



# Phactum

The Newsletter of the Philadelphia Association for Critical Thinking  
October 2007

editor: Ray Haupt

www.phact.org

PhACT Meeting  
October 20, 2007

## The Science of Sex

Philadelphia Inquirer author of the column "Carnal Knowledge", **Faye Flam**, will discuss the science of sexuality. She has been covering science for the Inquirer since 1995. Faye has explored all kinds of fringe thinking related to sexuality for the past 3 years. Her column has included awkward topics like, hatred of homosexuality, the science of kissing, elder sex, genital fits, the history of condoms and the algorithm of attraction.

### THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW

**LANGUAGE IS A VIRUS**

AN ONGOING LOOK AT THE MYRIAD WAYS IN WHICH REALLY, REALLY STUPID IDEAS INFECT THE POLITICAL MAINSTREAM

**THIS WEEK: THE WAR ON RATIONALITY**

STEP ONE: A CONSERVATIVE SCHOOL BOARD OBJECTS TO THE TEACHING OF A COMMONLY ACCEPTED SCIENTIFIC PRINCIPLE.

"HUMAN SEXUAL REPRODUCTION" IS AN INTERESTING THEORY--

--BUT MUST OUR CULTURE ALWAYS BE SO OBSESSED WITH SEX?

STEP TWO: AN ANCIENT MYTH IS SPRUCED UP SLIGHTLY AND PRESENTED AS A CREDIBLE SCIENTIFIC ALTERNATIVE...

PROponents of "INTELLIGENT DELIVERY" BELIEVE THAT BABIES ARE DELIVERED BY A STORK IN A MESSENGER CAP!

DON'T OUR CHILDREN DESERVE TO HEAR BOTH SIDES OF THE CONTROVERSY?

STEP THREE: SELF-STYLED EXPERTS STRIVE TO INSTILL DOUBT WHERE NONE SHOULD PLAUSIBLY EXIST.

WHAT THE SECULAR REPRODUCTIONISTS BELIEVE IS ABSURD, BOYS AND GIRLS! IT WOULD BE LIKE SQUEEZING A CANTELOUPE OUT OF YOUR NOSE! HA, HA!

HA, HA!

STEP FOUR: THE SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY IS CHALLENGED TO DEBATE THE ISSUE. IF THEY REFUSE, SO MUCH THE BETTER!

THEY'RE AFRAID TO FACE US!

THEY KNOW THEY DON'T STAND A CHANCE AGAINST OUR RELENTLESS STORKIST LOGIC!

STEP FIVE: THE LINE BETWEEN EDUCATION AND IGNORANCE GROWS EVER MORE INDISTINCT.

I USED TO THINK I UNDERSTOOD WHERE BABIES CAME FROM--UNTIL I LEARNED ABOUT THE LIES AND DISTORTIONS OF THE SECULAR REPRODUCTIONISTS!

WHY DO THEY HATE THE STORK SO MUCH?

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### The PhACT Council

- Eric Krieg, President
- Bob Glickman, Secretary
- Ray Haupt, Treasurer
- Dr. David Cattell
- Dr. David Cragin
- Tom Napier
- Harry Rothwell
- Becky Strickland

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

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

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

# PHACT CALENDAR

The Physics Department of Community College of Philadelphia hosts meetings of PhACT - at 2:00 PM, Community College of Philadelphia, 17th and Spring Garden Streets, West Building Room W2-48. Meetings are free and open to the public unless otherwise noted.

**Saturday, October 20, 2007:** Philadelphia Inquirer author of the column "Carnal Knowledge", **Faye Flam**, will discuss the **Science of Sexuality**.

**November 17, 2007 - Everything's Relative and Other Fables in Science and Technology**

Tony Rothman is a cosmologist who studies the Big Bang and related events. He is interested in extremal black holes, black holes on the verge of becoming naked singularities, as well as on the detection of gravitons. His father was Milton Rothman, who helped PhACT get started 11 years ago and also wrote much on Physics. Tony will speak on his latest book, "Everything's Relative and Other Fables in Science and Technology". This book takes a closer look and corrects much common knowledge about key historical moments in science and technology and corrects myths. Tony is a professor of Physics - where Einstein used to teach at Princeton University.

**Friday, December 21, 2007 - Phact Annual Winter Solstice Party.** This event is free but is for members only. Location and other details will be available to members at a later date.

**January 19<sup>th</sup> 2008 - Paul A. Offit, M.D.**, chief of infectious diseases at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and the Henle Professor of Immunologic and Infectious Diseases at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine will discuss **Vaccine Safety: Science Politics and the Media**. Dr. Offit is an internationally recognized expert in the fields of immunology and virology.



**Wednesday, October 10, 2007.** At The Wagner Free Institute of Science: "**Exploring Alaska: The Harriman Expedition Retraced**" *An Illustrated Presentation* By Robert McCracken Peck Senior Fellow of The Academy of Natural Sciences In 2001, an eminent group of scholars, writers, artists, and scientists retraced the route along the Alaskan coastline chartered 100 years earlier by Edward H. Harriman. Robert McCracken Peck was on board and will recount this fascinating journey. 4 - 7 PM. Lecture at 5:30 PM. This event is free and open to the public.

**Friday, October 12, 2007. Lecture: Saturn and its Satellites: New Findings from the Cassini Mission.** Dr. Ann Schmiedekamp, Professor of Astronomy and Physics at Penn State Abington. Dr. Schmiedekamp is a NASA Ambassador and a spokesperson for the Cassini-Huygens mission to Saturn and its Moons. The **Delaware Valley Amateur Astronomers**. Monthly meetings start at 7:00 PM and are usually held the second Friday of each month in the Greater Plymouth Community Center, 2910 Jolly Rd, Plymouth Meeting, PA. [Http://dvaa.org](http://dvaa.org). Free and open to the public.

**Friday, October 19, 2007** (12:00 p.m.) at the FLOP (Free Library of Philadelphia) 19th & Benjamin Franklin Parkway. **Gary Kasparov - How Life Imitates Chess: Making the Right Moves from the Board to the Boardroom.** Gary Kasparov became the youngest-ever World Chess Champion in 1985 at the age of 22, a title he held until 2000. He retired from professional chess in 2005 to

found the United Civil Front in Russia and has dedicated himself to establishing free and fair elections in his homeland. In *How Life Imitates Chess*, Kasparov offers a primer on successful decision-making based on lessons from the chessboard. Free.

**Wednesday, October 24, 2007** (7:00 p.m.) at the FLOP (Free Library of Philadelphia) 19th & Benjamin Franklin Parkway. **James Morrow - The Last Witchfinder** - James Morrow spent nine years polishing this cerebral and humorous tale of rationality versus superstitious bigotry. Set in late-17th-century London and colonial New England, the novel follows Jennet Stearne, daughter of witchfinder Gen. Walter Stearne, as she witnesses the pursuit of "Satanists" and her beloved aunt—a philosopher and scientist—put on trial and burned at the stake for her progressive ideas. Morrow's books include *Towing Jehovah* and *The Eternal Footman*. Free.

**Tuesday, November 6, 2007:** Speaker **Richard Leventhal**, Curator of the American Section of the University of Pennsylvania Museum and Professor of Anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania. Freethought Society of Greater Philadelphia (FSGP) at Ludington Library, 5 South Bryn Mawr Ave., Bryn Mawr, PA 19010 at 7:00 PM. Website: [FSGP.org](http://FSGP.org). Free and open to the public.

University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology presents **Amarna, Ancient Egypt's Place in the Sun**, a new exhibition that offers a rare look at the meteoric rise and fall of this unique royal city during one of Egypt's most intriguing



# PHACT CALENDAR

times. The exhibition, the centerpiece of the Museum's event-filled "Year of Egypt", runs through October 2007. Admission is free with museum admission: \$8 adults, \$5 seniors and students. Free Sunday afternoons until Memorial Day. For information: [www.museum.upenn.edu](http://www.museum.upenn.edu).

**Freethought Society of Greater Philadelphia (FSGP)** and the **Humanist Association of Greater Philadelphia (HAGP)** co-sponsor a monthly book discussion club. The book club meets on the third Saturday of each month at 7:00 PM at Willow Grove Barnes & Noble, 102 Park Avenue, Willow Grove, Pennsylvania 19090. If you have any questions, please contact the book club moderator, Ian Thomas. Email: [ian.thomas101@gmail.com](mailto:ian.thomas101@gmail.com) Phone: (610) 368-5915 Cell: (610) 565-4530.

**Philadelphia Brights Meetup Group.** Meetings are held at the Barnes & Noble Cafe at 1805 Walnut Street, at 7pm on the second Monday of the month.

**The Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education** presents a *free series of lectures exploring current environmental issues in the Philadelphia region and beyond, led by local experts.*

**Thursday, October 18: Life in our Streams and Waterways** Speaker: *Dr. Susan Gill, The Stroud Water Research Center*

**Thursday, October 25: Avian Migration** Speaker: *Bob Mulvihill, Powdermill Nature Reserve*

**Tuesday, October 30: Biodynamics, Food and Soils** Speaker: *Mary Seaton Carboy, GreensGrow Farms*

**Thursday, November 8: Land Preservation** Speaker: *David Harper, Land in Common*

**All programs: 6:30pm-7pm poster session and refreshments, 7pm-8:30pm speakers . See Page 7.**

**The Schuylkill Center is located at** 8480 Hagys Mill Road in the Roxborough section of Philadelphia., **For more information call** 215-482-7300 x110 or on the internet visit: [www.schuylkillcenter.org](http://www.schuylkillcenter.org)

**Delaware Valley Mensa.** Monthly Meetings are always open to family, friends, interested others and the public. See the "Events Calendar" on the Mensa website for more information. After the meeting we will adjourn to a local restaurant for some inexpensive food and conversation. The website is <http://dvm.us.mensa.org/>. See page 13 for a Mensa event on **October 19, 2007.**

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](mailto: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.

## The Wagner Free Institute of Science

offers an assortment of science lectures presented at the introductory college level by professors from various universities around Philadelphia. These courses are free and vary from a single night to an eight week course. They do appreciate donations or memberships. See their website at <http://www.wagnerfreeinstitute.org/>.

### Fall 2007 Wagner Institute Courses

***Invertebrate Diversity with an Emphasis on Mollusks,*** Professor Daniel Graf. **Tuesday, September 25, 2007**, beginning at 6:30 PM. 7 Tuesdays. The Academy of Natural Sciences, 19th Street and the Benjamin Franklin Parkway. This course will examine the most interesting, most important group of animals to ever inhabit the earth. ***This course requires preregistration and is limited to 15 students. To preregister, call 215-763-6529, ext. 23, beginning Tuesday, September 4.***

***Technological Breakthroughs of the 20th Century,*** Professor Paul Angiolillo. **Wednesday, September 26, 2007**, beginning at 6:30 PM. 8 Wednesdays. Wynnefield Branch of the Free Library, 5325 Overbrook Avenue. This course will explore technological breakthroughs that occurred during the 20th century that many of us take for granted, placing particular emphasis on the personalities and politics that shaped the discoveries. ***No preregistration required.***

***An Introduction to Insects and Related Arthropods,*** Professors Robert T. Allen and Jon Gelhaus. **Thursday, September 27, 2007**, beginning at 6:30 PM. 8 Thursdays. The Academy of Natural Sciences, 19th Street and the Benjamin Franklin Parkway. This class will explore the diversity of insects and related arthropods, examining the features of insects which have made them the most successful group of organisms on earth. ***This course requires preregistration and is limited to 20 students. To preregister, call 215-763-6529, ext. 23., beginning Tuesday, September 4.***

***Human Evolution: The Legacy of the Intelligent Biped,*** Professor Janet Monge. **Monday, October 15, 2007**, beginning at 6:30 PM. 6 Mondays. University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 33rd and Spruce Streets. This class will explore human evolution and what that means for us today. ***No preregistration required.***

## Letters and Articles Wanted

Phactum is the club newsletter of PhACT and members and non-members are invited to submit letters and articles for publication in Phactum. If something is on your mind that might interest a bunch of skeptics then by all means write it down and send it to the editor. The range of topics is as huge as your imagination and contrarian views are welcome. Please, no partisan politics and no heavy religion bashing. Original poetry is welcome too. Send by e-mail to:

**phactpublicity@aol.com.**

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## Letters

Editor: In view of the inability of the proponents of Intelligent Design to specify the precise nature of the Intelligent Designer, it would avoid confusion if there were a generic name for this being or force. I would thus like to introduce readers to the term "IDeity" that I have recently adopted when discussing this topic.

Tom Napier  
North Wales, PA

Editor: When people say, "Anything is possible," ("*But Anything's Possible*", September 2007) they're confusing two different meanings of the word *possible*. These are sometimes distinguished as "logically possible" versus "actually possible." The former simply means that the idea can be imagined without self-contradiction; an empiricist might want to add that the idea must also be testable, at least in principle. The latter, on the other hand, means that the thing can actually happen. If we allow that something is logically possible, we're simply saying that we can imagine circumstances that would cause us to believe that it's happened; if we say it's actually possible, that means we believe it has happened, or at least is bound to happen given sufficient opportunity.

Eric Hamell  
Philadelphia

Editor: A friend of mine who is a UFO believer sent me this. I've never heard of Bob Dean or Project Camelot and wonder if anybody in PhACT would care to comment.

[http://www.projectcamelot.org/bob\\_dean.html](http://www.projectcamelot.org/bob_dean.html)  
Tom Kearney  
Yellowstone NP, WY

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## Various Ruminations

Collected/written by Ray Haupt, editor  
(with help from others)

### Nepal Airlines sacrifices goats to fix airplane malfunction

Get a load of this from Reuters, September 5, 2007:  
*KATHMANDU (Reuters) - Officials at Nepal's state-run airline have sacrificed two goats to appease Akash Bhairab, the Hindu sky god, following technical problems with one of its Boeing 757 aircraft, the carrier said Tuesday.*

*Nepal Airlines, which has two Boeing aircraft, has had to suspend some services in recent weeks due the problem.*

*The goats were sacrificed in front of the troublesome aircraft Sunday at Nepal's only international airport in Kathmandu in accordance with Hindu traditions, an official said.*



*"The snag in the plane has now been fixed and the aircraft has resumed its flights," said Raju K.C., a senior airline official, without explaining what the problem had been.*

*Local media last week blamed the company's woes on an electrical fault. The carrier runs international flights to five cities in Asia.*

*It is common in Nepal to sacrifice animals like goats and buffaloes to appease different Hindu deities.*

Next time I go to Nepal it will be by Yak Train.

### **Dubious Mexican clinic open again.**

Readers of this newsletter might recall the October 2006 edition where we printed an article called "Defrauding the Dying" written by Dr. Raymond Richards, a New Zealand Skeptic and American history professor at University of Waikaito in Hamilton, New Zealand. In it Dr. Richards gives details of a clinic in Tijuana, Mexico offering useless "cures" to desperately sick people. The article below is from the September 12, 2007 Quackwatch weekly newsletter and unfortunately reports the resumption of operations of that same very shady and downright vicious "medical" facility.

*"Tijuana-based Hospital Santa Monica appears to be back in business. The clinic's founder and director, Kurt W. Donsbach, is an unlicensed chiropractor with a long history of illegal activity. Last year, in response to massive publicity about the death there of Coretta Scott King (widow of former civil rights leader Martin Luther King), the Mexican Government ordered Hospital Santa Monica to shut down. This week the San Diego Union-Tribune reported:*

*The hospital reopened at the same location with no name displayed outside but with the name "Centro de Atención Integral" on a health department certificate displayed inside. The hospital's Web site still identifies it as "Hospital Santa Monica."*

*Mexican officials said the facility is not authorized to treat serious diseases or to offer "alternative" treatments.*

*Several patients and patient family members at the clinic said that Donsbach represented that he ran the clinic.*

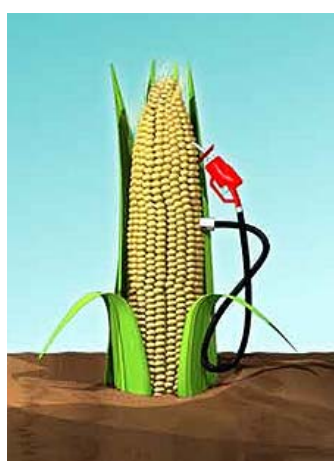
*During a 2006 deposition, Donsbach said that he had sold the clinic in 2002 to a former employee and that went there to "visit the sick" and pray for them but was not compensated for these visits. However, during another deposition, his office manager said Donsbach*

*received a percentage of revenue from the American patients.*

*A suit by a former patient who alleged that Donsbach had duped him was settled under confidential terms. [Crabtree P, Cearley A. Baja clinic shut down for unorthodox care reopens: Embattled founder's role open to question. San Diego Tribune, Sept 9, 2007] <http://www.signonsandiego.com/news/health/20070909-9999-1n9donsbach.html>".*

### **Global Warming - Ethanol**

In his always interesting "What's New" weekly newsletter, Dr. Robert Park wrote on September 28, 2007: **SUBSIDIES: FARMERS GET FAT WHILE LIVESTOCK GO HUNGRY.** *The price of corn is the highest in a decade. Ethanol plants are sprouting up in the corn fields. Land prices are turning farmers with 200 acres into millionaires. And yet, they still get direct government subsidy checks to "save the family farm."*



*"We're harvesting the sun," one of the new breed of business-man farmers boasts to Dan Morgan in today's Wash Post. Maybe "harvesting moonshine" would be more accurate. There is no credible study showing that ethanol is saving one drop of oil.*

The key statement here is "There is no credible study showing that ethanol is saving one drop of oil."

How can that possibly be so when companies and state governments are pouring massive investments and subsidies into the corn to ethanol business? Here in Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell recently proclaimed that within a few years Pennsylvania will be producing a billion gallons of ethanol per year in the quest for energy independence.

So who is right? Dr. Park or Governor Rendell? I am honestly asking that question and hope that someone can answer. Frankly I wish Governor Rendell to be right on this controversy, but hopes and wishes do not always translate into chemistry and physics.

In the March and April editions of Phactum we did briefly discuss the matter of gasoline vs. ethanol and concluded that there appeared to be little advantage to using ethanol as a means to reduce atmospheric carbon dioxide emissions. Hopefully that conclusion is warranted; rebuttal is invited. In the April edition we cited a news article asserting that it takes roughly the



energy equivalent of 3 gallons of ethanol to produce four gallons of the stuff.

Three will get you four would be a wonderful ratio if one were talking annual stock market profits, but how good a deal is that in the ethanol production market where millions of acres of land must be dedicated to grow corn to produce the fuel that will convert corn from other millions of acres of land into ethanol that will actually provide useful energy for other purposes?

Meanwhile, as corn is diverted to the ethanol market, the cost of cattle and human food has begun to increase. The ethanol production process is likely to become tedious, expensive, and counter-productive.

I am skeptical about ecstatic predictions from politicians that ethanol will lead the way to “energy independence” and reduction of “carbon footprint”.

If you do not subscribe to Dr. Park’s newsletter you should. To subscribe: : <http://www.bobpark.org>.

### Men in Space

And speaking of Dr. Park, if you do happen to tune into his website you might notice that he is a wee bit critical of NASA and their effort to get evermore manned space missions. In fact, Dr. Park is getting rather huffy about the matter. And why should he not be? It is expensive getting men into space and what can they do out there that robots and other automated systems can not? Furthermore, research funding is not easy to come by and there are plenty of other projects more likely to yield practical dividends. Sustainable energy independent of combustion is one such project

and deep sea exploration is another. I am sure we all could come up with dozens of ideas more worthy than sending a man to Mars.

### Gentle Wind Project - the return of the beast

In previous Phactums we have written about a mean spirited and litigious little cult known as the Gentle Wind Project. GWP had fallen upon some hard times in their home state of Maine. State Prosecutors thought they were shady operators and the judge agreed. So GWP shut their doors and moved west to Nevada and California where they re-emerged in the disguise of the innocuously named Family Systems Research Group (FSRG).

GWP was in the business of selling “healing instruments” which were nothing more than colorful cards which have received the correct “incantation”. The fee for those cards could be in the hundreds of dollars. Now FSRG is hawking their new “hexagram technology” where they calculate the clients “Hexagram Profile” to predict health, well being, etc. This is basically astrology hocus-pocus with a new name and an extravagant price tag.

Phactum’s spy network has reported that FSRG is having a conference in San Diego this month to demonstrate their new “products”. We do have contact information but will not give it unless specifically asked.

For a complete rundown of GWP, aka FSRG, operators, products, and method of operation visit this website: [www.windofchanges.org](http://www.windofchanges.org) which is operated by former members / victims of GWP.



### Global Warming - Schools must warn of Gore climate film bias

The UK newspaper, The Daily Mail, reported on October 3, 2007: *Schools will have to issue a warning before they show pupils Al Gore's controversial film about global warming, a judge indicated yesterday.*

*The move follows a High Court action by a father who accused the Government of 'brainwashing' children with propaganda by showing it in the classroom.*

*Stewart Dimmock (the plaintiff) said the former U.S. Vice-President's documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, is unfit for schools because it is politically biased and contains serious scientific inaccuracies and 'sentimental mush'.*

*He wants the video banned after it was distributed with four other short films to 3,500*

*schools in February.*

*Mr Justice Burton is due to deliver a ruling on the case next week, but yesterday he said he would be saying that Gore's Oscar-winning film does promote 'partisan political views'.*

*This means that teachers will have to warn pupils that there are other opinions on global warming and they should not necessarily accept the views of the film.*

*He said: 'The result is I will be declaring that, with the guidance as now amended, it will not be unlawful for the film to be shown.'*

This should not be a surprise to anyone. Politicians have a persistent habit of politicizing things and there is little reason to expect that the Vice President should be any different with this matter. That is unfortunate. It is good that they get reigned in sometimes, unfortunately it was by a British court, not a US one. In my view Gore did a good job of popularizing the issue of Global Warming but it would have been nice to refrain from the apocalyptic messages and to have been more diligent with his facts. Furthermore, some Global Warming enthusiasts do seem to be stifling capable scientists holding views that do not fully endorse the Environmental Zeitgeist. Just ask climatologists in Oregon, Virginia, and Delaware whose positions have been terminated or threatened by the governors of those states for their views on the matter. The Vice President might be right in his contentions, but he might also be wrong and one of those scientists more accurately on target. Let the debate rage openly among scientists.

### **Global Warming - NIMBYism on Steroids**

Cape Wind is a proposed privately funded project to install 130 wind turbines offshore in Nantucket Sound. The objective is to provide electric power for Cape Cod, Nantucket, and Martha's Vineyard using non-polluting wind power and in the process to offset 880,000 tons of carbon dioxide that would otherwise be produced by fossil fuel burning power generation facilities.

So what is there not to like about this? It seems that the Kennedy clan is not keen on the project as it will be unsightly and will adversely affect tourism. In



addition at least 100 local fisherman will have their fishing grounds disrupted. Furthermore there could be an adverse affect to sea creatures and birds might be sliced and diced by the turbine blades.

About 80% of Massachusetts voters have expressed approval of this project as have 65% of Cape Cod voters. The Kennedy opposition to this project, with considerable help from others in Congress, both Republicans and Democrats, has stalled the project for several years. There

are plenty of places to put a wind farm they say, and if it were 5 miles further off shore they would be all for it. No mention that 5 miles further off shore is deep water not well suited for a wind farm; but it would at least be out of sight of the Kennedy compound.

Why do we elect such people?

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### **The Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education**



The Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education's main focus is to educate people about the importance of the natural world, while giving them opportunities to explore environmental science in-depth and have fun while doing it! Through the Center's four interrelated departments: Environmental Education, Wildlife Rehabilitation, Land Restoration, and Environmental Art, visitors are exposed to the various ways that humans can connect with nature. Our approach to environmental education addresses all of the senses, allowing individuals to make the most of their experiences while visiting. Each area of expertise lends to advancements at The Center like standards-based educational programming, a high level of animal care, cutting-edge ecological restoration research, and providing a venue for emerging artists.

The Schuylkill Center is located at 8480 Hagy's Mill Road in the Roxborough section of Philadelphia., For more information call 215-482-7300 x110 or on the internet visit: [www.schuylkillcenter.org](http://www.schuylkillcenter.org).

## September 2007 Meeting Report

By Eric Krieg

On Saturday September 15th, we heard an analysis of the Salem Witch Trials from Walter Rowe, a professor of forensic science at George Washington University. He has spoken to PhACT before on forensic issues and is part of an informal speakers' exchange between PhACT and the skeptics group to our south, NCAS, National Capitol Area Skeptics.

In our country, the Salem Witch trials are a symbol of religious extremism and a case example of jurisprudence gone bad. When I visited the area a few years ago I got the impression that there's still a sense of collective guilt. Despite this, some stores for witches and paganism operate proudly.

Walter started by dispelling a number of common myths related to the trial. For example, no one was burned as a witch, the conviction rate of accused witches was certainly not nearly 100% and substantial evidence was required to prove a defendant was indeed a witch. Far from being country bumpkins, the people of the area were, on average, much more educated than in the other colonies and certainly more so than was then typical in Europe. Many leading figures on both sides of the debate were affiliated with Harvard University.

Walter described the times as contributing to the debacle. The whole area had just seen a governmental transition and fear of the Indians was endemic. Many settlers had been slaughtered by them. Salem was considered to be near the frontier and in danger of attack so patrols were often sent out to intercept infiltrators. A number of the accusers had either been subject to Indian attacks or had had close ones brutally killed. Towards the end of the talk Walter explained why he didn't believe the illness or poisoning theories of the origin of the accusers activities. He concluded that the overwhelming dread of attack was a plausible explanation. During the trial the language used to describe specters seen only by hysterical accusers was the same as that used to describe attacking Indians.

The trials ultimately lost credibility as the obvi-

ous targets, people who were already disliked, were dealt with and more prominent people started being accused. Finally, as more people were speaking out against the trials, the assigned governor dissolved the court hearing the proceedings and freed the surviving prisoners.

Walter talked about the period after the trials when the local church, the local government and even the participants realized the error of their ways and tried to make amends. Most of the accusers had an ongoing sense of rejection wherever they went. I found it interesting that one accuser had had the fortitude to make an open confession of being wrong and of causing great damage, yet still ended up blaming her actions on being misled by Satan. Walter explained that science was still taking root. Educated thinkers were only just beginning

to question paranormal claims that had previously been widely accepted.

As Walter wound down, he reminded us that the legacy of the witch trials stains our country to this day. Not long ago we had trials for child abuse and criminal Satanism in which the evidence took the form of false recovered memories. We have since found that accusations of ritualistic abusive Satanism are almost always based on delusions. Walter also reminded us that in many parts of the world, people are still regularly accused of being witches and are killed, often by frightened mobs. One Q&A question related to another historical

event thought to be analogous to the Salem Witch trials, the McCarthy anti-communist inquisitions. Without delving deeply into the issue, Walter pointed out that in that case history had since shown that there really had been a conspiracy of communist infiltration into our country.

The Witch Trials are a black spot in American history, but Walter did add perspective by observing that the witchcraft executions in the American Colonies amounted to 19 souls hanged whereas in Europe, from about 1450 to 1750, the number of executions is not precisely known but is estimated to be around 100,000, many of whom were burnt to death.

*Eric Krieg is President of PhACT and is an enthusiastic de-bunker of Free Energy hucksters and other scam artists.*





## Tom's Talented Telepathy Tester Goes Unused

By Tom Napier

Five years have elapsed since I described in Phactum a telepathy tester whose electronic probity should satisfy the most critical skeptic. For the benefit of new members (and any old ones who may have thrown out their April/May 2002 Phactum) here are its salient features. Those familiar with the ESP literature will recognize that its design circumvents the inherent flaws of many past telepathy testers.

The object is to determine whether one person can transmit one of four possible stimuli to a second person some distance away in another room. For electronic convenience the stimulus presented to the sender comprises one of four colored light-emitting diodes (LEDs). These emit red, green, yellow or blue light and are arranged in a square array behind a translucent panel on the sending device. The receiving subject holds a box carrying four correspondingly colored and positioned push-buttons. This box is connected to the sending device by a thin cable which may be many hundreds of feet long.

A test consists of a preselected number (20, 40 or 80) of trials. During each trial a randomly selected LED is illuminated for a fixed time of between two and fifteen seconds. (This time is preset to suit the subjects.) All the LEDs are then extinguished for a short period before the next trial starts.

At the receiving end a brief audible beep signals to the receiver that the sender is seeing a colored light. The receiver then presses one of the four colored buttons. At the end of a trial, information about the selected button is sent via the cable to the transmitting device. There it is compared with the stimulus and either a "hit" (colors match) or a "miss" (colors don't match) is recorded. If more than one button is pressed, only the first press is recorded whether the buttons are pressed simultaneously or sequentially. If no button is pressed before the next trial starts a "pass" occurs. Passes are ignored and don't count towards the preset number of trials.

Once the preset number is reached the test stops

and the total number of "hits" is displayed. If this number is statistically significant the display also shows this. Note that the results are not displayed until the test is over; scores cannot be inflated by "optional stopping." Statistically, several successive trials would be required to confirm all but the most powerful telepathic talent.

The mechanism that selects the target color is truly random. There is no possibility of predicting which color will appear next and all four colors appear with equal probability. The receiver's color choice is checked and recorded electronically. Many past experiments have been invalidated by inadequate target randomization and by human errors made when recording and checking the results. This device avoids these problems.

The electronically-generated signal that synchronizes the receiver's estimate with the sender's attempt bypasses the need for non-telepathic communication between the sending and receiving locations. The only obligation placed upon the experimenters is to ensure total sensory isolation between them.

The tester has a mode in which hits and misses are displayed as they are generated. This allows the experimenters and the subjects to become familiar with the tester's operation and to confirm that it behaves as specified. During this test the sending and recording devices would be placed near each other. The trial timing can be adjusted at this time.

The ultimate functional verification is to run a simulated test in which the receiving subject can see the LEDs. This can demonstrate, for example, that hitting the right button half the time gives a "hit" score of half the preset number of trials.

Many people claim to have ESP yet bitterly complain that they cannot convince skeptics. The availability of this incorruptible electronic arbiter should have brought hordes to my door to demonstrate their talents. Despite its appearance in a national electronics magazine and at a CSICOP conference, my telepathy tester sits untouched in its box. Perhaps I should have designed a better mousetrap instead.

*Tom Napier is a physicist in real life and in his spare time he feverishly is working on a fool proof mechanism for trapping those new fangled psychotic lab mice.*

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## Some PhACT Clerihews

by Elaine Brody

Long ago, in a restaurant far, far away (Jack's Firehouse at 2130 Fairmont Ave, Phila---I know it's a firehouse, but does everything on the menu have to be smoke-flavored, including the salad dressing?---but I



Caricature from Punch, 1881:

Admit that Homer sometimes nods,  
That poets *do* write trash,  
Our Bard has written "*Balder Dead*,"  
And also Balder-dash.

digress), a bunch of PhACTors were having a smoke-flavored meal after the monthly meeting (now there is an opening line worthy of the Bulwer-Lytton competition!). I don't remember exactly how it happened, but somehow the subject of conversation turned to clerihews. For those of you unfamiliar with humorous biographical poetry, a "clerihew" is a 4-line poem with an AABB rhyme scheme, whose first line is the name of a person. The subsequent lines should tell something about the person, in a funny or whimsical way. The form was invented by Edmund Clerihew Bentley in the early 1900's, and later imitators gave it the name "clerihew" in his honor. An example of Ed's opi (that's

not the plural of opus, but it should be), is the following screed about a famous chemist:

Sir Humphrey Davy  
Detested gravy.  
He lived with the odium  
Of having discovered sodium.

This is one of my favorite clerihews, and I was able to recite this and several others, to the obvious delight of my dining companions (work with me here). Some time later, unfortunately after everyone else had left, it occurred to me that two of the founders of PhACT had last names that weren't too hard to find rhymes for. Napier.....capier (nah).....drapier(hmm, maybe).....sapier(what?).....rapier! Aha! Now we're getting somewhere! The first two lines leapt into my mind like an Asian bighead carp into a redneck's rowboat.

Tom Napier  
Has a mind like a rapier.

Great! Now, the last couplet, something pithily observant yet wryly chucklesome. Okay, PhACT is a skeptic's society, so maybe "skeptical;" Tom probably doesn't like people who aren't, so, lessee, third line:

People not skeptical

What the hell rhymes with skeptical? Oh, for a rhyming dictionary! Skeptic...analeptic...what the hell does analeptic mean? Didn't know, so I looked it up; "restorative; esp. stimulating the nervous system and counteracting drowsiness or the effects of sedatives." Well, Tom is fun to talk to, but I'm not sure he's a match for Seconal. Besides, I'd have to rework line 3 to make it fit. So, what else might rhyme? I rather think non-skeptics might cause indigestion, perhaps "peptic ulcers"? Yes! Got it! "Dyspeptical," which may not be a word, but should be. So the finished clerihew goes:

Tom Napier  
Has a mind like a rapier.  
People not skeptical,  
Make him dyspeptical.

Awesome. Abso-bloody-lutely brilliant, even. So, the next time we had dinner after a PhACT meeting, I would carefully work the conversation around to clerihews, pause as if for inspiration, casually toss off my creation as if it had just popped into my head, then bask



in the warm glow of admiration from my astonished tablemates. Great plan, but alas, it never happened. The past laid schemes 'o mice and men, as Bobby Burns would say.

But my efforts were not totally in vain. Some-time later, there was a writing competition for Delaware Valley Mensa's publication Proteus. It won the prize for poetry. (It was the only entry.) Tom, the clever fellow, even wrote an apt reply, which was:

### A Clarifying Clerihew

Elaine,  
Although dyspepsia is a pain,  
What I feel is more like grief,  
When a Mensan backs some mad belief.

Thank goodness he didn't try to rhyme Brody.  
That could have gotten ugly.

But wait, there's more!

Luckily the other founder of PhACT has an easily-rhymeable name. (Is "rhymeable" a word? Maybe it shouldn't be.) So, without further ado, because I can tell your patience is wearing thin:

Eric Krieg  
Is in his own league.  
He detests the notion  
Of perpetual motion.

I know, you're stunned. What can I say? I was born with it.

*Elaine Brody is a long-time member of PhACT and is on the ex comm of Delaware Valley MENSA. She is also head of the Sea Monkey subgroup of DVM. (Sea Monkey Worship Day is May 16th, mark your calendars!) We did not know she was poetically inclined but have long suspected that she is mad. We now have circumstantial evidence.*

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"It is inaccurate to say that I hate everything. I am strongly in favor of common sense, common honesty, and common decency. This makes me forever ineligible for public office."

H. L. Mencken

## Soundbites

Compiled by Becky Strickland

♦ "[there is] a strong inverse relationship between human population density and forest cover in tropical countries. Razed rainforests are also an enormous source of greenhouse gases, dumping around 5 billion tons of CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere annually. [in addition] several recent studies have shown that a key predictor of armed civil conflict in developing nations is not their predominant religion or the region in which they are located, but the fraction of the adult population between the ages of 15 and 29. Rapidly growing countries are flooded with unemployed and disenfranchised young men. Far too often, they become prime fodder for crime or war, or even recruitment into a terrorist cell." William Laurance, a biologist at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute in Balboa, Panama, arguing for condoms to be made available to anyone who wishes to use them. *New Scientist*, September 1, 2007

♦ "I am an engineer, a master of calculation and tabulation. I write out hypotheses for hours, I reject and I prove them again. I make plans based on reason and proof." President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad says his calculations as an engineer as well as his belief in God convince him that Iran will not be attacked by western powers trying to end its nuclear program. (Reuters, September 3, 2007)

♦ In its September 15th issue, *New Scientist* magazine printed another response to Dawkins suggestion that atheists wear a scarlet A. Peter Magellan suggests a circle over a vertical line, depicting a magnifying glass, the most basic tool of rational scientific inquiry. More on his blog - <http://ma.gnolia.com/julefufiq>.

♦ "The current push to expand biofuel use is creating unsustainable tensions that will disrupt markets without generating significant environmental benefits." The authors of an OECD report, arguing that the rush to support alternative energy sources will lead to surging food prices and the potential destruction of natural habitats. *The Financial Times*, London, September 10, 2007.

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## No Sure Bet: Treating Pathological Gamblers and Their Families

by Gary Lange, Ph.D., MFT, CAS, CCGC

Problem gamblers use deceit and lies as freely as racing forms, lotto tickets, or other gambling paraphernalia. A person in the grasp of a gambling disorder uses a tremendous amount of secrecy and manipulation to squander any available financial resources, so much so, that their families often feel as though their “money is on fire”. Treatment of both problem gamblers and their families is what I call “*Addiction Plus*”. As therapists, we need to use all that we know about addiction, *plus* employ treatment for impulsive and comorbid disorders.

Nancy Petry’s (2005) review of studies summarized that 4-6% of the U.S. population are “Disordered Gamblers”. At least 85% of Americans gambled \$84.8 billion at casinos, card clubs, racetracks, “racinos”, lottery purchases and remote/internet games. (Casino City North American Alliance, 2006) They’ve also been involved in unregulated gaming in most sports betting, raffles, family games and hand held games. Pathological Gambling (DSM-IV) with five out of ten symptoms, comprises 1-2% of the population, whereas, “problem gamblers” (with one or two symptoms) make up an additional 3-4% of the population. As we know, Pathological Gambling is an Impulse Control Disorder and requires knowledge of addiction, *plus* how to deal with behavioral patterns similar to treating impulsive adolescents.

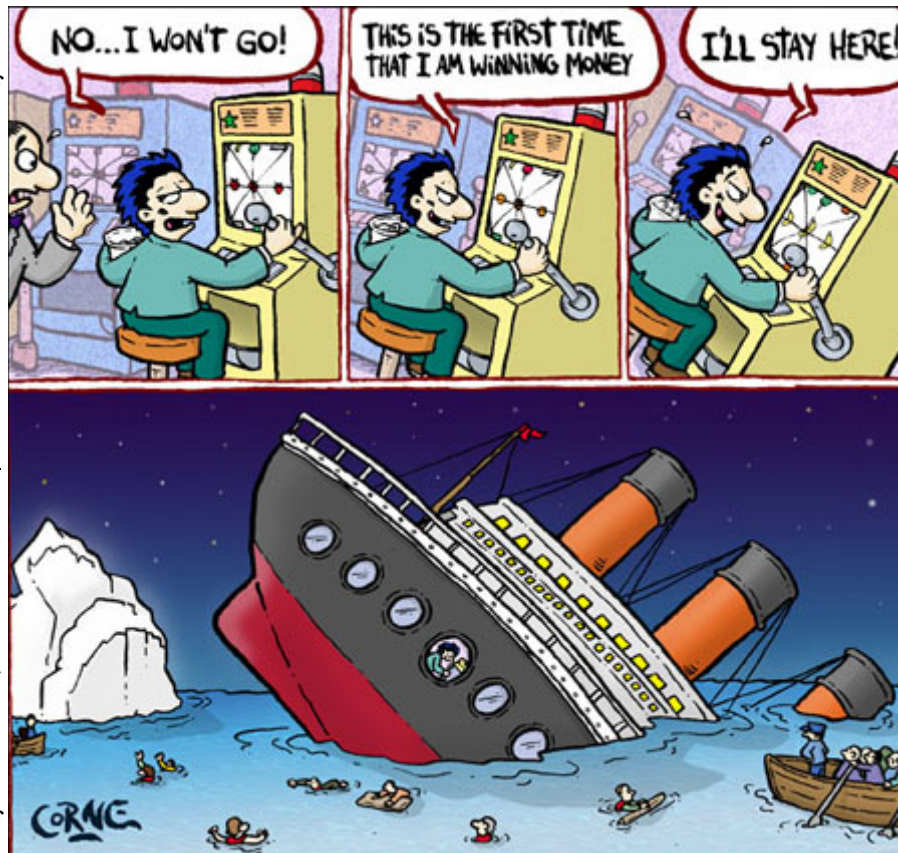
Problem gamblers affect eight to ten other people in their lives (Lobsinger & Beckett, 1996) and need our help as much as the families of any addict or mentally ill

person. Spouses and family members often have their own psychological problems, believe the gambler is having an affair or is a mythomaniac because of their lying and deceit.

Research also shows gamblers who seek psychological treatment often have co-occurring mood, anxiety and personality disorders. Petry (2005) summarized recent studies showing as many as 37% of disordered gamblers have Major Depression; 22% are Bipolar; 41% have Generalized Anxiety Disorder; and 18% have Panic Disorder. Dr. Petry also reports many disordered gamblers also have personality disorders (PD). Disordered Gamblers indicate 28% have Obsessive Compulsive PD; 23% have Antisocial PD; 24% have Paranoid PD; and between 13 to 15% have Histrionic, Avoidant and Schizoid personality disorders. My clinical experience is that there are high numbers with Narcissistic PD and Borderline PD, but available studies to date to sup-

port that assertion are small and inconsistent in numbers. “When dealing with problem gamblers, the therapist needs to be prepared for treating dual disorders,” is quite an understatement.

There are some small movements to require gambling establishments to fund treatment for problem gamblers. In Pennsylvania the Legislature requires that \$1.5 million of slots profits be set aside each year to fund





education and treatment for the state's problem gamblers. If a disordered gambler receives only 10 treatment sessions at a low \$50.00 per session only 3,000 people could be treated. As noted above, especially because of the co-occurring disorders, most problem gamblers would need many more than 10 sessions and this does not include family members. With the low estimate of only 1-2% of the population being pathological gamblers, each casino, in and of itself, would probably have more than 3,000 problem gamblers per year.

Treating disordered gamblers is more difficult than most of the alcoholics and addicts I have treated during the past 25 years. These aberrant gamblers are usually in their desperation phase and seek treatment later than alcoholics. Of course their "money is on fire" from their mounting debts as they continue lying during

their gambling problems escalate.

Four helpful and largely effective Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) treatment techniques assist gamblers and their families in getting a start on the road of recovery. To begin with, functional analysis involves diagramming triggers which initiate gambling, and evaluating both the positive and negative consequences of gambling (Petry, 2005). Disordered gambling clients are often surprised when asked about positive aspects of their gambling. They may actually need to be prompted to think about the escape, the excitement or the "big-win dream". Negative consequences such as loss of job or spouse, guilt, or depression are easier to identify when "sober" and hurting. The functional analysis helps the gambler see the larger picture with both positive and negative consequences. It is appropriate as AA

## Mensa Meeting - The Odds are Against Us

A Study on gambling  
History and Forms from Around the World  
( October 19, 2007 )

From prehistoric time to today's headlines, gambling has been a part of the human experience. Our speaker for this month's General Membership Meeting will inform us about the history of gambling throughout time. Dr. Louise Krasniewicz, Senior Research Scientist, American Section, Penn Museum, uses her anthropological research on games of chance to consider the place of gambling in human cultures across time. The illustrated lecture features gaming artifacts from Penn Museum's collection as well as examples from today's global gaming phenomenon, including the introduction of casinos into Pennsylvania.

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Prior to the meeting, those who can, are invited to attend the pre-General Membership Meeting Dinner at a restaurant (TBA) the King of Prussia area. Either contact me, or by rolling dice and decoding the cards dealt in a specific Baccarat tournament, you will learn the location of the dinner. This is an excellent opportunity to have a good meal and get to speak with Dr. Krasniewicz, one on one. Contact Pete Stevens ( [pete.stevens@phila.gov](mailto:pete.stevens@phila.gov) ) to reserve your place at dinner, by NOON, Friday, October 19th, 2007.

**This is the annual and only deviation from our usual schedule.** This month and this month only will, the General Membership Meeting will not be held at its usual location. The meeting will be at 8pm at the Sleep Inn/ Main Stay Suites, behind the King of Prussia Mall.

Hope to see you there, you will enjoy this presentation. Care to make a wager on that?

says to, "Think it through."

A second technique is to reinforce non-gambling. In the recovery field this is also known as "breaking through their denial". Abstinence from gambling is usually seen as the goal although harm reduction theories obviously provide assistance. Relapse for gamblers tend to be more common than with treatment for other addictions. Therefore, our therapeutic challenge is to help them get "back in the saddle" ASAP should a "lapse" occur. With this technique, the gambler is encouraged to keep track of any gambling thoughts or triggers on a daily basis and to reward and bolster non-gambling behavior.

A productive way to reinforce non-gambling behavior is to review a long list of pleasant, safe activities with clients. As with other addictions, by the time clients seek treatment, their world and choices have narrowed greatly. They can only think of a few things they like to do (except gamble). As we brainstorm with the clients, their list can grow exponentially. Previous activities are boring and devoid of passion. "Too often nothing is as intense or pleasurable as the unrestrained crazy wagering... This is known as *behavioral toxicity*, a process by which other rewards lose attractiveness." (McCown, 2007) This is reversible as neurotransmitters and other activities help rebalance the gambler (and family as well).

If they have a non-gambling day, the client can select a reward like a relaxing bath, a favorite TV show, or indulgent dessert. Recently a client reported she forgot how much she loves to take her dog on a hike, which is obviously good for the both of them. Longer term abstinence is reinforced with larger rewards like a new CD, a weekend out of town with a friend, watching a sporting event, dinner out or a new item of clothing. CBT recommends withholding rewards if the client has gambled that day. If the client is suicidal, we need to assess whether withholding of pleasure-full events is appropriate at this time.

A third technique to assist this very complex clientele involves utilizing supportive relationships. We all know that not all family members are supportive and we may need to assist our clients in determining who is supportive of their non-gambling. Religious affiliations, support groups and Gamblers Anonymous (GA) offer helpful relationships. My experience is that GA is not *yet* as strong and helpful as AA, but it is certainly better than a former poker buddy. I usually begin by having my clients list all of their relationships. Then we mutually focus on those who are supporters. Of course,



sponsorship, steps, service and giving "therapy" at meetings help gamblers with their daily commitment.

A fourth technique mirrors the alcoholic removing alcohol from their home. It involves excluding themselves from gambling establishments. Some states and casinos allow gamblers to sign "self-exclusion" forms barring themselves from entering and *cashing out a win* at that establishment. Homework and role-playing assignments can involve informing poker buddies, and other wagering partners that they are "on the wagon" and not gambling any more. This behavioral technique is easier to do when they are in the earlier stages of pain related to gambling consequences. If and when gambling urges develop later on, they'll need to drive further or explain why they want to gamble and this helps them "buy time" and reconsider a relapse to gambling.

Stress management is a fifth technique I use out of the many possible options available. Problem gamblers often need help assertively telling their gambling aunt not to visit, confronting a co-worker, having a GA Pressure Relief meeting, or telling a spouse about a debt. These disordered gamblers were impulsive when wagering and want capricious recovery and seek the "quick fix". Gamblers, who often have trust issues, still need direction with decision-making, relaxation and perhaps systematic desensitization. Their emotional and physical health is often in shambles. They frequently require encouragement to see a physician, help with monitoring "awfulizing" thoughts, assistance in choosing healthier nutrition and expanding their exercise program.

Families of disordered gamblers are quite co-dependent and often passively dependent. Family





# PHACT

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***H.M.S. Beagle***

## ***The Forgotten Sailor***

***Captain Robert FitzRoy (1805-1865). Captain of H.M.S. Beagle during Darwin's epic voyage.***

***Darwin had been taken on board the Beagle as a gentleman companion for FitzRoy. (The dictates of Britain's class system prohibited a ship's captain from socializing with his crew.) The Beagle's assignment was primarily to chart the coasts of Argentina, Chile and Ecuador, visiting several Pacific islands on the return.***



***One of the more poignant episodes of the Beagle's voyage involved FitzRoy's pet project to repatriate three Tierra del Fuegan natives who had been kidnapped on a previous voyage and taken to England to be "civilized". These Fuegians (Jemmy Button, Fuegia Basket, and York Minster) had been taught English and introduced to Christianity. FitzRoy hoped they would become effective missionaries in their homeland, but they quickly abandoned their new European habits in the harsh environment of Tierra del Fuego.***

***FitzRoy rose to the naval rank of admiral, served for two years as governor of New Zealand, and is noted for his meteorological studies (including invention of a barometer). Later in life, FitzRoy was vehemently opposed, on religious grounds, to Darwin's ideas of evolution. Yet he himself had played a key role in Darwin's intellectual development. He was a tragic figure, striving for greatness but suffering severe bouts of depression. He eventually committed suicide.***