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## Trends. The Cassini Mission to Saturn: Plutonium as Propaganda

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The Cassini mission to Saturn is uncontroversial from the perspective of yet another venture for an unmanned space craft contributing to man's knowledge of space. However, the mission is very controversial from the perspective of an energy source--about 72 pounds of plutonium--that will be carried by the spacecraft. How dangerous is this mission and other like it? What is the likelihood that at launching, during the orbit around Earth for a booster-rocket firing, and/or during a later swing by Earth to raise the spacecraft's speed that plutonium might be released posing a lethal risk to humans?

The dialogue--acerbic and soporific--on the controversy suggests that a so-called objective analysis of the alleged "facts" is hard to come by. On the anti-Cassini side are disparate allies and ideologues including those who (1) would stop all funding of space research at least until all earthly problems have first been resolved; (2) believe any risk with a probability of occurrence more than zero is unacceptable, criminal, and/or insane; (3) find the technical analyses of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration to be unrealistic, faulty, and/or purposive underestimates of risk; (4) enjoy being against anything "the government" is for; (5) are Luddites; and (6) find intrinsic reinforcement in political battle. On the pro-Cassini side also are disparate allies and ideologues including those who (1) embrace technology as other embrace God; (2) believe all human behavior and all of life can be predicted through equations; (3) find intrinsic reinforcement in political battle; (4) are self-styled avatars of progress, fads, and fashion; and (5) find the technical analyses of the "opposition" to be unrealistic, faulty, and/or purposive overestimates of risk. Both anti- and pro-Cassini sides also are motivated by irrational, illogical, emotional, and unconscious phenomena that have been explicated by the work of Bion and other Tavistock-influenced researchers focused on experiences in groups.

A last point. Even upon total agreement on all technical matters, the question of how much danger is acceptable is like searching for consensus on how many angels can dance on the head of the pin. Seeking a numerical answer mitigates against considering whether angels exist or can even dance. It takes two to tango, and the tango of plutonium as propaganda will go on. (See Bion, W. (1959.) Experiences in groups. NY: Basic Books; Broad, W. (September 8, 1997.) Saturn mission's use of plutonium fuel provokes warnings of danger. The New York Times, p. 8; The psychology of conspiracy. International Bulletin of Political Psychology, 1(1); The psychology of national security organizations: A Kleinian analysis. International Bulletin of Political Psychology, 1(10).)