. The former view has come to predominate; but if Pictish really is P-Celtic it represents a rather divergent branch of same (otherwise, it would be more readily interpreted), and it remains possible that there was indeed a non-IE-speaking population in the British Isles in historic times. See also my comments last time on the mysterious case of Shelta (Irish Tinkers' Cant), which is something of a focus for 'fringe' ideas but **may** genuinely have some (different) non-IE elements.

The Picts allegedly knew the secret of brewing ale from heather, a very useful skill in Scotland!

The Picts allegedly knew the secret of brewing ale from heather, a very useful skill in Scotland! A legend recounts how the invading Scots lost this art by throwing the last brewer off a cliff on the Mull of Galloway after he had tricked them into killing his son and prospective successor, who he had feared would reveal all under torture.

Folk-Linguistics

Ideas about language which are popular among people who know little or nothing about linguistics are described as **folk-linguistic**. It is, in fact, possible to regard 'fringe' theories such as those which I regularly discuss in this column as extreme (often idiosyncratic) manifestations of folk-linguistics.

Folk-linguistic ideas are not **necessarily** mistaken, or even confused; some of them are in fact accurate and indeed insightful. But they often require more careful or technical formulation in the light of linguists' findings and thinking – and in some cases they clearly **are** mistaken or confused, or at best dubious. Although interesting in themselves, they cannot be treated as reliably **valid**. (One maxim current among linguists is 'Accept as linguistically valid **everything** that a non-linguist says **in** her language but **nothing** that she says **about** it'!)

Folk-linguistic ideas are not necessarily mistaken, or even confused; some of them are in fact accurate and indeed insightful.

A while ago I referred to some folk-linguistic ideas current in the Chinese world, involving misperceptions (perhaps understandable in that context) of the relationship between speech and writing; most Chinese people regard the latter as primary. Indeed, people who know only language varieties which are not normally written, such as non-Mandarin Chinese 'dialects', are sometimes described by the Chinese as 'having no language'. And many linguistics students of Chinese background, focusing upon those **written** Chinese forms which are at least partly pictographic and thus non-arbitrary, are tempted to regard their native language itself as an exception to the principle that the forms of language are arbitrary.

The Chinese are not alone here. For instance, some 'fringe' linguists from quite other backgrounds wrongly use the phonological term *syllable* to refer to **written representations** of syllables, such as the Cretan Linear B characters. One such writer once told me that linguists must be confused in regarding syllables as features of pronunciation, since when he wrote down a Linear B

character and then listened intently he heard no sounds (and, he stressed, he was not deaf!).

In contrast with the Chinese, the Inca, whose civilisation represents the most 'advanced' culture without a writing system, must presumably have regarded speech as the **only** important manifestation of language. The Inca did communicate by means of assemblies of knotted string known as *quipu*, which, it is now thought, may have conveyed greater amounts of specifically linguistic meaning than was previously believed; but they produced no written texts as normally conceived (hence our uncertainty as to their more abstract ideas!).

Another Chinese folk-linguistic notion involves the idea that the main features which distinguish Chinese from English – monosyllabic versus (mostly) polysyllabic words, non-inflecting versus inflecting morphology (for example, Chinese verbs have no endings marking tense), presence versus absence of phonemic tone, and logographic versus alphabetic writing – form inseparable 'bundles'. This would imply that any given language must resemble either Chinese or English in **all** these respects – and, therefore, because the logographic Chinese writing system is unique in the modern world, that all other languages must presumably resemble English. (Many Chinese people actually **know** only Chinese and some English.) Chinese students are often surprised to learn, for example, that Vietnamese resembles Chinese in the first three of these four ways but is normally (and comfortably) written alphabetically.

Other common (cross-linguistic) folk-linguistic ideas include: the belief that the oldest known languages and, especially, the languages of illiterate traditional tribal peoples in places such as the Amazon, who lack advanced technology, are much more 'primitive' than, say, European or classical languages and 'have no grammar'; the view that non-standard native-speaker

English usage, especially stigmatised forms such as *ain't* (as in *She ain't coming*), is simply 'bad English'; the associated idea that native speakers of non-standard varieties of this kind are linguistically 'deprived' or 'challenged'; and the (again associated) idea that language use is in fact becoming 'worse' or 'looser' over time. Linguists would again reject these ideas on the basis of evidence and argumentation. (This is **not** to say that linguists recommend that students be allowed to use grossly non-standard forms or 'incorrect' spellings in formal or important contexts such as public exams or job interviews. Developed, literate societies do need standard varieties; and, while linguists would argue that too much emphasis is often placed on these things, it is unrealistic and indeed culpably disingenuous to encourage young and relatively powerless members of such a society to jeopardise their life-chances either through acts of sociolinguistic bravado or simply because they are inadequately informed.)

Some specific, less unsophisticated folk-linguistic ideas are held by some educationists and teachers who have not been adequately trained in linguistics or in the details of a given language.

Correcting the Correctors

Some specific, less unsophisticated folk-linguistic ideas are held by some educationists and teachers who have not been adequately trained in linguistics or in the details of a given language. For example: in Singapore – where most young people's English is now proficient (for many it is their first or even their only fluently-spoken language) but displays many region-specific word usages and grammatical features – locally-raised teachers of English are concerned to modify their students' usage in the direction of the traditional British norm; but they

themselves are typically less than fully aware of the relevant differences. As a result, they often ‘correct’ usage which is in fact already standard British English (while leaving ‘uncorrected’ some genuine characteristic Singaporeanisms such as *I slept at midnight*).

This pattern is even displayed in locally-produced ‘books of common errors’ aimed at students. My former colleague Adam Brown analysed some of these mistakes in a paper published in 2003. One typical example involves *change into*, as in *We changed into different clothes*; a prominent local book identifies this usage as ‘wrong’ and instead recommends the use of *change out into* – which is neither Singaporean nor British English!

Of course, many linguists suggest that Singapore – like other former colonies such as Australia and Canada – should now have its own norms for English. In Hong Kong, on the other hand, English is much less well known and much less widely used outside the classroom, and local norms do not seem sociolinguistically feasible; the need for students to adhere to the British norm (at least as a target) is thus uncontroversial. I myself have commented critically on similar ‘books of common errors’ used in that territory, prepared by over-

confident local authors without the involvement of native speakers.

Many linguists suggest that Singapore – like other former colonies such as Australia and Canada – should now have its own norms for English.

Naturally, error and conceptual confusion regarding language matters may arise among educationists and teachers even in native-speaker communities. For instance: on 29/1/12 there was a discussion on BBC TV’s Breakfast News programme of a proposal to reintroduce elocution lessons in schools near London, in the hope that the incidence of spelling errors such as *wew* for *well* (allegedly generated by ‘Estuary English’ accents in which this word is pronounced [wew]) would thereby be reduced. Now some (by no means all) non-standard spellings do relate to accent differences, and the particular error cited here is a candidate; but all attempts to modify young people’s accents through elocution (with whatever goals in mind) have proved conspicuously unsuccessful over many decades. And, more alarmingly, the interchanges of opinion on this programme were utterly vitiated by

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gross conceptual confusion. One speaker alone confounded the very different issues of a) **accent and spelling differences** (exemplified here by [wew]/*wew* and by what are often inaccurately described as ‘dropped Ts’ in expressions such as *Shut up!* – although this latter effect appears to have **no** consequences for spelling), b) the shifting **meanings** of idioms such as *Shut up!* (which is nowadays often used to express amazement rather than to demand silence) and c) standard versus non-standard sentence **grammar**. On 10/2/12 there was further discussion of this issue on *The One Show*, importing further confusion - notably the idea that non-standard spellings such as *sbort* derive from an unreported and probably spurious pronunciation difference (the pronunciation cited in the programme is in fact wholly ‘normal’, and the spelling with *-b-* is readily explained in other terms).

Even a very basic knowledge of linguistics would have helped considerably here. As long as such discussions are carried on in this confused manner, little progress can be expected.

Note

1. http://www.aske-skeptics.org.uk/pictish_stones.html

Comments on Mark Newbrook’s ‘Discontinuous Religions’ by David Barrett

Chris French circulated your latest ASKE Newsletter. Some interesting stuff - thanks! One comment/correction, though. Mark Newbrook, in ‘Language on the Fringe’, gives a mention to Ronald Hutton’s excellent work on the origins of modern Paganism, which ends with the statement ‘Predictably, few pagans accept Hutton’s ideas’ (*Skeptical Adversaria*, Spring 2012, pp. 9-10). In fact in Britain, Hutton’s ideas are very

widely accepted by most pagans, who have no problem distinguishing between the foundation myths of their religion and the actual origins of it. See my *A Brief Guide to Secret Religions* (Constable & Robinson, 2011:288-289): ‘They readily accept that their religion is a modern synthesis from many roots’.

Reply by Mark Newbrook

Thanks to David for this; I stand corrected. It appears that in making my

comment I relied excessively on my personal experiences (most of the pagans I myself have known would **not** accept Hutton’s views; but most of these people are not from the British Isles anyway) and to a lesser degree on Hutton’s own somewhat less optimistic comments on the reception of his ideas (which I may indeed have overstated).

THE EUROPEAN SCENE

ASKE is a member of the European Council for Skeptical Organisations. It has an Internet Forum on which you can read comments on sceptical issues from contributors and post your own. To access this, log on to the ECSO website (below).

Contact details for ECSO are:

Address: Arheilger Weg 11, 64380 Roßdorf, Germany

Tel.: +49 6154/695021

Fax: +49 6154/695022

Website: <http://www.ecso.org/>

Via the website you can access articles, news, and commentary on a range of topics of interest to sceptics.

The 14th European Skeptics Congress

<http://www.worldskeptics.org/>

From the Swedish Skeptics Association. (Föreningen Vetenskap och Folkbildning):

We invite science-friendly people worldwide to the 14th European Skeptics Conference, 23-25 August 2013, in Stockholm, Sweden. The conference is one in the series supported

by the European Council of Skeptical Organisations.

Conference language

English

Skeleton schedule

Thursday 22 August: Arrival and pre-conference events

Friday 23 August: Registration, talks, workshops

Saturday 24 August: Talks, workshops, conference party

Sunday 25 August: Talks, workshops, farewell, post-conference pub meet.

International Advisory Board

Massimo Polidoro, Italy

Amardeo Sarma, Germany

Marit M. Simonsen, Norway

(More to come)

Speakers

The organisers wish to hear ASAP from prospective speakers and people who

wish to suggest speakers. Note that we aim for an even gender representation and for a mix of backgrounds: activists, academics, medical professionals, journalists and more. We also welcome offers of partnership and support from likeminded organisations.

The 15th European Skeptics Congress

This will take place in London in 2015 and will be hosted by ASKE. It is hoped that other related organisations will also be involved. Please contact ASKE if you have any ideas or wish to be involved.

Alternative Medicine in Europe

See announcement at:

<http://www.homeopathy-ecch.org/>

OF INTEREST

SCEPTICISM, SCIENCE AND RATIONALITY (GENERAL)

The Skeptical Studies Curriculum Resource Center

<http://www.skeptic.com/skepticism-101/>

From Michael Shermer: 'The Skeptical Studies Curriculum Resource Center is a comprehensive, free repository of resources for teaching students how to think skeptically. This Center is made possible by your generous donations and contributions of course materials.'

How to Determine if a Controversial Statement is Scientifically True

<http://lifehacker.com/5919830>

'Every day, we're confronted with claims that others present as fact. Some are easily debunked, some are clearly

true, and some are particularly difficult to get to the bottom of.'

Rationalism in India

(See also 'The Mumbai Dripping Statue of Christ' later.)

From Indian humanist and rationalist, Babu Gogineni:

'Three recent pieces from my HUMAN ANGLE Monday op-ed column in PostNoon newspaper:

1. <http://postnoon.com/2012/05/01/charles-taylors-crimes/46321>

'Charles Taylor's Crimes (on the first due process conviction of a head of state for crimes against humanity);

2. <http://postnoon.com/2012/04/23/sending-india-to-school/45010>

'Sending India to School (on Litigation in the Supreme Court of India

questioning the constitutionality of the Right to Education Act)

3. <http://postnoon.com/2012/04/16/caste-in-injustice/43748>

'Alea Jacta Est? (Is the die caste? On Rahul Gandhi's declaration that he is a Brahmin)

'Other recent articles in PostNoon:

<http://postnoon.com/2012/04/02/the-sleep-of-reason/41127>

<http://postnoon.com/2012/04/09/hang-death-penalty/42435>

<http://postnoon.com/2012/02/11/shalt-thou-not-suffer-a-witch-to-live/27654>

'I was asked by some friends if the articles could be reproduced or translated: I would be honoured if a humanist point of view is so disseminated, and the Newspaper has confirmed that it has no problem so long

as credit is given to it as follows: “First published in PostNoon Newspaper www.postnoon.com”.

‘I would, of course, value any comments or criticism.

‘Best regards, and good wishes’.

How Rational is America?

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/2012/may/11/how-rational-america>

‘The home of conspiracy theories, creationism and climate scepticism is also a scientific powerhouse. Neil Denny is on a road trip to explore this contradiction.’

Statistics

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-17560252>

‘Go figure: Why nothing is really news at all’ by Michael Blastland.

‘[T]his characteristic of risk, to see things only in terms of what happens, or might happen, rather than what doesn’t, is actually a bias. Sometimes what doesn’t happen is as important a way of seeing the world as what does ...’

Logical Fallacies

<http://www.yourlogicalfallacyis.com/>

A useful website cataloguing logical fallacies.

SCIENTIFIC TOPICS

From Sense About Science

www.senseaboutscience.org

Recent activity includes:

‘**Misreporting Fukushima**’ at the American Association for the Advancement of Science conference (<http://bit.ly/HdgzCs>), followed by an open letter from scientists to David Willetts, Science Minister, about the irresponsible approach to risk communication by the EU Commission, summarised in this *Times Higher Education* article: <http://bit.ly/HFCiaN>.

‘For the Record’ pieces on claims that **aluminium in vaccines** poses a risk for children (<http://bit.ly/HH7tu2>); **reports that the Earth’s climate is not warming** (<http://bit.ly/HOD6UZ>); and headlines linking **mobile phone use** during pregnancy to ADHD in children (<http://bit.ly/HODbIt>).’

GM Crops

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/may/30/gm-debate-grown-up?newsfeed=true>

See the above for a mature discussion by James Randerson, and the following for a less-than-helpful rant by Joanna Blythman (the link says it all).

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2151380/GM-lobby-trying-force-increasingly-discredited-Frankensteins-Food-throats.html>

Meanwhile, Mark Henderson has put his chapter on GM in *The Geek Manifesto* online at:

<http://geekmanifesto.wordpress.com/2012/05/24/the-geek-manifesto-on-gm-crops/>

And from ‘Sense About Science’:

‘You may have seen in today’s press that protesters are planning to destroy John Pickett’s team’s chemical ecology research at Rothamsted on 27th May because it uses genetically modified wheat. The researchers are appealing for them to call off the destruction and discuss the work: “Growing wheat has an environmental toll of extensive insecticide use to control aphid pests. The research, which is non-commercial, is investigating how to reduce that by getting the plants to repel aphids with a natural pheromone... As scientists we know only too well that we don’t have all the answers. But if the work is destroyed, we’ll lose years of work and we will never know whether it could reduce the environmental impact of wheat growing.”

‘Sense About Science stands up for people whose research faces intimidation or suppression. We know that you will do all you can to make it clear that destroying scientific research is not acceptable. Please read their letter, watch their video and add your support to their appeal. (See:

www.senseaboutscience.org/pages/defend-science.html).’

Following this: ‘The Take the Flour Back group is pursuing this action but had agreed with the researchers’ proposal to debate their concerns before

27th May. The researchers organised a neutral venue and chair for a debate. Unfortunately Take the Flour Back has announced they will not take part. There is a timeline of the exchange between Professor John Pickett and Take the Flour Back at:

<http://www.rothamsted.ac.uk/Content.php?Section=AphidWheat&Page=Protest>.

‘Many of you left comments on the petition asking about aspects of the research and we have received many questions and points by email and twitter. The scientists at Rothamsted, and colleagues at institutions doing related work, have been responding to many of them; some of this is now up on:

<http://www.senseaboutscience.org/pages/rothamsted-appeal.html>.

‘Please send the message far and wide: forward the scientists’ appeal to your friends and colleagues, share the petition on Facebook and use Twitter hashtag #dontdestroyresearch’ (see:

<http://www.senseaboutscience.org/petition.php>).

And since then: ‘The planned direct action against the GM wheat experiment at Rothamsted did not happen yesterday. The Take the Flour Back group did not have enough support to storm the field and the local police kept them off Rothamsted’s grounds. Last night hackers attacked Rothamsted Research’s website but it is now back online. Your support has not only helped the scientists bear up under the pressure of the last few weeks but also made the threat to their research retreat in the face of opposition. There has been lots of media coverage in the last few days, including editorials in the Observer and the Times and articles in the Telegraph and Independent.

‘Some of you came to Rothamsted Park yesterday to tell the protest group why you didn’t want them to destroy publicly funded research. We have gathered some of the comments of support from the 6000 petition signatories as a PDF on our website at:

[http://www.senseaboutscience.org/data/files/Dont_destroy_research_public_support.pdf.](http://www.senseaboutscience.org/data/files/Dont_destroy_research_public_support.pdf)

Now a forwarded note from the GM wheat research team at Rothamsted:

‘We have the bad news that yesterday an individual broke into the experimental site and caused substantial damage. However, the overall integrity of the experiment has not yet been compromised. This is even more reason why we are extremely worried that the Take the Flour Back group is continuing with plans for direct action to destroy our GM wheat experiment entirely next Sunday. It has now issued logistical instructions for doing this and a ‘legal briefing’ for activists.

‘The group says it wants to destroy the crop because of a ‘contamination’ risk through cross-pollination with other wheat in fields a long way away. Their reason for pulling it up on 27 May was that “wheat is wind-pollinated” and that this was the last weekend before pollination is likely to occur. They did not seem to realise when they booked this date that wheat is in fact self-pollinating, and that therefore almost no pollen leaves the plant, let alone the field. We have informed them of this misunderstanding, but to no avail. They have also refused our offer to debate the issues in public in front of an audience, saying they do not have the “capacity” to field a speaker.

‘In the thousands of signatories on the petition against destroying our research, there are many diverse voices, including farmers, environmentalists, people local to Rothamsted, researchers in other fields, writers, musicians and all walks of life. We know many of you want to do something to help, and may feel angry and powerless about this latest vandalism. However, in discussions with the authorities, we cannot have our supporters counter-protesting on the day as it would provoke the kind of conflict that we have been trying to avoid. The only way forward is through communication and verbal engagement.

‘Take the Flour Back don’t need to hear angry invective, but as a last ditch attempt at getting them to call off their action, we think they should understand why so many people oppose destroying the research. The only way we know of reaching them is at info@taketheflourback.org. Although they may not reply, they will be taking note of the strong support that we have received.’

And now a message from Maurice Moloney, Director and Chief Executive of Rothamsted Research:

‘The scientists at Rothamsted Research want to record their sincere thanks for the amazing, spontaneous outpouring of support for safeguarding their research on aphid repellent wheat. As you all know, this project represented years of painstaking discovery research and the careers of a number of dedicated scientists. The idea that a self-appointed group would decide to destroy this was unconscionable and the researchers felt that they had to reach out to reasonable people for support. No-one expected such enthusiastic and heartfelt support, but it had a number of very positive effects.

‘You brought the discussion about the research into the realms of sensible debate. Your support really affected the attitude of commentators, who realised what strong support there is for public sector research even when it involves transgenic plants. It also had an effect on those threatening the work and certainly helped to reduce the size of the demonstration that was intent on destroying the experiment. Finally, it was a great source of encouragement to our scientists, even in the depressing period leading up to the direct action, when everyone was feeling under siege. They would read some of the comments and were re-energised to go ahead and struggle for the right to do good science despite the threats.

‘As you now know, the day of the action went by peacefully and the demonstrators were well behaved. We still live under the threat of another night-time raid, but we are doing our

best to safeguard the experiment. Our ecologists and field entomologists are in the field (in the pouring rain!) most days counting aphids, ladybirds and parasitic wasps that live off the aphids. But they are even more enthused to perform this work because of your support. They feel like they are members of a much larger team. This is a reminder of why we do science. It isn’t to produce scientific papers (although we must...), but it is to improve agriculture and all that depends on it.

‘So thank you, each individually, for your support, your comments and your suggestions. We have learned a great deal though this process, much of it due to you and your help.

‘The researchers will keep this list appraised of the progress of our work and invite any and all to contact us directly at Rothamsted.’

Is the tide turning in favour of GM crops? See:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-18593639>

Or if you need reassuring that you have enough intelligence to know when it’s being insulted, read Sean Poulter in the *Daily Mail* at:

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2165209/In-hot-water-MP-fan-Frankenstein-food-got-wrong-M-amp-S-broccoli-saying-genetically-modified.html>.

Teaching Evolution and Climate Warming in Tennessee

<http://thinkprogress.org/climate/2012/04/11/462354/tennessee-monkey-bill-to-dumb-down-kids-in-biology-and-physics/>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2012/mar/21/tennessee-bill-teachers-evolution-climate-change>

The state of Tennessee has adopted a law ‘to prevent school administrators from reining in teachers who expound on alternative hypotheses’ to the scientific theories of evolution and climate change. The National Center for Science Education has said of the primary alternative to evolution — creationism — that ‘students who accept

this material as scientifically valid are unlikely to succeed in science courses at the college level’.

Ignoring Global Warming Science
<http://thinkprogress.org/climate/2012/05/31/493086/north-carolina-bill-would-require-coastal-communities-to-ignore-global-warming-science/>

North Carolina Bill would require coastal communities to ignore global warming science.

Evolution

<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2004/11/darwin-wrong/quammen-text/1>

‘Was Darwin Wrong? No’. - National Geographic Magazine. Readable article on evolution and why it is not ‘just a theory’.

MEDICINE (GENERAL)

The Nightingale Collaboration

<http://www.nightingale-collaboration.org/>

The Council for Healthcare Regulatory Excellence (CHRE) is holding a consultation exercise on their Accredited Register scheme that will be launched in November. This scheme will ‘set standards for organisations that hold voluntary registers for people working in health and social care occupations and we will accredit the register if they meet those standards’. The new Government register could be a way for unproven and disproven therapies to gain undeserved recognition. The Nightingale Collaboration asks you to make your voice heard and make the CHRE aware of your concerns about allowing alternative therapists into the Accredited Register scheme. **This must be done before July 11th**. Please visit the Nightingale Collaboration website for further details.

Alternative Medicine and the European Parliament

<http://www.homeopathy-ecch.org/>

A Round Table Meeting of the European Parliament Interest Groups MEPs Against Cancer and MEPs for CAM on the above topic took place on Tuesday

27th March 2012 in the European Parliament.

Defending Science Online

<http://www.newscientist.com/article/mg21428626.300-guerilla-enlightenment-defending-science-online.html>

Pro-reason bloggers are doing a better job than scientists at challenging alternative medicine.

Edzard Ernst

‘I’m retiring - so critics should watch out’

<http://www.pulsetoday.co.uk/comment-blogs/-/blogs/14087591/i-m-retiring-so-critics-should-watch-out>

‘After serving in my post as ‘Professor of Complementary Medicine’ for 19 years, I am retiring to become Emeritus Professor, on 12 June....’ Free access to the full text is accessible at the above site. Interesting comments too.

Acupuncture

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21440191>

Ernst E., Lee M.S., Choi T.Y. Acupuncture: does it alleviate pain and are there serious risks? A review of reviews. *Pain*, 152(4):755-64.

‘Numerous reviews have produced little convincing evidence that acupuncture is effective in reducing pain. Serious adverse events, including deaths, continue to be reported’ (above link).

Also see the following link for Edzard Ernst on problems with Chinese acupuncture trials for the treatment of obesity (with lively discussion).

<http://www.pulsetoday.co.uk/comment-blogs/-/blogs/13685490/problems-with-chinese-acupuncture-trials>

Homeopathy and the Law

<http://www.quackometer.net/blog/2012/06/the-end-of-homeopathy.html>

‘Homeopaths have been in a panic over the MHRA’s activities in cleaning up existing medicines’ law. MPs have been bombarded with desperate, but misleading claims, that the law is being changed and that they will be put out of business.

‘The law is not being changed. But they may well indeed be out of business soon....’

The Legal Challenge that Could Stop Homeopathy

<http://theconversation.edu.au/the-legal-challenge-that-could-stop-homeopathy-in-its-tracks-6557>

‘Attempts to regulate or restrict the claims of homeopaths (*in Australia*) are currently underway. But it might take a legal challenge to ultimately stop homeopaths from promoting cures and treatments that simply don’t work.’

Homeopathy Protest

http://www.getwokingham.co.uk/news/2110665_sceptics_protest_at_homeopathy_meeting

‘A small but good-humoured protest outside Wokingham Town Hall greeted audience members at the first meeting of the Thames Valley Homeopaths. Six members of the Berkshire Sceptics Society handed out leaflets to those arriving to hear Dr Jayne Donegan’s presentation on an alternative approach to treating childhood illness on March 14.’

Explanation of Homeopathy

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kA6rUUOK9xE>

‘Crazy Homeopathy Lady Charlene Werner explains physics...’

Homeopaths on Homeopathy

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/the-lay-scientist/2012/apr/17/1>

‘In celebration of World Homeopathy Awareness Week, I (*Martin Robbins*) have decided to hand my blog over to leading homeopaths and allow them to have their say. After all, the more people know about homeopathy, the better; and who better to tell them than homeopaths, in their own words.’

‘Homeopathy Clinic Toes the Line’

<http://www.nightingale-collaboration.org/news/122-homeopathy-clinic-toes-the-line.html>

A victory for the Nightingale Collaboration against unsubstantiated claims made about ‘Marigold Therapy’.

Reporting Misleading Health Claims Online

<http://adventuresinnonsense.blogspot.co.uk/2011/04/fishbarrel-easy-way-to-report.html>

'FishBarrel' is Simon Perry's facility for making rapid online complaints to the ASA or Trading Standards about misleading health claims on the web.

Drinking Water

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-17741653>

Drinking water improves exam grades, research suggests. However...

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/health/healthnews/9313103/Tea-is-as-good-as-bottled-water-for-keeping-us-hydrated.html>

Tea and coffee are just as good as bottled water at keeping us hydrated, a study has found.

PSYCHIATRY AND PSYCHOLOGY

DSM-V

<http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn21580>

The above is a link to an article just published on the New Scientist site concerning the independence of the DSM-V working group members to the pharmaceutical industry. The article relates to a study by Lisa Cosgrove and Sheldon Krinsky just published in PLoS Med entitled 'A Comparison of DSM-IV and DSM-5 Panel Members' Financial Associations with Industry: A Pernicious Problem Persists'. Here's the link:

<http://www.plosmedicine.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pmed.1001190>

The following article in *Psychology Today* is about major concerns over the reliability of psychiatric diagnoses.

<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/dsm5-in-distress/201205/newsflash-apa-meeting-dsm-5-has-flunked-its-reliability-tests>

And the article below in *Psychology Today* refers to further criticisms.

<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/side-effects/201205/dsm-5-is-diagnosed-stinging-rebuke-the-apa>

And (*make this the last one* – Ed.) further woes are announced at this site:

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/allen-frances/dsm-5-costs-25-million-apa_b_1554405.html

Neuro-linguistic Programming

<http://www.james-gray.org/articles/>

Local UK councils are still sending staff on discredited NLP courses (by journalist James Gray).

RESEARCH

Research Project

mcmousseau@gmail.com

Marie-Catherine Mousseau is conducting qualitative research for a social psychology module at the Open University. 'My idea was to interview two persons who had an anomalous experience (with a phenomenological approach); I mean quite a powerful one which had an impact on their sense of self and identity - e.g. OBE, NDE, or other types of anomalous experiences provided it is quite meaningful for them. I was thinking you might know such persons; or if not would it be possible for you to send an email to your network at some stage to see if there is anybody that would meet the criteria and be interested in participating?'

Research Post

<http://www.jobs.ac.uk/job/AEQ460/research-fellow-in-cognitive-psychology-neuroscience/>

Dr Jason Braithwaite (University of Birmingham) is looking for a suitably qualified person to work with him on a project on 'Cortical Hyperexcitability and its Association with Out-of-Body Experiences (OBEs) in the Non-clinical Population'.

Developments at APRU

From Chris French: 'I am very pleased to announce that Dr Gustav Kuhn and his PhD student, Robert Teszka, will be joining the APRU this September. In addition to his general interest in visual cognition, Gustav is also one of the

world's leading experts on the psychology of magic and has published extensively on this subject.' Visit Dr Kuhn's web site at:

<http://www.gustavkuhn.com/VisualCognition/Home.html>.

'Robert Teszka is a magician-turned-researcher interested in how people pay attention to their surroundings and how they think about the world. Using magician's techniques of misdirection to inspire experiments, he studies how people's perceptions and beliefs are changed by what they notice - and by what they don't.'

RELIGION

The Mumbai Dripping Statue of Christ

<http://sanaledamaruku.blogspot.co.uk/>

The man facing blasphemy charges after he claimed water dripping from a statue of Christ in Mumbai was not miraculous but the result of a badly plumbed toilet is preparing to ask India's Supreme Court to abolish the blasphemy law. For a petition organised by the UK Rationalists, go to the following site:

<https://www.change.org/en-GB/petitions/we-call-on-the-catholic-archdiocese-of-bombay-to-encourage-the-withdrawal-of-complaints-against-indian-rationalist-sanal-edamaruku>

Miracle Christian Curers Told to Faith up to the Facts

<http://blogs.mirror.co.uk/investigations/2012/06/miracle-christian-curers-told.html>

'It's mid-morning and one of Britain's most controversial Christian groups is setting up shop outside Bath Abbey.....A few followers hand out leaflets under a grey sky by a banner reading "Healing" and occasionally a member of the public sits on a camp chair while a couple of adherents pray alongside....The Advertising Standards Authority banned the leaflets because the group could not provide any evidence it cured the ailments and could discourage people, "particularly the vulnerable", from seeking medical treatment....'

Teaching Genocide to Schoolchildren

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/may/30/christian-fundamentalists-plan-teach-genocide?fb=naive&CMP=FBCNETT-XT9038>

Good News Clubs' evangelism in schools is already subverting church-state separation. Now they justify murdering nonbelievers.

Catholic Schools against Gay Marriage

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/apr/25/catholic-church-schools-gay-marriage?fb=naive&CMP=FBCNETT-XT9038>

Pupils at state-funded Catholic schools in England and Wales are asked to back a campaign against same-sex marriage.

The Turin Shroud

<http://heresycorner.blogspot.com/2012/03/shroudmongery.html>

Yet another implausible theory about the Turin Shroud.

Prayer and Health Research

<http://ssrn.com/abstract=1992323>
<http://www.transpersonalstudies.org/ImagesRepository/ijts/Downloads/Andreescu.pdf>
<http://independent.academia.edu/AdrianAndreescu>

From Adrian Andreescu,

Re 'Rethinking Prayer and Health Research: An Exploratory Inquiry on Prayer's Psychological Dimension', *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 2011, **30**, 23-47.

'A brief literature review of cancer survival trials is employed by the author to raise questions on their design and to bring speculatively into discussion concepts such as "worldview," "intentional normative dissociation," and "psychosomatic plasticity-proneness." Using prayer's psychological dimension as a way to unite such elements opens new fertile perspectives on the academic study of prayer and health. In this context, it is suggested that a consistent interdisciplinary research agenda is

required in order to understand those biopsychosocial factors interconnected within the process and outcome of prayer before attempting to decipher the big answers laying dormant probably within the transpersonal and spiritual layers of human experience.'
(*Ideas tend to be expressed in the language they deserve – Ed.*)

Papal Mortality and the Success of the Welsh Rugby Team

http://www.bmj.com/content/337/bmj.a2768?ijkey=8f9abfc6d2e3aa20739b4da86986ace4f85241d8&keytype=tf_ipsecsha&linkType=ABST&journalCode=bmj&resid=337/dec17_2/a2768

'There is no evidence of a link between papal deaths and any home nation grand slams (when one nation succeeds in beating all other competing teams in every match). There was, however, weak statistical evidence to support an association between Welsh performance and the number of papal deaths.'

Naked Men in Wiccan Ritual Fires

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/crime/9222741/Naked-men-started-flat-fire-in-Wiccan-ritual-to-get-rid-of-negative-vibes.html>

Two naked men started fires in a flat as part of a pagan ritual to get rid of "negative vibes", a court heard.

OTHER UNUSUAL CLAIMS

Big Foot

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-17615457>

How do you find a creature most people believe is a myth?

UFO Sightings

<http://www.itv.com/thismorning/life/do-aliens-really-exist/>

Chris French discusses the Rendlesham UFO controversy with Gary Heseltine on ITV's 'This Morning'.

'Red Lights'

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/2012/jun/15/psychics-psychologists-red-lights>

Chris French (*not him again!* - Ed.) reviews 'Red Lights', a film about psychics, at the above site.

LIBEL REFORM

KEEP LIBEL LAWS OUT OF SCIENCE

From Sense About Science:

Visit the following sites:

<http://bit.ly/HhNUKd>

<http://bit.ly/Hbs5fr>

And there is more:

'Re our Libel Reform Campaign with English PEN and Index on Censorship: over 100 organisations and 60,000 supporters have been calling for this since December 2009. Open discussion about science, medicine, consumer safety, research practices, and much else, needs protection from bullying and chilling attacks. (For more on the current situation see Tracey Brown's BMJ Blog yesterday 'A defamation bill in the Queen's speech' <http://bit.ly/JUMgPK>). We expect the Government's bill to be published within a week (*now published - Ed.*). In the meantime we are adding responses to our website as they come in: <http://bit.ly/JUCcBM>. Or follow: @senseaboutsci on Twitter (#libelreform)'.

Stop Press: Please visit the following site for some up-to-date developments: <http://www.senseaboutscience.org/pages/urgent-help-needed-for-libel-reform.html>.

MOON LANDING

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_detailpage&v=UUFO8AGMwic#t=81s

Buzz Aldrin (aged 72) is verbally abused by someone claiming he never went to the moon but who gets more than he bargained for.

An Audience with Neil Armstrong

<http://thebottomline.cpaaustralia.com.au/>
In this four part series the first man to walk on the moon, gives a personal commentary on Apollo 11's historic lunar landing and his thoughts on leadership and taking risks to innovate for the future.

UPCOMING EVENTS

THE ANOMALISTIC PSYCHOLOGY RESEARCH UNIT AT GOLDSMITH'S COLLEGE LONDON

<http://www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/apru/speakers.php>
tamas.borbely@gmx.com

Seminars are held on Tuesdays at 6:10 p.m. in Room LGO1 in the New Academic Building, Goldsmiths College, University of London, New Cross, London SE14 6NW. Talks are open to staff, students and members of the public. Attendance is free and there is no need to book.

You are strongly recommended to register (at no cost) with the APRU's 'Psychology of the Paranormal' email list to ensure that you are informed of any changes to the programme. Visit:

<http://www.gold.ac.uk/apru/email-network/>
and
<http://www.twitter.com/ChrisCFrench>
and
<http://feeds.feedburner.com/apru>

SKEPTICS IN THE PUB

Website for all venues:

<http://www.skeptic.org.uk/pub/>

Go to the above website and then choose the venue you are looking for to access the upcoming events (and information on any associated local sceptic group). Current venues are now so numerous there is almost bound to be a meeting near you.

CENTRE FOR INQUIRY LONDON

<http://www.cfilondon.org/>

See the website for upcoming events.

THE 2014 EUROPEAN SKEPTICS CONGRESS

See 'The European Scene', earlier.

LOGIC AND INTUITION: ANSWER

Note: If you have any problems printing this, try the pdf version of this Newsletter at: <https://dl.dropbox.com/u/5532250/newsletter%202012-2.pdf> or email m.heap@sheffield.ac.uk.

Let, for the sake of simplicity, the distances to be travelled off and on the walkway be d_1 and d_2 respectively.

Let v_1 be your speed of walking and let v_2 be the speed of the walkway.

Let t_1 seconds be your time spent off the walkway and let t_2 seconds be your time spent on the walkway.

Now, if you don't stop at all to tie up your shoelaces, then:

$t_1 = \frac{d_1}{v_1}$ and $t_2 = \frac{d_2}{v_1+v_2}$ and the total time for your journey is the sum of these.

Let t be the time spent tying your shoelace.

So, if you stop to tie your shoelace while you are walking, then t_1 is now $\frac{d_1}{v_1} + t$ so:

$T_a =$ your total journey time if you tie your shoelaces off the walkway $= \frac{d_1}{v_1} + t + \frac{d_2}{v_1+v_2}$ [1].

If you stop to tie your shoelace on the walkway, you spend t seconds travelling at a speed of v_2 which means you will cover a distance of tv_2 units. This leaves a distance of $(d_2 - tv_2)$ to be covered at a speed of $(v_1 + v_2)$. (We assume that you don't come to the end of the walkway *before* you finish tying your shoelaces.)

So, if you tie your shoelaces on the walkway, $t_1 = \frac{d_1}{v_1}$ and $t_2 = t + \frac{d_2 - tv_2}{v_1+v_2}$

So, $T_b =$ your total journey time if you tie your shoelaces on the walkway $= t_1 + t_2$ or $\frac{d_1}{v_1} + t + \frac{d_2 - tv_2}{v_1+v_2}$ [2].

Now we compare the formulae for T_a and T_b (1 and 2 above). We find that the difference is $\frac{d_2}{v_1+v_2} - \frac{d_2 - tv_2}{v_1+v_2}$ or $\frac{tv_2}{v_1+v_2}$

Clearly T_a is greater than T_b by this amount. So tying your shoelaces **on** the walkway will lead to a quicker journey than tying them **off** the walkway.

Please let me know if I have made any mistakes!

Variation

Assuming by now you have not had enough of this puzzle, you may be interested in a variation (no, it's not the one about taking into account Einstein's Special Theory). Suppose while hurrying for your plane you walk at a constant speed except that you have just enough energy to run for a fixed period. When should you do this – on or off the walkway?

Answer in the next issue.



Cartoon by Marc van Wichelen <skepmarc@hotmail.be>

ABOUT ASKE

Founded in 1997, ASKE is a society for people from all walks of life who wish to promote rational thinking and enquiry, particularly concerning unusual phenomena, and who are opposed to the proliferation and misuse of irrational and unscientific ideas and practices. This is our quarterly newsletter and we have an annual magazine, the *Skeptical Intelligencer*.

To find out more, visit our website (address below).

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