
Reviews



The 'Whole Earth' Review of the Fringe

"The Fringes of Reason: Strange Myths and Eccentric Science." *Whole Earth Review* (P.O. Box 15187, Santa Ana, CA 92705), No. 52, Fall 1986. \$4.50.

Kendrick Frazier

VIRTUALLY THE entire Fall 1986 issue of the *Whole Earth Review* is devoted to a lively and informed treatment of the fringes of reason and pop ideas on, and beyond, the edge of science.

Staff editor Ted Schultz, who put this intriguing package of material together, introduces the diverse coverage. Over the past 200 years, he notes, science has succeeded in contradicting many of the mythic teachings of traditional religion, but nothing has replaced religion's role in providing meaning and hope "in what for many is a dreary and mundane world."

Thus new mythologies spring up "to fill this visionary void." Countering social standardization and the homogenizing influence of the mass media, "myriad strange beliefs spawn, fission, and multiply. Unusual religions. Space-age folklore. Pseudoscientific theories beyond counting."

"If we can entertain possibilities while withholding belief," says Schultz, "we can safely explore this world of modern mythology for sheer pleasure. The myths can be appreciated as art if not as actual reflections of reality, manifestations of human creativity in spectacular diversity."

Alan M. MacRobert, an editor at *Sky & Telescope* magazine, launches into a lively overview of intellectual self-help, "Reality Shopping: A Con-

sumer's Guide to New Age Hokum." His guidelines should be required reading for



Kendrick Frazier, a science writer, is editor of the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER.

all would-be consumers of New Age thought. Examples: "Watch whether the field of study remains barren over time" (Bates system, iridology, zone therapy). "If someone making paranormal claims compares himself to Einstein, Galileo, or Pasteur, dismiss him right away."

Says MacRobert: "The real significance of the paranormal boom is that so many of us take it so uncritically. It is as if the question 'Is this so?' has become irrelevant—and has been replaced by the attitude, 'If it feels good, it must be right for me.' . . . I think this paradigm has served us poorly."

The most thorough section, and perhaps the one of most interest to SKEPTICAL INQUIRER readers, is the full, skeptical treatment given to the "Hundredth Monkey phenomenon" claim. Schultz says *Whole Earth Review* chose to give the Hundredth Monkey story "a thorough scrutiny" partly because "it is extremely widespread in human potential, New Age, and even nuclear freeze circles" and partly because its popular acceptance is symptomatic "of growing confusion between speculation and proven fact."

The section's coverage begins with a reprint of Ron Amundson's Summer 1985 SKEPTICAL INQUIRER article. Schultz notes that Amundson gives a "definitive answer" to the question "Did the Hundredth Monkey phenomenon really happen?" (As you recall, it did not. Amundson's analysis, I am pleased to report, was given wide publicity and has been well received.) Schultz managed to locate Lyall Watson, originator of the Hundredth Monkey story, and to get a response to Amundson's analysis. Watson writes that he accepts Amundson's analysis "without reservation," but defends the concept as a valid metaphor nonetheless. I will say no more here, because Amundson plans to summarize Watson's response and reply to it in a future issue of the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER.

Humanistic psychologist Maureen O'Hara, who had prepared a strong critique of the Hundredth Monkey phenomenon even before Amundson, follows with a devastating examination (see Letters, *SI*, Winter 1985-86). "The Hundredth Monkey provides us with a case study through which to examine the deterioration in the quality of thought and scholarship among those people who participate in what has become known as the 'New Age' or 'human potential' community," says O'Hara. She fears that this deterioration could discredit humanistic science altogether, if it hasn't already. "My objection to the Hundredth Monkey Phenomenon . . . is not that it is myth, but that it is bad myth, and that it draws its force not from the collective imagination, but by masquerading as science."

Then there's a good article by primatologist Michael Huffman of Kyoto University, where he studies cultural evolution in the same macaque monkeys that are the stars of the Hundredth Monkey story. Huffman gives the real science of the subject. There is nothing mysterious about what happened in the transmission of potato-washing behavior among Japanese monkeys (as Watson led others to believe), he says. Still "much that may prove to be genuinely applicable to human cultural evolution has been learned from the study of Japanese macaques."

Sociologist Ron Westrum chips in with an article on the "Blind Eye of Science." Schultz notes that where the Hundredth Monkey case is an example of a pseudoscientific notion examined by science and found to be false, the reverse can also happen: an anomalistic claim ignored by science can later turn out to be true. Westrum describes the case of stones falling from the sky (meteorites) once ridiculed by scholars in the eighteenth century. He and others love to browbeat what they usually call "the orthodox scientific establishment" for its alleged pig-headedness on this matter (meteoritists dispute the interpretation). But it does serve to remind us

all—as if scientists need it—of the tentative nature of all scientific knowledge and the need for humility about all current understanding.

John A. Keel provides an interesting personal article on “The Man Who Invented Flying Saucers” (Ray Palmer), and William R. Corliss reports on his fascinating “Sourcebook Project,” with its 20 volumes and 7,000 pages of source material on scientific anomalies (mountain-top glows, marine phosphorescence displays, fish falls, etc.) culled mainly from the scientific literature.

Photojournalist Douglas Curran contributes the article “In Advance of the Landing: Folk Concepts of Outer Space,” based on his photographic wanderings (and his new book of the same title) among the farthest-out segments of the UFO subculture.

The issue is filled with the kinds of short reviews and excerpts that make the *Whole Earth* publications such fun to read. Publishers’ addresses are given for all source materials reviewed.

Schultz introduces the section on access to skeptical books and magazines with a brief history of CSICOP and the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER, “a major vehicle for skeptical writing.” Says Schultz: “I find the good skeptical publications at least as much fun to read as the paranormal stuff—usually lots better.” Unlike true believers and credulous journalists, skeptics “get to the bottom of the claims through careful examinations of history and facts. I have found more solutions to puzzling anomalies in the few years that I have been reading the skeptics than in the considerable greater number of years I spent reading the mystery mongers.”

The *Review’s* review of the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER is gratifyingly positive. “For 10 years, this journal [of CSICOP] has been a lone voice in a sea of irrationality. High-quality articles with plenty of references . . . usually right on target. Anyone who reads from the extensive literature of the paranormal has to read the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER. . . .”

There are capsule reviews of Abell and Singer’s *Science and the Paranormal*, Gardner’s *Fads and Fallacies* . . . and *Science: Good, Bad and Bogus*, Randi’s *Flim-Flam!* and *The Truth About Uri Geller*, and Zusne and Jones’s *Anomalistic Psychology*, as well as of *Creation/Evolution* magazine and Prometheus Books (“the best single source for skeptical literature”).

Of course the fringe groups, from serious to frivolous, are given their due too. And this makes for a lively compendium. So if you want to know how to reach the International Flat Earth Society, the Stelle Group (“dawn of New Age City”), the Borderland Sciences Research Foundation (“among the granddaddies of weird science”), the Secrets Newsletter, A.R.E. (Edgar Cayce’s devoted followers), the Rune-stone Asatru Free Assembly, Eckankar, Conspiracies Unlimited, Cosmic Awareness, or the Church of the SubGenius (a parody and the subject of a whole article), this is your guide.

It is a fascinating and worthwhile excursion through the fringes of science and New Age thought. Since *Whole Earth Review* reaches a broad audience—a fair number of whom tend to be somewhat attracted to fringe ideas—it is refreshing to have this clear-thinking, good-humored compendium of generally skeptical examinations and source materials presented in such an appealing package. I hope it is widely read and used. ●

A Mish-Mash of Lore, Forgotten or Imagined

5/5/2000: *Ice: The Ultimate Disaster*. By Richard W. Noone. Harmony Books/Crown, New York, 1986. 368 pp. Paper \$9.95.

Charles J. Cazeau

ALTHOUGH THE TITLE is very specific and blunt as to the message of Richard Noone's profusely illustrated book, the text wanders like a cowpath. The following outline may be helpful to the potential reader.

5/5/2000: *Ice: The Ultimate Disaster* proposes that on May 5, in the year 2000, there will be a pole shift along the earth's axis, causing ice masses at the South Pole to move rapidly (in a few hours) to the equator. At the same time, there will be an accompanying slippage of crustal plates, causing widespread vulcanism, earthquakes, and flooding. All this will result in a cataclysm that destroys most of the earth as we know it and many if not most of its inhabitants.

The immediate cause of this incredible scenario will be the buildup of Antarctic ice, causing an imbalance in the earth's rotation due to the weight of the ice in the magnitude of many trillions of tons. Contributing causes include (a) a nova explosion (Vela X), (b) changes in albedo, causing earth-cooling and ice-sheet growth, and (c) sunspot increases deviating from the 11-year cycle. If that isn't enough, a major planetary alignment in the solar system will take place at this time (a Jupiter Effect).

What is the basis for this belief? Ancient wise men 6,000 years ago saw this event coming; they wanted to warn those of us who would be 6,000 years distant. These wise men would be the ancient Egyptians, but since they came under the influence of the Hyksos it was the latter who decided to build the Great Pyramid of Giza 6,000 years ago, embodying future events in the angles, lengths, and other measurements of the pyramid. There is more. The pyramid, Noone says, was remarkable in that it could serve to produce an induction field such that an individual in the so-called King's Chamber could see into the future. The Great Pyramid is a time machine. It is now damaged in that respect. An offshoot of the Hyksos known as the Freemasons carried on this knowledge to recent times in their secret rituals and mysteries.

As evidence for the book's thesis and for these beliefs, author Noone claims there have been other pole shifts causing cataclysms in the past, especially in 6,000-year cycles. This, he says, is demonstrated by the research of Immanuel Velikovsky. He further claims that ice is growing in Antarctica today; the Piri Re's map proves Antarctica was ice-free 6,000 years ago; volcanic eruptions and earthquakes are increasing; and the sinking of Atlantis and Mu (in the Pacific) are good examples of cataclysms in the past.

The tenets of this book are without a shred of scientific foundation. It is riddled with factual error and suffused with unwarranted speculation. At the outset, the author claims to be a skeptic, and then proceeds to accept uncritically any data that support his hypothesis. I do not mean to be unkind, but Mr. Noone is gullible, either

Charles Cazeau recently retired as professor of geology at the State University of New York at Buffalo. He is co-author of Exploring the Unknown: Great Mysteries Re-examined and of the textbook Physical Geology. His most recent book is Science Trivia (Plenum).



unaware or deliberately ignoring the findings of science that relate to his own research. He thus follows in the footsteps and tradition of such discredited and equally gullible authors as Velikovsky, von Däniken, Barry Fell, and Charles Berlitz. Indeed, these authors form a rich source of support for Noone's ideas.

The author's major assumptions can be refuted easily without recourse to anything other than common sense. To wit:

1. He says the mass of ice at the South Pole will trigger a shift of the rotational axis. Yet this ice is the merest coating of frost on a mightier globe of denser rock 4,000 miles in radius, compared to a one-and-a-half-mile-thick sheet of less dense ice.

2. The Jupiter Effect of planetary alignment will aid in shifting the poles, he claims. This planetary distribution (not alignment) already occurred as recently as 1982. What happened? Nothing—despite the dire predictions of other writers.

3. He says that Antarctica was free of ice 6,000 years ago, but in all likelihood that ice sheet has been there for 20 million years. If it had all melted 6,000 years ago, it would have raised worldwide sea level more than 100 feet. There is no geological evidence to support this claim. Noone's basis, the Piri Re'is map, is a poor map of earth's geography, but for the time it was circulated, in 1513, not bad.

4. If a large ice mass can trigger a polar shift, why didn't that happen during the Pleistocene 18,000 years ago, when one-third of the earth in the Northern Hemisphere was covered by thick ice-sheets and sea level dropped more than 300 feet?

5. Noone claims that volcanoes and earthquakes are on the increase. No they aren't. Efficiency in reporting them is, and they have recently struck inhabited rather than remote areas.

Within the historical and archaeological realm, author Noone is completely lost. The Great Pyramid was not built 6,000 years ago. It was built in the Fourth Dynasty, about 4,500 years ago. It was not the first pyramid built, the other major pyramids being copies, but it was built after the Step Pyramid of the Third Dynasty. These facts can be read from the hieroglyphics of those times. In addition, the Hyksos did

not kindly come into Egypt 6,000 years ago and benevolently take over; they came in the Seventeenth Dynasty, plundering, murdering, leveling temples and cities, and enslaving the Egyptian people. Where does Noone get his ideas? There was no society of Freemasons 6,000 years ago that I know of, and my family is loaded with them. They started in about the twelfth century as a kind of union.

In summary, I would like to say that Mr. Noone's book is interesting and well-written, with several informative tracts, such as that on the ruination of the Knight's Templars in France by King Philip. Yet the reader should be mindful that in the opinion of this reviewer this tome is fictional—but the scientific attitude is to let readers judge for themselves. ●

Some Recent Books

Listing here does not preclude a more detailed review in a future issue.

Booth, John. *Psychic Paradoxes*. Prometheus Books, Buffalo, N.Y., 1986. 241 pp., \$13.95, paper. Combines explanation of original psychic conjuring tricks, biographies, and secrets of noted theatrical mentalists with author's own ghost-hunting experiences and conclusions. Examines the broad spectrum of devotees of psychic phenomena, from entertainers through spirit mediums to serious scientific investigators. Reprint of 1984 hardcover. (See brief review, *SI*, Summer 1985, p. 376.) 1985, p. 376.)

Cazeau, Charles J. *Science Trivia*. Plenum Press, New York, 1986. 285 pp. \$17.95. A lively and entertaining guide in question-and-answer format to typical questions people have about science and nature. A fun way to learn, and also a good guide to distinguishing science from pseudoscience; the final third of the book gives good-humored and scientifically responsible answers to questions about the supernatural: witches, demons, ghosts, monsters, UFOs, superstition, powers of the mind, and so on.

Moore, K. D. *A Field Guide to Inductive Arguments*. Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co., 2460 Kerper Blvd., Dubuque, Iowa 52001, 1986. 161 pp. \$19.95. A welcome manual for identifying and evaluating inductive arguments encountered in everyday life. Devoted to the idea that a student who studies patterns of argumentation will be able to reason more reliably and be a better judge of arguments of others. Exercises include many examples that lead student to see flaws in arguments made on behalf of astrology, psychic surgery, UFO reports, etc.

Wolman, Benjamin B., ed. *Handbook of Parapsychology*. McFarland & Co., Inc., Box 11, Jefferson, NC 28640, 1986 reprint. 991 pp. \$49.95. This volume, originally published in 1977, is a comprehensive reference on parapsychology.