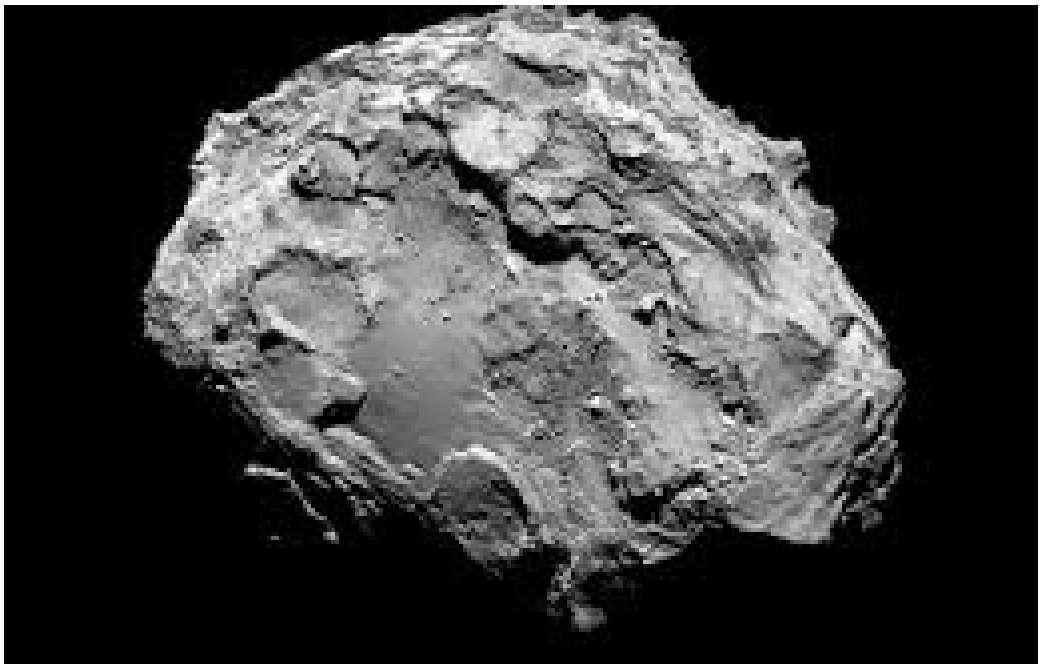


Noesis

The Journal of the Mega Society
Issue #197, November 2014

Contents

About the Mega Society

The Mega Society was founded by Dr. Ronald K. Hoeflin in 1982. The 606 Society (6 in 10^6), founded by Christopher Harding, was incorporated into the new society and those with IQ scores on the Langdon Adult Intelligence Test (LAIT) of 173 or more were also invited to join. (The LAIT qualifying score was subsequently raised to 175; official scoring of the LAIT terminated at the end of 1993, after the test was compromised). A number of different tests were accepted by 606 and during the first few years of Mega's existence. Later, the LAIT and Dr. Hoeflin's Mega Test became the sole official entrance tests, by vote of the membership. Later, Dr. Hoeflin's Titan Test was added. (The Mega was also compromised, so scores after 1994 are currently not accepted; the Mega and Titan cutoff is now 43—but either the LAIT cutoff or the cutoff on Dr. Hoeflin's tests will need to be changed, as they are not equivalent.)

Mega publishes this irregularly-timed journal. The society also has a (low-traffic) members-only e-mail list. Mega members, please contact the Editor to be added to the list.

For more background on Mega, please refer to Darryl Miyaguchi's "A Short (and Bloody) History of the High-IQ Societies"—

http://archive.today/K32e

—the Editor's High-IQ Societies page—

http://www.polymath-systems.com/intel/hiqsocs/index.html

—and the official Mega Society page,

http://www.megasociety.org/

Noesis is the journal of the Mega Society, an organization whose members are selected by means of high-range intelligence tests. Jeff Ward, 13155 Wimberly Square #284, San Diego, CA 92128, is Administrator of the Mega Society. Inquiries regarding membership should be directed to him at the address above or:

ward-jeff@san.rr.com

Opinions expressed in these pages are those of individuals, not of *Noesis* or the Mega Society.

Editorial

Kevin Langdon

This is a strong issue of *Noesis*. I'm grateful for the varied and interesting material we've received. Please keep it coming. Submissions by nonmembers of Mega are welcome. In this issue we have:

"Interview with Rick Rosner" (Part One and Part Two), by Rick Rosner and Scott Douglas Jacobsen of the In-Sight journal site--

http://in-sightjournal.com/

--where this originally appeared. Rick has certainly led an interesting life and he has lots to say about it. (More of the interview will appear in future issues of *Noesis*.)

"Capetown and a Rogue Journey to the Heart of (Administrative) Darkness," by Andrew Beckwith. An interesting travel piece.

"Doubting Doubt," by Adam Kisby. (I doubt that I understand what Adam is getting at here. :-?)

Due to a miscommunication between the author and the Editor, the wrong version of Richard May's family history piece "Hi" was included in *Noesis* #196. I regret the error; the correct version is included here.

"Obscure Words and Facts Analogies," by Jeff Ward. The first word of the title is very apt. It's way over my head.

"Super Intelligence?" by May-Tzu. Look! Up in the sky! . . .

Once again it's time for Mega Society elections. If you are interested in running for Administrator, Editor, or Internet Officer please submit a statement of candidacy for publication in the next issue of *Noesis*.

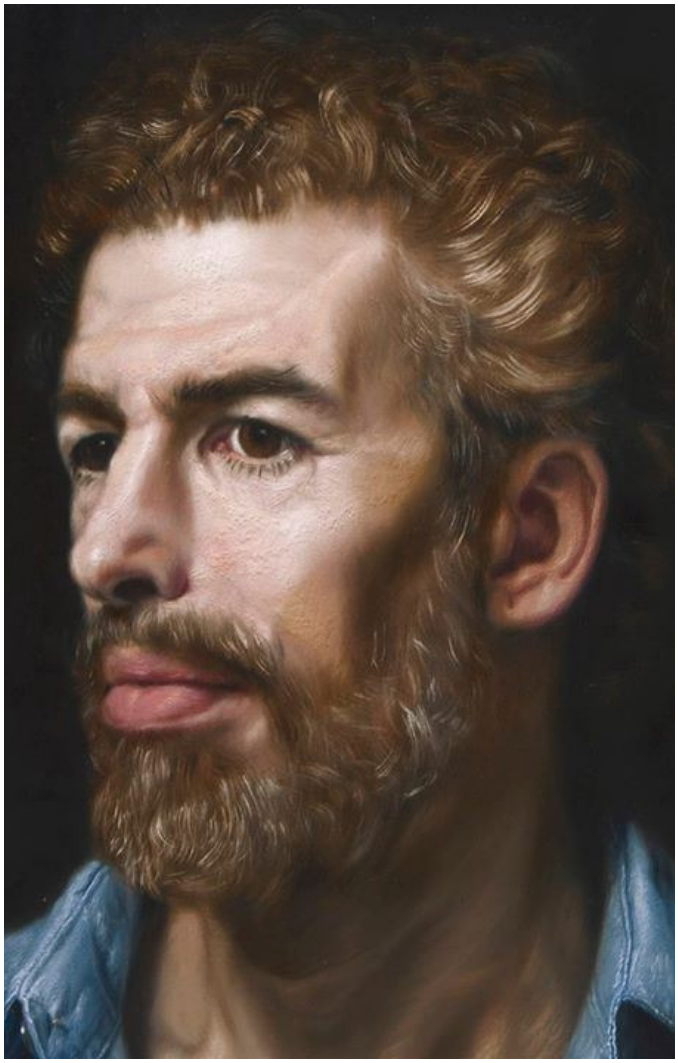
Contributions to *Noesis* are needed, as always. And letters to the Editor on any of the subjects discussed in these pages are welcome and encouraged.

Cover: Comet 67P/Churyumov-Gerasimenko from the Rosetta spacecraft (European Space Agency). On November 12 the ESA's Philae lander carried by Rosetta (sort-of-)soft-landed on a comet for the first time. Philae is returning surface photos and other data but an unfortunate landing site with very little sunlight has severely limited its functioning.

Illustration on page 4: A recent oil painting of Rick Rosner by Lance Richlin.

Illustrations on pp. 32 and 35 from the archives mentioned in Richard May's family history piece.

Interview with Rick Rosner by Scott Douglas Jacobsen
(Part One)



ABSTRACT

Part one of six, comprehensive interview with Rick G. Rosner, ex-editor for the Mega Society (1990-96), and writer. He discusses the following subject-matter: geography, culture, and linguistic background, and attenuated Jewish cultural influence during upbringing; *Noesis* issue 57 article entitled *When Good IQs Happen to Bad People*, and early signs of being a child prodigy; experiences in grade school, junior high, high school, and college; long history of forging identities beginning in entering high school another time, and many more, motivations for the behavior,

outcomes for him, and tease for upcoming book entitled *Dumbass Genius*; ideas on cosmology and physics beginning at age 10, coming to a realization at age 21, *Noesis* 58 comments on the equivalence, and subsequent development of the equivalence to the present day; discussion on a mathematical model to represent the equivalence and a layman analogy for this equivalence; coined phrase of "lazy voodoo physics," definition of it, and relation of this to considerations about 20th and 21st century cosmology and physics; entrance into the ultra-high IQ community, the Mega Society, forging another identity, pseudonym of Richard Sterman, *Noesis*, and eventual amends for forgery; three trends in *Noesis* of high-level material across arts and sciences, mix of scatological material (circa 1990-96), and his time as an editor from 1990-1996, earning position of editor, and thoughts on fulfilling the purpose of the journal's constitution; *My Problem With Black People* (1992), argument at the time for equivalent intelligence of the races, differing views of other Mega Society members, and current stance on the issue; current membership in societies and personal use through membership; Intelligence Quotient (IQ) pervading American culture, Raven's Progressive Matrices (RPM) and the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS), some independent researchers' work and test constructors' productions for those achieving maximum or near-maximum scores on mainstream tests, and this setting the groundwork for his obsession of IQ tests; *Titan Test* perfect score, and range, mean, and median for best high-range IQ test scores; criticism of some intelligence tests and solution through non-verbal/'culture-fair' tests, and recommendations for identifying giftedness; and interest in health from a young age and the reason for it.

Keywords: arts, child prodigy, college, cosmology, equivalence, Genius, giftedness, Giga Society, Intelligence, IQ, Jewish, mathematical, Mega Society, Mega Test, Noesis, physics, Rick G. Rosner, Richard Sterman, Raven's Progressive Matrices, sciences, Titan Test, Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale.

1. In terms of geography, culture, and language, where does your family background reside? How do you find this influencing your development?

I grew up in Boulder, Colorado, with my mom, stepdad and brother, and spent a month each summer with my dad and stepmom and their kids in Albuquerque, New Mexico. My ancestors came from Eastern Europe and the Baltics by way of Cincinnati and Shreveport. I'm Jewish, but out west Jewish cultural influence is somewhat attenuated.

2. In *Noesis* issue 57's article *When Good IQs Happen to Bad People*, you describe some of your experience as a kid. Could you elaborate on some of the history before entering grade school?

I showed some signs of being a child prodigy – by the age of about 18 months, I'd learned the alphabet, and by age 3 ¾, I'd taught myself to read at a near-adult level, which was unusual for the era. I was good with puzzles and math – but this wasn't encouraged. My parents thought I'd do better growing up as a normal kid, which did not go smoothly.

Some non-prodigy stuff – the theme music to *Perry Mason* scared me – I'd have to go hide behind the couch. My first crush was on Patty Duke on *The Patty Duke Show*, who I somehow conflated with my dad's sister, Aunt Janice, whom I saw during summer visitation with my dad in Los Angeles. My first memory is of the Raggedy Ann & Andy curtains and bedspread in my room. We had a very nice cocker spaniel named Tinkerbell, who died when I was four. (This is before cockers became overbred and high-strung.)

I was terrified of swimming, which was part of my generally being a wuss – had to be peeled off the side of the pool by the swim teacher.

3. What about your time in grade school, junior high, high school, and college? In particular, what do you consider pivotal moments in each of these cross-sections of latter portions of your early life?

I grew up nerdy and interested in science, deciding at a young age to make it my job to figure out the universe. At age six, I was left with a scary babysitter, which led me to start spinning clockwise, chanting to God, and to be sent to my first shrink.

I was uncoordinated. Each year, I'd enter the 50-yard-dash on track & field day, and each year, would come in last. (Maybe the other not-so-fast kids knew not to enter the race and avoid the embarrassment.) Even as a kid, I had gross caveman feet with weirdly long second toes. I used to take off my shoe to make girls scream and run away – I liked the attention.

In the 1970s, there was no such thing as nerd chic. If you were nerdy, you were probably lonely. But, like many misguided nerds, I thought my intelligence and niceness would inspire a girl to look past my nerdiness. I spent the second semester of ninth grade building a Three-Dimensional Gaussian Distribution Generator to demonstrate to my honors math class. The machine dropped a thousand BBs through a pyramidal tower of overlapping half-inch grids into a 24-by-12 array of columns. It was a supercharged Plinko machine with an added spatial dimension, forming a half-bell of BBs, thanks to the laws of probability. During its construction, I thought, "A girl will see this elegant experimental apparatus, think I'm brilliant, and become my girlfriend." I completed the BB Machine in time to demonstrate it to the class on the last day of school. No one cared. Of course they didn't – it was the last day of junior high, and a dweeb was pouring BBs into a plastic pyramid.

Realizing that my nerdiness was standing in the way of ever having a girlfriend, I began changing myself – lifting weights and wearing contact lenses.

Towards the end of high school, I saw my IQ test scores, which maxed out at about 150. I decided that a 150 IQ wasn't high enough for me to become the world-changing physicist I wanted to be, so I decided to become kind of a meathead – a stripper and a bar bouncer. At about the same time I was beginning my meathead career, I started to take high-end IQ tests, scoring in the 170s, 180s, and eventually 190s. I also found out that among the reasons I'd never scored much above 150 on school-administered IQ tests is that the tests

themselves don't go much above 150. (This makes sense – if you're a teacher or administrator trying to figure out whether a kid needs educational enrichment, it doesn't matter much whether a kid's IQ is 150 or 165. With either IQ, that kid will go stir-crazy in a regular classroom.)

I'd never quit thinking about physics, but my new, high scores gave me more confidence that I might eventually be able to theorize productively. Of course, a few points should probably be subtracted from my IQ for basing my life on IQ scores.

4. You have a long history with forging identities beginning with entering high school another time, and many more. What motivated this behavior? How long did you pursue this 'calling' of entering high school? In particular, how did each experience turn out? How many times did you do this?

Though I had started trying to de-nerdify myself as early as ninth grade, it wasn't effective. In my small town, my classmates were well aware of my nerdiness – there was no erasing that. After years of trying to be cool and failing, I was very frustrated and had something like a freak-out. I decided that I would not leave high school a virgin. So after graduating high school with the class of 1978, using forged transcripts, I went back to high school for a second senior year (class of '79) with my other family in Albuquerque. I only lasted ten weeks and didn't come close to even making out with a girl.

A note on inappropriateness: I think standards have changed since I did this. The creepiness factor has increased. But since I was just 18 – still roughly high school age – and barely talked to any girls much less date them when I returned to high school, it was pretty harmless.

1980: Went on a double-date to a high school prom because my girlfriend (who, like me, was in college) had a best friend who was still in high school and thought we should all go to her prom.

Also 1980: I went to L.A. to try to sell my back-to-high-school story to a Hollywood producer. Thought it would help sell the story if I were back in high school at the time. Tried to talk my way into a couple of L.A. schools without any transcripts, just a class of '81 letterman's jacket.

I eventually spent several more semesters in high school, but rather than tell about them here, I'll just tease my forthcoming book, *Dumbass Genius*, which will detail my more than ten years as a sometime high school student.

5. In terms of your ideas related to cosmology and physics, at 10, you began thinking about the universe. The reason for existence. At 21, you came to a realization. You note, "All the big theories are built around big equivalences." Namely, your realization of an equivalence between the operation of information in an individual consciousness and the operation of space & matter in the universe. Both have self-consistency. In addition to this, and later in response to a similar topic in *Noesis* 58,

you state, "I believe in matter and space as information held in some vast awareness…" What do you mean by these? In particular, the idea of a great equivalence. How have you developed the idea from the original equivalence to the present day?

I've continued to think about this stuff and think I have a pretty good theoretical framework, though it needs more math.

I believe that it's almost impossible to have a large, self-consistent system of information without that system having some degree of consciousness – probably a high degree. Consciousness can be characterized as every part of a system knowing what's going on, more or less, with every other part of the system, within a framework that assigns (emotional) values to events perceived by the system. (Of course there are processes which are peripheral to consciousness – most of the time, we're not aware of the finer points of breathing or walking or why we like looking at cat videos and butts.)

Plenty of people think that the universe is a massive processor of information. Quantum mechanics mathematicizes the limitations of the universe's information-processing ability. Being finite, the universe cannot observe itself with infinite precision.

6. Provided the nature of these particular equivalences, especially related to the universe, do you have a mathematical model to represent this equivalence? Furthermore, do you have a layman analogy for this equivalence?

I think the most efficient model of the information contained in a complex, self-contained and self-consistent system of information looks like the universe – locally three-dimensional (spatially) with linear time and particles and forces that transact business more or less the way they do in the universe itself.

I don't believe in the big bang – instead, I believe that what looks like a big bang is kind of a trick of perspective, based on the universe being made of information. Parts of the universe which have less information in common with us are more distant and red-shifted. The apparent age of the universe is a measure of the amount of information it contains (or has in play). Somewhat similarly, train tracks don't really touch at the horizon.

Kind of picture the universe as being at a slow boil. Some parts are energy-rich and expanding, while other parts are burned out and pushed to the outskirts by the expanding regions, waiting for their chance to expand again.

7. You have coined the phrase "lazy voodoo physics". How do you define "lazy voodoo physics"? Why resort to this form of considering major interests such as the structure and fate our universe, or existence of other universes, and other concepts arising from 20th and 21st century cosmology and physics?

Lazy voodoo physics is my term for crappy metaphysical theorizing (which I've done some of, particularly as a little kid). I prefer to think that my current metaphysical theorizing is less crappy.

It is possible to think about the universe without a full mathematical arsenal. George Gamow, who came up with the big bang, was notoriously unschooled in math. Immanuel Kant was among the first people to endorse the idea of galaxies, and Edgar Allen Poe offered a reasonable solution to *Olbers' Paradox*. Einstein himself had to be pointed towards the mathematical framework for general relativity by his friends. Trying to imagine the processes of the universe with the math to come later is not voodoo physics. Metaphysics doesn't have to be voodoo physics, either.

8. When did you enter into the world of the ultra-high IQ community? In particular, the Mega Society. In it, once more, you forged an identity. What motivated this resurgence of forging an identity? For instance, the use of the pseudonym Richard Sterman within the publications of the Mega Society journal, *Noesis*. To make amends, and needing stating, you did apologize to members and readers of the journal for the false identity portrayal.

When I first qualified for the Mega Society in late 1985, I was depressed from a bad breakup and would try to make myself less depressed by doing stupid stuff. After receiving a score on the Mega Test that qualified me for the Mega Society, I wrote to Marilyn Savant (who must've been in charge of membership at the time) and asked, "Hey, can I join your club…and want to go on a date? I'm a stripper." Marilyn wrote back and said my score didn't qualify me for Mega. She had no response to the personal invitation. (Later, my score did turn out to qualify me for Mega. My score's IQ equivalent jumped around as more scores came in and the test was repeatedly recalibrated.)

On the Mega Test, I had tied for the second-highest score in the country. The *CBS Morning News* called to invite me to be on the show. I asked the producer if I should wear my tux or my loincloth. She immediately cancelled me for being a crazy person. In my defense, I worked in bars until two in the morning and didn't wake up in time to see what morning news shows were like. I thought, stupidly, that the *CBS Morning News* would want somebody really fun. (Fun = loincloth.)

The other people with high scores were two Los Angeles math professors, Solomon Golomb and Herbert Taylor, and the Governor of New Hampshire. People seemed really annoyed that I, a roller skating waiter, stripper, bar bouncer, and amateur undercover high school student, was in their company.

In 1990, when the Titan Test came out, I remembered how appalled at me people were after the Mega. So I decided to take the test using my girlfriend's last name instead of my own, figuring that if I did well on the Titan, I could get a fresh start at talking to reporters without being tainted by being the person who shocked people the first time around. If this sounds dumb, it's because it was. My Twitter handle is @dumbassgenius because I

tend to do a mix of smart and dumb stuff (not usually on purpose). I wasn't trying to fool anyone for test purposes, I was just trying to sidestep my stupid past.

I did really well on the Titan, finally joining the Mega Society and becoming editor of the Mega Society journal. After a few months, I told everyone, "Hey, I'm the same guy who did well on the Mega Test." I don't think anyone was outraged. (I also took the Mega Test for a second time as Richard Sterman. But I soon came clean.)

9. In reading through the available literature of *Noesis*, i.e. available online, three trends persist to me. One, the range of high-level and engaging material across the arts and science, e.g. the lucid description of relativity by Chris Cole at the end of issue 69 entitled *Relativity – A Primer*. Two, the mix of the occasional scatological material in the writing, mostly c. 1990-1996. Three, the length of your time as the main editor from 1990-1996. How did you come into the world of the Mega Society? How did you earn the position of editor for six years? Do you think the journal fulfilled part of the purpose stated in the constitution to "facilitate interaction among its members and to assist them in gaining access to resources to accomplish their individual purposes"?

When the editorship was offered to me, I was underemployed. I'd written for some TV quiz shows and thought that work would continue but didn't know how to get that work. The publisher of *Noesis* said I could have the subscription money if I'd edit it. It wasn't much, but everything helps when you're a bouncer and nude model who's trying to cover a mortgage and pay for hair transplants. I edited *Noesis* for six years because no one else was clamoring to do it. Towards the end, I started getting TV work again, and became even less reliable about getting issues out on time. Other members volunteered to take over.

As editor, I didn't do too much editing. Most material submitted to me went straight into *Noesis*. I may have left out some crackpot submissions claiming to have disproved Einstein and perhaps some angry letters from people who thought they deserved to be admitted to Mega though they didn't meet the entrance requirements.

Some of the writing you term scatological may have been my writing about myself. While most of the material submitted to *Noesis* is at a high intellectual level or at least reflects striving in that direction, I was trying to be entertaining and tell the embarrassing and I hope funny truth about myself. I eventually became a professional comedy writer, and, without looking back on my writing for *Noesis*, I'm sure much of it was goofier and more obnoxious (and perhaps more entertaining) than the average article.

I'm fairly pessimistic about the effectiveness of most high-IQ journals, though I've seen some good ones. My editorship was at the very beginning of the internet era, so most communication was by snail mail. Now, of course, high-IQ organizations are online, which speeds up discourse. The Mega Society online journal has some good material and discussions.

10. Amidst the busywork of editorials and organization of the material, upon reading *Noesis*, one article struck me regarding the title and content entitled *My Problem With Black People*. At the time, August 1992, other members of the Mega Society argued for the possibility of intellectual inferiority of blacks. You argued otherwise. In that, by your estimate, all races have about equal intelligence. Although in defense of all parties involved in the discussion of issue 72, the articles were written in 1992. Much work written in public discourse has progressed on the issue of intelligence and race: 'does race count as an appropriate scientific category?', 'do IQ tests measure intelligence?' and so forth. Where do you stand on this issue now?

I don't have a problem with black people – in my juvenile manner, just wanted an attention-grabbing title. I believe that most work which tries to or claims to establish a relationship between intelligence and race has elements of creepy bullshit. Little good and lots and lots of bad has been done by people who claim that certain races or nationalities are mentally inferior to others.

Intelligence has a fluid relationship with environment, and all sorts of things can happen during an individual's lifetime which may or may not bring his or her intelligence to fruition. Sometimes, being imperfectly adapted to an environment may elicit the expression of intelligence – think of perfectly adapted jocks who never had to learn to think versus awkward nerds who, because of physical imperfection, have to follow the riskier strategy of original thought. So, people who want to eliminate or reduce the reproductive opportunities of groups that may be considered inferior (according to crappy, wobbly, arbitrary, prejudiced and culturally loaded standards) may actually be trying to eliminate one of the triggers for intelligence – being at odds with one's circumstances. More great art has been made by people who are ill-at-ease with their world than by people who are perfectly at home in it.

Furthermore, this is a particularly dumb time for arguments about racial differences in intelligence, as more and more of our effective intelligence comes from our interaction with technology. Tech is turning us all into geniuses, though it doesn't seem like it when you see so many people behaving stupidly with their devices. Since World War Two, the average IQ of all of humanity has gone up by 15 points – the Flynn Effect. One of the main suspects in this upslope is the pervasiveness of complicated modern culture. Culture and tech will keep getting more complicated, and humans in conjunction with our devices will keep getting smarter. Tech that's built into our bodies isn't too far in the future. More than one percent of the population already has built-in computers – pacemakers, cochlear implants, etc. So who cares about some hard-to-measure few-IQ-point alleged difference among groups when we're all going to end up being increasingly augmented geniuses?

People who insist on racial inferiority are creeps. We can discuss cultural differences – for instance, there seem to be cultural differences in causes of passenger jet pilot error – but the idea that some races need to be babysat by other races is gross. We're all going to need to figure out how to work with each (augmented) other as tech reshapes the world.

11. How many societies do you have membership inside of now? What use do you get from these societies?

Don't know how many societies I belong to. People ask me to click on things on Facebook, and sometimes clicking means that I've joined something. Could be 8 societies, could be 15. I'm not very good at Facebook and don't live on it, as does your Aunt Angie, with her constant posting of cat and casserole pictures. Currently living on Twitter.

12. Intelligence Quotient (IQ) pervades American culture more than most, based on my reading of the culture, with a litany of reactions ranging from reverence to laughter to skepticism – and serious scholarship. Many neuropsychological tests developed by those with appropriate qualifications have developed some of the most well-used and researched tests such as the Raven's Progressive Matrices (RPM) and the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS). However, mainstream standardized intelligence tests tend to have maximum scores at 4-sigma above the norm (160/164/196; SD-15/16/24, respectively). In the development of this work, some independent researchers and test constructors began to make tests for those earning maximum, or near-maximum, scores on mainstream tests. In the process, tests and societies developed for the high-ability population. This environment set the stage for the flourishing of your obsession: IQ tests. For example, on a high-ability test called the *Titan Test* – one of the most difficult – you set a record score. In fact, you earned a perfect score. You have taken many more. What are some of the other tests? In particular, where does your range, mean, and median lie for the set of high-range IQ tests taken?

It's hard to pin down what my actual score might be. It's silly to even think that people have one set IQ and that it's precisely measurable. My lowest scores probably reflect less than my maximum effort, and my highest scores probably grant me some extra points due to crazily high levels of diligence plus vast experience with these tests. It doesn't really matter unless we want to turn IQ testing into a reality show sport. And we should – why do we have a bunch of competition shows about people cooking from Mystery Baskets and none with IQ showdowns?

13. In the testing of intelligence, much criticism exists towards the potential for bias inherent in the tests themselves. For example, the use of an examinee's non-native language in intelligence tests. If an individual speaks a different native language than the test provides, they may score low in the verbal section, which may decrease the composite score. To solve this problem, non-verbal/'culture fair' tests exist. However, many of these culture fair tests have lower ceilings. What do you see in the future for high-range non-verbal tests? How will this change general intelligence testing and the identification of gifted individuals?

Intelligence testing has always been kind of a mess, often arbitrary and unfair. I think the best, easiest thing to do is test kids repeatedly, using a variety of tests. There are plenty of

good, long-established tests. Trouble is, school districts are broke and don't have the resources for repeated testing.

We can hope that tech will make schools more responsive to individual needs. Schools can be a little behind the curve. A century ago, school was the most interesting part of a kid's day – it's where the information was. Now, with the rest of our lives being so information- and entertainment-rich, school can be relatively uninteresting, which isn't helped by politicians and people who don't like paying property tax starving schools of resources.

School needs somewhat of a makeover – increasing automation and personalization, which the ongoing tech wave should help make possible. Don't know if a push for better giftedness-finder diagnostics needs a special push. Would guess that this won't be overlooked as part of high-tech changes to education.

Currently a crazy thing is the pressure on a few tens of thousands of high-end students, with endless AP courses and brutal study loads, for a seven percent chance of getting into an Ivy. When I was in school, the average AP kid took 1.3 AP courses; now it's more than 7. I assume our weird college admissions system will get somewhat straightened out by technological advances in education, or will become weird in exciting new ways.

14. You have great interest in health. In fact, you had interest in health since a young age. Why the deep interest in the health from a young age?

At first, I wanted to build muscles to impress girls. (This sort of worked, but it took many years of de-nerdification.) People were fit in the 70s – clothes were tight and high-waisted. The Arnold Schwarzenegger documentary, *Pumping Iron*, which came out in 1976, introduced many people to serious muscle-building. Weight training incidentally introduced me to some healthy eating habits, plus I've always been a little fat-phobic and perhaps over-disciplined.

Only much later did I read Kurzweil's book, *Fantastic Voyage: Live Long Enough to Live Forever*, and go from a few vitamins a day to a zillion. I don't buy Kurzweil's entire argument – that the Singularity will happen around 2040, and anyone who can live until then can live forever – but I do think there will be many biotech breakthroughs in the coming decades which may offer extra years of life. I want to stick around – the future is where you can find a lot of cool stuff.

Interview with Rick Rosner by Scott Douglas Jacobsen
(Part Two)

ABSTRACT

Part two of six, comprehensive interview with Rick G. Rosner, ex-editor for Mega Society (1990-96), and writer. He discusses the following subject-matter: health advice, longevity, mortality, Pythagoreans, Transhumanists, future scenarios of downloadable consciousness, aims for immortality, rewriting genetic code, partial/full mergers with biology, technological and medical futurists, United Nations on lifespans, Dr. Aubrey de Grey divided subproblems for solving aging, figuring out the mind as the ultimate longevity solution, consciousness and evolution, discounting of some animal consciousness by people, and the possibility of the same consideration for human consciousness; personal vitamin and nutraceutical consumption, considerations of efforts for longevity, aspirin and statins, and *Life Extension* magazine; possible negative interactions of nutritional supplements, circumin, vitamin D, Metformin, Type 2 Diabetes, resveratrol, methylene blue, Fen-Phen, and flossing and inflammation; possible negative interactions with ingested nutritional supplements taken alone or together with another nutritional supplement, and the reasons for considering his current set of nutritional supplements safe; obscure and mainstream thinkers on the progression of technology, some thoughts to do with the Law of Accelerating Returns, Dr. Ray Kurzweil, extrapolations of current technological trends from the past and the trends' influence on us in the future, and relevant extrapolations beyond this century; entrance into the world of trivia, '*Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*, first and second times on the show, and *Noesis* issue 150's articles *Three Letters of Protest Regarding "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?"* and *Request for Assistance from Mega Society Members*; rectifying the situation; mastering multiple intellectual fields, 12 years of university credit in one year at Excelsior College, and reason for pursuing this method of education accreditation; moving beyond academics into acting and physique building (bodybuilding), films with J.D. Mata, and reason for entering into this kind of work; and nude modeling, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, and time spent at the gym.

Keywords: animal, aspirin, consciousness, curcumin, consciousness, Dr. Aubrey de Grey, Dr. Peter Diamandis, Dr. Ray Kurzweil, Dr. Terry Grossman, Excelsior College, evolution, Fen-Phen, future, Giga Society, God, gods, immortality, inflammation, J.D. Mata, Law of Acclerating Returns, Life Extension Foundation, longevity, Mega Society, Metformin, methylene blue, Michael Bay, mind, mortality, nutraceutical, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Pythagoreans, Resveratrol, Rick G. Rosner, Saul Kent, statins, supplements, Transhumanists, Type 2 Diabetes, United Nations, vitamin D.

15. Furthermore, many people in history followed health advice. Some provided it. Today this persists. Primarily for well-being with a secondary benefit of longevity. Although, most people in recorded history accepted mortality of the body as fact, but in most cases attended to ritual, scripture, incantation, sacrifice, prayer,

meditative practices, and propitiation to a god, the gods, or God to attain immortality as a spirit, a disembodied awareness, an existence in another realm, or through continuous re-incarnation as a mortal creature in this world. These tendencies of thought wax and wane. For instance, Pythagoreans searched for immortality. Even today, an emergent sub-group of a modern school of thought, *Transhumanism*, aims for immortality through hypothetical future scenarios of downloading their minds onto computers, re-writing of genetic code for extended life, and partial/full mergers of biology with machines for bodies and minds immune to the present higher levels of degradation based on the degrading effects of time on our bodies. Some people come to mind such as Dr. Ray Kurzweil, Dr. Terry Grossman, M.D., Dr. Aubrey de Grey, Dr. Peter Diamandis, M.D., Saul Kent of the Life Extension Foundation, and others. What do you think of the many ideas and arguments behind these various groups for longevity – even outright 'immortality'? What makes their arguments and our situation different, and better, enough to have such possibilities arise in practicality?

It sucks to be among the last generations of humans who don't have a choice about dying. Medicine will advance tremendously in the next century, and so will life spans. Even the U.N., which isn't a hotbed of science fiction-ish speculation, says that living to 100 will become common.

Transhumanists like to argue that to be effectively immortal, you don't have to live until immortality is possible. You only have to live until medical science can extend your life at a rate of one year per year.

Researchers such as Dr. Aubrey de Grey say that aging will be conquered by breaking it down into a set of sub-problems and solving each of them. While not part of de Grey's sub-problems, figuring out the mind and consciousness can be seen as the ultimate longevity solution. If you can make the contents and actions of the brain transferable, then keeping your body going may become just one of a variety of longevity strategies.

But figuring out consciousness may be a good news-bad news thing. Consciousness constantly acts as an advertisement for itself, telling you that your life and thoughts and experiences are interesting. Evolutionarily, it has to do that. If you quit paying attention to your life, you make more errors, which might kill you. We come from millions of generations of ancestors who paid attention.

For instance, deciding when to cross at a traffic light. (Traffic lights seem to pop up in discussions of consciousness.) For you not to be killed crossing at a light, your lifetime error rate of observing and stopping for red lights has to be reasonably close to zero. If you weren't sufficiently interested in not being killed, your error rate would rise dangerously. Of course we see this with digital devices being so interesting that people become insufficiently interested in clear, real-life risks (texting while walking or driving a car or even a train being the sadly typical example).

Once we figure out consciousness, it may turn out to not be so awesome. Consciousness may be seen to incorporate a bunch of sensationalistic tricks to keep your attention, like a Michael Bay movie, and there may be a letdown – we're the saps who bought tickets to the movie.

We have little problem discounting consciousness in other creatures – the billions of chickens Americans eat each year, for instance, cows, pigs, octopi. The chickens live their short lives, they're killed, no big deal. A minority of people say it's the ultimate deal – that every creature's experience is important. But what happens if our understanding of consciousness leads us to believe that human consciousness just isn't that big a deal – not much more important than other animals'? That could be a bummer. (But this bummer might partially be addressed via biotech brain helper add-ons that make our moment-to-moment awareness more super-duper.)

We're gonna live longer, we're gonna get weirder, gradually turning into the augmented but still very human beings that will come after humans.

16. Granted, death stands atop the mount of costly adventures. You take high-level double digit numbers of vitamins and nutraceuticals every day. Even so, these measures for slowing, potentially halting or reversing, aging seem excessive and even dangerous. For instance, do they all have FDA approval? Where do you base your efforts for longevity? What research and evidence?

Mostly, I take vitamins and nutraceuticals, which may not do much – one way or the other. And most of the other stuff is apparently very safe and widely tested – aspirin and a half-dose of statins, for instance.

I research supplements and nutritional strategies on the internet, trying to separate the BS from the crumbs of actual information. *Life Extension* magazine is pretty good, even though it's trying to sell fancy vitamins. At least the claims in the magazine are backed up by some studies.

The purpose of the pills, of course, is to put off dying as long as possible. Will exercise, a semi-careful diet and mostly mainstream supplements increase my mortality? I hope not, and most statistics are on my side.

17. For instance, which ones of these nutritional supplements have sufficient clinical testing in favour of their individual use? What about potential negative interactions of an individual supplement or drug? What of negative interactions between two or more of them?

I mostly take nutritional supplements. Their effects are probably not as helpful or as potentially harmful as pharmaceuticals, though they haven't usually been through the same clinical trials as prescription drugs. (Some vitamins, however, have had more than a century of testing, and clinical testing is not a 100% guarantee.)

I take a big but not crazy dose of vitamin D and a lot of curcumin, both of which are currently very well-regarded. They're being studied extensively, and the studies are returning encouraging results. As with anything, future research may debunk them, but I don't think they're hurting me. People in India have been using curcumin for centuries, and this seems to be correlated with lower rates for some inflammation-based disease.

Some of what I take may be considered a little wacky. For instance, I take Metformin, a drug for Type 2 diabetes, even though I don't have diabetes. Among other effects, Metformin helps your body use insulin more efficiently. Along with resveratrol, it's one of only two drugs I know of which trigger some of the positive effects of calorie restriction (without the misery of calorie restriction). And Metformin is a more effective calorie restriction mimetic than resveratrol, because orally administered resveratrol gets knocked out by your liver.

Metformin is the most widely prescribed anti-diabetes drug in the world, with 48 million annual prescriptions in the U.S. alone. It's been used in the UK since 1958 and the U.S. since 1995. Negative side effects are rare. There is some evidence that Metformin may reduce the incidence of cancer. I like the stuff.

I sometimes take methylene blue, which may act as a detergent to loosen amyloid plaque in the brain. (Amyloid is sticky gunk thrown up by damaged brain cells.) MB is currently in Phase III trial for Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. (It turns urine a bright emerald green!) If I were in the NFL and taking a bunch of shots to the head, I'd use methylene blue like Splenda.

Most of what I take doesn't negatively interact. A couple of minor vitamin depletions are covered by a good multi-vitamin. (For instance, Metformin may reduce absorption of B12.)

You don't often hear about people dying early from vitamins. Occasionally, there's a study which might say something like, "People who take vitamin E might have slightly elevated mortality." Then you look at the study, and it's hard to apply to your specific situation, but you cut back on vitamin E. In the 70s, people went on the liquid protein diet. But it depleted potassium and caused heart attacks. A couple of people died – it was big news. In the 90s, Fen-Phen, a combination of diet drugs, killed people. Again, big news. If vitamins were knocking people off like crazy, we'd hear about it. So I take my chances.

Hey – here are two very safe things you should do to add years to your life – take half an aspirin or a baby aspirin each day, and floss your teeth. Unflossed teeth spread inflammation throughout your body.

18. In some sectors of the population, some obscure, and other more – as of recent – mainstream thinkers have extrapolations based on many highly complex technological innovations in society regarding the progression of technology. Some will use general hunches, e.g., things seem more complicated and, therefore, will

become more complex. Others will use mathematical modelling through extensions of such things as Moore's Law, e.g., the Law of Accelerating Returns *a la* Ray Kurzweil. How do you see these technological trends and changes influencing us in the far and recent past? What extrapolations do you consider most likely for this century and past it?

Many of the developments predicted by science fiction eventually happen, though often not as soon as science fiction predicts (the iPad, the atomic bomb, the internet and computer viruses, to name a few).

I think that will be the case with many aspects of the Singularity. (The Singularity is when, according to believers in the Singularity, artificial intelligence will be able to answer any question and solve any problem, and all our wishes will come true, sometime around the year 2040.) Humanity or some version of humans plus technology will get smarter and smarter, but it won't all happen at once or as soon as 2040.

But things will get weird. Good manners and considerate behavior will have an increasingly difficult time keeping up with changes in tech. It would be nice if people would stop being annoying or dangerous with their devices, but I can't see how manners will ever catch up with the accelerating development of technology. Tech will keep making people smarter but appearing to be stupider.

I don't think the future will be humans fighting robots. I think we'll become our own half-robots. We'll keep augmenting ourselves, adding devices around and to ourselves until our artificial systems do more information-processing than our natural systems. (We'll build expert devices of increasing sophistication, but for the near future, the most expert systems will be human brains plus tech. We already are expert systems – right now it's most effective to add onto us.)

Some people argue that the brain has hidden, possibly quantum, information-processing capacity and that we won't be able to emulate the brain. Obviously, the more complicated our brains turn out to be, the harder it will be to emulate them and interface with them. But we'll still keep going in that direction. We're already pretty good at piping information into our heads nonstop via our current devices.

One big though gradual change is we'll be able to change our drives, motivations, judgments and values. Much of what drives us is pretty thoroughly wired into our brains via evolution – sexual attraction, tastes in food, aesthetic preferences, to name some big ones.

Sex makes just about everyone crazy at one time or another, demonstrating that, to some extent, we're pawns of the need to reproduce. It's just weird that one of the primary engines of human progress is a compulsion for males to insert fleshy tubes into females' fleshy pockets. The entire history of the 21st century hinges on a few instances of oral sex, like this – Al Gore gets mad at Clinton for sullying the Presidency with Oval Office BJs. Gore underutilizes the still very popular Clinton in his Presidential campaign and

narrowly loses some important states. And there you have it – President George W. Bush and the 21st century.

The fascination with and rituals around eating get pretty weird, too. And look at magazine covers – all the time faces – just pretty faces.

As we better understand our brains, we'll be able to change our drives and desires. Suppose your spouse has put on 160 pounds. Is it better to be resentful of your spouse or to rejigger your sexual tastes to fit your super-sized spouse?

I think by the end of the century, consciousness will begin to be transferable and average life spans will increase by at least 40 years. We can hope this will lead to a reduction in the rate of population growth. People who can look forward to very long lives should on average have fewer kids and have them later, if at all.

There will be glitches, of course. Nanotech will have to be watched. The benefits of increasing technology will have to be made available worldwide in such a way that it's more attractive to join the modern world than to try to take down the modern world.

I doubt that we can count on non-selfish behaviour to turn around the degradation of our planet. A conscientious Prius-driving, recycling American still generates a lot of waste. (On a related note, smug Prius drivers are almost as bad as Audi drivers. "Ooh, I'm making less pollution, so I can drive however I want.") And the world population will keep growing until living indefinitely (and, later, consciousness becoming digitizable and transferable) reduces the production of offspring.

Eventually, high-tech measures will have to be deployed to fix the worst messes we've made – wide-spread extinction, global warming and the acidification of the oceans, and the like. (This will be followed by more tech to correct the negative effects of previous high-tech fixes). Large swaths of the globe will be Disneyfied – artificially restored and made pretty and sweet – like what New York did with Times Square, but on a global scale.

19. At some point, you entered the world of trivia. In particular, professional competition of trivia via the game show '*Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*'. You did not have a good experience with them on your first, or second, time qualifying to compete on the show, which you recount, somewhat, in *Noesis* issue 150's articles *Three Letters of Protest Regarding "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?"* and *Request for Assistance from Mega Society Members.* What happened, Rick?

Every quiz show has occasional glitches in which factual errors survive the fact-checking process. (It should work like this: a writer writes a question and cites a source. The question goes to a fact-checker who finds additional legit sources to confirm what should be the facts behind the question. Fact-checkers, writers, and producers eliminate ambiguity and make sure the answer is "pinned." I did an interview about the process.

On most quiz shows, most glitches don't affect the outcome of the game.

On *Jeopardy!* for instance, a glitchy question might come up, and no one answers it. The game goes on. Or someone gives an unexpected acceptable response. Judges check the answer during a commercial and perhaps award more points.

On *Millionaire*, however, since a player had to answer every question (at the time I was on the show) or withdraw from the game, a factually flawed question often knocked the player who received it out of the Hot Seat. It was *Millionaire*'s policy to rectify factually flawed questions, but they were getting sick of it – they'd had to do it many times. During our briefing, a contestant asked the executive producer what to do if we thought we got a bad question. A contestant had, very shortly before, gotten a bad question. The EP said, "Don't worry about bad questions. Just play the game. If a question is wrong, we'll look into it and make it right."

In my case, they thought they could weasel out of it by claiming a non-straightforward and non-traditional interpretation of the question. The flawed multiple-choice question was:

"What capital city is located at the highest altitude above sea level?"

with the possible answer choices of Mexico City, Quito, Bogota, and Kathmandu. Because of faulty writing and fact-checking, *Millionaire* failed to include the actual correct answer of La Paz, Bolivia. (For people who'd like to quibble, Bolivia has two national capitals, and La Paz is one of them. It's about four kilometers – two-and-a-half miles – above sea level.)

Millionaire tried to avoid responsibility for their error by arguing that they meant "*Which of these* four cities we gave you is the highest?" This interpretation goes against common sense and standard practice. I looked at 110,000 questions from productions of *Millionaire* in the U.S. and throughout the world, and their standard practice, as well as any other reasonable quiz show's standard practice, is, if you mean "Which of these?" you write "Which of these?"

Since 1987, I've worked on a bunch of quiz shows, writing more than 10,000 questions. I co-created a quiz show which ran for a season on VH1, was co-head writer of the show, edited all its questions, and acted as a judge. Quiz show questions are my business. (Additionally, I've tutored the SAT and related multiple-choice tests since I was a teenager and have looked at more than 40,000 SAT-type questions. Multiple-choice questions are also my business.) I'm probably the person most likely and qualified to take a dim view of *Millionaire*'s ad hoc, disingenuous, self-serving, lazy and dishonest interpretation.

I concur with standard practice and common sense. No writer or producer would reasonably expect a contestant to know the relative altitudes of four arbitrarily chosen

capital cities. It would be more reasonable to imagine that a contestant might have heard of the world's highest capital city, but that city was absent from the answer choices.

The writer of the question (who'd never before written for a quiz show and who didn't last very long) built the question from a list of altitudes of 30 random world cities in the *World Almanac*, apparently failing to realize that the omission of 96% of the world's cities from the list might be a problem.

During legal proceedings, I saw *Millionaire*'s fact-checking notes on the question, which indicate that they wanted the highest capital, didn't realize they didn't have it, and fact-checked only the altitudes of the cities they did have. Someone noted that he or she thought that Ecuador might have two capitals (that would be Bolivia), but this wasn't further pursued. Not knowing about La Paz, they had no knowledge of any quibbles about La Paz being a *de facto* capital – their research wasn't anywhere near that thorough. (Currently, a Google search for the phrase "La Paz is the world's "highest capital city" returns 97,800 results, while "Quito is the world's highest capital city" returns just 7 results, a ratio of 13,970 to one. Of course, back in 2000 when *Millionaire* was fact-checking the question, Google wasn't the go-to research tool.)

(And another thing – world cities have no official point from which altitude is measured. Quito's city limits extend down into river gorges and up the side of a volcano. Altitudes found within its city limits vary by a couple miles. Miles! From *Today in Ecuador*: "The Metropolitan District of Quito (DMQ) covers an area of 422,802 hectares (almost 1,050,000 acres), with altitudinal ranges from 500 to 4.800 meters above sea level."

(Quito has a single altitude like Olympic athletes have a single height. The facts behind the altitude question are messy and ambiguous at best. Had *Millionaire* done a better job researching the question, they would've been forced to throw it out before it ever got to a contestant.)

If *Millionaire*'s writers and researchers, with all their resources and unlimited time to check their work, can't come up with the correct answer, then they shouldn't expect some schmuck alone in the Hot Seat to be able to come up with the answer. That schmuck should be invited back (and many contestants were invited back, until I came along).

Eventually, I sued them, but no one has ever won a lawsuit against a quiz show. After I sued, *Millionaire* changed the official rules so that they're no longer obligated to come up with the correct answer. Contestants must choose the best answer from those offered, even if the correct answer isn't among them. Nice!

Discussing soccer, the executive producer of *Millionaire* said that people need to accept bad calls from judges and referees, in soccer and on game shows. This is a lousy parallel to draw. A call in a World Cup match would need to be reviewed immediately (with just a few angles captured on video). Changing a call after a game could affect the rest of the tournament, not just the teams but also billions of fans, so it's impossible to undo a call hours or days later. But a bad call on *Millionaire* affects just one person in the Hot Seat

and his family. And researching a faulty question isn't like reviewing a soccer call – you're not looking at video in the middle of a soccer game – you can take time to do adequate research. It doesn't change anything for anyone else to rectify a bad quiz show call for one person. You don't even have to televise it.

20. What would rectify the situation to you?

This happened more than 14 years ago. The past 14 years haven't been the greatest for the world. Next to it all, the *Millionaire* thing is nothing. I can continue to be annoyed by it, but I would be a big baby to still be crusading for rectification.

21. You have mastered multiple intellectual fields, especially with respect to having earned 12 years of university credit in one year at Excelsior College. In fact, you did this through a little-known system of taking tests, which continues your long-experience with the obsession of IQ tests into the domain of tests of general and specific knowledge. How did you discover this method of earning credit? Why did you pursue this means of earning tertiary educational credit rather than traditional classroom-based forms of education?

In high school, I wanted to go to Harvard. (I almost certainly would've gotten in. My SATs were in the top 1% of Harvard applicants, grades were excellent (until my senior year meltdown), was student body co-president, came from a geographically underrepresented part of the country, and back then, Harvard admitted about 18% of applicants, compared to about 6% today.) Then I freaked out, scuttled my application, and ended up attending my hometown school, the University of Colorado, which I didn't take very seriously. Did well in classes I liked, blew off classes I didn't, so lots of As and Fs. Didn't graduate.

Years later, I'm underemployed in LA. My wife is working at a fancy company in Santa Monica. She comes home and talks about the flashy clothes and jewelry worn by the other women who work there. Can't afford to buy her jewelry from a store but I do some research and find out that jewelry is marked-up like crazy – sometimes 500 or 1,000 percent. Start making jewelry for my wife – the individual components are affordable. But I need access to equipment. Turns out CSUN, a local university, offers a jewelry-making class. I go back to college to make jewelry.

At CSUN, I think, "I'm in my 30s and more mature and would probably be a better student this time around." So I decide to sign up for real classes – astronomy, advanced stats, econ, group theory – and get my degree. Turns out I still hate sitting in a classroom, plus CSUN has a bunch of general education requirements I don't want to deal with.

About this time, someone in the Mega Society tells me about schools that let you test out of subjects, which leads me to Regents College of the University of the State of New York (now called Excelsior University), an accredited school that awards credit in a subject if you get a high enough score on the GRE test for that subject. (The GRE is the

SAT for grad school.) The GRE comes from ETS, the same company that does the SAT, and I've always done well on their tests.

So I go on a rampage. There's an ETS testing center in Pasadena that offers GRE subject tests once a month. For a year, I take a test a month, studying for each test while working as a doorman at a bar called Mom's Saloon in Brentwood. (The loud music doesn't bother me – I used to study for *Jeopardy!* while bouncing.) I get good scores, earning a year's worth of college credit in each of 12 subjects and fulfilling the requirements to graduate with eight majors.

22. Not limited to the academic domain, you have entered, somewhat haphazardly, into other domains of inquiry and human endeavor such as acting and physique building. In particular, you have some short films featuring you, directed by J.D. Mata. What compelled entering into yet another domain of work?

I've always been a pretty decent actor but just didn't have the fortitude to go through all the rejection that usually accompanies trying to be a professional actor. (One key to acting is not going overboard with emotional intensity. Most moments aren't moments of extreme emotion.) Plus, I'm not overly photogenic. I act on the infrequent occasions when someone offers me the chance. (I've always hoped to sneak into acting by becoming famous enough to be cast in cameos as a curiosity or inside joke.)

23. Furthermore, based on your work in nude modeling, and so on, you have years of experience with bodybuilding and sculpting. However, this seems to have come attached to a downside of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). How many times do you go to the gym every week and month? How much circa 10 years ago?

Currently go to five gyms a day. They're in a circuit, with a mile or two between each gym. Luckily for me, L.A. has a lot of gyms, and I have cheap membership deals. Takes about two hours to do the circuit, which includes 80 to 100 sets. At my most OCDish, I was averaging nearly eight workouts a day, with a long streak of working out at least 50 times a week. At earlier, less-obsessed times, I averaged about ten workouts a week.

**********************Bibliography at the end of part six***********************

Capetown and a Rogue Journey to the Heart of (Administrative) Darkness

(to misquote Conrad)

Andrew Beckwith

I flew directly from Beijing to Johannesburg on a South African airways jet , leaving November 15, arriving November 16, as part of a 24-hour flight from Chongqing to Capetown in 24 hours. The SA airways service was maxed out in terms of attention to passengers, with broken earphones, burnt out in-house movie portals and the like making a debonair impression with air stewardesses being most attentive to basic needs of the traveler. The air stewardesses attended to numerous in house passenger complaints as to broken equipment intelligently, gave fantastic food service and were as busy as sled dogs for 14 hours. Ouch! I do not envy their job, 14 hours of passenger complaints induced mayhem. My next seat companion was a SA businessman who told me of his struggles with the Chinese market . His non-stop travelogue was a breakdown as to how Chinese auto engineers did car production in Beijing for SA bound vehicles; "They have the engineering details down pat but blow off our customer satisfaction finishing details on a whim, Dr. Beckwith. They're fantastic engineers, but are tone deaf to our SA domestic quirks. I guess we are not that important to them ?" Ho hum, that whine was the beginning of a quixotic journey into SA virtual reality which I will highlight for your enjoyment and reading edification.

Step number one in this quixotic journey was how a moderately fit American was in a wheelchair for a flight when in fact I was within a day of landing in SA quite mobile. That is what protection from a day of travel buys you. I was 24 hours in transit from Chongqing to Capetown, and a follow up whopper of 27 hours to NYC from Capetown , through Dubai. Being attuned to the nuances of SA complaint culture, via my friendly automotive engineer lead me to give a harried SA attendant in Johannesburg a 30 Rand (SA money denomination) Christmas present for hauling me about for 1 and a half hours through immigration in Johannesburg . While there, I began the non-stop query of local conditions which lead to an insight as to how SA adjusts to a level of official paperwork I can only describe as daunting and sublimely ridiculous.

My introduction started off with a roar in Capetown when a simple 150-Rand purchase of a taxi fee to the University of Capetown's Africa House was turned down by 3 credit cards, all highly rated, while the lowly Chase Freedom card emerged unscathed. I never did figure this one out, but SA only allowed the Chase freedom card while everything else was declined, 9 times, nine interactions, and with electronic regularity which was stunning. The taxi-stand personnel shrugged, and I sweated as they went though four cards , and they laughed as a low end card made the cut: " I guess that your bank will have a lot to discuss with you when you get back, buddo", ☺. Smiley faced, and that was reinforced when 2 hours later I was given a magnificent flat 2 times bigger than what I live in in America, with one crowning adornment: a huge TV which was not

connected to any local TV programming. I went to the Africa House receptionists and asked why, and they told me that the TV was NOT hooked up. Other than that, the furnishings were magnificent, with a great phone, microwave, a shower and small set of kitchen burners. Once again, local reality intruded when I found that the phone was for local calls only to the University of Capetown and that I could only get people outside to phone in internationally.

After getting a Korean fellow traveler to the DSU event to let me use his laptop to notify non-South-African contacts that I was not a Cosmic road kill, I then commenced to go to fix the non-laptop-based access to the local Internet. The next nit in quotidian reality was that I got approved for the Africa House internet in 2 hours, but that the server refused to accept my login. I went back to Africa House administration, and was politely ignored, then went back to the computer room, and proceeded to type in a login, without using their official system. One member of the Africa House saw me do it, gave me a thumbs up, while the official log in booboo was 'resolved' only the day of my exit to Dubai. Clearly the local help expected I would do the solution I stumbled upon, and that I was being a big baby if I bothered them about a problem I was expected to solve myself.

That should have given me a heads up as to what to expect, but the quotidian battle with administrative reality hit the big time when I got into a tussle with an 800 meter hill, with Dr. Peter Dunsby and another SA researcher serving as leading actors in a farce, which also told me as to how to not to have too high a level of expectations. This epic battle commenced on Tuesday morning when I waded through 7 pages of forms in an SA bank to process 50 USD into 410 Rand, then it got underway officially, when A. Beckwith decided he had to save some money, and avoid the 250-Rand fee for a bussed excursion. I just had to be frugal, one hand clapping. So, on Wednesday I proceeded to go up an 800 meter hill with Chinese sneakers, which promptly sheared apart on top of that huge rock pile, adjacent to table-top mountain, which gave me a drop dead gorgeous view of Capetown harbor, but from really WAY up. The front end of the shoes sheared apart, with the soles broken beyond repair and the front of the shoes flapping wide open.

It lead to 2 hellacious hours being walked like a doll down to a bus pick up. Dr. Peter Dunsby and another SA had to lead me gingerly down the hill, while I sweated and swore as I went at a plodding rate from the summit, with 398 meters of almost rock climbing grade to go down. Then dirt roads with potholes.

When I reached the base of the hill my shoes were about as functional as flip flops, while my feet ached. Nary a blister, though. I just felt as though I had walked through bare rock almost completely barefoot which was exactly what I had done.

Upon my descent, Dr. Dunsby announced sotto voce that I would, due to procedures, have to rehydrate in the Africa house. He and I began a dialogue, based upon British interpretations of what an order means -- i.e. the beginning of a discussion, not a final command, but it lead to me being ensconced in the Africa House with my documents bag in his car. Instead of 12 hours of recovery, my feet stopped hurting after 2 hours, and yet I had no way of reaching Peter Dunsby to get a pick up for the Wednesday

Banquet. It was all well-intentioned procedure, British-based to a T, but it had nothing to do with me, and all to do with South African customs. Much to Peter's surprise, I was back again in the conference, with really no issues, Thursday morning, after a two-kilometer walk through the campus, on those same ruined sneakers. He was jaw-dropped stunned as I did an almost barefoot based walk back to his conference, and he saw what I had descended the mountain in, i.e., totally ruined shoes.

"No Blisters, Beckwith ?" Affirmative. Dunsby stared, then shut up and I went with aplomb back to the conference.

What does this all say about SA complaint and administrative culture?

South Africa does not have the Chinese-based "Banfa" culture of how to negotiate ridiculous regulations. You are expected to do it yourself, with no formal ordered custom, but it lead to an administrative foot print, and I will only know upon return as to what to expect if and when I return back to Capetown. I am certain though that at least the Africa House will not forget me, as I nagged them on detail after detail. As a dedicated fixer of absurd situations, I gave them endless material to remember me by. Not intentionally, but yes it happened.

Did this travelogue have an academic counterpart? Yes. On Tuesday, after learning that 200 people , instead of 100, had showed up, my 30-minute talk was halved to 15 minutes, and I then was given an abstract, out of two which I had given on Black Hole physics. I then uploaded to SA based theorist Bob Osanka's cosmology session my Hindawi advances in high energy/Black Hole physics article, instead of a much longer 17-page article, but I also included in a 3-page addition.

I asked on Monday whether if I wrote up notes I would get Xeroxes of the notes. This request was politely ignored, and I retired Monday to figure out my options. The only way to do it was to make 18 finely written up hand written notes, of 6 documents, with one to go to Dr. Osanka, and the rest to the audience.

"Hey, Beckwith, didja ever hear of Xerox ?"

Not an option. I had to spend nearly four hours doing it. Writing 18 pages of equations in four hours.

"Beckwith., I would not have done it. OK I will scan your notes." But Bob let me know that he admired my pluck. I would not get help from Xerox. My crazy stunt, though, lead to Bob saying he would scan a document he never expected to get from me.

In it, the work of Dr. Hao Wen of Chongqing University on cyclindrical gravitational waves got its viewing in DSU, with applications, with me as a co author. But the bullheaded insistence on the hardest way possible to get it to the official record was given to the masses in Capetown. BY ME.

Is this about the same as what I did on the mountain ? Osanka though it was. “Beckwith you will never change. I will remember you,” quipped Osanka on Thursday after I told him of the booboo on the hill.

What other example did I see of SA creativity as to administrative conundrums? On Thursday, 4 world class physicists went to, with 26 extras (me included), to a night show-and-tell about the value of DM physics to an adjacent university.

One of the world class physics people was Dr. Durrer. I had asked her about a technical detail regarding massive gravitons, and she could not answer what I was asking her about her work in progress. Dunsby asked me to cease and desist, but that Durrer would find a way to answer me in an acceptable manner.

Sure enough, right in the public show-and-tell, session, Durrer dropped on the public a priceless answer to what I had asked.

She nodded politely to me, as I sat in the front row of the public meeting, and I snapped up the detail, with Dunsby on Friday commenting:

“She did it, for YOU, Beckwith. How you use it is your own business, but she’s now in Geneva, and we nary know the difference. Right ?”

Ahem.

As I said, bucking administrative details is an art form in SA. And I had time to reflect upon it, while returning on Emirate airlines, back to Dubai and then some. Emirates has about 4 times the expenditures per passenger than SA airlines.

Guess which airlines gave me the personalized attention. Hint, it was not Emirates.

On top of that I and others got a different view of how to duck the heart of Administrative darkness, the SA way, and also an invitation for a January Cosmology Safari in Natal , SA, in January 2015.

While my bank account will not allow it, I salute the sheer INVENTIVENESS of South Africa and its people, and this minor travelogue will let you know why.

ANDREW BECKWITH, PHD

Doubting Doubt

Adam Kisby
akisby@uchicago.edu

The word science is derived from the Latin word *scientia*, which literally means knowledge, but which also connotes a special kind of certainty. It is this special kind of certainty, arguably the hallmark of mainstream science, that the Principle of Burden of Proof attempts to secure. This principle may be identified with the rule adopted by René Descartes, which states, "I ought to reject as absolutely false all opinions in regard to which I could suppose the least ground for doubt, in order to ascertain whether after that there remained aught in my belief that was wholly indubitable." More commonly, this rule is reduced to "the burden of proof is on the claimant," which has about the same meaning in practice. What skeptics mean by "the burden of proof is on the claimant" is that it is the responsibility of the claimant to provide "wholly indubitable" proof to the skeptic. Marcello Truzzi's interpretation of burden of proof goes this far, but some skeptics push their interpretation a few steps further. According to skeptic Michael Shermer, "[the claimaint] has the burden of proving to the experts and *to the community at large* [emphasis added] that his or her belief has *more validity* [emphasis added] than the one almost everyone else accepts." He adds that "when you are an outsider this is the price you pay, regardless of whether you are right or wrong." Shermer believes that this kind of "skepticism is embodied in the scientific method," and that it should be.

Skepticism finds an unlikely supporter in Thomas Kuhn. Kuhn observes that "the development of any science" leads to "an immense restriction of the scientist's vision and to a considerable resistance to paradigm change." This situation is problematic, because it amounts to a grossly decreased awareness of the available data. At the same time, "within those areas to which the paradigm directs the attention of the group, normal science leads to a detail of information and to a precision of the observation-theory match that could be achieved in no other way." Further, "anomaly appears only against the background of paradigm," and "resistance guarantees that scientists will not be lightly distracted and that the anomalies that lead to paradigm change will penetrate existing knowledge to the core." In Kuhn's view, scientific revolutions would not be possible without pervasive skepticism in the scientific community. Other philosophers suggest that the costs of pervasive skepticism outweigh its benefits. The Principle of Burden of Proof does provide a degree of protection against the acceptance of truly dubious claims, but there are reasons to doubt the advisability of including this sort of skepticism in any version of the scientific method.

The first reason to doubt skepticism is that it is frequently misapplied. Henry Bauer charges that "nay-sayers all too often apply the burden of proof only to the anomalist side," i.e. "they are skeptical only in the one direction," and that "their own explanations frequently leave much to be desired." A corollary of this one-sidedness is that skeptics tend not to appreciate that "absence of evidence does not constitute evidence of absence," which is to say that they treat any claim that has no evidence for it as though there were evidence against it (Truzzi, "Perspective"). Bauer also notes that these

skeptics often choose to maintain several mutually incompatible conventional explanations for an anomalous phenomenon when a single logically consistent unconventional explanation would suffice to explain it. Such "kettle logic" (in the sense of Sigmund Freud), while necessary and desirable in a transparadigmatic context, is considered inappropriate within prevailing paradigms, suggesting that some motive other than the pursuit of the truth underlies this sort of skepticism.

The second reason to doubt skepticism is that it is inherently biased. Charles Fort argues that "nobody has ever really investigated anything, but has always sought positively to prove or to disprove something that was conceived of, or suspected, in advance." Describing scientific progress, Fort remarks that "no scientist has ever upheld a new idea, without bringing upon himself abuse from other scientists. Science has done its utmost to prevent whatever Science has done." Indeed, it seems that science "smiles into its beard" at every new idea. Bauer quotes Nobelist Paul Lauterbur on this subject: "You could write the entire history of science in the last 50 years in terms of papers rejected by [the mainstream scientific journals] *Science* and *Nature*." This resistance to new ideas reaches a seemingly pathological level in Karl Popper, who says that even if he were "utterly convinced of the truth of a statement," "certain of the evidence of [his] perceptions," and "every doubt [regarding the statement were to seem] absurd," it would not constitute "the slightest reason for science to accept [his] statement."

Unfortunately, this seeming pathology is not uncommon, especially during a paradigm shift. Decades after the scientific community at large accepted the reality of the extraterrestrial origin of meteorites, "some scientists, notably Prof. Lawrence Smith and Sir Robert Ball, continued to hold out against all external origins, asserting that nothing could fall to this earth, unless it had been cast up or whirled up from some other part of this earth's surface" (Fort). Kuhn describes "the transfer of allegiance from paradigm to paradigm" as "a conversion experience that cannot be forced." More dramatically, physicist Max Planck asserts that scientific theories do not triumph by "convincing [their] opponents," but "because [their] opponents eventually die."

The third reason to doubt skepticism is that while it protects scientific knowledge against type I errors, it exposes scientific knowledge to type II errors. A type I error is "thinking something special is happening when it really is not," whereas a type II error is "thinking nothing special is happening when something special, perhaps rare, actually occurs" (Truzzi, "Perspective"). William James presents the dilemma in these terms: "We may regard the chase for truth as paramount, and the avoidance of error as secondary; or we may, on the other hand, treat the avoidance of error as more imperative, and let truth take its chances." According to Roger Wescott, anomalous data tend to polarize respondents into believers and skeptics, and each extreme leads to its respective errors. Truzzi emphasizes the importance of guarding against both types of errors, and Wescott proposes "a requisitely delicate balance between sceptical imagination and imaginative scepticism." Sometimes, seeing is believing; sometimes, believing is seeing. Skeptic Carl Sagan also speaks of "an exquisite balance between two conflicting needs: the most skeptical scrutiny of all hypotheses that are served up to us and at the same time a great openness to new ideas." He most famously expresses this balance in this maxim: "Keep an open mind, but not so open that your brains fall out."

Shermer agrees that "the key to skepticism is to navigate the treacherous straits between 'know nothing' skepticism and 'anything goes' credulity." Of course, skeptics and anomalists have extremely different ideas about how best to establish this balance.

The fourth reason to doubt skepticism is that it forces a choice where a choice need not be made. Shermer cautions, "If you are skeptical about everything, you must be skeptical of your own skepticism." Shermer objects to this kind of skepticism, characterizing it as a self-defeating position, but it is precisely this kind of skepticism that Truzzi recommends. Truzzi refers to this position as "zetetic," which "was first applied to the followers of the Greek skeptical philosopher Pyrrho of Ellis [who] urged suspension of judgement about facts," and who urged "that we should 'be without beliefs'" ("Ruminations"). The ultimate zetetic is Charles Fort, who asserts "I believe nothing," including "nothing of my own that I have ever written." "We substitute acceptance for belief," Fort says. Highlighting the central component of his method, he says, "Except that we substitute acceptance for belief, our methods will be the conventional methods. Since the [zetetic] does not assert a claim, he has no burden to prove anything," but "if a skeptic asserts there is evidence for disproof," then "he is making a claim and therefore also has to bear a burden of proof" (Truzzi, "Pseudo-Skepticism"). It is always possible to choose not to choose, so as to avoid any burden of proof. As Sagan acknowledges, "We are not obliged to make up our minds before the evidence is in. It's okay not to be sure."

The fifth reason to doubt skepticism is that "judgment is always needed" (Bauer, "Razor"). In other words, neither doubting, nor believing, nor suspending judgment is *always* the proper course of action. It makes good sense to doubt when the risks associated with believing are high, to believe when the risks associated with doubting are high, and to suspend judgment when the risks associated with doubting and believing are high. Depending on the circumstances, each of these approaches may be entirely appropriate. The use of sound judgment to gauge all circumstances is likely to reduce of all kinds of error.

The sixth reason to doubt skepticism is that beliefs may be arbitrary, that what is believed to be true often varies widely from context to context. The unconventional beliefs of one culture or period are the conventional beliefs of another culture or period. There is "nothing, in religion, science, or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while" (Fort). It is Fort's acceptance that "what we call evidence, and whatever we think we mean by intuition and faith are the phenomena of eras." As such, the skeptics of today could be the anomalists of tomorrow and vice versa.

These reasons to doubt skepticism are sufficient to establish that the Principle of Burden of Proof is inconsistent with reason, and that it hinders scientific progress. Therefore, the Principle of Burden of Proof, as a general principle, is inessential to the process of scientific discovery and should not be considered an obligatory element of any version of the scientific method.

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Adam Kisby is a member of the Society for Scientific Exploration, an organization of scientists and scholars dedicated to the study of unusual and unexplained phenomena, and an active participant in the online high-IQ community.

He is the author of *A Revolutionary Kind of Science*; see:

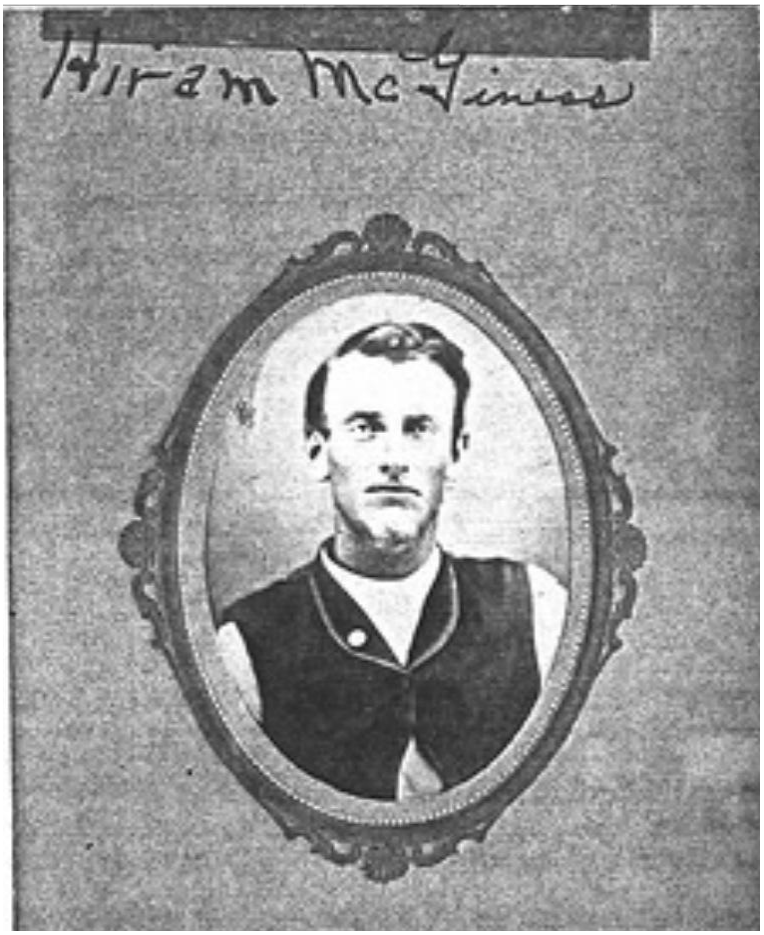
http://www.blurb.com/b/4168343-a-revolutionary-kind-of-science

Hi

(revised version)

Richard May

ferdlilac@yahoo.com



I never knew I had a grandfather on my mother's side, although I suspected that I might have had one. Grandfather was born ninety-five years before I was. His great grandfather fought in the Revolutionary War. At fifty years old he, Hiram McGinnis, married a seventeen-year-old girl, who was his daughter, adopted from a Brooklyn, N.Y., orphan home, shades of Woody Allen and Soon-Yi. So my grandfather is in effect my great grandfather.

Most people with the surname McGinnis, also spelled Maginnis, Magennis, Maguiness, McGuinness and Guinness, who immigrated to the U.S. during the 18th. century were Scots-Irish,

also called Ulster-Scots, i.e., Protestants from Northern Ireland, who earlier had originated in the Lowlands of Scotland. (See note below.) When I found Hiram McGinnis in a 19th. century Federal census, or actually several, it indicated that he was a farmer. All the McGinnises were farmers it seems (except for the "old Mrs. M'Ginnis," a notorious fortuneteller, warned by the Congregationalist church in the 1790s), who moved down from Shoreham, VT to Crown Point, NY a little after 1800. Farming, probably organic farming actually, though they didn't know it, was a noble occupation before giant agribusiness, but it seemed uninteresting.

Birth records of his children also confirmed that he was a farmer. And one said he was a carpenter. An old newspaper article I managed to obtain from a relative referred to Hiram as "a well-known character around Port Henry." What did that mean, I wondered. A drunken Irishman?

Eventually I obtained a copy of his last will and testament and probate letters. In a deposition taken because of a dispute regarding the probating of his estate, his sister-in-law called Hiram, "Hi." He was apparently considered to be a schemer by some of those who knew him.

To my surprise I discovered that many nineteenth century and early twentieth century Northern New York newspapers had been digitalized, including: the *Ticonderoga Sentinel*, the *Essex County Republican* and the *Elizabethtown Post*. None of these, however, specifically referenced Crown Point. But OCD is a terrible thing to waste, so I began to search these archived newspapers sedulously, not expecting to find anything about my dull McGinnis family of farmers.

Complicating the searches was the fact that McGinnis was a common name in that area and was spelled many different ways. There are very many ways to search with quotation marks for Hiram Porter McGinnis, if you include all possible spellings of McGinnis in the forms: H. P. McGinnis, H. McGinnis, Hiram McGinnis and Hiram Porter McGinnis. All these variations occurred in print. Factoids were randomly uncovered by the searches, however, and dopamine hits occurred.

Glimpses emerged of times past. Hi was listed in a tax record as a "mechanic." Another article revealed he was a Republican and was elected one of the local constables. In another Hi was said to be building a piazza for some local lady. Fortuitously, because these were weekly or monthly newspapers in a very rural area, many quite mundane events and doings by the local citizens were considered newsworthy.

I learned long before that Hiram had lived in Cold Spring Park. I thought it was only the name of an area of Crown Point. But from the newspaper articles I learned that Cold Spring Park was an actual park with a splendid view of Lake Champlain and various surrounding mountains, one of the most prized vistas in the region, according to the newspaper accounts. And to my astonishment I learned that this was not a public park but private property, and a major tourist attraction in the summer, owned with a mortgage by grandfather.

Newspaper reports mentioned the names and points of origin of many of the tourists. Some were from out of state and a few even from foreign countries. At one point Hi had constructed a fifty-foot observation tower for the benefit of tourists and the locals. In the winter large tents were erected for meetings of religious camps, as they were called. Prominent ministers spoke. Some events allegedly could accommodate up to a thousand people.

Several local Fourth of July celebrations were held at Cold Spring Park in the 1890s, during which Hi presented colorful lectures on his version of the local history and touted the alleged curative powers and health benefits of the waters of his cold spring. (Did the spring water lack lithium and Hi perhaps have a touch of hypomania, which facilitated his self-promotion?) There were both string bands and brass bands present for the festivities, according to his advertisements placed in local newspapers. Food and refreshments were available and, of course, there was the traditional fireworks display in the evening. Cold Spring Park was actually a business, founded on land described as not very arable, and Hi was the proprietor.

In an issue of the *Essex County Republican* newspaper with an 1894 date I discovered the following mention of Hi and his Cold Spring Park business:

—Mr. Hiram Porter McGinnis, proprietor of Cold Spring Park, requests us to publish the following : W.T. Foote Jr., in company with Sir Lieth Napier, M.D., M.C., M.B., M.R.C.P., London, F.R.S., Edinburg, visited Cold Spring Park last week. In speaking of the water the Dr. says: "I believe that the water in No. 1 Champion spring is of a most valuable and excellent quality of water, containing chemical ingredients of great power and likely to prove very beneficial to persons suffering from various complaints of the gastric, hepatic and venal viscera."

This seems an unexpectedly sophisticated promotional effort from a fellow who could barely sign his name on his application for a marriage license.

One article from the 1890s mockingly referred to Hiram as the "astrologer, Hiram P. McGinnis," because he publicly asserted that there was a relationship between the unusually cold winter and spring that year and the occurrence of a higher than normal number of sunspots on the surface of the sun at the time. An interesting theory to be proposed by a man of the 1890s who could read but not write, according to the 1900 census.

Another article referred to Hiram as "a giant towering above men in the physical sense." Yet another, discovered later, said that Hi, a man born in 1849, stood six foot seven inches tall and was nearly the tallest man in Essex County, N.Y.! So Hi was high, I guess.

A cousin suggested that maybe Hiram had Marfan syndrome. But in the past people with Marfan syndrome died in their forties. They did not live till their sixties. Moreover, although there is a fifty percent rate of autosomal inheritance of Marfan's by one's children, none of his five children were known to present symptoms of the syndrome; In fact his four daughters' ages at death averaged ninety-six years, the youngest living to one hundred two!

From various allusions found in these nineteenth century regional newspapers I learned from multiple sources that Hiram was considered "odd," a unique character, eccentric, affable and entertaining, a raconteur and local historian of the area. Perhaps Hi was a high-I.Q. type, having little formal education.

Two independent newspaper sources related that the local Port Henry congressman, Wallace T. Foote, Jr., a lawyer, brought the then-visiting Speaker of the House of Representatives, Thomas B. Reed, to Cold Spring Park to meet Hiram Porter McGinnis, because Hi was considered to be a Crown Point 'historian' of high entertainment value, not to mention a

character. Hi was said in one account to be thoroughly unimpressed with Speaker Reed and was said to have “stuffed him,” which apparently meant to “put him on” with a less-than-accurate embellished version of the history of the area.

With the assistance of a museum I was even able to obtain a JPEG of a photograph – probably from the 1880s — of the to-me-unheard-of McGinnis Family Band. Hiram, smoking a cigar, and his bearded older brother, James, smoking a pipe, are playing fiddles, as is their brother-in-law, Henry Betts. Rustic children sit in the foreground, staring at the unseen photographer. The scene looks more than a bit like Duck Dynasty.

Note: Most Catholic Irish with the surname McGinnis originated in County Down, one of the six counties in Northern Ireland.

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< http://news.nnyln.net/titles.html >

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Also of possible genealogical interest:

"The ALBAGESI Y-DNA Family," in *Noesis* #192 and at Richard May's Wordpress site:

http://ferdlilac.wordpress.com/2011/03/25/the-albagesi-y-dna-family-0/

Obscure Words and Facts Analogies

Jeff Ward

1. wet : dry :: hydric : ?
2. mountain surrounded by water : island :: mountain surrounded by ice : ?
3. October 31 : Halloween :: April 30 : ?
4. male : straw man :: female : ?
5. man and horse : centaur :: lion and eagle : ?
6. serial killer of husbands : black widow :: serial killer of wives : ?
7. dog : canine :: peacock : ?
8. China : Sino- :: Portugal : ?
9. evening : nocturne :: morning : ?
10. 1 : Sicily :: 2 : Hispaniola :: 3 : ?

Bonus

11. dog : canine :: dodo : ?

Submit your answers to Jeff Ward <ward-jeff@san.rr.com>. A report on the results will appear in the next issue of *Noesis*.

Super Intelligent?

May-Tzu

http://nautil.us/issue/18/genius/super_intelligent-humans-are-coming

"IQ of 1000" is not a defined concept by criterion validity or statistically.

What is the percentile? Top one per how many solar systems?

Speculating about 1000 IQ is analogous to talking about infinities or division by zero.

In any case such a being would not be 'human', but another species entirely.

Enhancing intelligence is inevitable.

But enhanced bullshitting is avoidable.