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Or try to.

When it comes to land animals or marine animals, the question of the kosher status of an animal is rule-based. If a land animal chews a cud and has cloven hooves it is kosher, otherwise not. If a marine animal has both scales and fins, it is kosher, otherwise not.

But for birds, it is different. Here the definition is list-based, or enumerative. If the bird is on the list of twenty-four non-kosher birds in Leviticus 11:13-19 and Deuteronomy 14:11-18, it is not kosher, otherwise (theoretically) it is kosher. But since we don't really know what all the Hebrew names for the species map to in term of current species names, we can never really be sure.

The Mishnah attempts to turn this list into a set of rules. Birds of prey are not kosher. (Birds of prey use their claws to catch their prey, so chickens pecking at worms are not birds of prey.) Birds with an "extra" toe, a crop, or a gizzard that can be peeled are not kosher.

There are further rules and descriptions, and it appears that one goal of these rules is to make sure all the "traditionally" kosher birds stay kosher.

(This raises the question of which comes first: the list or the rules. With birds, the rules are designed to match the existing list. With "language", its definition seems to change so as to make sure that only humans have "language".)

And now we look at the question "what is a reptile"? The traditional definition was cold-blooded, egg-laying lung-breathing animals with dry skin covered with scales or plates.

But then we came to cladistics and also the knowledge that birds evolved from dinosaurs. So now by some scientific classification systems, birds are considered reptiles because they are descended from reptiles. But most people would say that birds are **not** reptiles, and indeed science has to redefine "reptile" to get birds into that category. (Actually, the current classification is of the clade Archosauria, which includes "all living and extinct relatives of birds and crocodilians such as non-avian dinosaurs, pterosaurs, phytosaurs, aetosaurs and rauisuchians as well as many Mesozoic marine reptiles".)

So where does all this leave Pluto? Well, we can define what is a planet by a list (like the non-kosher birds), or by fixed rules (like reptiles), or by rules we keep changing (like languages).

It appears that the International Astronomical Union [IAU] is going with "rules that keep changing." The rules adopted in 2006 were that a planet is in orbit around the Sun, has sufficient mass to be in hydrostatic equilibrium, and has cleared the neighborhood around its orbit.

The first requirement ruled out all extra-solar planets; the last two requirements are ambiguous (the third one even more than the second). The IAU has a separate definition for extra-solar planets, which makes one wonder why they can't have a single definition--if they are going to have one solar system as an exception to the rules, why not have Pluto an exception within that solar system?

And I wouldn't be me if I didn't mention Jorge Luis Borges every chance I get, so let's just say that we want to avoid the type of categories Borges wrote about in "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins", in which he speaks of "a Chinese encyclopaedia entitled 'Celestial Empire of benevolent Knowledge'. In its remote pages it is written that the animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies." [-ecl]

Ray Harryhausen Films, Part 09 (film comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

[I misspoke last week; I only did two films that week, so that was not the last part--this one is.]

ONE MILLION YEARS B.C. (1966): ONE MILLION YEARS B.C. is basically a remake of the 1940 film ONE MILLION B.C. It starts out with a narrator saying, "This was a story of long, long ago when the world was just beginning." Well, no, it wasn't just beginning and in general this gets prehistory totally wrong. A million years ago, the only humanoids were Homo erectus and possibly Homo heidelbergensis, while the film has what are clearly Homo sapiens. The film also has dinosaurs,

which died off about 64 million years before its purported time, and it mixes Jurassic and Cretaceous dinosaurs. The various mammals are far too modern; this was the era of woolly mammoths, sabertooth tigers, and giant ground sloths. And I don't think there were ever giant spiders or giant sea turtles as big as these. (Unlike the lizard, the sea turtle is stop-motion animation, though the combining of actors and creature effects in a single frame is not nearly as well done as in many of Harryhausen's other films.)

Needless to say, eye liner, mascara, and perfectly coiffed hair are also wildly inaccurate.

Actually, given the sparseness of the population the narrator claims, the close proximity of two tribes, one completely dark-haired and one completely blond is evolutionarily unlikely.

There are a lot of non-stop-motion creatures: a warthog-like creature probably created by putting prosthetics on an actual warthog, a giant lizard created by using a regular lizard and split screen projection, and so on.

It is interesting that Harryhausen is often connected with dinosaurs, yet only one of the dozen films he made with Charles Schneer (VALLEY OF GWANGI) had dinosaurs; yet three of the five films he made elsewhere had them.

Released theatrically 21 February 1967.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0060782/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/one_million_years_bc

[-ecl]

THERE IS NO ANTIMEMETIC DIVISION by qntm (Sam Hughes) (book review by Paul S. R. Chisholm):

The secret Unknown Organization protects humanity from dangerous artifacts, entities, and phenomena. That includes antimemetics, which destroy memories. UO's Antimemetic Division works to contain these Unknowns. Unfortunately, the Unknowns destroy memories and even the records of the division and its members. As far as the Organization knows, there is no Antimemetic Division.

How can you fight an enemy you can't remember?

This was one of the three books Anthropic co-founder Jack Clark recommended on a recent podcast interview with Ezra Klein. (I couldn't remember who the interview subject was. I even had trouble finding a reference to it. Insert joke here. The other two were Ursula K. LeGuin's A WIZARD OF EARTHSEA and THE TRUE BELIEVER by Eric Hoffer.) The novel was inspired by the wiki for the SCP Foundation, a fictional organization that creates Special Containment Procedures for "anomalies." The SCP wiki is delightfully weird, and the novel first appeared on that site. The author, "qntm" ("quantum," a.k.a. Sam Hughes) is a talented writer. He makes the story flow. The first chapter grabbed my attention and wouldn't let go.

The novel naturally devolves--evolves?--into horror. That's unsurprising. The most terrifying diagnosis one can get, worse than cancer, is dementia. It promises the destruction of memory (and eventually cognition).

A little more than halfway through the book, the narrators' perception of reality shifts radically from the reader's, and from the reality described in the epilogue. I don't understand the ending. It's as if the author realized there was no way to finish the story and then threw words at it.

Great concept, good execution, disappointing finale. I can't recommend this book, but I don't recommend against it. [-psrc]

Second Time Books (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

I have mentioned Second Time Books (114 Creek Rd, Mt Laurel Township, NJ; <https://www.facebook.com/SecondTimeBooks/>) many times in my book column, but I will put this as a regular article. Second Time Books has been featured on "My Family Travels": <https://myfamilytravels.com/this-stunning-new-jersey->

bookstore-is-home-to-used-books-that-are-treated-like-gold/ and picked up on Facebook by "Explore New Jersey":
https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=122120635683208625&id=61586258759255

I cannot say enough good about this store. I just wish it were closer to me--but it's probably good that it isn't. :-) Tell Brandon I sent you. [-ecl]

STORIES YOU NEVER OF (letter of comment by Hal Heydt):

In response to [Joe Karpierz's comments on RABBIT TEST AND OTHER STORIES](#) in the 04/03/26 issue of the MT VOID, Hal Heydt writes:

[Joe Karpierz wrote,] "Those readers who are familiar with Mills' work will nod their head sagely when I say that she does not limit herself to one type of story, one genre, one theme, one anything.

You might want to take a look at Dorothy's collection STORIES YOU NEVER HEARD OF (). It Dorothy's various stories that either didn't total enough for their own collection (e.g. THE WITCH OF SYRACUSE, the collected Cynthia stories), or wouldn't fit anywhere else. [-hh]

This Week's Reading (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

The "Classical Stuff You Should Know" podcast did an episode on The Federalist paper #10, and not surprisingly, I have comments:

Federalist No. 10, "The Same Subject Continued: The Union as a Safeguard Against Domestic Faction and Insurrection" by James Madison begins, "Among the numerous advantages promised by a well-constructed Union, none deserves to be more accurately developed than its tendency to break and control the violence of faction."

He goes on to say, however, that factionalism still existed (in 1787, when this was written).

Madison defines a faction as "a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or a minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community."

He goes on to say, "There are two methods of curing the mischiefs of faction: the one, by removing its causes; the other, by controlling its effects." The first, he says, is undesirable; the second, impossible.

"But the most common and durable source of factions has been the various and unequal distribution of property. ... The regulation of [the] various and interfering interests [that arise from this] forms the principal task of modern legislation, and involves the spirit of party and faction in the necessary and ordinary operations of the government.

Madison notes, "No man is allowed to be a judge in his own cause, because his interest would certainly bias his judgment, and, not improbably, corrupt his integrity." I will add that this is why Madison would be appalled at Trump suing his own Department of Justice (and when I say "own", I mean he owns it) for any sum of money, let alone \$10 billion.

(It turns out, that the \$10 billion lawsuit over a leak of his tax returns has a couple of flaws. First, the statute of limitations seems to have expired. And second, the leak took place in 2019, when Trump was President, and hence in charge. So he's actually trying to collect damages for something he was responsible for ("The buck stops here"--Harry Truman).)

"It is in vain to say that enlightened statesmen will be able to adjust these clashing interests, and render them all subservient to the public good. Enlightened statesmen will not always be at the helm. Nor, in many cases, can such an adjustment be made at all without taking into view indirect and remote considerations, which will rarely prevail over the immediate interest which one party may find in disregarding the rights of another or the good of the whole."

Well, Madison nailed it there.

But then he goes on to say that in a pure democracy, a faction that is the majority can ride roughshod over the minority. But a republic, "by which [he means] a government in which the scheme of representation takes place ... promises the cure for which we are seeking. ... The two great points of difference between a democracy and a republic are: first, the delegation of the government, in the latter, to a small number of citizens elected by the rest; secondly, the greater number of citizens, and greater sphere of country, over which the latter may be extended. The effect of the first difference is, on the one hand, to refine and enlarge the public views, by passing them through the medium of a chosen body of citizens, whose wisdom may best discern the true interest of their country, and whose patriotism and love of justice will be least likely to sacrifice it to temporary or partial considerations."

He seems to think this wouldn't happen, or wouldn't happen as often, in a large republic: "as each representative will be chosen by a greater number of citizens in the large than in the small republic, it will be more difficult for unworthy candidates to practice with success the vicious arts by which elections are too often carried; and the suffrages of the people being more free, will be more likely to centre in men who possess the most attractive merit and the most diffusive and established characters."

We've seen how (in)accurate that is.

He goes on to say, "The influence of factious leaders may kindle a flame within their particular States, but will be unable to spread a general conflagration through the other States. A religious sect may degenerate into a political faction in a part of the Confederacy; but the variety of sects dispersed over the entire face of it must secure the national councils against any danger from that source. A rage for paper money, for an abolition of debts, for an equal division of property, or for any other improper or wicked project, will be less apt to pervade the whole body of the Union than a particular member of it; in the same proportion as such a malady is more likely to taint a particular county or district, than an entire State."

Okay, we now have religious sects trying to control the schools and other functions of government, and paper money, and the forgiveness of student loans, so I think we can say Madison is zero for three here.

H. L. Mencken may have been more perceptive when he said, "No one in this world, so far as I know--and I have researched the records for years, and employed agents to help me--has ever lost money by underestimating the intelligence of the great masses of the plain people. Nor has anyone ever lost public office thereby." [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

The optimist proclaims that we live in the best of all possible worlds; and the pessimist fears this is true.
--Irving Caesar

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