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# Skeptical Adversaria

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2010, Number 4 (Winter)

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The Quarterly Newsletter of The Association for Skeptical Enquiry



## FROM THE ASKE CHAIRMAN

Michael Heap

The world of experimental parapsychology is abuzz with excitement with the imminent publication of a paper reporting evidence for precognition in human laboratory subjects.

The paper will appear in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*; it is authored by Professor Daryl J. Bem of Cornell University and entitled 'Feeling the future: Experimental evidence for anomalous retroactive influences on cognition and affect'. Professor Bem reports the results of nine experiments that have found statistically highly significant effects for the retroactive influence of stimuli (i.e. stimuli that have yet to be presented) on participants' performance in various cognitive tasks. Avid readers of this newsletter (*Who? – Ed.*) will recall that Professor Bem presented some of this work at a symposium entitled 'Developing Perspectives on Anomalous Experience' which was held on June 4<sup>th</sup> 2005, Liverpool Hope University College, an account of which is to be found in the *Skeptical Adversaria*, 2005, Number 2 (June). Professor Bem is well-known in mainstream social psychology, having obtained his PhD in this field in 1964, and he has an international reputation in the study of attitudes and cognitive dissonance theory.

The conduct, analysis and findings of his experiments are impressive. If they are authentic then we must conclude that it is possible, however slightly, for our thoughts and feelings to be influenced by future experiences.

A draft version of Professor Bem's paper is at:

<http://www.dbem.ws/FeelingFuture.pdf>

and a summary and discussion is at:

<http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn19712-is-this-evidence-that-we-can-see-the-future.html>

Also Tim Valentine and Chris French discuss this and other issues on the Guardian Science Weekly podcast at:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/audio/2010/nov/29/science-weekly-podcast-memory>

### The Nightingale Collaboration

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

At TAM London in October 2010, Simon Singh announced the launch of The Nightingale Collaboration (Directors Alan Henness & Maria MacLachlan).

'Complaints about chiropractors' website claims, made by Alan Henness, Simon Perry and others, have shown that it is possible to confront and highlight misleading information, have it withdrawn and those responsible held to account.

'The Nightingale Collaboration will work to improve the protection of the public by ensuring claims made about complementary and alternative therapies are not misleading. We will do this by:

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- challenging misleading claims made by practitioners on their websites, in adverts and in their promotional and sales materials and subjecting these to scrutiny by the appropriate regulatory bodies;
- striving to ensure that organisations representing complementary and alternative practitioners have robust codes of conduct for their members that protect the public and that these are rigorously enforced.'

Visit the website and put your name on the newsletter list

## LOGIC AND INTUITION

**B**elow is (or are – I can never decide) a pot-pourri of simple puzzles and paradoxes that have come my way over the last year. Not all have a definitive answer but just thinking about them can be challenging enough.

### **Why not make reservoirs deeper?**

A lady wrote to a local newspaper that I receive, asking why the water authorities do not make existing reservoirs deeper as a way of solving water shortages over the summer. I have no knowledge or expertise in this area, but it got me thinking. There was no reply to the letter.

### **An enquiry into public enquiries?**

Earlier this year there was a discussion on ASKEnet about demands that there should be a public enquiry into the death of Dr David Kelly, the UN weapons inspector who died in 2003, apparently by his own hand. But are public enquiries any use? Maybe we should have a public enquiry into public enquiries. But if the conclusion of that enquiry is that public enquiries are indeed unreliable what should we do about it?

### **The paradox of the machine that makes tools**

I found this puzzle in David Deutsch's book *The Fabric of Reality* (Penguin, 1997), which I have just finished reading (i.e. struggling through).

A machine makes tools whose sole purpose is to make all the tools required to make more machines like it. The machines have imperfections because the tools that make them are imperfect. Can the tools ever be improved?

### **Variation on an old theme**

This is also from the above book and is a subtle variation of a well-known theme (already evident in one of the puzzles above).

I am studying the following statement: 'I, Michael Heap, cannot consistently judge this statement to be true'. Should I believe it? Should you believe it?

### **Two cosmic events**

*The Philosophy of Physics* by Marc Lange (Blackwell, 2002) is another book that I am reading, though an average rate of one sentence per day is all that I am equal to. Versions of these two related puzzles appear in the book.

(i) A spaceship destined for Mars is launched from Earth. It is a fact that this event alters the centre of gravity of the solar system.

(ii) The spaceship lands on Mars and the first cosmonaut descends to the surface. Unbeknown to her, immediately her foot touches the Martian surface she becomes a widow, for at that moment her husband dies in a car accident.

Do these events violate any fundamental laws of science?

Answers on page 11.

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## MEDICINE ON THE FRINGE

### **Michael Heap**

#### **When vision is blurred**

Some years ago I was suffering from increasing impairment in the vision of my left eye. The major symptom was blurring, particularly in bright light, and this made driving at night extra difficult. The problem was quickly diagnosed by my optician - clouding of the lens (a cataract) - and the remedy was straightforward, namely surgical replacement of the lens (the only effective treatment in my case). In due course I had the operation, which required only a local anaesthetic, in an outpatient clinic. It lasted less than 30 minutes and following a recovery period of a week or so it was clear (literally) that the condition was cured.

As a clinical and forensic psychologist, simply put, much of my work has been trying to help people change those ways of feeling, thinking and behaving that are blighting their lives and the lives of those around them, or recommending to other professionals how this might be achieved. Psychologists are not medically trained, so this work has to be undertaken without reference to any pharmacological strategies, which are the domain of the general practitioner or psychiatrist. Hence much of the work is at the level of human interaction – talking, listening, being empathic, instructing, offering guidance and advice, and so on. Commonly this takes

place at meetings of just one hour a week.

Unlike eye surgery which, without training, none of us would have a clue how to start, most untrained people can do the above kind of work, or at least make a reasonable semblance of engaging in much of what is required. (A test would be to hire actors and see whether patients, clients and observers can tell them apart from the trained professionals.) I sometimes say that counselling and psychotherapy are easy to do but not easy to do well, and I have no doubt that they do require real skill, knowledge and training.

My experience of cataract surgery led me to think how wonderful it would

be if psychotherapy were as cut and dried. But it will never be like this. Many people derive significant and lasting benefit from psychological therapy, but there are limitations on how effectively human beings can change through such means. Unlike a cataract, the diagnosis or formulation (a better term) is at best a vague generalisation or story; the likely outcome is difficult to predict for any given person (and what outcome is sought is not always clear-cut); and for many people therapy is only partially or temporarily effective. What progress is achieved in the therapeutic hour may be (and often is) undone during the rest of the week; hence I have never been impressed by claims that ‘psychotherapy is just placebo’.

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**Even mainstream NHS psychotherapists, such as clinical psychologists, adhere to their own preferred schools of therapy and methodology.**

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After having my eye surgery I was, in particular, struck by the thought that the salient components of the surgeon’s behaviour during the operation – i.e. what he *ought* to be doing - are for the most part determined by the structure and properties of the eye. Of no consequence are his or her personal beliefs, qualities and philosophy on life, or, so I imagine, his or her philosophy and theories about the human eye. Perhaps a robot could perform the same operation (and for all I know perhaps they are doing so now).

This is all far from the case with psychological therapies. I do not think, however, that the limitations that I have described for psychological therapies are that different from those of medicine in general. Many problems and symptoms for which people consult their doctor have no clear-cut diagnosis or pathology, likewise an obvious treatment of choice which will cure the condition. Again, the outcome may be

uncertain and for many conditions treatment may be more palliative than curative.

This state of affairs is one reason why there are so many treatments on offer for so many complaints and illnesses and why there appear to be no limits to the theories and beliefs that inform these practices. This is evident when one looks at what is on offer to people in different countries and cultures, but it is also evident in our own society – viz. alternative medicine. And this is certainly the case with psychotherapy; the very diverse nature of the presenting problems, their complexity and tenacity, the fact that their origins are not well understood, and the fact that there is seldom any quick fix that is of guaranteed (or almost guaranteed) efficacy collectively create the conditions for the generation of an extraordinary range of theories, claims and practices that come under the label ‘psychotherapy’. Some of which, like alternative medical practices, are quite bizarre. And as with alternative medicine, adherents of the different methodologies, usually those practitioners outside the mainstream, often promote them as being astonishingly quick and effective, despite little objective evidence to warrant this claim. Even mainstream NHS psychotherapists, such as clinical psychologists, adhere to their own preferred schools of therapy and methodology; hence what kind of assessment and formulation a patient may receive and what kind of therapy is undertaken may depend on the individual to whom they are referred.

I was motivated to give further thought to all of this by a posting on ASKE.net that drew attention to a video on YouTube at:

<http://www.philmollon.co.uk/HEALING-THE-SHADOW-SELF.html>

The speaker, a UK clinical psychologist, has developed a system of psychotherapy called Psychoanalytic Energy Psychotherapy (inspired by several other ‘energy psychotherapies’).

In the video he outlines what he calls ‘the shadow self’.

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**This video is an eloquent demonstration, but not of any advanced understanding of the human mind and its afflictions.**

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This video is an eloquent demonstration, but not of any advanced understanding of the human mind and its afflictions; indeed the ideas are the kind of vague mumbo jumbo and psychobabble that goes back, in the western world, to the time of Mesmer at least. Rather it provides eloquent testimony to the ideas and assertions that I have been putting forward in this article.

Incidentally, several other videos are recommended on the site – you may find interesting the one on ‘Proper energy flow, up-down’ at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1BnOZdefNM0>

**A successful hoax at the expense of ‘integrative medicine’**

<http://www.bmj.com/content/341/bmj.c6979.extract?paper=1>

In an article in the British Medical Journal (December 2010), entitled ‘Integrative medicine and the point of credulity’ John C McLachlan, Professor of Medical Education at Durham University opens with the following declaration:

*So-called integrative medicine should not be used as a way of smuggling alternative practices into rational medicine by way of lowered standards of critical thinking. Failure to detect an obvious hoax is not an encouraging sign.*

The ‘obvious hoax’, was the initiative of Professor McLachlan and was inspired by Alan Sokal’s famous paper (Sokal, A.D. [1996] *Transgressing the boundaries: towards a transformative hermeneutics of quantum gravity. Social Text*; 46/47, 217-52.) As Professor McLachlan informs us:

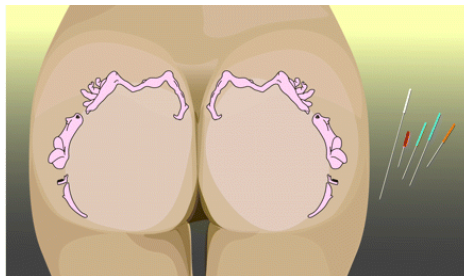
In 1996, Alan Sokal had a paper accepted in a cultural studies journal, in which he parodied postmodern philosophy and cultural studies by making a series of exaggerated, wrong, and meaningless statements about the potential progressive or liberatory epistemology of quantum physics in the style of the field....In the spirit of Sokal, therefore, I responded to a mass circulated email invitation to submit a paper to something called 'The Jerusalem Conference on Integrative Medicine.'

The following is snippet from the abstract of his proposed talk.

*Intensive study of the development of early human embryos indicates that there is a reflexology style homunculus represented in the human body, over*

*the area of the buttocks. This homunculus corresponds to areas of clonal expansion ("Blaschko lines\*"), in which compartments of the body have clear ontological relationships with corresponding areas of the posterior flanks.*

*\*[http://dermnetz.org/pathology/blasc\\_hko-lines.html](http://dermnetz.org/pathology/blasc_hko-lines.html).*



**Reproduced from Professor  
McLachlan's paper**

Professor McLachlan's request to present his paper was duly accepted by the conference organisers who, in their reply stated:

*We are happy to inform you that the Scientific Committee has reached it's (sic) decision and that your paper has been accepted.*

It would have been interesting to find out how his paper would have been received at the conference, but he elected not to attend.

The full text of Professor McLachlan's paper is available online (see above).

## LANGUAGE ON THE FRINGE

### Mark Newbrook

#### More made-up languages!

Last time I introduced the topic of invented languages. The second broad type of invented language involves languages created not for fiction but to be used widely as international 'auxiliary' (second) languages. For ease of learning, most such languages use internationally shared vocabulary as far as possible, and their grammars are much more systematic and regular than those of natural languages.

There have been many such languages, especially since Volapük flourished briefly in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. However, in the face of the growing domination of English as a second language, no artificial language can be said to have really established itself. Even Esperanto, much the best-known, has had only modest success. Like most such languages, Esperanto is very clearly an Indo-European (IE) language in grammatical terms, rather than genuinely 'neutral' as is sometimes naively claimed. The founder, Ludwig

Zamenhof, was Polish and – though something of a polyglot – had little knowledge of non-IE languages.

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**There is often an element of cultism in the movements that support languages of this kind, and Zamenhof's personality dominated Esperanto until his death.**

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There is often an element of cultism in the movements that support languages of this kind, and Zamenhof's personality dominated Esperanto until his death. Many of those who dissented from his specific ideas – or, subsequently, from majority decisions in the Esperanto organisation – left, often amid rancour, to form rival auxiliary languages such as Ido and Latino Sine Flexione (LSF; 'Latin without inflections'). The latter was developed and then used extensively by the linguist Giuseppe Peano. (I was recently called upon to

translate a lengthy linguistics paper written by Peano entirely in LSF.) Other auxiliaries, such as Lancelot Hogben's intriguing Interglossa and its successor Glosa, have moved away from IE grammatical patterns but have still failed to spread beyond small groups of followers.

Languages like these, based as they are on existing languages, may be described as *a posteriori artificial languages*. Volapük, however, displays some features typical of the earlier tradition of *a priori artificial languages*, where the language is instead based on a systematic, often idealistic philosophical ontology and word roots are invented from scratch. The medieval scholar Raymond Lull and John Wilkins in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century with his 'Real Character' are leading examples of this tradition. Strictly *a priori* artificial languages are, however, almost unlearnable, not only because the words are utterly unfamiliar to all learners but also because words with related

meanings tend to resemble each other. For example, in one 19<sup>th</sup>-Century language of this kind *ege* means ‘father’, *egi* ‘son’, *ego* ‘brother’, etc. There have been few such offerings of late, although a relatively recent philosophically-grounded, supposedly cross-linguistic **writing system** may be seen in the ‘Bliss Symbols’.

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**Very many men called Dennis become dentists (supposedly because of the similarity of the words!)...and many women called Lucy are lucky in life,**

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Invented languages of all kinds, except these last, can readily be learned with sufficient motivation. Many people have become fluent in Esperanto and such, and even in Klingon or Elvish – rather as ‘dead’ languages such as Cornish, some Australian Aboriginal languages and most spectacularly Hebrew have been revived and then transmitted as spoken tongues despite the absence of native speakers at the relevant times.

On *a priori* artificial languages, see Umberto Eco’s *The Search for the Perfect Language* (1995) and Alan Libert’s *A Priori Artificial Languages* (2000). A useful survey of artificial auxiliary languages generally is provided by Andrew Large in *The Artificial Language Movement* (1985).

**What’s in a name?**

*Focus*, the magazine for ‘science, technology and the future’, sometimes carries features on language matters. In issue 231 (January 2010), J.V. Chamary had an interesting article with the above title, summarising the findings of researchers James Bruning and Brett Pelham. In 2002, Pelham surveyed census and marriage records for

correlations between names and salient character traits/life experiences; he also conducted an experiment on the associations (positive-negative and more specific) of a range of name-number combinations. (Compare the material I discussed last time in ‘Sounding harsh, talking sexy’.) There are some bizarre but statistically significant patterns. For instance: very many men called Dennis become dentists (supposedly because of the similarity of the words!); people whose names have certain initial letters – especially those near the beginning of the alphabet – live longer than others and do better in school; and many women called Lucy are lucky in life, whereas those called Sophie are often perceived as especially sexy. The article included recommendations for the helpful naming of babies. (Thanks to Malcolm Saunders for this reference.)

Of course, these findings apply only to English-speaking communities. One wonders if similar research might be carried out elsewhere, especially where the same names occur.

**Two from the deep fringe!**

An Australian group called Liquid Crystals believes that it is in touch with survivors of Atlantis (in space/other ‘dimensions’) and has access to ‘11 [Atlantean] languages spoken and written’. In response to my email, one of the convenors said: ‘I am currently fluent in two of those, both written and oral, but am able to understand all 11 at a basic level. These are being offered back to Earth now’. When I identified myself as a seriously interested linguist and politely asked for links or references to more information, I was told: ‘I get about 150-200 such requests a day and run a business. I don’t have time for your many questions, you seem educated do your own work’. Are there thousands of Newbrooks out there?!

Anyway, so far I have had no luck finding anything more!

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And one ‘Chico’ appeared on an atheist bulletin board, saying:

‘Nothing fails like prayer? As a linguist with a strong faith in the delusional linguistic common, as a positive phenomenon, (which actually works as an illusion), but fails miserably as a tool for value, this statement as to the failure of prayer, disturbed me deeply. As usual when confronted with linguistic phenomenon, I began a lengthy search into formulation of my conceptualization. I am happy to report, I found this statement to be absolutely truth, and have found the truth to be a linguistic positive, due to the fact, language is a delusional, illusion. It is not real, and therefore, requires failure to eliminate most all positives, and nearly all the negatives as well. It prevents sensory overload, and prevents drowning in linguistic immersion’.

Eh? Again, my request for more proved fruitless! Chico told me:

‘The concept of illusion is greeted in the same manner as music, the concept of delusion is greeted the same as language. All four are illusion! This is a constant known as the four basics’.

He ignored a further enquiry. Oh well! Can any reader understand this stuff?

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## THE EUROPEAN SCENE

**A**SKE is a member of the European Council for Skeptical Organisations. It has an Internet Forum on which you can read comments on sceptical issues from contributors and post your own. To access this, log on to <http://forum.ecso.org/>.

### Contact details for ECSO are:

Address: Arheilger Weg 11, 64380  
Roßdorf, Germany

Tel.: +49 6154/695021

Fax: +49 6154/695022

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

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

### Future Meetings in Europe

Some of the following are provisional:

- In 2011 there is the TAM Zurich meeting (not organised but supported by ECSO; see 'Upcoming Events', below).
- 2012: International Congress, Berlin
- 2013 European Congress, Stockholm
- 2014 European Symposium, Prague
- 2015 European Congress, London

### Homeopathy in the European Union

From Willem Betz of the Belgian Skeptics”

‘Attached is a text (now slightly reworked by Amardeo [Sarma] and myself) that explains what is wrong with the EU laws. Any rectification solution of this EU farce will have to come from the European Parliament. Please use this text as you like. We suggest that you translate it in your language and use it to contact your EP delegates, asking them the questions formulated at the end: “Do you think it is ethically acceptable that the EP gives the quack-industry immunity and a blank cheque?” It would also be useful to let people know by articles in the press explaining how this quack promotion was imposed. All this as preparation for the February 5th action.’

### The EU, Consumer Fraud and Homeopathy

From Willem Betz (University of Brussels VUB; Belgian Skeptics SKEPP), 07/01/2011.

Consumer protection is a priority for the EU. Directive 2005/29/EC defines and condemns unfair commercial practices of all kinds, misleading advertising and aggressive sales methods. Health is also a priority, which led to the creation of the Directorate General for Health and Consumers that was tasked ‘to help make Europe’s citizens healthier, safer and more confident, to make laws on the safety of food and other products, and to check that the rules are properly applied by the member states’.

The EU directive is unambiguous. Any claim about *treating* or *curing* a disease or malformation is considered as unfair or misleading<sup>i</sup> unless the product is registered as *medication* and sufficient proof for its efficacy and related claims have been presented to and accepted by the EU or national pharmaceutical authorities.

Producers of food and food supplements are allowed to make claims about *promoting health* or *diminishing the risks of disease*, but only after the phrasing has been substantiated as well as presented to and approved by the European Food Safety Agency (EFSA). Hundreds of such claims have already been rejected as unfounded or misleading<sup>ii</sup>. By 2011 all false claims should have disappeared.

Medication has been regulated since much longer. The first strict EU ruling was established in 1965 (EU Directives 65/65/EEC, 75/319/EEC and 89/341/EEC). A medication can be registered at a national or EU level by the European Medicines Agency (EMA). All member states have to accept medical products recognized by other states. Since 1965, any claim on curing or relieving symptoms or disease has to be solidly substantiated, with the consequence that thousands of

‘traditional’ products have disappeared from European pharmacies for lack of efficacy or safety. This system functioned fairly well for many years, though there is still room for improvement.

However, in 1992 the EU parliament voted for a very strange exception to the protection against false claims. In the EU Directive 92/73/EEC, the requirement for proven efficacy was dropped for a special group of products: homeopathic and antroposopic medicinal products.

*Art.7 §4. The criteria and rules of procedure provided for in Articles 5 to 12 of Directive 65/65/EEC shall apply by analogy to the special, simplified registration procedure for HMP (homeopathic medicinal products), with the exception of the proof of therapeutic efficacy.*

One of the motivations was: ‘... the very low level of active principles they contain and the difficulty of applying to them the conventional statistical method<sup>iii</sup> relating to clinical trials, ...’. Another argument was “that homeopathic treatment is so highly individualised that it is not possible to associate one product with one disease<sup>iv</sup>”

The consequences of the above directive are that HMP (Homeopathic medicinal products) must be registered by the states as medication even if they contain nothing but sugar or water. They are even exempted from the obligation to mention their contents in weight or volume. Indicating the name of the first drop of the initial substance and the number of shakes, knocks and dilutions suffice.

Since such HMP are regulated by medication laws, they escape the rules for food or food supplements, perhaps they even escape the laws on unfair commerce.

The original text of the 1992 Directive imposed some strict limitations on such HMP: It was not permitted mention of any disease and use brand names. It was required to have a very highly diluted content and a warning on the label with the text 'product without scientifically proven indication'. These limitations were swiftly circumvented by the homeopathic industry. They were allowed to put 'complex' products on the market, meaning a mixture of several HMP, with disease-suggestive brand names. Flyers with medical indications may be distributed. None of this requires any proof whatsoever for efficacy.

The argument that homeopathy requires a highly individualised choice of medication that got them the exception in the first place was totally forgotten, but it had served its purpose of getting an exception.

Other additions to the directive opened more back doors: special registration procedures taking in consideration 'national traditions', the creation of a 'special category homeopathy with indications' that still did not need any proof of efficacy. This law was passed in The Netherlands 'in the interest of the Homeopathic export industry'. Concentrated tinctures are labelled and sold as 'homeopathic medication', of which some are dangerous.

In 2004, all this and more consumer fraud was legalized by Directive 2004/27/EC. The vendors of HMP may now mention diseases or symptoms if there is some past record of 'traditional homeopathic' use. 'Adequate bibliography' is sufficient as proof, without any elaboration of what that means. Since 2004, all member states had been obliged to install special pharmaceutical committees to register such HMP with indications. Genuine pharmacologists have to sit in committees with homeopaths and are obliged to register 'medication' that contains nothing but water, alcohol or sugar pellets, and they have to register

the 'traditional use' as a medical indication. Several scientific organisations and national Academies of Science or Medicine have officially protested against such absurdities, but authorities refer to the law as their guiding principle, even if pseudoscience and potential harm, possibly serious, to patients is being legalized. The emperor's new clothes are now defined by law against science.

The homeopaths openly admit that most of their products are diluted beyond Avogadro's number, with not a single atom or molecule of the original product remaining. The Directive further mandates that the EU Pharmacopeia must have a separate chapter on homeopathy. There we read that *the difference between solvent and HMP cannot be made by allopathic analytic methods.* (sic!)

They omit to mention that this difference cannot be made by anyone, neither by homeopaths, nor by clairvoyants, nor by any other method. The claim by proponents of homeopathy that water, alcohol, or sugar has a memory is still lacking any scientific proof. The Belgian skeptics' organisation offers a prize of 10.000 Euro for a proof that water has a memory, and a 1,000,000 US\$ challenge by the US James Randi Educational Foundation is also available for a similar feat. A few years ago, a campaign by the homeopaths included the claim that they could differentiate HMP and solvent. The claim was put to the test by the BBC program Horizon. If they would have succeeded, they would have won the 1,000,000 US\$ prize. They failed.

It is not our intention to deprive those who believe in magic water their cherished nostrum. However, we do ask our European Members of Parliament to consider whether it is ethically acceptable to sell and advertise products as medication that cannot by any means or by anybody be differentiated from plain solvent, whether it is water or alcohol, or from sugar.

Considering that no one is able to distinguish two homeopathic products<sup>vi</sup>,

we ask all concerned to consider whether it is acceptable to sell and advertise such products under different names and with different indications.

**We call on our European Members of Parliament to stand up to their responsibility** to protect citizens and to close this unacceptable gap in consumer protection laws that allow products without content to escape rules against consumer fraud, for food and supplements, and for medicinal products. We need uniform and non-discriminatory laws that protect citizens and patients, not promote selected industries against all good sense and fairness.

- If HMP are medication, they should be governed by the same rules as for any other medication.
- If HMP are considered as food or food additives, which is our recommendation, all rules for that category must apply: Any claim on health must first be approved by the EFSA.

Whether as food or as medication, all ingredients must be mentioned on the label with their internationally accepted chemical or biological names, expressed in verifiable weight or volume units. The homeopathic name of the starting product, the number of times it was diluted, shaken and knocked may also be mentioned provided it does not serve to mislead the consumer.

Citing that a product was once used by somebody for a specific indication certainly cannot be tolerated as proof of efficacy. This could be used as a precedent by other ancient or folk-remedies, opening a Pandora's Box for other desires.

<sup>i</sup> ANNEX I of the Directive contains a LIST of commercial practices which are IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES CONSIDERED UNFAIR: Nr 17: Falsely claiming that a product is able to cure illnesses, dysfunction or malformations.

<sup>ii</sup> lists of rejected claims can be consulted at:

[http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/labelling\\_nutrition/claims/community\\_register/rejected\\_health\\_claims\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/labelling_nutrition/claims/community_register/rejected_health_claims_en.htm)

Also claims for herbal products must be substantiated,

iii The expression that ‘conventional statistics’ are not applicable to homeopathy seems absurd. What prevents them from counting how many

persons got better (or not) after a homeopathic treatment, and compare it with the number of persons who got better (or not) in a control group? The same nonsensical phrase can be found in several EU documents concerning homeopathy, also in the EU Pharmacopeia. Note: The quote is condensed.

<sup>iv</sup> Note: the quote is condensed.

<sup>v</sup> if the dilutions are higher than DH24 (24 decimal) or CH12 (12 centesimal); many popular products are infinitely more diluted.

<sup>vi</sup> if they are prepared with the same solvent or granulae.

## OF INTEREST

### KEEP LIBEL LAWS OUT OF SCIENCE

<http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/john-kampfner-so-you-think-weve-got-free-speech-in-britain-think-again-2176967.html>

John Kampfner in the *Independent* (6.1.11) writes: ‘The case of Dr Dalia Nield, one of the country’s leading plastic surgery consultants, goes to the heart of the problem with English libel law. Dr Nield took issue with the company producing the cream, which claimed to increase a woman’s cup size. Her remarks, in a national newspaper, produced a familiar outcome – a threat of action from Britain’s legal establishment’. A citizens’ advice bureau has been threatened for challenging the conduct of a fraud-prevention firm. An official at a south London borough is being sued for comments allegedly made about a local headmaster in emails between himself and a civil servant.....’

John Kampfner is chief executive of Index on Censorship. To sign the libel reform petition go to

[www.libelreform.org](http://www.libelreform.org).

Also visit

[Twitter.com/johnkampfner](https://twitter.com/johnkampfner)

Meanwhile, the US based medical device maker which is suing British interventional cardiologist Peter Wilmshurst for libel over comments he made about a clinical trial of its septal repair implant has been ordered to pay

£200,000 into the high court in London if it wants to continue with its action against him.

The court has ruled that NMT Medical must pay the money into court by 18 January or its claim will be struck out and the court will make a costs order against the company in Dr Wilmshurst’s favour. See:

<http://www.bmj.com/content/341/bmj.c6957.extract?paperoc>.

### Scientology

<http://newhumanist.org.uk/2458/inside-the-mind-of-scientologys-messiah>

‘Twenty-five years after his death, Michael Bywater revisits the sacred texts of the pulp science writer turned prophet L Ron Hubbard’. In ‘Inside the mind of Scientology’s Messiah’ (Issue 1 of the *New Humanist* 2011).

Meanwhile, Midland council chiefs have been warned not to give tax breaks worth hundreds of thousands of pounds to the controversial Church of Scientology. Birmingham City Council is among authorities thought to have given the movement, whose supporters include Tom Cruise and John Travolta, tax relief on the buildings they use. And Communities Secretary Eric Pickles moved to cut the concessions, saying he did not think people would want their councils to give the organisation favoured tax treatment (*Sunday Mercury*, 18.10.10). See:

<http://www.sundaymercury.net/news/midlands-news/2010/10/18/birmingham-city-council-warned-over-scientology-tax-breaks-66331-27486850/>

### College of Medicine

Further to information in the last Newsletter, see ‘Don’t be deceived: The new “College of Medicine” is a fraud and delusion’ by David Colquhoun at:

<http://www.dcsience.net/?p=3632>

### The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission: Power Balance Australia Pty Ltd

<http://www.accc.gov.au/content/index.phtml/itemId/964065>

<http://www.accc.gov.au/content/index.phtml/itemId/964074>

Power Balance Australia Pty Ltd (Power Balance) claimed that their wristbands and pendants improve balance, strength and flexibility and work positively with the body’s natural energy field. It also marketed its products with the slogan ‘Performance Technology’. These claims made by Power Balance were not supported by any credible scientific evidence and therefore Power Balance has admitted that it has engaged in misleading and deceptive conduct in breach of s. 52 of the Trade Practices Act 1974.

Power Balance admits no reasonable basis for the wristband claims and consumers have been offered refunds. To address the ACCC’s concerns, Power Balance has agreed to several undertakings (see the above websites for details)

### Homeopathy and malaria

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-12153074>

The General Pharmaceutical Council has dropped the cases brought by Sense About Science 4 years ago against



pharmacists selling useless sugar pills for malaria. The Nightingale Collaboration, which campaigns for evidence-based medicine, will submit a new complaint to the General Pharmaceutical Council.

### **NHS job advert for a 'homeopathic specialist'**

<http://www.zenosblog.com/2010/08/nhs-tayside-want-to-employ-a-new-doctor/>  
For a follow up to this topic, featured in the last Newsletter, visit Zeno's Blog above.

### **Andrew Wakefield**

Also on Zeno's Blog (above) you can read a commentary on the latest accounts of Andrew Wakefield's fraudulent investigation on the supposed relationship between autism and the MMR vaccine. The original is at:

<http://www.bmj.com/content/342/bmj.c5347.full>  
and  
<http://www.bmj.com/content/342/bmj.c7452>

### **Memory and false memory**

From Chris French:

'Following on from my recent column for the Guardian is a feature on the need for those involved in the legal process to understand the complexities of human memory at:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/2010/nov/24/false-memories-abuse-convict-innocent>

'Prof Tim Valentine and I discuss these and other issues on the Guardian Science Weekly podcast at:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/audio/2010/nov/29/science-weekly-podcast-memory>

And from the website of the British False Memory Society:

'Innocent people still go to prison because there is an inbuilt bias against those accused of historic sexual abuse, according to a collection of articles and individual testimonies published and launched in London on Thursday 25th November 2010 in *Miscarriage of memory, historic child abuse cases - a dilemma for the legal system*, edited by William Burgoyne and Norman Brand. Copies of this book will be available from Amazon, good bookshops and the BFMS office.'

This book will be reviewed in the next ASKE Newsletter.

For the latest BFMS Newsletter visit their website at:

[http://www.bfms.org.uk/site\\_pages/frame\\_set.htm](http://www.bfms.org.uk/site_pages/frame_set.htm)

### **Sense About Science**

[www.senseaboutscience.org](http://www.senseaboutscience.org)

A reminder to keep visiting the Sense About Science website to keep in touch with their activities and the state of play of the 'Keep Libel Laws out of Science' campaign.

### **Florence Nightingale and Germ Theory**

The launching of the Nightingale Collaboration (see earlier in this Newsletter) prompted ASKE member Ed Buckner to recall the controversy over the common belief in Florence Nightingale's supposed antipathy to the germ theory. According to Ed 'It is claimed that this is a myth and that she did believe them'. See

<http://www.florence-nightingale-avenging-angel.co.uk/Germs.htm>

Readers may be also interested in Ed's posts on astrology (amongst other topics) at:

<http://ocham.blogspot.com/search/label/science>

### **Brazilian 'child-healer'**

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/oct/29/brazil-evangelical-revolution-miracle-healers>

Brazil's evangelical revolution has seen Alani dos Santos, aged 6, better known as the Missionarinha or 'Little Missionary', become one of Brazil's leading 'child-healers'. At the Pentecostal Church of the Miracle – a converted warehouse on the impoverished outskirts of Rio de Janeiro – 'she places her hands and the miracle happens....Thousands of people have been touched', says her father, Pastor Adauto Santos, 44, a former hairdresser and car thief who runs what is one of Rio de Janeiro's most talked-about churches and believes his daughter can cure ailments from cancer to Aids and TB.

### **The Post-Rapture Pet Care Registry**

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

'If the rapture happened right now, what would happen to your pets? It's a real concern, and a legitimate concern. Our pets are given to us by God for us to care for. We are stewards of their lives. Should we simply forget them at the Rapture, allow them to starve or worse?' Register your pets with the Post-rapture Pet Care Registry. Pay \$10.00 for lifetime membership.

## **Call for Contributions**

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

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### **QED: QUESTION, EXPLORE, DISCOVER CONFERENCE** Manchester, February 5-6<sup>th</sup>, 2011

[www.qedcon.org](http://www.qedcon.org)

Jointly organised by the Greater Manchester Skeptics and Merseyside Skeptics Society, the event will feature figures from all areas of skeptical activity - from the stalwart skeptical icons of Eugenie Scott, Jon Ronson and Dr Steve Novella (in his first ever appearance in the UK), to up-and-coming skeptical lights in the form of Kat Akingbade, Hayley Stevens and Trystan Swale.

The line-up also makes space for demonstrating the wonder of science - with the likes of Jim Al-Khalili, Bruce Hood, Simon Singh, Colin Wright and David Kirby speaking about their work, as well as examining the workings of the media with BAFTA-nominated documentarian Chris Atkins.

Alongside the guest speakers, grassroots skepticism will be key at QED, with panels and workshops from:

- Alan Henness and the Nightingale Collaboration showing how to combat quackery
- Simon Perry on how to run your own Skeptics in the Pub
- The Pod Delusion podcast, giving you the chance to voice your thoughts
- The 10:23 Campaign, who will report on their challenge to take their coordinated anti-homeopathy demonstrations to an international stage, as well as organising the UK's single biggest protest against the pseudoscience at QED.

To top it off, the festival will feature an evening of entertainment from comedian Robin Ince and skeptical musician George Hrab. Plus the Skeptic magazine will be well represented, with appearances from magazine founder

Wendy Grossman and our very own Professor Chris French.

All profits from the event will be donated to Sense About Science and the National Autistic Society, so it's a weekend of partying for the benefit of two great causes.

To find out more about QED, and to get your ticket, visit the above website.

### **THE 1023 CAMPAIGN: Homeopathy: there's nothing in it**

Website: <http://www.1023.org.uk/>

Email <mailto:contact@1023.org.uk>

Andy Wilson of the Merseyside Skeptics is co-ordinating the next international 'mass overdose' which will be held over the weekend of the 5th and 6th February 2011 (either day to allow some flexibility).

Please get in touch as soon as possible if you are organising an event in your locality.

### **NATIONAL SCIENCE TOUR**

<http://www.badsience.net/2010/12/im-doing-this-awesome-massive-nerd-tour/#more-1905>

On April 3<sup>rd</sup> (in Glasgow) and throughout May (various towns and cities), Ben Goldacre Simon Singh, Brian Cox and Robin Ince are holding a series of meetings in which they will talk about science 'and it will be funny'. They are also making 'a Spinal Tap tour video'. 'Come! There will be shouting and enthusiasm (*must there be?* - Ed.) and nerd facts just like in our Godless shows and festival stuff. A night like no other, mixing live presentations and fabulous projections of the phenomenal. Prepare to be amazed.'

### **TAM ZURICH 2011**

At the Volkshaus in Zürich's City centre  
September 8<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup>, 2011

<http://twitter.com/TAMZurich>

(The above link is not connecting at the time of writing.)

### **THE ANOMALISTIC PSYCHOLOGY RESEARCH UNIT AT GOLDSMITH'S COLLEGE LONDON**

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

[tamas.borbely@gmx.com](mailto:tamas.borbely@gmx.com)

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

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

<http://www.gold.ac.uk/apru/email-network/>

and

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

and

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

### **SKEPTICS IN THE PUB**

Website for all venues:

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

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

### **CENTRE FOR INQUIRY LONDON**

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

No events scheduled at the time of writing.

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# LOGIC AND INTUITION: ANSWERS

The answers are as follows:

## Why not make reservoirs deeper?

I don't know if this is a good idea or not. My first thought was that if it is indeed a good idea the water boards would have already done it. My second thought was 'Is it practical?' To significantly increase the volume of reservoirs that I know of (there are a lot of them around where I live) would require quite a sizable increase in depth and then there would be the problem of where to dump the enormous amount of material dug out. But then I realised that the original question is based on the premise that water is being lost because of overspill; that is there are periods when a reservoir's capacity is exceeded by the amount of water available for storage. How often is this the case? If it were seldom or never, then making the reservoir deeper would have little effect, rather like a restaurant owner increasing the seating capacity of his establishment despite the fact that it never gets full. Any further ideas are welcome.

## An enquiry into public enquiries?

This question is reminiscent of the old paradox 'This statement is false'. If we are to accept the conclusions of the public enquiry then we must also conclude that it itself is unreliable. Hence we should not accept its conclusion! Perhaps all we can say is that this particular public enquiry was useless.

## The paradox of the machine that makes tools

The furthest I have got with this question is that the tools could be improved if there were some variation in their quality and we could detect those variations. We could then choose only the better quality tools to make more machines or only use the machines made

with better quality tools (cf. biological evolution). Without such variation I am not sure we could improve on the tools. (We could also make certain conditions in the original question that make evolution difficult, e.g. that each machine only makes the necessary and sufficient tools to make one other machine and those tools are then thrown away.)

## Variation on an old theme

Again we are reminded of the paradox 'This sentence is false'. Let me quote Professor Deutsch here: 'I am trying as hard as I can, but I cannot consistently judge (*the statement*) to be true. For if I did, I would be judging that I *cannot* judge it to be true, and would be contradicting myself. But *you* can see it to be true, can't you? This shows it is at least possible, for a proposition to be unfathomable to one person yet self-evidently true to everyone else' (p. 237, *op.cit.*).

## Two cosmic events

There is an older version of statement (i) due to Thomas Carlisle and quoted by Professor Lange (p. 23, *op.cit.*), namely 'It is a mathematical fact that the casting of this pebble from my hand alters the centre of gravity of the universe'. Professor Lange suggests we interpret 'universe' as 'solar system' and asks the question 'Is this a violation of spatial locality?' 'Spatial locality' here refers to the requirement that for event A to have a causal effect on event B there must be no spatial gap between them in which no casual event on B takes place. We can say that the launching of the spaceship causes a slight shift in the solar system's centre of gravity (presumably somewhere in the vicinity of the Sun's centre) but what chain of causal events

connect the two? We can ask a similar question when we assert, with absolute confidence, that the death of the cosmonaut's husband on Earth causes the cosmonaut on Mars to become a widow. In both examples it seems that the answer to the above question is 'none'.

We could raise similar questions about time. In the second example, there appears to be no anomaly in saying that the cosmonaut becomes a widow at the same time that her husband dies. Yet the two events are separated by at least 55 million kilometres and we cannot have instantaneous cause and effect over distance. And in the first example it seems that the solar system's centre of gravity is dependent *at any moment in time* on the position of the spaceship once it starts its ascent. Hence again we appear to have instantaneous cause and effect over distance, in this case in excess of 149 million kilometres.

There is, of course, nothing in any of this that contradicts these fundamental laws of science. In Professor Lange's terminology this is because 'being the solar system's centre of gravity' and 'being a widow' are not properties *intrinsically* possessed by the particular locality or the cosmonaut respectively. If we examine them at the time the 'causal' events occur we shall not detect any changes in either.

## Note

If you spot any howlers or flaws in any of my answers or if there are points that I have missed, please let me know.

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## ABOUT ASKE

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

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

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

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

(Please note that the ASKE PO Box has now been closed down.)

For an electronic copy of this newsletter contact [m.heap@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:m.heap@sheffield.ac.uk)