

THE SKEPTICAL INTELLIGENCER

The Quarterly Magazine of ASKE
THE ASSOCIATION FOR SKEPTICAL ENQUIRY
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Incorporating the Skeptical Adversaria: the ASKE Newsletter

Edited by Michael Heap

To access a Word or pdf copy of this issue, please contact the Editor at m.heap@sheffield.ac.uk. If you are an ASKE member in the UK and would like a paper copy, again email the Editor.

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Editor's Announcement

ASKE's *Skeptical Intelligencer* 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. Details about house style are available from the Editor. We also welcome writers who would like to contribute a regular column - e.g. an 'On the Fringe' feature or take over one of the regular features.



FROM THE ASKE CHAIR

Michael Heap

The ASKE Paranormal Challenge (*Continued*)

In the previous 'From the ASKE Chair' I talked about ASKE's revised Paranormal Challenge (*note 1*) and some of the few claimants that have applied. I shall now mention two more recent claims, neither of which proceeded to the testing stage.

The first of these came in the form of an email request from a gentleman who wanted to enter for the ASKE Challenge and asked if we could meet up so that he could demonstrate his telekinetic ability. He attached a video of himself seemingly causing a page in a book to wave about by moving his hand back and forth in front of it (the page was supported in the upright position). I asked him to complete the ASKE Challenge form and specify how he proposed to eliminate natural effects that could cause the movement (which I suggested might be tricky). He then sent me a video of himself causing a pendulum to swing slightly, again by moving his hand towards and away from it. The obvious flaw was that he was holding the pendulum in his other hand. I reminded him that he must send me the ASKE Challenge form but I haven't heard from him since.

The second claimant contacted ASKE, describing himself as 'a paranormal investigator', stating that he understood that ASKE was offering 'a cash prize for anybody able to manifest a ghost/ spirit in a controlled condition'. He informed me that he travels the country helping people suffering from paranormal problems and does this with the aid of his Sumerian demon friend 'Kara' whom he has captured on camera many times. I asked him what form Kara took and he sent me an email attachment of what he said was an image of Kara; this was a photo of the living room of a house and I could see nothing unusual. Another email followed and he gave

more details of Kara and a YouTube link to a video of her appearing in a derelict building where he is standing. There was further correspondence and more links to YouTube.

From these videos it is evident that what he identifies as Kara is a brownish – greyish mist, roughly disc shaped, moving in an arc from one side of the screen to the other; this apparition is not noticed at the time but is only evident when viewing the video recording afterwards. As I informed the claimant, that's all science can say about it. So his claim as it stands is that while he is, say, sitting in a room the visual effect that I have just described will appear on a video-recording. On the other videos, what I take to be one of the unusual visual manifestations in question is the regular occurrence of a small patch of light moving quickly around the screen. This resembles the light from a hand mirror or other reflecting object when it hits a surface (*note 1*). Again that's all we can say about it. So his claim would be as stated above, but this time the visual effect is as just described (*note 2*).

Odd, incidental effects are seen and heard on video recordings that may have mundane explanations.

I impressed upon the claimant that he would need to describe in exact terms what he is predicting will happen so that if it does happen no one can be in any doubt that the claimed effect has occurred. (I made the mistake of not stipulating this in the case of a test of electronic voice phenomenon that I referred to in the last issue and which thus caused all sorts of problems.) This was particularly important in view of the fact that according to the claimant, Kara can take anything up to 45 minutes to put in an appearance on the

recording. Odd, incidental effects are seen and heard on video recordings that may have mundane explanations, so if one leaves the camera running for long enough there's a good chance of something turning up that one might interpret as unusual (favourites seem to be orbs, which photographers can explain without resort to the paranormal).

Our correspondence petered out after this and I am sure the gentleman was disappointed. In fact more recently an aspiring applicant accused me of making the test of his claimed paranormal ability impossible for him to pass! This was not the case but I understood his point of view. One difficulty is that ASKE is limited in the time and resources that may be required to carry out a rigorous test that will yield unequivocal results, one way or the other. To put this in perspective, you may recall that in 1973 the magician Mr Uri Geller (who, incidentally now claims he is using his telepathic powers to prevent Theresa May deciding to leave the EU - see *note 3*) was investigated by parapsychologists at Stanford Research Institute. The investigators concluded that Mr Geller had 'demonstrated his paranormal perceptual ability in a convincing and unambiguous manner' (see Wikipedia entry for Uri Geller). However, experts subsequently discovered flaws in the way these experiments were conducted (*op. cit.*) which could provide mundane explanations for the positive results.

Notes

1. My wife tells me that when she was a child this was called an 'iggy more'. I can only find one reference to this on the internet, where the term is rendered as 'icky more'.
2. The video links are available from me for anyone with a genuine interest.
3. <http://tinyurl.com/yyv7f47g>



LOGIC AND INTUITION

Balls again

A lot of puzzles about probability (which often turn out to be more like problems of logic, so don't give up on this one) involve black and white balls being drawn from bags (or coloured socks drawn from drawers). Here's a nice one. I have a bag containing one ball which has an even chance of being black or white. Into the bag I put a black ball. Then I draw out one of the two balls.

(i) What is the probability that the ball I draw out is white?

(ii) If the ball I draw out is white, what is the probability that the remaining ball is black?

(iii) If the ball I draw out is black, what is the probability that the remaining ball is black?

The answers are on page 20

Brothers and sisters

This is one for you to work on before the Autumn issue – and you are

welcome to send to the editor (for publication here) what you think the answer is and, in particular, what the simplest explanation is for your answer. The puzzle is simply 'Do boys have more sisters than girls do?' Assume randomness throughout.

This is quite a well-known puzzle but I urge you not Google it!



THE EUROPEAN SCENE

European Council for Skeptics Organisations

There are quite a number of countries with national skeptical organisations, many of which are affiliated to ECSO. 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/> (which has an email contact facility)
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/skeptics.eu/>
ECSO also has a Twitter handle, @SkepticsEurope.

The ECSO website now has a comprehensive calendar of skeptical events taking place across Europe, replicated at the ESP website (below).

The ESP - European Skeptics Podcast



Building a bridge for skeptics

<http://theesp.eu/>

At the time of writing the number of podcasts is now up to 174 ('Eating beaver').

You'll also find a comprehensive calendar of event of skeptical interest taking place all over Europe at:

http://theesp.eu/events_in_europe

European Skeptics Congress 2019

See 'Meetings' this issue.

Reporting clinical trials in Europe

'This report assesses the reporting performance of the 30 European universities that have sponsored the largest number of clinical trials governed by the incoming EU Clinical Trials Regulation. Together, these universities have sponsored 4,575 clinical trials. Results are verifiably due for 940 of these trials. However, only 162 of verifiably due trials (17%) have made their results public on the EU Clinical Trials Register. The remaining 778 trials (83%) are in violation of EU transparency rules.

'Most of the 778 clinical trials verifiably missing results were run by universities in Denmark (246 trials), Austria (225), and Germany (117).

'None of the assessed universities in France, Italy, Norway and Sweden have made a single clinical trial result public on the registry. Some universities in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands have also not posted results for any of their clinical trials. Only some UK universities perform

well, with some institutions now boasting reporting rates of over 80%.'

For further accounts see:

<http://tinyurl.com/y3d6jgtr>

and

<http://tinyurl.com/y289azgz>

and

<http://tinyurl.com/yxzhx68o>

European Manifesto Against Pseudo-Therapies

You are invited to sign the European Manifesto against Pseudo-Therapies at: <http://pseudoscience-manifesto.apetp.com>.

The request comes from the Association to Protect the Sick from Pseudoscientific Therapies at:

www.apetp.com:

'I am writing this email from Spain, to inform you that we are making a manifesto focused on Europe (although we are not closed to signing people from all over the world) that aims to bring together more than 15,000 scientists against pseudoscientific practices that produce a danger to the sick and the citizens. We talk about practices like homeopathy, acupuncture, bio-magnetic pair, Reiki and so on and so on. We have experience in this type of manifestos, and their results at the media and political level are very important.

Recently we managed to gather 1,500 scientists from Spain, and we managed to appear in newspapers and televisions in many countries: See:

<http://tinyurl.com/y8twg4jv>

‘The objective in this manifesto would be to get media attention worldwide, and to point out the European directive 2001/83/CE as one of the causes of millions of citizens a year being deceived by homeopathy.’

‘We are looking for help in all possible countries of the entire skeptical movement, to get spread and organize the collection of signatures. The manifesto, its translation into English and other languages, as well as the web platform to show it and collect the signatures, will be ready by the end of next week. However, we need help in every possible country.’

Belgium



Willem Betz

From SKEPP, the Belgium skeptics society:

‘As you have probably already read in the press, on our Facebook page or our website, our Honorary Chairman Prof. Em. Dr. Willem Betz died on Saturday, June 8, 2019. He was 76 years old and had been ill for a long time.’

‘Wim Betz was one of the founders of SKEPP in 1990. He was first secretary and from 2005 to 2013 chairman of SKEPP. He was known worldwide as a critic of homeopathy and other unproven medicine.’

‘Wim Betz was first a general practitioner and later a general

practitioner in medicine at the VUB. As such, he was regularly confronted with alternative medicine. Unprejudiced as he was, he initially took courses on such remedies. However, he soon had to conclude that its effect was not proven and that success was due to psychological causes.

‘Wim therefore criticized attempts to give homeopathy, acupuncture, osteopathy and chiropractic any form of recognition, such as with the controversial Colla Act of 1999. Betz pointed out that one could just as well recognise the laying on of hands or healing by prayer because the results are neither better nor worse. This position sometimes led to lively discussions with opponents, sometimes on television.’

‘The fact that to this day it has still not been possible to recognise alternative medicine in Belgium is partly due to the critical voice of Wim Betz.’

‘Wim Betz received the Outstanding Skeptics Award from the European Council of Skeptic Organizations (ECSO) in 2012. In 2011, he was the first Belgian to receive the Bruinsma Erepennig Brothers Award from the Dutch Society Against Quackery. Wim was also a fellow of our American sister association CSI (formerly CSICOP).’

‘Wim has always assisted us with advice and action and was an important source of information for all of us. We’re going to miss him.’

Germany

From Brit Hermes, former practitioner of naturopathic medicine, now a vocal critic:

‘On May 24, 2019, the District Court (Landgericht) of Kiel, Germany

ruled against naturopathic cancer quack Colleen Huber in a defamation lawsuit she brought against me. Huber filed suit in September 2017 over my opinions about the dubious treatments and human subjects research at her cancer clinic in Tempe, Arizona (USA), and also over my suspicions that Huber was cybersquatting domains in my name.....’ Read more at:

<http://tinyurl.com/y3naa23m>

From Edzard Ernst:

‘German homeopathy has had a free ride for about 200 years. But, since a few years, critics have started voicing their opposition pointing out that homeopathy lacks evidence of effectiveness. Sales figures, previously in excess of 600 million Euros, have thus started to decline. As a result the homeopathic industry has begun to fight back – as previously discussed, not always by honest or fair means.’

‘Now, a new development has taken place; a manufacturer of homeopathic remedies, Hevert, has sent legal letters to several critics of homeopathy in an attempt to stop them stating that homeopathy is not effective beyond placebo. Failing to abide by this demand would be punishable with a huge fine of 5 100 Euros.’

<http://tinyurl.com/yy2dwtj9>

Romania

The power of the Internet has allowed Romania’s busy witch community to gradually migrate their ancient practices onto the Web. See:

<http://tinyurl.com/yy2dwtj9>



MEDICINE ON THE FRINGE

Michael Heap

In the vanishingly unlikely event that something happens between now and my demise that elevates my status to that of ‘celebrity’ and the editors of the Oxford Dictionary of Quotations feel obliged to include in its pages something that I have said, I should like it to be this:

‘If you survey healing throughout history and across contemporary cultures, and even within our own culture, you will encounter an extraordinary and fascinating range of human behaviour and beliefs, bounded only by the healer’s own imagination and the compliance of those seeking to be healed, and therefore unbounded. I think this is more so than in any context other than religion’ (*note 1*).’ (*Is this the best you can do?—Ed*).

So now think what happens when healing and religion get together.

In previous issues of the *Skeptical Intelligencer* the ‘Of Interest’ columns have reported the promotion and sale of a substance more commonly used as an industrial bleach, under the guise that it provides a cure for an extraordinary range of diseases and conditions including cancer, HIV/Aids, and malaria. It is also promoted as a cure for autism. This panacea is known as Miracle Mineral Solution or Master Mineral Solution (MMS). MMS contains sodium chlorite, a chemical used mainly as a textile bleaching agent and disinfectant. The sodium chlorite is mixed with an acid, such as the juices of citrus fruits, producing chlorine dioxide, a toxic chemical that can cause nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, low blood pressure and renal failure.

Recently (*note 2*) Robert Baldwin, an American pastor from New Jersey, backed by a British ‘former clairvoyant’ called Sam Little, has been running a network that has given MMS to up to 50,000 Ugandans. On 23.5.19 the Ugandan police arrested

Little at a village church in Kitembi in western Uganda. According to Wikipedia; ‘Baldwin operates under “Global Healing”, the ministry he founded, which uses “the power of Almighty God ... to greatly reduce the loss of life”. Baldwin offers smartphones to clerics as an incentive to spread the “miracle cure”.’

In June 2019 it was reported from Texas that the mother of four autistic children filmed herself feeding one of them for the first time with the bleach solution.

This is not the only religious connection. In October 2016 a man who calls himself ‘the archbishop’, Mark Grenon of the ‘Genesis II Church’, claimed that MMS cures virtually every illness and disease, including breast cancer, diabetes, HIV, autism, leukaemia and herpes ‘just with the one drop an hour’ (*note 3*). Despite his exposure by ABC News, he is still making a good living promoting MMS worldwide. Also in October 2016, in Ireland a leading Co Kildare member of the Genesis II Church, ‘Bishop’ Patrick Merlehan, was convicted at Naas District Court of manufacturing MMS not in accordance with the Health Products Regulatory Authority and with placing MMS on the market, contrary to market regulations (*note 4*).

Later, in November 2018 in Canada, Stanley Nowak of Riindel, B.C. pleaded guilty to 17 charges related to the sale of MMS. He is the first person convicted under Canada’s Food and Drug Act for marketing, packaging and selling the product (*note 5*). More recently the Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority has issued a ban on the sale

of MMS and has advised the health minister to encourage stricter regulation of MMS in Europe.

In June 2019 it was reported from Texas that the mother of four autistic children filmed herself feeding one of them for the first time with the bleach solution (*note 6*). A police review of social media posts revealed that throughout the last year, she had given regular doses to two of her children, aged 27 and 28.

In fact, according to *Business Insider* (*note 7*) hundreds of videos that promote MMS as a cure for autism have been discovered on YouTube, some appearing in the top three search results for ‘autism cure’. *Business Insider* also reports that MMS has caused dozens of injuries and two deaths in the US. YouTube removed most of the videos after they were reported by the publication.

How has it come about that the poor and the sick are being persuaded to swallow bleach in the name of religion? The name Miracle Mineral Solution was coined by a former Scientologist Jim Humble in 2006 in a self-published book *The Miracle Mineral Solution of the 21st Century*. On his website he says this:

‘I want to tell you about a breakthrough that can save your life, or the life of a loved one. In 1996, while on a gold mining expedition in South America, I discovered that chlorine dioxide quickly eradicates malaria. Since that time, it has proven to restore partial or full health to hundreds of thousands of people suffering from a wide range of disease, including cancer, diabetes, hepatitis A, B, C, Lyme disease, MRSA, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson’s, Alzheimer’s, HIV/AIDS, malaria, autism, infections of all kinds, arthritis, high cholesterol, acid reflux, kidney or liver diseases, aches and pains, allergies, urinary tract

infections, digestive problems, high blood pressure, obesity, parasites, tumors and cysts, depression, sinus problems, eye disease, ear infections, dengue fever, skin problems, dental issues, problems with prostate (high PSA), erectile dysfunction and the list goes on. This is by far not a comprehensive list.' (note 8)

Humble by name

There is, incidentally, a disclaimer at the bottom of the website stating, 'The protocols described on this site are official sacraments of the Genesis II Church of Health and Healing.'

Notes

1. Heap, M. (2002) Healing and therapy in the age of mass affluence. *Skeptical Intelligencer*, 5, 3-13.

2. <http://tinyurl.com/y3u83txx>
3. <http://tinyurl.com/hbvlqhw> and <http://tinyurl.com/y4medq2w>
4. <http://tinyurl.com/jz38dse>
5. <http://tinyurl.com/y7cmdres>
6. <http://tinyurl.com/yxlu6xuz>
7. <http://tinyurl.com/y6qnlur4>
8. <https://jimhumble.co/>



LANGUAGE ON THE FRINGE

Mark Newbrook

Riders on recent items!

In 'Language on the Fringe' 42 and 43 I referred to the claims of Evan & Steven Strong and others to the effect that Australian Aboriginal peoples ranged widely across the Earth and that their traditional lore is highly reliable; see also Lynne Kelly's *The Memory Code*, which I reviewed in *The Skeptical Intelligencer* 21:2 (2018). There are indeed various strong claims about early Australia, including those of Bill Gammage, who holds that under Aboriginal tutelage much of pre-colonial Australia resembled cultivated parkland rather than semi-desert as is usually imagined (see his 2011 book *The Biggest Estate on Earth*). And (without embracing the more extreme ideas in this area) one should acknowledge that the pre-colonial Aboriginal peoples may have been considerably more able, in surprising domains, than some C19-20 accounts suggest. For example, Duane W. Hamacher (writing in 2017; see Note 1) states: 'Aboriginal Australians carefully observe the properties and positions of stars, including both overt and subtle changes in their brightness, for subsistence and social application. These observations are encoded in oral tradition.' This includes 'two oral traditions from South Australia that describe the periodic changing brightness in three pulsating, red-giant variable stars: Betelgeuse (Alpha Orionis), Aldebaran (Alpha Tauri), and

Antares (Alpha Scorpii). The Australian Aboriginal accounts stand as the only known descriptions of pulsating variable stars in any Indigenous oral tradition in the world.' The relevant information was missed (perhaps through failure to realise that such things were possible) by earlier ethnographic researchers, who apparently misidentified some astronomical references and more generally had little knowledge of astronomy. If this finding is confirmed, it is obviously very much to the credit of these pre-technological astronomers. The much respected Hellenistic Greek astronomers (who did note outright 'novae', stars not previously seen) were unaware of such variations.

'Aboriginal Australians carefully observe the properties and positions of stars, including both overt and subtle changes in their brightness, for subsistence and social application.'

Secondly: again in 'Language on the Fringe' 43, I discussed the question of the historical validity or otherwise of oral narratives. There is an associated issue involving the statuses of **written** historical narratives (etc.) on the one hand and archaeological evidence (often not transparent) on the other. The astute and diligent Jason Colavito has now raised the specific

case of claims regarding Viking women warriors, discussed in one episode of Megan Fox's often 'fringy' TV documentary series *Legends of the Lost*. Fox's show diverges into more overtly 'fringe' topics such as dowsing and ley-lines, but she starts by suggesting that mainstream scholars have denied the existence of these female warriors, which she and others have only recently proposed. She is supported on this point by the bio-archaeologist Cat Jarman, who specifically accuses Colavito and others of wrongly claiming that mainstream scholars are in principle quite amenable to this notion. But in fact, as Colavito responds, mainstream scholars are **not** dismissive of the issue; they themselves been discussing it seriously since C19. As often occurs, the real issue for Jarman and such is not that scholars have not discussed the matter but rather that they have come to the 'wrong' conclusions!

What is more genuinely interesting here is the point that most of the evidence **for** Viking women warriors is textual evidence. Although much of this material is late in date and/or of mythological character; it is this which inspires scholars (many of them female) such as Judith Jesch and the overtly feminist Mary Wilhelmine Williams who accept the notion. But the archaeological evidence is **much** scantier. Those mainstream scholars who prefer to rely on archaeology – including Harold Williams, who

somewhat ironically defends Fox against Colavito's specific criticisms – tend to regard Viking women warriors as a feature of 'pseudo-history'.

Similar issues regarding the status of types of evidence arose in the once- vexed question of whether or not the Vikings reached the New World: the literary evidence of the sagas and the contentious Vinland Map versus the lack of archaeological evidence until the discovery in 1960 of the obviously Norse site at L'Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland (which did not resolve the issue of the Map's authenticity but **did** give a positive answer to the basic question; a second site has recently been reported elsewhere in Newfoundland).

For Colavito's thought and for links, see Note 2.

Thirdly: I refer to my comments about racism in 'Language on the Fringe' 35, 37 and 42. On 23/1/19 I viewed the exhibition 'Bodies of Colour: Breaking with stereotypes in the wallpaper collection' at the Whitworth Gallery, Manchester. The 'blurb' stated: 'Racism is a system of oppression originating from the belief in the superiority of white people over others'. Racism is surely itself a belief or attitude as well as a system of oppression; but, far more importantly, it is **not** confined to white supremacists (although admittedly racism of this kind has probably been the most damaging of late). For example, I myself was at times the victim of some low-key racism at the hands of Chinese people in Hong Kong (many Chinese people believe that as a 'race' they are morally and culturally superior). When I made my point to the gallery invigilator (I was apparently not the first), I was invited to leave a written comment, which I did. Perhaps predictably, I have received no feedback!

Finally, I return to the case of the Silpho Moor Disk, which I discussed last time. Three specific points: 1) It may be that Longbottom's phrase 'positions relative to the line' refers (obscurely) to the various **orientations** of the characters, not (as I had

imagined) height above or below a (notional) line along which they were written; if this is so, my comment about his 'sophistication' is invalid. 2) I referred to the script as a cipher; it should be added that some ciphers (obviously not this one) involve the **same** script (usually an alphabet) but scrambled (for example, X represents A, etc.). 3) Although Egyptian hieroglyphs are much the most familiar to non-linguists, the term *hieroglyph* is also used for some other scripts of this type (pictorial/logographic, often though not always used in a priestly context); the best example is 'Anatolian hieroglyphs', once known (somewhat inaccurately) as 'Hieroglyphic Hittite'.

J is for Jesus

On 9/2/19, back in Manchester, I was walking across Piccadilly Gardens and came upon a stall run by a vocal group of locally-based fundamentalist Christians with a major (and well-informed) focus upon the Old Testament, including knowledge of the original Hebrew text. When engaged in conversation, the main-man ranted rather than discussing issues calmly, but some key points involving my own discipline nevertheless became clear; two of these stand out.

Firstly, these people reject the overwhelming mainstream scholarly opinion that the consonantal 'tetragrammaton' YHWH was the original name of the Hebrew God. (Jewish believers carefully refrain from pronouncing YHWH, and to avoid accidents it is furnished with vowel-diacritics which obviously belong to another word, hence the term *the Lord* frequently used of God in *Genesis* and elsewhere. Readers may recall the parody involving the English form of YHWH, *Jehovah*, in the Monty Python movie *Life of Brian*!) David Leonardi, on whose work I have repeatedly commented in this forum, holds that the C7 CE 'Masoretic' revision of the Biblical Hebrew writing system, which introduced the vowel-diacritics in their current form, thereby distorted the text and its meaning in crucial ways; but

the Manchester group appear to believe that even some of the 'sacred' and thus officially immutable consonants have been at least misinterpreted and that the relevant texts and the associated theology have therefore been misconstrued by almost all later scholars (this is exemplified by their non-standard view of the status of the form YHWH).

These people reject the overwhelming mainstream scholarly opinion that the consonantal 'tetragrammaton' YHWH was the original name of the Hebrew God.

Secondly, and closer to home for me, the group make much of the fact that the letter J is the newest of the 26 letters of the English version (and similar continental versions) of the Roman Alphabet; they accurately state that it began to be distinguished systematically from I in 1524. J is in origin the consonantal version of the Roman vowel-letter I, representing the sound [j], now usually spelled in English with Y, as in *yellow*; in Classical Latin only I was used, but later the two (phonetically similar but structurally contrasting) sounds came to be distinguished in writing. (The same applies to U and V as a pair.) Subsequently, J came in English and in French, Spanish, etc. to have other sound-values, but in German and Dutch it still represents [j].) Biblical Hebrew names beginning with the sequence [j] + a vowel were spelled in New Testament Greek with I (iota) and in Latin with I and later with J; the latter spelling passed into English (etc.). This is why the name *Jesus*, specifically, is spelled with a J, now pronounced the same as G before 'front' vowels as in *George*.

The group displayed (and orally supported) a poster claiming that because J arose as late as it did *Jesus* cannot be the true name of the Christian Messiah (and should therefore not be used, for fear of divine

anger!). But of course it has never been suggested that it was the original form of the name (except perhaps by those who are so badly informed that they think that the New Testament was composed in English!). *Jesus* (pronounced ‘Jee-zus’) is the name of this man (if he existed as an individual, as now seems to be the majority view) **in Modern English**, just as *Germany* is the English name of the country which its natives call *Deutschland* and *Athens* the English name of the city which the Ancient Greeks called *At^hēnai*. Jesus is called *Yeshua* in Hebrew and will also have been so called in Aramaic, his first language, and it is this word which was represented in Greek as *Iēsous* and then in Latin as *Jesus*, hence the English version; but we are not obliged to call Jesus *Yeshua* in English. The crass incoherence and tendentiousness of this claim, grounded as it supposedly is in details of the history of the letter J which would strike many readers/listeners as novel and perhaps as impressively learned, must reduce one’s respect for the otherwise scholarly impression which these people make (despite the extreme character of some of their notions). And indeed (as with many other such people) linguistics as such does not appear to be among their strengths.

Can you speak Ummo?

I referred above to my material in the last issue on the Silpho Moor Disk. As I indicated at the end of the article, there are various other accounts of what purports to be the written language of extraterrestrial aliens. Discussion of various such proposals can be found in Chapter 5 of my 2013 book *Strange Linguistics*. One belief-system which I did not manage to include in the book is Ummo or Ummoism: a long series of associated claims (dating mainly from the period 1966-80) that beings from a planet called Ummo were communicating with selected humans in France and Spain, sending them letters and other documents. It was rapidly conjectured that Ummo was an elaborate hoax, and

eventually one José Luis Jordán Peña claimed responsibility; but some groups of believers persist. The prominent (if excessively lauded) ufologist Jacques Vallée was quoted at one stage as regarding Ummo as possibly genuine.

The key initial report involved a claimed sighting of ‘an enormous circular object with three legs and, on its underside, a curious symbol: three vertical lines joined by a horizontal bar. The two exterior lines curved outward at the edges ...’ (see Mike Dash’s 2000 book *Borderlands: The Ultimate Exploration of the Unknown*). Following this the spate of documents began – apparently type-written, received in the mail, and all bearing this same symbol.

Ummo or Ummoism: a long series of associated claims that beings from a planet called Ummo were communicating with selected humans in France and Spain.

Much later, in 2002, an author using the pseudonym Jean Pollion published a book in French titled *Ummo, de Vrais Extraterrestres* (‘Ummo, real extraterrestrials’), in which he analyses the thoughts and language of the ‘Ummites’ as revealed in their supposed output. He argues that the Ummo language is unique in that it has no vocabulary of the usual kind but instead has only 18 basic symbols (‘soncepts’) which in various combinations make up ‘functional’ descriptions of whatever entity is in question. An analogy would be an alphabetic system in which each letter (whether or not it corresponded with a phoneme or other phonological unit, or the equivalent in a non-oral system such as a sign language) was not itself meaningless (as occurs in all human languages written in this way; the meanings of human words can be ascribed only to the **series** of letters of which they are composed) but contributed a specific component of

meaning to the meaning of the entire word – and in the case of Ummo a ‘functional’ component, though the exact force of this term appears obscure in context.

Such a system is possible in principle but would struggle to deal with a large set of concepts such as are easily represented by the vocabularies of human languages (whatever kind of system is used to represent them in writing). Pollion does not adequately explicate his proposed analysis. For discussion of the issues which arise in such cases, see Chapter 2 of my 2013 book, which covers similar non-mainstream proposals regarding ancestral human languages where all words are said to have been composed of very short (often phoneme-length) meaningful components; one such is ‘Earth Mother Sacred Language’ as presented by John J. White. (But it does have to be acknowledged that **some** of the problems which arise here might not be relevant to putative aliens with different mental attributes.) Pollion’s account of Ummo also illustrates again the tendency of linguistic amateurs to confuse language and script which emerges in the Silpho Moor case, and the further tendency (also off-target) to regard script rather than linguistic structures (spoken, etc.) as primary.

Isolated or I-E?

On 22/12/18 I was in a queue for the ‘Magic Lanterns’ show at the Botanic Gardens in Birmingham, and I fell into conversation with a local lady of Pakistani origin who proved to be a native speaker of Burushaski – the first I had ever met! Burushaski is spoken in the far north of Pakistan and (as this well-informed lady knew well) is generally regarded as ‘genetically’ isolated (though replete with loan-words from the surrounding Indic languages such as Urdu). Several attempts have been made to establish ‘genetic’ relationships between Burushaski and apparently unrelated languages – including the particularly expansive proposals of David Leonardi’s ‘hero’ Merritt Ruhlen and

his ally Sergei Starostin, who proclaim large networks of early ‘genetic’ relationships regarded in the mainstream as at the very least unproven. Most notably, Ilija Casule argues that Burushaski is in fact an Indo-European language, albeit not Indic or Indo-Iranian. He claims that ‘by applying the most stringent principles of the comparative historical method’ he has identified nearly two hundred Burushaski words which display firm Indo-European correspondences (mainly involving velar consonants) with the ancient Anatolian/Balkan IE languages (most notably Phrygian and Thracian) and also with Baltic (Lithuanian, etc.) and Slavic. Casule’s proposals appear inadequately argued. They are reported in his 2009 book *Burushaski as an Indo-European “Kentum” Language: Reflexes of the Indo-European Gutturals in Burushaski*. (The term *Kentum* refers to one of the two posited early branches of I-E, which – with the

exception of Tokharian, found in manuscripts of C6-8 CE – was located in Europe. If Casule were right, Burushaski might perhaps be a distant relative of Tokharian.)

The main other mysterious language of Pakistan is Brahui, which is spoken in Balochistan, a very different part of the country. Brahui is a Dravidian language related to Tamil, Malayalam, etc.; all these other Dravidian languages are spoken far away in Southern India. Some people believe (partly for political reasons) that the undeciphered Indus Valley Script (dating mainly from the 2nd Millennium BCE) represents Dravidian; many of these invoke Brahui, which they interpret as a survivor of early Dravidian domination in the region. But there are other, mainstream accounts of the situation of Brahui suggesting that the language was transplanted to the region at a much later date. For a summary of the issue, see J.H. Elfenstein, ‘A periplus

of the “Brahui problem”’, *Studia Iranica*, 16 (1987), pp. 215-233.

As I have remarked before, the identity of the Indus Valley language is a thorny issue in India and Pakistan. Recent findings involving ancient DNA have sparked fresh debate, at varying levels of sophistication and at times displaying the usual ‘axes to grind’ involving the religions and language-affiliations of the various writers. In particular, it has now been proposed that there were **two** early ‘invasions’ of what is now Pakistan from the west, one before the peak of the Indus Valley Civilisation and one – bringing early I-E in the form of Sanskrit into the Subcontinent – towards the end of it. By no means all South Asians will readily embrace such a view, whatever the strength of the evidence.

Notes

1. <https://arxiv.org/abs/1709.04634>
2. <http://tinyurl.com/yxfkpgwd>



CORRESPONDENCE

ASKE has received the following request for support from the Waldorf-Anthroposophy-Steiner Survivors Only Support Group (*note 1*).

Occult Movement Attempting to Silence Criticism

I’m asking for help in preventing Anthroposophy—an esoteric movement founded by occultist Rudolf Steiner at the turn of the 20th century—from silencing a critic who has insider knowledge of its controversial Waldorf schools and its so-called complementary medical practices (*note 2*).

The ever-growing number of Waldorf schools is currently over 1,200 in 60 countries. Waldorf PR promotes them as developmentally appropriate and academically rigorous. Critics challenge these claims. The website of People for Legal and Nonsectarian Schools has described Waldorf schools as the missionary arm of Anthroposophy. A US study by

David Jelinek, PhD, and Li-Ling Sun, PhD, found theories and ideas throughout the Waldorf science curriculum that are based on pseudoscience, virtually no Waldorf educators surveyed or interviewed kept abreast of current trends and research in science education, and the justification for Waldorf education seemed to be a diatribe against public schooling and the science education research community. The study concluded that Rudolf Steiner’s pseudoscientific ideology should be removed from the science curriculum.

Grégoire Perra is a former Waldorf student, Waldorf teacher and high-level Anthroposophist-turned-whistleblower. He has a blog (*note 3*) where he has posted dozens of articles in French

confirming much of what other critics of Waldorf schools and Anthroposophical medicine have been working to expose. Additionally, Grégoire has shared this information in videos and interviews. Some of his articles have been published in English at (*note 4*). These are the main issues critics have with Waldorf schools:

- The surreptitious presence of occult beliefs throughout the Waldorf curriculum and other school activities;
- The teaching of pseudoscience;
- The anti-science and anti-technology stance, which (unknown to most parents) is based on a belief that science and technology are the domain of a demon named Ahriman;

- Anthroposophy's belief that people reincarnate through different races, with dark-skinned people being the least spiritually evolved and so-called Aryans being the most spiritually evolved;
- A history of failing to deal with bullying based on a belief that it is the victim's karma to be bullied;
- Serious safety issues, possibly due to belief in karma and reliance on students' guardian angels;
- Sexual, physical, and other inappropriate teacher behavior;
- Anthroposophic medicine, which not only prescribes scientifically unproven treatments manufactured by Anthroposophic businesses but also subscribes to the belief that vaccinations can interfere with karma;
- High numbers of unvaccinated students, which in some cases have led to disease breakouts;

- Deceptive PR and lack of honesty about the true nature of Waldorf education.

In 2013, Anthroposophists filed a lawsuit against Grégoire and UNADFI, the French anti-cult organization that published his article, "The Anthroposophical Indoctrination of Students in Steiner-Waldorf Schools." The Anthroposophists lost. Now, however, they have filed three separate lawsuits against Grégoire for speaking and writing about what he witnessed during his years as a Waldorf teacher and his experiences with Anthroposophic medicine. It appears as if they might be trying to bankrupt him in order to shut down his blog and permanently silence him.

Anthroposophists have a right to believe what they want to believe, but in my opinion the sick do not deserve to be misled and possibly put in danger by purveyors of treatments that are not evidence-based and today's children

deserve an education based on reality rather than on the teachings of a long dead occultist.

To successfully defend his right to promote reason over supernatural beliefs and prevent further moves to gag critics, Grégoire needs help with funding for his legal costs. His crowdfunding site has raised just over 75 percent of the needed amount. This is a request for donations to help reach the finish line. Donations can be made in any amount at [Soutenir le lanceur d'alerte grégoire perra](http://Soutenir-le-lanceur-d-alerte-grégoire.perra) (note 5). Even the smallest donation helps get closer to the finish line.

Notes

1. <http://www.waldorfcritics.org/index.html>
2. <http://tinyurl.com/y5hkpff8>
3. <https://veritesteiner.wordpress.com/>
4. <http://tinyurl.com/y4xt969g>
5. <http://tinyurl.com/y5jkhj4>

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ASKE has received the following letter from a lady who consulted 'a clairvoyant'.

On consulting a clairvoyant

'I'm compelled to write this as I'm fuming! I bought a living social voucher for a reading from Ani Marshall. When I complained that the reading is like an extract out of the book, 'The Secret' she responds by saying 'Hang on to it, it will resonate with you'! NO, it'll resonate with everyone who read the book. Sorry for the rant, please see the reading below.'

The reading

'A clairvoyant reading is a reading in which I connect with spirit and your higher self and am given messages, symbols or images to represent you and your situation. In readings there is no clarity on timeline and I can therefore be presented with images of past, present or future situations, however I will always try my best to look at the question or query you have. Keep an open mind as you may read the messages and not connect with them at this present time, however you

may find 6 months or more down the road everything clicks into place. Sometimes spirit thinks there is other important work for you to focus on and can therefore push the reading in that direction.

'You know those moments when you glance around and feel your heart overflowing with love and appreciation for everything you have created in your life? That's what life is about: emotional fulfilment, happiness and contentment. When this card appears in a Tarot reading, you are content in all aspects of your life – relationships, work, lifestyle, well-being and more. You are basking in the abundance of life and experiencing your emotions with such intensity and pleasure.

'Indulge and enjoy life's pleasures. This includes enjoying good food and wine, appreciating the arts, making love, relaxing in a luxurious resort or experiencing beauty. Live in the moment and give yourself permission

to indulge temporarily without any guilt about the possible negative consequences of such pleasure.

'Remember to count your blessings and express gratitude for what you have. Start or end every day by creating a mental list of the three things for which you are most grateful. Over time, you will intensify your sense of contentment and your ability to attract what you wish for – it is the Law of Attraction. If you are struggling to find the positive side of life, then expressing gratitude will help you see that you have a lot to be glad about.

'Your grounding is an energy tool that helps you filter energy from your chakras and aura back to the earth, it is a tool that is used by your energy body subconsciously. Although you are not physically aware of it, it still works to help clear your energy but most times needs to be recreated or corrected. Keeping your grounding clear and flowing is important as it can hold

stagnant energy and clog up your energy's flow. You can do this through a grounding meditation (a pre-recorded meditation can be purchased via request for £5.00, payment link sent on request) or simply by being in nature, walking on grass bare foot or through an energy clearing or healing, which I offer as a service for £20.00.

'A great way to start your day is to thank the Universe for everything, by saying thank you, thank you, thank you, you allow the Universe to acknowledge your appreciation for all that you have received and in return it

will open doors for you. Breathe in love, exhale stagnation.

'I hope I have been able to offer you some insight or different perspectives on your situation. While I believe my readings are always right, as a human, I am prone to errors in translation or interpretation. Thus, I encourage you to connect with your reading directly, and if any questions arise from your reading, look inward and ask the light within you, your inner intuitive voice, what it is you still need to see from this reading and as you study this reading and review it time and time again, I know you will find

every answer you seek. I enjoyed doing this reading for you and hope to hear from you in the future.'

Love and Light,

Ani Marshall

www.animarshall.co.uk

I offer the following services:

Recorded grounding meditation £5

Email Readings £20

Skype Readings £40

Energy Clearing £20

121 Meditation £50 for 4 sessions

Group Meditation – Mondays at 9pm GMT £5 per week (one session per week)

REVIEWS AND COMMENTARIES

MARK'S BOOKSHELF

Mark Newbrook

A Secret Vice

J.R.R. Tolkien

Edited with critical commentary by Dimitra Finn and Andrew Higgins (Harper Collins, 2016)

'A Secret Vice' is the title of an essay by J.R.R. Tolkien, delivered in 1931 as a talk to a literary society, in which Tolkien first publicly revealed his long-standing interest in invented/constructed languages (his 'secret vice'); he repeated the talk some twenty years later with modifications. It deals with a range of topics, the most prominent being that of constructed languages generally: both international auxiliary languages – the best known of which is Esperanto – and 'artistic languages' constructed for aesthetic pleasure. (Some of this latter type are mainly intended to be used in works of fiction; for obvious reasons, mostly – but not always – in science-fiction or fantasy.)

For a summary of this topic area, see Chapter 11 of my 2013 book *Strange Linguistics*, written with the help of the constructed-languages expert Alan Libert and providing many references to books on this matter by Libert and others. Included are works

on Tolkien's languages, specifically; see also the work of Carl F. Hostetter, referred to in 'Language on the Fringe' in *The Skeptical Intelligencer* 21:4 (2018).

In his essay, Tolkien also discusses (a) the relationship between the mythologies of peoples and the languages in which they are couched (and upon which they often have some influence); and (b) phonaesthetics, the study of the aesthetic effects characteristic of the phonologies (sound-systems) and word-forms of various languages (he cites Greek, Finnish and Welsh as especially 'beautiful' in this respect; the sound-patterns and indeed some of the grammatical features of Finnish and Welsh, specifically, are echoed in those of his 'Elvish' languages). In this latter area his thought overlaps somewhat with that of his fellow 'Inkling' Owen Barfield. (The Inklings were a mid-twentieth-century group of Oxford writers, literature scholars and philologists centred on Tolkien and C.S. Lewis. The text of a talk on Barfield which I gave on 21/1/19 to the philosophy discussion group in Ulverston, Cumbria which I attend is available on request.)

Tolkien's son Christopher edited his father's essay and included it in a 1983 volume of his essays; but in 2016 Dimitra Finn and Andrew Higgins published the book in question here, the first ever **critical** study of Tolkien's essay. The two scholars have also published more specific studies of Tolkien's languages, notably Higgins' 2016 article 'Tolkien's Secret Vice and "the language that is spoken in the island of Fonway"' (which deals specifically with one of Tolkien's early linguistic creations, as described by Tolkien in 'A Secret Vice').

The book in question here goes beyond the original text to discuss the significance of language-invention not only for Tolkien's own stories of Middle-Earth and his thought on these matters but also for the huge subsequent body of fantasy writing inspired in large part by Tolkien, up to George R.R. Martin's *Game of Thrones*. In this respect it forms part of a vast descriptive and critical literature, and I propose to focus here upon its discussion of Tolkien specifically. (But those with a broader interest in invented languages should pay close attention to the more general sections of the book.)

Towards the end of their book Finn & Higgins also discuss the various reactions to Tolkien's languages over the years and their profound influence upon subsequent attempts at language-invention.

Finn & Higgins emphasise the sometimes underplayed but in fact crucial point that for Tolkien, a career academic philologist, it was linguistic invention which came first; philological and other linguistic points arise repeatedly in his essays, and, as he emphasised in various places, his mythology was in large part motivated by the desire to give his languages a setting, and it had to reflect them as well as being reflected in them. The cultures of his invented peoples and their historical development loom large in Tolkien's fiction and intermesh with his accounts of the developments of the associated languages. His cultural conceptualisation might sometimes appear dated nowadays, especially in respect of 'degrees of civilisation', but the general point is not thereby impugned. The main omission from the cultures described in the text of *The Lord of the Rings* is religion. This is interesting, given Tolkien's own commitment to religion (he was a Roman Catholic) – but he explained later **why** he imagined the cultures of Middle Earth as lacking formal religion.

One section of this book summarises Tolkien's account in his essay of his linguistic inventions as a child and as an adolescent, which always incorporated strikingly aesthetic considerations but naturally became more linguistically sophisticated as he became more aware of a range of real languages and began to learn philology; from an early stage he drew connections between his languages and his invented histories. He exemplified his early versions of what became Elvish by means of poems, an approach which connects well with his ongoing aesthetic/ literary focus.

In addition, Tolkien emphasises the sheer fun of linguistic invention, especially the invention of unfamiliar or unusual formal patterns for expressing the semantic contrasts required by the

communicative process. In his younger days he was once delighted to meet a fellow enthusiast who had cleverly and to his own glee devised a system of **prefixes** marking grammatical 'cases' (rather than suffixes, as in English *he vs him*) – apparently with no knowledge of the 'exotic' real-world languages such as Kiswahili in which this pattern actually occurs. (In those languages which possess them, grammatical cases serve to signal 'functional' contrasts such as Subject vs Object.)

Tolkien was also enthused by 'phonaesthetics'. The problem for linguists in this area ... is that most aesthetic judgments about language appear irreducibly subjective..

As noted, Tolkien was also enthused by 'phonaesthetics'. The problem for linguists in this area (whether real or invented languages are concerned) is that most aesthetic judgments about language appear irreducibly subjective. If one thinker regards the sounds of Language or Accent A as more appealing than those of Language or Accent B, and another has the opposite feeling, there seems to be no way of resolving the issue, and the matter thus appears of limited interest to linguists, striving as they are to study language empirically. In the same vein, if one thinker regards the sounds of a given language or accent as importing some more specific ideas, for example by suggesting a rural setting, and another thinker has no such response or has a conflicting response, there appears to be no means of taking the matter further. More learned and sensitive language-observers might regard their own responses as objectively superior (more reliable) to those of neophytes or (even more so) of the altogether untutored – but in such matters it is not self-evident that this must be the case, and in any event different language-observers, even if equally learned and sensitive, can disagree over such judgments.

The modern field of sociolinguistics does take an interest in such judgments. But it does so by way of describing the patterns of judgments across **populations** of language-observers or between two or more such populations – and seeking to explain the patterns which it finds. The explanations offered normally involve the psycho-social background to such responses; there is no question of **endorsing** aesthetic judgments in the way that a philosopher inclined to an objectivist meta-aesthetic theory might look to do. Just like modern linguistics generally – for instance, structural linguistics as applied to matters of grammar – sociolinguistics is altogether **descriptive** rather than prescriptive, finding no grounds for reaching or approving aesthetic judgments as if they were susceptible of being genuinely true or false. And in examining such responses its approach will be largely statistical; as noted, it seeks to discover the patterns of reaction across populations – just as it also (in its role as a quantitative branch of social & geographical dialectology) seeks to discover the patterns of actual usage (how many people say word X this way, how many that way, etc.). Surveys of this kind are very remote from the practices of scholars such as Tolkien.

Patterns of the kind unearthed by sociolinguists are often influenced by non-linguistic factors. Perhaps predictably, the subjective associations of different spoken languages, accents and individual speech sounds differ for contrasting groups of experimental subjects who do or do not know the languages in question, can or cannot accurately identify the geographical areas where the accents are used, do or do not like what they know or believe about these areas or entire countries, etc. For example, the sound-pattern of German was often perceived positively by non-German-speakers, specifically as rural and gentle in character, until the 19th Century (Germany became industrialised only in that century), but after two world wars it came to be commonly perceived as 'guttural' and

aggressive. And people who misidentify the geographical locus of an accent with which they are presented (thinking, for example, that a Scot is a Mexican) typically judge the aesthetics of said accent and the likely personal characteristics of the speaker in terms of their views about the community to which they mistakenly ascribe the accent. Judges whose knowledge and attitudes differ in such respects react very differently to a given accent; the sounds of the accent itself appear largely irrelevant.

Finn and Higgins include in their work another of Tolkien's essays on language, 'Essay on Phonetic Symbolism'. Phonetic symbolism or sound-symbolism is the point at which Tolkien's ideas about sound qualities best find a place in modern linguistics. Although almost all linguistic sounds are themselves essentially arbitrary, there is wide agreement about the 'feel' of some particular sounds and sound-sequences, within a given language or even cross-linguistically. For example, almost everyone, whatever their first language and their experience, agrees that an object called [ikiki] in some unidentified language will be spiky, whereas an object of similar size and colour called [umumu] will be rounded. It is not always at all clear **why** this should be; but the 'strongest' type of sound-symbolism is onomatopoeia, where the sounds of a word actually mimic sounds heard in nature in the relevant context (such as *bow-wow* meaning 'dog'). As might be expected from the foregoing, Tolkien tends to overstate the prevalence, specificity, explainability and significance of such phenomena; but he is not mistaken in drawing attention to them, and many of his specific points are or may be correct (or at least arguable).

Although most of Tolkien's thought on these matters pre-dated these specific sets of findings (socio-linguistics emerged as a substantial sub-discipline of linguistics only after 1950), he was obviously aware of modern linguistics more generally (though not as aware as was Owen Barfield), and displays no overt

sympathy for its striving towards scientific or at least science-like status. Even his interests in historical linguistics, where he was naturally strongest, involved the largely pre-theoretical (descriptive, not strongly explanatory) domain of philology ('comparative linguistics'), which existed from the 1780s, rather than the overtly theoretical aspects of historical linguistics which originated more recently, in the 1870s, and which were eventually integrated into the largely non-historical discipline of theoretical linguistics (very much science-like by design) which emerged after World War I. Tolkien, with his literary interests, was perhaps drawn away from mainstream 20th-Century linguistics (never especially strong at Oxford, in any case) into closer association with literary studies where his aesthetic interests and indeed the apparent subjectivity of his focus appeared orthodox and were accepted. In this respect he drew support from the other Inklings, notably C.S. Lewis, who can be read as regarding strictly empirical matters (in all domains) as of less significance than those involving 'the human spirit'.

For example, almost everyone ... agrees that an object called [ikiki] in some unidentified language will be spiky, whereas an object of similar size and colour called [umumu] will be rounded.

Tolkien was occasionally guilty of sheer errors or damaging omissions regarding linguistic description/ theory. For instance, he held or at least stated that phonemes (speech sounds considered as units of linguistic structure) are indivisible, like atoms as conceived before the development of sub-atomic physics; but, while they are not **syntagmatically** divisible (even if they have consecutive distinguishable phonetic stages as they are uttered, these stages have no structural significance) they are certainly divisible

into phonological **features**, by means of which they contrast with each other and form phonological systems. (On request I will explain this further to any reader who is interested!)

Most scholarly writers who have followed Tolkien into language-invention (or have come to it from other beginnings) are more familiar with modern linguistics than with philology (or literary studies; they generally pay little attention to this latter domain and thus have little if anything to say about the aesthetics of their invented languages). Naturally, some such writers know more linguistics than others, and thus invent more convincing languages. Some, indeed, know too little about language and should probably not have attempted to furnish their works – for example, of science-fiction – with a linguistic element. It is much harder than most lay people – or even science-fiction writers – imagine to invent parts of what might even begin to pass as a genuine language. A recent example of **good** work in this domain is the short-story/ movie *Arrival* (reviewed by me in this forum in 2017), although the very astute but non-linguistically-trained author perhaps wisely refrained from describing his alien language in any great detail. However, in respect of the field of philology *per se* (now perceived almost as endearingly dated by some of those who are aware of it), Tolkien remains the outstanding language-inventor. (This is **not** to say that all commentators on Tolkien's languages know philology well enough themselves to assess them meaningfully or even to describe them accurately. For instance, Ruth S. Noel, in her 1980 book *The Languages of Tolkien's Middle-Earth*, displays a failure to grasp the system of initial consonant 'mutations' which Tolkien borrowed from Celtic into Elvish.)

There is much more that could be said about this book, which will repay close reading by all with a general interest in fantasy literature or in language as well as by followers of the vast literature on Tolkien specifically.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

OF INTEREST

SKEPTICISM, SCIENCE AND RATIONALITY (GENERAL)

The Institute for Scientific Freedom

This exciting new development will be of interest to all skeptics. For further information click on the website

<https://www.scientificfreedom.dk/>

The Institute held its first conference in Copenhagen in March 2019 and videos of talks are now on You Tube. See:

<http://tinyurl.com/y3fs7n5o>

These are as follows:

[Death of a whistleblower: scientific censorship in action, Peter Götzsche](#)

[The Tamiflu story, Tom Jefferson](#)

[Statins - a case study in bias, data transparency & censorship, Maryanne Demasi](#)

[Scientific censorship in psychiatry, Robert Whitaker](#)

[Most of you think we know what our vaccines are doing - we don't, Peter Aaby](#)

[The healthcare system is broken - how can we change it? David Hammerstein](#)

[Litigation as an instrument for silencing whistleblowers, Peter Wilmshurst](#)

[We need to debunk the fake news in healthcare, Kim Witczak](#)

Sense About Science

Keep visiting the Sense About Science website for new developments:

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

Good Thinking

Make sure that you are on the Good Thinking's Newsletter email list:

<http://goodthinkingsociety.org/>

Uncertainty in science

'Uncertainty is an inherent part of knowledge, and yet in an era of contested expertise, many shy away from openly communicating their

uncertainty about what they know, fearful of their audience's reaction. But what effect does communication of such epistemic uncertainty have? Empirical research is widely scattered across many disciplines. This interdisciplinary review structures and summarizes current practice and research across domains, combining a statistical and psychological perspective.'

<http://tinyurl.com/y3chtqsm>

MEDICINE

The Nightingale Collaboration

Keep visiting the Nightingale Collaboration website. If you have not already done so, why not sign up for free delivery of their electronic newsletter?

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

NHS medical data

'At the DataLab we value openness and transparency as we believe open discussion of ideas and methods are the key ingredients for high quality data analysis. We think it is unhelpful that so much NHS data analysis is outsourced, or done behind closed doors.'

<http://tinyurl.com/y2rbdppa>

Clinical trials

The first meeting of the Research Transparency Strategy Group took place on 3 April 2019. Minutes can be found at:

<http://tinyurl.com/yyzmqwb3>

Similarly: 'Following an enquiry by parliament that showed that many clinical trials conducted in the UK still do not report results, the government is now developing plans for a monitoring system to ensure that in future, every clinical trial is registered and reported. At:

<http://tinyurl.com/y43jhja9>

Also: 'British universities have become European leaders in clinical trial transparency, and their performance

continues to improve at breakneck speed. ... Meanwhile, across Europe, violation of EU transparency rules for clinical trials is still the sad norm.' At:

<http://tinyurl.com/y3oqaht4>

See also:

<http://tinyurl.com/y2mg422>

And: 'The FDA is taking new steps to test the capabilities of real-world evidence, by attempting to predict the results of randomized, controlled trials before they are completed.' See:

<http://tinyurl.com/y5hmgvf5>

Mammographic screening

'Thousands of unnecessary mastectomies may have resulted among women persuaded to take part in the government's AgeX study, claims a report by HealthWatch experts published today in the British Medical Journal. The study, announced as "the biggest randomized controlled trial in history", has already invited over a million women to undergo mammographic screening for breast cancer without first checking they understand the test could harm as well as benefit.

<http://tinyurl.com/yxljc3h9>

See original article at:

<http://tinyurl.com/y4ompd2n>

Placebo

'When placebos work as well as medicine', featuring Stoner Placebo Capsules.

<http://tinyurl.com/y2rbdppa>

Sleep

'The current study identified 20 sleep myths. Mean expert ratings of falseness ranged from 5.00 (SD = 0.00) for the statement "during sleep the brain is not active" to 2.50 (SD = 1.07) for the statement "sleeping in during the weekends is a good way to ensure you get adequate sleep." Mean responses to public health significance ranged from 4.63 (SD = 0.74) for debunking the statement that "many adults need only 5 or less hours of sleep for general health" to 1.71

(SD=0.49) for the statement that “remembering your dreams is a sign of a good night’s sleep.”

<http://tinyurl.com/y6mwbvte>

Review and commentary at:

<http://tinyurl.com/y5hlot6b>

Chronic fatigue syndrome

‘IV rituximab has been used to treat chronic fatigue syndrome. A large, well-designed new study shows it doesn’t work.’

<http://tinyurl.com/y5ugk5lg>

Vaccination

Video: ‘The Side Effects of Vaccines - How High is the Risk?’ At:

<http://tinyurl.com/yxwo8jnv>

Also: ‘Public mistrust of vaccines means the world is taking a step backwards in the fight against deadly yet preventable infectious diseases, warn experts.’ At:

<http://tinyurl.com/y5otsezi>

And: ‘It was a traveller from Israel, state health officials say, who unknowingly brought the measles to Oakland County in early March, and sparked what has become the largest measles outbreak in Michigan in 28 years. Before he came to visit an Orthodox Jewish enclave in Southfield and Oak Park, the man spent some time in New York, where an unrelated and fast-spreading measles outbreak among mostly unvaccinated children led the mayor last week to declare a state of emergency. At:

<http://tinyurl.com/y3jw3lbo>

And: ‘A group of five unnamed mothers are suing the city of New York, trying to get it to block a mandatory measles-mumps-rubella vaccination order city officials ordered earlier this month in specific ZIP codes in Brooklyn amid a major measles outbreak.’ At:

<http://tinyurl.com/y3xsl55j>

And: ‘As anti-vaccination groups fight back against public health campaigns to promote immunization in the face of measles outbreaks, some Canadian doctors say the battle has escalated beyond social media platforms to personal threats and attacks. At:

<http://tinyurl.com/y5ulwwoy>

But, far too late: ‘Trump now says parents must vaccinate children in face of measles outbreak.’ At:

<http://tinyurl.com/y2ooof7h>

And yet: ‘Across the (US), counties are reporting measles cases: at least 206 in 11 states, per the latest count. On social media, platforms such as Facebook and YouTube are facing pressure to crack down on conspiracy theories and misinformation about vaccines. And on Capitol Hill, lawmakers are discussing what they’re calling “a growing public health threat.” But in state after state, legislators are introducing bills that make it easier for people to opt out of vaccinations.’

<http://tinyurl.com/y5uhgemy>

Medical misinformation generally

‘The growing toll of popular fallacies about health and illness is evident given outbreaks of measles and other preventable communicable diseases in many nations. This “medical misinformation” phenomenon has been described as “a health-related claim of fact that is currently false due to a lack of scientific evidence,”¹ but that may be a generous interpretation. Complementary and alternative medical approaches, without firm evidentiary bases, have coexisted uncomfortably with mainstream scientific medicine for decades, and they persist.² By contrast, contemporary misinformation of greatest concern is supplanting well-proven interventions and ideas with unproven ones that are clearly false and, in some cases, harmful.’

<http://tinyurl.com/y4ad4y7a>

Read a critique of the above article at:

<http://tinyurl.com/y2wwh3cf>

Holland & Barrett and Tesco

‘Kate and Sabrina (of Channel 4) go undercover at leading health retailer Holland & Barrett and investigate whether you can trust Tesco’s claims about their own-brand eco range.’ (Expires end of June 2019.) At:

<http://tinyurl.com/y4fooxyd>

Moreover: ‘Holland and Barrett staff are misleading customers with false claims about weight-loss pills, an investigation found.’ At:

<http://tinyurl.com/y2mswajx>

Cancer: Mainstream

‘Two new studies call into question the FDA’s use of the accelerated approval pathway and surrogate endpoints in the approval of new cancer-directed therapies.’

<http://tinyurl.com/yy352vla>

Cancer quackery

‘A third of cancer patients in a new study said they used herbal medicines, chiropractic massage or other alternative remedies, but many kept this secret from their doctor. Of the cancer patients and survivors who said they used complementary or alternative medicines (CAMs), 29 per cent said they didn’t tell their doctor, the University of Texas-led study found. There is no evidence that any alternative treatments can improve cancer survival.’ At:

<http://tinyurl.com/y4gk65s2>

See also:

<http://tinyurl.com/y5ooyvjy>

And: ‘The journal Prostate Cancer and Prostatic Diseases is not widely known for its high drama. So it might come as a surprise that in 2018, it published a letter to the editor that would end up drawing curse words from urologists and making biomedical executives nervous. Scientists at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center were writing to point out that a recent study about a diagnostic test had left out data showing how many potentially aggressive tumors might have been missed. Would the authors kindly publish those numbers? Two of the study authors responded, and refused. ... Many see it as just one example of a wider phenomenon in which science is spun for the benefit of companies marketing clinical tests. In 2013, a review of 126 diagnostic accuracy studies found that around a third of them misrepresented findings, making techniques seem more beneficial than was accurate. External researchers wonder if that is what’s going on in

this study, which a former Beckman executive told STAT was in part designed to persuade insurers to pay for the test.’ At:

<http://tinyurl.com/y5583oy3>

Stanislaw Burzynski

More on Stanislaw Burzynski, an internist, who has treated patients with experimental, unapproved cancer drugs at a clinic in Houston, Texas. ‘Yet the National Cancer Institute says there is no evidence that Burzynski has cured a single patient, or even helped one live longer. He has not backed up his claims by publishing results from a randomized, controlled trial — considered the gold standard of medical evidence — in a respected, peer-reviewed journal.’

<http://tinyurl.com/y3w fq4st>

Homeopathy

‘Homeopaths are prescribing potentially dangerous autism “treatments” containing rabid dog saliva and cancerous breast tissue to children as young as three. They claim the pills can undo the “damage” caused by vaccines and conventional medicine that they believe can trigger autism.’ At:

<http://tinyurl.com/y2otqsgk>

And: ‘Thousands of American children are being put on homeopathic alternatives to vaccination by practitioners who claim they can prevent measles and “cure” autism, the Guardian has learned. At least 200 homeopaths in the US are practicing a controversial “therapy” known as Cease that falsely asserts that it has the power to treat and even cure autism. The acronym stands for Complete Elimination of Autistic Spectrum Expression.’ At:

<http://tinyurl.com/yxavx7g9>

Mercifully: French medical and drug experts say homeopathic medicines should no longer be paid for by the country’s health system because there is no evidence they work. At:

<http://tinyurl.com/y2g5omcw>

And: ‘Walmart is committing wide-scale consumer fraud and endangering the health of its customers though its

sale and marketing of homeopathic medicines, the Center for Inquiry alleges in a lawsuit filed in the District of Columbia on May 20. CFI, an organization advancing reason and science, says the mega-retailer is deceiving consumers by making no meaningful distinction between real medicine and useless homeopathic treatments on its shelves and in its online store, misrepresenting homeopathy’s safety and efficacy.’ See:

<http://tinyurl.com/yxcbhtme>

Meanwhile: ‘Did you know that some of our Montreal pharmacies employ naturopaths who give advice to customers, even though this is forbidden? This is one of the many upsetting facts uncovered by Philippe Mercure for his La Presse investigation on the sale of homeopathy in drugstores. He was inspired by an article I wrote a few months ago, revealing that at least two-thirds of big-chain pharmacies in Montreal were selling the now-infamous Oscillocoquinum, sugar pills alleged to help with flu-like symptoms.’ At:

<http://tinyurl.com/y5thoou8>

And: NHS England has said it is going to ‘formally request’ that the Government ban GPs from prescribing homeopathy. At:

<http://tinyurl.com/y3e6vqmb>

Related to this: ‘The Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) will scrutinise homeopathic medicines advertised as part of “natural immunity” programmes. Such treatments can promise patients better protection than traditional vaccinations but are considered ineffective by doctors. Failure to comply with regulations could result in a fine or six months’ imprisonment.’ See:

<http://tinyurl.com/y4lkwyo3>

Traditional Chinese Medicine

‘Over the past decade proponents of TCM have worked hard to move it into the mainstream of global health care—and it appears those efforts are coming to fruition. The latest (11th) version of the World Health Organization’s list

known as the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD) will include these remedies for the first time. ... To include TCM in the ICD is an egregious lapse in evidence-based thinking and practice. Data supporting the effectiveness of most traditional remedies are scant, at best.’

<http://tinyurl.com/y2kk73q3>

See also:

<http://tinyurl.com/y2nchd6x>

Acupuncture

‘Teaching midwives to poke with needles on non-existing meridians.’

<http://tinyurl.com/y6n5t549>

Naturopathy

‘On a recent flight from Washington to Phoenix, naturopath Josh Axte jumped out of his seat when the captain asked if anyone on board was a doctor. A passenger near the rear of the plane had begun seizing and was unconscious on the floor. The passenger also had a deep laceration on her forehead after hitting it on the seat while falling down.’

<http://tinyurl.com/zp7r4ly>

Vitamin drips

‘Exposed: How doctors are peddling £150 ‘pointless’ vitamin drips in clinics that are made to look like beauty spas’.

<http://tinyurl.com/yy7etw7n>

Somaderm

‘A “miracle” healing gel, a cult-like following, and a fiercely protected empire.’ ‘Self-described “gellers” tout Somaderm as a double-barrelled miracle elixir: a goldmine and a fountain of youth. But past users have reported alarming symptoms – and their attempt at speaking out is met with legal threats.’

<http://tinyurl.com/yxzkts6>

Himalayan salt lamp

‘Himalayan salt lamp: allergen trapper, insomnia cure or just a fancy light?’

<http://tinyurl.com/yxnyesgv>

See also:

<http://tinyurl.com/y6hrjs44>

Urine therapy

‘It seems ridiculous to have to say this, but health experts are warning people not to rinse their eyes or mouths out with urine.’ (*This is in bad taste – Ed.*) You can read more about this (*will anyone want to? – Ed.*). At:

<http://tinyurl.com/y6lrluwX>

Crystal therapy

‘Gwyneth loves them, Adele can’t sing without them and Kim Kardashian uses them to deal with stress. Many of us are lured by their beauty and promise of mystical powers, but are “healing” crystals connecting us to the earth – or harming it?’

<http://tinyurl.com/yxvqus7p>

PSYCHOLOGY AND PSYCHIATRY

Hans Eysenck

‘Hans Eysenck, who died in 1997, is described in the Dictionary of National Biography as having an “international prominence and impact ... unmatched among post-Second World War British psychologists.” He’s usually called “controversial” in that he denied the link between smoking and cancer, had strong links with the tobacco industry, thought race was related to intelligence, opposed comprehensive schools, nursed an intense hostility towards psychoanalysis, supported astrology and parapsychology, and declared the entire discipline of economics as worthless. Now David F Marks, the editor of the Journal of Health Psychology, has called for a formal investigation of some of Eysenck’s work and the retraction or correction of 61 publications.’ (*Not before time- Ed.*)

<http://tinyurl.com/y3s4g37c>

‘Repressed memories’

‘Can purely psychological trauma lead to a complete blockage of autobiographical memories? This longstanding question about the existence of repressed memories has been at the heart of one of the most heated debates in modern psychology. These so-called memory wars originated in the 1990s and many

scholars have assumed that they are over. We demonstrate that this assumption is incorrect and that the controversial issue of repressed memories is alive and well and may even be on the rise.’

<http://tinyurl.com/y6brcds8>

Gender

‘Ann Widdecombe has come under fire after she suggested science might one day “produce an answer” to being gay. The Brexit party MEP said she had once pointed out that there was a time when it was thought impossible for men to become women and vice versa. She added: “The fact that we think it is now quite impossible for people to switch sexuality doesn’t mean that science might not be able to produce an answer at some stage.”’

<http://tinyurl.com/yyjxsyn>

POLITICS AND SOCIAL POLICY

Magical thinking since the fall of Soviet Union

‘While the impact of the massive tide of dissent that arose out of the Soviet state’s botched effort to reform itself is well known, reflections on glasnost tend to ignore the extent of some of the oddities that arose from free(r) speech in the Soviet Union’s twilight period. Out of the Party’s effort to craft its own centralized historical narrative rose a wave of “alternative” histories, including a number tainted by conspiratorial and magical thinking.’

<http://tinyurl.com/yykesbjk>

Race

‘Race does not provide an accurate representation of human biological variation. It was never accurate in the past, and it remains inaccurate when referencing contemporary human populations. Humans are not divided biologically into distinct continental types or racial genetic clusters.’

<http://tinyurl.com/y3h3xhtc>

CONSPIRACY THEORIES

Moon-landing

‘50 years after Apollo, conspiracy theorists are still howling at the “moon hoax”’

<http://tinyurl.com/yym4y6pe>

RELIGION AND CULTS

Atheists and agnostics

A recent study from the University of Kent showed that many atheists entertain supernatural beliefs such as the idea of ‘forces of good and evil’, ‘things being meant to happen’ and the continuation of life after death.

<http://tinyurl.com/y2khhlee>

Exorcism

‘For the first time in 14 years, the Roman Catholic Church has opened up its annual exorcism class in Rome to all major Christian faiths in a bid to stem the rising tide of demonic forces around the world.’

<http://tinyurl.com/y6c7oq2s>

Holy water

‘To deal with a wave of violence and corruption sweeping over the Colombian port city of Buenaventura, the bishop of the local Diocese has proposed using a Navy helicopter to shower the city in holy water and purge evil.’

<http://tinyurl.com/y6gkc2a7>

Noah’s ark

‘In the Bible, the ark survived an epic flood. Yet the owners of Kentucky’s Noah’s ark attraction are demanding their insurance company bail them out after heavy rains caused nearly \$1 million in property damage.’

<http://tinyurl.com/y4hw3opw>

ECOLOGY

Climate change

‘To deny climate change in 2019, in the face of overwhelming evidence and the effects of climate change manifesting all around us, requires either a high level of ignorance and scientific illiteracy or sociopathic extremes of dishonesty. Today’s bad chart has both! It comes from Patrick Moore, policy adviser on climate and

energy for the Heartland Institute, the organization known in part for its well-funded opposition to science, such as denying the adverse health effects of tobacco and creating K-12 curriculum aimed at “dissuading teachers from teaching science...”

<http://tinyurl.com/yxj8w284>

MISCELLANEOUS

Loch Ness monster

‘The Loch Ness monster might be real according to DNA taken from a lake where the famously elusive — and so far fictitious — beast is said to dwell. A team of scientists from New Zealand studied samples from the waterway in the Scottish highlands to see if they matched any working theories about what the beast could be — including a long-necked dinosaur that survived extinction or a freakish fish. “We’ve tested each one of the main monster hypotheses and three of them we can probably say aren’t right and one of them might be,” Neil Gemmell, a professor of biology and ecology at the University of Otago, New Zealand, told *The Scotsman*. “There are a few things that are a bit surprising.”’

<http://tinyurl.com/yyunknua>

Flat Earth

‘There was the three-hour presentation which contended that the universe is a giant egg. There was the Manchester musician who posited that the Earth is the shape of a diamond. And another who believes that the moon is a projection. Welcome to the Flat Earth UK Convention, a raucous departure from scientific norms where people are free to believe literally anything.’ *Guardian* article by Michael Marshall.

<http://tinyurl.com/y9tk8e9a>

And if you think things couldn’t get much dafter than that, what about this: ‘I plant trees for a living, but Flat Earthers tell me they don’t exist’. See:

<http://tinyurl.com/y47hflk>

And recently Michael Marshall visited King Alfred’s Academy in Oxfordshire ‘on an unusual mission: to highlight proofs that the Earth is actually flat, and to encourage students to question the shape of their world’. See:

<http://tinyurl.com/y5zddajr>

UFOs

‘UFOs are real, but don’t assume they’re alien spaceships.’

<http://tinyurl.com/yyl8qcv6>

Ghosts

‘The Estes Method is the latest trend sweeping through Ghost Hunting circles. It claims to be a more accurate spirit communication method. So, what’s the deal? According to the *Week in Weird* website, the idea was conceived by ghost tour operators hosting public ghost events at the Stanley Hotel. Greg Newkirk writes that the trio were wondering what would happen ‘if they isolated the noise from an SB7 Spirit Box ... and fed it into a person, making them the Receiver’.

<http://tinyurl.com/y36wy6na>

Yeti

‘For centuries, humans have been searching for the Yeti - and now, in an unceremonious tweet, the Indian Army is claiming to have found evidence of the mythical Himalayan monster.’

<http://tinyurl.com/y45snh22>

Water divining

A police sergeant who drew a large following with posts about life on the cushiest beat has been criticised for wanting to use a water diviner to solve the Isles of Scilly’s first suspected murder in 40 years.

<http://tinyurl.com/y43fe5xx>

The Voynich manuscript

‘A university that breathlessly declared one of its academics had cracked the code of the celebrated Voynich manuscript has been forced into an embarrassing climbdown after

medieval experts poured scorn on his theory.’ (*Note: Mark Newbrook will be giving his opinion on this in a future issue.*)

<http://tinyurl.com/y6rd5l2v>

The Endcliffe Park fly-past

‘By now the whole world knows of Tony Foulds, the 82-year-old Sheffield man who almost daily tends the memorial to the crew of the USAAF bomber *Mi Amigo* which crash landed in in February, 1944. He believes the pilot of the Flying Fortress tried to wave him and other children playing in the park that day out of the way before it crashed. All 10 on board died. He says he has felt “guilt” ever since that day. When his story was aired on BBC Breakfast by show host Dan Walker in January as a result of a chance meeting there was an unprecedented reaction. The world was touched by the story of a man who had, in the words of the BBC, tended to the memorial “almost every day for decades” or “since 1944” as the *Guardian* reported.

‘His efforts were honoured by a flypast over the memorial this February on the 75th anniversary of the crash. Tony has been feted, local people want him to be awarded an honour and city council leader Julie Dore has called for him to get a “star” in the pavement outside the Town Hall.

‘But does Tony’s story stand up?’

<http://tinyurl.com/yyybj4wd>

and

<http://tinyurl.com/yxnepcg>

(From the Editor: My wife and I watched the fly-past from our garden [not far from the memorial] and the live coverage on television. Our emotional reaction was somewhat subdued a few days later by what we heard was being said on the streets of Sheffield. But on this occasion, how much does the truth really matter?)

UPCOMING EVENTS

EUROPE-WIDE EVENTS

The ECSO website has a calendar of events of skeptical interest taking place all over Europe, including the UK. See: <https://www.ecso.org/european-events/> (or [http://theesp.eu/events in europe](http://theesp.eu/events_in_europe)).

18TH EUROPEAN SKEPTICS CONGRESS

This will take place from August 30th to September 1st, 2019, in Ghent and will be hosted by the Belgian and Dutch skeptical societies. There is a reduction in the conference fee for members of skeptical organisations affiliated to ECSO, including ASKE.

<https://www.esc2019.be/>

THE WELLCOME COLLECTION

From April 11 to September 15, 2019, 'our free exhibition "Smoke and Mirrors" will be the first ever to focus on the relationship between magic and psychology.

"Smoke and Mirrors" will seek the truth about deception, ask how bias and suggestion affect our senses and decisions, and consider what it is about the human condition that means many of us believe in magic and the supernatural, even in the face of logical explanations.

"Artefacts from the world of magic will include those from Derren Brown, Tommy Cooper, Paul Daniels, Debbie McGee and Harry Houdini.

'Explore spirit photography, magic props, psychology experiments and more to see how magic works on – and in – your mind'.

The venue of this exhibition is Wellcome Collection, 183 Euston Road, London NW1 2BE.

<http://tinyurl.com/y5sjrxke>

THE ANOMALISTIC PSYCHOLOGY RESEARCH UNIT AT GOLDSMITH'S COLLEGE LONDON

Chris French has organised an exciting programme of seminars for this academic year. Visit:

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

Also of interest (and open to the public) is the programme of seminars organised by Goldsmiths Psychology Department which can be found at:

<http://www.gold.ac.uk/psychology/dept-seminar-series/>

SKEPTICS IN THE PUB

Choose the venue you are looking for to access the upcoming events.

<http://tinyurl.com/twohd4x>

SCIENCE MUSEUM, LONDON Conspiracy Theorists Explained

July 31 2019, 19.30–21.00

IMAX Cinema, Level 0

Price: £10; Age: 18+

In spite of irrefutable proof of the Apollo 11 lunar landing, theories persist that it was an elaborate hoax. In this discussion chaired by presenter and author Dallas Campbell (*Bang Goes the Theory, Stargazing Live*), a panel of experts in space science and the nature of conspiracy theories will attempt to get to the bottom of just why conspiracy theories take root. In addition to giving some common Moon landing conspiracy theories a thorough and definitive debunking, we delve into the nature of conspiracy theory, exploring its psychological and sociological roots. We'll also examine the rise and influence of modern factors such as social media and the proliferation of fake news. Speakers on the night include:

Dallas Campbell – broadcaster and author of 'Ad Astra: A Definite Guide to Leaving the Planet'

Sue Horne – Head of Space Exploration, UK Space Agency

Doug Millard – Space Gallery Curator, Science Museum

Richard Evans – Director of Leverhulme-funded project Conspiracy & Democracy

Daniel Jolley – Lecturer in Psychology and Head of the Conspiracy Psychology Lab, Staffordshire University

<http://tinyurl.com/y4v3rhf8>

MERSEYSIDE SKEPTICS SOCIETY

'This year marks the tenth anniversary of the Merseyside Skeptics Society, and their flagship podcast, Skeptics with a K. To commemorate the event, the team are hosting a special one-day conference with some of their favourite speakers from the last ten years – including Professor Chris French, Dr Alice Howarth, Meirion Jones, Emma McClure and Simon Singh. There'll be evening entertainment, a lightning session of four additional short presentations, and a picnic in the park... plus event host Michael Marshall will share stories from ten years of skeptical activism. The event will take place on July 6th at the Liner Hotel in Liverpool, and tickets cost just £29.' Pick up your ticket at:

<https://mssx.co.uk/>

NINE LESSONS AND CAROLS FOR CURIOUS PEOPLE

November 29th and 30th, The Lowry, Manchester

'Nine Lessons and Carols for Curious People has been an end of year tradition playing to sold-out audiences in London for over a decade. In fact, this year will be the tenth staging of the show. So to celebrate, for the first time ever, this annual celebration of the curious and the creative, this variety night like no other, will be combining ideas, experiments, science, songs, comedy, poetry and more at The Lowry in Manchester. The event will be hosted as always by QED regular Robin Ince, alongside Brian Cox, and ticketholders can expect to see a host of familiar faces from past QED events, and the very best of the UK science communication community.' Tickets for each evening cost £23 and can be purchased at:

<https://cosmicsambles.com/ninelessons>

RATIONALISTS INTERNATIONAL

The 2019 Rationalist International Conference will be held in Cambridge, UK, July 27-28.

<http://tinyurl.com/y5gxbebg>

CENTRE FOR INQUIRY UK

For details of upcoming events:

<http://centreforinquiry.org.uk/>

CONWAY HALL LECTURES LONDON

25 Red Lion Square, London
WC1R 4RL

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

LONDON FORTEAN SOCIETY

For details of meetings:

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

COUNCIL OF EX-MUSLIMS OF BRITAIN

For details of meetings:

<http://tinyurl.com/y8s6od5r>

SCIENCE EVENTS IN LONDON

'Eventbrite' lists a series of scientific meetings in London (some free, some not-so-free). At:

<http://tinyurl.com/m8374q9>

FUNZING

'Funzing' organises evening talks at social venues in London, some being of interest to skeptics. See:

<http://uk.funzing.com/>

LOGIC AND INTUITION: ANSWERS

Balls again

Essentially we have a bag containing two balls O (original) and P (placed). We know P is always black and O is 50% likely to be black and 50% likely to be white. So:

Fifty per cent of the time we have a situation where P is black and O is black. Therefore (1) on 25% of *all occasions* P will be black and left in the bag, and (2) on 25% of *all occasions* O will be black and left in the bag.

Fifty per cent of the time we have a situation where P is black and O is white. Therefore (3) on 25% of *all occasions* P will be black and left in the bag, and (4) on 25% of *all occasions* O will be white and left in the bag.

So we have just four equally probable situations (1, 2, 3 and 4)

Therefore:

(i) The probability of a white ball being drawn out is 25% (3).

(ii) When a white ball is removed (3) the probability that the remaining ball is black is 100% (clearly, since we know that a black ball was placed in the bag and there are only two balls).

(iii) Of the four equally likely situations when a black ball is removed (1, 2 and 4) it is only in situations 1 and 2 that a black ball remains. Therefore the probability that a black ball remains when a black ball is removed is 2/3 or almost 67%.

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 or email:

m.heap@sheffield.ac.uk

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