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Letters and Comments, Issue 26, 2002

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Letters and Comments

I am a long-standing and enthusiastic reader of the HMN Journal. After reading journal #25, I wanted to raise two issues—being interested to know what others think of them. I shall be brief—and (playing devil's advocate) blunt.

First, on the article about Maharishi's vedic science. This seemed to me a rather long-winded way (8pp!) of saying that Wigner's famous phrase (about the unreasonable effectiveness of mathematics in science) is mistaken because of an assertion that the two worlds are governed by the same laws—the same melody. This seems an ex-cathedra circular argument asserted without evidence or supporting argument other than an appeal to authority. What has this metaphysical stuff to do with a “humanistic” mathematics?

Secondly, from another long (9pp this time) article on “person-centered” math, “Imagine the trigonometry involved in hurting a football...that's the same geometry and calculus involved in tossing a crumpled sheet of paper...performing operations of geometry, trigonometry and calculus all the time.” Hey, but you aren't! You're throwing a football, a ball of paper. Isn't it dishonest and misleading to suggest otherwise to students? Otherwise why bother to study calculus when you are already doing it OK? Isn't mathematics a second-order activity in which you are looking at the throwing in a specific way, one which is quite different than the first-order activity of the footballer? Do we have to sugar the pill in this particular way?

-Dick Tahta

Letters to the editor are always welcome.

Future Issues will be online at <http://www2.hmc.edu/hmnj/>

Among the future online articles, will be Stephen Brown's article:

Humanistic Mathematics: Personal Evolution and Excavations

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The HMNJ is also working on constructing a website. You can see what progress we are making at <http://www2.hmc.edu/hmnj/>. While it may be a while until the website is fully functional, we hope you will contribute your suggestions for improvements and ideas for functions to alvin_white@hmc.edu.