

*What's in a name? That
which we call a rose
By any other name
would smell as sweet.
~William Shakespeare,
Romeo and Juliet*

Phactum

**The Newsletter and Propaganda Organ of the
Philadelphia Association for Critical Thinking
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Has SETI Lost Its Compass? By Thomas M. Medero



The Allen Telescope Array in northern California continues the search for radio signals from civilizations beyond our solar system.

Brilliant scientists all have a cause they believe in wholeheartedly that gives them the spirit they require to forge ahead even though the experimental results may be doubtful. That is simply the nature of science. Then there's SETI, the group of dedicated scientists who are convinced that we are not the only intelligent life in the cosmos, and that we possibly can contact these other life forms in a reasonable amount of time with the communications equipment we now have.

In a 1972 partnership with NASA, the national space agency funded a SETI study under the guidance of astronomer Frank Drake and Bernard Oliver of Hewlett-Packard to assemble an array of some 1,500 earth-based electro-magnetic detecting radio telescopes. The project was titled Cyclops; and why they chose this name with 1,500 eyes on the sky is, I confess, beyond me. Their optimism was such that this was just what was needed to hear from other life forms "out there" in the expanse of the

(Continued on page 2)

There are innumerable worlds of different sizes. In some there is neither sun nor moon, in others they are larger than in ours and others have more than one. These worlds are at irregular distances, more in one direction and less in another, and some are flourishing, others declining. Here they come into being, there they die, and they are destroyed by collision with one another. Some of the worlds have no animal or vegetable life nor any water.

— *Democritus, according to Hippolytus, Refutation of the Heresies*
(trans. W. K. C. Guthrie) 4th century BC.

cosmos. I'm no physicist, but the size of the area to be explored is unimaginably larger than can be productively examined. But, it seems to be a worthwhile idea, with the possibility of bringing all manner of benefits to human civilization and health (assuming they are of a friendly nature. Otherwise, we're in BIG trouble). As with any endeavor on a scale this large, economics cannot be denied. And with great dismay, SETI had to shut down 42 radio telescopes in the Allen Telescope Array. These are men and women of science, not MBAs.

In defense of SETI's lack of productive evidence since humans first looked to the heavens in antiquity, Russian Astronomer Andrei Finkelstein saw the need to speak up and defend SETI's cause with good old-fashioned reasoning. Mr. Finkelstein concluded that the fundamental laws of the cosmos, with its almost infinite planetary capacity would make a life form on some other planet rather probable. To add some credence to this view, astronomers have identified 1,235 planets in the "Goldilocks Zone", that area of planetary orbit that is neither too hot nor too cold, but has a circular orbit so that it may avoid extreme weather conditions and support life as we know it. Add to this another 68 planets that are somewhat earth-sized and therefore possibly habitable.

Now, the search is still unproductive, but perhaps we don't have the right tools. But this quest has already raised some important scientific questions. Notwithstanding our technical achievements of the last fifty years, we still have no

knowledge of how an extraterrestrial may or may not communicate. Our human arrogance aside, we don't even know how dolphins communicate yet. We are making a rather huge baseless assumption that they are using something compatible with our primitive communications technology. Second, the nearest planets to us are light-years away. It would take perhaps a thousand years for any communications from us to reach them, and double that to return to us. Unless Einstein was wrong and electromagnetic radiation can move faster than the speed of light, we will have a very long wait indeed to hear a response. Don't hold your breath. Thirdly, we have no idea where to look for these supposed life forms. It's a big cosmos out there. So, it's essentially just a shot in the dark. The chances of directly hitting a target light-years away are slim to none. Finding a civilization with our primitive communication right on the mark is akin to that of a blind man scoring a hole-in-one (no of-

fense intended).

So, it appears to me that the SETI endeavor has dressed itself up as a legitimate science, but key elements of the scientific method are conspicuously missing. First, the scientific method requires one to start with a hypothesis. The hypothesis here is that there must be intelligent life forms other than our own, but the claim is based on no evidence whatsoever—it is simply a baseless claim. As the scientific method progresses, it should move on to theories derived from the hypotheses based on further experimental evidence either validating or disclaiming the hypothesis. SETI has done neither except to re-state the claim that there are other life forms. I could claim that the Oort Cloud is made of green cheese and I would have a hypothesis equally valid to SETI's. Call SETI a leisurely pursuit, an area of interesting inquiry, or a curiosity, but it is not science.

So, men and women who remain convinced of extraterrestrials continue on with your quest. But, consider not the odds against your chances of success; there was once a time when the whole of human civilization was completely convinced that the world was as flat as a pancake. But, I am at a loss as to what SETI's beliefs are based upon; is it the authority of pseudoscience, or a tenacious belief employed simply to eliminate the discomfort of doubt. The true danger here is that if this course of thought remains unchecked, it may well hold our psyche hostage to misinformation that asserts itself as truth. This, I dare say, is what I feel has happened in the case of SETI. They may have heard what seemed to be a



Planet of the Cats

Cartoon by Gruhn
 gruhn@webdonuts.com
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good idea, and its source might have been some very credible people. They may have put so much effort into this effort that the investment prevents them from giving up. This investment costs time and leads to belief by default "If we've spent this much time, we must be on the right track". It appears SETI's critical eyes have been blinded by the tenacity of belief. The credible source(s), the plausibility of the idea, have all conspired to perpetuate the dream of finding extra-terrestrial life. How many careless thinkers have tenaciously held onto unexamined beliefs ready to defend them only to come up short when the dialectic begins in earnest?

Perhaps a more reasonable pursuit would be to search for extremophiles or some other exotic life-form rather than "intelligent life". All of our scientific discoveries of the past 500 years have occurred in small steps. Francis Crick did not come up with the double helix for DNA as his first thought. This more sensible search could be carried out in our own cosmic back yard, and if some amino acids or peptide chains could be found, we might have a better foundation for actual

scientific pursuit. Finding "parts" of life rather than the whole assembly would, I think, be a more productive endeavor. When searching the vastness of space, it seems counterintuitive to look for the "big enchilada" rather than something small that might point us in the right direction. However, if anything is found, past experience tells us it's still a long, long way off. I'll stay true to my skepticism; it has become my port in the storm of unreasonable people. And I'll certainly listen intently with an open mind when Mr. Bennett gives his talk. I am, at this point in time, skeptical of SETI's credibility as a scientific endeavour.

Tom Medero, a resident of Philadelphia for twenty years, is originally from Long Island, NY. Currently a student at Community College of Philadelphia, he is transferring to Temple University next year to continue his studies in Psychology and Cognitive Neuroscience.

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"Our sun is one of 100 billion stars in our galaxy. Our galaxy is one of billions of galaxies populating the universe. It would be the height of presumption to think we are the only living things in this enormous immensity."

**~ Wernher von Braun (1912 - 1977),
quoted in the New York Times, 29 April 1960**

Letters to the Editor

Editor: I'm glad to see, in the May/June 2011 Phactum, someone (Tom Conti) in addition to me complaining about all the anti-gambling propaganda in Phactum, and disappointed to see, on the next page, more anti-gambling propaganda. As I have stated before, material about gambling relevant to PhACT and Phactum is limited to articles about the ability of psychics to predict winning numbers; the belief that one is on a "hot streak," or one's luck has got to change; the belief that there are lucky and unlucky numbers or that some numbers are better to choose than others, etc. (Actually, as I have written before, some numbers really are better to choose than others--and I choose them--for reasons I won't explain again, because if I convince enough people, those numbers will no longer be better and I will lose my advantage. And now that I think of it, it's possible that some psychics really can have some better-than-chance skill at picking winning numbers, likely not by psychic ability, but by inside knowledge of an upcoming rigged drawing, like the "Triple Six Fix" Pennsylvania Daily Number of 24 April 1980.) The societal impact of gambling is not relevant to PhACT and Phactum. At a stretch, you could claim that critical thinking

skills ought to be applied to that issue and therefore it is relevant, but I'm not buying it, because critical thinking skills ought to be applied also to the wisdom and legality of killing Osama bin Laden, a discussion about the economies of Ireland and Greece, the various advantages and disadvantages of comparing batters by RBI, OPB, SLG, AVG, OPS, etc., and just about every other issue under the sun--but you don't run those kind of articles. As Mr. Conti wrote (and as I thought I had maybe written, but I can't find a record of it), enough already.

Howard J. Wilk
Philadelphia

Editor's response via email: Actually, I am at a loss to understand why almost any issue that has societal impact is not relevant to include in Phactum. Gambling does have impact, as well as a lot of other things which indeed often are included in Phactum ... such as vaccines and homeopathy.

I appreciate your letters though. It makes the publication more lively. I wish more people would write letters and articles about things that interest or irritate them whether it be something sparked by Phactum or elsewhere.

Mr Wilks responds: You wrote: "I am at a loss to understand

why almost any issue that has societal impact is not relevant to include in Phactum." Well, that's just it:

If almost any issue with societal impact was relevant to include in Phactum, then Phactum could include almost anything, and it wouldn't be any different than the newspaper, Reader's Digest, nytimes.com, philly.com, wikipedia, a print encyclopedia, or the internet in general. That, of course, is not the purpose of PhACT or Phactum, which is supposed to be about more in-depth attention to issues more narrowly defined than just "societal impact."

Editor's response: I see your point about in-depth, but what issues qualify in your opinion? And which might disqualify?

Obviously you are not enthusiastic about considerations of social impact of gambling as a topic, but in which direction would you have me go? More attention to chiropractic, mental health, quackery, voodoo, UFO's? All great topics. A concrete proposal would be helpful, better yet an essay on some topic of interest to you that fits your notion of what should be in Phactum.

And, as a matter of fact, gambling does have huge societal impact and is a topic that interests me. I am not aware of any other skeptic group that addresses that topic. Plenty beat on homeopathy, Bigfoot, and Madame Blavatsky.

Mr Wilks responds: You wrote: "And, as a matter of fact, gambling does have huge societal impact." Of course it does! No one is disputing that. But something having societal impact is not the criterion for what belongs in Phactum. For what issues do qualify, the "all great topics" you mentioned do, or just look at the PhACT web page or pick up an issue of Skeptic or the Skeptical Inquirer. Should we continue fighting in Iraq? That broad question is not relevant to Phactum. Do certain bomb detectors bought by Iraq as described in this story <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/newsnight/8471187.stm> work? That's relevant to Phactum.

What should we make of the demonstration by some

Iraqis that they work, by the fact that when the testers walk into a room with a gun on the table, the device swings towards the gun? What's wrong with that test? Those are issues relevant to Phactum. Should states run lotteries because they raise money and some people derive entertainment by playing them, even though some people destroy their lives by playing them? Big societal impact. Doesn't belong in Phactum. Is gambling a sin? Doesn't belong. Can psychics predict winning numbers? Belongs. In order to fight crime, should we hire more police officers, set up more surveillance cameras, and make prison sentences longer? Big societal impact. Not relevant to Phactum. Can psychics solve crimes? Relevant. Should we construct this road or that? Not relevant. Are there, as is widely believed in Iceland, elves who live in rocks, who must be propitiated else bad luck be visited on the construction workers who destroy or move the rocks or on those who use the road? (See <http://www.slate.com/id/2213353/>) The existence of elves or of a god or gods whom we can't detect in any way and is not testable is not relevant. Testing whether propitiation or no propitiation of elves affects the workers' and drivers' accident rate, and if it does, what are the better explanations? That's relevant, as is the efficacy or prayer, and how best to test it.

Gambling has a huge impact on society, of course, but having societal impact is neither necessary nor sufficient for inclusion in Phactum. I don't understand why you seem to have difficulty understanding my point.

Howard J. Wilk
Philadelphia

Editor: In reference to the July/August 2010 issue of Phactum, you and I discussed (by phone, shortly thereafter) a couple of errors relating to my earlier Phactum article about windmills. You said you would publish corrections, but with all of your PhACT/Phactum duties, I'm not surprised that they slipped your mind.

First, the by-line of my article was printed as "David L. Leiter" when it is actually "L. David Leiter" -- Hey, you got all the spelling right! You wouldn't believe some of the variations of my last name that I've received.

Second, I found a minor mathematical error in Paul Schlueter III's letter re. my windmill article in the above Phactum issue. Paul is a obviously a very bright guy and a major contributor to Phactum's pages.

However, he said: "...yes, a three blade rotor spinning at 15-20 RPM will generate pulses at 45-60 Hz, ..." Those pulses will actually be a 45-60 pulses per minute, not 45-60 Hz, which is pulses per second. I mentioned in my article that each pass of a blade apparently creates a high-frequency "whistle" based on the experience of others -- I have never been close enough to a big, commercial windmill to hear any whistle or other acoustical pulse.



Online PhACT Discussion Board

PhACT does have an online discussion board facility where skeptics, critical thinkers, and others can discuss whatever might be on their minds.

All are invited to participate in discussion of any topic that might be on your mind. You need not be a PhACT member. The discussion board may be found at: <http://phactforum.org/>

In our above phone conversation, you and I agreed to withhold the above "windmill correction" from publication to see if any other "PhACT techies" caught it as well. Apparently, they have not, but then again they probably read Paul's letter with less scrutiny than I did.

Dave Leiter
Willow Grove, PA

Editor: In a letter to Phactum (April 2009, page 7) I wrote that "[Benjamin] Franklin recommended that lightning rods have sharp points and the Royal Society agreed. King George III, angry at Franklin for some recent unpleasantness, ordered some blunt ends installed and asked John Pringle,



Sir John Pringle
(1707 - 1782)

President of the Royal Society, for an opinion in favor of the change. Pringle replied that 'the laws of Nature were not changeable at royal pleasure.'" I've just learned of a similar, earlier incident: Fr. Ferdinand Verbiest, S.J. (for all you heathens, that would be "Father" and "Society of Jesus"—the Jesuits) was a missionary in China in the 17th century, and a mathematician and astronomer. He suggested that mistakes in the Chinese calendar be corrected, which suggestion alarmed various mandar-

ins and functionaries, who feared the consequences of altering an Emperor-approved calendar used by millions. They begged Verbiest to withdraw his suggestion, to which he replied, "it is not within my power to make the heavens agree with your calendar."

Howard J. Wilk
Philadelphia

Editor's note: The name John Pringle might be familiar to some Phactum readers who happened to notice the letter from Franklin to Pringle in 1757 (Phactum, November 2008, page 14. <http://www.phact.org/data/phactums/Phactum%202008-11.pdf>) about experiments in electric shocks in paralytic cases. Pringle was a Scottish physician and is credited as being the "father of military medicine". Pringle was a frequent travel companion of Benjamin Franklin and interestingly, in 1774, was appointed personal physician to His Majesty King George III. See more on page 12.

Editor: While kayaking on June 11, 2011 in Darby Creek at the John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge at Tinicum (near Philadelphia International Airport) I saw hundreds of dead fish floating in the water. The Delaware County Daily Times in an article the next day entitled DEP: No clue on why fish died at Ridley Park Lake reported on a mass fish kill, also on the eleventh, at nearby Ridley Park Lake (excerpts below):

"The field tests that (DEP agent Michael McAdams) did showed nothing abnormal," said DEP spokesperson Deborah Fries. "The Ph, the acid level, the dissolved oxygen – all were normal (and) tests for chlorine and solvents were

negative."

"It's my suspicion that whatever contaminant killed the fish moved on through and went downstream and was diluted by the time people got out there and began sampling," she said.

"We may never know what caused this, but the investigation is still ongoing," said Fries.

Could the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection be fishing up the wrong stream? Our area is not only near the South Jersey Pine Barrens but was also allegedly haunted by the Jersey Devil, a.k.a. Leeds' devil, during the Phenomenal Week of 1909. Today biologists take samples looking for toxic substances while no one believes that these mysterious fish kills were due to the return of the Jersey Devil to the Delaware Valley. Nonetheless, in a bygone era, our local monster might not have gotten off so easy. Below is a relevant excerpt from an article entitled JERSEY SEES A DEVIL. Leeds' Monster Reappears Among the Pines. which appeared in the July 31, 1899 issue of the Hornellsville Weekly Tribune, Hornellsville, NY:

At other times Leeds' devil, like a bird of prey, hovered over a silent, star bespangled pond in some silent recess of the cedar swamps, blasting with its foul breath the lives of hundreds of fishes, found floating next day upon the surface, tainted and unfit for food.

Don Nigroni
Glenolden, PA



Fishkill photograph by Don Nigroni

In a later report scientists determined that it was low oxygen in the water due to high temperatures, algae, and lack of rain that caused the fish kill. It was not the foul breath of the Jersey Devil.

<http://delcotimes.com/articles/2011/06/22/news/doc4e01488528ae4909606350.txt>

Editor: Below is a curious early reference to our local sea monster, the Cape May Sea Serpent, which appeared in a December 20, 1844 article in a Philadelphia newspaper, The

Inquirer and National Gazette. Several persons supposedly saw the creature up close at sea near Cape May, NJ and described it as being 25 feet long. Dolphins traveling in a line can surely account for many such sightings.

Don Nigroni
Glenolden, PA

The Sea-Serpent AND

NATIONAL GAZETTE.

PHILADELPHIA:

Friday, December 20, 1911.

The Bridgeton (N. J.) Chronicle has been informed by a gentleman from Cape May, that the Sea-Serpent was seen a few days since off Cape Island. Several pilots who approached within a short distance of the monster describe it as 25 feet in length.

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Various Ruminations

Collected/Written by Ray Haupt
(with help from others)

“The best part is it’s Homeopathic”

.... chirped the bubbly voice on the radio. “Now you can get guaranteed all natural relief from tinnitus. Just call 1-800-779-1990 for risk-free trial (while supplies last).”

It would appear from the advertising that a cure, or at least temporary relief, has been found for tinnitus, a condition where noise, usually ear-ringing, is perceived when in reality that noise is not present. The condition is very common as about twenty percent of people between 55 and 65 years of age have some degree of affliction. It is an annoying syndrome, the main causes being age, exposure to loud noises, ear injury, and circulatory system disorder. Tinnitus in itself is not dangerous.

The great medical achievement promised in radio advertising and elsewhere is the result of a discovery by a rock and roll drummer, perhaps lending credence to the old saying

“necessity is the mother of invention”.

In an article at the Mayo Clinic website:

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/tinnitus/DS00365/DSECTION=causes> exposure to loud noise is listed as one common contributor to the problem:

“Loud noises, such as those from heavy equipment, chain saws and firearms, are common sources of noise-related hearing loss. Portable music devices, such as MP3 players or iPods, also can cause noise-related hearing loss if played loudly for long periods. Tinnitus caused by short-term exposure, such as attending a loud concert, usually goes away; long-term exposure to loud sound can cause permanent damage.” Rock and roll drumming is not specifically listed.

The wondrous curative medication is a homeopathic remedy called Quietus. The product is described at the website <http://www.quietrelief.com/>.

Oddly, missing from the product description at the manufacturer’s website are the cost and a list of ingredients of this potion. Fortunately, Quietus can also be obtained at Amazon.com where a 60 day supply is listed for \$99.99 plus shipping and handling. Super deal!

But what is in the Quietus Tinnitus Relief System? The ingredients are not listed on the packaging other than notation that there are 60 pills and a .5 ounce bottle of ear-drops. A search of FDA and CDC websites yield no information on that matter as neither agency appears to have heard of Quietus.

Doctor Thomas Latino, who was mentioned in Phactum, March 2011 where he analyzes the ingredients in another homeopathic product called ZyVestra, comes to the rescue as he explains the medicinal properties of the ingredients in the Quietus Tinnitus Relief System:

<http://thebuzzstopshear.com/2010/10/quietus-homeopathic-treatment-a-study-by-dr-thomas-latino-phd/>

The active ingredients are: *Apis Mellificais*, *Aristolochia Clematis*, *M. Chamomilla*, *Lachesis Mutusis*, *Thuja Occidentalis*, *C. Officinalis*, *K. Phosphoricum*, and *Salicylic Acid*.

Unfortunately Dr. Latino did not include the dilution of the various components of Quietus. Perhaps the most fascinating of the ingredients as described by Dr. Latino is “*Lachesis Mutusis*, a poison derived from the venom of the lethal Bushmaster snake. It is highly toxic and if introduced into the blood stream can lead to paralysis of the central nervous system and cardiac tissues. The venom undergoes extensive dilutive processes so that in the final form, only traces of the neurotoxin remain. Recent studies demonstrated that *L. Mutus* in conjunction with other homeopathic treatments alleviated inflammation and the pain associated with certain types of infections.”

Amazing, is it not, that a rock and roll drummer, the developer of Quietus, would have knowledge of and access to Bushmaster snake venom? Rattlesnake venom is much more available as is noted in the next story.

There is more to “Quietus” than just a homeopathic rem-

edy for hearing affliction. In history there were at least three members of the Roman military or political classes named Quietus:

† **Tiberius Avidius Quietus** (died 107) was a Roman politician and made governor of Roman Britain in 97 where he held the post until 100.

† **Lusius Quietus** was born in Mesopotamia and was awarded Roman citizenship for his services as a soldier. Quietus was commander of the Roman-Moorish Cavalry. He was murdered in 118.

† **Titus Fulvius Iunius Quietus** was one of several Roman conspirators against the Roman Emperor Gallienus. Quietus did have some short term success but in 261 he was murdered. In 260-261 some coins were struck bearing Quietus' likeness.



More recently things get a bit weird. A 1992 science fiction novel by P.D. James entitled the *Children of Men* describes "Quietus" as a ritualized and government sanctioned form of mass suicide by drowning. Then, in 2006, a

screen play of that same novel was written and a movie produced, actor Michael Caine being one of the major members of the cast. In that movie Quietus is no longer a suicide by drowning ritual but instead is a ceremonial suicide vehicle in the form of a pill. How strange for a drug company, even a homeopathic drug company, to name its product in such a bizarre manner.

Snake venom

Meanwhile, Don Nigrone reports that in Galloway Township, New Jersey, very near the sites explored by Joe Nickell and his PhACT compatriots in an unsuccessful expedition to flush out the Jersey Devil in June of 2010, a Good Samaritan stopped his car to help a timber rattlesnake cross the road. For his efforts the poor fellow was bitten on the right hand as he attempted to hold the wayward snake by the back of his head.

http://www.pressofatlanticcity.com/news/breaking/little-egg-harbor-township-man-stops-to-help-a-timber/article_d7989168-9929-11e0-88ae-001cc4c03286.html

The Good Samaritan, Mr. Nelson Drinkwater, will recover but the bite was life threatening and treatment very expensive. Four to six doses of antivenin are required at \$13,000 per dose. Antivenin is expensive to produce and is rare. The first step in producing the antivenin, milking a rattlesnake, is at the least a bit nerve wracking and



Rattlesnake Milking

requires holding the snake by the back of the head as Mr. Drinkwater unsuccessfully attempted.

The newspaper article suggests that rattlesnakes are rare in New Jersey. That may be so but it did not deter a rattlesnake from finding Don Nigrone and Bob Clark a few days after PhACT's wildly unsuccessful Jersey Devil Hunt as they further explored the area. Bob wisely used a telephoto lens and kept his distance. See Bob's photo in Phactum, July/August 2010, page 2.

The PHACT Campaign

Ed Gracely reports and was amused by the name of a lobbying campaign by an interesting and very well respected professional organization, the American Public Health Association. The APHA is the primary organization for public health professionals. The campaign, called PHACT (Public Health Action) is described as an effort to convince the congress to more vigorously support Public Health issues. The organization, APHA, certainly is worthwhile and historic and claims in their website that:

"The American Public Health Association is the oldest and most diverse organization of public health professionals in the world and has been working to improve public health since 1872. The Association aims to protect all Americans, their families and their communities from preventable, serious health threats and strives to assure community-based health promotion and disease prevention activities and preventive health services are universally accessible in the United States. APHA represents a broad array of health professionals and others who care about their own health and the health of their communities."

The APHA was founded in 1872 in Atlantic City, New Jersey ... not terribly far from the lair of the Jersey Devil. In the May 1918 edition of the APHA's *American Journal of Public Health*, a Canadian physician named Peter H. Bryce, an official at the Department of the Interior, in Ontario, Canada, submitted a most interesting and elegantly written article entitled "History of the American Public Health Association". The article begins by recapitulating a speech delivered by Boston physician Dr. Henry Bowditch at the International Medical Congress which convened as part of the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876. Dr. Bowditch discussed many of the Public Health issues and controversies of the day and the previous century. Dr. Bryce then filled in public health history for the next forty years and trumpets the many successes of various disease control programs in the United States and in Canada.

It will be interesting to see if the PhACT website, OUR PhACT website, gets more hits in the next few months. That would be very nice since they are using our name and for the most part we sing the same tunes. Check them out.

The APHA website is: <http://www.apha.org/>

The APHA PHACT campaign website is:

<http://www.apha.org/advocacy/tips/>

PHACT+Campaign.htm

Dr. Peter Bryce's article of May 1918 may be found at:
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1362184/?page=1>

OUR PhACT Website is: <http://www.phact.org>

Vitamin Donuts

We are rendered speechless

**Where is Steve??**

A scholar, Marcel LaFollette, has added photos of scientists and reporters who aided in the defense of John Scopes in that famous trial during July of 1925. There is a Horatio, a Wilbur, a Kirtley, and a Winterton but not a Steve in the bunch.

<http://content.usatoday.com/communities/sciencefair/post/2011/07/smithsonian-unearths-scopes-trial-scientist-images/1>

Florida Evil Spirit Cleansing Scam

Get a load of this Associated Press article reported in the Herald Tribune. It seems that three Florida women were arrested on Federal fraud charges for scamming thousands of dollars from people to cleanse them of evil spirits.

<http://www.heraldtribune.com/article/20110510/WIRE/110519991/-1/FEATURES21?Title=3-charged-in-evil-spirit-cleansing-scam>

One may feel sorry for the victims of this fraud, but they

are partially to blame too in that a massive lack of Critical Thinking allowed them to fall for such a preposterous scheme. The three defendants in this matter were apprehended in Texas and will be extradited to Florida. The major damage here appears to be financial.

Contrast the events in this story to the one that will be discussed in Australia at a meeting of the Canberra Skeptics. The speaker, Mr. Leo Igwe, is a skeptic and activist in Nigeria trying to expose superstition and witch hunting that has far more desperate consequences than mere financial considerations. See page 10. The Canberra Skeptics website is: <http://www.canberraskeptics.org.au/>

Gambling notes

By request we will back off on the gambling topic ... for this edition of Phactum anyway.

Yet another Sea Monster

A Sea Monster was discovered beneath the Brooklyn Bridge. It's a great tabloid story but reality is a bit more mundane. The creature found was about seven feet long and quite decomposed.

<http://www.foxnews.com/scitech/2011/05/26/sea-monster-discovered-beneath-brooklyn-bridge/>

Scientists identified the animal as being an Atlantic Stur-



geon, which can grow to about 12 feet in length and 800 pounds weight. The sturgeon eats krill, shrimp, and small fish. Atlantic sturgeon in North America range from New Brunswick to Florida including Delaware Bay and various haunts of the Jersey Devil. The Delaware Bay population is very small. In 2006 a tagged Atlantic sturgeon was observed in Philadelphia at the mouth of the Schuylkill River.

Although it is good to know that the Hudson River is home to a population of sturgeon it is kind of disappointing that the found monster is not a ferocious one such as

Megapiranha.

DVD cover from the 2010 movie "MegaPiranaha"

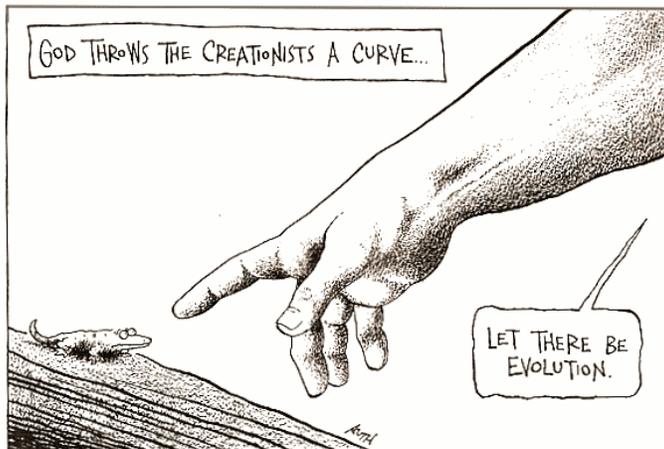
Creeping Creationism

Or should that be "Creepy Creationism"? In either case this story was submitted by Professor Jon Nyquist, a geophysicist at Temple University and also appeared in the June 17, 2011 edition of the weekly newsletter distributed by Glenn Branch, Executive Director, at the National Center for Science Education (NCSE). The story reveals a distinct subterranean attitude on the part of certain geologists attempting to propel Creation Science by stealth burrowing into conferences and activities attended by serious minded scientists and worse yet, leading some of those events.

"Creationism creeps into mainstream geology," a report by NCSE's Steven Newton, is the cover story of the July 2011 issue of *Earth*, published by the American Geological Institute. In his article, Newton discusses a geological field trip conducted during the annual meeting of the Geological Society of America in 2010. He explains, "it was an example of a new strategy from creationists to interject their ideas into mainstream geology: They lead field trips and present posters and talks at scientific meetings. They also avoid overtly stating anything truly contrary to mainstream science. But when the meeting is over, the creationist participants go home and proudly proclaim that mainstream science has accepted their ideas."

"During the trip," Newton relates, "the leaders did not advertise their creationist views, but rather presented their credentials in a way that minimized their creationist affiliations," adding, "the field trip leaders were careful not to make overt creationist references. If the 50 or so field trip participants did not know the subtext and weren't familiar with the field trip leaders, it's quite possible that they never realized that the leaders endorsed geologic interpretations

completely at odds with the scientific community." But clues - such as referring to Cambrian outcrops as rocks that are "called Cambrian" and hinting at the continental extent of a "massive marine transgression" -- were abundant "if you knew what to listen for."



Creationists love to boast about their participation in scientific meetings, Newton observed, even when it consists only of conducting field trips or presenting unrefereed papers and posters. But he suggested that it would be counterproductive for societies such as the GSA to exclude creationists from participation in their meetings, however, arguing, "We let a thousand flowers bloom, weeds and all.

The best ideas from the meetings are further subjected to peer review in journals, which is where theories are built; conferences are more freeform. Geology will not suffer if creationists participate in our meetings, but the public relations damage from the misperception that we are systematically hostile to any view -- especially religious views -- is real."

For Newton's article, visit:

<http://www.earthmagazine.org/earth/article/456-7db-6-a>

Meanwhile, back at the NCSE Ranch, the list of Steve's has, as of June 30, 2011, grown to 1167 but rather oddly Steven Newton is missing from the roster. Not at all odd is the fact that one of the trip leaders described in Newton's article, Steve Austin, chair of the Geology Department at the Institute for Creation Research, is also missing from the Project Steve list.

The NCSE website is: <http://ncse.com>

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Wanted!!

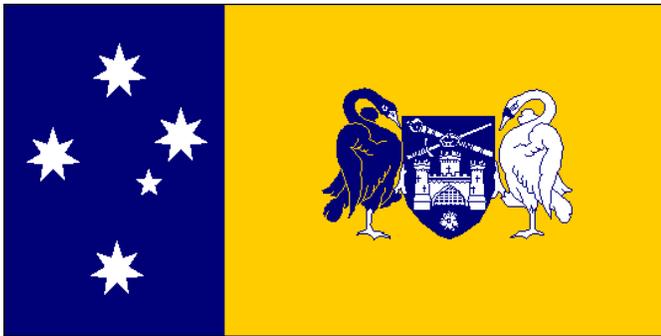
Articles, poetry, Letters to the Editor, suggestions to improve Phactum.

Almost all topics are welcome - no celebrity gossip, and no partisan politics please.

Send submissions to phactpublicity@aol.com

Canberra Skeptics Inc. and the CSIRO Discovery Science Centre Proudly Present

Witch-hunters, Injustice and Superstition: How science and skepticism will benefit Africa



Speaker: Mr Leo Igwe

Thursday, 18th of August 2011 - 6:00 - 7:30 p.m.
Optus Theatre, CSIRO Discovery Science Centre,
Clunies Ross Street Acton ACT 2601
Free Admission

- ◆ Africans stand to gain a lot by embracing the skeptical outlook; what are those gains?
- ◆ Will Africans ever harvest them?
- ◆ And how do we ensure that Africa reaps the fruits of skeptical rationality?

Mr Leo Igwe will talk about how science and skepticism has been used to challenge irrational beliefs systems that have resulted in children being killed for being witches. He will also discuss the consequences of challenging such beliefs in Africa and the role science, skepticism and critical thinking can play in Africa's future.

Leo Igwe is the founder of the Nigerian Humanist Movement, the Nigerian Skeptics Society and former director of the Center for Inquiry/Nigeria. Leo currently works for the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) as its director in West and Southern Africa. He also represents IHEU at the African Commission on Human and People's Rights in Banjul, Gambia. In the past few months, Leo has spent much of his time rescuing alleged witch children in Akwa Ibom state in Southern Nigeria. Leo has been arrested, detained and beaten up several times by the police and local gangs in the course of his work and campaign against superstition, injustices and religious fanaticism. He writes for "The Skeptic" and has authored numerous articles on human rights, humanism, skepticism and freethought in Africa.

Dinner will follow the lecture at the Canberra Club (Level 1, 45 West Row Canberra City ACT 2601). To RSVP for the dinner please contact To RSVP for dinner please contact email at mail@canberraskeptics.org.au

The event was made possible by a generous grant from the National Science Week 2011.

Editors note: We expect that few if any of Philadelphia's Critical Thinkers will be attending this event due to dismal logistics, but it is an excellent topic although a depressing one. Sadly, in the 21st Century this kind of thinking is common in some parts of the world, and even more unfortunately the thinking is translated into various violent vigilante sorts of "justice" or self-righteousness. We hope that in the course of discussion the joyless plight of albinos in those science-free jurisdictions will be at least mentioned as a part of those purgatorial rites heavily influenced by cynical financial gain by a few. Commentary on this meeting and this topic is invited.

Empty Nest, Full Life

by Albert Fried-Cassorla

Soon, soon, they'll be leaving soon.
You hear this silent dirge,
like an annoying chorus in the room.

So for eighteen years you've raised and loved them, and now it all
seems to point
to that one auspicious day when they blow your happy joint.

True, there's more... an excitement and expectation that illuminates the way.
Still, you watch the days cascade like leaves in driest times of August.
And you count the cartons piling up while searching for hidden plusses.

"Don't forget us -- we're the ones who love you!"
...your thought cries loud and mainly unspoken.

Yet you wonder,
What part of me may soon lie broken?

As you prepare and taste the fast future, you know this surely is no death --
just a long-deferred dear parting, a time of bated breath.
There's tiny solace in that lonesome fact, though it salves the smarting.



The deeper wisdom, it looks to me,
lies in coming days
and what they're bringing
in the newer shape of couplehood,
and time to do one's bidding.

So send them off! you addled parents like me, you cherishers of last moments.
Remember the thrills you felt, the joys of place and knowledge.
Hey, those crypts you thought you saw were just the marbled halls of college.

Yes, wise up, you parents like us! And avoid the sentimental sink.
The Book of Life's still being writ -- stay ahead of the fast-drying ink.

August 21, 2000

Albert Fried-Cassorla is a teacher for the School District of Philadelphia, is a philosopher, playwright, poet, and in 1999 was a finalist in the Montgomery County (PA) Poet Laureate's Contest.

Thank you, Albert.
Phactum readers are invited to submit original poetry.



A letter from Benjamin Franklin to Sir John Pringle observing the physics of an oil lamp



Philadelphia, Dec. 1, 1762.

Sir,

During our passage of Madeira, the weather being warm, and the cabin windows constantly open for the benefit of the air, the candles at night flared and run very much, which was an inconvenience. At Madeira we got oil to burn, and with a common glass tumbler or beaker, slung in wire, and suspended to the ceiling of the cabin, and a little wire hoop for the wick, furnish'd with corks to float on the oil, I made an Italian lamp, that gave us very good light all over the table. The glass at bottom contained water to about one third of its height; another third was taken up with oil; the rest was left empty that the sides of the glass might protect the flame from the wind. There is nothing remarkable in all this; but what follows is particular. At supper, looking on the lamp, I remarked that tho' the surface of the oil was perfectly tranquil, and duly preserved its position and distance with regard to the brim of the glass, the water under the oil was in great commotion, rising and falling in irregular waves, which continued during the whole evening. The lamp was kept burning as a watch light all night, till the oil was spent, and the water only remain'd. In the morning I observed, that though the motion of the ship continued the same; the water was now quiet, and its surface as tranquil as that of the oil had been the evening before. At night again, when oil was put upon it, the water resumed its irregular motions, rising in high waves almost to the surface of the oil, but without disturbing the smooth level of that surface. And this was repeated every day during the voyage.

Since my arrival in America, I have repeated the experiment frequently thus. I have put a pack-thread round a tumbler, with strings of the same, from each side, meeting above it in a knot at about a foot distance from the top of the tumbler. Then putting in as much water as would fill about one third part of the tumbler, I lifted it up by the knot, and swung it to and fro in the air; when the water appeared to keep its place in the tumbler as steadily as if it had been ice. But pouring gently in upon the water about as much oil, and then again swinging it in the air as before, the tranquility before possessed by the water, was transferred to the surface of the oil, and the water under it was agitated with the same commotions as at sea.

I have shewn this experiment to a number of ingenious persons. Those who are but slightly acquainted with the principles of hydrostatics, &c. are apt to fancy immediately that they understand it, and readily attempt to explain; it but their explanations have been different, and to me not very intelligible. Others more deeply skill'd in those principles, seem to wonder at it, and promise to consider it. And I think it is worth considering: For a new appearance, if it cannot be explain'd by our old principles, may afford us new ones, of use perhaps in explaining some other obscure parts of natural knowledge. I am, &c.

BF.

Ray Haupt attends the 2010 SSE Annual Meeting

A rebuttal by PhACT subscriber L. David Leiter on the matter of remarks made by the Phactum Editor concerning the annual meeting of the Society for Scientific Exploration in Boulder, Colorado, June 2010



I smell Baloney

Before this whole event fades into history, I have some comments in response to Ray's report on his experiences at the June 2010 meeting of the "Society for Scientific Exploration", which appeared in the July/August 2010 issue of *Phactum*, in his "Various Ruminations" section. Most importantly, I want to personally thank Ray for spending a significant chunk of personal time and money to attend that meeting, thus giving SSE a fair chance to

redeem itself in his eyes.

I spent essentially all of the general-agenda events of the meeting seated next to Ray. I teased him several times for keeping his arms crossed on his chest during many of the presentations -- a classic, defensive, "body-language" posture. If he counters that the lecture hall was too cold, it wasn't. Further, I kept hearing mumblings from Ray's direction that sounded suspiciously like "B---S---!", and in fairness, I must admit that this was not the most inspiring SSE Annual Meeting that I have attended in my 20 years as an SSE member. However, it was not that bad considering that the "program chair" reportedly dropped the ball in the last 10 yards of his preparation activity, and a last-minute substitute saved the day.

I was not at all surprised or upset by Ray's published comments regarding the meeting in the above issue of *Phactum*. Sadly, however, these were not his only significant comments regarding the meeting and SSE, as I will discuss in my own following comments.

As of this annual meeting, SSE elected a new president. Dr. Bill Bengston succeeds our previous president, Dr. Garret Moddel. At the conclusion of Dr. Bengston's acceptance speech, and just before the meeting adjourned, I reminded Ray, in some detail, that Bengston was the scientist who had conducted some ground-breaking experiments in psychic healing of a standard type of laboratory mice, injected with a standard type of cancer cells, that normally, unfailingly produced 100% fatality in approximately 28 days.

Bengston's name should be familiar to PhACT's Council members. Despite several efforts on my part to get PhACT to invite him to speak at one of its monthly meetings, that invitation was never extended. What was PhACT's Council so afraid of? Dr. Bengston's unique research is at least fascinating, and the risk of "psychological infection" of PhACT meeting attendees' minds is essentially zero. Any attendee who wishes to walk out on a speaker is always free to do so. In fact, I remember that very thing happening during a presentation by Bill Wisdom years ago. I wasn't offended by anything Wisdom had to say. I like Bill, and besides, he plays a great banjo!

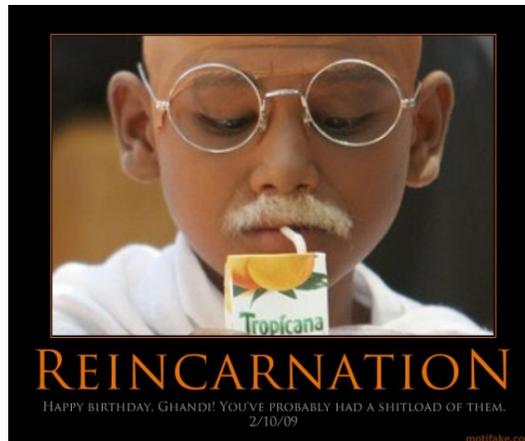
For those who are interested in Bengston's pioneering work, go to scientificexploration.org then go to SSE's Journal, JSE, then read Bengston's paper, "*The Effect of the 'Laying On of Hands' on Transplanted Breast Cancer in Mice*", in the 14-3 edition of JSE. Warning: Have a defending psychologist close at hand to avoid damage to your personal skeptical inclinations.

O.K.! When I reminded Ray of Bengston's work, his verbatim response was, "It never happened!" (**WHAT?**) Then, in curt, rapid-fire secession, he declared, "There is no God", and "Reincarnation doesn't exist". My actual notes, made the next day, of Ray's emphatic, triple declaration are available for review by appointment by serious inquirers. Ray is of course welcome to comment on the accuracy

of my statements above.

My immediate reaction to Ray's triple-barrage was sadness -- real, deep sadness! How could my old friend from PhACT, an organization ostensibly dedicated to time-tested, hard science, say such things, and more importantly, why? I was so shocked that I didn't respond at all to his three statements, but instead wished Ray a safe trip home and said goodbye to him. As an indication of how distracted I was at the time by his comments, I forgot to pick up the DVDs of the meeting's formal proceedings that I had ordered, which were available shortly after adjournment; and that led to all kinds of grief getting the filming contractor to ship them to me.

Shortly after returning home, it suddenly occurred to me that Ray's three forceful declarations were likely not an



attempt to convince me that they were indisputable facts, which I'm sure he realized I would not accept, but were instead a verbal reinforcement of his own personal belief system, which declarations, it appears, he made to ward off the effects of the preceding three-day assault of the SSE meeting on that belief system.

Let's start with Ray's opening "jaw-dropper", i.e. "It never happened!", his response to my brief description of Bengston's work. Well, can I prove that Bengston's research article in JSE is not a total fabrication, as Ray's statement implies? Certainly not easily, and certainly not without a ton of willing help from Bengston and other people involved in the original experiments, and the several confirmation studies at other universities.

As an interesting aside, Bengston addressed an SSE Annual Meeting on the same subject months after (if memory serves) his paper appeared in JSE. Apparently, according to his presentation, after word got around about his pioneering research, other skeptics (like Ray), but instead "credentialed types" from several other universities, invited Bengston to repeat his experiment at their facilities, under their observation. Apparently, he accepted these several invitations and a resulting pattern emerged:

- 1) He would repeat his experiment there with similar results.
- 2) His hosts couldn't believe it, so they requested a confirmation study.
- 3) Bengston would accommodate them, again with results confirming both the original and the immediately-previous study.
- 4) Bengston would never hear from them again!

Back to Ray's stated belief that "It never happened!". Let's take a more practical approach. If you were Bengston (or me) would you be willing to devote much effort to convince a single skeptic like Ray, whom had probably never even read Bengston's original paper in JSE, of its validity and accuracy? Moreover, if you, the reader, were a tenured professor like Bengston, at a College on Long Island, NY, (I did a Google check! You can too!) and a respected full member, and now president of an 800-member international society (SSE) consisting of approximately 1/3 fellow scientists, and you had already risked your career with such controversial research, would you be willing to try to convince a single, rigidly-skeptical officer (Ray) of a skeptics' association that repeatedly declined to invite you to address one of their meetings, by repeating a difficult and time-consuming biological experiment for his sole benefit?

Now, let's consider Ray's second declaration, i.e. "There is no God!". Really? That statement carries exactly as much scientific weight as my saying: "God is absolutely real!", i.e. zero! Actually, I am currently an Agnostic Deist, a title I borrowed from a friend, whom I believe originally coined it,

and whom has studied the subject far more extensively than I am willing to. (I was previously a "Scientific Reincarnationist", more below.)

Ray, the preceding exercise in a (currently) futile difference-of-opinion is hardly anything close to science (PhACT's purported bastion of defense for its many positions), or can you prove your contention with solid, unassailable data? I can't prove mine either. This whole subject reminds me of the old joke about the two Protestant churches across the street from each other. Each had a message on their "announcement- board" out front. One board said, "There ain't no Hell!", and the other said, "The Hell there ain't!".

Ray's final declaration was (paraphrasing) "Reincarnation doesn't exist!". Ray knows that I accept human reincarnation as a natural phenomenon, based on an ever-growing body of solid, repeatable, scientific evidence, which evidence he will likely never attempt to access.

A while back I asked Ray face-to-face (again paraphrasing), if he had had any significant experience in his youth (Ray is about my age, which is 74) where, either voluntarily or involuntarily, he had been involved in a faith-based philosophy that he later rejected, and then broke away from. He said "No.". I must take Ray at his word, but if it's accurate, he's the first and only skeptic*, in whom I've had some insight regarding his formative years, whom has not had such an experience; and that

includes two skeptics who are well-known celebrities on TV documentaries. For more details on this phenomenon, please see my two papers in JSE issues 16:1 and 18:4.

Ray, you now have the "bully pulpit", re. this submission. Ray gets upset when I refer to nearly all so-called skeptics as "pseudo-skeptics". (True) "Skepticism is doubt, not denial." However, he and other PhACTors seem to have no problem referring to the work of SSE members as "pseudo-science".

Do I detect a double-standard here?

Editor's Notes:

- ♥ Dr. Bengston's web site may be viewed here:
<http://www.bengstonresearch.com/>
- ♥ See this web blog for a scientist's view of Energy Healing as announced by Dr. Bengston:
<http://skepstat.blogspot.com/2007/09/no-thanks-i-dont-need-any-treatment-ive.html>
- ♥ Perhaps I was a riverboat gambler in a previous incarnation.
- ♥ Thanks for speaking out, Dave.

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Thanks to Josiah Gilman

05-02-2007

LEPERS ... I HEAL LEPERS

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The Magic of Names

by Paul Schlueter III

"And out of the ground the lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him." ~ Genesis 2:19-20, King James version

And so, the lord God (whose name many consider it a sin to utter) created animals (and man), but left the naming of them to his favorite creation. Was this so that Adam would get a taste for creativity? The Bible doesn't say, but the great naming session falls between the point where God decided that it wasn't good for Adam to be alone and that He should "make him an help meet for him" (usually interpreted as a helping companion with whom to share Eden), and the point where God anaesthetized Adam in preparation for removing a rib (later to become the first clone, Eve.) This is the first Biblical indication that mankind was intended to have dominion over the Earth and its other creatures, if you happen to subscribe to the Creation story.

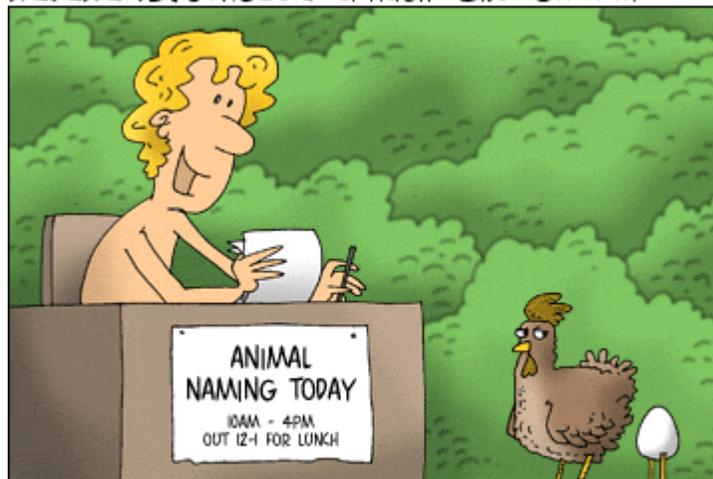
Authors of many persuasions have since called man "the great namer", or phrases of similar weight. From a linguistic point of view, it makes sense; a species sort of needs language, before it becomes capable of using proper nouns to name objects and beings. Nobody can deny that your dog knows who you are, but he has no name for you. We can only guess at the recognition that non-linguistic creatures might have, but (so far, at least) naming seems to

be one of the last holdouts among "skills unique to humanity." Verbal communication, tool-making and tool-using, and even mourning the dead have all been shown to exist among animals, but naming remains our domain alone.

Among many aboriginal tribes, anthropologists have found that it is common for a child to be given a secret, spiritual name at or near birth, known only to a few intimates; other names, by which the person is thereafter commonly known, tend to spring from memorable or distinctive actions or characteristics, for which the person is widely recognized. Among such tribes, there is often a belief in great spiritual threat, should the secret, spiritual name fall into the hands of an enemy (particularly one with knowledge of witchcrafts.) If your enemies know your "true" name, they can call any number of curses down upon you, they can control the fate of your soul after death, and so on.

The power of a spiritual name may well have also held sway in western cultures, before organized religion came along. Many of our own spiritual stories and myths involve demons and monsters, over whom men may only gain

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(See Genesis 2:18-25)

03-28-2011

JUST LET ME KNOW WHO WAS HERE FIRST AND I'LL GET THE PAPERWORK STARTED

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"I wake up every morning at nine and grab for the morning paper. Then I look at the obituary page. If my name is not on it, I get up."
 ~ Benjamin Franklin

control after learning their true names. It is a very common theme in demonology that demons jealously hide their identities, and that they can only be enslaved to a witch's will if the witch invokes their true and actual name in a spell. Even the fairy tale of Rumpelstiltskin implies that the knowing of one's name can give another power over him.

Today, among the urban tribes of street gangs, names have a similar power. Each modern human (in the urban U.S.) is given a name by his/her parent(s), which is then formally registered with the government (often with a footprint) as the primary identifier for that individual throughout life. The gangster must conceal this name, primarily to protect himself from identification by the police for any illegal acts he may commit. So, early in the life of certain male urban children, they attain some nickname, and to call them by anything else is disrespect. Some "street names" are silly monikers; other ones are serious attempts to build up a particular image. Among African-Americans, it is common to adopt a "Muslim" name (in part to demean and discredit the "slave name" given by an otherwise well-meaning parent.) Among girls, aliases are often meant to lend an air of attractiveness, while among guys, they often lend an image of toughness. Just don't ever use such a person's legal name in public, because to do so threatens them with the possibility of being identified by authorities. Police, on the other hand, will spend hours interrogating arrestees, seeking out any and all known aliases of his associates, so they can add them to their identity files. If the Po-po knows who you are, he can control your life in THIS existence (often a greater threat than the afterlife.)

Identity, in the modern world, is not only limited to one's name. We have grown quite expert at identifying persons by their fingerprints. In fact, we even apply similar techniques to identify apes in zoos, and wild rhinos and elephants which have taken to pressing their noses against the granaries they

"Fate tried to conceal him by naming him Smith."

~ Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. (1841 - 1935),

American jurist

analysis, we are not only able to identify individuals (whether human, animal, or plant), but even to identify the individuals' ancestry. At one time, only your surname indicated your parentage, and that was often highly debatable.

In our cultural tradition, the surname is inherited paternally, and women adopt their husband's surname at marriage. In matrilineal societies, the family name is inherited from mothers (of whom we may hold far more confidence of identity than the fathers.) Lately, though, many of us have elected to modify or ignore these traditions, so the U.S. surname has become of much less use in identifying our lineages.

We may change our names, legally, but to do so we must also advertise the fact widely, so that we don't abuse the privilege as a means to hide from our creditors (or those pesky Authorities.) Also, there is something of a cottage industry in the (illegal) preparation of falsified identification documents, using the remarkable facilities

available with computer-generated graphics. You want to impress the gals on the internet dating service? Just PhotoShop your head onto the buff torso of some well-muscled jock, and your chances for a date this Saturday will go up dramatically (what you do once she sees the real you is another story.) Kids far under the legal drinking age can easily gain access to bars and liquor stores (as well as tobacco shops), using fake IDs.

Another method that the U.S. government has devised to identify us is the Social Security Number. Change your name all you want, but the SSN stays with YOU, so the tax man can always track you down. The threat came when everyone else began using the same number to tell us apart. Now, the SSN has become the new "secret, spiritual name" of most Americans, which we dare not let our enemies learn, under

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Thanks to Brian Hockett

03-10-2004

UMMA ... COULD YOU CHECK AGAIN UNDER MY MAIDEN NAME?

"I have known a German Prince with more titles than subjects, and a Spanish nobleman with more names than shirts."

Oliver Goldsmith (1730 - 1774), Irish poet and physician

great threat of identity theft! We could find ourselves the proud new owners of credit accounts, through which are purchased untold goods and services, injuring something far more crucial than "our good name" - our Credit Scores!

I'm left with a few questions, though. For example, you know the play "Death Takes A Holiday", a.k.a. the movie "Meet Joe Black", right? In it, Death comes seeking you out when it is your time to go. So, how does Death know you? If you're hiding out down at your road dog's crib, going by the name of your favorite handgun, can Death find you? How? Do you have a special scent (which is probably how your mutt would find you, come supptime)? Can Death read your Aura like a DNA analysis, and spot it among millions of fellow mortals?

Coming back to the rational world for a while, I wonder what practical value a name really has, in this day and age? The parent whose entire name I share recently sent me an internet search printout of our name, and it turns out that, while each of us is on it, there are also quite a few other Paul Schlueters in the U.S. Shucks, if you're not too particular about the spelling, I even share the name of a former Prime Minister of one of the Scandinavian countries! Let's not even LOOK in Germany, where the family originated. I don't know any of those others guys, but for their sake, let's hope none of them ever gets arrested and has to explain their name's similarity to that of some convict in PA! Guess what Schlueter means in German: Jailor, or Turnkey! How ironic is that?

Well, it's not my "secret, spiritual name", anyway! I was born under a whole other name, to a whole other family, in a distant northern state, and then put up for adoption. Only a year or so later did I get selected as my parents' new son, and receive this name! You may well have closer blood ties and national heritage links with your next door neighbor than I do with the people I call Mom and Dad! Yet, I resemble my Dad in many ways, and my Mom couldn't love me more. Having located my birth families, I can affirm that the genetic ties are also undeniable; I have a late cousin who so closely resembles me that we could have swapped photo IDs, and nobody could tell the difference! Not a few of my blood relatives are happy that I was adopted, seeing how I turned out... at least I didn't ruin THEIR "good names" with my criminal record! I can only wonder what influences derive from the facts that both of my birthparents rode motorcycles (as did I, alone among my adopted family), or that both were somewhat rebellious, and stood out as "black sheep" among

their families? The Nature vs. Nurture debate holds few firm answers, yet many tantalizing anecdotes!

As humans, we go on giving names to things at every opportunity. We name the products we design, hoping that consumers will be swayed by the magical trickery of suggestive marketing. We name our cars, and our homes, perhaps so we have something to curse while we kick them for breaking down. We name our diseases, not because knowing what we're suffering from helps us much, but because we just want to have something to call it, in our misery (or our prayers.) We give nicknames to our familiars, so that they can always figure out who is shouting to them from across the street without turning to see. We name our streets, presumably so we don't get lost (and yet, not necessarily in a rational manner that would help us find our way.) We name battleships, and we name hurricanes. We name the geographical features of our world, and the patterns we perceive among the stars in the sky. We name our favorite recipes. There's even a crude joke about naming the excrement that took a bit longer than usual to pass.

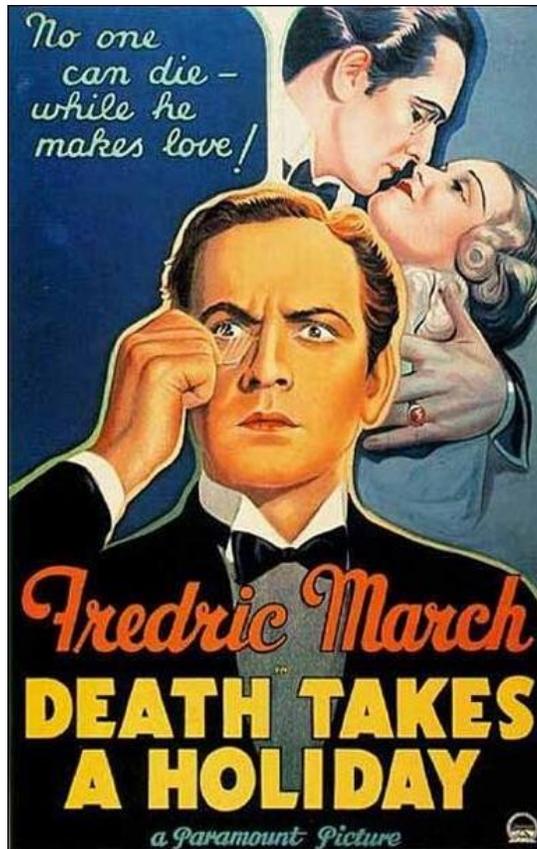
We name our organizations, too, to help identify our common interest. Yet, the names can also be vague; what sort of Critical Thinker does

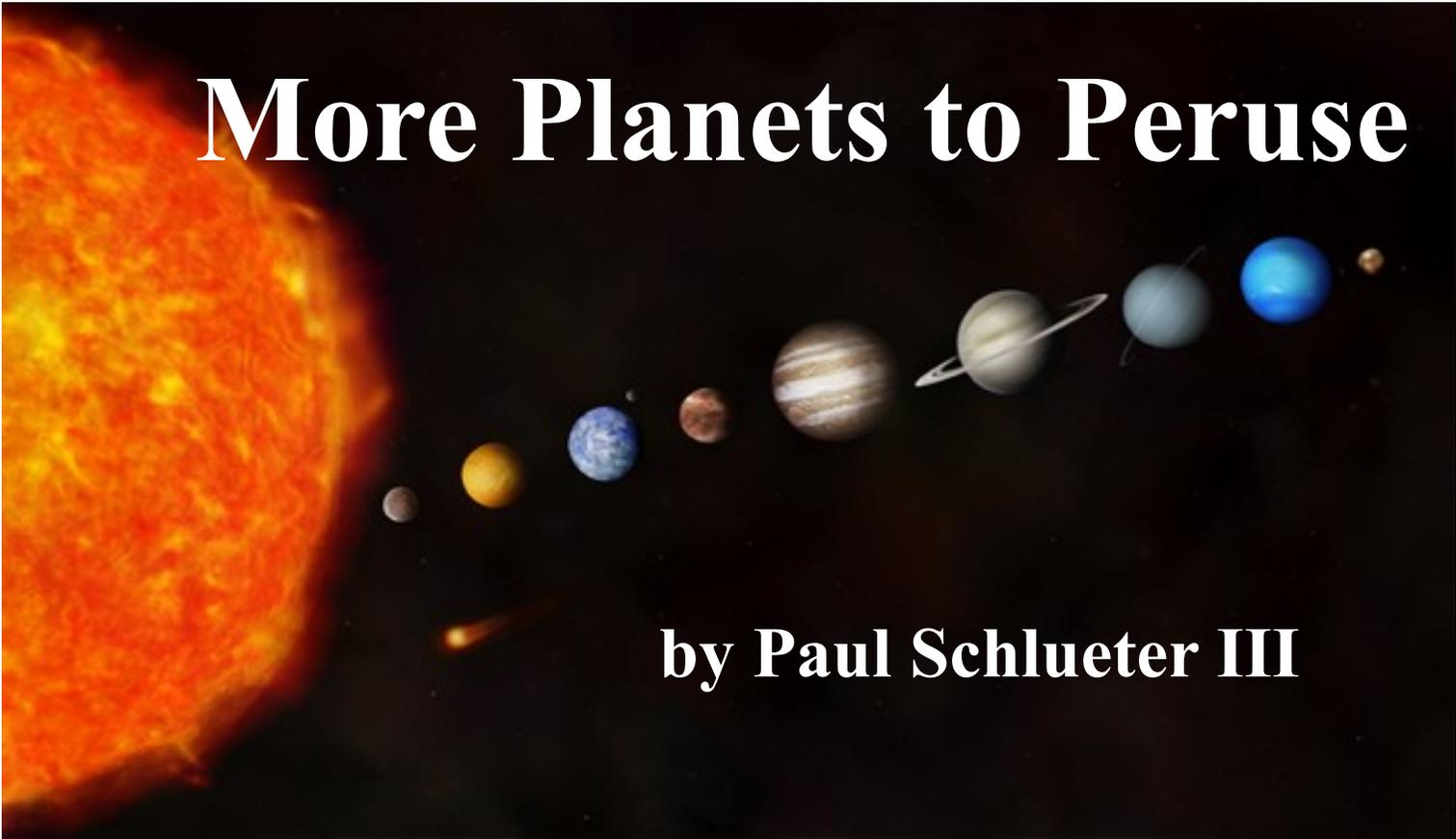
PhACT appeal to most? One type thinks of the critical (i.e. , crucial , essential) aspects of a problem, then develops and weighs a variety of solutions to it. Employers like that sort of person. The other sort is one who enjoys criticizing and critiquing everything, even when there isn't a problem needing solution. Employers don't have much use for that sort, do they? Depending on which sort one has the most experience with, his opinion of membership in an organization of Critical Thinkers might be positive or negative. Names need to be clearly understood, if they are to have useful value in identifying us.

If there is actually anything that practically all of us hold a nearly spiritual reverence for, it is the practice of naming. Maybe names really are magical, in some way that really counts to our psyches.

Paul Schlueter III is serving Life in Prison in NE Pennsylvania. His supporters have created a website about him. www.jaylbird.org

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More Planets to Peruse

by Paul Schlueter III

NASA's Kepler observatory, orbiting our home world outside the light distorting atmosphere, has been racking up its share of planet sightings. Focusing on just one tiny patch of the sky, Kepler has found 1,235 "candidate planets," more than tripling the number we've spotted so far.

Kepler looks for the periodic dimming of light that occurs when a planet "transits," or passes in front of, its distant star. It is able to be very much more sensitive to such variations in the luminosity of pinprick stars because the atmospheric distortion (what causes the apparent "twinkle" of starlight, as viewed from here on the planet surface) is absent. However, such planets are only considered "candidates" until ground-based telescopes can verify their presence. Kepler, in other words, is primarily telling us where to look with our big 'scopes.

In a Science News article, 2/26/11, p. 18, Ron Cowen reports on the latest announcement from NASA. The Kepler chief scientist is Bill Borucki, from the Ames Research Center in Mountain View, CA (a NASA facility.) A Feb. 2 briefing from Borucki detailed the findings of the orbiting observatory's first four months of operation. If similar rates of planet discovery can be applied to the remainder of the sky (which Kepler hasn't examined yet), he suggests that there may be 20,000 "goldilocks zone" planets in the Milky Way alone. Goldilocks planets have orbits within which planetary temperatures are likely to permit water to remain

mostly in liquid form, a condition thought to be a necessity for the development of life. In some cases, experts think, the moons of Jupiter-sized planets might have liquid water, and thus potential life.

Of the recent 1,235 candidates, 54 appear to be potentially habitable a mere five are similar to the size of Earth. Many are Superplanets (more than twice Earth's size, and up, up, up from there). Other Earth-sized planets are there but most are not within the habitable planet-star distance range that interests life-seekers. The lion's share of planets Kepler has found resemble Neptune in size (perhaps because, being so big, they're easier to spot.) They account for nearly two-thirds of the candidates. 288 others "are a few times the size of Earth."

Borucki anticipates that at least 90 percent of the candidate planets will end up being verified by other observatories. There's no explanation offered for other phenomenon that might create a false reading suggesting the presence of a transiting planet. However, imagination offers a few options; sunspots on a rotating sun's surface might reduce the light emitted in a periodic pattern; spotty dust clouds or asteroid swarms might orbit at planet-like rates; there could even be yet-undiscovered phenomenon that interfere with starlight by way of periodic gravitational fluctuations which bend the light in their region.

Astronomers have verified over 500 extrasolar planets, entirely separate from those found by Kepler. The planetary transit method of detection is one of the newer methods. In

order for a planet to be detected by transit, it must pass between Earth and that planet's star, so there are a whole lot of orbital angles that planets could take which don't bring them into line-of-shadow. The earlier method of planet detection was to find a star that appeared to "wobble" (periodic variations in emitted light frequency suggest that the star is moving back and forth, causing a Doppler shift similar to what we hear when a loud vehicle approaches, then recedes.) The problem with star wobble searches is that they tend to find stars with super-massive planets (Jupiter or bigger) which orbit very closely. Such finds are interesting, but planets like that are thought to be incapable of supporting life.

A number of scientists and creative thinkers have been writing a lot, lately, about what we'll do if (most likely "when") we find an Earth-sized planet in the goldilocks zone, and then detect some phenomenon that might indicate the presence of intelligent, technological life forms there. The scenario of "Battle: Los Angeles" is highly unlikely, because the very same laws of Physics which constrain us from travelling to other planets will impede bad guys from other worlds, as well. A scenario similar to "Contact" (with Jodie Foster) might be a bit more plausible; another party might conceivably send us a light-speed message that would give us a technological leg up. Or, as in "Species," the series of movies which introduced Natasha Henstridge, aliens might send us information which we'll use to create the DNA of their lifeform right here on our planet (a spectacular shortcut!)

Even if we manage to find incontrovertible proof that somebody intelligent is sending a message in our direction, we have to realize that the message that reaches us (at light-speed, presumably) will be tens, hundreds, or even potentially thousands of years old when it gets here. It'll take the same length of time for a return message to reach them, IF our leaders decide to send one.

I had a long-term correspondence with another human being only 5,000 miles away, in South America, and the month-long snail mail turnaround was frustrating, at best. What would a turnaround perhaps several human generations in duration be like? Imagine Columbus writing a letter, which then was answered around the time of the American revolution. Expect the next turnaround in about 2160!?! What sort of conversation could be held, at that pace? That would involve correspondents only 142 light years or so distant (what are there, like THREE stars within that range, maybe?) More likely would be turnarounds measured in millennia, or longer.

Imagine, instead, that Jesus had written the first letter; a thousand years later, Leif Ericson might have written the next one, from Newfoundland, and a thousand years after that, maybe Osama Bin Laden might have written about his plans for a terrorist attack. What sort of image would our species present to distant scientists if those three letters were the basis for getting to know us? We can scarcely bridge the cultural differences on our own home planet across such leaps of time. Now, imagine that our correspondents asked us to EXPLAIN anything that Jesus, or even Leif, had said? We'd be hard-pressed just to explain what Osama was thinking.

Personally, I'm partial to the method we used when we sent that space probe out through the solar system., with a golden plaque aboard that showed line drawings of a man and a woman (naked, as if we go about in that manner!) There was also an LP record-type of audio recording sent along (do YOU currently have the technology in your home to play a vinyl LP?), bearing messages from some of our leaders, and some musical selections that'll REALLY make 'em wonder what we're trying to say. That probe, by the way, has only passed

the "edge" of our own solar system a decade or so ago; it'll be a VERY long time before it encounters anything but space dust and photons. Even if it is someday spotted, captured intact, and (however miraculously) interpreted with reasonable accuracy, will we still resemble the 1970s species that sent the thing out into space? Will we have denuded our world and starved ourselves into extinction by pressure-cooking ourselves in a fossil fuel furnace?

I'm fascinated by the advancements we've made in finding other objects in space which resemble our own planet. We'll indubitably find ways to infer great and wondrous tidbits of information about them. I'm all for continuing the search, but I won't set the table for company just yet.

(FOOTNOTE: The NASA probe we sent out into space also bore a schematic diagram of our own solar system, indicating that we live on the third planet... of NINE. Pluto was indicated, as well. Now you have to wonder; what will the recipient think when they 'scope us out, and only see eight planets in our system? Or will they also see Zena, and make the count ten? Will they think they're looking at the wrong system, and send their message elsewhere? Will they simply figure we're a bunch of dopes who can't even count our neighboring planets correctly? I'm just sayin'...)

MCHUMOR.COM by T. McCracken



"We've got to move closer to work.
These 200 light year commutes are killing me."

Cartoon by T. McCracken
<http://www.mchumor.com/>
Used by Permission

PHACT CALENDAR

PhACT Events



Dr. David Cattell, Chairman of the Physics Department of Community College of Philadelphia hosts meetings of **PhACT** - at 2:00 PM on the third Saturday of most months at Community College of Philadelphia.., Parking is easily available and costs \$3.75 for all day. Enter the college parking lot on 17th Street which is one way south bound. This meeting site is handicap accessible. **PhACT Meetings are free and open to the public unless otherwise noted.**

Saturday, September 17, 2011 at 2:00 PM - The Search for Extra Terrestrial Intelligence, or SETI, has gone on since it was first recognized that the planets and stars are objects like the earth and the Sun. Various techniques have been proposed, from dream journeys to lighting immense fires in the deserts, before we had electronics and nuclear technologies. Some of the present techniques will be discussed, and the possibilities of future systems based on what have been planned by various groups and organizations. Modern communications techniques in everyday use will be mentioned, and a few props will be brought to demonstrate a few concepts.

Our speaker is Earl Bennett, President of the Philadelphia Area Space Alliance, and SETI League member. Bennett was born in Philadelphia, in 1949, and attended Drexel University. His interest in space exploration and science has lead him to join various organizations including: The SETI League, The Planetary Society, AMSAT (The Amateur Satellite Corporation), and The National Space Society, N.S.S. Earl has been President of the Philadelphia Area Space Alliance for a number of years. They promote science and technology education by performing outreach to the general public as guests of various museums and organizations.

Saturday, October 15, 2011 - TBA C2-28 (LECTURE HALL)

Saturday, November 19, 2011 - TBA C2-28 (LECTURE HALL)

Thursday, July 14, 2011 at 7:00 PM at the Academy of Natural Sciences - Mega-Bad Movie Night!

Join us at the Academy after hours to watch some "awesomely awful" movies. The Academy's own experts will be onstage to comment on the many scientific absurdities—think Mystery Science Theater 3000!

Enjoy light snacks drinks, and exploring the museum before the feature film begins. Then sit back, relax, laugh, and cringe as we watch an "awesomely awful" flick.

You must be 18+ years of age to attend these events (and 21+ to drink).

Mega Python vs. Gatoroid After a species of giant python invades the everglades, park rangers breed mutant alligators to counter the threat. Soon, the battle between massive pythons and enormous gators threatens all of Florida!!



Reception: 7–8 pm

Grab some snacks and a beer, and then check out the many cool things on display at the Academy. We'll have out some amazing boa, python, and alligator specimens from our Herpetology Collection. And keep an eye out for some live reptiles too!

Movie: 8–10 pm

For quick easy online registration, visit:

megabadmovienightmegapythonvs-gatoroid.eventbrite.com/

or for registration by phone, call 215-299-1060.

Friday, July 15, 2011 at 7:00 PM - Delaware Valley Amateur Astronomers in the Greater Plymouth Community Center, 2910 Jolly Rd, Plymouth Meeting, PA

TeV Gamma-Ray Astronomy and Supernova Remnants - Dana Saxon, Ph.D. candidate, Univ. of Delaware

Free and open to the public. <http://dvaa.org>

The **PhACT Calendar** is open to members and non-members who wish to announce meetings and events of other groups of which they are interested or affiliated. These events should be of some general interest to the Skeptical or Scientific community and should be within a reasonable radius of Philadelphia. Send submissions to the editor at phactpublicity@aol.com. Keep the announcements brief. Space is limited and insertions will be made on a first come-first served basis after the needs of PhACT are accomplished. Phactum does not accept paid advertising.

Wednesday, July 20, 2011, at 5:30 PM at the Norristown Public Library (1001 Powell Street, Norristown, Pennsylvania).

“Dinner and a Movie” night.

Please arrive at the library Community Room around 5:30 PM with your own dinner to chat with friends before the screening of **The Lord is Not on Trial Here Today**. This 55-minute documentary presented by the Freethought Society tells the compelling story of the landmark 1945 First Amendment case that established the separation of religion and government in public schools. The Lord is Not on Trial Here Today is written, produced, directed and photographed by Jay Rosenstein. This film has won a Peabody Award. It was named “Best Historical Documentary in the Mid-America Region” and won an Emmy Award for “Best Writing in the Mid-America Region.”

Wednesday, July 20, 2011 at 6pm at Laurel Hill Cemetery, 3822 Ridge Avenue, Philadelphia, PA19132. 215-228-8200

<http://www.thelaurehillcemetery.org>

Died at Sea, Lost at Sea, Buried at Sea

Died at Sea, Lost at Sea or Buried at Sea; these words inscribed on a grave marker tell us there is some special story or event associated with that individual's connection to the sea. Laurel Hill has many examples that illustrate this phenomenon. Led by Dr. J. Joseph Edgette, this tour will delve into and expose the circumstances that lie beneath the grave. A pilot shot down during war, the victim of a shark attack, those who did not survive Titanic's foundering, and other tales from the depths of Davey Jones' locker will be included. \$20.00 general / \$17.00 members / \$15.00 seniors & students. Children under 12 are free

Monday, July 25, 2011 at 7:30 PM at the Free Library of Philadelphia. Larry Flynt and David Eisenbach, Ph.D. **One Nation Under Sex: How the Private Lives of Presidents, First Ladies and Their Lovers Changed the Course of American History**

FREE No tickets required. For Info: 215-567-4341.

Notorious publisher and free speech champion Larry Flynt has been challenging America's interpretation of the First Amendment—and showcasing his brash style in assorted halls of justice—since his Hustler magazine hit national newsstands in 1974. Controversy with moralists is part of Flynt's territory: He has courted and been bedeviled by hypocrisy among “family values” politicians, once placing an ad in The Washington Post offering a million dollar reward to anyone with “documentary evidence of illicit sexual relations with a Congressman, Senator or other prominent officeholder.” In One Nation Under Sex, Flynt teams with Columbia professor David Eisenbach, creator and host of the History Channel special, The Beltway Unbuckled, to reveal how the checkered sex lives of America's leaders have shaped key decisions throughout history.

Tuesday, August 2, 2011 at 7:30PM at the Free Library of Philadelphia - **Juan Williams Muzzled: The Assault on Honest Debate**

Cost: \$15 General Admission, \$7 Students

Buy tickets online: <http://libraryphila.tix.com/Event.asp?Event=376496>

When NPR fired longtime news analyst Juan Williams for stating on The O'Reilly Factor that seeing people in “Muslim garb” on airplanes made him nervous, he called it a “chilling assault on free speech,” and said: “The critical importance of honest journalism and a free flowing, respectful national conversation needs to be had in our country.” Prior to

SOCRATES CAFE is moderated by: Lewis Mifsud, Ph.D., P.E., a member of PhACT and of The American Academy of Forensic Sciences. At 7:00 PM every Monday evening except holidays (on Tuesdays after a Monday holiday) at the Springfield Township Public Library (215-836-5300) at 1600 Papermill Mill Road, Wyndmoor, PA. 19038. This philosophical discussions group is free and open to the public. Join us and share your critical thinking, questions and opinions.



his stint at NPR, Williams spent two decades at the Washington Post, covering every major political campaign from 1980 to 2000. A graduate of Haverford College and a Fox News political analyst, Williams is also the author of six books, including the landmark Eyes on the Prize, a moving chronicle of the Civil Rights Movement. In Muzzled, Williams discusses how the nature of debate is choked by political correctness and the growing difficulty of speaking out on sensitive topics.

Wednesday, August 3, 2011 at 6pm at Laurel Hill Cemetery, 3822 Ridge Avenue, Philadelphia, PA19132. 215-228-8200

<http://www.thelaurehillcemetery.org>

Retracing the Streets of Philadelphia to their Majestic Dead End

Philadelphia's streets are as varied as her residents. Whether big and busy boulevards, quiet tree-lined lanes, or gray back alleys with asphalt as weathered as the old brick row homes that line them, each of our city's streets bears a history – a story – all its own. Many of those stories end at the same figurative stop sign, however. From Shippen Lane to Gratz Street, Rittenhouse Square to Wayne Avenue, their namesake and extended family origins now rest at Laurel Hill. Join us on this twilight trip through the famed historic site – Philadelphia's ultimate dead end – to learn more about how the roads upon which we live and travel earned their place on the map.

After the tour, toast to our great city Philly-style: over home-brewed beer, cheesesteaks and soft pretzels.

Retracing the Streets of Philadelphia will be led by Pete Hoskins, current President and CEO of the Laurel Hill and West Laurel Hill Cemetery Companies. While not born or bred in Philadelphia, Pete is former Commissioner of the City's Streets Department (Among other titles), and knows the thoroughfares of his adopted home as well as any native son.

\$20.00 general / \$17.00 members / \$15.00 seniors & students

Children under 12 are free

Saturday, August 6, 2011 at 3:00 PM. **The Freethought Society** will

host Mike Reid. Reid is the newly-elected president of the Washington Area Secular Humanists. The presentation “**Foundations of Evolution**” will take place in the Montgomery Auditorium (large basement room) at the Free Library of Philadelphia (1901 Vine Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania). Reid's free and open-to-the-public presentation will highlight the historical precursors that made Charles Darwin's Theory of Evolution possible.

Thursday, August 18, 2011 at 6pm

at Laurel Hill Cemetery, 3822 Ridge Avenue, Philadelphia, PA19132. 215-228-8200

<http://www.thelaurehillcemetery.org>

From Classy Broads to Daring Dames: The Ladies of Laurel Hill

TWILIGHT TOUR What do a ballerina, a sculptor, a maker of pyrotechnic devices, and a kindergarten leader have in common? First, they're all buried at Laurel Hill Cemetery. Second, they all happen to be women whose accomplishments in life have been largely neglected, devalued and forgotten throughout history... But, we are now working to right this wrong, unearthing their stories, and ensuring that they are told for all to hear!

\$20.00 general / \$17.00 members / \$15.00 seniors & students

Children under 12 are free

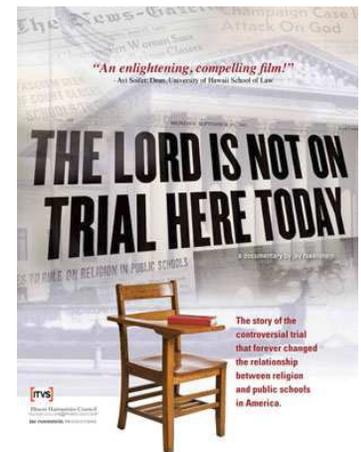
August 19 – 20 - 21, 2011

‘Battle of Belmont Plateau’ - Civil War Reenactment

LIVING HISTORY & BATTLE REENACTMENT – Commemoration of the 150th Anniversary of the Civil War

Belmont Grove, West Fairmount Park, Philadelphia, PA

Portraying: Authentic Civil War Battles and ‘Living History featuring



Philadelphia's participation

Camps open daily at 9AM - Battles at 1:30PM on Saturday and Sunday

- * Many authentic military and civilian reenactors are expected;
- * Visit both Union and Confederate camps where troops will demonstrate camp life and discuss aspects of Civil War history and military topics;
- * See troops drilling, mounted cavalry, artillery
- * Living history presentations, period music;
- * Sutlers tent village selling period items, jewelry, crafts, military items, souvenirs etc.
- * Food vendors plus picnic facilities
- * Parking lots close to all of the action
- * Free Admission and Free Parking!

Near Exit off I-76 Schuylkill Expressway

Directions to Belmont Plateau and Belmont Grove Camp area in West Fairmount Park: <http://www.epru.org/news/directions.php?d=40>

Further details and online registration: <http://www.civilwarphilly.net/reenactment>

Questions: reenactment@civilwarphilly.net or call 215 563 6500 x6461

Co-sponsored by the Philadelphia Civil War Consortium and Union League of Philadelphia.

Sunday, August 21, 2011 at 2pm at Laurel Hill Cemetery, 3822 Ridge Avenue, Philadelphia, PA19132. 215-228-8200

<http://www.thelaurehillcemetery.org>

Philadelphia's Industrial Magnates

Laurel Hill Cemetery was founded in 1836 on bluffs overlooking the Schuylkill River just as the nation's Industrial Revolution was getting underway. Technological innovation made for the rapid transition from a mercantile to an industrial economy, and the ranks of wealthy Philadelphians expanded as well. Although a number of them made their eternal rest in what has come to be called "Millionaires Row," they are, in fact, to be found throughout the cemetery. Learn their intriguing stories on this walking tour led by Richard A. Sauers that will visit gravesites of the city's early millionaires.

\$15.00 general / \$12.00 members / \$10.00 seniors & students

Children under 12 are free



Sunday, August 28, 2011 at 2pm at Laurel Hill Cemetery, 3822 Ridge Avenue, Philadelphia, PA19132. 215-228-8200 <http://www.thelaurehillcemetery.org>

www.thelaurehillcemetery.org

The Memorable Monuments of Laurel Hill: A Homage to the Stone Carvers of Yore

In 1881, The New York Times remarked that the monument of William J. Mullen, temporarily on display at the 1876 Centennial before being installed at Laurel Hill was constructed in "...attitudes ranging from the sublime to the ridiculous." 175 years later we still can't stop talking about it. Monuments come in all shapes, sizes and composition in Laurel Hill Cemetery, but some stand out prominently among the rest. Join us as we visit the final resting place of Mr. Mullen and many more of Laurel Hill's most unusual Victorian memorials. If you've ever wanted insight into cemetery symbolism, this is the tour for you!

\$15.00 general / \$12.00 members / \$10.00 seniors & students

Children under 12 are free

Monday, September 12, 2011 at 6:00 PM at National Mechanics, 22 S. Third Street, Philadelphia, PA 19106

Science on Tap is a monthly gathering that features a brief, informal presentation by a scientist or other expert followed by lively conversation.

Chile peppers are one of the most notable gifts of the New World to the Old. The global spread of chile peppers altered world cuisine, giving us everything from moles to masalas. Just as important, the "heat" of chile peppers provides a window for understanding the sensations of pain and temperature.

In this spicy illustrated talk, biochemist **Joseph Rucker** will share his interest in the history and science of chile peppers. Joseph Rucker, Ph.D.,

is the director of research and development at Integral Molecular, Inc.

Presented by the American Philosophical Society (APS) Museum.

Open to the public (age 21+ or accompanied by chaperone 25 years or older).

Wednesday, September 14, 2011 at 7:15 PM at the Franklin Institute.

The Rittenhouse Astronomical Society. Laura Misajet will discuss **The Effect of Planetaria on Modern Media / Culture**. A warm welcome home to Laura who was a previous lecturer and show producer here at the Fels Planetarium. Her extensive background in planetarium education coupled with running her own business as she pioneered development of all-sky visuals for planetaria in the early 1990's gives her a rich background from which to talk about the influence of planetaria on our media and culture. Laura now works with Zeiss as a planetarium consultant and sales representative.

<http://www.rittenhouseastronomicalsociety.org>

The Rittenhouse Astronomical Society meets the second Wednesday of the month.

PhACT Event

Saturday, September 17, 2011 at 2:00 PM- PhACT Meeting - The Search for Extra Terrestrial Intelligence. Earl Bennett who has been President of the Philadelphia Area Space Alliance (PASA) for a number of years will discuss this topic. PASA promotes science and technology education by performing outreach to the general public as guests of various museums and organizations. See Page 20 for more details.

Saturday, September 17, 2011 at 6pm at Laurel Hill Cemetery, 3822 Ridge Avenue, Philadelphia, PA19132. 215-228-8200 <http://www.thelaurehillcemetery.org>

www.thelaurehillcemetery.org

Unearthing Laurel Hill by the Light of the Harvest Moon

TWILIGHT TOUR Laurel Hill seems to acquire an unexplained aura of magic and mystery after the sun goes down. Gain a new perspective on this historic site in the dark of night.

\$20.00 general / \$17.00 members / \$15.00 seniors & students

Children under 12 are free

Sunday, September 18, 2011 at 2pm at Laurel Hill Cemetery, 3822 Ridge Avenue, Philadelphia, PA19132. 215-228-8200

<http://www.thelaurehillcemetery.org>

New Jersey in the Civil War: Remembering the Boys Beyond Our Blue River

From Privates to Generals, equipment and supplies, New Jersey played an important role in the Civil War. The regiments of Pennsylvania's neighbor to the east fought surely and bravely and were undoubtedly a part of the Union's success. As we celebrate the sesquicentennial of this famed conflict, learn the stories of the war veterans who travelled across the river and now find their final resting place beneath Pennsylvania soil.

\$15.00 general / \$12.00 members / \$10.00 seniors & students

Children under 12 are free.

Friday, September 23, 2011 5:30 PM - 7:30 PM The American Philosophical Society, Benjamin Franklin Hall, 427 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia

REBECCA KAMEN: Making the Invisible, Visible: Discoveries Between Art and Science

Reception: 5:30pm Program: 6:00pm

Rebecca Kamen's work explores the nexus of art and science, informed by wide ranging research into cosmology, spirituality, philosophy and science. Ms. Kamen has exhibited and lectured about her work both nationally, and internationally in China, Hong Kong, and Egypt. She has been the recipient of a Virginia Museum of Fine Arts Professional Fellowship, a Pollack Krasner Foundation Fellowship, a Strauss Fellowship, two VCCS Professional Development Grants, and a Travel Grant from the Chemical Heritage Foundation. In 2001, Ms. Kamen was awarded a President's Sabbatical Award from Northern Virginia Community College where she has been a Professor of Art since 1978. She is the recipient of

the Chancellors Commonwealth Professorship for 2011-2013, to further develop her work bridging art and science. Ms. Kamen's work is represented in many private and public collections such as, KPMG Peat Martwick Corporation, Gannett Corporation, IBM, Capital One and the Institute for Defense Analysis. Free and open to the Public. To register: <http://www.amphilsoc.org/node/2803>

This lecture is co-sponsored by The Philadelphia Area Center for History of Science (PACHS) and The Chemical Heritage Foundation.

Saturday, September 24, 2011 at 2pm at Laurel Hill Cemetery, 3822 Ridge Avenue, Philadelphia, PA19132. 215-228-8200

<http://www.thelaurehillcemetery.org>

The Worlds of Thomas Jefferson at Laurel Hill Cemetery

Adopted sons, signers of the Declaration, painters, sculptors, men of science, ladies of belle letters, famous physicians, pariahs of free press, purveyors of fine wine and, of course, political provokers both friend and foe: all recognized by Thomas Jefferson as luminaries in our nation's early "Constellation of Worthies."

Join William David Barker of Williamsburg, Virginia – foremost Jefferson scholar and acclaimed portrayer of America's third president – on this historical exploration of the worlds of Thomas Jefferson at Laurel Hill. \$15.00 general/ \$12.00 members / \$10.00 seniors & students
Children under 12 are free

Sunday, September 25, 2011 at 2pm at Laurel Hill Cemetery, 3822 Ridge Avenue, Philadelphia, PA19132. 215-228-8200

<http://www.thelaurehillcemetery.org>

Stop the Presses: Laurel Hill's Newspaper Publishers

If you have an interest in publishing or journalism, than this is the tour for you! Laurel Hill is the location where all of the city's major newspapers are all brought together in one place. Our cemetery contains the final resting places of not just a few but all of the publishers of Philadelphia's major newspapers. This tour, led by Dr. J. Joseph Edgette, will visit their graves and tell the stories of success, failure and intrigue surrounding these influential and powerful men. Publishers of the Philadelphia Ledger, Inquirer, Daily News, and Evening Bulletin will be among the major newspaper Czars included along with a few lesser known surprises. Join us for an afternoon that is sure to give a whole new meaning to the word "deadline."

\$15.00 general / \$12.00 members / \$10.00 seniors & students

Children under 12 are free

Wednesday, September 28, 2011 at 7:15 P.M. At Brittingham's Irish Pub and Restaurant, 640 East Germantown Pike, Lafayette Hill, Pennsylvania. (610)828-7351. Willard Sterne Randall on his new book **Ethan Allen: His Life and Times** released June 2011.

Thursday, September 29, 2011 at 7:00 PM in the Skyline Room located on the second floor of the Free Library of Philadelphia (1901 Vine Street, Philadelphia). The Freethought Society will host Dr. Alan Mann, an anthropologist at Princeton University will discuss "What does it mean to be human, and how did we evolve this unique capability?" This event is free and open-to-the-public.

Wednesday, October 5, 2011 at 5:30 to 7:30 PM at the American Philosophical Society, Benjamin Franklin Hall, 427 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia. Reception: 5:30pm Program: 6:00pm

ANDREW BURSTEIN and NANCY ISENBERG: Madison and Jefferson

Please join us for a lecture, reception, and book signing

Andrew Burstein and Nancy Isenberg are Professors of History at Louisiana State University. Burstein is the author of seven other books, including Jefferson's Secrets and The Passions of Andrew Jackson. Isenberg is also the author of Fallen Founder: The Life of Aaron Burr and Sex and Citizenship in Antebellum America. Students of political culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they previously collaborated on a

study of death in early America: Mortal Remains (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

James Madison is the least humanized of the founders, Jefferson the most controversial. In Madison and Jefferson, a thorough reinterpretation of founding era politics, the authors have given Madison his due as a hard-nosed political partisan. He wrote scathing pieces in national newspapers; as Washington's chief adviser in 1789, he initiated the first presidential administration and then went on to undermine it a few short years later, working with Jefferson to establish the first opposition political party. Jefferson, the more expressive in letters and public documents, did not always agree with Madison's approaches, but his affection for his political partner remained undiminished over their fifty-year association. As Virginians, they often privileged their state's interests over the cause of Union, while at the same time eagerly pursuing policies of western expansion and settlement, equally aggressive in their designs against European interests in North America. The story of their long friendship is a critical, if under-studied, factor in the evolution of America's modern partisan environment. This event is free and open to the public.

To register: <http://www.amphilsoc.org/node/2804>

Wednesday, October 5, 2011 at 5:30 to 7:30 PM at the Chemical Heritage Foundation, 315 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, PA

History Live: "Cancer Therapies: Nineteenth Century to Tomorrow"

The next installment of CHF's History Live series will focus on the history and future of cancer therapies.

Dario C. Altieri, director of The Wistar Institute Cancer Center, and Stephen J. Lippard, the Arthur Amos Noyes Professor of Chemistry at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, will appear in conversation with Russel E. Kaufman, president and CEO of The Wistar Institute, and Thomas R. Tritton, president and CEO of CHF.

Carin Berkowitz, associate director of CHF's Beckman Center for the History of Chemistry, will serve as emcee.

Schedule:

5:30 p.m. Cocktail reception

6:30 p.m. History Live conversation

7:30 p.m. Dessert and coffee

This event is held in collaboration with the The Wistar Institute, an independent nonprofit biomedical research institute that has been dedicated to expanding the boundaries of knowledge of biology and medicine for more than a century. <https://www.chemheritage.org/secure/register-for-an-event.aspx?eventid=72794> History Live presents first-person accounts of legendary careers before a live audience.

CHF's Oral History Program captures and preserves the oral memoirs of notable figures in chemistry and related fields. For additional information, please contact Nancy Vonada, manager of events and donor relations, at 215.873.8226 or nvonada@chemheritage.org

Free and Open to the General Public but you must pre-register: <https://www.chemheritage.org/secure/register-for-an-event.aspx?eventid=72794>

October 8-9-10, 2011 Annual Meade Society Fall Excursion: Pilgrims to the Battlefields of the Rebellion

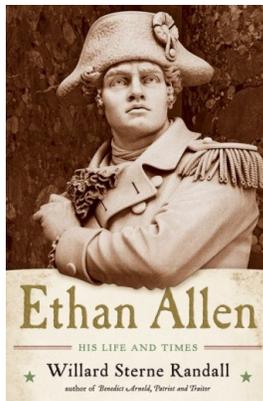
'Excursion to Civil War Washington, 1861. The outbreak of War' (tentative) Bus trip; 2 overnight lodgings; touring; dinners; historical programs by leading historians.

Call: 215-848-7753; Jerry McCormick gedwinmc@msn.com

Friday, October 14, 2011 - Sixth Annual Gravediggers Ball to benefit the Friends of Laurel Hill Cemetery Historic Preservation Efforts

The Friends of the Laurel Hill Cemetery will again 'resurrect' the Gravediggers' Ball. This black-tie or costumed event will be held at the Crystal Tea Room at Wanamaker's and will include cocktails, dinner, dancing and musical entertainment by a dynamic 11-piece dance band. All proceeds go towards the continued restoration and preservation of historic Laurel Hill Cemetery (burial site of General Meade and many Civil War veterans!).

Cost: \$175 donation per person, At Meade Society Table: \$150 per person! For info call 215.228.8200, or visit theundergroundmuseum.org



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 which includes e-mail delivery of Phactum.

If you wish **US Mail delivery annual membership is \$25.** Checks should be payable to **PhACT.**

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

Donation of \$ _____ enclosed for additional support
Donation of \$ _____ dedicated for High School Science Fair prizes

Mail checks to:
PhACT
653 Garden Road
Glenside, PA 19038

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ E_mail _____

The Philadelphia Association for Critical Thinking is grateful for the hospitality extended by Community College of Philadelphia and especially Dr. David Cattell, Chair of the Physics Department, for hosting PhACT and giving us access to such excellent facilities. Part of CCP's mission is to serve Philadelphia as a premiere learning institution and PhACT is pleased to support this goal by having talks on wide ranging, engaging, and educational topics.

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

If you are not a supporting member/subscriber we invite you to become one. \$15 for a one year membership to PhACT with email Phactum subscription. \$25 for US Mail subscription. \$10 for students, email only. Donations are welcome.

Send letters of rebuttal, ideas, short essays, poetry, opinion pieces, complaints, and lavish praise to Ray Haupt, Phactum editor, at phactpublicity@aol.com.

PhACT's High School Science Fair Student Prize Funds

Prizes awarded in 2010	= \$ 300.00
Prizes awarded in 2011	= \$ 500.00
Leftover prize from 2011 prizes	= \$ 28.00
New donations	= \$ 28.00
Total 2012 Prize Fund	= \$ 56.00

Please donate. Small contributions are preferred and donations in excess of the 2011 goal will be applied to the 2012 Prize Fund or some other youth science education project not yet determined.

ALL money collected for this project will be used for student prizes. PhACT members and others are invited to participate as judges. Contact Eric Krieg for more information: erickrieg@verizon.net

Policy For Article Use

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Phactum Editor, Ray Haupt
phactpublicity@aol.com

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