
Skeptical Adversaria

2012, Number 3 (Autumn)



The Quarterly Newsletter of the Association for Skeptical Enquiry



FROM THE ASKE CHAIRMAN

Michael Heap

The Belgian Skeptical Society SKEPP is now offering one million euros to anyone who can ‘demonstrate the ability to accomplish feats that are paranormal or impossible according to present scientific knowledge’.

Candidates for ‘The Sisyphus Prize’ will be tested in Belgium but must first pass a pre-test in their native country overseen by the national skeptics society (in the case of the UK, ASKE). If they pass the pre-test the national skeptics will award them a prize equivalent to 500 euros (the actual value is in fact a local decision). SKEPP stipulates that a deposit of 50 euros will be required from all applicants for the pre-test and this will be refunded should the person pass the pre-test. However, the national organisation may charge what they wish or waive this fee altogether.

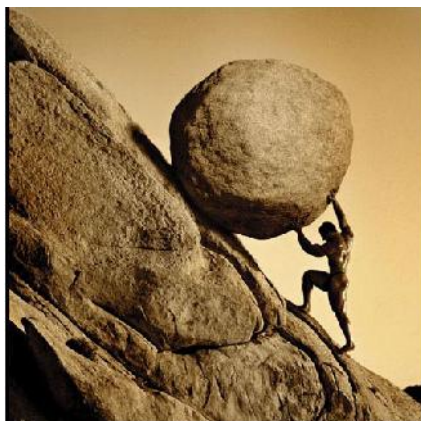
Having passed the pre-test the applicant will enter for the Sisyphus Prize of 1M euros. This is undertaken by SKEPP in Belgium.

The scheme will run from 1st October 2012 to 30 September 2013 or until an applicant has been awarded the prize. It is possible that the scheme will be extended beyond this period but this is uncertain at present.

The prize is not open to ‘stage magicians and illusionists’.

For many years ASKE has offered a more modest prize to anyone who can demonstrate paranormal abilities under controlled conditions. No-one has actually been tested, although I did represent ASKE at a reasonably rigorous

test of dowsing in March this year (the dowser was unsuccessful). For the time being we will be substituting the ASKE Challenge with the pre-test for the Sisyphus Prize.



*Sisyphus**

Details of prize, including the contract for the applicant, are to be found in Dutch on the SKEPP website <http://skepp.be/>. I have an English version and this will appear on the ASKE website in due course (in the meantime I can email a copy to anyone interested). SKEPP is anxious that it is made clear that in the case of any legal dispute, ‘only the text in Dutch as published by SKEPP has legally binding value for the one million euro prize and only the Belgian courts can judge’.

Contents

From the ASKE Chairman	1
Logic and Intuition	2
From the Bookshelf	2
Medicine on the Fringe	5
Language on the Fringe	7
The European Scene	9
Of Interest	10
Upcoming Events	14
About ASKE	16

*The story of Sisyphus, a king in Greek mythology, is a somewhat tortuous one. The pertinent detail is that, as a punishment from Queen Persephone for his trickery, Sisyphus was made to roll a huge boulder up a steep hill. Before he could reach the top, however, the boulder would always roll back down, forcing him to begin again. I suppose there is a connection with scepticism here, akin to the metaphor of ‘the unsinkable rubber duck’.

LOGIC AND INTUITION

This is the fourth issue of the newsletter in which you find yourself at an airport rushing to catch your flight.

In the last issue I posed the following question: Suppose while hurrying for your plane you walk at a constant speed (on and off the walkway) except that you have just enough energy to run for a fixed period. When should you do this – on or off the moving walkway?

Last time, I provided an algebraic solution to the question of when you should stop to tie your shoelace – again on or off the walkway. Readers are invited to send in the algebraic solution to the above puzzle.

But – like the earlier version of the problem, the answer may be derived logically. One way of approaching the earlier version – when to tie your shoelaces – is to imagine you are with someone and to think what happens when one of you stops to do up his or her lace before the walkway while the other carries on and stops on the walkway to tie the lace. You can do the same with the present version. Suppose your friend puts on the burst of speed – say for 10 seconds – before reaching the walkway, thus arriving there a certain distance (d metres) ahead of you. Once on the walkway the lead that your friend has on you will increase more because your friend is moving faster than you (he or she is still walking at the usual pace).

You then step on the walkway and increase your speed for 10 seconds, then resume the usual pace. You will thereby reduce the distance between the two of you only by d metres, so your friend remains ahead of you.

As I mentioned when I introduced the first version of this puzzle in the Winter 2011 Newsletter, it is a favourite of Marcus du Sautoy, Simonyi Professor for the Public Understanding of Science (*note 1*). And it's not just about running to catch a flight. I quote Professor du Sautoy:

'There is an economic maxim that underlies both decisions: a worker should spend as much time as possible on the most efficient machine. In this case, staying on the walkway for as long as possible is the best strategy. Stop to tie the shoelace on the walkway but don't press the boost button (*i.e. temporarily increase your walking rate*) as it will get you off the walkway quicker. Save that for the bit of the airport without the moving walkway.'

It would be interesting to hear from any reader who knows or can think of other ways of applying this maxim.

Incidentally, if you are really, really fascinated by airport walkways, you can always read 'Optimal speeds for walking

and running, and walking on a moving walkway' by M. Srinivasan (2009) in *Chaos*, Jun;19(2): 026112 (*note 2*) and the feature 'Using the airport moving walkways actually slows you down' in the *Daily Telegraph* 16.7.09.

Notes

1.<http://people.maths.ox.ac.uk/dusautoy/Jenny's%20Scans/Sexy%20Maths/Time%20s2-20090506-Formula-won-the-key-to-boosting-travel.pdf>

2.<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19566272>

3.<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/science-news/5836445/Using-the-airport-moving-walkways-actually-slows-you-down.html>

The Boat and the Rock

For the next puzzle you have to travel by boat. You are standing in a boat in the middle of a lake holding a rock. You throw the rock into the lake. With respect to the land, does the water level rise or fall or stay the same? Answer in the next issue.

FROM THE BOOKSHELF

Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C. S. Lewis by Michael Ward. Oxford University Press, 2008, pp 345. ISBN-10: 019973870X; ISBN-13: 978-0199738700.

Reviewed by Mark Newbrook

As children, many readers may have enjoyed the series of seven 'Narnia' books written in the mid-20th Century by the Oxford academic C.S. Lewis (1898-1963). Lewis used these stories to express his theological views, which were those of an erstwhile atheist returning to the Christian faith of his

childhood (*note 1*). He also wrote a science-fiction trilogy and much theologically-oriented non-fiction.

Widely-read corpora such as these naturally attract many interpretations, some of them seeking hitherto unrecognised patterns and themes. In this case, the Christian sub-text is plain

enough, even to some young readers, at least in some of the books; the lion-divinity Aslan sacrifices himself in *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, and the Narnian world eventually ends in transition to a 'higher' state in *The Last Battle*. But no serious reader has ever doubted the presence of other motifs and

messages. And, as Michael Ward argues in his introduction, some of these may be **deliberately** covert. Ward himself believes that he has discovered a further coherent sub-text covering all seven books, involving ancient pagan astrology and astronomy and in particular the ancient associations of the ‘seven planets’, i.e. the Sun, the Moon and the planets out to Saturn, minus Earth (the outer planets were of course unknown until modern times). Each book is themed according to the attributes of a given ‘planet’.

Lewis regarded paganism as the groping of pre-Christian thought towards the truth which was fully revealed in Christianity (*note 2*). While he knew that ancient geocentric cosmologies were factually mistaken, he saw in them much truth of other, theological types, not subject to empirical disconfirmation (*note 3*). Ward’s thesis is thus *prima facie* by no means implausible.

Ward himself is an Anglican priest and a theologian, and he evidently endorses not only Lewis’s Christian world view but also his entire vision (*not 4*). His book is thus more important for a skeptical audience than would be

the case if it involved only the exegesis of fantasy literature. It has to be said that he does not succeed in producing a case for the Lewisian model of the universe that would persuade a well-informed unbeliever. Indeed, he does not really attempt this. But – whether or not he is correct in his specific interpretive thesis – he does provide a new, well-researched account of Lewis’s thought in general, and this can be considered on its merits by philosophically-inclined readers.

Lewis regarded paganism as the groping of pre-Christian thought towards the truth which was fully revealed in Christianity.

It remains unclear, however, whether Ward is indeed correct in his specific thesis. He marshals much textual evidence in its support, and he critiques (rather briefly) other interpretations and the ‘null hypothesis’ that there is **no** second sub-text. But he does not devote much space to the seeking-out of **contrary** evidence, and many of the equations between elements in Lewis’s

text and the relevant astrological notions seem rather imprecise and marginal. In sum, this proposal will require much more discussion if all Lewis scholars are to accept it.

Notes

1. He was decisively influenced in this respect by another member of the ‘Inklings’ literary circle, J.R.R. Tolkien, who himself approached the issues very differently in *The Lord of the Rings*.

2. Although he respected thoughtful atheists, the mature Lewis believed that they were, in the final analysis, patently confused and wrong, lacking a coherent place in the intellectual world. Indeed, his vision of the moral and psychological requirement for humanity to subordinate itself to divine will is in places disturbingly uncompromising for the non-believing reader.

3. He felt, indeed, that empirical precision actually hindered perception of such things.

4. Indeed, in places Ward simply accepts the truth of Christianity and of spiritual entities generally as a matter of fact.

---0---

Nothing Matters: A Book About Nothing by Ronald Green. Winchester & Washington, DC: iff Books, 2011), pp xii + 279. ISBN 978 1 84694 707 0.

Reviewed by Mark Newbrook

I first came upon Ronald Green’s ideas about ‘nothing’ when I attended his somewhat undisciplined talk at Leeds Skeptics in The Pub on 18/2/12. The text of his book (which is naturally more detailed) is much better organised and considerably clearer; it has received positive online reviews. And Green’s ideas, while at times somewhat convoluted, are not without interest to philosophers, historians and skeptics.

Green holds (a) that the absence of any one item or kind of item (in a given context or generally) is not the same as the absence of any other item or kind of item. This appears doubtful, except in a

psychological sense involving the expectation that X or alternatively Y will be present and the discovery that X in the former case and Y in the latter is in fact absent; in both cases, no relevant thing is actually present and the two situations are thus objectively the same (unless X and Y are both simultaneously in question and one is present while the other is not). Green argues further (b) that none of these absences is equivalent to the existence of nothing (no thing) at all, which is ‘what **everything** isn’t’ (emphasis mine) and is therefore of indefinitely wide scope. This second claim (b) **does** appear valid, though it is

not obvious that its consequences are as profound as Green suggests.

The notion of non-existence *per se* has of course been problematised in western philosophy since classical times. Notably, Parmenides struggled with the idea that reality might be complex (as it appears to be, *prima facie*), perhaps partly for linguistic reasons; he effectively concluded that a thing either exists or does not and cannot vary in quality, but the notion of something not existing was itself problematic for him – as it was for later Greek thinkers, notably the still revered Aristotle. More recently, philosophers

have worried in particular about special cases such as kinds of entity which exist only in fiction (unicorns and such), no longer exist (dinosaurs), have not yet come to exist, are logically impossible ('round squares'), etc. Some groups of philosophers, notably existentialists such as Jean-Paul Sartre (critiqued by Green), have taken an especial interest in the concepts of 'nothingness' and 'non-existence'. In addressing issues of this kind, Green is thus part of a major scholarly tradition. His short final chapter on 'thinking of nothing' provides a somewhat slanted but nevertheless interesting critical history of thought about these matters.

A linguist might observe that many languages have different expressions for 'no'.

Green has some expertise in linguistics; and in this context a linguist might observe that many languages have different expressions for 'no' as in *There are no books/horses [here], There are no unicorns, There are no longer any dinosaurs*, etc.) on the one hand and for 'nothing' on the other; thus pointing up Green's (b). But the context-specific, optional use of general expressions such as *nothing* to indicate the absence of any thing of a given expected type (*I looked for X but I found nothing*) arguably underlines my own doubts about Green's (a) (Green himself acknowledges that this usage occurs). There might also be a case for extended comments regarding the contrast between 'single' and 'multiple' negation, as in standard English *I haven't seen none/nothing* (stressed), meaning 'I **have** seen some/something' versus the same expressions (without special stress) in non-standard English, meaning 'I have seen none/nothing' – and of equivalent expressions in other languages where multiple negation is standard and universal. However, as I

have argued elsewhere, it is probably dangerous in a philosophical context to focus too heavily upon the ways in which ideas are expressed in specific languages (although this approach is common enough in 'analytical' philosophy).

Green commences with a chapter on the mathematical and arithmetical notion of 'zero' (as in positional arithmetic), which was introduced into Christian Europe in medieval times, from ultimately Indian origins via the Islamic world. The use of the symbol *0* and the concept of an unoccupied slot in an array of two or more digits (as in *20* or *101*) confer enormous (and quickly obvious) advantages over earlier European approaches to arithmetic; and it is clear that the basic **concept** of 'zero' was already familiar in Europe. However, there was considerable resistance to this innovation. Citing contemporary texts, Green argues that the issue involved philosophical and religious objections to the implied reification of empty sets. Some sections of Green's discussion of these events involve what may be judged a degree of over-extrapolation; on the other hand, most of the historical points made in this chapter – while not especially widely known – do not appear controversial at all. (Again, there are in fact some pieces of linguistic evidence which might usefully be adduced in this context, such as the use of *dim* = 'not' for *0* when rehearsing multi-digit numbers in spoken Welsh.)

Green continues with a chapter on 'nothing in the arts'. This chapter actually ranges beyond issues centrally involving the arts; it includes, for instance, an important discussion of the meanings of 'gaps' in communication, such as failures to respond to questions. These are acknowledged as gaps in statements such as *John said nothing*, describing a situation where both John and Mary were silent but where it was John's 'turn' in terms of conversation-

structure; such silences may have various quite specific intended meanings, or may be read as having such meanings by social (or legal) convention. In contrast, the failure to speak (etc.) of persons who cannot do so (for example because they are dead) has **no** meaning in the normal sense. On a different front, silences may have profound psychological effects and significances. Where he does focus squarely on the arts, Green has much to say about matters such as the 'Theatre of the Absurd' with its pointed use of silences and its sometimes obsessive sparseness of action and dialogue, the use of silence in recent movies, 'minimalist' abstract visual art and sculpture, the debate about the desirability or otherwise of any replacement structure on the site of the destroyed World Trade Center in New York, etc. He argues that art can represent nothingness, and, more importantly, that anything at all can constitute art, with the consequence that there is nothing (no thing) outside the scope of art. Green may be justified in making these statements; but I do not think that these issues are as significant for the actual definition of the notion of 'art' as he suggests.

Green suggests that Christianity and other 'western' religions have adopted an 'ambivalent' attitude to the notion of 'nothing'.

In his penultimate chapter, on 'believing in nothing', Green suggests that Christianity and other 'western' religions have adopted an 'ambivalent' attitude to the notion of 'nothing' (partly because of issues surrounding the Creation; see below), whereas 'eastern' faiths embrace the notion, denying the ultimate reality of the observable universe. Hindus and Buddhists also take an especially positive view of the

abandonment of personal desires, and indeed have as their ultimate goal the disappearance of individual consciousness into ‘nothingness’ (not nothing at all, but the absence of what preceded) by way of assumption into *moksha* or *nirvana* and release from the cycle of reincarnation. (Reincarnation, of course, is itself not accepted by Christians etc. with their belief in a **single** earthly life followed by survival in an altered state.) Perhaps surprisingly, Green has less to say about atheism, even though this belief-system differs from religions precisely in its denial of the reality of what is for believers the most important entity in the metaphysical universe and in the associated view that on a personal level physical death is indeed followed by absolute nothingness (it constitutes annihilation). Elsewhere in this chapter, Green also discusses at some length the unresolved philosophical-cum-scientific

issue of why **anything** exists, rather than there being no universe at all.

In addition to those mentioned above, some of Green’s other points too seem overstated or worse. For example, on the first page of his preface he appears to maintain that if ‘everything started from nothing’ – as in theories involving divine creation *ex nihilo* or a cosmogenic ‘Big Bang’ – this ‘nothing’ must have contained the ‘seeds’ of all the things which then emerged. It seems to me that this does not follow, and that the profound importance which Green ascribes to ‘nothing’ cannot be grounded in this specific point and must, if genuine, derive from other points. If the world was indeed divinely created *ex nihilo*, God presumably pre-existed; but maybe God, if there is such a being, is so different from all created entities that *nothing* might still be deemed a reasonable description of the pre-

creation state of the world itself. In any event, it is not obvious that on any of these various accounts the ‘seeds’ of all the subsequently created things already existed. Where Green turns to this issue at length, in his chapter on ‘believing in nothing’, he makes interesting remarks but still ‘fudges’ some points – and offers a damagingly unfair interpretation of the logical consequences of William Temple’s ideas on these matters. Another problem involves Green’s cross-linguistic comparison of written symbols for numerals, including zero, which involves several sets of symbols which have a common origin, misleadingly presented as if each constituted an independent example.

While it will be obvious from the above that I do not endorse by any means **everything** that Green says in his book, I do **not** endorse **nothing** in it (!); and I certainly **do** recommend it.

MEDICINE ON THE FRINGE

Michael Heap

On Food and Mental Health

Not too long ago in our nation’s history the main concern about the food we ate was that it was not in sufficient supply and, for most people, what was available was limited in variety and quality. This remains the case for many people across the world and there are still people in our own society who, while not exactly starving, are undernourished because of their circumstances. But for most of us in the developed world, the quantity, quality and diversity of the food available to us are unimaginably better than at any previous time in our history. In fact we have so much, we are throwing a lot of it away. Should we announce this joyful message from the rooftops? Apparently not! It seems that the consumption of food remains a source of angst for many people and that

this angst is, in turn, a source of income for quite a few others.

If we simply stopped worrying about food would we be any the worse? I doubt it, but many people might be put out of business.

There is no evidence that the more anxiety and effort that overweight individuals invest in their food consumption, the more likely they will achieve a normal weight.

The most obvious concern is overeating and its effect on appearance, fitness and health. There is no evidence that the more anxiety and effort that overweight individuals invest in their food consumption, the more likely they

will achieve a normal weight. Yet people do worry, in numbers sufficient to spawn a huge industry around dieting, one that promises much but delivers hardly anything.

Worrying about overeating is not the only privilege that an abundance of good food bestows upon the more affluent members of the world community. The subtle tweaking of what foods we actually avail ourselves of from the rich panoply on offer can also be a significant preoccupation in our idle hours. Recently the ‘Body and Soul’ section of the *Times* contained an article by Dr John Biffra entitled ‘Is your diet making depressed?’ Dr Biffra reminds us that ‘If you wake up feeling low, or are struggling with feelings of anxiety or depression, you are not alone. Millions of Britons now rely on medication to cope with life and recent figures show

that prescriptions for antidepressants have risen by 9.1 per cent in just 12 months'. Since he would not otherwise have mentioned this, Dr Biffra clearly believes that there is a connection between these facts and the kinds of food we eat. Specifically, amongst the culprits he identifies are too much of the following: fruit (and the wrong types), sugar and carbohydrates generally, wheat, and the wrong kind of fats.

The idea that certain foods may be the cause of psychological distress periodically comes to the fore.

I have no doubt that the reader will have read many articles like this – i.e. on the theme 'Could X be causing your Y?', Y being depression, irritability, mood swings, anxiety, panic attacks, insomnia, headaches and various psychosomatic complaints, children's tantrums, restlessness, and inattentiveness, and so on; X may be various types of food or drink, food additives, pollutants, electrical equipment, radiation from external sources, a constant low humming noise that most people can't hear, and the spirits of dead people.

Let's stay with food! What goes round comes round. The idea that certain foods may be the cause of psychological distress periodically comes to the fore and I recall that there was particular public and media interest in this in the late 1970s and 80s. There were several television programmes featuring the topic; I recall one with a studio audience of people claiming that their unhappiness and distress were caused by food allergy. It did seem to me somewhat perverse that, at the same time, harrowing images were appearing in the media of thousands of starving,

emaciated people in what we then called 'the third world'.

One notable stimulus for these developments was a popular paperback book by the late Dr Richard Mackarness who, at the time of its publication, was a psychiatrist at Park Prewitt Hospital in Basingstoke. The title of the book, first published in 1976, was *Not all in the Mind: How Unsuspected Food Allergy can Affect your Body and your Mind*. On the back cover we were informed that 'In this new and vitally important book, Dr Richard Mackarness, doctor and psychiatrist, shows how millions may be made ill, physically and mentally, by common foods such as milk, eggs, coffee and white flour'.

So was 1976 a landmark date in the history of modern psychiatry? No. Food allergy and food intolerance have failed to establish themselves as serious considerations in the assessment and treatment of people with mental health problems (although, of course, allergy is a major cause of serious physical illness for some people). But as I have said, for a time there was much public and media interest in the idea. Naturally the alternative medicine industry jumped on the bandwagon and clinics specialising in the diagnosis and treatment of food allergy sprouted up all over the place. Some thrive today but studies have repeatedly shown that (a) the diagnostic procedures used to detect allergy at these clinics is invalid and (b) many people are mistaken in their belief that they have a food allergy or intolerance.

Incidentally, some clinical psychologists at the time were also persuaded that food allergy might be the cause of their patients' problems and they began putting them on exclusion diets. This provoked a furious debate in the columns of the *Bulletin of the British Psychological Society* between one psychologist, who claimed that she had

successfully treated her own depression by avoiding certain foods (always a warning sign) and others who considered that psychologists had no business instructing people on what foods they should and should not eat for medical reasons, this being the domain of nutritionists and dieticians.

Food allergy and food intolerance have failed to establish themselves as serious considerations in the assessment and treatment of people with mental health problems.

Food and health have been in the news most recently in at least two respects. One concerns the results of research that contradicts the current fashion for believing that a diet very low in calories promotes a longer lifespan. Early work on mice held out the promise of this for humans, but more recent research on monkeys at the National Institute for Aging in Maryland and at Wisconsin National Primate Research Centre failed to support this:

<http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v489/n7415/full/nature11432.html>).

The other announcement is that organic food, though more expensive than non-organic food, does not make you any healthier, according to researchers at Stanford University; see:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-19465692>

(but please bear in mind animal welfare).

So: enjoy your food, but don't abuse it!

LANGUAGE ON THE FRINGE

Mark Newbrook

How not to Cite Languages your Readers don't Read

Scott Alan Roberts' book *The Rise And Fall Of The Nephilim* (2012) commences with a fairly typical much-overstated broadside against skeptics, unsurprisingly deals mostly with Roberts' non-mainstream ideas concerning the 'Nephilim' (the mysterious 'giants' referred to in *Genesis*) – and presents the relevant Hebrew data in a **very** strange manner! Hebrew is written from right to left, and usually with the 'vowel-points' introduced around 700 CE; when quoting from earlier sources, Roberts cites it in this form. But when citing Hebrew on his own account, he reverses the letter-order. Thus the words read from left to right, making them appear utterly bizarre to those who know Hebrew (as if the English word *giants* were spelled *stnag*). And Roberts does not transliterate his cited Hebrew into Roman letters for the benefit of his non-Hebraicist readers (surely the vast majority); one therefore wonders why he thought that (inconsistently) adopting a left-to-right 'ductus' would be useful. He also omits the vowel-points, **and** (by way of sheer error?) some of the letters themselves.

Language, Religion and the Law

Some extremely strange thinkers, notably David Wynn-Miller and Mary Croft, are concerned with what they take to be the inadequate basis for most current laws in most countries (including the UK) and with what Croft in particular identifies as the religious basis for legal principles: truly valid laws allegedly arise out of the will of God. This material is taken seriously by some advocates of radical meta-legal reform. These authors present linguistic analyses and theories which allegedly (not always at all obviously!) would

support their critiques of current laws. However, these analyses are themselves inaccurate, and the associated linguistic conceptualisation is seriously confused.

Wynn-Miller in particular focuses upon English grammar as it is manifested in texts such as those of laws and of justificatory preambles to laws. On his web site, he describes English grammar as providing 'a set of rules for the construction of the English Language so that human-beings can communicate with each other and understand that communication correctly'. (Presumably he would say the same about the grammars of other languages.) He continues: 'If the rules of grammar were not defined, then it would be impossible to know what is meant by any words or statements. Dictionaries provide definitions for words and the rules of grammar define the construction of sentences in order to convey meaning and ideas unambiguously'.

Many nouns (not all) refer to tangible items (sometimes called 'photographables'), but they are not themselves those items.

The tone here is more 'prescriptivist'/'normative' than a mainstream linguist would prefer (it suggests that grammars should lay down rules for usage, even for native speakers); but Wynn-Miller's ideas are in other respects relatively uncontroversial up to this point. However, he then makes the bizarre claim that it is important to retain as many nouns in the language as possible, because they refer to things or places and therefore 'are' real, tangible items. In fact, Wynn-Miller's ontology is badly astray here. Many nouns (not all) **refer** to tangible items (sometimes called

'photographables'), but they are not themselves those items (like the well-known picture of a pipe by Magritte, the word *pipe* is not itself a pipe). On the other hand, Wynn-Miller says, verbs describe actions and motions, cannot describe real, tangible items, and are thus harmful to thought. This too is confused: many verbs (not all) describe dynamic assemblies of wholly tangible entities, collectively forming physical events: 'filmables'. (Some nouns, such as *stampede*, also refer to filmables rather than photographables.)

Wynn-Miller refers to his novel version of English grammar as 'Truth Language' because it (supposedly) retains all nouns as nouns. He offers examples of the operation of 'Truth Language' involving various English sentences; one example is *For the text of this web-site is with the absence of the legal-advice*. (This sentence is, obviously, in very strange English, to say the least; Wynn-Miller does not identify the author.) Wynn-Miller badly misanalyses the grammar of the sentence, and then proposes a new, supposedly preferable version: *For the absence of the legal-advice is with the text of this web-site*. He describes this version as 'unambiguous'. In fact, no **ambiguity** is present in the original sentence; the term *ambiguity* is apparently being used idiosyncratically here. In addition, the new formulation is not palpably clearer than the original, and it itself might in fact be 'ambiguous' if the original were ambiguous; it is also, again, bizarrely phrased. It is indeed far from clear why this new formulation is deemed preferable to the original; this may be because it is held to express (subtly) a political 'truth' adhered to by Wynn-Miller (and Croft), whereas the original expresses (subtly) an uncongenial political notion.

Furthermore, Wynn-Miller's new formulation **still** includes non-nouns.

Some of Wynn-Miller's sentences are cited by his ally David Myrland, who openly rejects the authority of the United States government and legal system (rather after the manner of the 'Freemen of Montana' and other such groups), threatens to enforce his own principles by sending armed gangs to 'arrest' officials, and is currently serving a sentence for non-compliance with various laws. Myrland too suggests that grammatical problems in the English of legal texts render them invalid; in his lawsuits against the American authorities, he presents extensive (often inaccurate) grammatical analyses of such texts, along similar lines.

One is reminded here of thinkers such as John Trotter, who argues that certain kinds of formulaic expression of philosophical interest – for instance the logician's *For all X, X is Y* = 'all Xs are Y', as in 'all men are mortal' – are to be deemed ungrammatical even though they are the normal forms used by the relevant native speakers (logicians) in such cases. Trotter goes on to claim (bizarrely) that these expressions are not only ungrammatical but are therefore also logically invalid – and that, because the issue at hand is central in discussions of logic, the whole basis of logic is thereby impugned. But Myrland's grasp of grammar (and of language matters more generally) is far inferior to Trotter's. Indeed, Wynn-Miller, Myrland and Croft simply do not understand the grammar of English – or linguistics – well enough to make any valid comments on language, or to draw any theoretical conclusions.

Strong Atheism

I hope I may be permitted a philosophical aside in this context. In a recent issue of the US Skeptics' e-journal (11/4/12), Michael Shermer (while upholding a 'weaker' form of atheism; see below) suggests that 'strong' atheism – the view that one **knows** that there is no God – is incoherent, because it is not possible to

prove a universal negative (thus, one cannot prove that there are no foxes in the wood, only that no-one has found one there). However, this assumes that the question of God's existence is mainly empirical in character. And arguably it is not; and in some non-empirical domains one **can** prove a universal negative. Thus, we **know** that there are no round squares, as this notion is self-confounding and thus incoherent. And, if the notion of God is, as some philosophers argue, itself incoherent – albeit not as blatantly so as that of a round square – then we can also know that there is no God. (Of course, most identifying atheists do not take this view; they simply hold that theism creates more serious philosophical issues than it resolves and/or that there is no good evidence in support of the view that there is a God – and are guided by 'Ockham's Razor'.)

Second-language varieties of a given tongue often display features carried over from the background language and culture of their users.

Foreign Ideas, English Words

Second-language varieties of a given tongue often display features carried over from the background language and culture of their users. For example, ethnically Chinese people in Singapore (who nowadays mostly know English well) confidently identify foods (including hitherto unfamiliar foods) as *heaty* or *cooling*. These are words directly translated from Chinese terms referring to properties belonging to a traditional Chinese theory of physiology. 'Heaty' foods and drinks are said to make one's body hotter, and 'cooling' ones the reverse, even though they themselves are not necessarily hot or cold respectively. Singaporeans are typically surprised when they first find that English-speaking westerners do not think in terms of these categories, do not use the word *cooling* in this specific

way, and do not use the word *heaty* at all.

Of course, there are also non-linguistic manifestations of such cultural differences. One of these involves the Chinese view that taking a shower relaxes one before sleep rather than providing an invigorating start to the day. Physiological uniformity (we are all of the same sub-species) is again outweighed by cultural variety.

'Not by Me!'

In 1979-80, I was in the early stages of work on my PhD thesis in Linguistics at Reading University. My topic involved variation and change in the pronunciation of English in my native Wirral, on the western fringes of Cheshire, and by way of background I needed to consult earlier theses and other publications on Cheshire English. Among these works, I crucially gained access to a then recent Leeds University PhD thesis on the speech of a village near Tarporley, east of Chester (Leeds has long been a major centre of dialect studies). This thesis included a fascinating second volume in which the author compared, with the aid of maps, the results of many previous investigations which he had consulted as background to his own work.

A card attached to the title page indicated that the author had stipulated that substantial reference to his thesis (even with due acknowledgment) required his written permission – a most surprising and indeed a bizarre condition, but one which Leeds had apparently accepted. So I obtained the writer's current address, which was in the very village in question (like me and many others, he had evidently chosen to study the language variety which he himself knew best and to which he had the easiest access), and wrote to him seeking permission to use his material. I had an even bigger surprise when I read his reply. He denied having written the thesis, stating that he had only ever done an MA at Leeds, on a completely unrelated topic of a literary nature (which I was welcome to cite!).

It appeared unlikely that there had recently been two language scholars of exactly the same name in the same department at Leeds, one of whom had worked on the usage of this small village while the other actually lived there (and, it seemed, had no knowledge of his namesake); and on fresh enquiry Leeds confirmed that only the one such student was listed in their records.

Had this man somehow **forgotten** the long slog of researching and writing up his thesis? Had some dark trauma – obviously much worse than my own encounters during fieldwork with aggressive dogs and children – erased all trace of the experience from his conscious mind? Or was he **lying**? Why should he lie? So far from being such as to embarrass him, the work was truly

excellent; and in any case his authorship was a matter of public record.

What did I do? I cited the work as necessary and told my supervisor the story, resolving that if my external examiner raised the matter I would tell him too. He did not raise it. But I never discovered the truth behind this most mysterious affair.

The Last Squawk

Some languages have unusual demises. It is generally held that the last-known speaker of Modern Cornish, an elderly lady of Mousehole named Dolly Pentreath, died in 1777. (As noted last time, various sources claim that the language survived in patches as late as the early 20th Century. Revived 20th/21st-Century Cornish - which perhaps should be called 'Postmodern Cornish' – is based mainly on Middle Cornish,

because we possess a much more substantial literature from the earlier period.) However, Dolly was survived by her pet parrot, which allegedly continued to speak in Cornish for many years, although no-one was now able to understand its utterances or to prompt it further.

More Folk-Linguistics!

In *The Sun* (12/4/12), it was reported that an aspiring teenaged online star was proficient in five languages including 'Swiss'. There is, of course, no such language (maybe *Swiss German* was intended?). And the girl's mother was quoted as stating that her voice was unusually high-pitched precisely because she spoke so many languages. Eh?

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 15th European Skeptics Congress

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

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

The organisers 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

Speakers

The organisers wish to hear ASAP from prospective speakers and people who wish to suggest speakers. Note that they aim for an even gender representation and for a mix of backgrounds: activists, academics, medical professionals, journalists and more. They also welcome offers of partnership and support from likeminded organisations.

The 16th 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.

European Conference on Alternative Medicine

From Willem Betz:

The European Parliament is organising a conference on alternative medicine. The program and the choice of speakers do not inspire much confidence.

http://www.epha.org/IMG/pdf/CAM_CONF_PROGRAMME_060812.pdf

<http://www.epha.org/a/5243>

OF INTEREST

SCEPTICISM, SCIENCE AND RATIONALITY (GENERAL)

Skeptical Videos

<http://skeptv.net/>

'The internet is wide and chock full of video content. Scattered throughout this landscape are programs, shows, movies, documentaries and more that are of interest to, about, or otherwise for skeptics, rationalists, freethinkers and other science minded people. The goal of the project is to collect as much of that content into one place as possible. Hoping to make it easier to find programs which might appeal but were otherwise unknown or hard to find. If there are any freely available programs or shows which you know of that I missed, please let me know about them.'

From Sense About Science

www.senseaboutscience.org

Be sure to update yourself on the activities and campaigns (including the campaign against the libel laws) by visiting the above website.

The John Maddox Prize

<http://www.senseaboutscience.org/pages/john-maddox-prize.html>

Sense About Science has launched this with *Nature*. 'It will recognise the achievements of scientists, in particular those at an early stage in their career, who have spoken out about science in circumstances where this was difficult ... The prize commemorates Sir John Maddox. Much has been written about Sir John's rich career:

<http://www.nature.com/nature/history/full/nature06241.html>'.

EuroScience Open Forum (ESOF)

<http://www.senseaboutscience.org/blog.php/38/quotnow-theres-a-science-voice-in-the-roomquot>

Peer review: the nuts and bolts' guide

<http://www.senseaboutscience.org/pages/peer-review-the-nuts-and-bolts.html>.

The 21st Floor Science Wiki Project

'Open Access has been a topic that has provoked much debate and discussion in the scientific community with many viewing it as a necessary step to opening up science to the general public and assisting engagement. It is clearly a good thing that research, at least that which is publicly funded, be available to the public whose money allowed research to take place.

'However we at the 21st Floor feel that Open Access on its own may not be enough, science can be, at times, a complex an inaccessible thing. Research papers are full of disciplinary jargon and research terms that may be daunting to scientists from different disciplines or even from different fields within a single discipline. In short there are papers out there that may remain impenetrable to non-experts which is an issue that open access alone cannot fix.

'The 21st Floor Wiki Project plans to open up scientific research to the public by offering plain-language summaries of important scientific research.

'If scientists or researchers have written or read anything that has been published in the scientific literature then we would like to invite them to create a page which summarises the work for a lay audience.

'We would also like to invite scientists, researchers and science fans to summarise your research, or research you feel is important, in a way that can be easily understood by those outside your field.

'We would hope that we could then develop these contributions into a resource that spans all disciplines and makes science more accessible and understandable to both non-scientists and scientists in other fields alike.

'If anyone wishes to contribute the page should be named after the published title of the work and should ideally include the following sections

(loosely following the structure of a standard research paper):

A brief summary

Why the work was done (what inspired the research? why did the authors want to ask these questions?)

What was done

What the results were

What conclusions can be drawn from these results

Implications of the research (what has been done with the work since publication? has it been reported in the popular press? have any scientific or public controversies arisen from the work?)

'The service will always remain completely free of charge and advertising. Hopefully, with your help, we can turn this into a worthwhile resource for everyone who is interested in science and research for any reason.

'Users can sign up to the 21st Floor science wiki project and add a page directly here.

'Any questions can be fielded to keirliddle@gmail.com or by calling 07590038268.'

Why Science is so Important?

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/video/2012/sep/21/why-science-important?fb=optOut>

'Alom Shaha has set up a website and invited people to contribute answers to a question every science teacher (and scientist) must confront: what's the point?....' At:

<http://whyscience.co.uk/about/index.php>

Scientific Fraud

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/2012/sep/13/scientific-research-fraud-bad-practice>

'False positives: fraud and misconduct are threatening scientific research.'

SCIENTIFIC TOPICS

Dihydrogen Monoxide

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

A campaigning website for people concerned about the proliferation of the chemical dihydrogen monoxide and the conspiracy of silence concerning the dangers posed to the public.

Climate Change Antagonists

<http://websites.psychology.uwa.edu.au/abs/cogscience/documents/LskyetalPsychScienceinPressClimateConspiracy.pdf>
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/environment/climatechange/9503044/Climate-change-deniers-are-either-extreme-free-marketeers-or-conspiracy-theorists.html#>

'We report a survey (N > 1100) of climate blog users to identify the variables underlying acceptance and rejection of climate science. Paralleling previous work, we find that endorsement of a laissez-faire conception of free-market economics predicts rejection of climate science (r = .80 between latent constructs). Endorsement of the free market also predicted the rejection of other established scientific findings, such as the facts that HIV causes AIDS and that smoking causes lung cancer. We additionally show that endorsement of a cluster of conspiracy theories (e.g., that the CIA killed Martin-Luther King or that NASA faked the moon landing) predicts rejection of climate science as well as the rejection of other scientific findings, above and beyond endorsement of laissez-faire free markets.'

Climate Change: Integrity

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-19047501>

'A formerly sceptical climate scientist says human activity is causing the Earth to warm, as a new study confirms earlier results on rising temperatures.' Also visit:

<http://richarddawkins.net/articles/64661-2-bombshell-koch-funded-study-finds-global-warming-is-real-on-the-high-end-and-essentially-all-due-to-carbon-pollution>

Climate Change: Hypocrisy

<http://news.heartland.org/newspaper-article/2012/08/10/monckton-exposes-bias-flaws-skeptic-magazine-global-warming-article>

'Readers of Skeptic magazine should exercise skepticism themselves regarding the magazine's biased and flawed reporting on global warming, a well-known global warming expert observes in a newly published paper by the Science and Public Policy Institute.'

"Be skeptical, be very skeptical," Lord Christopher Monckton, Viscount of Brenchly, advises in "Be Skeptical of Skeptic's Skepticism of Skeptics" Anyone who starts out by using the hate-speech term "Climate Deniers" - laden with political overtones of Holocaust denial - cannot expect to be taken seriously as an objective scientist.'

Ah, yes, but.....

<http://www.thetwentyfirstfloor.com/?p=4552>

'At the right wing American Freedom Alliance conference "Big Footprint: Is Green the New Tyranny" in Los Angeles in June 2011, as a grand finale, Monckton displayed on the giant conference screen a large Nazi swastika next to a quote from Adolf Hitler. A few seconds later came another quote, next to another large swastika, from Australia's climate change advisor Professor Ross Garnaut, which suggested that "on a balance of probabilities, the mainstream science is right" on human-caused climate change.'

MEDICINE (GENERAL)

The Nightingale Collaboration

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

Please visit the website regularly and lend assistance the campaign against misleading claims for unproven and disproved 'alternative' medicines. See the latest on complaints to the ASA.

Health Secretary Supports Homeopathy

<http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/tomchiversscience/100179258/jeremy-hunt-health-secretary-thinks-homeopathy-works/>

'The man put in charge of the nation's health policy is on record as supporting spending public money on magic water to cure disease.' Educated at Charterhouse public school and Oxford, Mr Jeremy Richard Streynsham Hunt has no previous experience in healthcare or medicine.

Does Homeopathy Work?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-B-tRys7haI&feature=related>

Debate on 'Does Homeopathy Work?' at the Natural History Museum in London, featuring Dr Ben Goldacre, medical doctor and science writer for the *Guardian* (www.badscience.net) and Dr Peter Fisher, clinical director of the Royal National Homeopathic Hospital in London.

Homeopathy Smear Campaign

http://www.quackometer.net/blog/2012/07/german-homeopathy-companies-pay-journalist-who-smears-uk-academic.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+TheQuackometerBlog+%28the+quackometer+blog%29
<http://www.sueddeutsche.de/wissen/homeopathie-lobby-im-netz-schmutzige-methoden-der-sanften-mezizin-1.1397617>

Two interesting articles (one in English one German) that reveal how the homeopathic industry pays a journalist to organise and manage a smear campaign against Edzard Ernst.

Homeopathy in A&E

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HMG1bOGu8q0&feature=player_embedded

If you haven't seen this, take a look.

Positive, but Disputed Claims for Acupuncture

<http://nccam.nih.gov/research/results/spotlight/091012>

'A recent NCCAM-funded study, employing individual patient data meta-

analyses and published in the Archives of Internal Medicine, provides the most rigorous evidence to date that acupuncture may be helpful for chronic pain.' But not in the opinion of others. See:

<http://www.sciencebasedmedicine.org/index.php/an-acupuncture-meta-analysis/>
<http://www.sciencebasedmedicine.org/index.php/can-we-finally-just-say-that-acupuncture-is-nothing-more-than-an-elaborate-placebo/>

Naturopathy

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/alberta-gives-naturopaths-full-status-as-medical-professionals/article4441076/>

Alberta has beefed up the powers of its naturopathic doctors, giving them full status as medical professionals but stopping short of funding treatment.

Quack Cancer Cures

<http://boingboing.net/2012/08/15/on-quack-cancer-cures-and-a.html>

On quack cancer cures, and 'alternative medicine' as religion.

Alternative Medicine in India

<http://news.outlookindia.com/items.aspx?artid=768338>

'Thousands of doctors of alternative medicine (homoeopathy, Ayurveda, Unani) today launched their three-day strike here against FDA's decision of banning them from practising allopathy.'

Jail for Unethical Alternative Therapists in Australia?

<http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/jail-mooted-for-unethical-alternative-therapists-20120729-236ed.html>

Eggs and Health (Yet Again)

<http://www.nhs.uk/news/2012/08august/Pages/Eating-egg-yolks-as-bad-as-smoking.aspx>

'Eating egg yolks is as bad as smoking in speeding up coronary heart disease' the *Daily Mail* says, reporting that egg yolks contribute to the clogging up of arteries which, in turn, can increase the risk of heart disease. But, for a more intelligent account, see the above site.

Organic Foods

<http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/story/2012-09-03/organic-food-health/57557912/1>

Organic products have no significant nutritional advantage over conventional foods, even though consumers can pay more for them, a new study finds.

Electromagnetic Hypersensitivity

<http://apps.facebook.com/theguardian/lifeandstyle/2012/jul/20/man-living-alone-woods-escape-wifi-mobiles>

Phil Inkley has fled civilisation to escape electromagnetic fields, which he believes cause nosebleeds, headaches, convulsions and blackouts...the condition known as 'electromagnetic hypersensitivity'.

Veterinary Medicine

<http://i.imgur.com/psYRB.png>

If you are looking for a typical example of alternative medical nonsense, you can do no better than visit the above website. Whilst you're at it also see <http://www.dogrocks.co.uk/>.

PSYCHIATRY AND PSYCHOLOGY

Lie Detectors

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/2012/aug/10/polygraph-lie-detector-tests-sex-offenders>

'Why giving polygraph tests to sex offenders is a terrible idea' by Chris French.

RESEARCH

Sleep Paralysis

From Lucy Pardee: 'I am doing some script research for a fictional feature film script for Big Talk Pictures, the producers of films such as *Shaun of the Dead*, *Hot Fuzz*, *Attack the Block*, *Scott Pilgrim vs. The World* and *Paul*. The film is a ghost story set in London both now and in the past, and partly concerns paranormal experiences, sleep disorders and psychic damage.' Lucy is keen to talk to any sufferers of sleep paralysis by way of background research. Please contact her directly:

lucypardee@googlemail.com.

RELIGION

Creationism in Schools

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2012/jul/17/creationist-groups-approval-free-schools>

<http://www.humanism.org.uk/campaigns/what-you-can-do-to-help/creationist-free-schools>

Three groups intending to teach creationism have gained approval from the Government to open fully state-funded Free Schools in 2012 and 2013.

American Fundamentalist Christians

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/isfree/belief/2012/aug/30/american-religious-fundamentalists-rewrite-history>

'Republican religious fundamentalists would rewrite American history. Textbooks pushing falsehoods help the Republican right build an image of the US and its constitution in its own likeness.'

Mormonism

<http://www.tnr.com/print/article/politics/magazine/104901/ex-mormon-romney-religion-kirn>

'Confessions' of ex-Mormon Walter Kirn.

Anti-Religion Campaign

<http://ukhumanrightsblog.com/2012/07/22/alien-poster-campaigns-anti-religious-message/>

Concerning an alien poster campaign's anti-religious message. 'Swiss authorities refuse to allow an association to put up posters featuring extra-terrestrials and a flying saucer on the grounds that it engaged in activities that were considered immoral.'

The Higgs Particle

(It's the Atheist Particle, Actually!)

<http://postnoon.com/2012/07/10/its-the-atheist-particle-actually/58312>

'Both Peter Higgs and the Nobel laureate Leon Lederman who gave the Higgs Boson its name 'The God Particle' are atheists. Peter Higgs was not the first to think of it, but the particle

which now has his and Satyendranath Bose's name probably is the most devastating blow to the idea of God. So how did this particle which Lederman once called the "God-Damn Particle" become "the God Particle"? (A typo in the article: Fermions have "half an integer spin").

PSYCHICS

Psychic Jailed

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/crime/9349384/Psychic-who-made-clients-strip-and-perform-porn-acts-facing-jail.html>

'Karl Lang, 49, was found guilty today of 12 counts of causing women to engage in sexual activity without consent.

'The rogue medium targeted two women in their 20s who sought him out in the belief he could contact dead relatives.

'Lang, of Newport, South Wales, brainwashed his vulnerable victims and went so far as to claim he was Jesus Christ reincarnated.

'Both women were encouraged to perform sex acts in front of him and

pressed to act more and more outrageously as his influence increased.

'One told the trial she was conned into acting like a "porn star" in the belief that her naked antics would boost her own spiritual powers.'

OTHER UNUSUAL CLAIMS

Underwater 'Crop Circles'

<http://www.thisiscolossal.com/2012/09/mysterious-underwater-crop-circle-art-discovered-off-the-coast-of-japan/>

'Mysterious underwater crop circles have been discovered off the coast of Japan' (but they have a rational, nonetheless fascinating, explanation.)

UFO Sightings

<http://cnews.canoe.ca/CNEWS/WeirdNews/2012/07/24/20022731.html>

UFO sightings in Canada neared a record high in 2011, a new study reveals.

Apocalypse 2012

<http://www.theawl.com/2012/09/nasa-apocalypse-expert>

Feature on David Morrison, 'the NASA scientist who answers your 2012 apocalypse emails'.

THE LAW

Funny Legal Facts from all over the World

<http://www.onlylawsite.com/funny-legal-facts-world/>

'We live in such a colourful world. Not all of the laws outlined are currently in use; however they definitely left their trace during the years. We made a small collection of some interesting laws and legal facts from all over the world!'

Charles the Daft

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2012/sep/18/prince-charles-letters-ministers-judges>

'Prince Charles's letters to ministers should be disclosed, judges rule. Freedom of information tribunal says public has right to know how prince seeks to influence government policy.....'

**KEEP LIBEL LAWS
OUT OF SCIENCE**

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*?

UPCOMING EVENTS

THE ANOMALISTIC PSYCHOLOGY RESEARCH UNIT AT GOLDSMITH'S COLLEGE LONDON

<http://www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/apru/speakers.php>

or

<http://www.skeptic.org.uk/events/goldsmiths>

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>

Also from Chris French,

'I've recently been giving support to one of our students, Ben Kuper-Smith, who is setting up a Goldsmiths Humanists Society. We've already got a great line-up of speakers (including Robin Ince, Andrew Copson, Alom Shaha, Caspar Melville, Stephen Law - oh, and me). All talks will be open to the public. Full details to follow in due course.

'Follow @goldhumanists and @chrisfrench on Twitter for the very latest announcements.'

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.

LONDON FORTEAN SOCIETY

<http://forteanlondon.blogspot.co.uk/>
www.facebook.com/LondonForteanSociety

From Chris French:

'Keep an eye on forthcoming events at the London Fortean Society as they have some great talks coming up. Of particular interest to subscribers to this list are the following (details not up on LFS web site yet):

25 Oct: The Moon and Madness

29 Nov: Alasdair Hopwood APRU artist in residence and creator of The False Memory Archive

'The London Fortean Society meets on the last Thursday of each month, except July and December, upstairs at the Bell, 50 Middlesex Street, London E1 7EX, 7.30pm for 8pm start. £3 or £2 concessional.'

THE OPEN UNIVERSITY PSYCHOLOGICAL SOCIETY SOUTH REGION

'Things that go bump...exploring psychological theories of the paranormal'

Saturday 27th October 2012

Oxford Brookes University, Oxford
Speakers include: Professor Chris French, Head of the Anomalistic Psychology Research Unit in the Psychology Department at Goldsmiths College; Professor Frederick Toates, Emeritus Professor of Biological Psychology at the Open University; Dr Richard Broughton, currently senior lecturer at the Centre for the Study of Anomalous Psychological Processes, University of Northampton; and Dr Peter Naish, ex Open University and now Visiting Reader in Psychology at Sussex University.

Delegate rate £35. Book online now at:

<http://www.oups.org.uk/bookings/ticket-sales>

and choose 'SOUPS One Day Conference 2012'. Those presenting posters will be eligible for a reduced rate of £25; groups of 8 or more received a 10% discount. For more information email:

soupsevents@gmail.com.

CENTRE FOR INQUIRY LONDON

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

See the website for upcoming events, including the following:

Healing powers of the mind?

Saturday, 20th October 2012

Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square
London WC1R 4RL

Do some people have the power to heal others by psychic means? Would medicine benefit by being more aware of our 'spiritual' dimension? Where do psychic and spiritual approaches to medicine end and quackery begin? Does hypnosis work, and if so, how? Does meditation offer real benefits – and if so, what are they?

Programme

10.30 a.m. Registration

11.00-12.00p.m. Chris French on
Psychic Healing

12.00-1.00p.m. Andy Lewis on
Anthroposophy

2.00-3.00p.m. Michael Heap on
'Hypnosis: Suggestion or Trance?'

3.00-4.00p.m. Serena Roney-Dougal on
research into the effects of meditation

Introduced by Stephen Law (Provost
of CFI UK

Registration £10 (£5 students
concessions). Free entry for Friends of
CFI UK.

Tickets from the BHA website here:

<http://www.humanism.org.uk/meet-up/events/view/194?page=1>

Journalism, Churnalism and Media Bias

Saturday, 15th December 2012

Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square
London WC1R 4RL

How much journalism is churnalism – the uncritical regurgitation of press

releases? To what extent can we trust what we read in the press about medical and other scientific discoveries and breakthroughs? How impartial is mainstream media coverage of key political and economic issues? And just how much of tabloid news is just, well, made up?

Speakers include: Ben Goldacre (Guardian columnist, doctor and author); Michael Marshall (expert on press-release-based churnalism); Rich Peppiatt (a former tabloid journalist, shortly touring a show based on his experiences); and Greg Philo (Research Director of the Glasgow University Media Group. Co-author of *Bad News from Israel*). Introduced by Stephen Law

Registration £10 (£5 students concessions). Free entry for Friends of CFI UK. Tickets on the door and from the BHA website here:

<http://www.humanism.org.uk/meet-up/events/view/196>

QED 2013

From the QED Team:

‘QED Tickets: now on sale!

‘We’re pleased to announce that as of 10:23am this morning, QED tickets are available to purchase. The next QED takes place on April 13th-14th 2013 and weekend tickets cost just £99, with a new, lower, concession rate of £59 for full-time students (with any recognised student ID).

‘Flying over from the US to take to the mic as our MC for 2013 will be comedy podcaster and JREF field coordinator Brian Thompson. Brian will be residing over an extensive, exciting and all-round excellent line-up of speakers, including:

Stevyn Colgan
Richard Dawkins
Rachael Dunlop
Ben Goldacre
Natalie Haynes
Mark Lynas
Brooke Magnanti
Rose Shapiro

‘You can find out more about our speakers, as well as securing your attendance to our event in 2013, by visiting the QED website. You’ll also be able to pick up a ticket to our gala dinner event - costing just £45. Last year, tickets to our dinner sold out within the first day of sales, so we recommend you move swiftly if you’re planning to come!

‘Of course, there’s still plenty to announce for QED 2013, and the team are working hard to line up further speakers, panels and entertainment for what promises to be an exciting weekend. Expect further announcements over the coming weeks and months, and we’ll see you all in Manchester next April!’

THE 2014 EUROPEAN SKEPTICS CONGRESS

See ‘The European Scene’, earlier.

Intelligent Design...



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).

If you share our ideas and concerns why not join ASKE for just £10 a year? You can subscribe on our website, write to us at the address below, or email <mailto:m.heap@sheffield.ac.uk>

Association for Skeptical Enquiry
email: aske1@talktalk.net
website: <http://www.aske-skeptics.org.uk/>

For a pdf copy of this newsletter contact m.heap@sheffield.ac.uk