

The REALL News

The official newsletter of the Rational Examination Association of Lincoln Land

"It's a very dangerous thing to believe in nonsense." — James Randi

Volume 7, Number 12 **Special Millennium Exploitation Issue!**
Not a Single Article about the Millennium!

December 1999

A Central Illinois Scientist Responds to the Black Box

by Karen Bartelt

Dr. Michael Behe, author of *Darwin's Black Box*, appeared recently (October 5-6) at Lincoln Christian Seminary in Lincoln, IL. Briefly, *Darwin's Black Box* proposes that certain cellular structures are "irreducibly complex" — that all parts must be functional for the structure to work, and Behe asserts that gradual Darwinian evolution does a poor job of explaining these features, therefore, there must be an "intelligent designer."

Prior to his appearance, Behe was the subject of a large article by the Michael Miller, religion editor of the *Peoria Journal Star*. Piqued by what Behe might have to say to a receptive-but-nonscientific audience, I attended two of the three lectures. What follows are my responses — as a scientist — to Behe's lectures at the seminary and his October 3 interview in the *Peoria Journal Star*.

In his *PJS* interview, Behe described three lines of criticism from scientists. First, he said that scientists consider his findings to be of a religious nature rather than science. Since the standard definition of science tends to be something like "the systematic study of the natural world", it is hardly unfair for scientists to respond in this manner! If Behe and others want to explore the possibility of a "designer" that subsumes our current body of scientific knowledge, they are welcome to do so. Just don't call it science, and let's see how fruitful it is in ten years.

Behe went beyond this at Lincoln, however, saying (supposedly to mimic scientists), "That Behe fellow is a known Christian... Therefore design is a religious idea." This is a ridiculous assertion. Some of Behe's most vehement critics are also "known Christians," and never has the idea of design been rejected because it comes from a particular religious group; it is rejected by the bulk of the scientific community because there is absolutely no evidential support.

Aha, you say, but what about all of those wonderful examples of irreducible complexity (IC) in *Darwin's Black Box*? Behe used many of them at Lincoln. They have all been soundly refuted in scientific journals and on the web. Behe proposed that a mousetrap is irreducibly complex (all parts must be there for it to function) and therefore a good metaphor for IC in biological systems. On PBS' *Firing Line* in 1997, evolutionary biologist

and "known Christian" Kenneth Miller demonstrated how that analogy fails — with Behe sitting across the table! There is a more basic flaw in Behe's assertion, however — that a molecular machine must perform a specific task, or it is useless to the organism. Just as a mousetrap without a critical part might function as a great paperclip or a very interesting earring, a proto-flagellum or enzyme might be capable of some function (Indeed, this is what is seen). That's basic evolutionary biology.

This brings me to Behe's second allegation: scientists say that he "isn't the proper type of scientist to be discussing evolution." From my reading of many reviews, the criticisms tend to center around the fact that Behe is either selectively ignorant of the evolutionary literature that exists, or that he just doesn't know how to do a computer search! For example, at



Lincoln he said that if one looks in the scientific literature for evidence of Darwinian evolution, this literature "is absent." In *Darwin's Black Box* (p.179) he is even more emphatic: "There has never been a meeting, or a book, or a paper on the details of the evolution of complex biochemical systems." How, then could John Catalano have done a keyword search of the word "evolution" and come up with 13,000 hits <<http://www.talkorigins.org/faqs/behe/publish.html>> — articles describing the evolution of the immune system, cilium, flagellum, blood-clotting system, eyes — subjects that Behe says do not exist! Perhaps Behe could be forgiven for being sloppy in 1996 when his book came out, but to make this statement in 1999 indicates

(Continued on page 4)

In This Issue

A Central Illinois Scientist Responds to the Black Box.....	1
A Visit to the Conspiracy Museum.....	4
REALLity Check.....	6

Purpose

The Rational Examination Association of Lincoln Land is a non-profit educational and scientific organization. It is dedicated to the development of rational thinking and the application of the scientific method toward claims of the paranormal and fringe-science phenomena.

REALL shall conduct research, convene meetings, publish a newsletter, and disseminate information to its members and the general public. Its primary geographic region of coverage is central Illinois.

REALL subscribes to the premise that the scientific method is the most reliable and self-correcting system for obtaining knowledge about the world and universe. REALL does not reject paranormal claims on *a priori* grounds, but rather is committed to objective, though critical, inquiry.

The REALL News is its official newsletter.

Annual Membership Rates: Regular, \$20; student, \$15; family, \$30; patron, \$50 or more; subscription only, \$12.

Board of Directors

Chairman	David Bloomberg
Vice Chairman	Jim Rosenthal
Secretary-Treasurer	Bob Ladendorf
Newsletter Editor.....	Wally Hartshorn
At-Large Members	Prof. Steve Egger
	David McMaster
	(one vacancy)

Editorial Board

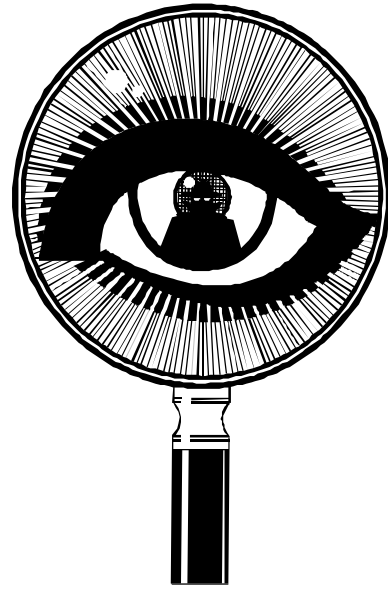
Wally Hartshorn
David Bloomberg
Jim Rosenthal

Unless otherwise stated, permission is granted to other skeptic organizations to reprint articles from The REALL News as long as proper credit is given. REALL also requests that you send copies of your newsletters that reprint our articles to the above address.

The views expressed in these articles are the views of the individual authors and do not necessarily represent the views of REALL.

REALL Contacts

REALL Hotline.....	217-726-5354
Chairman, David Bloomberg	chairman@reall.org
Editor, Wally Hartshorn	editor@reall.org
Web Site	www.reall.org



A Nod to Our Patrons

REALL would like to thank our patron members. Through their extra generosity, REALL is able to continue to grow as a force for critical thinking in Central Illinois. To become a patron member of REALL, please use the membership form insert. Patron members are:

Karen Bartelt,
Washington
David Bloomberg,
Springfield
David Brown,
Danville
Alan Burge, D.D.S.,
Morton
David Gehrig,
Champaign
Charles Hanson,
Springfield
Wally Hartshorn,
Springfield

Bob Ladendorf,
Springfield
John Lockard, Jr.,
Urbana
Bill Mellon,
Valparaiso, Indiana
James Rosenthal,
Springfield
Doug Smith,
Springfield
Richard Walker,
Springfield
Melanie Wojtulewicz,
Chicago

Predictions

- More Weird Web Sites
- Book Reviews
- Skeptic Music



From the Chairman

David Bloomberg

Evolution, evolution, evolution! Those will be our watchwords for the next six months or so – or until the Illinois State Board of Education revises its school science standards to include the word (say it with me now), “evolution.”

As many of you already know, about 2 ½ years ago, the Board instituted new standards. At the time, then-superintendent Spagnolo didn’t want to include the word “evolution” for fear of getting on the wrong side of the religious right. The draft standards went out and comments poured in to say, “Add evolution!” So they did. And then the word disappeared again at the behest of Spagnolo. I should note that most of the concepts of evolution are present – this isn’t Kansas, after all – but the word itself is missing. This means they use vague language to try to work around the missing word when there is a perfectly good, scientifically proper, word to use: evolution. To some people, this may seem like a little thing, but it is not. There is simply no reason to avoid using the proper term; no reason to cloud the issue.

Anyway, I, along with then-Vice Chairman Ron Larkin, spoke at the Board meeting at which the standards were presented. Alas, the Board chose to ignore our comments.

Fast-forward to today. The Board is reviewing the standards (they had said they would do so in three years). We have a new state superintendent – one who hopefully is not afraid of the religious right. The Chicago Tribune finally realized that “evolution” could not be found in the standards (with a front-page article on October 24). Now is the time to get this issue taken care of.

To that end, last meeting REALL formed an Evolution in Education Committee. Also, I have been in contact with the National Center for Science Education, the media, and numerous contacts in the teaching and scientific realm throughout the state. We are working on a plan of action to bring this issue into the light and to help make our standards the best they can be.

If you are interested in helping us, please let me know. Call, mail, or e-mail, and I’ll put you on the committee list. Also, if you have any friends or contacts who might be interested in helping out, either let me know about them or put them into contact with us. We need to show the Board that this is not some petty non-issue that will just go away if ignored.

December Meeting

Well, there’s one thing that doesn’t have anything to do with evolution – this month’s meeting. And it doesn’t have anything to do with the millennium, either (which, after all, doesn’t change for another year anyway).

On Tuesday, December 7, we will feature a presentation by Rense Lange called **Paranormal Experiences Out of Virtually Nothing: The Role of Attentional Bias**. Rense has talked to us before – last time about poltergeist delusions in September 1998. This talk also deals somewhat with poltergeists and similar paranormal phenomena, but in a different way. Here he will address two mechanisms that have been found to be related to the occurrence of anomalous experiences and beliefs. He will discuss how attentional bias plays a role – if you think some-

From the Editor

Wally Hartshorn

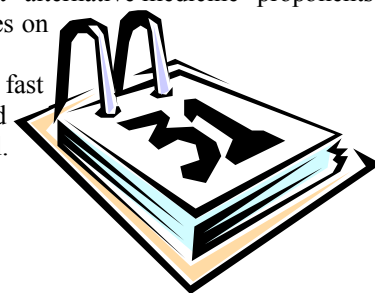
December 1999 is here, and as we all know, that means that soon we will be faced with an unavoidable deadline that might possibly cause major anxiety for some. No, not that deadline. I’m talking Christmas. What should I get for my girlfriend?

Speaking of anxiety, David Bloomberg recently visited a shrine to anxiety — The Conspiracy Museum. He wrote up a description of what he saw for this issue. If you’ve read *The Illuminatus! Trilogy* by Robert Shea and Robert Anton Wilson, you have an idea of what David encountered.

Our cover article, written by Karen Bartelt, discusses the supposed flaws of evolution, as described by Dr. Michael Behe in *Darwin’s Black Box*. Given the recent actions of various state boards of education, I think it’s probably a very good idea to know what some of the creationists believe.

Lastly, David has another edition of “REALLity Check,” discussing an odd claim about “alternative medicine” proponents as well as the recent activities on the creation/evolution front.

Well, that deadline is fast approaching, so I think I’d better take a trip to the mall. See you in January 2000! ☹



thing will happen, it’s more likely that you will notice something that you otherwise would have missed, and assign its cause to that which you were expecting. In more humorous terms, people are predisposed to do dumb things when they don’t understand what they’re dealing with.

This doesn’t only apply to poltergeists. Rense will address the further implications for a number of other issues, including Susan Blackmore’s “meme” theory, certain aspects of clinical psychology, etc. Overall, his talk will outline a completely new perspective on the genesis of hauntings, delusions, and related processes.

Rense Lange has a Ph.D. in psychology and a Masters in computer science. He has written numerous papers for refereed journals in areas ranging from psychology, artificial intelligence, catastrophe modeling, and paranormal events.

I hope to see you there! ☹

(Continued from page 1)

either continuing ignorance or arrogance. Scientists have penetrated the "black box" to a much greater extent than Behe would have his general audiences believe!

Behe's purported third area of criticism from the scientific community is that he hasn't published enough in scientific journals on this topic. Behe agreed, saying later that he wants to see "real laboratory research on the question of intelligent design." Well, so would the rest of us scientists, and then perhaps intelligent design (ID) would be taken seriously! A recent keyword search of the words "intelligent design" turned up exactly one article, and it was about robots! This small well-funded (by the Discovery Institute) cadre of ID proponents is great at attending/hosting conferences, traveling and giving speeches (usually to general, not scientific, audiences), and writing apologetic books. Their own journal, *Origins & Design*, which I read regularly, should be brimming with research articles on "intelligent design." Instead, there are theological arguments and critiques, articles that address the design issue in general but do not detail any original research that supports intelligent design, book reviews, reports from conferences, and advertising for ID books, videos, tapes, and study kits.

Perhaps part of Behe's publishing dilemma is that neither he nor anyone else in the ID movement can come up with a definition of design that differentiates designs done by their proposed "designer" from products of natural selection (elsewhere, fellow ID proponent William Dembski admits this, saying, "In principle, an evolutionary process can exhibit such 'marks of intelligence' as much as any act of special creation" [Dembski, 1998]). At Lincoln, Behe relied upon a particularly egregious "folk-science" type definition of design: Using a *Far Side* cartoon showing a person swept into the air and impaled by a jungle trap, Behe said, "You look and realize that the trap was designed. Just look at how the parts interact." You just know design when you see it! In fact, humans are not always able to discern real design from apparent design, and tend to impose design when it is not there; hence the "face on Mars", and the sightings of the Virgin Mary on the side of a building or the face of Jesus in a tortilla.

Furthermore, if we assume that Behe is correct, and that humans can discern design, then I submit that they can also discern poor design (we sue companies for this all the time!). In *Darwin's Black Box*, Behe refers to design as the "purposeful arrangement of parts." What about when the "parts" aren't purposeful, by any standard engineering criteria? When confronted with the "All-Thumbs Designer" — whoever designed the spine, the birth canal, the prostate gland, the back of the throat, etc., Behe and the ID people retreat into theology. At Lincoln, Behe rebuffed one of his critics, Russell Doolittle, who pointed out (referring to biochemical systems) that "...no Creator would have designed such a circuitous and contrived system" (Doolittle 1998). Behe accused Doolittle of defending evolution on theological grounds, (also saying that God could do whatever God wanted) but in fact, Doolittle was asking nothing but that an "intelligent designer" design intelligently! This is a big problem for ID proponents, as they admit elsewhere: "Charles Darwin ... saw the existence of what he regarded as poor biological engineering (suboptimality) ... as prima facie evidence that God could have not directly created the world. This viewpoint continues to undergird much evolutionary reasoning in our own day,

and poses a difficult challenge to theories of intelligent design." (O & D, Winter 1999)

Behe has set himself (and the other intelligent design proponents) up as Davids-with-slingshots against the intractable Goliath of science. In the *PJS* article, Behe stated that "the scientific community resists such unorthodox ideas as intelligent design," and "I guess every profession has its codes, unwritten or written, and anybody who speaks out, especially in the field of biology, and especially in the field of intelligent design, risks some consequences to their [sic] career." In answer to a question at one of the lectures, Behe stated that though there really is "no place to go," scientists hold to Darwinian theory because they are confirmed atheists and materialists. Scientists are conservative and don't support new ideas, he continued, noting that the chemiosmotic hypothesis was not supported initially, and the person who came up with the idea committed suicide. (The chemiosmotic theory is now a biochemical paradigm; to go into it in detail would require an extensive knowledge base in chemistry and biochemistry). How arrogant of Behe to misrepresent this information so completely! Peter Mitchell proposed the chemiosmotic theory in the 1960s. It did meet with resistance at first, but was well-accepted by the 1970s. Behe (conveniently?) left out a few little teensy facts: Mitchell was awarded the 1978 Nobel Prize for this theory — a nice monetary vindication! And Mitchell died in 1992. I don't know whether he committed suicide, but his demise occurred 14 years after basking in the glow of a Nobel Prize. This subtle demonization of the orthodox scientific community is important to the ID proponents. Since they have no data to support their hypotheses, they must rely solely upon casting doubts on well-established theories like evolution, and one way to do so is to make science look like a closed union shop unable to respond to new ideas.

So what to make of Behe and ID in general? Rather than the "shockwave in the scientific community," as one of the introductory speakers at Lincoln described *Darwin's Black Box*, it is really kind of a yawn. Behe and others are attempting to bring back the "argument from design," which goes back at least to the mid 1800s and William Paley. This argument was repudiated in that century, and Behe offers nothing new. Behe is welcome to attempt to resuscitate this dead horse, but he had better do so by taking an honest and complete look at the literature before he eliminates natural selection as an agent of apparent design. He should stop using his Christianity as a crutch to prop up his dubious science, get back into the laboratory, and start producing some results that support his premises. New ideas in science are treated with skepticism — not only Peter Mitchell, but biologists Barbara McClintock, Mitoo Kimura, and Sewell Wright went through periods where their ideas were thoroughly scrutinized and criticized. Why have they prevailed and their ideas become cornerstones of biology? Because they were able to support their ideas with evidence.

Dr. Karen Bartelt is an organic chemist and an Associate Professor of Chemistry at Eureka College in Eureka, IL. She can be reached through the college, 300 E. College Avenue, Eureka, IL 61530, or at <bartelt@eureka.edu>

(Continued on page 7)

A Visit To The Conspiracy Museum

by David Bloomberg

A couple of months ago, while I was in Dallas on other business, members of the North Texas Skeptics told me about The Conspiracy Museum. Near the site of the JFK assassination, this museum looks at U.S. history a bit differently than most.

Most of the museum is dedicated to discussing “THE Conspiracy.” But also, of interest to us in Central Illinois, were several walls on the Lincoln assassination.

Regarding Lincoln, they did at least get one thing right — it was the first conspiracy that killed a president of the U.S. That, however, is not enough for the folks at The Conspiracy Museum.

Instead of just relying on the real conspiracy, other accusations are leveled as well. First and foremost is that John Wilkes Booth was not killed — it was somebody else. To this end, they have several affidavits from various people to the effect that Booth was not in the casket that supposedly carried him. One was from the last living pallbearer (who was rather old by this time), one from a guy in the army (again, many years later) and one from the son of somebody who was somehow related to the case. There is a full wall dedicated to Booth’s escape and eventual killing (though they say it wasn’t he who was killed). As his path is followed, mistakes in the chase are outlined and given as “evidence” that those in command wanted him to escape. After all, we know that the military never makes mistakes. Just ask the Chinese about their embassy.

But the museum can’t quite figure out who is to blame. They implicate Vice President Andrew Johnson as possibly being part of it; but they implicate several others as well. Johnson is accused because he and Booth apparently once dated sisters, and Booth supposedly called on him at a hotel the day of the assassination. They don’t explain, however, why one of the assassins of the (real) conspiracy was supposed to kill Johnson himself. Similar inconsistencies can be found throughout the Lincoln “exhibit.”

Those inconsistencies also hold through the rest of the museum. Here is where “THE Conspiracy” is explained. To quote from their pamphlet:

“For one hundred and sixty years, the Federal Government was a close reflection of the founding fathers’ vision. In 1940, America’s mobilization for World War II precipitated an unprecedented third...then a fourth presidential term. This affront to George Washington planted the seeds for the Military-Industrial Complex’s control of the Executive Branch.

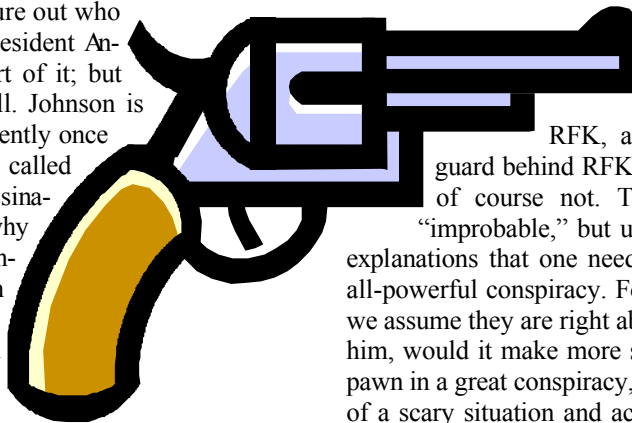
In 1960, the Central Intelligence Agency spawned by the cold war, changed the United States Foreign Policy from Peace to War by sabotaging its own spy operation in the downing of the U2 spy plane over Russia. Three years later, the CIE with the assistance of the Mafia and the FBI publicly murdered President John Fitzgerald Kennedy in Dealey Plaza, Dallas, Texas. This

coup d’etat of the executive branch established the Professional War Machine (PWM), which even today controls the Presidency by political assassination.”

Both the pamphlet and a large sign in the museum quote Sherlock Holmes: “Once you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, no matter how improbable, must be the truth.” Unfortunately, their definition of “impossible” and general understanding of this quote is severely lacking.

The sign goes down the list of what is “impossible,” claiming that it was impossible to inflict JFK’s throat wound except from the grassy knoll; it was impossible to inflict Martin Luther King’s fatal wound from the location of the accused assassin. It was impossible to inflict Robert Kennedy’s fatal wound from Sirhan Sirhan’s position; it was impossible for Ted Kennedy to have been driving the car in which Mary Jo Kopechne died; it was impossible for the USSR to shoot down Korean Air flight 007 over the Sea of Japan and find the first debris nine days later and 200 miles away from the crash site. In various places around the museum, they explain why all these things are “impossible,” though none of them actually ever approach that level of evidence.

Even if, for a moment, we assume that they are right — that any or all of these things were “impossible,” they have not provided one shred of evidence to support the grand conspiracy theory of the military-industrial complex. They seem to be using the creationist model here — if one is wrong, the other must be right. Creationists say that if they can disprove evolution, they must be



right; this is simply untrue. The same holds here. Even if, for example, one could prove that Sirhan Sirhan didn’t fire the shot that killed RFK, and that it came from the gun of a guard behind RFK, does that prove the conspiracy? No, of course not. Their grand conspiracy is not only “improbable,” but unproven. There could be many other explanations that one needs to investigate before assuming an all-powerful conspiracy. For example, in the RFK case, even if we assume they are right about the origin of the bullet that killed him, would it make more sense to assume that the guard was a pawn in a great conspiracy, or that he fired in haste in the middle of a scary situation and accidentally hit RFK instead of Sirhan Sirhan? The museum never addresses this issue.

But back to “THE Conspiracy.” According to the museum, the military-industrial complex went through all of this to keep war expenditures going — more money for them. So when JFK started thinking about peace, he had to be removed. When MLK encouraged peace, he had to be eliminated. When RFK followed the same path as his brother, it was his turn. For some unexplained reason, they apparently got tired of killing the people who opposed them, and decided to try something new with Ted Kennedy. So they kidnapped Kopechne, ambushed Kennedy on the road, put her in the car and dumped it into the water, drowning her as a warning to him (and to ruin his chances of ever running for president). Since he now knew how powerful they were,

(Continued on page 7)

REALLity Check

by David Bloomberg

Hoo-boy, still catching up from the overflow last month. But don't worry, I should have plenty of time to get caught up next month, when the Y2K problems and miracles don't happen. (Consider that my psychic prediction.)

Those Talkative Dead People

Among the things that I predict is that the dead will *not* rise from the grave. So we'll just have to find other ways to talk to them, I guess. *USA Weekend* had an article about a supposedly scientific examination of the possibility of dead people being able to talk to us (10/1). Alas, while the article portrays it as scientific, the protocols leave a bit to be desired.

Basically, you pick a message (like a short phrase) known only to you and store it, encrypted, in a computer. Then you die (I would guess most subjects aren't terribly fond of that part). Then, you send that message back to a living friend or relative, who relays it to scientists on this project, who check it against the one you stored in the computer while you were alive. If it hits, bingo!

Of course, there's one rather large problem here – you know the phrase while you're still alive. The folks running the project (a husband and wife team at the University of Arizona) have no way of knowing if you pass along this phrase to somebody *before* you die. What's interesting is that the article quotes *Skeptic* magazine publisher **Michael Shermer** as saying the project seems scientifically well-designed. I find that hard to believe. The article does end with another quote from him, saying, "We'd all like this to be true. But when we want something to be true so badly, that's when we have to be especially careful not to be fooled." Indeed – and the protocols, as described in this article, leave way too much room for getting fooled.

Upside Down & Backwards

In the *Chicago Tribune*, each Sunday brings a small "Alternative Watch" in the FamilyHealth section. Usually it's meaningless ("Eat healthy!"). But the one on October 3 was a bit odd.

It talked about a study on a new medicine, VEGF, that was supposed to stimulate the growth of new coronary blood vessels to the heart (kind of a do-it-yourself bypass). They gave 1/3 of the study a low dose, 1/3 a higher dose, 1/3 a saline shot (placebo). At the end of the study, they tested the group to see who could walk longer on a treadmill. The low-dose went 26 seconds longer, the higher-dose went 32 seconds longer, and the placebo went 43 seconds longer! While the conclusion was that there was no statistically significant difference, it does show how powerful an effect placebos can have.

What's really interesting is that the article claims that "some alternative health practitioners ... have long contended the 'placebo effect' is too often unexplored in research studies."

Huh? Since when do they claim that? It's those of us on the skeptical side who are pointing out that the placebo effect is often not looked at by the alternative practitioners. In fact, that's

the main reason for double-blind scientific studies – to account for the control group and the placebo effect. And that's what gets me the most about the author here claiming that it's alternative medicine proponents who say the placebo effect has been ignored – they're the ones who so often don't want to do the proper studies. Instead, they claim it worked for somebody, so it's good! Very odd conclusion by the author of this article, but at least it still showed that the placebo effect can be powerful and needs to be accounted for in all studies.

Evolution: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly

Science has had its ups and downs in the past couple months as different states have treated evolution in widely varying manners. First, the Kansas state board of education removed it from their science standards. Then Kentucky has followed suit, though perhaps for different reasons. And New Mexico struck back by emphasizing evolution. Meanwhile, Kansas is reconsidering their standards! Whoa. And that's not to mention Illinois (see "From the Chairman," this issue).

Ok, one step at a time.

Kentucky substituted the phrase "change over time" for "evolution" in their science standards. According to an article on *CNN.com* (10/6), they claimed they made the change because of "testing sensitivity" guidelines, which are there to avoid making kids take a position on controversial matters. Also, they claimed the word "evolution" is "a lightning rod that creates a diversion from what we're teaching, and we did not want to advocate a particular doctrine or a specific view." Of course – why advocate the position of science in a science class? How silly!

The director of the Kentucky Science Teachers Association said that a lot of teachers are upset and added, "Why don't we just stop calling the sunrise the sunrise?"

This change appears to have been slipped in rather slyly. "Evolution" was actually in the guidelines as presented to the state Board of Education, but was removed by officials of the education department. The change didn't require approval by the Board, but one member was quoted as saying the change should have been brought to their attention. Indeed, it should have – but apparently the folks who made the change learned nothing from the way people reacted when Kansas removed evolution. While this change is much less severe, it is a case of using unclear language when there is a perfectly suitable term – evolution. The fact that some people are upset by this term should not mean science should bend to their wishes.

New Mexico, on the other hand, seems to "get it." In that state, a Board of Education committee unanimously approved changed to the science standards that would actually strengthen the teaching of evolution! They removed language that implied the teaching creationism or "intelligent design" (the newer slick term to hide creationism) was supported. The change won't really affect much of what's being taught in New Mexico classrooms, but science teachers are happy with the clear standards – something that needs to be relayed to the folks in Kentucky and,

not incidentally, here in Illinois.

But then there's Kansas. On the plus side, the Board voted to have its Education Commissioner propose changes to the science standards they approved a couple months ago. But they didn't tell him how to do it.

The really amusing part, though, is that this has been spurred, at least in part, because three national science groups have refused to allow the Board to use their copyrighted materials in their standards because of the contempt the Board has shown for science. The National Research Council (an arm of the National Academy of Sciences), the National Science Teachers Association, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science all stood up and said Kansas' new standards fail to advance science education, and therefore they would not allow their materials to be used. Even so, the Board chairwoman has said the rewrite is unlikely to reverse its decision about removing evolution. She just wants the standards rewritten to avoid copyright problems.

Five of the ten members, including the chairwoman and three others who supported the standards, are up for re-election next year. Hopefully, the voters will pay attention to this race and vote these folks out of office. ♡

(Continued from page 4)

References

Behe, M., *Darwin's Black Box*, New York: The Free Press, 1996.

Catalano, J., *Publish or Perish — Some Published Works on Biochemical Evolution*, Available from <<http://www.talkorigins.org/faqs/behe/publish.html>>. Accessed January 20, 1999.

Dembski, W., *The Intelligent Design Movement*, Cosmic Pursuit 1998; Spring, <<http://www.origins.org/offices/dembski/docs/bd-idesign.html>>, Accessed July 29, 1999.

Doolittle, R., *A Delicate Balance*, Boston Review 1998. <<http://www-polisci.mit.edu/bostonreview/BR22.1/doolittle.html>>

Editors, Letter, *Origins and Design*, 1999; 19(2): 4. ♡

(Continued from page 5)

he has kept quiet ever since then about them. Why didn't they just kill him instead? That is, of course, never explained.

"THE Conspiracy" also engineered the shoot-down of Korean Air's Flight 007 to foster anti-communist feelings in America. According to them, it wasn't shot down by a Soviet fighter, but by American stealth planes, because America was becoming too peaceful.

The evidence for all of these claims consists of hand-drawn posters and unbacked claims, often cluttered with errors in facts, grammar, and spelling. For example, there are diagrams "proving" the wounds involved in several assassinations were impossible. There is a statement that a guy recording sounds on an open mike three miles away during JFK's assassination proved that the shooter was on the grassy knoll. No explanation of how such an accurate triangulation was made with one microphone; no citations; just a statement that patrons are expected to take on faith.

There is very little "new" information at the museum. They apparently update situations by posting Internet notes on a couple cork bulletin boards. One web article noted some recent "discovery" that the CIA wanted the mob to kill Castro. The museum folks apparently thought this somehow linked to the JFK assassination. Amusingly, the banner ad on the printout asked: "Is your monitor on the fritz?" I'd have to say the answer to that is "yes" for these folks. I was somewhat surprised that there weren't any new claims regarding the recent death of JFK Jr. Certainly he can be weaved in there somewhere.

The final poster in the museum notes that "THE Conspiracy" is less powerful now, but still in control as shown by Clinton accepting the Warren Report. In other words, he accepted it not because it contained the facts and the proper conclusion, but because he was afraid he would be next otherwise.

But shortly after my visit, one politician stood up and told the world that he believed the military-industrial complex had killed JFK. Jesse "The One-Term Governor" Ventura essentially echoed the views of The Conspiracy Museum in his much-publicized Playboy interview, though those remarks were largely overshadowed in the media by his statements about religion, women, and overweight people. Since he dared talk publicly about "the truth," perhaps he will be next on the list for "THE Conspiracy" to take out.

Then again, if there were such a conspiracy, why would they allow the existence of this museum? If this is all true, they've shown no hint of reluctance at murdering people whenever it suited their needs, so why didn't they simply take out the museum's proprietor? Or arrange a gas leak and explosion at the museum itself? It would all be so simple ... if it were actually true. ♡

Our Next Meeting

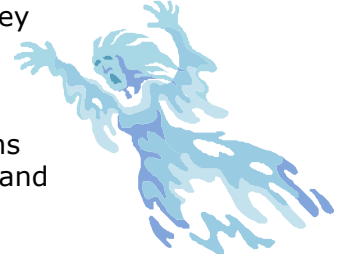
Paranormal Experiences Out of Virtually Nothing

By Rense Lange, Ph.D.

People are predisposed to do dumb things when they don't know what they're dealing with. More specifically, if a person thinks something odd will happen, it's more likely that they will find something odd to have happened! This type of "attentional bias" becomes apparent when looking at paranormal experiences like poltergeists, hauntings, and similar occurrences.

Rense Lange will discuss the role of attentional bias, address two mechanisms that have been found to be related to the occurrence of anomalous experiences and beliefs, and relate these to ghosts, delusions, meme theory, aspects of clinical psychology, and more.

Lange has a Ph.D. in psychology and a Masters degree in computer science. He has written numerous papers for refereed journals in areas ranging from psychology to artificial intelligence to catastrophe modeling to paranormal events.



www.reall.org

Springfield, Illinois
Lincoln Library (7th & Capitol)
Tuesday, December 7, 7:00 PM

Free and Open
to the Public

Rational Examination Association
of Lincoln Land (REALL)
P.O. Box 20302
Springfield IL 62708

