

AGGIELIFE

THE BATTALION

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The Phantom Year 2000

Public menaced by false claim that the millennium has begun

BY KELLY PREISER
The Battalion

For the past year, the media bombarded everyone who would listen with dire predictions of what the year 2000 might bring. Millions prepared for disaster, buying "Y2K compliant" products, stockpiling their homes with water and food and ensuring their banks were Y2K-ready.

However, Jan. 1, 2000 came and went with only a few minor problems.

Was all the preparation worth the effort?

In the sense that potentially cataclysmic computer problems were solved, the millennium hype was mostly beneficial, as well as profit bearing. While some spent the past year preoccupied with the question, "Where will I be on the eve of the millennium?" others are pondering the same question now, in anticipation of New Year's Eve 2000, and the coming of 2001.

Why would a 2001 celebration be of any importance (except maybe to a Texas A&M junior), especially after the remarkable celebrations that occurred just three weeks ago?

Some people say that a person is one year old after the first year of life, which also marks the beginning of the second year of life. In the same way, one begins the 21st year of living after turning 20 and his or her 22nd year after turning 21.

Time can be thought of in the same manner. The Julian Calendar never had a year "zero"—the calendar went from 1 B.C. to

1 A.D. With the approach of the year 2000, 1,999 years have been completed. A millennium does not technically occur until 1,000 years have passed.

The 2,000th year just began, so the end of this year will actually be the end of 1,000 years, and 2001 will be the beginning of the next millennium.

Western culture seems fascinated with timekeeping. Decades, centuries and millenniums are celebrated as a result of base-10 mathematics.

Colin Allen, associate professor and assistant department head in the Departments of Philosophy and Humanities said, "Our numbering system is based on the number of fingers (including thumbs) we have, hence, a base-10 numerical system. If we'd evolved with fewer fingers, or ignored our thumbs, the rollover from 1999 to 2000 would have come much sooner."

Are these celebrations merely distinguishing humanly created abstractions of time, or are they substantial?

Linda Radzik, assistant professor of philosophy and humanities said, "I think the millennium has already occurred. In my opinion, what marks the change are the little cultural differences—getting used to saying 2000, trying to figure out what to call this decade. These little things are what make us reflect on the past and future, they make it feel like a new era."

"Not only is 'time' itself an illusion as demonstrated by Einstein's theories of relativity, but our divisions or chopping up of time has historically been and is now completely arbitrary," Dale Baum, professor of history, said.

"The entire dating scheme is arbitrary and, by most accounts, not even accurately zero at the 'actual' birth date of a historical Jesus, which if you believe the estimates, should be placed at about 3 or 4 B.C. If this is right, the true 2,000th anniversary of that birthday passed without a fanfare a few years ago," Allen said.

Daniel Bornstein, professor of history and director of the Interdisciplinary Program in Religious Studies, said, "Our obsession with the year 2000 as numbered from the birth of Jesus is shaped by our particular cultural blinders ... throughout history, various states have begun the new year on other dates. On Dec. 25, style of the nativity, for instance, or Mar. 25, style of the incarnation. Of course, these dates refer to Christian history, as does our convention of dividing history into two grand periods."

Other cultures' calendars differ and therefore they celebrate the new year at different times. The Chinese celebrate the new year in February and the Muslim calendar numbers years from Mohammed's flight from Mecca to Medina.

With these variations, it is impossible to measure time accurately and to have everyone on the same timeline. By means of applying

Western cultural standards, should one expect another millennium celebration in 2001? Or will the turnover from 1999 to 2000 suffice, letting the real start of the millennium go by as any other New Year's celebration?

"I think people will have big New Year's parties next year, since so many decided not to this year," Allen said.

"I didn't make any special preparations for this one, I definitely won't make any for next. I'm planning on celebrating New Year's next year just the same as I did this year. Any excuse for a party is just fine with me," Jeff Walker, junior construction science major, said.

With this in mind, the question, "where were you on the eve of the 3rd millennium?" may now be better stated, "where will you be...?"



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