**3/29/09 THESKEPTICARENA.COM**

**PALMISTRY**

**PALMISTRY, ALSO KNOWN AS CHIROMANCY, IS THE PRACTICE OF TELLING FORTUNES FROM THE LINES, MARKS, AND PATTERNS ON THE HANDS, PARTICULARLY THE PALMS.**

**PALMISTRY WAS PRACTICED IN MANY ANCIENT CULTURES, SUCH AS INDIA, CHINA AND EGYPT. THE FIRST BOOK ON THE SUBJECT APPEARED IN THE 15TH CENTURY. THE TERM CHIROMANCY COMES FROM THE GREEK WORD FOR HAND (CHEIR).**

**PALMISTRY WAS USED DURING THE MIDDLE AGES TO DETECT WITCHES. IT WAS BELIEVED THAT CERTAIN SPOTS ON THE HAND INDICATED ONE HAD MADE A PACT WITH THE DEVIL. PALMISTRY WAS CONDEMNED BY THE CATHOLIC CHURCH BUT IN THE 17TH CENTURY IT WAS TAUGHT AT SEVERAL GERMAN UNIVERSITIES. BRITAIN OUTLAWED PALMISTRY IN THE 18TH CENTURY. IT IS POPULAR ENOUGH IN AMERICA IN THE 20TH CENTURY TO DESERVE ITS OWN BOOK IN THE COMPLETE IDIOT'S GUIDE SERIES.**

**ACCORDING TO ANN FIERY (THE BOOK OF DIVINATION), IF YOU ARE RIGHT HANDED, YOUR LEFT HAND INDICATES INHERITED PERSONALITY TRAITS AND YOUR RIGHT HAND INDICATES YOUR INDIVIDUALITY AND FULFILLMENT OF POTENTIAL. THE PALMIST CLAIMS TO BE ABLE TO READ THE VARIOUS LINES ON YOUR HAND. THESE LINES ARE GIVEN NAMES LIKE THE LIFE LINE, THE HEAD LINE, THE HEART LINE, THE SATURNE LINE. THE LIFE LINE SUPPOSEDLY INDICATES PHYSICAL VITALITY, THE HEAD LINE INTELLECTUAL CAPACITY, THE HEART LINE EMOTIONAL NATURE, ETC.**

**SOME PALMISTRY MIMICS METOPOSCOPY OR PHYSIOGNOMY. IT CLAIMS THAT YOU CAN TELL WHAT A PERSON IS LIKE BY THE SHAPE OF THEIR HANDS. CREATIVE PEOPLE HAVE FAN-SHAPED HANDS AND SENSITIVE SOULS HAVE NARROW, POINTY FINGERS AND FLESHY PALMS, ETC. THERE IS ABOUT AS MUCH SCIENTIFIC SUPPORT FOR SUCH NOTIONS AS THERE IS FOR PERSONOLOGY OR PHRENOLOGY. ALL SUCH FORMS OF DIVINATION SEEM TO BE BASED ON SYMPATHETIC MAGIC AND COLD READING.**

**THE AUTHORS OF THE COMPLETE IDIOT'S GUIDE TO PALMISTRY, ROBIN GILES AND LISA LENARD, CLAIM THAT "PALMISTRY WORKS BECAUSE YOUR HAND CHANGES AS YOU DO." THEY CLAIM TO HAVE A FEW ANECDOTES TO BACK THEM UP ON THIS, BUT FAIL TO PRODUCE ANY SCIENTIFIC SUPPORT FOR THE CLAIM. THEY ALSO THINK THAT CLONING MAKES IT MUCH EASIER FOR US TO UNDERSTAND HOW PALMISTRY WORKS. "PALMISTRY IS POSSIBLE BECAUSE YOU ARE REPRESENTED IN YOUR HAND. NO TWO HANDS ARE ALIKE BECAUSE YOU--AND YOUR CELLS--ARE UNIQUE." TRUE, AND THEY ARE AS LIKELY TO DISCOVER WHETHER I WILL MARRY A RICH WOMAN OR FIND THE JOB OF MY DREAMS BY LOOKING AT MY CELLS AS BY LOOKING AT MY PALMS.**

**ALTHOUGH YOU CAN OFTEN TELL A LOT ABOUT A PERSON BY EXAMINING HIS OR HER HANDS, THERE IS NO SCIENTIFIC SUPPORT FOR THE CLAIM THAT YOU TELL SUCH THINGS AS WHETHER YOU WILL INHERIT MONEY OR FIND YOUR TRUE LOVE FROM THE LINES OR MARKS ON YOUR HANDS. I SUSPECT THAT MANY OF THOSE WHO THINK THEY HAVE FOUND SUPPORT FOR PALMISTRY ARE GUILTY OF CONFIRMATION BIAS AND HAVE FOUND IT IN THE FORM OF ANECDOTES.**

**THE DESIRE FOR KNOWLEDGE OF THE FUTURE SEEMS TO BE AT THE ROOT OF PALMISTRY AND OTHER FORMS OF DIVINING SECRET KNOWLEDGE THROUGH PARANORMAL REVELATIONS. ALSO, FORTUNE TELLERS RELIEVE US OF THE OBLIGATION TO GATHER EVIDENCE AND THINK ABOUT THAT EVIDENCE. OUR PALMISTS AND GRAPHOLOGISTS, ETC., ALSO RELIEVE US OF THE DIFFICULT TASK OF EVALUATING THE CONSEQUENCES OF TAKING VARIOUS ACTIONS. THEY ABSOLVE US OF THE RESPONSIBILITY OF DECISION-MAKING. THEY ARE GREAT COMFORTS, THEREFORE, TO THE INSECURE, THE LAZY, AND THE INCOMPETENT. OF COURSE, THEY CAN ALSO BE DATA POINTS, I.E., THEY PROVIDE ONE MORE PIECE OF DATA THAT A PERSON CAN USE TO MAKE A DECISION. SOME WRITERS EVEN USE DIVINATION SUCH AS THE TAROT OR THE I CHING TO GIVE THEM IDEAS FOR CHARACTERS OR PLOTS. THEY PROBABLY COULD DO JUST AS WELL BY THUMBING THROUGH THE BIBLE, A NEWSPAPER, A POETRY ANTHOLOGY, AN ENCYCLOPEDIA, OR A SKEPTICAL DICTIONARY.**

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\***

**THE SCIENCE SEGMENT**

**TEXAS SCHOOL BOARD SET TO VOTE ON CHALLENGE TO EVOLUTION**

**3/21/09**

**THE TEXAS BOARD OF EDUCATION WILL VOTE THIS WEEK ON A NEW SCIENCE CURRICULUM DESIGNED TO CHALLENGE THE GUIDING PRINCIPLE OF EVOLUTION, A STEP THAT COULD INFLUENCE WHAT IS TAUGHT IN BIOLOGY CLASSES ACROSS THE NATION.**

**THE PROPOSED CURRICULUM CHANGE WOULD PROMPT TEACHERS TO RAISE DOUBTS THAT ALL LIFE ON EARTH IS DESCENDED FROM COMMON ANCESTRY. TEXAS IS SUCH A HUGE TEXTBOOK MARKET THAT MANY PUBLISHERS WRITE TO THE STATE'S STANDARDS, THEN MARKET THOSE BOOKS NATIONWIDE.**

**"THIS IS THE MOST SPECIFIC ASSAULT I'VE SEEN AGAINST EVOLUTION AND MODERN SCIENCE," SAID STEVEN NEWTON, A PROJECT DIRECTOR AT THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR SCIENCE EDUCATION, WHICH PROMOTES TEACHING OF EVOLUTION.**

**TEXAS SCHOOL BOARD CHAIRMAN DON MCLEROY ALSO SEES THE CURRICULUM AS A LANDMARK -- BUT A POSITIVE ONE.**

**DR. MCLEROY BELIEVES THAT GOD CREATED THE EARTH LESS THAN 10,000 YEARS AGO. IF THE NEW CURRICULUM PASSES, HE SAYS HE WILL INSIST THAT HIGH-SCHOOL BIOLOGY TEXTBOOKS POINT OUT SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THE FOSSIL RECORD THAT, IN HIS VIEW, UNDERMINE THE THEORY THAT ALL LIFE ON EARTH IS DESCENDED FROM PRIMITIVE SCRAPS OF GENETIC MATERIAL THAT FIRST EMERGED IN THE PRIMORDIAL MUCK ABOUT 3.9 BILLION YEARS AGO.**

**HE ALSO WANTS THE TEXTS TO MAKE THE CASE THAT INDIVIDUAL CELLS ARE FAR TOO COMPLEX TO HAVE EVOLVED BY CHANCE MUTATION AND NATURAL SELECTION, AN ARGUMENT POPULAR WITH THOSE WHO BELIEVE AN INTELLIGENT DESIGNER CREATED THE UNIVERSE.**

**THE TEXTBOOKS WILL "HAVE TO SAY THAT THERE'S A PROBLEM WITH EVOLUTION -- BECAUSE THERE IS," SAID DR. MCLEROY, A DENTIST. "WE NEED TO BE HONEST WITH THE KIDS."**

**THE VAST MAJORITY OF SCIENTISTS ACCEPT EVOLUTION AS THE BEST EXPLANATION FOR THE DIVERSITY OF LIFE ON EARTH.**

**YES, THEY SAY, THERE ARE UNANSWERED QUESTIONS -- TRANSITIONAL FOSSILS YET TO BE UNEARTHED, BIOLOGICAL PROCESSES STILL TO BE DISCOVERED. THERE IS LIVELY SCIENTIFIC DEBATE ABOUT SOME ASPECTS OF EVOLUTION'S WINDING, FOUR-BILLION-YEAR PATH. BUT WHEN CRITICS TALK ABOUT EXPOSING STUDENTS TO THE "WEAKNESSES" OR "INSUFFICIENCIES" IN EVOLUTIONARY THEORY, MANY MAINSTREAM SCIENTISTS CRINGE.**

**THE FOSSIL RECORD CLEARLY SUPPORTS EVOLUTION, THEY SAY, AND STUDENTS SHOULDN'T BE EXPOSED TO CREATIONIST CRITIQUES IN THE NAME OF "CRITICAL THINKING."**

**"WE WILL BE TEACHING NONSENSE IN THE SCIENCE CLASSROOM," SAID DAVID HILLIS, A BIOLOGY PROFESSOR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN.**

**POLLS SHOW MANY AMERICANS ARE SKEPTICAL OF OR CONFUSED BY EVOLUTION; IN A RECENT SURVEY BY GALLUP, 39% SAID THEY BELIEVE THE THEORY, 25% SAID THEY DIDN'T, AND 36% HAD NO OPINION.**

**THE DISCOVERY INSTITUTE, A SEATTLE THINK TANK THAT CHALLENGES EVOLUTION, CITES A RECENT ZOGBY POLL THAT FOUND A STRONG MAJORITY OF AMERICANS SUPPORTS LETTING TEACHERS EXPLORE BOTH "STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES" OF EVOLUTION. OTHERWISE, STUDENTS SEE ONLY "CHERRY-PICKED EVIDENCE THAT REALLY AMOUNTS TO PROPAGANDA," SAID JOHN WEST, A SENIOR FELLOW AT THE DISCOVERY INSTITUTE.**

**THE TEXAS SCHOOL BOARD WILL VOTE AFTER TAKING PUBLIC TESTIMONY IN A THREE-DAY MEETING THAT STARTS WEDNESDAY. DR. MCLEROY LEADS A GROUP OF SEVEN SOCIAL CONSERVATIVES ON THE 15-MEMBER BOARD. THEY ARE OPPOSED BY A BIPARTISAN GROUP OF SEVEN, OFTEN JOINED BY AN EIGHTH BOARD MEMBER CONSIDERED A SWING VOTE, THAT SUPPORT TEACHING EVOLUTION WITHOUT CAVEATS.**

**NEITHER SIDE IS CONFIDENT OF VICTORY. ALL MEMBERS OF THE BOARD HAVE COME UNDER ENORMOUS PRESSURE IN RECENT MONTHS, ESPECIALLY THREE REPUBLICANS WHO SUPPORT TEACHING EVOLUTION WITHOUT REFERENCES TO "WEAKNESSES." THE STATE REPUBLICAN PARTY PASSED A RESOLUTION URGING THE THREE TO BACK DR. MCLEROY'S PREFERRED CURRICULUM. A CONSERVATIVE ACTIVIST GROUP PUT OUT A NEWS RELEASE SUGGESTING ALL THREE WERE IN THE POCKET OF "MILITANT DARWINISTS."**

**ONE OF THE THREE, FORMER SOCIAL-STUDIES TEACHER PAT HARDY, SAID SHE HAS RECEIVED THOUSANDS OF IMPASSIONED CALLS AND EMAILS.**

**MS. HARDY SAYS SHE INTENDS TO STAND FIRM FOR EVOLUTION, BUT SHE HAS LEARNED NOT TO PREDICT WHAT HER COLLEAGUES MIGHT DO. CURRICULUM STANDARDS CRITICAL OF EVOLUTION WON PRELIMINARY APPROVAL IN JANUARY, BUT SEVERAL BOARD MEMBERS SAID LATER THAT THEY HADN'T UNDERSTOOD THE ISSUES.**

**"ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN," MS. HARDY SAID.**

**WRITE TO STEPHANIE SIMON AT STEPHANIE.SIMON@WSJ.COM**

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\***

**THE ARENA GOES ABROAD**

**RELIGION IN AMERICA**

**1/31/09**

**WANT TO BE ALMOST CERTAIN YOU'LL HAVE RELIGIOUS NEIGHBORS? MOVE TO MISSISSIPPI. PREFER TO BE IN THE LEAST RELIGIOUS STATE? VENTURE TO VERMONT.**

**A NEW GALLUP POLL, BASED ON MORE THAN 350,000 INTERVIEWS, FINDS THAT THE MAGNOLIA STATE IS THE ONE WHERE THE MOST PEOPLE — 85% — SAY YES WHEN ASKED "IS RELIGION AN IMPORTANT PART OF YOUR DAILY LIFE?"**

**LESS THAN HALF OF VERMONTERS, MEANWHILE — 42% — ANSWERED THAT SAME QUESTION IN THE AFFIRMATIVE.**

**JOINING MISSISSIPPI IN THE TOP "MOST RELIGIOUS" STATES ARE OTHER NOTCHES IN THE BIBLE BELT: ALABAMA (82%), SOUTH CAROLINA (80%), TENNESSEE (79%), LOUISIANA (78%), AND ARKANSAS (78%).**

**NEW ENGLAND PREDOMINATES IN THE TOP "LEAST RELIGIOUS" STATES: FOLLOWING VERMONT ARE NEW HAMPSHIRE (46%), MAINE (48%), MASSACHUSETTS (48%), ALASKA (51%) AND WASHINGTON (52%).**

**"CLEARLY, STATES IN THE SOUTH IN PARTICULAR, BUT ALSO SOME STATES IN THE SOUTHWEST AND ROCKY MOUNTAINS ... HAVE VERY RELIGIOUS RESIDENTS AND NEW ENGLAND STATES IN PARTICULAR, COUPLED WITH STATES LIKE ALASKA AND OTHERS, ARE IRRELIGIOUS," SAID FRANK NEWPORT, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF THE GALLUP POLL.**

**THE REASONS WHY, HOWEVER, ARE FAR LESS CLEAR, OBSERVERS SAID.**

**FOR EXAMPLE, SOME MIGHT ATTRIBUTE THE RELIGIOSITY OF MISSISSIPPI TO THE HIGH PERCENTAGE OF AFRICAN-AMERICANS — LONG KNOWN FOR BEING COMPARATIVELY HIGHLY RELIGIOUS — WHO LIVE THERE.**

**"MISSISSIPPI IS STILL NO. 1, EVEN IF WE LOOK ONLY AT WHITES," SAID NEWPORT. "WHITES IN MISSISSIPPI ARE ALSO VERY RELIGIOUS."**

**OVERALL, GALLUP RESEARCHERS FOUND THAT 65% OF ALL AMERICANS SAID RELIGION WAS IMPORTANT IN THEIR DAILY LIVES. THE TOTAL SAMPLE OF 355,334 U.S. ADULTS, INCLUDING RESPONDENTS WITH LAND-LINE TELEPHONES AND CELLULAR PHONES, HAD A MARGIN OF ERROR OF PLUS OR MINUS 1 PERCENTAGE POINT. SOME STATES HAD MARGINS OF ERROR AS HIGH AS PLUS OR MINUS 4 PERCENTAGE POINTS.**

**NEWPORT WAS SURPRISED THAT ONE STATE — UTAH — DID NOT MAKE THE "MOST RELIGIOUS" LIST, GIVEN THE STATE'S LARGE MORMON POPULATION.**

**"THEY APPARENTLY HAVE TWO KINDS OF PEOPLE IN THE STATE," HE SAID. "THEY HAVE THE VERY RELIGIOUS AND DEVOUT MORMON POPULATION BUT IT ALSO LOOKS LIKE THEY HAVE A LOT OF NONRELIGIOUS PEOPLE."**

**MARK SILK, DIRECTOR OF THE GREENBERG CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGION IN PUBLIC LIFE, SAID GALLUP'S FINDINGS REFLECT RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS FROM THE UPCOMING AMERICAN RELIGIOUS IDENTIFICATION SURVEY, WHICH HE IS WORKING ON WITH OTHER SCHOLARS.**

**"NEW ENGLAND IS NOW SLIGHTLY AHEAD OF THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST IN TERMS OF THE HIGH RATE OF UNCHURCHED PEOPLE," SAID SILK, CO-AUTHOR OF ONE NATION, DIVISIBLE: HOW REGIONAL RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES SHAPE AMERICAN POLITICS.**

**ALTHOUGH EVANGELICALISM MAY BE MAKING SOME INROADS IN WESTERN STATES LIKE WASHINGTON AND OREGON, HE ATTRIBUTES THE PREDOMINANCE OF NEW ENGLAND STATES IN THE "LEAST RELIGIOUS" CATEGORY MORE OTHER DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS IN THE NORTHEAST.**

**"WHAT WE ARE FINDING ... IS A CONSIDERABLE DROP IN NEW ENGLAND IN THE CATHOLIC POPULATION," SAID SILK, WHOSE CENTER IS BASED IN HARTFORD, CONN.**

**AND IT'S A MATTER OF THEM MOVING AWAY FROM THE CHURCH, HE SAID, NOT THE REGION. "CATHOLICS ARE HOLDING THEIR OWN NATIONWIDE BECAUSE OF LATINO IMMIGRATION BUT, RELATIVELY SPEAKING, THERE'S LITTLE OF THAT IN NEW ENGLAND."**

**SILK SUSPECTS SOME CATHOLICS HAVE LEFT THE CHURCH BECAUSE OF THE CATHOLIC SEX ABUSE SCANDAL THAT FIRST ERUPTED IN BOSTON, WHICH "KIND OF PUSHED SOME SORT OF RELATIVELY LOOSE AFFILIATION CATHOLICS OVER THE EDGE."**

**FOR HIS PART, NEWPORT SAID CATHOLICS OVERALL NO LONGER ARE MORE RELIGIOUS THAN THE AVERAGE AMERICAN — WHEN IT COMES TO STATING THE IMPORTANCE OF RELIGION OR IN ATTENDING CHURCH SERVICES —— BUT IT'S HARD TO SPECIFY EXACTLY WHY NEW ENGLAND STATES FIGURE SO PROMINENTLY IN THE "LEAST RELIGIOUS" STATES.**

**"THEY'RE ABOUT AVERAGE AND THAT'S A CHANGE," HE SAID. "IT USED TO BE YOU'D FIND CATHOLICS SIGNIFICANTLY HIGHER. ... I DON'T KNOW TO WHAT DEGREE THAT WOULD AFFECT WHAT'S GOING ON IN NEW ENGLAND."**

**FOLLOWING IS GALLUP'S ENTIRE LIST OF STATES, IN ORDER OF WHAT PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS SAID RELIGION IS "AN IMPORTANT PART" OF THEIR DAILY LIVES:**

**BY STATE:**

**• MISSISSIPPI: 85%**

**• ALABAMA: 82%**

**• SOUTH CAROLINA: 80%**

**• TENNESSEE: 79%**

**• LOUISIANA: 78%**

**• ARKANSAS: 78%**

**• GEORGIA: 76%**

**• NORTH CAROLINA: 76%**

**• OKLAHOMA: 75%**

**• KENTUCKY: 74%**

**• TEXAS: 74%**

**• WEST VIRGINIA: 71%**

**• KANSAS: 70%**

**• UTAH: 69%**

**• MISSOURI: 68%**

**• VIRGINIA: 68%**

**• SOUTH DAKOTA: 68%**

**• NORTH DAKOTA: 68%**

**• INDIANA: 68%**

**• NEBRASKA: 67%**

**• NEW MEXICO: 66%**

**• PENNSYLVANIA: 65%**

**• FLORIDA: 65%**

**• MARYLAND: 65%**

**• OHIO: 65%**

**• IOWA: 64%**

**• MINNESOTA: 64%**

**• ILLINOIS: 64%**

**• MICHIGAN: 64%**

**• DELAWARE: 61%**

**• WISCONSIN: 61%**

**• DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA: 61%**

**• IDAHO: 61%**

**• ARIZONA: 61%**

**• NEW JERSEY: 60%**

**• WYOMING: 58%**

**• COLORADO: 57%**

**• HAWAII: 57%**

**• CALIFORNIA: 57%**

**• MONTANA: 56%**

**• NEW YORK: 56%**

**• CONNECTICUT: 55%**

**• NEVADA: 54%**

**• RHODE ISLAND: 53%**

**• OREGON: 53%**

**• WASHINGTON: 52%**

**• ALASKA: 51%**

**• MASSACHUSETTS: 48%**

**• MAINE: 48%**

**• NEW HAMPSHIRE: 46%**

**• VERMONT: 42%**

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\***

**FAMOUS QUOTES**

**IMMANUEL KANT (1724 – 1804) 79 YEARS.**

**HE WAS AN 18TH-CENTURY GERMAN PHILOSOPHER FROM THE PRUSSIAN CITY OF KÖNIGSBERG (NOW KALININGRAD, RUSSIA). HE IS REGARDED AS ONE OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL THINKERS OF MODERN EUROPE AND OF THE LATE ENLIGHTENMENT.**

**HIS MOST IMPORTANT WORK IS THE CRITIQUE OF PURE REASON, AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE LIMITATIONS AND STRUCTURE OF REASON ITSELF. IT ENCOMPASSES AN ATTACK ON TRADITIONAL METAPHYSICS AND EPISTEMOLOGY, AND HIGHLIGHTS KANT'S OWN CONTRIBUTION TO THESE AREAS. THE OTHER MAIN WORKS OF HIS MATURITY ARE THE CRITIQUE OF PRACTICAL REASON, WHICH CONCENTRATES ON ETHICS, AND THE CRITIQUE OF JUDGMENT, WHICH INVESTIGATES AESTHETICS AND TELEOLOGY.**

**"WE CAN JUDGE THE HEART OF A MAN BY HIS TREATMENT OF ANIMALS."**