

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

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Quote Mining: The Tradition Continues, Part 2

ICR Representative Frank Sherwin Visits Eureka College

by Karen E. Bartelt, Ph.D.

The first part of this article discussed how Frank Sherwin, of the Institute for Creation Research, gave a presentation at Eureka College on April 5, 2001, and detailed a number of cases in which he took quotes out of context in an obviously deceptive manner.

Social Commentary; Conclusion of Lecture

Science? Religion? Frank Sherwin's summary made it obvious what he thought creation science was: "Creation science model is a worldview, because it's based upon the scriptures: the book of *Genesis* and the other 65 books of the Bible. (Those religions with more or fewer books in their Bibles need not apply, I guess—KB) We don't try to hide this. We are supernaturalists..."

He then pointed to a quotation attributed to an anthropologist named Tiger in the October 1995 *Scientific American* (I have not found this article yet): "Darwinian science inevitably will, and should, have legal, political, and moral consequences." This concerned him, he said, because evolutionists have said it was just a theory about the origin of species. This led into a discussion of the supposed consequences of evolutionary theory, and Sherwin summarized the conclusions made by the authors of a book entitled *A Natural History of Rape*. He wondered aloud about how an "evolutionist" would feel if his daughter were raped, and the rapist "holds it [that book] up to the judge...well?...". We were supposed to conclude that evolution promoted rape, I guess.

It occurred to me that a rapist could always use another book to justify rape if he were so inclined:

"And they called unto Lot, and said to unto him where are the men that came into thee this night? Bring them out unto us, that we may know them. And Lot went out the door unto them and shut the door after them and said, 'I pray you, brethren, do not so wickedly. Behold now, I have two daughters which have not known men; let me, I pray you, bring them out unto you, and do ye to them as is good in your eyes..." Genesis 19:5-8

or

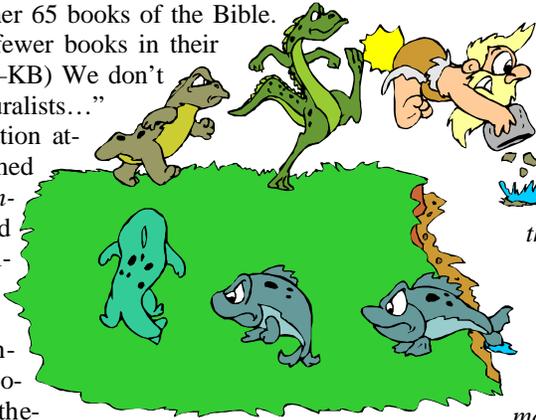
"Now therefore kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman that hath known a man by lying with him. But all the women children, that have not known man by lying with them, keep alive for yourselves." Numbers 31: 17-18

If the ICR chooses to blame evolution for social ills, they should stop leaving such a great paper trail of their own words that seem to justify things like racism. This from Henry Morris of the ICR (1991):

"The descendants of Ham were marked especially for secular service to mankind. Indeed they were to be "servants of servants," that is "servants extraordinary! ... These include all nations that are neither Semitic nor Japhetic. Thus, all of the earth's 'colored' races – yellow, red, brown, and black – essentially the Afro-Asian group of peoples, including American Indians – are Hamitic in origin..."

and

"The Japethites and Semites have, sooner or later, taken over their own territories, and their inventions, and then developed and utilized them for their own enlargement. Often the Hamites, especially the Negroes, have become the actual personal servants or even slaves to the others. Possessed with a genetic character concerned mainly with mundane matters, they have eventually been displaced by the intellectual and philosophical acumen of the Japethites and the religious zeal of the Semites."



Questions and Answers, Miscellany

After a short intermission, Sherwin returned to thumb through the 3 x 5 cards that people from the audience had written questions on. Some of the more salient comments follow.

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Purpose

The Rational Examination Association of Lincoln Land is a non-profit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) 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.

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From the Chairman

David Bloomberg

OK, first thing's first—I neglected to thank the McMasters last month for hosting our REALL picnic at the end of June! Thanks! It was a lot of fun to get together with people, eat some good food, drink some good drink, and converse some good conversation! We will definitely make this a regular event.

Moving on to August, we of course hosted the noted Italian skeptic, Massimo Polidoro. We had a decent turnout at the meeting, considering it was a summer weekend and the Fair was going on. I was hoping to see some more faces that I recognized, but on the plus side that means I saw a lot of new people instead. The talk was quite interesting, and I think everybody learned a bit more about him. I've been a Houdini fan since grade school—I can still remember doing a special book report on a biography about him where I dressed up as Houdini by using paper chains to bind myself and putting talcum powder in my hair to make it look gray—and even I learned some interesting items.

In return, several of us showed Massimo the town. On Friday we went to Robbie's for some jazz music, and then to Augie's to eat. While at Robbie's we introduced him to the mayor (I bet none of the other local groups could boast that they did that!). On Saturday we showed him some more of the local area and, of course, took him on a tour of the Lincoln Home. I offered to take him to the State Fair so he could have a corn dog and an elephant ear, but for some reason he just gave me a strange look. Finally, on Sunday it was time to see him off. When we got to the airport, we found that the flight before his had been cancelled because of a just-averted pilot strike! From here, off he went to Iowa.

(“Chairman” continued on page 4)

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✍ **In response to someone who asked just what was the scientific evidence for creation:** “Well, I went over that. Whether you want to accept it or not, of course, is up to you.”

✍ **In response to the statement that science is essentially atheistic:** “No it’s not. Science is a search for truth. That’s what I was taught...You had in the past creation scientists like Newton, Kepler, Boyle, Maxwell, and Faraday. Many others who had no problem doing science and who believed in the *Genesis* 1:1 account.”

✍ **Regarding a question about the large number of species and how many animals were on the Ark:** “Evolutionists are not sure what a species is...This individual doesn’t know how large Noah’s Ark was...Noah’s Ark was the size of a WWII escort aircraft carrier.”

The size of the ark is the least of the creationists’ problems. The ark/global flood model has serious problems related to thermodynamics, the geologic record, the consequences of such a flood, and the list goes on. Two comprehensive reviews of these problems can be found at http://home.austarnet.com.au/stear/henke_refutes_sarfati.htm and <http://www.talkorigins.org/faqs/faq-noahs-ark.html>.

✍ **In response to why the “Designer” makes mistakes:** “Well, that certainly fits in with the creation/corruption model. Certainly we are experiencing the Second Law of Thermodynamics on human beings. Even Theodizius Dobzhansky said ‘The human species is experiencing what is called genetic load, or genetic burden,’ implying a dragging down. Certainly not this upward formative process of evolutionary progression. As things move on and on, they get more genetic burdens.” Cain’s wife was his sister—no genetic burden.

Sherwin perpetuated the creationist urban legend about the second law of thermodynamics, and misrepresented evolution as an “upward formative process”—this “great chain of being” was popular 150 years ago.

✍ **Quoted Barbara Stahl's 1985 book:** “Paleontologists have virtually no clue as to the origin of ornithischian dinosaurs.”

The book is out-of-print. Sherwin resorted to a 16 year old source when there is an ever-growing body of data about dinosaur evolution.

✍ **Referred to the 1980 meeting of 120 evolutionary biologists and geologists in Chicago.** “For three days these evolutionary biologists and other scientists got together and studied ‘does micro lead to macro?’ That was written up in *Science* magazine by the editor of *Science* magazine. He said, ‘At the risk of doing damage to some people at the meeting, no.’”

The actual quotation, from Roger Lewin’s (1980) article, is “At the risk of doing violence to positions of some of the people at the meeting, the answer can be given as a clear ‘No.’” The next sentence conveys the context, and Sherwin omitted it: “What is not clear, however, is whether microevolution is totally decoupled from macroevolution; the two can more probably be seen as a continuum with notable overlap.” (Lewin 1980) Sherwin did not give a complete and honest review of this significant article. This conference dealt with the “Modern Synthesis” (slow change based upon the accumulation of small changes) versus Gould, Eldredge, and others’ punctuated equilibrium.

librium. Ho, hum. This is a great period piece, whereby some new information challenged the existing paradigm (i.e., typical advances in science), and new mechanisms of speciation were discussed. Despite the title—“Evolutionary Theory Under Fire”—one came away with the feeling of a theory undergoing revision—as do all good scientific theories—not one being consigned to the garbage dump. Perhaps John Maynard Smith summarized the proceedings as well as any, saying “I thought the meeting was very positive. This was the first time in 25 years that there has been serious discussion between paleontologists, geneticists, and the like. This can’t be anything but good.” (Lewin 1980)

Besides giving an unfair picture of what really happened at that scientific meeting, this is another 20-year-old source. For a great 21st Century discussion of punctuated equilibrium and Darwinian evolution as paradigms, see “The Paradox of the Paradigm” in Michael Shermer’s *The Borderlands of Science*. Shermer argues that “there exists an overarching Darwinian paradigm and a subsidiary punctuated equilibrium paradigm, both constituting paradigm shifts (with the former significantly broader in scope and the latter more narrowly focused), and that they presently peacefully coexist and share overlapping methods and models.”

✍ **On Archaeopteryx:** “Archaeopteryx at that time (1859) seemed to be a good transitional form between reptiles and birds. However, we have to keep in mind that even though Archaeopteryx had claws on its wings and a long bony tail and teeth in the bill, it still had wings and feathers and it flew. When Stephen Jay Gould was having a written debate with Duane Gish in one of the more popular science magazines, Dr. Gould could have mentioned Archaeopteryx as a transitional form, but he did not. This is back in the early 1980’s.”

Sherwin did not supply a citation for this alleged debate, and I could find no evidence that it ever occurred. Isaac Asimov did engage in a debate with Duane Gish in *Science Digest* in 1981. Neither Gish nor Asimov mentioned Archaeopteryx, though they did discuss transitional forms. However, Stephen Jay Gould did have a lot to say about Archaeopteryx in the early 1980s:

“Archaeopteryx is regarded as an intermediate form because it occurs, first of all, so early in the history of birds. But secondly, and more importantly, is a remarkable mixture of features of reptiles and birds. ...we find an organism that has some features that are very birdlike and some that are very reptilelike. That’s exactly what we would expect in an intermediate form, and that’s what we find in Archaeopteryx. Archaeopteryx has feathers, and those feathers are very much like the feathers of modern birds. Archaeopteryx also has a so-called furcula or wishbone, as in modern birds. However, in virtually all other features of its anatomy point by point, it has the skeletal structure of a reptile; in fact, very much like that of small running dinosaurs that presumably were their ancestors. For example, it seems to lack the expanded sternum or breastbone to which the flight muscles of birds are attached. It has a reptilian tail. And detail after detail of the anatomy proves its reptilian form. Most outstandingly, it possesses teeth, and no modern birds possessed teeth. Archaeopteryx and other early birds possess teeth,

Uri Geller Claims Credit for Helping Big Brother Contestant

By David Bloomberg

As if reality TV shows weren't strange enough, the British version of *Big Brother* recently got an added dose of weirdness. Self-proclaimed psychic Uri Geller has decided to use the popular show to once again draw media attention to his favorite topic: Himself. According to a report at the Web news site, Ananova, Geller claimed that he had kept houseguest Paul around, even though he'd been nominated for eviction four times. Wow! He must have been making a lot of phone calls!

Unlike in the U.S., the British version of the show did not change the rules to make it so fellow contestants vote each other off. They still nominate two contestants and then viewers vote. So Geller is claiming to have somehow changed the votes of millions of viewers. Quite a claim! What does he have to back it up?

In the Ananova article, not a whole lot. As usual, Geller did not appear to have told anybody he was going to do this *ahead of time*. It was only after Paul had stuck around so long that Geller took credit (he similarly took credit for temporarily stopping the Olympic cauldron's rise in Australia when part of the machinery jammed—again, he made the claim *after* it occurred). It sure would be a lot more impressive if he would tell people *before* he did these things. But then he faces the problem that it probably wouldn't happen.

So what has Geller done to help Paul? He says he's visited the *Big Brother* house twice to send Paul "good vibes." He's also sending him a telepathic "message to be charming and self-confident." Oh, well, that's helpful. How could anybody doubt his awesome powers? I wonder if anybody has checked the silverware drawer to see if it's full of bent spoons.

Amusingly, Paul was nominated in the very next week. In fact, he was nominated alongside the girl he'd been romantically involved with on the show. Not a very good position for somebody to be in—you'd think Geller could have used his powers to prevent it since he claimed to have helped so much earlier. After the nomination, Paul was ousted with 83% of the call-in votes—not even close. I guess his magic ran out.

If I were in the U.K., I would have had to vote against him just to see what kind of excuse Geller came up with. Alas, the news has been silent about Geller since then. I suspect Geller has been silent as well. After all, "psychics" are not known for trumpeting their failures. And the media is not known for discussing them much either.

Actually, allow me to correct myself. The media has been silent about Geller's failure in this particular case. Ananova did have another article on Geller a few weeks after Paul was voted out of the house, this time discussing how Geller was considering taking the case of a man who had been convicted of murdering a high-profile reporter (she hosted the British equivalent of *America's Most Wanted*). Even though the evidence in the case was rather overwhelming (there was a videotape of the murder, he confessed, stuff like that), Geller said when he first

heard about the crime, he'd thought it was a Serbian hit man, and so might try to find "the real killer." Well, maybe it'll keep him busy for a while.

Too bad Geller didn't concentrate his vast psychic abilities on the U.S. version of *Big Brother*. If anybody could use some psychic healing, it's this crew. Perhaps Geller could have foreseen the violent tendencies of one contestant (who held a knife to another player's throat, though he said he was just kidding around), or telepathically told another that his strategy of nominating the most popular player for eviction would backfire. Hey, if he can manage to keep people in Britain from voting off Paul, maybe he could actually get people in the U.S. to watch the show! Oh, wait. Those would have required making statements and predictions ahead of time, which doesn't seem to be in Geller's game plan. I almost forgot.

It's interesting to note that the Ananova article didn't contain any info on who Geller was actually predicting will win. You can bet that if Paul had managed to do so, Geller would have been right there to take credit. My psychic powers tell me so. ☹



(*"Chairman"* continued from page 2)

That leaves us wondering what to do to follow up on such an event. So I figured, what better time to have Skeptic Jeopardy?

September Meeting

We will finally return to our usual first-Tuesday-of-the-month meeting time and will get together at the Lincoln Library, 7:00, Sept. 4 (the day after Labor Day). There, you can test your ability to have some fun by participating in our annual Skeptic Jeopardy game. You don't want to miss this! It's more fun than a barrel of monkeys!

Also in September—FMS Seminar

On September 22, Parents Against Cruel Therapy (PACT) will be having a day of seminars about repressed memories and false memory syndrome (FMS) in Champaign. Speakers will include attorney Zachary Bravos, who won a \$10.6 million settlement for Patty Burgus against Dr. Bennett Braun; psychologist and professor Robert Sprague; Adriaan Mak, FMS activist from London, Ontario; Grace McAllister, editor of Australia's FMS Bulletin; Claudette Grieb, a parent from Canada whose daughter "recovered" false memories and then hanged herself and her own daughter (Grieb's granddaughter); and more.

The cost for the day (including dinner) is only \$20. It will be held at the Hawthorn Suites at 101 Trade Center Drive in Champaign. For more information or to register, contact David Hunter at d9it@aol.com or 217-359-2190. ☹

(“Quote Mining” continued from page 3)

and the teeth are of reptilian form.” (Gould 1982)

Sherwin’s conclusion about Archaeopteryx: “So we would say that Archaeopteryx is a very bizarre bird, but not on its way to becoming anything like a 100% bird. (What?!) We believe that Archaeopteryx as far as we can tell from the fossil evidence (and there’s been a number of fossils of Archaeopteryx that have since been found), Archaeopteryx was a bird.”

Accurate information on Archaeopteryx can be found at <http://www.talkorigins.org/faqs/archaeopteryx.html>.

In answer to the question, “What is the creation model?”: “Well, creation model is based on *Genesis* 1:1. We are a Christian organization. We do believe the Bible.”

In answer to, “How many quotes have you pulled out of context?”: “Well, let me count here, ha ha. These quotes, as far as we can tell, are not taken out of context. The authors have said it, and so I went ahead and used their quotes. The references are right there, so you can look it up for yourself.”

At least eleven quotations were out of context. I didn’t check them all. Some of the sources were so old or so superficial that I did not pursue them. The original intent of eleven authors (at least) was twisted and misrepresented.

There was no specific question about the hominid fossil record, but Sherwin ended the question and answer period with four “quotations from evolutionists” concerning the fossil record. He ended as he began, with out-of-context quotations. Here is one of them: “The evolutionary history of humans is complex and unresolved. It now looks set to be thrown into further confusion by the discovery of another species and genus, dated 3.5 million years ago.” (Lieberman 2001)

It helps to read more than the first sentence. Lieberman continued: “The confusion is in part a testament to the intense, successful fieldwork efforts that have almost doubled the hominin species over the past 15 years. We can now say with confidence that hominin evolution, like that of many other mammals, occurred through a series of complex radiations, in which many new species evolve and diversify rapidly. It seems that between 3.5 and 2 million years ago there were several human-like species, which were well-adapted to life in different environments.”

In response to this obviously canned question, “If a creator exists, what must I do?”: “We believe that that creator actually took on human form and lived and dwelt among us for 32 years. His name was Jesus Christ. And so if you want to dispute that, then what I would ask you to do is disprove the resurrection, ok? That’s the first step. Show the resurrection of Jesus Christ never occurred. It’s one of the most well-established facts in history...Then you’d have to do a pretty good job of disputing biblical prophecy and fulfillment. In other words, the Bible’s true, and God has left His supernatural signature on His Word. For example, when Jesus Christ was crucified, on that day, over 30 Biblical prophecies about Him specifically were fulfilled. Kind of difficult for writers centuries prior to Jesus Christ such as Isaiah and the psalmist David to write specific prophecies about an individual who didn’t show up for centuries afterwards.”

This is hardly germane to the title of the lecture! And it certainly is not beyond dispute in any event.

Conclusions

Despite the title—The Scientific Evidence for Creation—no evidence was presented beyond Frank Sherwin’s argument from personal incredulity: The flagellum (or DNA) looks designed and is real teensy; therefore there must be a creator. More importantly, Sherwin continued the established ICR tradition of lifting quotations from scientists and using them out-of-context. The gospel of Matthew said it best: “I tell you, on the day of judgment, you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter; for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” (Matthew 12:36-37, NRSV)

I suggest the following:

- ? Scientists should become aware that anything they say may be used to further the agenda of the ICR and other young earth organizations, and try to write accordingly.
- ? Persons with interest and expertise in the creation/evolution controversy should be relentless in attending, exposing, and challenging this nonsense, wherever and whenever it occurs.

Fallout, E-mails, Etc.

A few days after the lecture, I sent this to the campus:

*I have nearly completed reviewing the videotape from Institute for Creation Research speaker Frank Sherwin’s 4-5-01 visit to Eureka College. A complete summary of the out-of-context quotations used by Sherwin, a miscellany of his other misinformation about science, and some general comments about why we *don’t* teach creationism in the science classroom will be given on May 14 (Term Study Day) at 3pm in VB-25. Take a study break. Refreshments will be served.*

About 20 people came to the presentation, which formed the backbone of this article. Very few creationist students attended.

Responses to Sherwin’s and my presentation follow. Spelling and grammar are unedited:

Student A: “Being the open minded person i am, unlike yourslef [sic], i will be attending your fun filled lecture. I will be attending with an open mind. But i only have one question, Where did it all start from? That’s right, something had to start it all. Molecules did not just evolve out of thin air, not that there was even air. I have the feeling that you were scared at the creation speakers lecture because you were out passing letters about evolution during intermission. The thing is, i am not scared, i know that one day you will learn the truth, maybe that may happen before you die. I will not be passing out letters saying creation is the truth, eventhough [sic] it is the truth, as stated in the bible. So I will be attending your comment session enjoying your refreshments. I will see you on term study day.”

The “letter about evolution” was a one page flyer detailing some of the typical ICR misinformation about evolution. I sent a response to Student A, assuring him that I was not scared at Sherwin’s lecture, and I was looking forward to seeing him at mine. He never showed up.

Student B: “He pulled many quotes out of context and then flatly denied it, after I asked the question point blank on a note card (yes that was me). He used many different speaking

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REALLity Check

by David Bloomberg

I usually report on what turns out to be bad news here, so I'm just going to report good news this month. As it happens, both of these deal with "psychics."

Miss Cleo Gets Hit

I know this will *shock* and *dismay* everybody reading here, but Yahoo News reported (8/1) that Miss Cleo, the Jamaican woman who graces daytime and late-night TV commercials with her psychic hotline, is only *acting*. Yes, that's right. A former employee says she can prove that Miss Cleo doesn't even know how to read Tarot cards, and she was given a script of how to keep callers on past the three free minutes.

But that's not even close to the only bad news out of Miss Cleo's camp in the past few months.

The *Nashville Scene* reported (6/7) a story written by a man who answered a help wanted ad and ended up answering phones for Miss Cleo. When you call her hotline, you expect some sort of mysterious foreign Tarot reader. Instead, "You'd get me: White. Middle-class. Believer in the scientific method. Not intuitive. No connection to the soil. Only tenuously connected to my own subconscious, much less the collective one. No voodoo dolls on my mantel or dashikis in my closet."

He was never asked if he had any powers, or even if he *believed* in psychic powers. He got a packet of information explaining the generic meanings of Tarot cards and ending with a question that would get the victim—er, caller to keep talking while the money added up. He said the goal was a 19-minute call (which costs about \$80). Since the first three minutes are free, he was given a list of questions to ask so he could take up as much of that time as possible. None of this was terribly revealing to those of us who know about these "services," but the more it hits the news, the better.

Yahoo also reported (7/31) that almost 1,400 complaints have been filed against the company, which has changed names at least 19 times. The article discusses one case in which the woman called and never made it past the "free" three minutes, but was still charged \$88 on her phone bill, and then contacted repeatedly to try to get her to spend even more!

But *that's* not even the worst of it for Miss Cleo.

CNN.com reported (7/25) that "the Missouri attorney general has filed two lawsuits against [Miss Cleo's] psychic hotline for false advertising, fraud and other unlawful business practices, alleging the company bilked consumers out of money and caused them significant injury." According to the suit, she billed people who didn't call and even billed dead people (hey, it was just a matter of time—first the psychics charge to talk to dead people, now they're billing the dead people directly). The attorney general said: "Miss Cleo should have seen this coming," Nixon said. "It doesn't take a crystal ball to realize that ripping off consumers isn't without consequences."

The AP then reported (8/8) that the hotline had been ordered to pay a \$75,000 fine for violating Missouri's "no-call" law. I'm not sure if there are still other parts of the suit pending, though. I hope so, because \$75,000 is probably chicken feed to

these sorts of folks—it's just a cost of doing business. It seems to me that if they really are responsible for the fraudulent charges they've been accused of, they should be spending time in jail, not just writing out a check that they'll then make up in only a few days by scamming *more* people.

The Future Is Jail

In other psychic news, the Seattle Post-Intelligencer reported (6/16) on yet another "psychic" con artist who was busted and actually *will* go to jail. In this case, Sylvia Lee scammed a Chinese immigrant out of nearly \$220,000.

As usual in these cases, the scammer did a variety of strange things to get the victim to turn over her money. Among other things, Lee had the woman to buy jewelry from which something magical would be made and 12 gold coins, which were supposed to be used to build a wall that would keep out evil. She also had the woman turn over a large amount of cash, which she was going to pray over. But when the woman returned, the "psychic" was gone—along with the cash.

This sort of thing just keeps happening. On the one hand, I'm happy to see these folks getting serious jail time for it. But I'd be happier to see fewer victims. It also seems to me that if you're a lone operator and scam people using psychic claims, you get jail time. If you run a big company that scams people using psychic claims, you just have to write a check...

Graphology Bad, Psychic Good

Long-time readers will recall that back in October 1997, I reviewed a chapter of Scott Adams' book, *The Dilbert Future*. In that chapter, Adams dropped his humor and spoke to the reader seriously about what he thought the future held. Among other things, he shared his beliefs in psychic powers and that affirmations actually change reality – things like that.

When that review hit the Web, Mr. Adams saw it and was rather, um, upset. He sent me a response to be printed in the newsletter. (Both the original article and the response are, of course, available at www.reall.org.) Unfortunately, his logic skills were not exactly set on "high" when he wrote that, and I pointed out the flaws in a response of my own.

Anyway, why am I recounting this now? Because the August 15 and 16 Dilbert cartoons features Dogbert advising the Pointy-Haired Boss to use handwriting analysis (graphology) to detect dishonest employees. When asked if this kind of thing has been tested in double-blind scientific studies, Dogbert says that it has been tested, but the scientists who did the tests lied about the results. He could tell they lied by using graphology!

So what's the deal? Again, longtime readers of this newsletter may recall that only two months before we published my review of Adams' book, we published an article analyzing graphology. To make a long story short, it's pretty much the same thing as a psychic reading—vague statements and cold reading where you remember the hits and forget the misses.

But here we have Scott Adams being skeptical of graphology
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blunders that anyone who has had a speech course knows how to look for... I only regret that the audience didn't know enough about the topic to know how false his ideas were.”

Student C: “I am writing to you in response to your campus-wide e-mail about the ICR speaker. I understand that you do not agree with his findings and that you do not believe in the same origins of the universe that he, and I, believe in. I understand that, but what I do not understand is why you feel the need to dispute each and every one of his findings. You state that the jet engine/flagella is a false analogy. It is that in grammar [sic] only. The way he stated it is not exactly correct, but can you not see the correlation? He was stating that the odds are near impossible that a unit so small, is so comparable to a modern-day machine.

Furthermore, I am no english [sic] scholar, in fact I struggle daily in my classes, but what constitutes [sic] an ‘out of context quote’?

While I feel that perhaps not everything in Dr. Sherwin's [sic] presentation was accurate, nor was it 100% plausible [sic] I don't feel that it was appropriate that someone of your status, and your influence should mail the entire campus and criticize him. In all honesty I was really quite offended, and more than a little hurt that instead of simply mailing Campus Crusades and letting them know of your grievances.”

I replied to Student C that, as a senior faculty member in science, it was absolutely appropriate that I respond to pseudo-scientific attacks such as Sherwin's. Student C didn't come to my presentation, either.

Student D: “I was not impressed with the lecture [Sherwin's] and felt that the information used as ‘evidence’ for creationism was very weak.”

Student E: “May I ask you a question? Why do you bother? Does that annoy you that people believe in creationism? I truly [sic] do not understand the whole evolution theory [sic] at all. All I know is that we are supposed to be evolved [sic] from monkey [sic] or bacteria. So that must be why they put the warning labels on anti-bacterial soap. The whole monkey thing also. [sic] Correct me if I am wrong but we are supposed to be derived from monkeys? Some of us may look like monkeys, but I find that hard to believe that we come from monkeys. That explains why King Kong looks so familiar. I will be attending your lecture on Monday. I am looking forward [sic] to hearing your presentation. No monkey business!! ” [sic]

Student E showed up, to his credit, and helped himself to the refreshments (bananas).

Student F: “I will openly acknowledge that I am not very well learned in the whole debate on Creation verse [sic] Evolution. At this point in my life, Creation makes more sense. In the future, I intend to do a sufficient amount of research on the topic, however its [sic] just not feasible at this juncture [sic] in my life.”

Student F was one of the organizers of the lecture.

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(“REALLity Check” continued from page 6)

ogy with no indication he's changed his position on psychics!

In fact, Adams has in the past, made fun of other topics that we are skeptical of. He has hit on alien abductions and recovered memories, for example. But he has also used his column to attack skeptics after many shared their displeasure at that same chapter I mentioned. For his part, Adams has previously said he considers himself a “skeptic,” but like so many others who misuse the term, he doesn't really seem to know what it means.

For one thing, it's hard to understand how somebody who is knowledgeable about these things can be skeptical of graphology but believe in psychic powers just because he was apparently fooled by one once.

I said I would only report the good news, so let me point out that the fact that Adams poked some fun at graphology in one of the most popular comic strips in the country is a good thing. I wish he'd realize how silly it is to disbelieve one while believing the other; they operate on the same principles. 📧

Our Next Meeting

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Join us for a change of pace as we enjoy some good food while testing our knowledge of skeptic facts and trivia. We'll split up into teams, hands on buzzers, and show what we know! And if you feel you don't know enough, here's a fun way to learn more!



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