



# Rational Inquiry

Dare  
to  
think

VOLUME 10, ISSUE 1

NEWSLETTER

WINTER, 2005

The San Diego Association for Rational Inquiry is dedicated to the encouragement of rational thought in all areas of human affairs. Composed of citizens from every walk of life, and with a variety of technical, scientific, legal, and humanistic backgrounds, the association strives to encourage rational discourse in the life of San Diego. For more information, see page seven.



## JREF Meets in Las Vegas

The James Randi Educational Foundation (JREF) *Amazing Meeting 3* was held in Las Vegas January 13-16, 2005. Like SDARI, JREF is an organization formed for the purpose of conveying to the public the value of rational, critical thinking. Under Randi's active leadership, JREF has gained considerable publicity internationally as well as nationally, and has had through its various outreach programs and million-dollar-challenge an impact on the public.

A number of very interesting talks were given, including an excellent one by Michael Shermer from the Skeptics Society in Pasadena. However, he was outshone by Richard Dawkins, Professor at Oxford, and the foremost evolutionary biologist in the world today, with many excellent books on evolution to his credit. Many of the attendees had come to the meeting specifically to hear his talk; they were not disappointed. He introduced the word "perinormal" to describe a very useful concept. Whereas "paranormal" is something beyond normal experiences and scientific explanations,

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## Eugenie Scott Speaks on Evolution vs. Creationism(s)

By Barbara B. Hemmingsen

Many if not most ancient cultures developed views of how our world was created. Usually, some powerful god or gods in the human image, or some powerful being in an animal image, were imaged as creators. Our Western culture is no exception. Perhaps more than is the case for other cultures, Christianity has focused on a creation process by a personal god using Biblical descriptions as explanations. These ideas have evolved into what many of us think of as creationism as it exists today: only a few thousand years ago, God all at once created humans, animals and all of nature just as they are today. Rejected totally is the fact that all living things have evolved over billions of years from unicellular forms to the very complex life we have today. The now overwhelming scientific evidence for evolution as a natural process, and its near unanimous acceptance by scientists in all disciplines, appears to have had no impact on the creationists. If it were not for the potential damaging influence that creationism could have on the education of youngsters, its ideas could be dismissed as nonsense, but the

reality is too serious for such dismissal.

The problem of creationism gaining a foothold in the schools was one of the themes for Dr. Eugenie Scott in her lecture sponsored by SDARI on January 10, 2005—when she spoke to an audience of 220. Dr. Scott is the Executive Director of the National Center for Science Education, an organization that has, for many years, been in the forefront of the effort to prevent the teaching of creationism in public school science classes. Other organizations, such as the ACLU, also have contributed much to these efforts.

Dr. Scott first outlined what the term "evolution" stands for and emphasized that biological evolution concerns species changing through time in relation to their environment through adaptation. She gave a number of examples of the data from various scientific disciplines that all support the fact of evolution. She then went on to describe the creationism — or rather, creationisms — continuum. She started with the most extreme creationistic beliefs based on the Hebrew

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October Meeting Report

## This Conspiracy of Fluoride

By Keith Taylor

As befits a guy now in his eighth decade I visit the doctors McClusky and Yamamoto regularly. One spends a lot of time keeping my aging body in good running condition. The other is fighting an uphill battle to keep my few remaining teeth in my mouth. I pay attention to them because they skip the bum dope and follow scientific principles.

Bum dope is a special target of the San Diego Association for Rational Inquiry (SDARI). I hooked up with them from the get-go because I needed something to help me tell the difference between it and the straight skinny. Most anything sounds plausible if it's told with a straight face.

Skeptical folks comprise SDARI. Not cynical but skeptical, they just insist on the scientific method of determining what's what. In October SDARI heard from a couple of dental hygienists and one of San Diego's top scientists. Eleanor Nadler and Gail Gilman told of the problems San Diegans were having in overcoming what they felt were bogus lawsuits that were thwarting the addition of fluoride to the San Diego's water supplies. Dr. Elie Shneur, head of the Biosystems Research Institute in La Jolla, told of the science that supported the claims that fluoridation was a safe and effective way of preventing tooth decay and enhancing general health, especially for children.

But, things don't come easy nowadays, especially when they deal with health and when they are supported by public money. In fact several naysayers to fluoridation showed up at the meeting to present their case.

They argued that the American Dental Association (ADA) has a strangle-

hold on the industry. They even told us many dentists oppose its use but that those dentists are afraid to break ranks with the powers that control their profession.

And it isn't just the ADA that they say is trying to strangle the industry. Ironically the fertilizer industry is in league in opposing fluoridation. According to a web site touted by one, "Fluoridation is not about 'children's teeth'. Rather, it is about industry ridding itself of crude hazardous waste products, silicofluorides, for a profit. Silicofluorides are 85 times more toxic than naturally-occurring calcium fluoride."

And so it goes. And so it has gone since 1945, when Grand Rapids, Michigan, was the first city to add fluoride to the water, and opposition arose. The opposition continues to this day and although it waned for a while the Internet resurrected it. The charges range from the plausible to the ridiculous.

One of the opponents to fluoride recommended a site called **fluoridedebate.com**. There I read "Because it is almost as toxic as arsenic, fluoride's ability to play havoc in the human body should surprise no one."

Dr. Shenour, a SDARI founder, distributed a flyer which described the terrifying effects of taking too much of a poison called dihydrogen monoxide. Scary stuff that dihy. – uh, that stuff. Then he explained it was water! In it's simplest terms poison is something that will kill you if taken in large enough quantities. Water can do that. So can fluoride but not when only a single drop of the stuff is in a large bathtub filled with water: That's one part per million.

Back and forth went the arguments

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February's Meeting

## The Special Investigations Agency

Does a day ever pass without our being offered one get-rich idea or another? By the time we think we've seen them all, along comes another, even more plausible and more nefarious. SDARI complains to the media who too often pass along such schemes, but are we alone?

Remember the "healing cards" that were being offered to the victims of last year's fire? We complained in the papers and our complaints caught the attention of a group who does indeed do something about it.

Our guest for February heads the local branch of the Special Investigations Agency, Inc. (<http://www.us-sia.org/>). The local outfit is comprised mostly of ex cops who use their training and dedication to educate, promote, and assure integrity and ethics by providing an investigative and intervention resource to the general public. They then monitor the progress of the case to insure the proper course of action is taken. Although they try to avoid going to court, sometimes it happens. About ten folks have visited the local lockup as a result of the actions of S.I.A.

Kevin LaChapelle served as a Police Officer specializing in Street Gang Prevention/Intervention strategies and Community Oriented Policing. He also served as Governing Board President for the Grossmont School District with its 22,000 students. □

The Skeptics Society Annual Conference 2005 "Brain, Mind, & Consciousness", May 13-15, 2005, Pasadena, CA. Registration fee includes lectures by world-class scientists and three meals. Go to [www.skeptic.com](http://www.skeptic.com) for more information.

## Rational Musings by the President

Anti-evolutionists say, “Teach both sides. Let the students decide for themselves.” During my college years some very important issues in science had just two sides, and both sides were taught. In particular, cosmology and geology were on the verge of major new paradigms.

The fact that the universe is expanding had been discovered a few decades before, but the question remained whether the expansion was steady-state or whether it implied the universe had a beginning event. Astronomer Fred Hoyle hypothesized that as old galaxies move apart, new ones are born in the spaces among them, leaving the overall appearance of the universe forever unchanged. He disparagingly referred to the alternative model as the “Big Bang” theory. But evidence against Hoyle was growing. Young galaxies were not found to be as common as required, and astronomers calculated that the age of the oldest stars corresponded well with the projected time of the putative Big Bang, about 13 billion years ago. A few years later the discovery of cosmic background radiation, the echo of the Big Bang, essentially ended the steady-state theory.

Geology was undergoing a conflict of similar proportion. In 1911 a German scientist named Alfred Wegener had proposed what at that time seemed to be a preposterous theory: that the continents of the world had moved. His initial interest was piqued by the obvious fit of the coasts of South America and Africa, and by published data showing that ancient fossils were identical on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. His contemporaries attributed this to former land bridges between the two continents. But Wegener collected further evidence. Geological features like

mountain ranges and mineral deposits seemed to disappear into the ocean and reappear on the other side. He discovered similar clues associating other land masses throughout the world. He concluded that the continents were once joined as one, but had broken up and drifted, plowing their way through solid ocean-bottom crust. He attributed the drift to centrifugal and tidal forces, a mechanism that did not satisfy critics.

By the early 1960s additional data was beginning to appear supporting Wegener’s ideas. Magnetometers were revealing that the direction to the Earth’s magnetic poles had wandered over time. More interestingly, the wandering history was different on each continent. This strongly implied the continents were moving and rotating with respect to one another. Again, the definitive evidence came a few years later, this time from the ocean bottom. Underwater magnetometers showed that a massive underwater mountain range known as the Mid Atlantic Ridge was a source of new crust, continually widening the ocean bottom. The continents aren’t drifting through solid crust, they are riding along with it as the sea-floor spreads. This now thoroughly accepted mechanism is known as Plate Tectonics.

There was a Big Bang. Continents do move. Evidence proved Hoyle wrong and evidence proved Wegener right. Competing theories were both taught while the evidence accumulated and was being evaluated.

So can’t Creation Science or Intelligent Design be taught beside evolution in biology classes? If so, which version should be taught? Young Earth Creationists believe the universe is less than 10,000 years old, which contradicts not just biology, but most of science. Old Earth Creationists believe the six days of creation may have taken 13 billion years, but insist different

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model of the world (**the Flat Earthers**), which was modified by **the Geocentrists** who accept that the Earth is spherical. Both groups believe the sun, moon and stars circle the stationary earth at the center of the solar system. In addition, they and **the Young Earth Creationists** believe, despite the findings of modern physics, chemistry and biology, that the Earth is about 10,000 years old. The Young Earth Creationists, the most influential of whom is Henry Morris the founder of the Institute for Creation Research in Santee, CA, rarely interpret flat-earth and geocentric passages of the Bible literally but they do maintain that all forms of life were specially created and not subject to descent with modification. Often associated with Young Earth Creationism is **Scientific Creationism**, the effort to support special creation theology with scientific data. However, this movement believes that the Bible trumps science as the Bible is the source of revealed truth and does not change, as does sometimes science when new data emerge. Morris has written that if evolution happened, then God cannot exist, salvation is non-existent and humans have no reason to behave well. In other words, all the evils of society are due to the ideas of evolution. If a child is taught evolution, and accepts it, then the child must give up belief in God. That this is not so, is shown by the remaining kinds of creationisms.

From the 1700s, theologians have tried to harmonize creationism with scientific data showing that the Earth is ancient. These **Old Earth Creationists** posit God’s special creative involvement, but over long periods of time; however, they do not accept common descent of species. **Gap Creation-**

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## Shame the Media

By Richard Uhrich

An efficient tactic in fighting pseudoscientific nonsense is to attack its major source of publicity, that is, by educating the press. In particular, when a local television news-talk show uncritically interviews a homeopath or psychic healer, I've found a quick e-

mail to the host of the show can sometimes provide surprisingly good results. (There are frustrating counterexamples, too.)

The example here involved an interview with a menopause specialist and "medical intuitive" whose practice includes holistic and "integrative" medicine. I sent the following note:

Dear X,

Read this from Dr. Carrolle's website ( <http://www.drcarolle.com/> ):

"Eighty years ago, Albert Einstein shared his brilliant formula  $E=MC^2$ ... Which means that everything (including your body) is composed of energy. Our medical "experts" have forgotten this fact... and YOU are paying the price. If your body is composed of pure energy shouldn't you be discovering what's blocking your internal energy flow?"

First of all, this is the 100th anniversary of Special Relativity; not the 80th. More importantly, what do you think it has to do with "internal energy flow?" What do you think "internal energy flow" is? What evidence is there that it even exists? Why do New Age scammers find it necessary to throw around pseudoscientific terms even while disparaging mainstream science and medicine? Most importantly, why do you shill for them? Your responsibility as a journalist is to do more than provide free advertising for such extraordinary claims.

Richard Uhrich  
President  
San Diego Association for Rational Inquiry

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"kinds" of life were created separately. Intelligent Design enthusiasts say life may or may not have evolved from a common ancestor, but the process was guided by one or more "unknown" intelligent beings (maybe God?). These mutually incompatible ideas have one blatantly obvious thing in common: they begin with the conclusion that life had Creator(s) or Designer(s). They are faith-based religious beliefs, not evidence-based scientific theories as the examples above were.

In the Big Bang and Continental Drift controversies, evidence continued to accumulate until scientists, not students, could reach a consensus. The purpose of presenting both sides was not to let junior high or high school students decide which was true; it was to show college students that the evidence did not yet support a conclusion.

Richard Uhrich



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## JREF from page 1

perinormal refers to things we can't readily explain and don't understand yet ("but we are working on it"). He outlined a number of cases where the two are clearly distinguishable, and other cases that are less so. Religion, for example, may be either: it is paranormal when dealing with a personal intervening god, or it may be perinormal when dealing with unknown forces that brought about the Universe, without a personified god (an Einsteinian type religion). All in all, a fascinating lecture.

On the last day, Seth Asser, a pediatrician and former member of SDARI,

Here is the reply I received:

"I agree. I am working on your point. [signed X]"

X is a popular local TV personality whom I've written about similar inter-

views, and she has always responded sympathetically. She still interviews kooks, though. Perhaps it would help her conversion if other members of SDARI sent mail when they see outrageous "news" features.



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**ism** claims a large time gap between Genesis chapter I: 1 and chapter I: 2 with the pre-Adamic creation destroyed before chapter I:2 when God recreated the world in six days and Adam and Eve. **Day-age Creationism** relates each of the six days of creation as very long periods of time, thereby accommodating the evidence for a very old Earth. **Progressive Creationists** accept physical science data, but argue that God created “kinds” of life at intervals and thus the fossil record is explained. Progressive Creationists do not accept that earlier life is genetically related to later life. Rather, they argue that God created kinds of creatures serially through time (Origin of Life; Cambrian Explosion; humans) and that “evolution within a kind” then occurred. **Continuous Creationism** allows the evolution of species but posits the active guidance of God. **Intelligent Design Creationism** (IDC) straddles Young Earth and Old Earth Creationisms. IDC avoids making statements about what did happen, it only states that evolution is wrong because there are complexities in nature that can only be explained by the intervention of a supernatural intelligence. **Evolutionary Creationism** and **Theistic Evolution** state that evolution happened, there is the branching tree of life through time, but that God is in charge. EC is the position of more conservative Christians and TE is the position of the Catholic Church and mainstream Protestant sects.

Theistic Evolution is followed on the continuum by a nonreligious view called **Materialist Evolutionism**. The word “materialism” is used in science to emphasize that science is a materialistic enterprise, focusing on matter and energy and their interactions in the natural world. Science cannot study supernatural forces and is therefore neutral to religion. Scientists use materialist

November Meeting Report

## Einstein for the Hoi Polloi

By Keith Taylor

As program chair I get nervous before every meeting. We are a scientific group. An open meeting by folks who rely on science often disturbs folks who don’t want their own ideas disturbed. If you don’t believe it give a lecture on the *USS Liberty*.

On the other hand, we could have a meeting so technical and esoteric, even for a scientific group, that few would want to attend. I wondered how many others, besides me, are baffled at the 100 year old idea that there is a special relationship between space and time?

Thus I was very surprised and pleased on November 28th to see an audience larger than usual, including several newbies, show up to hear a lecture about the miracle year of Albert Einstein, one of the greatest thinkers in the history of the world.

Dr. Giancarlo Borgonovi of the Science Applications International Corporation is dedicating a display in March to Dr. Einstein in Balboa Park. We asked him to tell us a bit more about this great genius.

methodology because it works well in understanding the natural world. If scientists accepted the intelligent design position that some aspects of the world are too complicated to have been natural, then they will stop looking for natural causes and will never find them. In contrast, the word “materialism” is used in Philosophy to describe a philosophical position that matter and energy are all there is, the supernatural does not exist. Materialist evolutionists are using the word “materialism” in the philosophical sense. But their lack of belief in a supernatural being is

That he did, and more. His lecture told of the three papers in his miracle year of 1905: the quantum idea of the photoelectric effect, the interpretation of Brownian motion to demonstrate the reality of atoms and molecules, and the theory of Special Relativity.

Relativity, of course, modified our concepts of space, time, mass, and energy. It transformed our understanding of the universe.

In addition to his achievements we got a thumbnail sketch of Einstein as a very human guy.

We had several new faces. One joined SDARI on the spot. Please help us in spreading the word and invite someone to our next meeting.

For those who want additional information on Einstein’s ideas the speaker, recommends two books for the lay person.

*Ideas & Opinions*, by Einstein, is available on Amazon.com for less than \$10.

Also *The Fabric of the Cosmos* by Brian Greene, Amazon.com for less than \$20.



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NOT a scientific finding, but a philosophical viewpoint.

Given the multiple versions of creationism, and the impossibility of finding scientific evidence to support the more extreme versions, Dr. Scott reasonably pointed out that it is impossible to teach any or all of them as alternatives to evolution in a Biology classroom. However, it is possible to teach them as part of a course in Comparative Religion, and indeed she supported such a course several times.

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**FLUORIDE** from page 2

and back and forth they've gone since the earliest days of fluoridations. Some seem plausible, especially to a guy like me. Some are even over the line for all but the most gullible, not, usually, including me. The claim has been made that fluoride in municipal water caused AIDS. Too bad that wasn't true. We could have stopped a horrible disease by simply shutting off a valve.

So where does an uninformed lay person go? I sort of like the approval of the American Dental Association, and I simply don't buy into that stranglehold idea. It smacks of the usual argument of vast conspiracy. I just don't believe in most of them.

If such a conspiracy exists it would have to include some 94 national organizations ranging from The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, to the American Cancer Society, to the AFL/CIO, to the very prestigious National Academy of Sciences. All claim to recognize the public health benefits of community water fluoridation for preventing dental decay.

If that isn't enough, both doctors McClusky and Yamamoto gave me 100% assurance the process is safe. Furthermore both insist it's effective in preventing cavities and sound teeth promote good health. Ya gotta trust folks when you turn your health over to them, and even let them put their hands on you and their fingers inside you, at both ends.



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Efforts to introduce any form of creationism into science classes in public schools have been soundly rebuffed by the courts. However, the creationists are continuously coming up with new

twists in the hope that one will slip "through the cracks." It is as if the scientists are saying, "2+2=4", the creationists are saying "2+2=6" and the school boards compromise by saying "2+2=5". However, the public schools MUST teach the consensus version of life's origins and of arithmetic! But evolution must be taught with sensitivity. The child should not be expected to believe evolution, only to learn and understand, and make up its own mind. Many teachers use the Creationism-Evolution continuum in their classes to show students the range of religious positions on evolution.

To complete the evening, the audience provided several good questions and comments, which both Dr. Shneour, the moderator, and Dr. Scott handled with grace.

Resources suggested by Dr. Scott: [www.NCSEweb.org](http://www.NCSEweb.org) Click on "News room" and "Resources"

Pennock, Robert (1999) *Tower of Babel: The Evidence Against the New Creationism*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. (An examination of the new directions that anti-evolutionists have taken and a proposal for the use of linguistic evolution as an effective counterattack.)

Pennock, Robert, ed. (2001) *Intelligent Design Creationism and its Critics*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. (A collection of previously published and hard to find articles by both Intelligent Design advocates and critics which provides a series of "discussions" covering topics such as ID's existence as a political movement, its theological grounding, and its claims to be science.)

Scott, E.C. (1997) Antievolution and creationism in the United States. *Annual Reviews of Anthropology* v. 26, pp. 263-289.

Scott, E.C. (2004) *Evolution vs. Cre-*

**James Enright**  
(1932 – 2004)

One of the founding members of SDARI, Dr. James Enright, Professor of Behavioral Physiology at Scripps Institution of Oceanography, passed away on September 23, 2004. He was 71. Jim was a true scientist who did research and teaching in many areas, but specialized in visual physiology. As a colleague, I knew him not only as a very critical reader of scientific publications, but also of his own research. He had a sharp eye for flawed statistics. He was a genuine skeptic, and gave two lectures concerning science and critical thinking to SDARI, and wrote several articles for *Rational Inquiry*. Jim attended our meetings regularly with his wife Roswitha until he was overcome by illness. He will be much missed.

Edvard Hemmingsen

*ationism*. Greenwood. Publishing Group, P.O. Box 6926, Portsmouth, NH 03802-6926 ISBN: 0-313-32122-1. (Contains quotations from both literatures.)



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spoke about legalized child abuse and death inflicted by faith healers and religious practitioners. He volunteered to speak to us locally about this subject at a later time.

About 550 people participated in the meeting. SDARI was represented by Lorraine and Harry Sutton, and Barbara and Edvard Hemmingsen.



# Membership Application

I would like to join the San Diego Association for Rational Inquiry. Enclosed is my annual membership fee of \$20 (\$12 for students, seniors, and disabled people, \$6 if younger than 18.)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

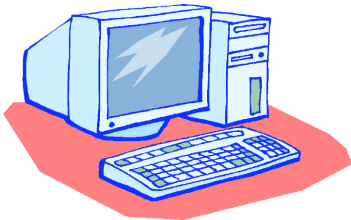
City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip+4: \_\_\_\_\_

Special interests: \_\_\_\_\_

Expertise: \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to: San Diego Association for Rational Inquiry      Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
P.O. Box 623  
La Jolla, CA 92038-0623      Email: \_\_\_\_\_

For more information contact Keith Taylor at 619-421-5844, or check our website at [www.sdari.org](http://www.sdari.org)



Visit the webpage of SDARI to get the latest information on lectures and other events sponsored by the Association. You also will find other interesting facts and links to other organizations with goals similar to, or related, to ours.

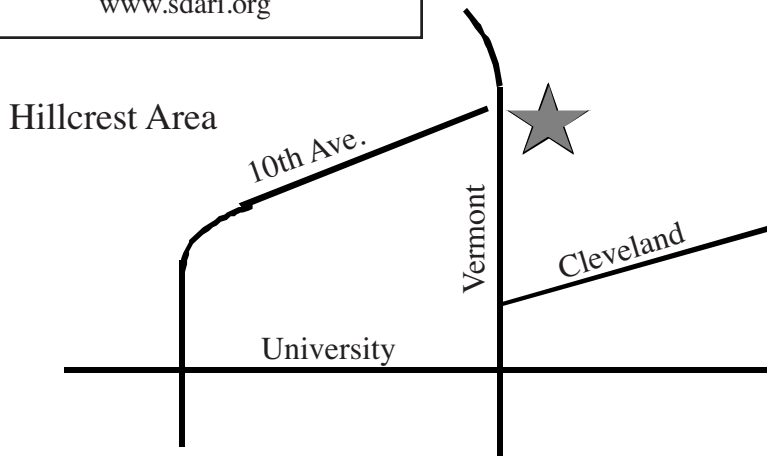
The Webmaster is Harry Sutton.

[www.sdari.org](http://www.sdari.org)

## Lecture Schedule and Meeting Location

Public lectures are held at 7 p.m. on the fourth Sunday of the month (except December.) The location of the meetings is the Joyce Beers Community center, at the intersection of Vermont and 10th Ave. in the Hillcrest area, near Ralphs and Trader Joe's markets (in Uptown District shopping Center.)

The lectures are free, but a donation of \$5 is suggested.



## We need your support!

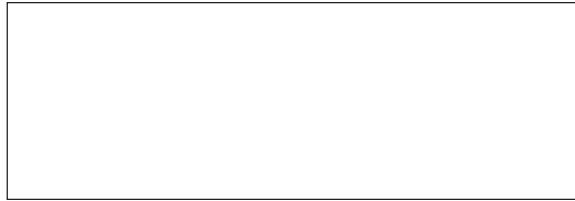
Please renew your membership. It costs to print and mail this newsletter and promotional fliers, award Science Fair prizes, and occasionally, to defray a small expense for the speaker. SDARI has been granted federal tax-exempt status. Donations are deductible under section 170 of the Internal Revenue Code.

## Submission of Manuscripts

Articles, essays, book reviews, letters to the editor, cartoons, and other written material may be submitted to *Rational Inquiry*. Pertinent announcements and clippings are welcome also. The submissions are subject to editing and abridgement. The approval of the author(s) will be sought for changes that materially affect the content. Published material becomes the property of SDARI unless copyrighted by the author. Submitted articles that contain copyright material must have the permission from the copyright owners before publication. Such permission must be submitted to the editor in writing. Anonymous material will not be considered.

Please send material for publication to the editor at [dad2wrk@cox.net](mailto:dad2wrk@cox.net).

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We are on the Web!  
[www.sdari.org](http://www.sdari.org)

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## San Diego Association for Rational Inquiry

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## *Up-coming events:*

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In the **Joyce Beers Community Center**  
(see p. 7 for directions):

**Sunday February 27, 2005, 7 p.m.**  
Kevin Chepelle, head of local unit of Special Investigations Agency will speak on the investigative and protection work they do. Additional details on page 2.

**Sunday March 27, 2005, 7 p.m.**  
UCSD's Biology Professor Milton Saier will speak on "Our Precarious Earth and its Biosphere."

**Sunday April 24, 2005, 7 p.m.** Science Fair winners will present their projects.