

Phactum

The Newsletter of the Philadelphia Association for Critical Thinking
May 2006

B.Z. Toons

www.bztoons.com

by Brian Zaikowski



Hey, I'm really sorry. It doesn't look like we are going to get you're car started. Do you have a roadside assistance plan?



The PhACT Council

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Phactum is, in theory, printed 6 times a year and is the main propaganda organ for the Philadelphia Association for Critical Thinking.

If you are not a subscriber we invite you to become one by sending a \$15 membership to PhACT, \$10 for students.

to skeptics and may including good recipes for lasagna as well as End of the World speculation.

The Physics Department of Community College of Philadelphia will host a meeting of

PhACT

Philadelphia Association for Critical Thinking

Saturday, April 15, 2006 at 2:00 PM

**Community College of Philadelphia
17th and Spring Garden Streets**

Terrorism and Emergency Preparedness

Ralph Gumbert is the Director of Emergency Medical Services for the City of Trenton. He has lectured the FBI on the impact terrorism has and could potentially have on our system. This discussion will address such topics as initial emergency response to a large scale event, preparedness efforts at the local level, and the potential widespread impacts from various terrorism events,

*The event is free and open to the public. Bring a friend.
Executive meetings are held prior to each lecture at 1 PM. Any
member may attend. Refreshments will be served.*

**LOUISIANA ACADEMY OF SCIENCES
STATEMENT ON "INTELLIGENT DESIGN"**

The Louisiana Academy of Sciences adopted a resolution on "intelligent design" at its March 10, 2006, annual business meeting. The resolution reads:

Whereas the stated goal of the Louisiana Academy of Sciences is to encourage research in the sciences and disseminate scientific knowledge, and

Whereas such pursuits are based on the scientific method requiring the testing of hypotheses before their inclusion in the body of scientific knowledge, and

Whereas organic evolution is amenable to repeated observation and testing, and

Whereas the ideas of Intelligent Design are not amenable to verification by observation and experimentation, and

Whereas the Academy respects and supports the right of people to possess beliefs in Intelligent Design and other matters that are not encompassed by the subject matter of science,

Therefore be it resolved that the term "Intelligent Design" does not denote

a hypothesis, theory, or method of inquiry that falls within the realm of science, and

Be it further resolved that the members of the Louisiana Academy of

Sciences urge fellow Louisianans, political leaders, and educators to oppose the inclusion in state science programs of Intelligent Design or

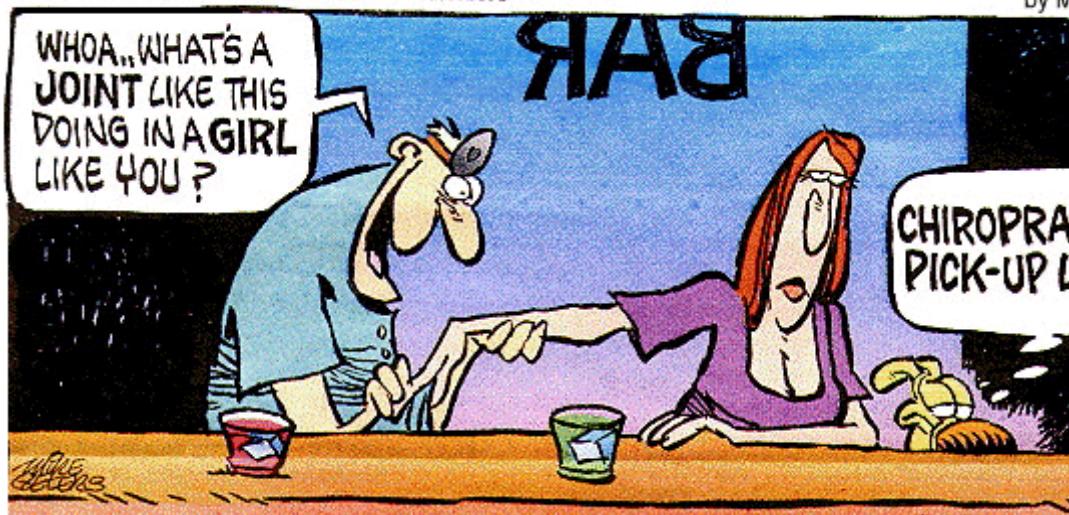
other similar ideas which cannot be tested, accepted, or rejected by the scientific method.

Founded in 1927, the Louisiana Academy of Sciences issued a similar statement about creation science in early 1982, a few months after Louisiana's "Creationism Act" was passed in 1981.

For the Academy's statement (PDF), visit:
http://www.laacademy.org/docs/Report_votes.pdf

Ever been treated by a Chiropractor? If you have had a good experience or not so good experience it could be interesting to hear your first-hand tale. Why not write it up and submit it to Phactum? Send it to: Phactpublicity@aol.com

MOTHER GOOSE AND GRIMM



WALTER'S COSMIC ENERGY INTENSIFIER

By William A. Wisdom

Just about every year for the past 15 or 18 years my wife Fritzi and I have attended the Blue Grass and Old Time Fiddlers Convention in Mt. Airy, North Carolina, which draws musicians and fans from around the country. We have regularly camped near one of the most colorful, generous, and interesting characters we've ever met.

Walter is a tall, lean fellow of indeterminate age--somewhere between 60 and 75--invariably wearing tattered shorts, sandals, and a scraggly beard to his waist. His little homemade trailer, in the shape and colors of a barn, is pulled by a pickup truck whose South Carolina license plate reads "THE BUM". Though now retired, for many years he worked as a physicist. Over the years, we have come to realize that Walter is no fool, though he is indeed a jester.

The first thing Walter does when he arrives at a festival is to decorate his trailer and surroundings with an exotic array of plants, sculptures, and signs (e.g., "Borogove Crossing", complete with a cutout borogove).

For the past several years he has brought us one sort of present or another. Once it was some of his homemade onion wine. And once it was a Cosmic Energy Intensifier of his own design, a larger version of which we had admired in previous years. Ours was a pyramidal wooden frame about four

inches along the sides of the square base, with bright red beads attached to all its edges. Its function, Walter explained, was to absorb, intensify, and redirect the "cosmic energy" all around us--something like an orgone accumulator--the main difference being that orgone is imaginary whereas cosmic energy (he tells us) is very real.

Although he assured us, when asked, that it worked, we were rather skeptical. In fact, we had no idea what it meant for it to "work". But it was not long before we had our own experience of the Cosmic Energy Intensifier in action. Our little electric water heater failed to work one morning. We had no idea what the problem was; it had worked well the day before. So Fritzi and I undertook our separate investigations of the problem. My first thought was to put the Cosmic Energy Intensifier on top of the heater and try again. At just the same time, Fritzi decided to plug in the water heater. Voilà! It worked just fine. The Cosmic Energy Intensifier had done its job!

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Who sez there are no miracles??

When I was a young boy, the local 5 and 10 had a banana split special.

Pop a balloon and you pay the price of the paper in the balloon, between \$.01 and \$.49. I had only \$.01. I ordered the banana split, popped the balloon, and lo and behold it was the \$.01. Now is that a miracle or what? But it can be explained by science. I had a 1 in 49 chance. Boy I wish I had those odds in the lottery.

This tale was submitted by Keith Newman, a middle school science teacher in the Philadelphia School District.

A new threat to America's leadership?

By Tom Napier

A familiar lament is that education in the sciences and engineering is discouraged in the United States, that all the best U.S. science workers are foreign born and trained, and that, thanks to ready international communication, many technical jobs are being out-sourced to workers abroad. I recently found evidence that this trend extends to the pseudosciences as well.

The Center for Frontier Sciences sends me biannual copies of their journal "Frontier Perspectives." (I had once written to them to point out a particularly silly mistake in one of their columns.) As is my wont, I skimmed through the most recent issue. I'll spare you a summary, most papers could most charitably be described as unsupported speculation, but I noticed one thing. There were papers from Russia, Norway, Hungary, Italy and Germany. Not one paper came from an American institution. A check on the previous issue added Argentina and Australia to the list. Its American connection amounted to a co-author retired from MIT and an article, with no institutional affiliation, written by someone in Ambler.

Does this reflect a trend? Is American pseudoscience falling down on the job? Are we skeptics going to have to look abroad for the richest veins of raw material?

Of course there might be another explanation. Perhaps the credibility of American crackpots has sunk too low even for Frontier Perspectives. Listen, you guys, you have a duty to make your ramblings at least seem plausible. America's future as the world leader in wacky ideas is at stake. Don't leave the whole burden to the Creationists.

Update - Since I wrote this, the Fall/Winter 2005 issue of Frontier Perspectives has arrived and corroborated my case. It contains not one paper by a U.S. Author. On the other hand, I am happy

to report that a gentleman in Armenia has rediscovered N-rays. He finds that minerals emit radiation that instruments can't detect; only "biolocation" can sense it. As the author alludes to biolocation having been used for 2000 years to find water and various metals you may draw your own conclusion. You won't be surprised to hear that it is "not yet accepted in mainstream science." To paraphrase George Santayana, "Those who cannot remember past mistake are condemned to repeat them."

Tom Napier is a physicist and life long Critical Thinker.

I support the aims of PhACT and would like to join/rejoin for the next year. The annual membership is \$15 and \$10 for students. I have enclosed a check payable to **PhACT**.

Membership dues of \$_____ enclosed to pay for _____ years of membership.

Donation of \$_____ enclosed for (please indicate)

_____ additional support _____ a specific purpose: _____

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