

## Are Universes Thicker Than Blackberries?

*Martin Gardner*

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Gardner is known for two things. His writing on so called recreational mathematics and on the debunking of scientific fallacies. Both have been pursued during a career spanning almost sixty years. The present book is a collection of recent essays, mainly on science and philosophy, some mathematics, including a fictional short story, some literature, but mostly on various parapsychological charlatans. Taken all in all one must say that the collection does not really measure up to his past standards. Gardner was a disciple of Carnap, and thus it is understandable that he should take a certain exception to Popper (of whom Carnap memorably remarked that he [Carnap] was much closer to Popper than Popper was to him), but his criticism of him and his alleged renunciation of inductive proof is misdirected. True, Popper may have been a very unpleasant personality, and his reputation may be rather inflated, especially as to originality, yet he made some important points explicit. (In fact it is very hard to be an original philosopher, almost everything you can think of will have been anticipated.) The essays on mathematics are rather uninspiring, and his dabbling into literature whimsical and sentimental. The bulk of the work is on the fraudulence of parapsychology, where Gardner feels he has a mission. Thus one as a reader is treated to quite a few cases in greater length and detail than one might want to suffer. Gardner, an amateur magician on his own, proposes that magicians are far better than scientists to defraud the outrageous claims made by various media. The argument seems very persuasive, magicians are indeed privy to various dirty tricks, that the ordinary scientist would never have thought of, accustomed to a subtle but not malicious adversary, in the words of Einstein. Thus the scientists are no less guillable than the general public, in fact it can be argued more so.

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