

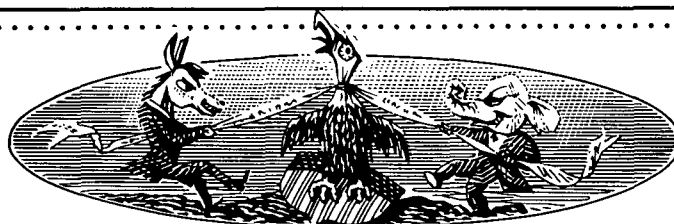
Frankly, hitherto astrology never fetched me. It had been my view that the arrangement of the planets overhead would hold about as much influence on my fate as an overhead cloud, and certainly less than an overhead bird in the final stages of digestion. Yet now I am beginning to weaken. Doubtless, many other Americans are too. Until recently the pundits were attributing Ronald Reagan's successful presidency to "magic." No less a political sage than Dr. Garry Wills, toiling in the pages of *Time* magazine, attributed the President's success to "magic." So now we know the source of the magic. Why all the surprise?

In the end, when the last gasp over Mr. Regan's revelations of White House stargazing sounds, my guess is that Mr. Regan's only effect will be a mild boom in the occult, and I take it he had higher ambitions than that. His problem in attempting to denigrate the President is that the President is a success. In fact, Ronald Reagan has presided over the first successful presidency since the 1950s. Now as he teeters through his eighth and final summer in the White House and the sniping begins, it is instructive to recall that he is the first President since Eisenhower to reach such a point and the only one in history to achieve it at the age of 77.

Some of his early accomplishments are now beginning to tarnish. His policy in Central America is in a dismal condition. He had rehabilitated the prestige of the presidency, but that prestige is now somewhat reduced. Yet in both cases the responsibility for these problems has to be borne at least in part by others: in Central America by the congressional Democrats who thwart his policy with no better policy to offer; in his entourage by those who have no honor. When the historians contemplate the prosperity and peace of the Reagan years, they are going to have to confront one fact: Ronald Reagan was President

during that peace and prosperity. Donald Regan, of course, is an ingrate. If he felt frustrated by Nancy Reagan he had the honorable alternative of quitting. He could have written his book for the historic record but he should have had the decency of earlier disgruntled appointees such as James A. Farley under FDR and Sherman Adams under Eisenhower. He should have waited until his benefactor was in retirement: and then he might have practiced the restraint that others in his position have shown in the past. But he could not. As the poet wrote, Don Regan has demonstrated all the attributes of a dog save loyalty. □

CAPITOL IDEAS



BECKMANN VS. EINSTEIN

by Tom Bethell

After Howard Higman's conference at the University of Colorado ("Boulder's World," *TAS*, June 1988) I went up into the Rocky Mountain foothills to see my old friend Petr Beckmann, who lives in a mountain eyrie with his wife Irene, two black Labradors, an A.B. Dick 360 printing press, science books and journals, and a mass of publishing paraphernalia. John McCarthy, a computer-science professor at Stanford, calls Beckmann "the I.F. Stone of the right," but that is not quite on target. Beckmann is part libertarian (but he considers most libertarians too left-wing), part Randian (too much of a cult there), and wholly anti-Communist. Since 1973 he has published *Access to Energy*, a "Pro-Science, Pro-Technology, Pro-Free Enterprise Monthly Newsletter," for about 3500 subscribers. Every day he bicycles down into Boulder to pick up his mail—sixteen miles round trip, vertical climb of 1100 feet on the way back—which is sufficient exercise for a 63-year-old man with sixteen screws in his shin bone (bicycling accident in September 1986).

Apart from putting out his newslet-

ter (a marvelous read every month), Beckmann writes books and publishes them himself under the imprint of Golem Press. *The Health Hazards of Not Going Nuclear* has sold 50,000 copies since he published it in 1976, and *The History of Pi* has sold well, too. But the book that interested me and that I wanted to discuss with him was published only recently—*Einstein Plus Two*, a critique (perhaps a demolition) of Einstein's special theory of relativity. He spent four years writing it, but he had worked on it sporadically for decades, conducting some experiments relevant to the theory while teaching at the University of Colorado.

Beckmann told me that he is confident there is a fundamental error in Einstein's theory. His book presents a different theory, giving results consistent with all known experiments, including those most recently conducted with lasers. Beckmann's theory also explains two further phenomena which Einstein's theory cannot derive—the quantization of electron orbits, and the Titius-Bode Law, describing the orbits of all four known planetary systems (the Solar System and the moons of Jupiter, Saturn, and Uranus).

We went out for a walk and Beckmann told me a bit about himself, occasionally giving orders in Czech to one or another of his dogs. He was born in Prague in 1924, and, because his father was categorized as politically en-

dangered (both his parents were Communists, as well as Jewish), he and his mother were transported as refugees to England in 1939. He spent World War Two in England, enlisted in a Czech squadron of the Royal Air Force, and serviced the then secret radar project. He so treasures his wartime memories of England that he doesn't want to go back and discover that victory was won only that Punk Rock might triumph.

In 1945 Beckmann returned to Czechoslovakia, received a Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering from Prague Technical University, and then a Doctor of Science degree from the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences. In 1963 he was invited by the University of Colorado to be a visiting professor; he defected to the U.S. the following year, and thereafter he taught electrical engineering at Boulder until his retirement in 1981. He has published more than 60 scientific papers, mostly devoted to electromagnetics and probability theory.

During his eighteen years at the university Beckmann saw a tremendous decline in higher education, beginning with the Vietnam war, the slide continuing to this day. "England in 1939 was nowhere near as far gone as the U.S. is today," he said with characteristic pessimism. Moreover, "Hitler had very few sympathizers," unlike the Soviet leadership today. He believes the general deterioration of morale in the U.S.

will continue "until we are hit over the head with a stick." What that stick will be he does not know, but one possibility is "the Soviet Union being taken over by the military."

Beckmann told me that he had doubted Einstein's theory ever since he was first taught it. It was true, he conceded, that many "nuts" attack Einstein, but a fair number of respectable scientists have long questioned the theory as well, among them Albert A. Michelson of Michelson-Morley fame. Beckmann said Einstein's special theory should not be called a theory "of relativity," for that is not what characterizes the theory. The postulate of relativity was stated by Isaac Newton in the *Principia* and Beckmann considers it uncontroversial. According to it, if one object is moving in relation to another, there is no "privileged position" in the universe permitting us to decide which is moving and which is at rest. The laws of physics apply impartially, whether you decide one is moving and the other at rest, or vice versa.

It is Einstein's famous second postulate that Beckmann challenges: the claim that the speed of light is a constant, whether or not the observer is moving in relation to the light source. As Einstein famously claimed, two observers, one moving toward and another away from a light source, will

both measure the light as moving toward them at identical speeds. Beckmann dissents. His rival claim is that the velocity of light is constant with respect to the gravitational field through which it passes. Light from a distant star, for example, will travel at one speed in its local gravitational field, increase as it moves out into space, then slow down again as it approaches the sun, and then travel at a slightly dif-

ferent speed as it moves into the gravitational field of the Earth. Light, in fact, should be thought of as a disturbance of the gravitational field, just as sound is a disturbance of the air. "Like waves on the water of a stream flowing into a river and into the sea," Beckmann writes, "light travels with different relative velocities through a vacuum in the terrestrial field, through that in the solar field, and through

that of the fields that lie beyond." As can be shown by simple geometry, Einstein's claim of a constant speed of light, whatever the motion of the observer, leads directly to bizarre results, which in turn are resolved when space and time are distorted accordingly by what is known as the Lorentz Transformation. These distortions are themselves dependent on the velocity of the observer. To a fast-moving body,

other bodies shrink, put on weight, and age more slowly! The calculations used to alter space and time along these lines precisely offset the geometrical discrepancies that arise when you assume an invariant velocity of light.

"When I run, I feel a wind; but not one that will make a windmill turn," is the dramatic opening sentence of *Einstein Plus Two*. "A physicist who *falsely* assumes that the effect-producing velocity (that makes the windmill turn) is that with respect to the observer, but *correctly* applies the relativity principle, will expect the windmill to turn when he is running. The experimental evidence will contradict his expectation, and he can then either abandon his false premise, or he can so distort space and time that the observer's motion produces two exactly equal and opposite forces on the windmill, keeping the mill motionless as observed. The Einstein theory, in effect, takes the latter road; but I believe the laws of physics . . . must hold regardless of any observer, who should do nothing but observe."

Space and time are our most fundamental "givens," and velocity (space divided by time) is derived from them. Beckmann likens the assumption that the derivative (velocity) is more basic than the fundamentals (space and time) to the contortions of a man who attempts to reconstruct the ground floor of his house, dwelling undisturbed on the second floor as he does so.

I asked about Einstein's famous formula equating mass and energy ($E=mc^2$). Had this not been demonstrated by the atom bomb? The formula is "perfectly correct," Beckmann replied, "but you can derive it from universally accepted principles of electromagnetism without distorting space and time." In effect, it has nothing to do with Einstein's theory. Physicists before Einstein came very close to deriving the formula—some say Henri Poincaré did.

What about the oft-repeated story of the advance of Mercury's perihelion (the orbital point closest to the sun)? A 43-seconds-of-arc-per-century discrepancy (from the result predicted by Newton) had been discovered in 1880. Supposedly Einstein's theory "predicted" this. "Einstein's theory accounted exactly for this [43-second] residue," Bertrand Russell wrote in *The ABC of Relativity*.

Beckmann said he could hardly believe the way history had been distorted in the semi-official version of Mercury's perihelion. What was later to be known as Einstein's formula (explaining Mercury's orbit) was discovered and published in 1898, seventeen years before Einstein, by a man named Paul

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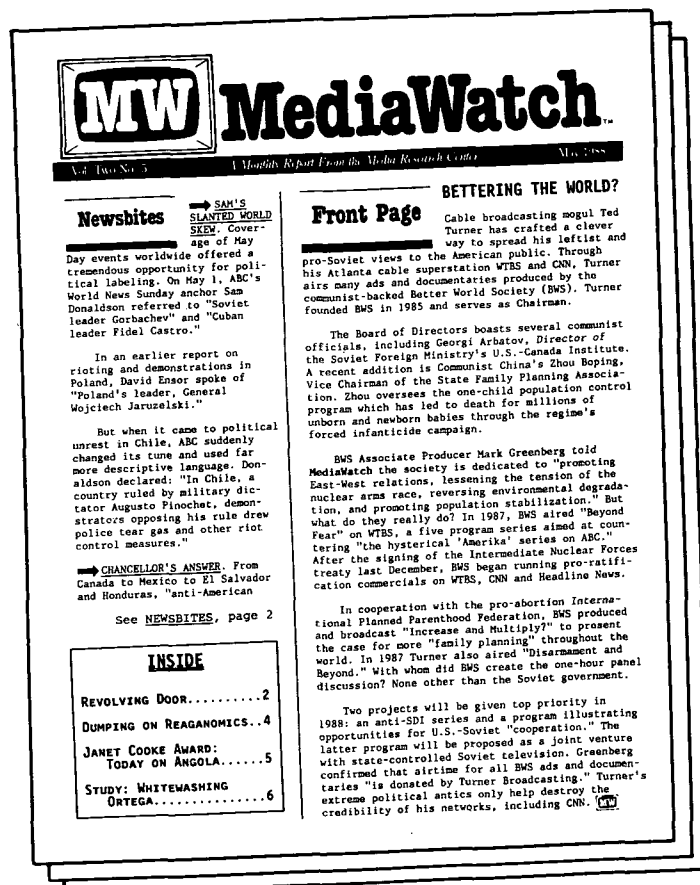
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Gerber, who was probably a high-school teacher in Stargard, Germany. Using classical, not Einsteinian physics, and the assumption that gravity is not instantaneous (as Newton thought) but propagates with the velocity of light, Gerber derived Einstein's equation exactly. By contrast Einstein used a complex trick bag of gravitational tensors and Riemannian geometry. Yet Gerber is forgotten.

Is there not something wrong with a theory that gets you to the right place (the explanation of Mercury's orbit) by a complex route, distorting space and time *en passant*, when you can arrive at the same destination by simple methods?

Likewise the Michelson-Gale experiment of 1925 (not to be confused with Michelson-Morley) demonstrated an optical effect that is immediately explained as illustrating the different velocities of light along different latitudes of the rotating Earth (the Earth's gravitational field does not rotate *with* the Earth). Michelson used three lines of high-school algebra and classical physics. Einstein bent space and time with tensor calculus to get the same result.

Another famous experiment that supposedly confirmed Einstein was the demonstration (at the time of a solar eclipse in 1919) that light rays from stars are bent when they pass through the gravitational field of the sun. But such refraction is exactly what would be predicted if the velocity of light varies as the gravitational field changes. In order to explain the light path observed in 1919, said Beckmann, you do not need Einstein's complications—only the principle that light travels along the path that gets it from A to B in the shortest time (Fermat's Principle).

The great problem in testing the relative merits of Einstein's theory and his own, Beckmann said, is that all or nearly all the evidence confirming Einstein is generated by experiments in which "the observer is nailed to the gravitational field of the Earth." And in all such experiments, Beckmann and Einstein would expect to get the same results. In principle, Beckmann says, there are experiments that can decide between the two, but at present it is not possible to measure this difference, because measuring instruments can still only be moved at an insignificant fraction of the speed of light.

"I am not so naive as to think that the first attempt to move the entire Einstein theory *en bloc* onto classical ground will turn out to be perfectly correct," Beckmann writes in his preface. But he told me that he was nonetheless confident that Einstein's theory is wrong. Meanwhile, he said, he was beginning to worry that "they'll fail to crucify me." He would rather have his

errors exposed, if such exist, than be ignored. A handful of physicists have taken note of Beckmann's effort, however, among them Howard C. Hayden, an associate professor of physics at the University of Connecticut.

"Frankly, I think he's on to something," Hayden told me over the telephone. He said he would recommend Beckmann's book to anyone interested in the logical structure of physics.

Hayden also said he was submitting an article "about one aspect of the book" to the journal *Foundations of Physics*. "Beckmann asserts that the speed of light has never been shown to be a constant," he said. "At first I thought this must be wrong, but I have since reviewed the literature and I have not found one paper that would show him to be incorrect. The constancy of the speed of light has not been demon-

strated experimentally. The simplest explanation for all the speed of light experiments is not Einstein's, it's Beckmann's, and he gets the results normally attributed to relativity effects without the use of distorted space and time." □

(Einstein Plus Two *may be ordered from The Golem Press, Box 1342, Boulder, Colorado, 80306, \$36 pp.*)

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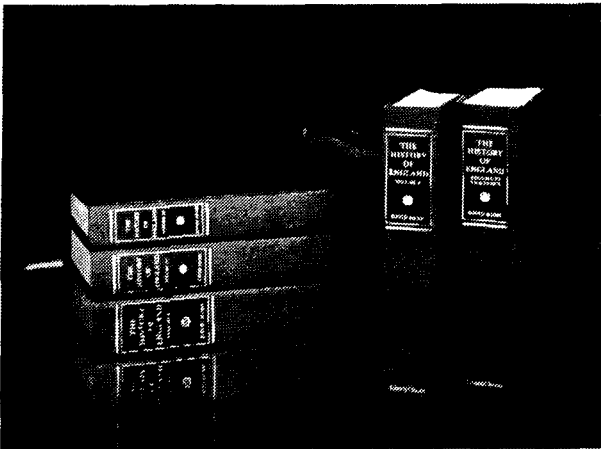
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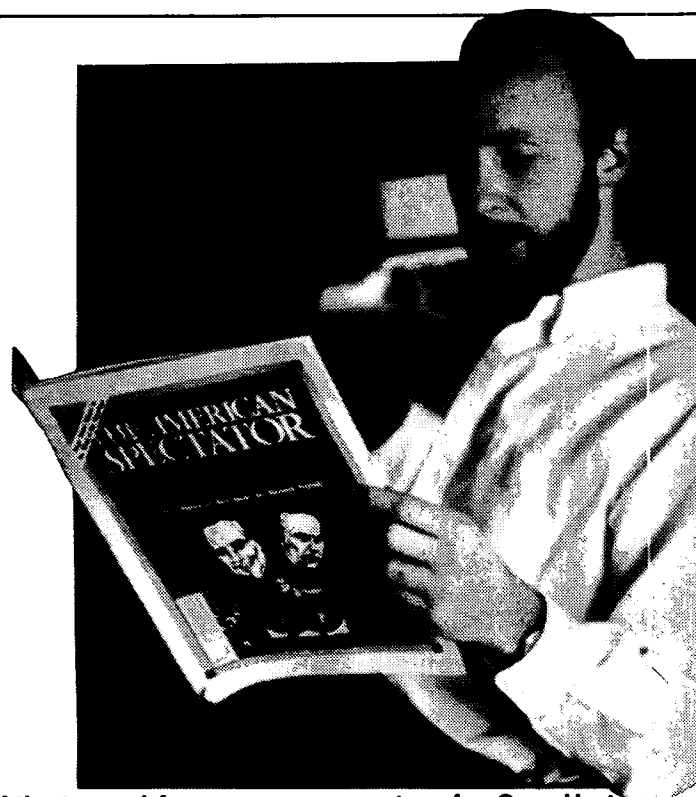
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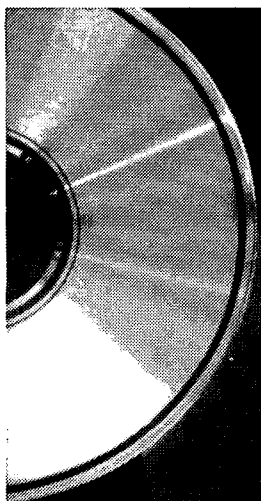
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GEORGE BUSH, STATESMAN

In an exclusive interview, the Vice President submits a foreign policy for conservatives to reflect on.

Conservatives have not let George Herbert Walker Bush forget his cantankerous right flank. George Will called him a "lapdog" in 1986 and has been peeved at the Veeper ever since. Around the same time, Richard Viguerie told the *Wall Street Journal* that a Bush candidacy in 1988 would restore to the GOP "the image of the little man in the top hat in the Monopoly game . . . destroying hopes for a Republican majority." Then there was the widespread and—has anyone noticed?—now faded wimp business. Evans and Novak recently wrote that Bush's remarks "on defense spending and arms control could, with slight editing, be uttered by any Democratic candidate." Hawks of various persuasions suspect that he will allow SDI to be strangled in its research-and-testing crib and START us down the slippery slope of unverifiable and destabilizing long-range nuclear-arms cuts. As trade with Moscow picks up speed in the Reagan twilight—"Abel again rushes to pull Cain out of the ditch," Pat Buchanan tartly observed—dark murmurings of "detente" issue from the wings. George Bush: the Corporate Republican; the Establishment Republican; the not-tough-enough Republican. Too willing to cut deals, say those who support the Reagan Doctrine of rolling back Communism and dread a retreat into a lackluster policy of containment. The pro-Israel camp worries: Is he too pro-Arab? Uninspiring on the contras, Central American activists protest. A lack of vision, cry the vision-seekers.

What gives? Are the complaints simply the sort of pessimistic kvetching the right loves to engage in even after more than seven not altogether unsuccessful years of the unflappably optimistic Ronald Reagan, or does Bush pose se-

rious problems for the way conservatives wish to see the foreign policy of the United States conducted? I caught up with the candidate aboard Air Force Two on a recent flight down to West Virginia and discussed some of the foreign policy issues of concern to conservatives.

After months on the campaign trail, Bush appeared relaxed, almost serene. Contrary to the Democratic candidates, he is fully in command of the details of complex strategic and international questions and seems to enjoy talking about them. He made a point of repeatedly stressing his belief that there have been no "fundamental changes" in the Soviet Union, no basic "changes in direction. We should look at what's happening in the Soviet Union," he added, "as a challenge—meaning, be careful, be cautious—but as an opportunity" too.

On trade with Moscow, Bush wants

to tighten up the export control system on high-technology, strategically important items. "One area we can do more with them is in agricultural exports," he said. "I strongly favor agricultural exports to the Soviet Union. I would not impose a grain embargo for political purposes—that proved to be counterproductive, and it made us lose market share. But in terms of a *naïve* view that all is well now and we're on some kind of new plane of 'detente,' I don't believe that."

Bush said that the U.S. must continue to look for signs of fundamental shifts in the Soviet Union's domestic and foreign policies. "How do you find those shifts? Some of them are through regional change. I'm delighted that the Soviets have agreed to *begin* taking their forces out of Afghanistan. But there are other areas where we ought to look for some kind of manifestation of change—Angola, Central America."

Regarding meeting regional challenges from the Soviets, the Vice President remarked that "if you see something worth doing, don't be *afraid* to do it, but don't suggest that that means there is a fundamental change in the system—I think the jury is still out" on the question of fundamental change.

There is a restrained cast to Bush's statements; he does not engage in broad intellectual or rhetorical sweeps. He's familiar with and bows briefly in the direction of the Big Ideas—Marxism-Leninism, Democracy, Rollback, Containment, Mutual Assured Destruction—but then steers the conversation back to details, to specific regions, issues, negotiating stances, historical lessons. The word "realistic" and warnings about naivete frequently surface. "I believe that our system—capitalism, freedom, and democracy—is so superior to Marxism" that it is simply no contest. "The role of the United States is to be strong advocates for freedom and democracy—hold that banner high—and wherever possible offer hope and support for those that are struggling."

He said he favors continued support for a policy of rollback. "I don't know whether we've rolled back Communism in Afghanistan, but it looks like we've rolled back Soviet occupation—and that's a very worthy thing. And similarly we should work to see that the Cubans get out of Angola, that Angola has a right to be associated with the West and not be dominated by a Marxist master."

Of dictatorships in Latin America, Bush said he was "optimistic about the hemisphere. We hear all the criticisms from the liberals and the Democrats, but great progress has been made and I really believe we're on the threshold of a much more democratic hemisphere. I think we'll see some of the dictatorships of the right give way to more



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