

Summary and Selected Highlights of the 2014 AG

for the Evangelical Christianity SIG

by Larry D. Paarmann

September 24, 2014



Boston Skyline

The 2014 AG met in Boston, MA, July 2 through 6, 2014. The primary AG hotel was the Boston Sheraton, in the Back Bay area of Boston (downtown Boston). There were some 2,400 attendees at the AG. There were 165 speakers for the over 250 meetings of various types (not all presentations, some Mensa organizational, debates, games, etc.). At times there were as many as 11 things taking place at the same time. There were also organized tours of the Boston area, for those who could somehow work it in. Obviously, I attended only a few of the events that were available, and therefore what is summarized below is highly selective and no doubt somewhat biased.



Boston Sheraton Hotel



Hospitality Room



Ballroom



Boardroom



Pool



Guest Room

I have organized the material below into three categories: (1) those events of special interest to members of the Evangelical Christianity SIG, (2) additional events that I found interesting, and (3) an outing to Salem that may be of interest. Printed below is the verbatim abstract from the printed program for each event, the verbatim biographical sketch for the speaker if there was one, followed by my comments.

1. Events of Special Interest

Evangelical Christianity SIG Meet & Greet

Abstract This is a time for current members of the SIG to meet, and greet, and get acquainted, and for prospective members to see what we are about. There is no planned program. Everyone is welcome.

Biographical Sketch (M) Larry D. Paarmann is the coordinator of the Evangelical Christianity SIG. He is retired from a career in electrical engineering, having taught at three universities and having

worked in industry as well. He is the vice president of the Sunflower chapter of American Mensa. For more information about the Evangelical Christianity SIG, contact Larry at LDPaarmann@cox.net or visit evansig.org.



Comments We had 20 people present at the Meet & Greet. Only two were members of the SIG (myself and one other) and the others were interested visitors. Of those, a few were present at the 2013 SIG Meet & Greet also, but most were new visitors. We went around the room introducing ourselves, and most freely had things to say. The interaction was excellent, and informative. I found it very stimulating, and rewarding, and our hour and 15 minutes allotted was soon gone. A little over half of those present left me their names and email addresses, I have contacted each one via email (except for a couple where I guess I couldn't read their email address correctly, or for some reason I couldn't get through), and a few of those have joined our SIG.

Scientific Evidence for the Existence of God

Abstract Is there a God? Can science help us answer that question? This fascinating presentation will take a deep dive into several areas of science with philosophical and spiritual implications. Be ready to put your intellect into high gear for a clearly explained tour of science beginning with the origin of the universe and continuing up to present day. A science background is not needed but an inquisitive mind is. The speaker will be available for Q&A.

Biographical Sketch (M) Perry Lanaro holds a bachelor's in physics and an MBA, both from UCLA. He currently works in entertainment industry. He combines a natural understanding of science with the story-telling aspect of the entertainment industry to present sophisticated scientific concepts in an understandable and entertaining manner.



Comments Perry, a member of Mensa, is associated with Reasons to Believe, the Hugh Ross apologetics organization. The presentation covered a lot of ground. It started with "big bang" cosmology, discussed how water expands with temperature as does ice, and how important this is for life on earth, discussed that the ratio of electromagnetic force to gravity is very high, on the order of 10^{40} , discussed the initial conditions of the big bang, specifically the mass/density ratio, discussed the formation of galaxies, stars and planets, and then introduced the anthropic principle, that there are too many fine tuning cases in nature for them to be coincidental. As of 2008, 816 critical factors had been identified of a crucial nature for there to be life on earth. This then led into a discussion of the origin of life, and that some 1,600 genes appear to be the minimum for life to get started: the idea that this could happen spontaneously is a myth. Then a discussion of evolution followed, defined micro and macro evolution, evolutionary mechanisms, the fossil record, and the appearance of man.

God Is On Our Side: Religion and Civil Rights in the South

Abstract Former President of the ACLU of South Carolina, Neil has stood in the forefront of civil rights issues involving religion: teaching Intelligent Design, opening government meetings with “Jesus prayer,” manger scenes and Ten Commandments displays, police harassment of Druids and much more. We will explore how religion impacts civil rights; how politics impacts meaningful change; whether these issues are particularly prominent in the South; and what such prominence may suggest philosophically or sociologically. So, leave your rotten tomatoes at the door, and let’s discuss the (pick one: saintly/devil-spawn) ACLU and its fight (pick one: for/against) religious freedom.

Biographical Sketch (M) Neil Caesar is a devoted M2M husband, father of three, nationally known health lawyer, fighter for civil rights, devotee of jazz, magic and pop culture, and ponderer of all things wonderful and mysterious. He is also a Stage II A lung cancer survivor, a fact which is neither unimportant nor all-important. Neil became a Mensa Life Member in 2012, in part to thumb his nose at the gods. For more information, contact Neil at neilbcaesar@gmail.com.



Comments For whatever the reasons, I didn’t take any notes during the presentation, and therefore my comments will be brief. It was an interesting talk, and brings a new perspective, for me, to the issues that the ACLU champions. There is often another side to all such issues, and we shouldn’t jump to conclusions.

Debate Room: Separation of State and Church

Abstract Was America founded as a Christian nation? Are atheists too aggressive? Should “In God We Trust” remain on U.S. money? Should “Under God” remain in the Pledge? Should the U.S. military keep its “Spiritual Fitness Test”? Should taxpayers pay for rebuilding churches after hurricane Sandy? Is opening government meetings with prayer OK (SCOTUS says yes)? Should blasphemy be illegal (Europe may say yes)? Do all beliefs deserve equal respect? Debate Room is not a heated debate, but a fast-paced moderated discussion where everyone gets to be heard, and the most interesting speaker gets a prize!

Discussion I only heard the tail end of this debate, and what I heard was all on taxation, or lack thereof, of churches. What position should our society take on this issue?

Scientific and Moral Issues Surrounding Human Cloning

Abstract Human cloning was successfully achieved for the first time in May 2013, but it hardly made a ripple in the news partly due to the misleading packaging of the story by research scientists and journalists. This laboratory breakthrough was led by Shoukhrat Mitalipov, Ph.D. at Oregon Health &

Science University and the Oregon National Primate Research Center, following his previous successes in cloning monkey embryos in 2007. Father Tadeusz Pacholczyk, Ph.D. will discuss the important scientific and moral issues surrounding these research developments, explain the implications for biomedicine, and address how society should assess the ethics of future scientific developments. This session is sponsored by the M-Altarstone SIG.

Biographical Sketch Father Tadeusz Pacholczyk, Ph.D., “Father Tad” is a nationally known expert on bioethics and medical ethics and speaks at numerous events ranging from university presentations to television news programs to state legislatures. He is the director of education at The National Catholic Bioethics Center in Philadelphia, and has a doctorate in neuroscience from Yale University, where he focused on cloning genes for neurotransmitter transporters. He did post-doctoral research at Massachusetts General Hospital/Harvard Medical School. He can be contacted at NCBCenter.org.



Comments This was a very interesting presentation. He described different types of cloning. (1) Parenting or reproductive cloning is where a complete, functioning, new individual is the result. Examples include Molly the sheep, and a human baby, etc. (2) Therapeutic cloning is where growth is interrupted from stem cells. The embryo is destroyed. If life begins at conception, the embryo is aborted. (3) Somatic-Cell Nuclear Transfer (SCNT) is a laboratory procedure for accomplishing either reproductive or therapeutic cloning. SCNT is cloning. (4) Fetal Farming is cloning to develop a desired organ. According to Father Tad, cloning always results in abortion, except in the case of reproductive cloning.

2. Additional Events of Interest

Past Climate Insights into Our Warmer Future

Abstract This talk will place 21st century global warming into the context of climate change over the past 21,000 years. We will briefly discuss the evidence for anthropogenic global warming, scale it against the range of climate variability experience by human civilization over the past ten millennia, and explore the role of greenhouse gases in driving the end of the last Ice Age. This past perspective will be tied together with a long view into the future to understand the far-reaching implications of our planetary experiment and the wicked nature of the climate problem.

Biographical Sketch Jeremy Shakun is a paleoclimatologist who studies earth’s climate history using the pages written in glacier, ocean, and cave deposits. He completed his doctorate at Oregon State University in 2010, conducted postdoctoral research at Woods Hole, Harvard, and Columbia, and



has been an Assistant Professor in the Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences at Boston College since 2013.

Comments This talk had a lot of information in it by someone who is actively doing research in the field. He showed many graphs, etc., showing rising temperatures over time on the surface of the earth and in the ocean waters. He also showed graphs illustrating the rising amount of CO₂ gas in the atmosphere. Rising temperatures and rising CO₂ gas appear to be correlated. He also showed graphs illustrating cycles of ice ages in the polar ice sheets: this suggests that there have been many ice ages in the past. The speaker did a fine job with his presentation. However, he is a young PhD graduate, and I couldn't help but wonder how well he had personally processed all of the data he showed us, and how much of it was simply restating what he had been told.

One question that did come up: was increases in CO₂ gas causing the increase in temperatures, or was it vice versa? He agreed that this was a good question, and that the data was not clear. However, he did suggest that CO₂ increases appear to lead rising temperatures, which would suggest that CO₂ gas causes rising temperatures. When asked about those who find the data unconvincing, the speaker indicated that he was aware of such dissenters, but it didn't sound like he had given any real consideration to their concerns.

Not the God Particle: An Inside Look at Particle Physics at CERN

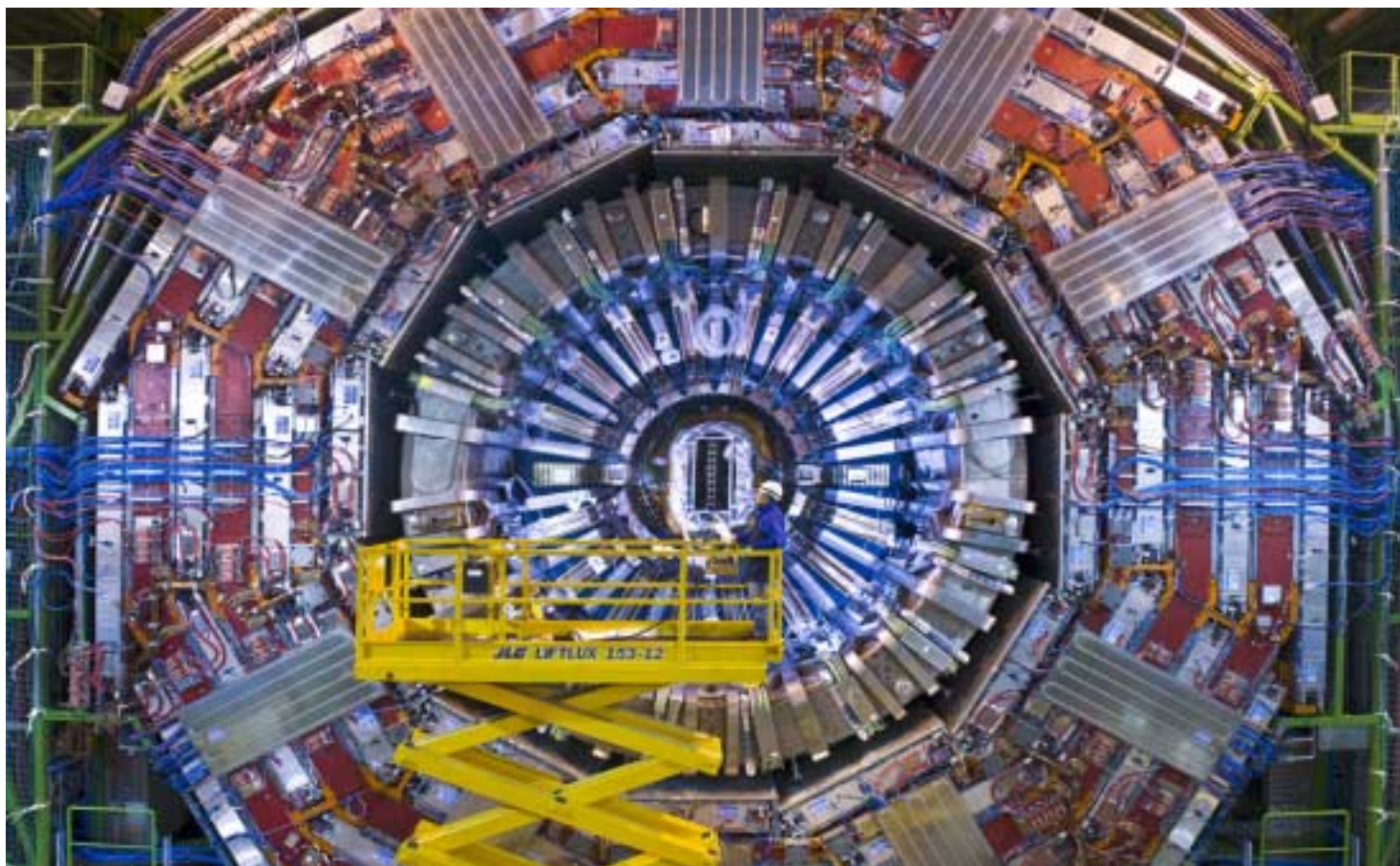
Abstract There has been a lot of media hype regarding the discovery of the Higgs Boson at the LHC in Switzerland, but this does not present a complete picture of particle physics. This talk will give some insight into what goes on in the field that one might not otherwise learn about.

Biographical Sketch (M) Jason Veatch is currently working on his doctorate in particle physics at the University of Arizona. He has spent time working on site at CERN but can usually be found running around the mountains of southern Arizona. Particle physics has been a passion of his since high school and he is very enthusiastic about sharing his work. For more information, contact Jason at jveatch@cern.ch.



Comments The speaker opened his talk by saying that it had nothing to do with God. The Higgs Boson has nothing to do with God: this was media hype. By the way, CERN is an acronym from the French, something like Organization European Research Nuclear. CERN is located near Geneva, Switzerland, and houses the world's largest particle accelerator. The Higgs Boson or Higgs particle is an elementary particle initially theorized in 1964,

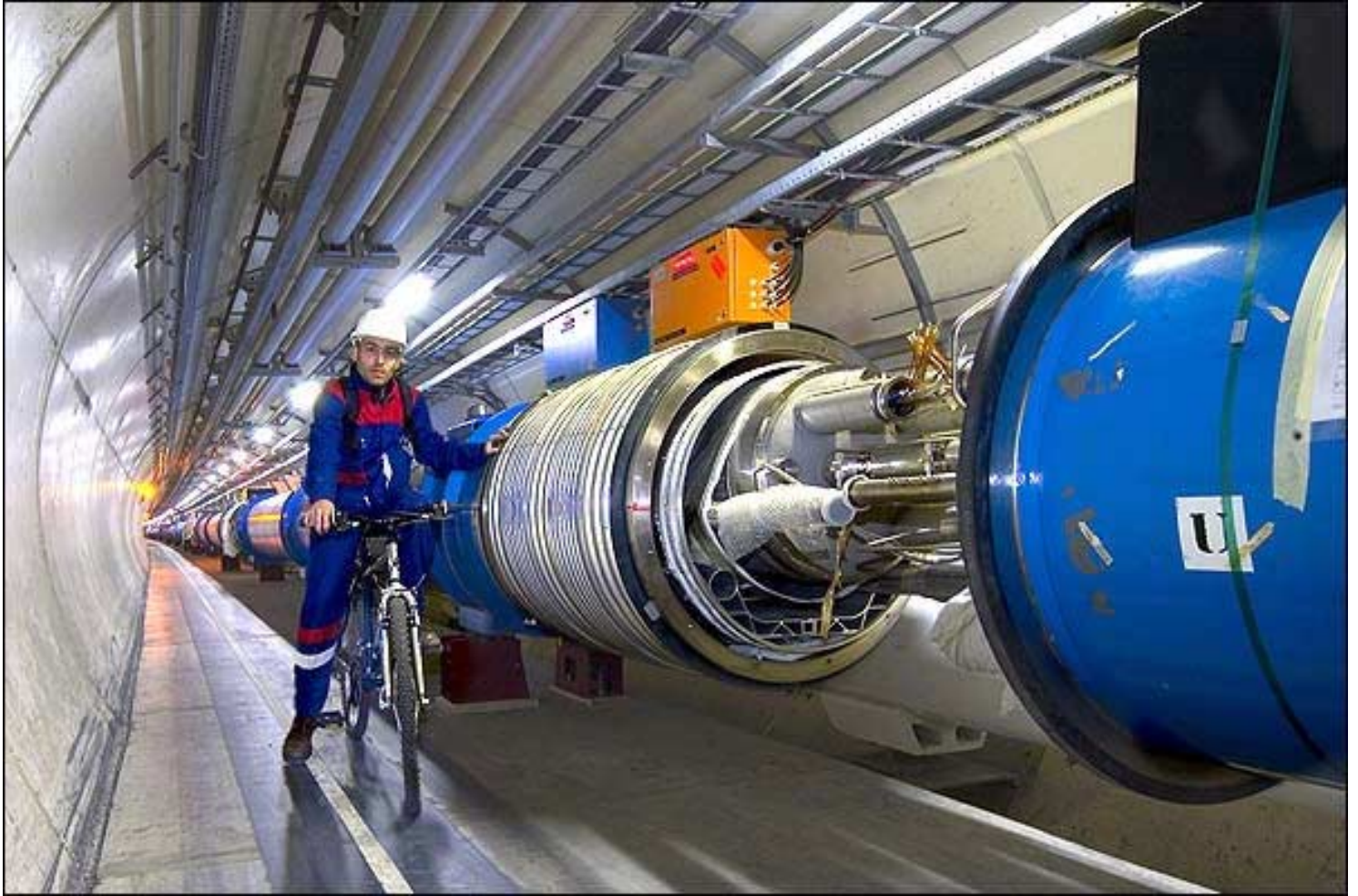
whose discovery was announced at CERN on July 4, 2012. LHC is an acronym for Large Hadron Collider. The LHC was started up in 2008. The speaker's talk was highly entertaining and informative, filled with many images, jokes, and inside information about life working at CERN. He attempted to give a whirlwind introduction to particle physics, and to also describe the LHC at CERN.



The target area of the LHC

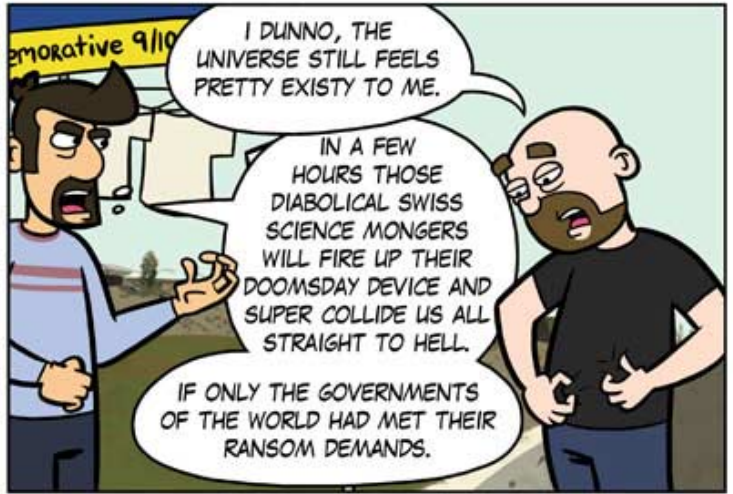
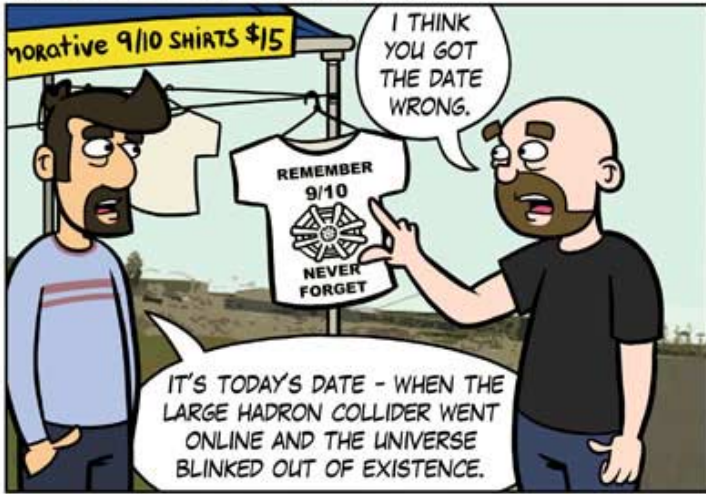


Another view of the target area of the LHC



The circumference of the accelerator ring is 16 miles: a bicycle helps get around.

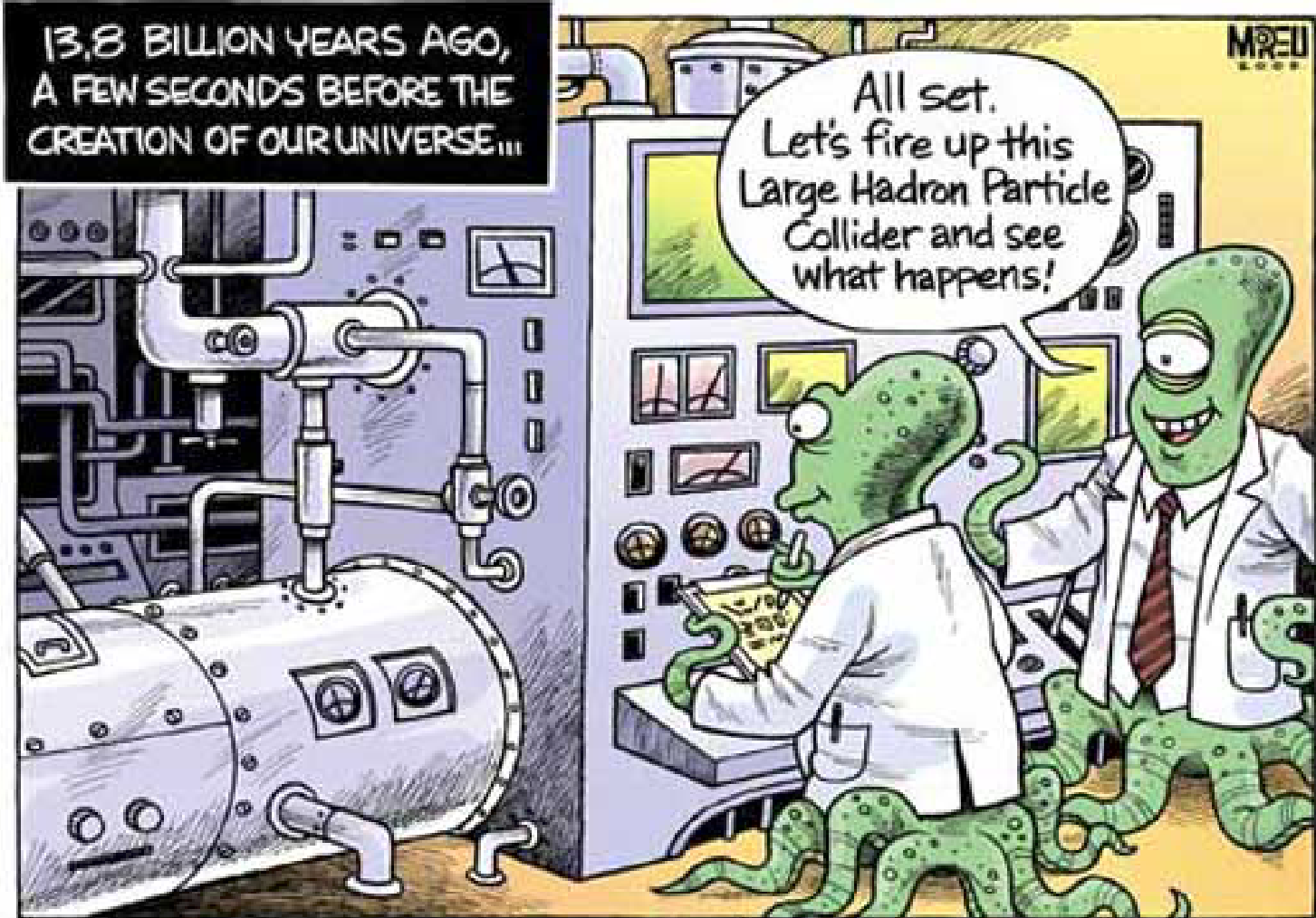
"With So Much Drama In The LHC"



Hijinks ENSUE by Joel Watson

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People who work at the LHC joke about the feared black hole that it was thought might occur.



Another LHC joke

The Essence of Reality

Abstract We perceive reality as parents and culture taught us. But even discerning Mensa minds are fooled by common notions: whatever you believe in seems to be true – the mind filters info to support accepted ideas. Tom Nehrer exposes artificiality in religion and science, showing how each individual encounters a meaningful reality: events and relationships invariably reflect ones own inner mindset. Real issues always have inner components. Tom shows how to delve inward, what to look for and how to change. He will explore various paradigms, east and west, traditional and esoteric, showing how they fail to recognize the inner-outer connection.

Biographical Sketch (M) Tom Nehrer, expanding personal awareness, morphed engineering and software development into visionary expression. Triggered by an early mystic experience, Tom mastered techniques to explore within. He personally reshaped his career – from inside and out – into a life of travel, writing and speaking. His website, always free, three books and 150+ international talks communicate unique awareness of life’s inner-outer flow. Never seeking followers or donations, Tom shares liberating, beneficial insights from his personal clarity of awareness. For more information, contact Tom at tom@neher.net or visit neher.net.



Comments The speaker advocates meditation to release thought and quiet the mind, perhaps using a mantra. He also advocates self-hypnosis to review problems in your life. He suggests using a pendulum to empty the mind. He also advocates dream analysis. He faults his mother for teaching and disciplining him not to cross the street, etc. He says our subconscious is full of the essence of who we really are, but that many foreign ideas are implanted there as well. He suggests that by auto-suggestion we can get rid of disease, etc. His ideas seem to be New Age, Christian Science, and ideas from many Eastern Religions. He claims to have knocked Jesus off of His pedestal, and now he is free, healthy, and successful.

3. An Outing to Salem

Salem, Massachusetts On July 6th, the last day of the AG, there were only a few meetings, and most of them were organizational. This was the perfect opportunity to go on a sight-seeing trip to Salem.



This is a high-speed catamaran ferry similar to the Salem-Boston ferry.



The Peabody Museum in Salem

**One of the oldest continually-operating art museums in the USA.
It holds one of the major Asian art collections in the USA.**



Lunch in the Garden Restaurant at the Peabody



Dinner at Turner's Seafood Restaurant in Salem



The House of Seven Gables in Salem