

THE SKEPTICAL *INTELLIGENCER*



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Incorporating the Skeptical Adversaria: the ASKE Newsletter

Edited by Michael Heap

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GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS

The *Skeptical Intelligencer* welcomes formal and informal contributions on any subject within the ambit of the Association for Skeptical Enquiry (ASKE).

Formal articles should be aimed at the intelligent layperson, and authors should take particular care to define or explain unusual terms or concepts. Equations, statistics or other numerical and symbolic tools may be employed whenever required. Articles should be as succinct as possible, but may be of any length.

Authors of contributions to the *Skeptical Intelligencer* should be take care to ensure that texts are temperate in tone and free of vituperation. They should also ensure that arguments are either supported by express evidence/arguments or identified as speculative. 'Do not pretend conclusions are certain that are not demonstrated or demonstrable.' (T.H. Huxley).

Before being accepted for publication, submitted texts will be reviewed by the Editor and any appropriate advisors. Where improvements or changes are desirable, the editorial team will work with authors and make constructive suggestions as to amendments.

Authors should submit an electronic, double-spaced copy of their article or letter.

When referring to another work, authors should:

- Cite only the surname, year, and (where appropriate) page number within the main text: e.g. '...according to Hyman (1985: p. 123), the results of this test were not convincing...' or

'...according to Bruton (1886; cited in Ross, 1996)...

- List multiple references in date order: e.g. '...a number of studies have thrown doubt on this claim (Zack, 1986; Al-Issa, 1989; Erikson, 1997)...
- In the case of electronic material, give the author and the date the material was accessed on line
- Place Internet addresses URLs in angle brackets: e.g. <<http://www.nothing.org>>

A complete list of references in alphabetical order of authors' surnames should be given at the end of the article. The list should be compiled using the following conventions:

- *Articles*: Smith, L.J. (1990) An examination of astrology. *Astrological Journal*, **13**, 132-196.
- *Books*: Naranjo, X. (1902) *The End of the Road*. London: University of London.
- *Chapters*: Griff, P. (1978) Creationism. In D. Greengage (ed.) *Pseudoscience*. Boston: Chapman Publishers.
- *Electronic material*: Driscoe, E. Another look at Uri Geller. <<http://www.etc.org>>. Accessed 21 April 1997.

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FROM THE ASKE CHAIRMAN

Michael Heap

The 15th European Skeptics Congress took place in Stockholm from August 23 to 25. This was hosted by the Swedish Skeptics Association (Föreningen Vetenskap och Folkbildning) under the auspices of the European Council of Skeptical Organisations (ECSO).

The congress was a most enjoyable and informative event. On the programme were UK's Chris French, Michael ('Marsh') Marshall, and Hayley Stevens and, as well as Sweden and the UK, there were speakers from Norway, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Italy, France, Australia and the USA (including a final address by Kendrick Frazier of the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry).

The congress organisers wisely took account of the importance of 'networking' and informal social interaction between delegates, and the refreshment and lunch breaks were sufficiently lengthy and the venue facilities appropriate for this to take place – likewise the random seating arrangement around the tables at congress's gala dinner.

I am spared the task of providing for you a review of the presentations. This has already been done by Bruno Van de Castele. His summaries and comments on each day's presentations may be accessed by links on the congress website, <http://eurocepticscon.org/>.

I would like to make special mention of the presentations of three speakers. The first was entitled 'A Fact-based Worldview through Animated Data' and was brilliantly presented by Hans Rosling, Professor of International Health at Karolinska Institute and co-founder and chairman of the Gapminder Foundation. He was ably assisted by his son Ola Rosling. The Gapminder website is at <http://www.gapminder.org/> and concerns itself with the accurate reporting of data on the health, wealth and wellbeing of the world's population and the debunking of myths and common misunderstandings.

The second presentation I'd like to mention is that by Shane Greenup from Australia, who has degrees in Philosophy and Microbiology. He told us about 'RbutR' and I'll let Bruno van de Castele explain:

'The focus of RbutR is to create a way to find and store rebuttals to specific pages on the web. Although currently only available as a Google Chrome browser plugin, the goal is to create a tool that can pop up on any system, saying that there are rebuttals to what is said on an Internet page (even if the article is true).'

Please visit the RbutR website at <http://rbutr.com/>: 'RbutR tells you when the webpage you are viewing has been disputed, rebutted or contradicted elsewhere on the internet'.

Standing in for Susan Gerbic, who could not attend, was a speaker whose full name I did not catch ('Philip'). He informed us about 'Guerrilla Skepticism on Wikipedia'. This project aims to provide correct and critical information on Wikipedia. and was founded by Ms Gerbic, a professional portrait photographer living in California. See: <http://guerrillaskepticismonwikipedia.blogspot.co.uk/>.

On behalf of ASKE I congratulate Martin Runqvist and his fellow Swedish Skeptics for a well-organised, inspiring and memorable congress.

Sleep and the lunar cycle

The results of a recent scientific study into sleep quality that were announced in the press and on Radio 4's 'Today' will be of considerable interest to skeptics. The research is reported in a paper entitled 'Evidence that the Lunar Cycle Influences Human Sleep' in *Current Biology*, Vol. 23, Aug. 2013, pp. 1485-

1488 and is by the University of Basel's Christian Cajochen at and his colleagues.

The researchers examined sleep patterns and lunar cycles by reanalysing the results of an experiment on age and sleep quality performed a decade ago. That study collected 64 nights' worth of data on 33 volunteers, aged between 20 and 74. According to the authors:

'To exclude confounders such as increased light at night or the potential bias in perception regarding a lunar influence on sleep, we retrospectively analyzed sleep structure, electroencephalographic activity during non-rapid-eye-movement (NREM) sleep, and secretion of the hormones melatonin and cortisol found under stringently controlled laboratory conditions in a cross-sectional setting. At no point during and after the study were volunteers or investigators aware of the *a posteriori* analysis relative to lunar phase. We found that around full moon, electroencephalogram (EEG) delta activity during NREM sleep, an indicator of deep sleep, decreased by 30%, time to fall asleep increased by 5 min, and EEG-assessed total sleep duration was reduced by 20 min. These changes were associated with a decrease in subjective sleep quality and diminished endogenous melatonin levels.'

Professor Cajochen is reported to be 'skeptical' about interpreting the findings in terms of a direct causal connection between moon phase and sleep. Clearly *more research is necessary* as we are all fond of saying.

LOGIC AND INTUITION

Averages

'The average' is the theme of this issue's 'Logic and Intuition'. Most people seem to have an intuitive grasp of what the term 'average' means, but 'the average' (usually of a set of numbers or measures) can have unusual and counter-intuitive properties. By the way, if you are averse to mathematics don't stop reading this: everything will be explained in simple terms. For the moment, by 'average' I am referring to the arithmetic mean.

First, a paradox from a book by the same name written by Jim Al-Khalili (*note 1*). It is commonly put about by the people of Scotland that the average intelligence of the Scots is higher than that of their counterparts in England (apparently it's something to do with the porridge or possibly all that blowing on bagpipes). Hector McTavish, a man of impeccable Caledonian credentials, has just moved south of the border, causing the average IQ in Scotland **and** in England to rise simultaneously. How has our hero achieved this remarkable feat? The answer is on page 21.

Now consider this: say a student obtains the following marks out of 100 in four exams: 40, 82, 66, 68; what is her average mark? We add the marks together, giving 256, and divide by the number of marks (4), giving an average mark of 64 per cent. Somehow we are supposed to think of this mark as representing her overall ability. But she never obtained this mark in any of the exams, and she scores above it in the majority of cases (3 out of 4).

These apparent anomalies are more strikingly demonstrated in two other examples. Firstly, the 2011 census revealed that married couples had a higher average number of dependent children, namely 1.8, in their family than other family types (1.7). Not only does

no family have these numbers of children, it is impossible for them to do so. Secondly, it is always the case that the majority of workers in the UK earn *less* than the average annual wage or salary. This is because there is a lower limit to how much one can earn in a year but no upper limit. The minority of people on very high wages push up the average disproportionately, leaving the majority earning below this.

In the latter example the average represented by the *median* may be more useful. This is the value of the wage which divides the population exactly in half; thus 50 per cent earn more than the median and 50 per cent less. Strictly speaking on its own this assumes that no one actually earns the median wage; if the median value of what we are counting or measuring is shared by many people, then a more useful statistic might be the mode or modal value. The modal number of hands people have is 2, but not the mean number, which might be 1.999999....: This is because a minority of the people counted may have had the misfortune to have lost one or both hands.

I shall forego discussion of the geometric mean – it's far too dramatic. Instead I want to move on to a newspaper article I read a few weeks ago on the sexual interests and activities of young people, a favourite topic of journalists for at least as long as I can remember. (I date my earliest recollections to the publicity surrounding the 'Lady Chatterley' obscenity trial in 1960). The article was the usual copy-and-paste lament about the malign influence of the Internet on young people that frequently appears in the media at the moment. At some point (I don't have the original now) the author announced that the average age at which young people in the UK have their first

experience of intercourse is now 14½ years, whereas in Sweden it is 16. My first reaction was to think that the former figure seemed very low compared with other reports I have read (16 or 17 is the widely quoted average age). But then I started to wonder exactly what the author meant by this. Had she really thought about what she was stating? Clearly we need to know what populations were being sampled in both cases, specifically their age ranges. If the author is referring to arithmetic means, obviously the samples have to be made up of people who are already sexually experienced, which means they must be older – and in all likelihood much older – than 14½ and 16 respectively.

It's just possible that the author meant that 50 per cent of people in the UK currently aged 14½ have had sex; this would give the median age at which people born 14½ years ago have sex. But this seems unduly low when compared with current estimates.

Maybe I'm misunderstanding something here.

Now for a second paradox. In the old –and entirely fictitious – former colonial city of Hungoo, the Chinese-speaking population earns on average more per annum than the English-speaking population. The city is in fact divided into two halves, East and West. In both East Hungoo *and* West Hungoo, Chinese speakers earn on average *less than* English speakers. Surely this is not possible - is it? The answer is on page 21.

Note

Paradox: The Nine Greatest Enigmas in Science. Jim Al-Khalili, London: Transworld Publishers (Black Swan Books), 2013.

MEDICINE ON THE FRINGE

Michael Heap

On ‘Creeping Diagnostic Criteria’

For the reader unfamiliar with the programme, ‘Dragon’s Den’ appears weekly on BBC-2 and features members of the public appearing before a panel of leading entrepreneurs and attempting to persuade them to invest in their company. They first present a ‘pitch’ in which they describe and demonstrate their product, after which they are interrogated about it and their company finances, their business plan, and so on.

It seems to me that no one should attempt to put on this undergarment without first carrying out a risk assessment.

Recently a woman appeared in front of the panel with a device that she claimed would provide a more accurate measure of a woman’s brassiere size. To the consternation of the panel she announced, ‘Eighty per cent of women are wearing an ill-fitting bra with devastating physiological and psychological consequences’. I am, understandably, untutored in the perils of the brassiere but if what this lady is saying is true, it seems to me that no one should attempt to put on this undergarment without first carrying out a risk assessment. However, the panel was unmoved and the lady’s bid was unsuccessful.

There is a long history of manufacturers claiming dubious health advantages for their products. One of the most notorious of these, in our modern age, was ‘For your throat’s sake smoke Craven A’. Sometimes the manufacturers would actually invent a medical condition which their product would then either alleviate or prevent occurring. Who amongst you now remembers the condition ‘one degree under’? This was invented by a director of Aspro. No prizes for guessing what

the cure was. On the other hand you might have had ‘hidden hunger’; I cannot recall what the remedy for this was but the condition was certainly not the same as the ‘hidden hunger’ that afflicts millions of people in developing countries because of their poor diet. In the 60s if housewives felt they might be suffering from ‘washday hands’ they were advised to switch to Rinso washing powder. I also recall a newspaper advertisement for a certain brand of pastilles which posed the question ‘Are you suffering from X’ (I’ll reveal ‘X’ in a moment). There was then a list of common symptoms and if you ticked off a certain number you were indeed ‘suffering from X’. ‘X’ was in fact catarrh, one of the symptoms being ‘crusts in the nose’. The remedy? You’ve guessed it!

How different all this is from modern mainstream medical practice. I doubt it! Like the above, medicine is a human activity and, as always, human nature – specifically its less ingenious side - will out.

I recently attended a lecture at the University of Sheffield by Alan Maynard, Professor of Health Economics at the University of York. The title of his lecture - ‘NHS “re-organisation”’: why do we jump on the spot?’ - wonderfully summarises its contents.

Amongst the many themes in Professor Maynard’s lecture that would have aroused the interest of sceptics was the ever-increasing tendency to extend the criteria of what is considered clinical or pathological, thus enlarging the population of potential patients requiring assessment, monitoring and treatment by the medical industry (the public and private health services and, amongst other interested parties, the pharmaceutical companies). His summary of some of the evidence that illustrates this is contained in the table presented here.

‘US creeping/leaping diagnostic criteria’

Tabulated summary of information provided online (*note 1*).

- Diabetes: reducing fasting sugar level from 140 to 126: produced 1,681,000 new cases (14%)
- Hypertension: reducing systolic from 160 to 140, and diastolic from 100 to 90: produced 13,490,00 new cases (35%)
- Hyperlipidaemia: reducing cholesterol from 240 to 200: produced 42,647,000 new cases (86%)
- Osteoporosis in women: reducing T score from 2.5 to 2.0: produced 6,781,000 new cases (85%)

‘Numbers needed to treat to save one life inflated; with nice profits for providers.’

I have not the expertise to comment critically on this particular thesis but there seems to be an interesting paradox here: *The increase in the number of effective available treatments is accompanied by an increase in the number and prevalence of illnesses requiring treatment.* More medicine means more illness, and more people are being identified as having problems that are no longer considered to be part of the normal vicissitudes of human life but clinical conditions requiring the attention of the medical and related professions.

It is gratifying, therefore, that there is a backlash against this trend, one that is coming from within the professions concerned. I am referring here to the recently established British Medical Journal’s ‘Too Much Medicine Campaign’, which ‘aims to highlight the threat to human health posed by overdiagnosis and the waste of resources on unnecessary care’ (*note 2*). According to this source ‘There is growing evidence that many people are overdiagnosed and overtreated for a

wide range of conditions, such as prostate and thyroid cancers, asthma, and chronic kidney disease. Through the campaign, the journal plans to work with others to increase awareness of the benefits and harms of treatments and technologies and develop ways to wind back medical excess, safely and fairly’.

According to the BMJ’s Dr Fiona Godlee, ‘Like the evidence-based medicine and quality and safety movements of previous decades, combatting excess is a contemporary manifestation of a much older desire to avoid doing harm when we try to help or heal. Making such efforts even more necessary are the growing concerns about escalating healthcare spending and the threats to health from climate change. Winding back unnecessary tests and treatments, unhelpful labels and diagnoses won’t only benefit those who directly avoid harm, it can also help us create a more sustainable future’.

Accordingly, the BMJ campaign was recently involved in organising a ‘Preventing Overdiagnosis’ conference in New Hampshire from 10-12.9.13 (*note 3*), where experts from around the world gathered to discuss how to tackle the threat to health and the waste of money caused by unnecessary care. In 2014 the BMJ will publish a special issue based on the conference and the second conference will also be held in September of that year in Oxford.

Coincidentally (*it’s not a coincidence – Ed.*) the phenomenon of creeping diagnostic criteria has been on my mind for some time with respect to matters closer to my own professional work. In particular, over the years we have witnessed this trend in the field of psychological disability. I am not just referring to the publication in May 2013 of the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association, about which I have written in previous issues.

A team of specialists in Australia and the UK say that expanding the diagnosis of dementia will result in up to 65% of people aged over 80 having Alzheimer’s disease diagnosed.

Consider the following from a recent issue of the British Medical Journal (*note 4*):

‘A political drive, led by the UK and US, to screen older people for minor memory changes (often called mild cognitive impairment or pre-dementia) is leading to unnecessary investigation and potentially harmful treatment for what is arguably an inevitable consequence of ageing. ... A team of specialists in Australia and the UK say that expanding the diagnosis of dementia will result in up to 65% of people aged over 80

having Alzheimer’s disease diagnosed – and up to 23% of non-demented older people being labelled with dementia. They argue this policy is not backed by evidence and ignores the risks, harms and costs to individuals, families and societies. It may also divert resources that are badly needed for the care of people with advanced dementia’.

Creeping diagnostic criteria is part of a larger phenomenon – ‘agenda creep’ or ‘agenda overreach’ may be the labels to use for this – which is widely manifest in many areas of human activity. In the present case it denotes the tendency of the service professions to expand by gradually extending their remit, thus enlarging their potential client group and the power that they wield.

Definitely something for sceptics to keep an eye on!

Notes

1. <http://www.slideshare.net/OHENews/quality-in-the-nhs-maynard-annual-lecture-2013>
2. <http://www.bmj.com/too-much-medicine>
3. <http://www.preventingoverdiagnosis.net/>
4. <http://group.bmj.com/group/media/latest-news/screening-for-minor-memory-changes-will-wrongly-label-many-with-dementia-warn-experts>

 ***Editor’s Announcement***

ASKE’s *Skeptical Intelligencer* is once again a quarterly magazine and incorporates the previously quarterly ASKE newsletter, the *Skeptical Adversaria*. Paper editions are available on request (see above). The magazine is widely circulated electronically to skeptical groups and individuals across the globe. Formal and informal articles of interest to skeptics are welcome from people of all disciplines and backgrounds. 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? Would you like to contribute a regular column in your speciality or area of interest – e.g. an ‘On the Fringe’ feature? Or would you like to take over one of the regular features? Please get in touch with the Editor if you wish to make a contribution to skepticism in this way.

LANGUAGE ON THE FRINGE

Mark Newbrook

Does being multilingual (or knowing some linguistics) make you a better philosopher? (Part 2)

I return here to the question of how far philosophical analyses can safely be grounded in linguistic facts.

Even if a word in one language does have a very near equivalent in another language in respect of its 'cognitive' meaning, different 'associations' may lead to difficulties in the translation and understanding of philosophical (as of other) texts. Thus, the main Chinese words meaning 'free', 'liberty' etc. have (or until recently had) negative associations suggestive of licentiousness, anarchy, etc. Nineteenth-century Chinese readers of western philosophy in translation thus struggled to follow texts where the words had positive associations (typically assumed as obvious and so not explained).

More crucially: syntactic constructions may generate different puzzles and solutions to puzzles as they vary across languages. The confusing English construction *I don't think it'll rain* actually means (usually) 'I [positively] think that it will not rain'; the negative is seen as having been 'raised' from the second (subordinate) clause into the first (main) clause by a manoeuvre (a 'transformation', as early Chomskyans said) which causes the surface grammar to differ from the logical/semantic structure. In Ancient Greek, Chinese and indeed most other languages, this manoeuvre is not usual, at least with verbs of thinking; the surface sentence corresponds with the logical/semantic structure. On the other hand, the Ancient Greek word meaning 'say' **does** readily trigger constructions of this kind; for instance, the sentence *ouk ephe* (found in Xenophon's *Anabasis*) and literally translated as 'not [he] said', appears to mean 'he didn't say' (in response to a suggestion as to a fact), but in fact means 'he denied it'

(‘he said that ... not ...’) – thus confusing many modern learners. This puzzle is generated (for different verbs) by English and Greek syntax, and it is probably of no specifically philosophical interest, but I have witnessed (effectively monoglot) philosophy students going into major contortions seeking a (partly) philosophical explanation of why these things are said in this way in English.

Almost all ancient Greek philosophers were themselves monoglot, and some of them arguably based their metaphysical theories too heavily on the structure of Greek.

Some aspects of the grammars of different languages may actually help or hinder the understanding of philosophical issues. For example, Latin has two different words corresponding with the 'inclusive' and 'exclusive' senses of English *or*, as in *You can have juice or coffee* (both, if you wish) or *You can have juice or coffee* (you must choose). Latin has *vel* in the former case and *aut* in the latter (*aut* is also used in threats, as in *Be quiet or I will send you out!*). This distinction is crucial in logic, but beginners sometimes struggle with it, arguably because English and indeed most languages do not formally encode the logical distinction (except by means of *and/or* etc.). It is more than possible that native speakers of Latin grasped it more readily, and that those who now learn Latin thereby become better equipped to grasp it if they go on to study philosophy.

Indeed, given that many philosophers in the modern West have been familiar with Latin and Ancient Greek, it is perhaps surprising that some of the rather different structures and idioms of these languages have not been more

saliently invoked in discussion of these philosophical matters. Ancient 'western' philosophy was conducted very largely in Greek (with some late use of Latin). Almost all ancient Greek philosophers were themselves monoglot, and some of them arguably based their metaphysical theories too heavily on the structure of Greek. Parmenides, for instance, struggled with the idea that reality might be complex (as it appears to be, *prima facie*), partly because Greek makes no formal distinction between the notions 'be' (with a complement, as in English *be soft* or *be a woman*) and 'exist'; he effectively concluded that things either exist or do not (the latter notion is itself problematic for him) and cannot vary in quality. Modern English-speaking philosophers would hardly come to this view, and most find it unpersuasive as expounded by Parmenides.

Naturally, the grammars of wholly 'exotic' languages are liable to differ more markedly from those of English and related languages. For example, in Kwakwaka (western Canada) all verbs used in statements must include an inflection indicating the strength and nature of the evidence for the claim made: eye-witness, deduction, hearsay, etc. It is reported that native speakers of Kwakwaka are especially clear-minded and precise about such matters (for instance when giving evidence in court), and if this is the case an explanation may be sought in the structures referred to. These structures would presumably assist in philosophical thought as well.

I will conclude my remarks on these matters next time.

One or many?

The real number 1 (1.00000...) clearly has no special mathematical status; it is merely the number immediately following 0.99999... and half-way between 0 and 2.00000... Any series including 1.00000... can be re-scaled so that a different number

replaces 1.00000... However, many people feel that the **integer** 1 (as in 0, 1, 2, 3...) does have a special status: there is a genuine difference between dealing with just one of some kind of item and dealing with more than one. For instance, in religious studies one distinguishes between monotheism (belief in one god) and polytheism (belief in more than one god).

Many 'tribal' languages exhibit very short integer series: 'one', 'two', 'many', etc.

In languages such as (Modern) English there is a clear distinction of form (*boy* vs *boys* etc.) between singular and plural (except for a few nouns such as *sheep* and some pronouns such as *you*; verb-forms are slightly more complex). Speakers of such languages thus tend to think that linguistic patterns support the notion that 'one' is special: a case involving one item has a form all to itself, distinct from the form used for two, three or more. However, many languages have quite different patterns. In Chinese and Japanese, for example, nouns (though not pronouns) have **no** distinctive singular and plural forms. In contrast, early Indo-European languages (including, marginally, Old English) had separate forms for **pairs** of items, for instance Ancient Greek *thea* ('goddess'), *thea*: with a long vowel ('two goddesses'), *theai* ('three or more goddesses'); verb-forms too showed a three-way contrast of this kind. In some languages these 'dual' forms were used only for 'natural' pairs such as a person's two eyes, but in others they applied to **any** group of two items of the same kind, including those arising by chance. There are also 'paucal' forms, used instead of plurals for small sets from three up to around six.

Although these matters require further investigation, it does appear *prima facie* that users of such languages are (predictably) less 'aware' than are (say) English speakers of the one/more-than-one contrast.

Many 'tribal' languages exhibit very short integer series: 'one', 'two', 'many', etc. Stories are told in Australia of early-20th-century Aboriginal stockmen with limited English having been able to specify only that 'many' sheep had been stolen ('Yes, but **how** many?'). Of course, if such languages come to be used in contexts requiring longer series, they rapidly acquire same, often by 'borrowing'.

Another possibility is that **no** tokens of a type are in question. Currently, English usage in such cases is shifting from singular verb-concord (*None of them was there*) to plural (*None of them were there*). There seems no 'logical' reason to prefer either. (In some non-native varieties, singular forms are very much the norm here, as in Hong Kong English *On this island there is no building and no person* = '...there are no buildings and no people').

It is not clear what one should use as the ordinal form of *no/none/nought/zero* (corresponding with *first, second* etc.); various forms have been suggested. At Oxford University the week before the 1st Week of Term (when students return after the vacation) has traditionally been called **Noughth Week** (*noughth* is pronounced like *nought* + *th* as in *fourth*). When the robots in Isaac Asimov's cycle of 'Robot' novels invent a Law of Robotics which conceptually precedes the First Law, it is named the **Zeroth Law** (*see Editor's note*). And in rugby league football, where a team which gains possession of the ball then has the opportunity to use it over a set of six tackles, the extra tackle which is now allowed in certain circumstances before the first tackle is the **Zero Tackle**.

There are other cases where singular-plural concord issues arise, for instance with nouns such as *government* or *team* (*The team is/are playing well*) and the proper names of teams (compare British English *Liverpool are winning their matches* and American or Australian English *Hawthorn is winning its matches*; in Australia, one even reads *The Hawks* (= Hawthorn) **are** *winning its matches*). In the USA, the form *The*

United States was treated as plural (*The United States are...*) until well into the 19th century. Of course, some of this variation involves the degree to which the entities in question are regarded as acting as one.

Reincarnation, music, language and lightning

I recently discussed xenoglossia, the supposed transmission of ability in specific languages through reincarnation or other mystical means. Another ability which some believe is generated in this way is a talent for music (composing or playing). Indeed, there are also reports of both unexpected linguistic competence and musical talent suddenly emerging (in different cases) after trauma, for instance after the subject has been struck by lightning. Some have suggested that such events can 'rewire' a brain and thus enable the rapid appearance of unexpected abilities.

Like the specifics of particular languages, the details of how music works (and of what is judged to be 'good' music) vary between cultures.

Like the specifics of particular languages, the details of how music works (and of what is judged to be 'good' music) vary between cultures. It would be interesting to investigate how far those who manifest musical ability 'out of the blue' conform in these respects with their background culture, or instead with any other specific culture (with which they may allegedly have had no contact, as in xenoglossia). And in cases of this second type one could also examine how far the subject's other behaviour and thinking patterns (linguistic, cultural, etc.) correlated with their newly-found musical ability. (Of course, a third possibility is that the subject's performances might be altogether idiosyncratic.)

If such cases did involve 'rewiring', rather than some altogether mystical process, it might be suggested that the new musical 'genius' presumably would

now possess only what a musical ‘genius’ possesses **without** studying music; that is, the ‘raw’ talent as opposed to the culture-specific details which she would surely have to learn.

In this context: there is less cross-cultural agreement than might perhaps be expected as to what counts as, for instance, ‘sad’ music (instrumental only). There is a substantial literature on this. Of course, music *per se* inevitably communicates less specific notions than does language, even within a particular culture.

There is less cross-cultural agreement than might perhaps be expected as to what counts as, for instance, ‘sad’ music (instrumental only).

A further point which arises in the context of such discussions is that western ideas about music (European, or associated with the European diaspora) and ‘western’ scientific ideas are not as closely parallel as some devotees of ‘non-western’ notions suggest. The former really are culture-specific and in no way universal, whereas the latter, although they **arose** in ‘the West’, are intended to be universal and can – because they are empirical and (in principle) rigorously testable – be embraced by members of **any** culture (as long as they are willing to grapple with any specific cases where the new ideas genuinely conflict with the old).

Sex in Sumerian?

The early Mesopotamian culture of Sumer aka Sumeria arises repeatedly in the context of non-mainstream claims regarding ancient languages and scripts, because it is the earliest known genuine ‘civilisation’. In addition, Mesopotamia is a centre of what may well be an immediate pre-script phase of written semiotics; and the full-blown written Sumerian language – which can now be read – is the oldest known written language (and, moreover, is, as far as is known, ‘genetically’ isolated). The Sumerian ‘cuneiform’ script was later

adapted to write other, unrelated Mesopotamian languages such as the Semitic language Akkadian.

A very special non-standard interpretation of Sumerian, focusing on the script, has been proposed by Peter Linaker. Linaker proclaims the exaggerated view that 20th-century structuralist linguistics requires that **all** linguistic structures be interpreted as systematic. In fact, because of prior linguistic changes, any language at any given time is liable to display a varying proportion of unsystematic features. These may be exemplified by irregular verb morphology, as manifested for instance in English past tense forms such as *rose*, for what would be the regular form **rised*. ‘Fossilised’ forms such as *rose* exemplify older, now superseded morphological systems, often quite systematic/regular in their day, which are no longer productive; that is, no such new forms now develop in English.

Because of Linaker’s general stance, he seeks covert patterns which would explain apparently unsystematic features of languages **without** any reference to older systems. And he unreasonably regards the (in fact not uncommon) mixture of logographs (characters representing entire words) and near-alphabetic spelling which characterizes the Sumerian cuneiform script as *prima facie* unsystematic. As part of his ‘remedy’, he argues that some features of the Sumerian script which are generally interpreted as near-alphabetical can be interpreted only by ignoring the phonology and focusing instead upon hitherto unrecognized semantic properties of the characters.

Linaker thus develops a theory involving the existence of covert, highly coherent systems of cuneiform characters. Many of these involve alleged ‘double-entendres’ – often with reference to sexual matters. Bizarrely, Linaker appears to believe that such matters would (‘naturally’) **never** be overtly expressed in **any** culture. The whole scenario appears unlikely! But in any case Linaker adduces no persuasive

empirical evidence in support of his novel readings.

More fun things!

Readers may recall my discussion last time of cases such as *let/let* and *cleave/cleave*, where the development of homonymy created semantic clashes and eventually the elimination of one or both words from the general vocabulary. Another example of this kind involves parts of rural France, where in medieval times the words for ‘cat’ and ‘rooster’ became homophonous. Obviously this would not do in a farming context! In these areas, the word for ‘rooster’ was replaced by other words, usually by the word for ‘pheasant’ but in one dialect by the word for ‘clergyman’!

Compare French essence (‘petrol’) and Esso (Standard Oil). A hyper-diffusionist ‘nutter’ ignorant of the etymologies would enthusiastically posit common origin!

A case parallel with that of *silver box* from last time is that of expressions such as *French teacher*. Say it to yourself; **is** she French, or does she **teach** French?

Another nice chance similarity: compare French *essence* (‘petrol’) and *Esso* (Standard Oil). A hyper-diffusionist ‘nutter’ ignorant of the etymologies would enthusiastically posit common origin!

I was once riding a cable-car to Sentosa Island in Singapore. A notice in the cabin warned that the Sentosa Island Company would accept no responsibility for damage to **their** property (with no reference to that of passengers). A few weeks later the system was struck by a passing rig. There were deaths, injuries and a great deal of property damage...

Is the 19th-century usage exemplified in *A house is building there* (‘being built’) perhaps reappearing? On 20/5/13 I received an email from Amazon reading ‘You might like to know that the

following titles **are releasing** this week'!

Singaporeans use the word *other* more widely than do users of English in the UK, the USA, etc. For them, *X and other Ys* does **not** imply 'X is a Y'; so they will say or write things like *I have been to Japan and other European*

countries ('and also some European countries'). A group of Singaporeans thus failed to see the humour in a horror-film outline reading *She discovers that he keeps his wife and other half-human creatures in a shed!*

I propose to make this a regular closing item.

Editor's note

Perhaps the most well-known 'Zeroth Law' belongs to thermodynamics, namely: 'If two systems are each in thermal equilibrium with a third system, they are also in thermal equilibrium with each other'.

ARTICLES

BIGFOOT TALK: CLAIMS REGARDING THE 'LANGUAGE' OF CRYPTIDS. PART 1: BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

Mark Newbrook

Mark Newbrook has been associated as a lecturer and researcher with universities in Singapore, Hong Kong, Australia and the UK. His main areas of research interest are dialectology, controversies in historical linguistics and skeptical linguistics generally.

In his book *Voices In The Wilderness* (Mariposa, CA; self-published; 2012)¹, Ron Morehead promotes the view that Bigfoot/sasquatch (the North American equivalent of the Himalayan yeti) not only clearly exists but communicates using oral forms which (while not readily understood) clearly qualify to be described as *language*, supposedly in the strict sense of this term (but see below).

Morehead presents recordings of some such extracts on a CD which accompanies his book. However, it should be noted at the outset that these are **not** the key extracts of material analysed by Scott Nelson and discussed on the main relevant website (see later). Morehead and Nelson have so far failed to respond (after some months) to queries regarding the relationship between these two bodies of material, and Morehead himself has not responded to my query as to whether or not he has his own copies of the recordings transcribed by Nelson. I will comment in Part 2 on the material on Morehead's CD. See below on my

other queries, which have also remained unanswered for months. **I want to stress that my comments here are subject to modification as and when I do receive more information from Morehead or Nelson.**

The fact that these claims involve a 'cryptid' (an animal not recognised by mainstream zoology) renders them all the more dramatic. Naturally, animals as similar to humans as Bigfoot, if real, would be among the most likely non-humans to manifest behavioural and mental patterns of a linguistic nature. Most of the more sober writers who hold that Bigfoot really exists equate the animals with supposedly extinct human-like primates such as the prehistoric *Gigantopithecus*. Obviously, Morehead and his associates mainly cite authors who uphold such interpretations of the non-linguistic evidence. These writers include some rather dubious commentators such as the Bigfoot-advocate Ivan Sanderson (see Morehead p. 14) and a possibly 'maverick' unidentified scientist with

odd ideas (cited on p. 23, perhaps in the role of a 'straw man'; see below on Morehead's attitude to mainstream science); but they also include some highly qualified writers, notably Jeff Meldrum (*Sasquatch: Legend Meets Science*; NYC; Tom Doherty; 2006). But of course this matter is highly controversial; very many other scholars who have examined the evidence for Bigfoot (including 'skeptical cryptozoologists') hold that this evidence is inadequate, or indeed that it is most unlikely (on a variety of grounds) that any creature such as Bigfoot exists in North America.² And in addition no case of genuine language-use by **any** non-human species has ever been verified.

However, the allegedly linguistic material can itself, in principle, be assessed without consideration of the overall 'Bigfoot controversy'. Whether or not Bigfoot exists in the real world as a flesh-and-blood animal (or indeed in any other manner) is not the key issue at this point. If it should appear that the material in question here is **not**

linguistic in character, then there would be no reason to hold that Bigfoot has language, at least on this evidence; but it would remain possible and maybe even likely (though probably not certain) that Bigfoot **exists**.

The existence of recognisably non-human Bigfoot-vocalisation or oral communication would not per se be especially dramatic.

Alternatively, it might perhaps emerge that, even if the material is indeed (probably or certainly) linguistic in character, Bigfoot (whether the creature exists or not) is (probably or certainly) not responsible for it. There may be other possible explanations, including faking by humans (not necessarily by those now presenting the material; see below on ‘Enochian’). Principles such as ‘Ockham’s Razor’ would favour other explanations unless the evidence for highly dramatic (cryptozoological) explanations were very strong indeed. In fact, it would be very difficult for Morehead or Nelson to **demonstrate** even that the oral material recorded was produced in the context of field-work aimed at the study of Bigfoot, and still more difficult to show that it really was produced by animals of this kind encountered in that context. (See again Part 2 of this paper, when it appears, on Morehead’s CD.)

Naturally, it is also possible that some **specific** auditory features of such material might suggest non-human origins, whether or not the material appeared to be linguistic in nature as opposed to non-linguistic animal vocalising (see below). For example, it might emerge that some of the phonetic features of the material indicate a vocal tract with physical proportions very different from those of a human vocal tract. Some earlier analytical work

based on recordings of this kind suggests this conclusion.³ Later I will consider the claims made by Morehead’s associates about these matters. However, if Bigfoot does exist, this fact itself is the main dramatic finding in question at this point (if the material under discussion is genuinely **linguistic** in character, this would be a **second** very dramatic finding). Many types of animal, including non-human primates, vocalise and indeed communicate (non-linguistically) by this means (see again below); the existence of recognisably non-human Bigfoot-vocalisation or oral communication would not *per se* be especially dramatic.

Morehead’s presentation is frequently highly personal, not to say subjective; it is not always possible to assess his statements adequately. He also adopts a rather ‘popular’ and negative ‘anomalist’ view of science as practised by mainstream scientists; and in places (see p. 56) he advances the now widespread ‘New Age’ views regarding (for instance) the applicability of quantum physics to cryptozoology, and also endorses the often somewhat suspect ‘scientific’ work carried on in the former USSR and in its main contemporary successor state, Russia.

In addition, Morehead is not himself trained in linguistics or any other relevant discipline; where he does comment on linguistic matters – for instance on p. 59 where he briefly refers to the alleged use of human language by trained apes and then to mimicry of human speech-sounds (see below) – he appears naïve. The main body of data upon which Morehead relies was recorded by him but has been analysed by associates with some relevant expertise, notably Scott Nelson. These analysts do not offer explicit definitions of the notion ‘language’, and it is not always clear that they are adequately aware of this

issue; many commentators on such matters use the term *language* in a loose and popular sense, to refer to relatively complex but non-linguistic animal communication systems. Note for example pp. 23, 25, 48, etc., where Morehead himself can be read as equating ‘coherent’ oral communication – and perhaps even phenomena such as the unexplained clicking and quasi-metallic sounds which he and his associates reportedly heard in the Sierra Nevada – with unfamiliar manifestations of language. (Morehead is also very ready to interpret sounds heard just after he himself has vocalised as deliberate ‘replies’, even when no entity was actually seen; see for example p. 31.)

In fact, language proper is distinguished from all other known systems of communication by several key formal and functional features. The two most important distinguishing formal features of human language are its ‘double articulation’ (its organisation into individually meaningless phonemes which, in combination, make up meaningful morphemes/words) and secondly the salience of grammar and especially of syntax (the grammar of phrases, clauses and sentences). Together these features enable each human language to express a potentially infinite number of structured sentence-length meanings with finite inventories of phonemes on the one hand and of morphemes/words on the other. Functional features peculiar to language include its use in referring to specific entities (especially entities not present at the time of an utterance, as in *Sirius* or *yesterday*) and in generalising from individual entities (entity-tokens) to entity-types (as in *this tiger* versus *the species Tiger*). **No** non-human communication system of this degree of flexibility and sophistication is **known** to exist.⁴

In addition, it must be remembered that the concepts of ‘language’ and

‘speech’ are crucially distinct. Almost all profoundly deaf people, some of whom cannot speak at all, still have language, including active use of language (signed and/or written); and a creature which can produce human-like speech sounds, for example a parrot or a mynah which can mimic such sounds, may prove **not** to have language. Furthermore, some human vocal phenomena, such as the ‘babbling’ of infants and many cases of glossolalia (‘speaking in tongues’), are (or appear to be) merely phonetic, not linguistic; they do not exhibit the structural patterns typical of genuine language, and their individual word-length components do not appear to be meaningful. And the most important distinguishing features of genuine language, as identified above, are themselves **non**-phonetic, belonging to more abstract structural ‘levels’ of language such as phonology and notably grammar. Determining that these features (or any other such features) are present in Morehead’s material would thus require not merely a close study of the phonetics but also phonological and grammatical analyses – and in many instances, indeed, an appreciation of the **meanings** of the various sequential parts of the utterances (which would not necessarily be at all easy to come by in cases such as this).

It must be remembered that the concepts of ‘language’ and ‘speech’ are crucially distinct.

Although some of those who have analysed or discussed Morehead’s material – notably Scott Nelson, who clearly knows some linguistics – do have some relevant expertise, none of them appears to have qualifications or intellectual authority in the discipline of linguistics as normally conceived (the scientific study of language). In

particular, the term *crypto-linguist*, as used of Nelson himself, seems to refer to a person with skills in interpreting (and perhaps analysing) oral linguistic data heard or recorded in difficult conditions, rather than to a person with training or proficiency in linguistics.⁵

Such ‘crypto-linguistic’ skills would of course be **relevant** here. However, there is a major difference between (a) the task of interpreting material in a human language with which one is familiar, heard or recorded in difficult conditions, and (b) the much more awkward task of analysing short samples of material which is not only recorded in less than ideal conditions but in addition is (if it is indeed linguistic in nature at all) in an altogether unknown language which is apparently non-human in origin – and thus may share far fewer features with any language known to the analyst than even altogether unrelated human languages might share. There are parallels here with other cases of alleged languages emanating from very unusual sources, such as that of ‘Enochian’, a supposedly non-human (angelic) language allegedly channelled to an associate of the Elizabethan mystic John Dee but conceivably faked (see my *Strange Linguistics*; Munich; Lincom-Europa; 2013; pp. 150-151). It is at this point that genuine expertise in linguistics would be invaluable. In Part 2, I will consider how far Nelson’s own expertise appears adequate to the task which he has set himself.

Another writer whose work is cited by Morehead in support of the view that language is involved here is Nancy Logan, described as a ‘human sound expert’.⁶ In fact, Ben Radford, in commentary upon an earlier set of claims over a decade ago, points out that Logan seems to have ‘little or no actual training (or degree) in linguistics’.⁷ She is a multi-lingual interpreter, and her other qualifications (self-described) include being a natural

mimic of hitherto unfamiliar sounds and having a Russian friend who allegedly thinks that Logan herself is Russian. Some of Logan’s comments as reported by Morehead are naïve-sounding, for instance her unexpanded reference to the contentious notion of a ‘primitive language’ (no such languages are actually known), cited on p. 58 in Morehead’s book.

Even if commentators are linguists, their ideas on such matters are still subject to critical analysis (like those of specialists in any other discipline).

Of course, the fact (if so it be) that Logan (for example) is not a linguist in the normal sense of this term does not imply that **all** of what she says is necessarily mistaken, confused etc. – especially given that people such as Logan **would** appear likely to have a better than average ‘feel’ for language/languages. But it **does** mean that the terms *linguist* and *expert* should not be used here to claim intellectual authority for what such people have to say on linguistic issues. In any case, even if commentators **are** linguists, their ideas on such matters are still subject to critical analysis (like those of specialists in any other discipline). The authority deriving from their status does not exempt them from skeptical consideration. Other trained linguists must examine the material independently and assess their claims. See later on this as it applies to Nelson’s very forthright statements.

I referred above to Radford’s comments on earlier claims of this nature. It should also be noted, by way of background, that even some ‘pro-Bigfoot’ investigators (whether or not qualified in linguistics etc.) have expressed themselves dubious as to the

claims made for auditory material of the kind in question here. For example, the anthropologist Grover Krantz (*Big Footprints*; Boulder, CO; Johnson Books; 1992), who regarded the existence of Bigfoot as highly probable, found ‘no compelling reason to believe that any of [the recordings in question] are what the recorders claimed them to be’ and indeed was informed by one of the very ‘university sound specialists’ cited by the claimants that humans could easily imitate such sounds (pp. 133-134). While this information is rather anecdotal in character, it does cast further *prima facie* doubt upon the value of the ‘specialist’ endorsements of the present set of claims.

For his own part, Nelson does not seem committed to the free exchange of material and ideas which is usual in academia. Maybe he fears that mainstream scholars, becoming persuaded that his claims are correct, will seek to plagiarise him and claim the considerable intellectual credit which would then accrue (this would, of course, be an unlikely outcome) – or else he fears, despite his own apparent vast confidence, that he will be discredited if his claims are subjected to well-informed scrutiny. Whatever his motives, he asserts that those who wish to undertake worthwhile analysis of the material must use the original recordings, not copies on CDs etc. This can apparently be accomplished only by arranging to visit Nelson in the USA (at one’s own expense) for private sessions – an unreasonable requirement. In fact, it appears that CDs presenting this specific material (albeit perhaps at lower quality levels which Nelson might deem inadequate for serious analysis) are not even available (as noted, perhaps not even from Morehead himself); thus, even researchers who reject Nelson’s strictures (see later) cannot ‘go their own way’ and analyse the material regardless.

Thus, Nelson’s attitude has (so far) prevented me from analysing the actual material which is transcribed by him on the web-site and upon which his comments are focused. But in Part 2 of this paper I will comment on what Nelson says about this data.

Nelson also declines to respond to requests for information about the detailed methodology involved in coming to his linguistic analyses.

Morehead himself appears to regard the recordings on the CD accompanying his book as wholly adequate, although of course they involve a different body of recorded material. Given his attitude, I will, as stated, comment in Part 2 on the material on this CD (although, as will be seen, it is not especially interesting or impressive in this context).

In my experience, Nelson also declines to respond to requests for information about the detailed methodology involved in coming to his linguistic analyses. In his material, he merely presents his analyses themselves. The consequence of this is that other researchers (even if they can access the actual recordings) will struggle to arrive at useful conclusions regarding any points where their own (partly independent) analyses differ from Nelson’s, or indeed to critique his analyses in other than superficial terms. I myself am proceeding as best I can in the absence of any proper exposition of Nelson’s methods (and of the recordings); it is of course possible that some of my comments would have to be revised if a detailed exposition were later presented.

However, Nelson does present his own (very brief) set of criteria for assessing whether or not the recorded material said to be produced by Bigfoot

should be regarded as genuine language associated with a non-human species (as will be gathered, he thinks that it should). In Part 2 of this paper I will examine these criteria themselves in respect of (a) their clarity as expressed by Nelson and (b) their validity (including the extent to which they suggest that Nelson’s expertise in linguistics is adequate). I will also address, as best I can in the circumstances, the question of whether or how far Morehead’s material should actually be regarded as linguistic in nature, either in Nelson’s terms or on other criteria (including the largely non-phonological criteria discussed earlier, such as the presence of syntax).

One unfortunate aspect of the presentation of this material by Morehead (and Nelson) involves the dogmatism with which Nelson’s conclusions are presented. For instance, throughout the body of material Morehead and his followers treat the existence of Bigfoot as certain. More specifically, Morehead himself (p. xiii) invokes ‘science’ (at this point without any specific references) as having ‘time-tested’ his account of Bigfoot language-use and as having ‘established’ some aspects of his claims; and he continues in this vein throughout. If he hoped for friendly consideration from scholars, he would have been better advised not to be so forthright. As quoted by Morehead on the web-site (and in his emails to me), Nelson too repeatedly states that the recorded material is **undeniably** linguistic.⁸ It should not be necessary to emphasise that – especially in the context of utterances allegedly produced by members of a non-human species whose very existence is disputed – no linguist will simply accept another researcher’s assurances that ‘[these] utterances are linguistic, by the human definition of language’. As noted above, this is especially the case where no apparently valid statements of

the meanings of the utterances can be proffered – even though **some** features might be identifiable as linguistic without meanings being known.⁹

Part 2 of this paper will appear in a subsequent issue.

Notes

1. Morehead's associated web-site is <http://www.bigfootsounds.com>. This and other web-sites cited in these notes were repeatedly accessed during January-March 2013.

2. There is, of course, an enormous 'cryptozoological' literature on Bigfoot, some of it skeptical or critical in character but much of it produced by 'believers' of varying degrees of sophistication. I will not attempt to summarise this literature here.

3. See for instance R. Lynn Kirlin and Lasse Hertel, 'Estimates of pitch and vocal track length from recorded vocalisations of purported Bigfoot', in *Manlike Monsters on Trial: Early Records and Modern Evidence*, eds. Marjorie Halpin and Michael M. Ames (Vancouver and London, 1980), pp. 274-290. Morehead cites this material and invokes Kirlin as a supporter (<http://www.bigfootsounds.com/experts-point-of-view/87-2/>; see also p. 57 in Morehead's book); but he does not acknowledge that Kirlin, while of the opinion that the sounds in question

were not made by human beings, does **not** suggest that they should be regarded as linguistic in nature.

4. For more on these general issues, see Chapter 8 of my book *Strange Linguistics* (Munich; Lincom-Europa; 2013) – especially pp. 187-188. On specifically cryptozoological-cum-linguistic issues, including comment on reports of what could be 'pre-linguistic' behaviour involving cryptids such as Bigfoot and on 'wilder' claims regarding actual language-use by such entities (some of them involving telepathy and other 'New Age' notions), see my paper 'Cryptozoology and linguistics' (*Skeptical Intelligencer* 6, 2003/2004, pp. 8-11); a second version appears in the cryptozoology journal *Animals & Men* (Issue 34, 2004, pp. 38-41), and both versions contain references to the centrally relevant literature.

5. <http://www.bigfootsounds.com/experts-point-of-view/r-scott-nelson>; see also pp. 61-63 in Morehead's book. Nelson's expositions of his ideas can also be seen/viewed online at places such as:

<http://bigfootevidence.blogspot.com/2012/11/scott-nelson-on-kctv5-talking-about.html>,

<http://www.kctv5.com/story/20101315/faces-of-kansas-city-man-says-he-has-audio-proof-of-bigfoots-existence>,

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=hNHdt3hj8BE, <http://bigfootevidence.blogspot.co.uk/2011/10/samurai-chatter-spoken-language-of.html?m=1>, etc. I will examine Nelson's analyses and associated background comments in Part 2 of this paper.

6. <http://www.bigfootsounds.com/experts-point-of-view/nancy-logan>; see also pp. 58-59 in Morehead's book.

7. http://www.csicop.org/si/show/bigfoot_at_50_evaluating_a_half-century_of_bigfoot_evidence. These claims involved Sierra Sounds, who marketed a CD entitled *The Bigfoot Recordings: The Edge of Discovery*. For Logan's statements regarding her own expertise, see:

<http://www.bigfootsounds.com/logan.asp>.

8. <http://www.bigfootsounds.com/experts-point-of-view/r-scott-nelson>; see also p. 62 in Morehead's book.

9. Furthermore, given the doubts outlined above regarding the supposed inability of humans to produce such sounds, it is not even clear how Nelson or Morehead can be so very certain that the data are not faked (and note that even if it is not faked it may not necessarily be associated with Bigfoot specifically).

HOMEOPATHY FOR HAY FEVER: SOMETHING VERY MUCH TO BE SNEEZED AT

Niall Taylor

Niall Taylor is a veterinary surgeon in practice in the South-West of England who manages a web-site (<http://www.rationalvetmed.org/>) which primarily aims to examine the scientific papers homeopaths and other practitioners of CAM use as evidence to support their position.

In the year 2000 a research paper was published in the *British Medical Journal* which was the last of a series of four on the treatment of perennial rhinitis (hay fever) using homeopathy (Taylor, 2000). The trials were carried out largely by the same authors and published at intervals over a 15-year period; the others being Reilly et al (1985) in the *British Homeopathic Journal* and Reilly et al (1986) and Reilly et al (1994) both in the *Lancet*. As with the first three, the authors considered the results from the final 2000 paper confirmed that homeopathy was different from placebo, and when they combined the results from all four trials they felt this gave further confirmation still. The authors' final conclusion was: *'The objective results reinforce earlier evidence that homeopathic dilutions differ from placebo'*.

The authors' final conclusion was: 'The objective results reinforce earlier evidence that homeopathic dilutions differ from placebo'.

Since then this set of trials has been considered one of the darlings of homeopathic literature - three of them having achieved the holy grail of being

published in mainstream journals - and they are mentioned regularly by homeopaths in support of their position. The final instalment (Taylor, 2000) is cited in lists published by no less than three separate homeopathic bodies as some of the best proof homeopaths can offer that homeopathy works (European Network of Homeopathy Researchers, 2007; Faculty of Homeopathy Research; and British Homeopathic Association).

Despite the hype however, and when considered by anyone without a vested interest, these papers really are a pretty ineffective demonstration of what its proponents claim homeopathy has to offer.

Many criticisms have been made of them, some of the most effective appearing in sceptical blogs and in discussions in the James Randi Educational Forum (JREF). A considerable number however, appear from medical practitioners in the *BMJ* itself in the form of Rapid Responses - a sort of email equivalent of letters to the editor.

One of the most compelling and fundamental problems with the 2000 paper is described by Miller in the *BMJ* (all links are given below) who points out that, even though only 51 volunteers started the trial, the statistics were analysed as if this number was

120, giving a completely misleading idea of the power of the study. Miller notes that if the statistics are done correctly the significance deteriorates from the claimed 5% to an entirely worthless 34%. As he says, *'The only conclusion is that the trial is not able to prove anything'*.

These papers really are a pretty ineffective demonstration of what its proponents claim homeopathy has to offer.

Brown, again in the *BMJ*, points out that it is unlikely the patients recruited into the trials even had perennial rhinitis in the first place, and Hadjicostas, a homeopathic researcher, comments (very politely), *'I would like to say to the respectable members of the group who organized the research, that what they have done is not actually homeopathy...'*, but says he feels this doesn't matter since, whatever it was, it worked - and it's results that count with homeopaths (at least when they are favourable to homeopathy anyway).

A similar tone is struck by Tim Vickers and Andrew Lancaster in their carefully balanced commentary at the end of the fourth paper where they point out that, despite the authors'

assertions (that this paper added to cumulative proof that homeopathy was effective), the outcome measure - nasal peak inspiratory flow - looked at in the 2000 paper wasn't significant in any of the previous three so no such conclusion could be drawn. Quite the opposite actually, as Vickers and Lancaster say, 'These data do not strengthen the conclusion that homeopathy differs from placebo. In fact, the effect of including the current study in their meta-analysis with data from the three earlier trials is to weaken (though not overturn) this conclusion...'

In the real world, if homeopathy were really as wonderful and effective as its proponents claim, there would be dozens of such results.

This conveniently flexible approach to outcome measures is another major criticism of the whole series. One eloquent contributor to the JREF discussion comments that when the papers are studied carefully the authors seem to have done the trials, obtained the figures for several outcome measures, and then chosen the best ones to present in the conclusion. This tactic, known as the 'Texas Sharpshooter' fallacy, is akin to firing a load of bullets at the side of a barn, drawing a circle round the best group and then calling yourself a sharpshooter - it is almost impossible to get a bad result using this method. (What that has got to do with Texas I don't know - there are barns elsewhere in the world - but the analogy is a good one!)

So (to paraphrase Monty Python), apart from questionable statistics, flawed methodology, the possibility that the patients may not have been suffering from the condition supposedly under test, and the opinion of a

homeopath that the treatment under trial wasn't actually homeopathy at all, and then anyway, even if we ignore all those flaws, this allegedly all-powerful treatment still only barely manages to outperform a mere sugar tablet - just what is the problem with this series of trials?

Well - in a nutshell, and if any other criticism were needed - it's a one off.

In the real world, if homeopathy were really as wonderful and effective as its proponents claim, there would be dozens of such results. True, there is no such thing as a perfect trial; it's always possible to find one flaw or another, but then again hay fever is an extremely common disorder and there is no shortage of potential experimental subjects looking for an effective, risk-free fix. Thus the body of evidence should have 'grow'd like Topsy' in the nearly-30 years since the original trial in this series.

But it hasn't - so why not? Why hasn't this work been repeated time and again by other, independent authors, perhaps sponsored by those enormously rich homeopathic pharmacies, until the weight of evidence becomes so overwhelming proponents can legitimately dismiss any criticisms as unwarranted nit-picking?

Homeopaths are fond of criticising opponents for not being open-minded enough to believe that homeopathy might work. My question to them would be: are they open minded enough to admit that it doesn't? Because however you look at it, the only sensible explanation for such a profound lack of proof is that there is no proof to be had - homeopathy is completely and utterly ineffective. These trials are just another example of homeopaths torturing the statistics to fit pre-conceived ideas.

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REVIEWS AND COMMENTARIES

The Secret Life of Uri Geller. BBC 2, July 21, 2013

Ray Ward

On 21 July BBC2 showed a programme called *The Secret Life of Uri Geller*, made by an independent company. It would have disgraced Channel 4 or 5, or one of the less responsible cable or satellite channels. For it to have been transmitted by the most respected broadcasting organisation in the world can only be called scandalous.

About five minutes was about the Israeli raid on Entebbe in 1976 to rescue hijacked airline passengers, though there is not a shred of evidence that Geller had anything to do with it.

It contained not a word of scepticism about Geller's claimed paranormal powers, long exposed as being achieved by conjuring tricks. (At one point the commentary said he *knew* he had paranormal powers, without any hint of doubt.) It purported to be about work he is said to have done for various intelligence agencies including the

Israeli Mossad and the CIA. But not a scrap of real evidence for such work was ever produced, with Geller conveniently saying he did secret things but - they were secret, so he couldn't talk about them!

About five minutes - quite a large part of a programme of less than an hour - was about the Israeli raid on Entebbe in 1976 to rescue hijacked airline passengers, though there is not a shred of evidence that Geller had anything to do with it. It's said he used his powers to disable radar so that the planes could fly safely, though they in fact flew low, beneath the radar. When asked he said - yes, you've guessed it! - he couldn't talk about it. There was also a lot about remote viewing experiments, but their closure in 1995 ('despite their many successes' - what successes?) rather clearly indicates that they were considered a waste of time. Obviously they wouldn't have been shut down if they worked, but the blame was placed on a born-again Christian who was said to consider such things incompatible with his beliefs. Geller's fooling of the

wonderfully gullible Senator Claiborne Pell also featured. (Pell believed that James Randi reproduced a drawing paranormally, though he had given Randi a clear view of his own drawing!)

I wrote in protest to the *Radio Times*. My letter wasn't published, but they did publish an excellent letter from Dr Len Fisher of the School of Physics, University of Bristol, and I am grateful to him for permission to reproduce it:

'A one-hour homage to Uri Geller? With no sceptical comment, and no reference to the number of times that this man has been exposed on television and elsewhere? Shame, BBC, for so tarnishing your image, and shame especially to the scientifically illiterate programmer responsible for this travesty.'

This is the version as published; however, Dr Fisher also told me that 'this man' was originally 'this fake', but the *RT* changed it.

Metro's critic said the programme was like a Brass Eye spoof, and at least one other perceptive person of my acquaintance has said it seemed like a

send-up, but if it was I fear the vast majority of viewers would not have seen it as such.

I made a formal complaint to the BBC on their website as follows:

‘Uri Geller was a not-very-successful nightclub magician in his native Israel until he hit on the idea of claiming that his effects were produced by genuine paranormal powers. As the excellent letter from Dr Len Fisher in the Radio Times says, he has many times been exposed as a fake. (I also wrote to the RT but my letter wasn’t published, which is why I waited to see if it had been before making this complaint.) This programme would have shamed Channels 4 or 5, or one of the dodgier cable or satellite channels; for it to be disseminated by the most respected and prestigious broadcasting organisation in the world (yes, I do know it wasn’t made by the BBC itself) can only be called a scandal and a disgrace. There was not a word of scepticism about his claimed powers, and reams of rubbish about his alleged involvement in intelligence gathering, for which not a shred of real evidence was produced, with Geller conveniently saying he couldn’t discuss it. A large part of the programme was about the Israeli raid on Entebbe to rescue hijacked airline passengers in 1976, with stuff and nonsense about Geller having paranormally disabled Egyptian radar, though there is not a scrap of real evidence that he had anything to do with the operation and Geller himself said - yes! - that he couldn’t discuss it! For the BBC to publicise, in so totally irresponsible a way ...’

This was the reply (which came so fast I suspect there had been other complaints):

‘Thanks for your contact regarding “The Secret Life of Uri Geller” broadcast 21 July on BBC Two. We understand that you felt the programme was biased in favour of Uri Geller and did not sufficiently examine his alleged abilities.

‘Uri Geller is a well-known and controversial figure and his claims have been documented and

challenged on many occasions. This programme set out to examine a very specific aspect of Geller’s life – his apparent involvement in covert operations for various intelligence agencies over a number of years. It was never intended as a rigorous investigation into his alleged abilities, as this has been covered several times in the past.

‘Nevertheless, please be assured that your comments regarding this issue have been registered to our audience log. This is a daily report of audience feedback made available throughout the BBC, including to programme producers, as well as members of senior management. The audience logs help to shape future decisions regarding BBC programming and output.

‘Thanks again for taking the time to contact us.’

This is, of course, nonsense. I was perfectly well aware that the programme’s aim was not to discuss Geller’s claimed powers as such, but to examine his claimed involvement in intelligence operations, and not a scrap of real evidence for any such involvement was produced!

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Editor’s insertion:

Further correspondence

In response to a further complaint, Ray received the following reply from the BBC’s Editorial Complaints Unit.

‘I’m sorry you were unhappy with our previous response. The film was not a profile of the entire life and work of Uri Geller but an examination of a narrow aspect of his life, details of which have only recently emerged. As the commentary made clear in the opening minutes, Geller has been on our television screens for more than 40 years. As such, viewers are already very familiar with his work as an entertainer who bends spoons etc. and will have come to the film with pre-existing opinions about his alleged abilities.

‘Some aspects of Geller’s work that the film looked at are verifiable fact (e.g. his participation in the Stanford

Research Institute experiments) while others are speculation (the extent of his participation in the raid on Entebbe). The commentary made a clear distinction between the two where necessary, while a post-watershed BBC Two audience is shrewd enough to treat the claims and comments of the various interviewees with due scepticism.

‘The film was not overtly critical or aggressively inquisitorial of Geller or the other interviewees, but nor was it unquestioningly accepting. For instance, viewers were implicitly invited to question Geller’s frequent and repeated refusals to confirm, deny or otherwise comment on any specific details about his alleged missions. And the things Geller actually does say are, perhaps, equally telling:

‘I always had this James Bond in mind, you know. I was a great storyteller in school. I could fantasise and imagine things and I would utter them out and create a story about everything.’

‘On a similar note, the soundtrack to the film was based almost entirely on television and film themes, such as *The Twilight Zone*, *Doctor Who*, *James Bond*, *The X-Files* and *Twin Peaks* – prompting the audience to question how much of Geller’s and the interviewees’ stories is likely to be based in fact and how much is likely to fall into the realms of fantasy.

‘To label the film as uncritical or one-sided does it and the viewers a disservice. It may not have been the documentary you were hoping for, but to present a set of directly opposing views on a particular subject or to set out to prove/disprove a particular version of events are not the only devices by which to achieve due impartiality or due accuracy.

‘If you would like to take your complaint further, you can contact Stage 2 of the complaints process, the BBC’s Editorial Complaints Unit, within 20 working days, and they will carry out an independent investigation.....’

Ray's reply:

'I wish to escalate this matter to stage 2. The programme was simply a waste of time and money. There was, I reiterate yet again, not a word of real scepticism about Geller's claimed powers. A one-hour programme about another aspect of

his supposed abilities for which not a shred of real evidence was produced is surely pointless. You refer to "the extent of his participation in the raid on Entebbe", as if were established fact that he played some part in it. There is not a scrap of real evidence that he had

anything to do with it at all! The distinction you claim was not made clear. More perceptive viewers will have seen the points you make, but certainly not all, and I, for one, did not see the supposed significance of the music!'

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://eurocepticscon.org/>

August 23 to 25, 2013

See the Editorial in this issue for a congress report.

The 16th European Skeptics Congress

This will take place in London in 2015 and will be hosted by ASKE. Related organisations will also be involved.

Denkfest 2014

September 11-14

Zurich, Switzerland

Core topics: Medicine & methods, evolution, humanism in the 21st century. Talks in English and German with simultaneous translation. See:

<http://www.denkfest.ch/>

<https://www.facebook.com/denkfest/info>

OF INTEREST

SCEPTICISM, SCIENCE AND RATIONALITY (GENERAL)

Sense About Science

From Max Goldman

I want to make the Sense About Science website better and I need your help. To see what's working with our site – and what isn't – we need to collect some evidence. So we've come up with a survey that sets a series of short navigational tasks, which we think will take at most 20 minutes to complete. I appreciate this is a fair amount of time, but the in-depth feedback you'd provide would be invaluable to us. So if you're able to help, click on the link below and the survey will appear side-by-side with the Sense About Science website in your browser. You can adjust the width of the frame to suit your screen.

If you have any questions about the survey please get in touch with me. Thanks very much for your time.

<http://www.senseaboutscience.org/data/files/resources/133/survey.html?>

Narendra Dabholkar

Narendra Dabholkar, Indian skeptic and crusader against superstition, was killed by four gunmen on August 20th 2013, aged 67:

<http://www.economist.com/news/obituary/21586275-narendra-dabholkar-fighter-against-superstition-was-killed-august-20th-aged-67-narendra>

What Britons don't know about Britain

A new survey has shown that the British public has the wrong idea about many issues including crime, benefit fraud and immigration. See Jon Danzig's blog at:

<http://goo.gl/v5jgZ>

Book on anomalistic psychology

It's out at last! *Anomalistic Psychology: Exploring Paranormal Belief & Experience* by Chris French (*for it is he*) and Anna Stone, Palgrave, Macmillan Publishers. Order your copy from:

<http://www.palgrave.com/products/title.aspx?pid=271718>

SCIENTIFIC TOPICS)

Shale gas

In the last issue I reported on recent developments – or lack of them – in the exploration of GM technology. It would come as no surprise to find that skeptics are divided on the merits and otherwise of GM crops but not on how to investigate and discuss these. A similar situation pertains to shale gas and the process used to extract it (hydraulic fracturing or 'fracking'). For a simple

explanation of the process of fracking and the reported pros and cons see:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-14432401>.

For a favourable review see:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-14432401>

For a recent negative critique by the economist Lord Stern, see:

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/sep/04/david-cameron-fracking-lord-stern>

MEDICINE (GENERAL)

The Nightingale Collaboration

See the website below for recent activity.

If you do not already do so, why not sign up for free delivery of their electronic newsletter? At:

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

Antibiotics

The Drugs Don't Work: A Global Threat. Professor Sally Davis, Chief Medical Officer for England (Penguin Special). 'Resistance to our current range of antibiotics is the new inconvenient truth. If we don't act now, we risk the health of our parents, our children and our grandchildren. Antibiotics add, on average, twenty years to our lives. For over seventy years, since the manufacture of penicillin in 1943, we have survived extraordinary operations and life-threatening infections. We are so familiar with these wonder drugs that we take them for granted. The truth is that we have been abusing them: as patients, as doctors, as travellers, in our food. No new class of antibacterial has been discovered for twenty six years and the bugs are fighting back. If we do not take responsibility now, in a few decades we may start dying from the most commonplace of operations and ailments that can today be treated easily.'

Order from:

<http://www.amazon.co.uk/Drugs-Dont-Work-Penguin-Special/dp/0241969190>

Supplements

The consumer magazine *Which?* Has reported that 'research shows that some supplement manufacturers are making misleading claims on their products - as a result, people could be wasting money on unnecessary food supplements. Other manufacturers use clever language and font sizes to exaggerate the effect that some ingredients have. So although only a small minority of people actually need supplements, a third of adults in our survey told us they regularly take them. The supplements industry was valued at £385 million in 2012'. See:

<http://www.which.co.uk/news/2013/08/supplements---are-they-worth-it-330480/>

Iridology

A woman who died after seeking the remedies of a 'natural' therapist (an iridologist) in preference to mainstream medicine treated the therapist as 'a bit like a priest', a tribunal has heard.

<http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/crime/9089390/Iridologist-gave-woman-false-hope-tribunal-told>

The British Veterinary Voodoo Society

Concerning homeopathy in veterinary medicine: 'In light of the gratifyingly supportive attitude of professional bodies (including the RCVS and a number of UK veterinary schools) towards systems of medicine based on magical thinking, the BVVS believes the time has come to extend our professional scope beyond the areas covered at present, and exploit the full potential of the discipline.' At:

<http://www.vetpath.co.uk/voodoo/>

Homeopathy for cats

Are homeopathic remedies safe for cats? See:

<http://www.wdam.com/story/23257936/are-homeopathic-remedies-for-cats-safe-and-healthy>

PSYCHIATRY AND PSYCHOLOGY

False memory planted in mouse's brain

'The feat will help to reveal how more complex false memories, such as of sexual abuse or alien abduction, can arise in people...'

Chris French, head of the Anomalistic Psychology Research Unit at Goldsmiths, University of London, is a leading researcher in false memories in people. He said that the latest results were an important first step in understanding their neural basis (*Oh go on!* – Ed). At:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/2013/jul/25/false-memory-implanted-mouse-brain?CMP=EMCNEWEML6619I2>

The False Memory Archive

'The False Memory Archive is a project devised by the APRU's artist-in-residence, Alasdair Hopwood, that involves asking people to submit their own false (or non-believed) memories via the internet (do feel free to tell us about your own!).' You can read more about it here:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-24286258>

and here:

<http://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/17299/1/the-false-memory-archive>

Dissociative Identity Disorder

Rosie Waterhouse has published a critical article on the controversial diagnosis of Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID; formerly Multiple Personality Disorder, MPD) in the *New Scientist*. Preview at:

<http://www.newscientist.com/article/mg21929361.000-multiple-personalities-takedown-of-a-diagnosis.html>

(Ms Waterhouse is giving a talk on 'Satanic ritual abuse, false memories and multiple personalities: Anatomy of a 20-year investigation' on October 29, 2013 as part of the APRU Invited Speaker Series:

<http://www.gold.ac.uk/apru/speakers/>

Talk by Elizabeth Loftus

Entitled 'The fiction of memory' at:

<http://bit.ly/1g2MeEN>

RELIGION

Ex-Bishop Richard Holloway

'HARDtalk' speaks to the former Bishop of Edinburgh, Richard Holloway. 'He entered a seminary at the age of 14, intent on becoming a monk, and rose to be the leader of the Anglican Church in Scotland. But he gradually lost faith in many of the certainties of Christianity, including the existence of God. He finally resigned from the church, accusing it of cruelly persecuting gay people. So, did his own loss of faith betray those he once preached to?'

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-YYoxqd8Xwc>

Creationism in Europe

Creationism in Europe: Facts, Gaps, and Prospects. Stefaan Blancke, Hans Henrik Hjermitsev, Johan Braeckman, & Peter C. Kjærgaard, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 22.8.13. For the full text, go to:

<http://jaar.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/full/1ft034?ijkey=ZfS7FAR9rsvE4cE&keytype=ref>

For the pdf, go to:

<http://jaar.oxfordjournals.org/content/ear/ly/2013/08/22/jaarel.1ft034.full.pdf?keytype=ref&ijkey=ZfS7FAR9rsvE4cE>

Why do people laugh at creationists? (Part 39)

'So amazingly Conservapedia describes a 'volcano' theory, which suggests that small creatures could have been dispersed great distances after Noah's flood, due to volcanoes.' At:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4mj_mGbfyPPU

RESEARCH

Psychotherapy and anomalous experiences

This is a request for assistance in helping complete and/or distribute a survey - for psychotherapists and clinicians - regarding anomalous experiences within psychotherapy. The survey is being conducted by Paul Atkinson, a long time therapist who is a PhD psychology student under the supervision of Dr David Luke at the University of Greenwich. If appropriate please complete the survey or pass it on to those you think may be interested. Full details on the survey link:

https://greenwichuniversity.eu.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_9KVGHY3VvzZnJG

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OTHER UNUSUAL CLAIMS

Another cheating psychic

A psychic has been accused of hiding a man in an attic to make knocking noises on the ceiling during a hotel 'ghost tour'. See:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstos/pics/howaboutthat/10288469/Psychic-accused-of-planting-man-in-attic-during-ghost-tour.html>

Loch Ness Monster (or the unsinkable rubber duck)

The photograph hailed in August 2012 as 'the best ever taken of the Loch Ness monster' has been revealed to be an elaborate hoax by its creator, 61-year-old George Edwards, who operates a cruise boat on the loch. He has admitted that 'Nessie' was nothing more than a carbon fibre hump that starred in 'The Truth Behind the Loch Ness Monster', a 2011 National Geographic documentary.

At the time, Nessie 'expert' Steve Feltham, who has dedicated 21 years of

his life to hunting down the beast, called it 'the best photograph I think I have ever seen. I think the images are fantastic - that's the animal I have been looking for all this time'.

Mr Feltham has now criticised the forgery as harmful to both Mr Edwards' credibility and the Loch Ness Monster brand (*What about Mr Feltham's credibility?* - Ed.) 'It does the subject no good and damages his own reputation. When you read things like this in the papers, people will think it's all just a fairytale' (*We already did* - Ed). See:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstos/pics/howaboutthat/10355915/Best-ever-photograph-of-Loch-Ness-monster-revealed-as-a-fake.html>

Crop circles

'The most intricate crop circles, which have baffled experts and fuelled rumours of alien visitors, have relied upon careful planning and execution. In the past, the best crop circles have attracted tourists from around the world, sparked rumours of aliens and theories of fiendishly difficult mathematical formulas hidden in their meaning. Numbers of the destructive crop designs have fallen dramatically this year, with just 15 being counted in July compared to 50 the previous year. Most scientists now agree that crop circles are man-made. This week one crop circle creator (*Matthew Williams*) announced he has retired from the practice due to hay fever.' For more, including how to make your own crop circle, see:

http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstos/pics/howaboutthat/10217151/Crop-circles-demystified-how-the-patterns-are-created.html#disqus_thread

UPCOMING EVENTS

THE ANOMALISTIC PSYCHOLOGY RESEARCH UNIT AT GOLDSMITH'S COLLEGE LONDON

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

<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/>

<http://www.twitter.com/ChrisCFrench>

or

<http://feeds.feedburner.com/apru>

SKEPTICS IN THE PUB

Website for all venues:

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

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/>

The 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.'

CENTRE FOR INQUIRY LONDON

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

CONWAY HALL LECTURES LONDON

<http://conwayhall.org.uk/talks-lectures>

See the website for upcoming events of interest to sceptics.

HEALTHWATCH

<http://www.healthwatch-uk.org/>

Open meeting and Annual General Meeting on Thursday 24 October at The Medical Society of London, 11 Chandos Street, Cavendish Square, London W1M 0EB. Reception at 6.30 p.m.; AGM at 7.00 p.m.; Presentation of Annual HealthWatch Award to Dr Fiona Godlee, Editor-in Chief, BMJ at 7.40 p.m. by Nick Ross, HealthWatch President. The meeting is free. It will be followed by a buffet dinner with wine at 8.45 p.m. (cost £45), booked in advance before October 1.

ROYAL SOCIETY OF MEDICINE

Hypnosis and Psychosomatic Medicine Section

*Healing the Subconscious: Dissociation
and the Power of Belief*

Monday 9 December 2013

Venue: Royal Society of Medicine,
1 Wimpole Street, London, W1G 0AE

RSM members: £30- 50

Non RSM members: £45-£75

3.30 pm Registration, tea and coffee

3.55 pm Welcome and introduction.

Dr Rumi Peynovska, President,
Hypnosis and Psychosomatic Medicine
Section, Royal Society of Medicine

4.00 pm Rescued by the subconscious?

**New and ancient ways of inner work -
psychiatry's opportunity.** Dr Alan
Sanderson, Consultant Psychiatrist, Co-
founder and Chair, Spirit Release
Foundation

**5.00 pm Dissociation and beliefs in
reincarnation in children.** Professor
Simon Dein, Honorary Professor,
Durham University and Senior Lecturer
at University College London

6.00 pm Tea and coffee break

The David Waxman Memorial Lecture

**6.30 pm Personal identity and its
preservation over time.** Dr Michael
Heap, Chartered Clinical and Forensic
Psychologist, Sheffield

Register online at:

[http://www.rsm.ac.uk/academ/hye01.php?utm_source=SilverpopMailing&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=HYE01%20-%20Solus%20-%20sections%20\(1\)&utm_content=.](http://www.rsm.ac.uk/academ/hye01.php?utm_source=SilverpopMailing&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=HYE01%20-%20Solus%20-%20sections%20(1)&utm_content=)

LOGIC AND INTUITION: ANSWERS

The answers are as follows:

The Hector McTavish paradox

The explanation that the Scots would give us for Hector's unusual achievement is that (i) the average IQ in Scotland is indeed higher than in England; (ii) Hector's decision to move to England must indicate that he is *less* intelligent than his fellow Scots who remain north of the border; **but** (iii) he is

still more intelligent than the average English person!

Wages in Hungoo

This is quite possible if the following circumstances hold: (i) the population of West Hungoo is much higher than East Hungoo; (ii) there are many more Chinese than English speakers in West Hungoo (iii); the average wage of *all*

people in West Hungoo is much higher than that of East Hungoo; and (iv) there are many more English speakers than Chinese speakers in East Hungoo.

You may test this out with the figures in the table below.

This puzzle is similar to one on proportions that appeared in the Autumn 2008 issue of the *Skeptical Adversaria*.

	Number of English speaking earners	Average wage of English speakers	Number of Chinese speaking earners	Average wage of Chinese speakers
West Hungoo	50K	50K	150K	40K
East Hungoo	50K	20K	10K	15K

THE ASSOCIATION FOR SKEPTICAL ENQUIRY (ASKE)

- ASKE is committed to the application of rational, objective and scientific methods to the investigation and understanding of ideas, claims, and practices, especially those of an extraordinary and paranormal nature.
- ASKE is committed to challenging the uncritical promotion of beliefs and claims which are unsupported or contradicted by existing objective and scientific knowledge.
- ASKE opposes the misinterpretation and misrepresentation of science for purposes which deceive the public.
- ASKE supports the objective evaluation of all medical or psychological techniques offered to the public and opposes the uncritical promotion of techniques which are unsupported or contradicted by existing scientific knowledge.
- ASKE supports all efforts to promote the public awareness of the rational and scientific understanding of extraordinary and paranormal claims.
- ASKE is committed to a rational understanding of the reasons and motives which underlie the promotion and acceptance of irrational and paranormal claims and beliefs.
- ASKE accepts the rights of individuals to choose for themselves their beliefs about the world.

About ASKE

Founded in 1997, ASKE is an association of 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 magazine and newsletter. 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:

m.heap@sheffield.ac.uk

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email: aske1@talktalk.net;
website: <<http://www.aske-skeptics.org.uk>>.