

# Skeptical Adversaria

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## FROM THE ASKE CHAIRMAN Creationism and Evolution

I suppose it's an advanced sign of aging when one increasingly finds oneself looking back and asking why so many things that didn't appear to be broken at the time have since been 'mended'. This insight came to me when it was announced in March that a school in Gateshead is supposedly teaching the biblical account of the universe's origin as part of its Biology syllabus.

When I was at school we too were taught this, but only as part of our religious education, or as we called it then 'Scripture'. We were also taught the same at Sunday School. Actually, I myself and many of my schoolmates were never formally taught Darwinian evolution at all; I dropped Biology at the age of 14 years as it was so badly taught. I assume that evolution was on the O-level or A-level syllabus. Most of my own knowledge of evolution has been derived from hearing other people talking about it, reading about it for myself, watching television programmes, and so on.

I can't see why children cannot still be taught biblical accounts of the origin of the universe and humankind in their Religious Education classes and evolution in their Biology lessons. At least, I do not see why people committed to science should have any objection to this arrangement. I can well understand, however, why it doesn't suit the creationists. It certainly doesn't suit Sir Peter Grady. Nor does it suit him that he has apes for ancestors. 'I don't believe my ancestors were monkeys' he protests. "Where do monkeys come from? If we come from monkeys – where did they start?" Well, if he read about evolution he would have his question answered. Of course he's got a right to believe whatever he wants, but he's also got something the rest of us don't have. He's got £75 million. And £2 million went to the school in Gateshead.

I suppose there was a time when, in a way appropriate to my age, I 'believed' the story of Adam and Eve. The second stage in my relationship with this story was to believe that whoever wrote it must have been some kind of half-wit; why seemingly intelligent people were willing to give it the time of day was beyond my understanding. It was only much later that I entered a third stage; namely astonishment that some thousands of years ago a person was inspired to write this story that, even today, raises profound questions about morality, the relationship between man and woman, humans and animals; about sex and sin, the power of knowledge to corrupt, and so on. The story can only convey the power of its

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message if it is interpreted as a fable and not as a literal account of the creation of the universe.

### **From the Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine**

Every month I receive the Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine and most of its contents are unintelligible to me, as, as I have already stated, I do not even have an O-level in Biology. I have noticed that the term 'evidence based' is making an increasingly frequent appearance in the Journal's pages. 'Evidence based', though a worthy aspiration for any treatment offered to the public, should not be interpreted as the sole justification for the promotion of that treatment. Nobody would buy a car purely on the basis that 'it has passed its MOT'.

The risk is that this particular selling point will in due course come to serve more the interests of the supplier than the consumer, rather like 'holistic' and 'natural' in the case of alternative medicine and 'organic' and 'low fat' in the food industry.

Amongst the papers in the latest issue of the journal is a study of dowsing in homeopathy. (As an aside, this set me thinking what could be the sceptic's 'headline from hell' – e.g. 'Astrologer's psychic pet in past-life mystery' or 'Uri's UFO crop circle drama'). I had not realised that some homeopaths claimed to be able to distinguish homeopathic from dummy preparations (the paper's authors use the term 'placebo' which I do not like in this context) by dowsing. In this particular study six dowsers attempted to distinguish *Bryonia* in a 12c potency (a dilution of  $10^{-24}$  and therefore unlikely to contain a single molecule of the starting material) from a dummy

preparation prepared in an identical manner using distilled water as a starter. The trial was double-blind. None of the six homeopaths performed better than random selection on 26 trials, despite the high level of confidence in most cases.

Another paper of interest to sceptics is entitled 'What's the Point of Rigorous Research on Complementary/Alternative Medicine?' by Edzard Ernst, Professor of Complementary Medicine at the University of Exeter. Professor Ernst lists eight arguments that he has encountered against applying the principles of science to complementary or alternative medicine. I shall not list them here, but suggest that you guess what these are. (If you can't get the paper, email me and I will list them for you).

Skipping the paper on 'Psychiatry, Post-Modernism and Post-Normal Science' by R. and J. Laugharne, which I have yet to get round to reading, I must mention 'The Dangers of Wearing an Anorak' by six ophthalmologists from the Birmingham and Midland Eye Centre. This is not the cryptic title of a speech at a conference of train spotters or UFO buffs. It is a serious analysis of the visual field restriction caused by the anorak hood and thus the 'theoretical' increased danger of the wearer's being knocked down by a vehicle whilst crossing the road. The article concludes, 'Anorak wearers should turn their heads to look sideways when crossing the road'. Ah yes! But the anorak hood that the authors studied could be drawn tightly around the face. The anorak I wore until last year had a very roomy hood with no such facility. Whenever I turned my head, all I saw was the inside of the hood, since it stayed in the same place. I eventually gave the anorak to a jumble sale, but maybe I should have had it incinerated.

### **WRITE AN ARTICLE FOR THE SKEPTICAL INTELLIGENCER**

The *Skeptical Intelligencer* will be out at the end of this year and we need articles of interest to sceptics. It is no longer a refereed journal, although articles are still subject to scrutiny by the editor and his advisers. Articles can be of any length and depth. If you have already an article in print, we would be interested in reprinting it in the *Intelligencer* with discussion commentaries by other members.

Please send your articles to the editor, Mike Heap.

## SKEPTICS AND RELIGION - A REGULAR COLUMN

by Doug Bramwell

Widespread among skeptics is the opinion that skeptical criticism should not extend to established religious beliefs.

The grounds for this view are usually some form of the argument that because skepticism is science based, and because science and religion are concerned with radically different aspects of reality, skeptics should not target the beliefs of the latter.

A common way of expressing the supposed difference between science and religion is to say that while science can tell us 'how' things happen, it cannot tell us 'why'. This comment, which is typical of popular journalistic theology, ignores completely the fact that science has spent the last several centuries explaining the 'why' of happenings that previously were thought to need some transcendental explanation. There are still many 'whys' to be answered, but most working scientists would perhaps respond with a request to "Give us more time - maybe a century or two".

More serious - and probably the real point behind the 'how' and 'why' question - is the argument that science is concerned with facts, while religion is concerned with values, and particularly with moral values. There is a widespread belief that religion, or at least the established traditional religions, if not 'come-lately' cults, is somehow specially qualified to talk about morality. Although widespread, this view is philosophically indefensible - and the religious seem, on the whole, to be no more moral than non-believers - and its thinkers, if anything, less rational.

The tendency of skeptics to back away from criticism of religion seems much stronger in the USA than in the UK. The explanation may be that religious belief is so strong in the USA that criticism would harm rather than help the skeptic cause.

However, one aspect of religion where skeptics will generally comment, and are willing to carry out scientific investigations, is when some claim is made that a 'miracle' has occurred. Here the transcendental belief is not being questioned, but only the specific claim that there has been a supernatural happening.

Notice the difference here between the reserved skeptical attitude to established religious beliefs - "Wait till they come up with a miracle" - and the often much more aggressively rationalistic

attitude taken toward, say New Agers or others with suspect non-religious or unconventionally religious beliefs.

One current argument for criticising New Age and other contemporary irrational beliefs, while ignoring those of the established religions, is that the former are perhaps psychologically useful myths. Is there perhaps need for a goose and gander equality here?

Some may respond by emphasising the harm that can result from the opinions and doctrines, and even more from the actions, of none religious supernaturalists and members of some recent religious movements. The medical decisions made by Jehovah's Witnesses are an obvious example.

But in relation to established religions, there is hardly need to mention Northern Ireland, Palestine or, more recently, Gujarat. It may be protested that such horrors are not condoned by the religious leaders. But we should also recall the harm and suffering resulting from the dogma-driven activities of the Roman Catholic Church in its efforts to combat the so-called 'sins' of contraception, abortion and euthanasia.

Philosophically, it may be true that, by astutely defining their boundaries, religion and science can be made not to conflict. - but only when religions no longer make and act on - metaphysical and other claims that conflict with scientific knowledge. The truth of the virgin birth, the bodily assumption of the Virgin, and the resurrection of Jesus are no longer open to testing. In the case of transubstantiation, as I understand it, the fact that the wine and wafer show no signs of changing into blood and flesh is accounted for by maintaining that while their substances change, their properties do not.

Such metaphysical contortions are equal in their irrationality to the nuttiest beliefs of the New Agers. The danger is that irrationalities too easily become the basis for action. I think that, as skeptics, we should not refrain from commenting on irrational beliefs, whoever holds them.

I hope - Editor Willing - to contribute briefly in this way in future issues of '*Skeptical Adversaria*'. Subjects will likely range from miracle claims that can be scientifically investigated, to more reflective pieces on the rationality of beliefs.

Relevant news items, comments and outright disagreement will all be welcomed - and will please the editor by helping to fill the pages of the '*Adversaria*'

## Psychic dreamer's TV test hailed as a triumph

By Tony Youens

The above headline is one that was used by *Psychic News* back in 1995. It tells how Chris Robinson, a psychic who claims to see the future in his dreams, predicted on Carlton TV's *This Morning* (with Richard Madeley and Judy Finnigan) that the contents of a box would be a child's toy. The headline serves equally well in 2002 as Chris Robinson has repeated his success. The test was once again with Richard and Judy, this time of course on Channel 4.

It was the original *Psychic News* story that prompted me to contact Chris Robinson back in 1995. At the time he was doing the rounds on various TV chat shows and performing, if that's the right word, his 'box test'. The idea was that the host of the show would place something, anything, in a box and Chris would dream about the contents prior to coming on the show. Then during the show Chris would read out his impressions and the box would be opened and his success or otherwise would then be assessed.

Perhaps it's tempting to think that a child's toy is somehow 'guessable' but personally I doubt it. When you consider all the possible objects that could be placed in a box the chances of a correct guess are, to use the familiar phrase, vanishingly small. In addition Chris says he has made many other successful predictions and has in the past been used by the police to help them solve crimes.

The result of the recent test on Richard & Judy was no less impressive. This time Chris would be taken to a secret location and he would have to predict where it was. He was actually taken to Tower Bridge and the area Chris was standing on was opposite Guy's hospital\*. Next to the bridge was HMS Belfast. Judy Finnegan opened the envelope (that had been signed by her and Richard before Chris left the studio) and it said; hospital, paddle, river, jetty, wooden poles, water, train, a large note (with a dollar sign). Another card said, "I could be going to a hospital or bridge with cars, etc. and windows in it. Windows in the hospital or bridge." A third card showed a drawing of a van on the roof of a structure with windows and at the bottom was written, "Boats; Only one boat". Ignoring the possibility of a hospital without windows and the fact that HMS Belfast is a ship not a boat (and there was more than one there anyway) it was a pretty impressive performance. Not easily explained by the skeptic I suggest. Richard Madeley was utterly amazed and Chris was invited to come back in the near future.

In 1995 I carried out my own test with Chris and on that occasion he was unsuccessful. He was equally unsuccessful when he was tested by Dr Richard Wiseman and he also bombed on the (TV

version) James Whale Show. So what is actually going on? Well as ever we can't be sure but if a possible method reveals itself then any test should take this into account. This is only fair to the psychic claimant who otherwise might have to endure, the admittedly minor, irritation of skeptics still refusing to believe.

There is at least one such loophole. During my own test I found that Chris made copious 'dream notes'. Such a tactic may well enable a psychic to claim some success. This scatter gun approach is well known to skeptics. I'll call this 'PM-1' (possible method #1). On this basis one could argue that such a method would occasionally bring a measure of success. Nevertheless to appear on national television and make loads of predictions is by itself is surely a risky strategy.

Thus we come to PM-2. TV studios are not particularly good places to carry out psychic testing. Interviewers, researchers and producers, etc. can sometimes be overly helpful as they want the person in question to be successful. It is not necessarily happening in this case and I use the example only to illustrate that there are sometimes conditions that are less than watertight. Other aspects where controls are less than satisfactory include that, within certain limits, you are allowed to move around; you are also allowed to bring along a partner or friend and most of the time you are left alone to help yourself to as much coffee as you can drink. Finally and this could be significant, researchers and the like *often communicate via two-way radio*. Such a method of communication is not 'secure'. Now here are a couple of interesting points.

1. The researcher (Polly) who took Chris to the secret location was wearing a transmitter and headset (Chris also had a radio mike). This was clearly necessary as they were doing a broadcast from outside the studio but this is exactly the type of equipment they use on set and around the studio.
2. You can listen into conversations using this equipment with a radio scanner.

3. I have been told that Chris is somewhat of an expert with radio scanners.
4. It is possible that information about the test was discussed using said two-way radio.

I cannot personally vouch for number 3 on the list and in fairness I must point out that I have no evidence that Chris has ever, or would ever, resort to such methods. The point is that this possibility must be guarded against.

Of course you cannot rely on this (i.e. PM-2) being successful and in such cases you will need to use PM-1 as a back up. If this turns out to be the case then you stand a very good chance of being wrong. That isn't too much of a setback as many people appear to think that this only goes to show that it's genuine and not just a trick. In my own experience I found that Chris would make summaries of his dreams but if they proved incorrect he could still refer you back to his abundant notes and see if there was a connection that he overlooked.

Therefore, in fairness to all parties I suggest the following protocols as a minimum requirement.

#### *Predicting a secret location.*

1. Chris's prediction(s) is logged and signed on either his arrival at the studio or preferably first thing in the morning before arrival. (On the show it was only signed at the start of the show when Chris brought it on). They must be in one envelope that is clearly identified (not by Chris). Either way all this must be done *before* a final decision has been taken regarding the actual location. Needless to say Chris is not to be allowed anywhere near his prediction again.

They can be brought in to the studio at the start of the show but Chris must not be allowed to touch the envelope again.

2. Before the day of the show a variety of different locations are selected and sealed in envelopes. Perhaps about 15 distinct locations would be a good number. These are secured away until the show starts. No-one in the research team is allowed to know about these locations. Preferably only one person will know. An envelope is chosen in a random manner; maybe shuffled and one picked by another guest. The other envelopes remain unopened in the studio for later verification.
3. Chris can be blindfolded, etc. (as was the case on R&J) and the location is opened by the driver just before departure and before Chris gets into the vehicle. Chris is kept incommunicado from this point on (if he hasn't already).
4. When interpreting the result equal weight is given to the things that are incorrect and focus is not just directed at the possible hits.

I emailed the Richard and Judy show via their website. I explained that I had previously tested Chris Robinson and offered to test him again but I have never received a reply. Meanwhile I am sure Chris will be equally successful in subsequent visits to the show and who knows this may be down to as yet undiscovered psychic forces. The trouble is such tests will be meaningless until they tighten up their procedures.

\* I'm not actually sure if this was correct and I tried to check on the Internet. I couldn't see how Guy's hospital would be visible from Tower Bridge but I may be wrong. If someone in London could tell me I would much appreciate it



#### **Your letters.**

Unusually the letters column has a letter in it this issue!

#### *Astrology and Accountability.*

It is hard to avoid them - in your newspaper, on Teletext, in magazines and on web pages. What are they? Astrology forecasts for your particular birthsign and the like. Even the most hardened skeptic can tell you whether they are Libra or Scorpio. Not that you have to believe the rubbish to know your "star sign" but even in the so-called modern world this stuff is still so very pervasive. I am sure I am not alone in the immense irritation felt

when confronted with say, Russell Grant's syndicated smirk pictured above a complete waste of column inches. Or the sadness and anger at the premium rate Tarot line adverts aimed at the very people who can least afford to be kept hanging on the line whilst their friendly psychic adviser charges them £1 a minute.

Another feature of the "modern world" is the much discussed advance of what has been called the compensation culture - where everything has a price, from the loss of a relative to a scalding from gulping microwaved fast food. It has been claimed that UK society is heading the way of the USA with an abundance of lawyers promoting a

fierce litigiousness amidst accusations of such practices as "ambulance chasing".

The idea has occurred to me, and I am sure that it is not original, that the two things described above, neither desirable singly, could be put together to some benefit. Suppose someone followed the advice given by the astrologer, psychic line, whatever, vague as it usually is, and it led to some form of say, emotional damage, financial loss or another outcome detrimental to that someone's wellbeing - could they sue? Currently the astrological columns peddle their claptrap without having to be accountable in any way for the advice they offer to the lonely, the lovelorn and the just plain gullible. In the UK we have some pretty effective consumer protection laws and regulations. Can these not be employed in calling the astrological and psychic forecast peddlers to account, preferably financially? (A threat to the wallet tends to have more immediacy.) Even if the only end result was similar to that achieved by some US skeptics, an astrological column disclaimer stating that it is "for

entertainment only", would not such a small victory be worth it?

Those more informed on consumer protection law will very likely say this idea is unworkable but, if suitably aggrieved users of astrological or psychic advice were found, and their cases were promoted well enough, the very publicity might at least force people to reassess what many people tell me is "just a bit of harmless fun". Having seen the money spent by a gullible and vulnerable acquaintance on "talismans" and similar trash from the Maria Duval organisation it is obvious none of this stuff is harmless and the Russell Grants of this world are but the thin (?) end of the wedge. If the hobbling of the newspaper astrology columns is but a small first step it is certainly, to this writer, a worthwhile one. I would be most interested if anyone knows of any attempts to "get legal" with these charlatans and whether success was achieved.

*Ross Sargent.*

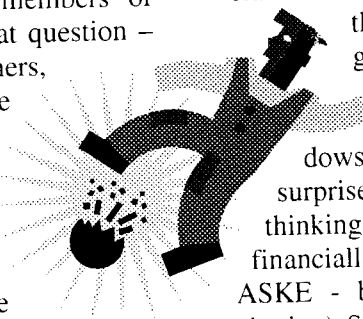
## An Immodest Proposal

One of my favorite science fiction novels is *The Stars My Destination* (Alfred Bester, 1955, also known in the UK as *Tiger, Tiger*). The story begins with the discovery of a laboratory technician's power to teleport himself away from life threatening situations - in this case a fire in the lab. Once this ability is noticed by superiors and colleagues the tech, Jaunte, is forced into one potentially lethal trap after another, that the phenomenon may be studied with the proper scientific rigor. In the novel Jaunte survives, the technique is taught to others and human society is revolutionised by the ability to "jaunt".

This set me thinking - is it possible to test for so-called paranormal powers - members of ASKE already know the answer to that question - but do it in such a way to benefit others, prove the reality or otherwise of these powers, and, most importantly, if the powers prove imaginary, weed out those that lay claim to them? A sort of Darwinian elimination process with the added benefit that if, and it is a very big if, such powers are real they would very definitely be seen to work. (Which leads to the obvious point why aren't we all endowed with such powers if they are beneficial to survival?)

The first test I originally suggested in a letter sent some time ago to two well-known skeptical publications but sadly it did not see print. (By the time you have read this letter you may understand why.) One of the most accepted, claimed paranormal powers is dowsing. The public somehow do not associate this old practice with other equally unlikely claims such as telepathy or telekinesis. It does seem to have a different feel to it and to most people it is just an accepted practice that they don't really question. This needs changing.

Dowsers, when asked of their methods, are seldom consistent as to what is required in order to find underground targets, be it gold, water or oil. But they are all definite on their consistent ability to find the sought after material. Also a common claim amongst the paranormal community is that if their supposed power is used for personal gain it will rebound upon them to their disadvantage. (I have not heard this argument mentioned with regard to dowsing in particular but I would not be at all surprised, it being a component of "magical" thinking. It is also a common argument about financially rewarding challenges - think Randi or ASKE - but then the prize can be donated to charity.) So a test is needed that will conclusively prove that dowsing definitely is real and also useful in benefiting others. Given the above reasoning it seems to me only one thing will do and that is to use dowsers to look for landmines. This would



meet all the criteria with the added benefit that the inept or charlatan dowzers would be eliminated leaving only those with the true knack. Many people will say that this is a facetious, unpleasant and sick idea to which I can only answer, yes.

The second test is also, by some standards, in questionable taste. It will attempt to verify under extreme conditions a particular form of the supposed power of telekinesis. Picture if you will a Houdini-style setup, comprising a large, metal tank with a lockable door, operated by a key on both outside and inside. A porthole in the side for observation is part of the design as is the pipe to carry the water that floods the tank. A suitable subject then needs to be found. Ideally someone who claims to be able to distort the shape of metal objects by their paranormal power. What kind of objects? Well spoons for one, but for our purposes a key will be the necessary "bendee".

It is proposed the subject, who, for convenience, we shall give the identifier U, is searched thoroughly for any concealed implements -preferably by an expert, such as a good stage magician. Once U is verified as "clean" he is placed in the tank and the door is locked and the water supply turned on. Now the subject, before incarceration, is presented with a key that will open

the door from the inside - but this key is bent out of shape (do you begin to get the picture?). U then has the chance to use the famed metal bending powers to straighten the key, open the door and emerge, possibly somewhat damp, but alive. The tricky bit - and suggestions are welcomed on this point - is how to stop U straightening the key the "easy way", to use a Randiism, i.e. with good old muscle power. Front runner in ways to do this is not to bend the key so much as to twist it - such deformation being much harder to reverse by ordinary physical means.

I am

aware that this may not be the best solution so, as I say, suggestions are welcome.

Now the few friends and acquaintances that I have exposed to the above ideas tell me that they are, apart from being, in their opinion, unworkable, above all, cruel and certainly politically incorrect. In my more lucid moments I agree with them. The rest of the time I am ashamed to admit that I find it a pleasant mental exercise to think of increasingly torturous thought

experiments particularly when confronted with yet more so-called evidence for the paranormal and the charlatans and self-deluded who lay claim to the powers of that non-existent realm.

## *Skepsis*



### **Talking Point!** Tony Youens

#### **Challenge news.**

Well there isn't any really so it's almost a certainty that we'll extend this for another 3 months to give everyone a chance. Locally (to me) there was a huge article about the challenge in the *Nottingham Evening Post* but it only produced an enquiry from someone who said they would answer the questions using telepathy. Fine by me anytime soon will do, but if they think we're going to assemble all the relevant parties in a single room then they are sadly mistaken. I am particularly disappointed with the lack of interest shown by the media. The air time given to mediums by some TV & radio stations is considerable.

#### **UFOs in Bournemouth?**

I was approached to do a radio interview for BBC Radio Solent about a UFO sighting in Bournemouth. To be honest I find debates about UFOs tedious. No matter how daft the sighting you get the, "I know what I saw" response (in which case it's no longer unidentified). However having read the newspaper article it was apparent that claims of alien intelligence were somewhat premature.

The sightings occurred at night yet we are confidently informed that the craft was 100 ft in length and flew between 1,500 and 3,000 ft (over half a mile high). Obviously we can not know how big a space craft really is as we've never stood next to one. And even if we had

this one could be much bigger or smaller, who knows? Neither is it possible to accurately determine the size, distance or speed of something when there is no background to enable a point of reference.

It was claimed by observers to be "triangular in shape". This was presumably inferred from the formation of the lights (seeing the craft only from below of course) as it would be too dark (and at 3,000 ft?) to tell the shape. Surely it shouldn't be assumed that the lights were around the edge of the 'craft' therefore it could be round, square, oval indeed I doubt that an observer could tell whether it was solid at all. (LED's on balsa wood with a helium balloon?)



### Saudi religious police.

Not normally a story ASKE would cover as such but I felt this was the most appalling example of religious cruelty I have heard for years. According to BBC News (Online) Saudi Arabia's religious police the 'mutaween' prevented school girls from leaving a burning building because they were not wearing headscarves and proper robes. The report didn't say how many were killed but the father of one of the dead girls said that the school watchman even refused to open the gates to let the girls out. I didn't see anything on the evening news about this. Perhaps it would have been different if it had happened in Iraq.

### Emmanuel College

There's been a quite a stir about Emmanuel College in Gateshead and it's teaching of creationism. Richard Dawkins has been popping up all over the place whilst Tony Blair has feverishly burrowed his head well into the sand. It seems that although they teach this rubbish they teach it well and thus get a good Ofsted report. That's okay then.

This was surely an issue that ASKE should take an interest in – and yet as an organisation we seem to have let the whole thing pass with little or no comment.

### Media List

I notice that we've recently had Gordon Livesey and Nik Nicol appear on the *Kilroy Show*. I feel that the show itself doesn't seem to give much time to skeptics. Yes they're on but much more time is allowed for the unbelievably tedious stories about miracle cures or amazingly accurate mediums. The skeptical response has to be fast otherwise it seems to be rapidly cut short.

Meanwhile members are invited to send in their details so that they can be added to our media web page. I am getting asked more and more about this page so if you want to put yourself forward please do. The Kilroy Show isn't a bad training ground.

### Alternative Medicine

According to *Reuters* The World Health has called for further clinical research into the safety and efficacy into alternative treatments. They warn that they are often misused and may harm patients. In fact they claim that incorrect use of alternative therapies has actually caused deaths in wealthy countries. They cite the herb Ma Huang (ephedra), used in China to treat acute respiratory congestion, which through long term use in the United States "lead to at least a dozen deaths, heart attacks and strokes". In Belgium 70 people required renal transplant or dialysis for interstitial fibrosis after taking a wrong herb as a dietary aid.

Despite reports like this the popularity of alternative medicine continues. In France three in four people have used complementary or alternative medicine at least once and in Germany three out of four clinics treating pain offer acupuncture.

Meanwhile Italy's National Medical Association (FNOMCEO) has recognised some forms of alt med as legitimate treatments. Nine therapies have been recognised including; acupuncture, homeopathy, ayurvedic medicine, osteopathy, chiropractic and traditional chinese medicine. According to Istat, the national statistics bureau, 9 million Italians use complementary or non-conventional medicines and would like such therapies to be

provided free of charge by the national health system.

Of course in the UK we have our own self appointed champion of alternative treatments namely Prince Charles. Writing in the *Daily Mail* he bemoaned the fact that millions of Britons had to pay for their preferred forms of quackery from their own funds. (Okay he didn't quite put it that way). Some poor souls couldn't afford it and had to limit their options to mere orthodox medicine. This appalling situation should be rectified by including them on the NHS. I can't tell you how warm I feel knowing Charles Windsor is urging the government to spend my tax on his pet theory. He further informs us that in the UK we spend £126 million a year on herbal medicines and 10% of people say they visited a complementary practitioner last year. Probably if would be cheaper if we all grew our own 'healing gardens'. For pity's sake make him King and shut him up!

### Parliament resorts to psychic to locate a missing colleague.

I suppose we can take some heart from the fact that the parliament in question was that of Muldova and not our own. Four psychics were called in to find Vlad Cubreacov a member of the Christian Democratic Party. It will come as no shock to ASKE members to find that they all failed. The head of the committee that was created to investigate the disappearance, Mihai Plamadeala, said, "Unfortunately, the data offered by the four mediums was contradictory in this case." Not to worry I'm sure they will eventually show they were spot on should Mr Cubreacov ever be found.

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