

# 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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## The Doom of Debunkeritis by Martin Kottmeyer

While doing some searching on the Web, an old item popped up that caught my fancy. It was a small piece that appeared a decade ago called "The Varieties of Debunkeritis." It presents a symptom list of pathological skepticism. It was surprisingly short. There are a mere eight items. Compared to that infamous list of 52 symptoms of alien abduction that turned up frequently in UFO circles, this is a model of conciseness.

Oddly, each 'symptom' seems to be regarded as a disease unto itself and each specifically ends with the word disease, e.g. bully's disease, snooper's disease, crackpot's disease, party-line disease. I may be no expert on medical nosology, but neither the medical handbooks or psych manuals in my library show much use of the word disease in labels for symptoms or disorders. Doctors don't speak of tooth disease, or skin disease, eating diseases, borderline personality disease, passive-aggressive disease. Right off, the adolescent nature of the exercise grates on the ear.

I'll confess that the basic notion of debunking being a pathological condition is a notion I feel I could accept on some level. Skepticism is not a 'natural' state of mind, is it? Belief, the faith that things will make sense eventually if we just listen and play along, is the default position of the growing mind. Things we think absurd the first few go rounds usually make sense after we get enough information. The empirical-critical style took a long time to develop and requires a large amount of training and a culture of backgrounding knowledge. <sup>1</sup> Disbelief is a tricky skill and if you display it too much or ham-handedly it will raise eyebrows as surely as a Letterman-level stupid human trick.

It is often aggressive in its questioning. Assumptions are always under scrutiny. One of its values is "the critical ethos that does not shrink from nastiness." <sup>2</sup> Successful scientists are often indifferent to social relationships, group activities, and politics. They are often arrogant and hostile, precise, and internally pre-occupied. <sup>3</sup> Once you start down the path of skepticism, where **do** you eventually end up? Though we may like to rationalize our disbelief as a matter of education or refined

noses, there are dark moments when one can see how we might be the sick, sick bastards that believers say we are. And, on a personal note, "Probing Exosemination" (*The REALL News*, March 2002, Vol. 10, #3) could not help but raise self-doubts about my own mental hygiene.

Though that much can be conceded, this particular symptom list does not ring true if they are meant to be generalities. The items look based on one or two examples per symptom

with no realization that most debunkers don't fit. "Bully's disease" purports to describe a tendency among debunkers to threaten people with legal suits. Yes, there's been an example or two of this among debunkers, but haven't there been more examples of this among ufologists over the years?

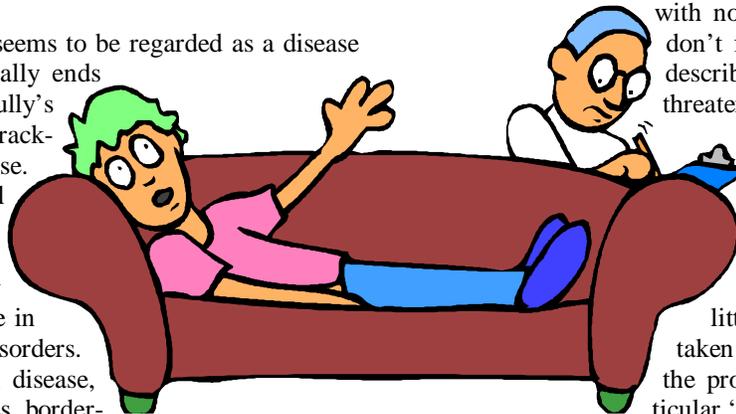
It seemed slapped together with little or no insight into debunkers taken as a whole. To fully appreciate the problem, let's focus in on one particular 'symptom,' quoted here in full:

Apocalyptic's disease: The strange view that popular interest in anomalies and the paranormal threatens not only science, which most would regard as a hugely powerful entity in any modern society which depends on sophisticated technology for its economic survival, but also the continued existence of civilization and democracy. Further symptom: the belief that those who hold unconventional views comprise such a clear and present danger that hundreds of thousands of dollars must be raised as rapidly as possible to construct a Taj Mahal of debunkeritis near Buffalo, New York. <sup>4</sup>

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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.

The REALL News is its official newsletter.

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## From the Chairman David Bloomberg

I'm beginning to think this picnic is just not in the stars. OK, not quite, but we are once again pushing it back. August is simply too busy to find a good weekend, so it looks like we'll move it back to the end of September or early October. Hopefully, we will also have a better chance of nice (not 95+ degrees) weather. Stay tuned and we'll let you know.

So, then I said, "OK, so we'll have our regular August meeting on the first Tuesday of the month." Bob Ladendorf had attended the CSICOP world skeptic's conference in California, and he brought back a tape of the Intelligent Design session. I thought this would be great as a sort of primer before the September meeting (see below). Then he called to say that the sound was terrible and there was no way we could watch it. Then something came up and I can't even make the August meeting! I'm beginning to understand why many organizations kind of take the summer off.

So, there will be no August meeting.

## September

But we do still have something planned for September! As mentioned last month, Professor Karen Bartelt will be coming to talk to us about the Intelligent Design movement, some history, some deceptions, and the like. This should be Tuesday, September 3 (back to our usual first-Tuesday schedule), so plan for it now! A few months back we had a meeting in which we discussed how we could fight against the local creationists, and this meeting is one of those ways. In fact, I expect a number of them to show up to argue with professor Bartelt, so be sure to come and show your support. We don't want the creationists outnumbering us at our own meeting! (I should note that we

*("From the Chairman" continued on page 3)*

## A Nod to Our Patrons

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(“Debunkeritis” continued from page 1)

The author had to have derived the basic notion from a piece written by David Jacobs called “The Debunkers” that appeared in the *Proceedings of the First International UFO Congress*,<sup>5</sup> Jacobs was certainly the first person to ever suggest that debunkers were apocalyptic. The notion is too idiosyncratic to think that Clark derived the idea independently and there are no doubts he knew of it for he was at this Congress, presenting papers himself. I have already argued at length that Jacobs was wildly mistaken in this claim—see “Debunkers of Doom” *The Anomalist* # 8, Spring 2000, pp. 162-75. Those disbelievers on record about the future tend to be optimists and believers in progress. Some even expect us to be around quite a long while, even beyond the time our sun turns into a red giant.

Clark’s version of this notion is differently worded than Jacobs and one can recognize it echoes a paragraph in a different work. Specifically this:

“No empirical evidence thus far has been offered to substantiate CSICOP’s often stated contention that science—an enormously powerful entity in any well-developed, sophisticated technological civilization—is threatened by unorthodox beliefs. Although CSICOP was formed ostensibly to defend science against what it described as a growing hostility to it, a Harris poll released in January 1978 concluded that scientists are viewed as being engaged in the most prestigious field with 66% percent of the public saying that they have very great prestige and an additional 25% regarding them as having considerable prestige. Nor is there any evidence that proponents of anomalies, the paranormal or The New Age are representative of antisience trends in society. In fact, most such individuals seek to have their efforts validated as scientific...”<sup>6</sup>

Some of this looks a bit disingenuous. Let’s compare Clark’s version of things to what appears in the advance announcement to the April 30, 1976 symposium that launched CSICOP:

Many individuals now believe that there is considerable need to organize some strategy of refutation. Perhaps we ought not to assume that the scientific enterprise will continue indefinitely; for all we know, like the Hellenic civilization, it may be overwhelmed by irrationalism, subjectivism, and obscurantism. Perhaps antiscientific and pseudoscientific irrationalism is only a passing fashion; yet one of the best ways to deal with it is for the scientific and educational community to respond in a responsible manner—to its alarming growth.<sup>7</sup>

The first thing to note is that the concern is expressed neither dogmatically nor histrionically. Clark’s characterization omits the perhaps and the fact that the announcement immediately balances the line with an admission that the paranormalism of the 70s may be “only a passing fad.” The challenge to provide empirical validation of a threat seems a bit blind, for the hypothetical potential is explicitly founded on the example of Hellenic Greece. The poll seems largely irrelevant for, beyond the obvious fact that one can’t define a trendline with a single point, the growth of anti-science among academics and elites is probably what the author had in mind and that is hardly a matter in dispute.<sup>8</sup> (In fairness, there may be *some* dispute. Brian Siano, who also accuses some skeptics of being apocalyptic, offers a critique of the overblown rhetoric surrounding political correctness which challenges the size of the beast, but he specifically sidesteps the obscurantist anti-science of the postmodernism fad as outside his range of attack.<sup>9</sup> Though I agree some anti-PC rhetoric is correctly termed apocalyptic, notably the example he gives by Rush Limbaugh, his examples from the skeptical community only involve metaphors of embattlement.)

The announcement, moreover, is an inevitable simplification of a paper by Paul Kurtz that is appropriately nuanced and more expansive on the nature of the concerns he wanted CSICOP to deal with. In his paper for the inaugural symposium, Kurtz muted the concern over the challenge to civilization even further. While noting that cults of unreason and irrationalism inundates advanced societies in the present, he takes the long

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(“From the Chairman” continued from page 2)

will structure the talk so the creationists cannot interrupt Professor Bartelt the way they did Professor Malcolm Levin last year when he gave his talks. We’re not going to let them get away with that twice.)

## New Board Member

Back at our last Board election, Mike Henebry was added to our Board. Usually we try to put in a short bio for new Board members right away, but we have been a little bit slow this time. Without further delay, however, allow me to introduce Mike Henebry:

Mike Henebry has worked at the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) for the past 14 years. Before joining

the IEPA, he was an environmental scientist at the Illinois Natural History Survey, and was an assistant professor of biology at several small, liberal arts colleges in Kansas and Iowa. He has a bachelor’s degree in biology from Millikin University in Decatur, IL (his hometown), a master’s degree in zoology from Eastern Illinois University, and doctorate in environmental toxicology from Virginia Tech. Mike became a member of REALL about two years ago because of his concern about the pseudoscience that often appears in the media.

Welcome aboard, Mike!

In closing for this month, I hope everybody is having an enjoyable summer, and we’ll see you at the September meeting and then the picnic, whenever we get it rescheduled! ♣

(“Debunkeritis” continued from page 3)

view that this is relatively constant through time. “What is apparent is the tenacious endurance of irrational beliefs throughout history down to the present day—and in spite of the scientific revolution.” He is bothered by the attitudes of the counter-culture that regards science as dehumanizing. “This attitude is paradoxical, for it seems to occur most virulently in affluent societies, which have made the greatest strides in scientific research and technology. What was once considered to have the highest promise for humankind is now regarded by many as its greatest threat.” But science has its defenders and is not being overwhelmed. He wonders, “Is the level of irrationality greater or less than in previous times, or has the level of nonsense remained fairly constant in human culture and only assumed different forms?” He opts for a view that gullibility and attraction to mystery is rooted in human nature and even education in science can’t eradicate it since one cannot acquire specialist mastery in all domains. He wants to cultivate scientific attitudes and stimulate reflective criticism.

He doubts there are easy solutions and is resigned to the fact that irrational thinking can not be overcome. He recognizes, “There is always the danger that science itself may be engulfed by those forces of unreason.” But this concession carries no more apocalyptic sensibility than admitting the earth could, in principle, be hit by an asteroid or angry postal workers could theoretically organize into an army and storm the White House. He isn’t saying it will happen, only that it’s not impossible.

On a positive note, he speculates that “progress in overcoming irrationality” will recognize humanity’s fascination with mystery and drama. He makes his dominant expectation for the future in these remarks:

The breakthroughs in science are astounding, and they will continue as we probe further into the microworld of matter and life, and into the universe at large. The space age is the beginning of a new epoch for humankind, as we leave our solar system and explore the universe for extraterrestrial life. Perhaps there will be no more exciting excursion that we will take. We need to disseminate an appreciation for the adventure of the scientific enterprise.

And further along he adds,

“We need to celebrate life and its potential goods, to find joy and happiness as part of it, and to satisfy the quest for meaning.”<sup>10</sup>

Clark does not bother with the fact that Kurtz explicitly denied that Western civilization is being overwhelmed in his paper. It is hard to see how all this could be considered consistent with an apocalyptic outlook. To fully appreciate how deeply weird the charge of “apocalypticist’s disease” looks, however, we have to pull the camera back and let into the frame

some book titles by Paul Kurtz, CSICOP’s chairman:

- *Exuberance: An Affirmative Philosophy of Life* (Prometheus, 1977).
- *The Courage to Become: The Virtues of Humanism* (Praeger/Greenwood, 1997)
- *The Fullness of Life* (Horizon Books and Prometheus, 1974).
- *Building a World Community* (Prometheus, 1988).

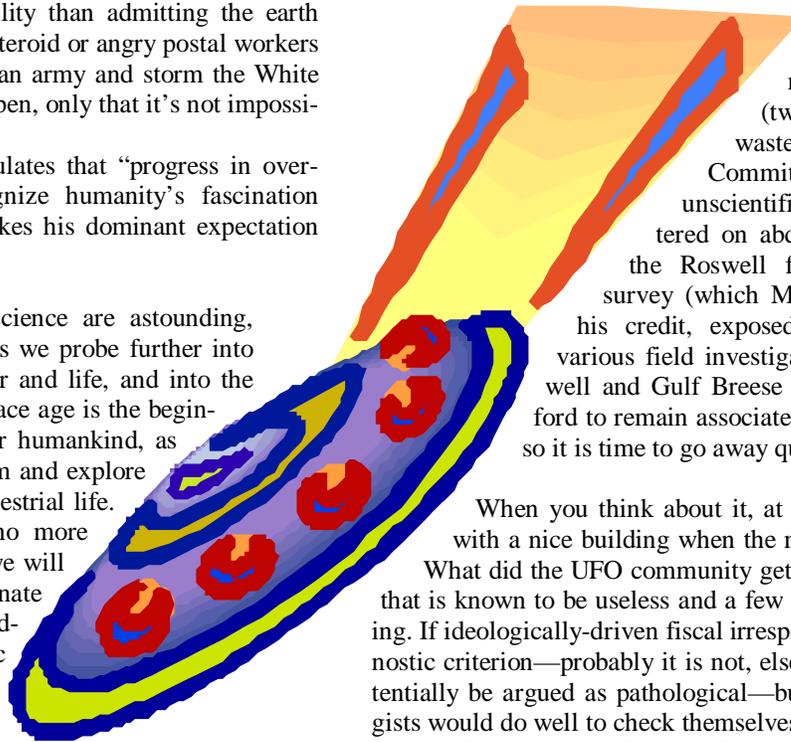
Ask yourself, do these seem the types of titles you’d expect of someone you would label as either apocalyptic or diseased?

The matter of the Taj Mahal of debunkeritis built near Buffalo that costs hundreds of thousands of dollars is presumably a pithy comment in Clark’s mind, but the UFO community of which Clark is a member was not exactly engaging in sage thriftiness at the time either. The year following Clark’s comment, Jacques Vallee exited the field leaving this explanation:

My decision to withdraw from the (UFO) field is consistent with the observation that serious, constructive scientific work is impossible in present conditions. Over the last four years ufology has squandered close to one million dollars (twice the amount wasted by the Condon Committee) in absurd, unscientific procedures centered on abduction ‘research,’ the Roswell fiasco, the Roper survey (which Mark Rodeghier, to his credit, exposed as flawed) and various field investigations of the Roswell and Gulf Breese type. I cannot afford to remain associated with any of this, so it is time to go away quietly.<sup>11</sup>

When you think about it, at least CSICOP ended up with a nice building when the money was finally spent. What did the UFO community get for their money? A poll that is known to be useless and a few reports that settled nothing. If ideologically-driven fiscal irresponsibility is a valid diagnostic criterion—probably it is not, else all gambling could potentially be argued as pathological—but if it were, then ufologists would do well to check themselves into rehab.

In “Debunkers of Doom,” I had the opportunity to point out that the individual who called debunkers apocalyptic confessed he himself had fallen into an apocalyptic mindset in recent years. Curiously, the author of our debunkeritis symptom list presents us with much the same irony. Back in 1969, Jacques Vallee heard a rumor that Clark had become so convinced that an extraterrestrial invasion was imminent that he had been driven close to a breakdown.<sup>12</sup> A few years later, 1975, he is co-author of a book that alleges the UFO myth is saying man is on the brink of catastrophe because our age has denied him belief in the magical and wonderful. “If this balance is not soon restored, the UFO myth tells us, nature will have its



way. The collective unconscious, too long repressed, will burst free, overwhelm the world, and usher in an era of madness, superstition and terror—with all their sociopolitical accouterments: war, anarchy, fascism.”<sup>13</sup> This sounds so close to the position he hangs on Paul Kurtz over a decade later you could almost wonder if he has mistaken Kurtz for himself. Not even a full year separates their statements.

Indeed, a few pages later, *The Unidentified* speaks of technology and the civilization it sustains as plunging deeper into the abyss and adds, “...the prospect of the imminent collapse of all our familiar institutions looms ever greater.”<sup>14</sup> The talk of technology and the continued existence of civilization in the debunkeritis piece echoes these lines more closely than anything one can find in Kurtz. More, *The Unidentified*'s lines have the same unqualified histrionic quality. Kurtz, by contrast, shows in his essay an attempt at balancing alternatives. He also demonstrates there a tolerance and understanding of those he disagrees with that is quite unlike the attitude that Clark typically shows and which is on display in the debunkeritis piece.

Of lesser note, in 1990, Clark penned an item called “The Last Decade” that had a more muted apocalyptic tone. Looking at Gulf Breeze and Roswell he reports the ‘UFO controversy’ might end before the end of the decade because the scientific community would no longer be able to ignore or deny the existence of extraordinary aerial machines in the face of the mounting evidence. Soon ufologists would be trampled to death in the stampede of scientists rushing to study what they will finally realize was “the single most important scientific question of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.”<sup>15</sup> Needless to say, you can still readily find untrampled ufologists jawing away on websites like “UFO Updates.” Increasingly, that evidence of recent years melts away and ufologists retreat to praising and defending the grand UFO classics of the Blue Book years. Such increasingly remote and inconsequential events are not going to convince pragmatic scientists that ufo phenomena are worth caring about. There are far more important things to study—curing diseases, improving computers, endangered species, better energy production and utilization, the ultimate basis of matter and energy, the nature of mind, and much more.

One is reminded of the psychological axiom that invective is often self-diagnosis. Clark seems to attribute apocalyptic views to debunkers because it is a projection of his own manner of thought. He at least is not alone in this. Apocalyptic expectations are a habit of thought ubiquitous throughout the UFO community as I have shown several times in the course of demonstrating the psychological dimensions of UFO belief. Many of the more important ufologists have presented world destruction fantasies in their writings<sup>16</sup> and the number of UFO experiencers with such expectations on the record is well above one hundred<sup>17</sup> If apocalyptic thought is to be considered a disease by Clark's precedent, then UFO history is a plague pit of dead prophecies ready for kerosene and torch. We had better remember apocalyptic fears are an idea whose time is always coming and going. Academics have written dozens of books on this common error.<sup>18</sup>

Presumably more fun could be had showing how the other symptoms of debunkeritis are more reflective of the psychology of Clark and his buds than his chosen bête noirs. I choose to move on. There is a work yet to be written on the pathology of

debunkers. Probably it will build on studies like Bob Altemeyer & Bruce Hunsberger's work on atheists<sup>19</sup>, Adrienne Miller & Andrew Goldblatt's developmental approach to hypercritical intellectuals<sup>20</sup>, or various studies of the unsaintliness of scientists. It will not surprise me when “The Varieties of Debunkeritis” does not make it into the references.

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14. *Ibid.*, p. 248.
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17. “Apocalyptic Thought Connected with Ufos and ETs ” entry in Ronald Story, ed. *The Encyclopedia of Extraterrestrial Encounters: A Definitive Illustrated A-Z Guide to All Things Alien* New American Library, 2001, pp. 77-83 ; also

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## Don't Get Duped

### Guide Cuts Through False Medical Claims

by David Bloomberg

As REALL members certainly know, you can page through almost any magazine, go surfing on the web, or clicking through cable, and you will find plenty of people trying to sell you all sorts of medical “miracles.” Get thinner without any effort; build up your abs; prevent aging; down vitamin pills by the dozens to counter every known disease; all of these and more pervade our lives.

But Larry M. Forness, founder of the National Center for Sports Medicine—among many other titles and honors—says this is all so much baloney. He was tired of seeing so many people suckered, and so has written *Don't Get Duped!: A Consumer's Guide to Health and Fitness* (Prometheus Books, \$21).

Forness aims for nothing less than complete consumer education in these pages. He explains that the contents of this book could save readers money, frustration, and even their lives. He says, “this book will give you fact, not fluff, so you can stop wasting your hard-earned money on false claims. I will also show you what you need to know to truly be ‘an informed consumer’—someone who doesn't get duped.”

In other words, he doesn't just pick a few examples of the false claims he mentions, but he goes into great detail about how the reader can spot similar flaws in any claims encountered in the future. He even includes copies of some of the most outrageous ads he's encountered, either from his own mail or the Internet, and he dissects these to point out all of the fallacies, misstatements, and outright lies.

Perhaps the biggest problem, according to Forness, is that people get duped because they are told what they want to hear. Since they want to hear it, they believe it more easily. This certainly follows the path we, as skeptics, have seen so many times before—whether in alternative medicine or psychics or many other pseudoscientific claims. After all, who doesn't want to lose weight without any effort or prevent illness with a miracle drug? But Forness wants consumers to be more critical, and to do so he lists his “fundamentals of fakery.” He begins with the principle of unconscious implication—whereby the advertiser doesn't make an outright phony claim, but implies it and the consumer assumes the rest. Then there is the principle of scientific technobabble, which probably needs no further explanation. And so on.

In discussing his principle of “screaming superlatives,” Forness provides a list of words that should be given no credence whatsoever when they appear in medical ads. Among these are words every reader has seen in such advertisements: **AMAZING!**, **Incredible!**, **REVOLUTIONARY!**, **Unbelievable!**, **MIRACULOUS!**, and many more.

Other terms that sound important also have no meaning, such as my particular favorite, “all natural.” Forness says, “There is no scientific or medical definition of that phrase. But it's been created by the industry, touted long and loud, and we have accepted it without knowing it is meaningless.” The impli-

cation is that it must be better, but the truth is that it means nothing of the sort. I am particularly fond of pointing out that bird droppings are “all natural.” Should we create a supplement based on them?

Another point he hits on is one that you've seen in these pages before: Herbal supplements “do not have to be scientifically proven to be effective at anything.” Because of political pressure, they are exempt from the standards that regulate drugs, and this makes them both potentially dangerous *and* potentially a complete waste of money. Indeed, he lists a number of such “all-natural supplements” that have killed people.

In trying to educate the consumer, Forness not only tells the reader what to be wary of, but provides a basic background about the human body and what its needs are. He lists vitamins and how they are helpful, as well as what too much of a given one will do—side effects you will almost never hear from those trying to sell megadoses of the stuff.

He also provides words that nobody really wants to hear, but that everybody should listen to—that there is only one guaranteed way to lose weight: “take in fewer calories than your body expends every day.” This means either reducing your caloric intake, increasing exercise, or a combination thereof. “There is no ‘quick fix’ from any pill, potion, powder, or program. None.”

So why do companies keep bombarding us with their miracle drugs? He quotes an industry insider as saying, “The manufacturers and ad makers are not in business to educate you. They are in business to make money.” In other words, they do better if consumers simply believe them and buy what they're selling rather than questioning it.

But Forness isn't working for them—he is working for the consumer. His goal is to provide readers with the tools to make their own choices in the healthiest ways possible. And *Don't Get Duped!* contains a wealth of easy-to-understand information that will certainly help in those decisions.

*[A shorter version of this article originally appeared in the State Journal-Register. It is reprinted with the author's permission.]* ♡

*(“Debunkeritis” continued from page 5)*

- “M.K.'s Ultra-Brick of the Apocalypse” an unpublished research file.
- 18. Richard Landes, “Millennialism,” February 1, 1999 draft article for the *Merriam-Webster Encyclopedia of World Religions*, on the Web. There is surely a book to be written on the nature of apocalypse in ufology and few are in a better position than Clark to write it.
- 19. Bob Altemeyer & Bruce Hunsberger, *Amazing Conversions: Why Some Turn to Faith & Others Abandon Religion*, Prometheus, 1997.
- 20. Adrienne Miller & Andrew Goldblatt, *The Hamlet Syndrome: Overthinkers Who Underachieve* William Morrow, 1989, chapter 25. ♡

## REALLity Check

by David Bloomberg

Usually in this column, we look at news items from different media sources. This time, though, we're just going to look at one. This will be the *U.S. News & World Report* special edition, covering three articles from the magazine that have appeared in the last two weeks (as of this writing). Two are on evolution/creation, which was the cover story of the July 29 edition, and one is on alternative medicine, which was a part of their special hospital ranking edition on July 22.

### Alternatives

We begin with the story on alternative medicine, which itself begins at Lutheran General Hospital in Park Ridge, Illinois—a few blocks away from where I went to high school. Apparently Lutheran General now has a “Center for Complementary Medicine,” where they practice acupuncture and other unproven “alternatives” to medicine. The article notes that hospitals don't add in these practices only because the patients want it—though that is one concern—but also because the practices are not covered by most insurance or government programs, so patients pay out of pocket, meaning more money for the hospitals.

But the article goes on to note that while these centers are associated with hospitals, they are not an integral part. This is in large part because many doctors do think alternative medicine practices can make the patients feel better, “there is widespread skepticism that these treatments have lasting medical benefits.” It continues, “Most alternative therapies have not been studied rigorously, and the conditions they often treat—pain and nausea, for example—are ones where the placebo effect, or power of suggestion, can be potent.” Indeed. The only thing I disagree with there is the statement about many of these “therapies” not having been tested. Indeed, a number of them have been tested rigorously—and they have failed.

The positive news is that “mainstream physicians are the hospital bureaucracy often resist making alternative medicine part of inpatient hospital care.” The Lutheran General Center, for example, gets a lot more patients from outside referrals than from inside the hospital. On the down side, the article ends on the note that this could change as more teaching hospitals and universities add ideology of alternative medicine to their programs. Notice I didn't say “information.” I'm all for them teaching proper information about alternative medicine. Because if they did so, there wouldn't be any referrals at all.

### Evolution

It's always nice to see a good cover story on a topic we so often deal with. The U.S. News cover showed a picture of a

baby with the headline, “The New Reality of Evolution.” Subtitles were, “Where We Came From” and “Where We're Going.” Hmm. The “new” reality? I don't think it's all that new, frankly.

Unfortunately, even though the overall main article is good, this idea of “newness” carried through the entire article. There are statements like, “By now, scientists say, evolution is no longer ‘just a theory.’” By now? We've been trying to explain that for decades!!

But that is really the exception in this article, which is overall well-written. The sentence immediately following the one quoted above explains, “It's an everyday phenomenon, a fundamental fact of biology as real as hunger and as unavoidable as death.” Elsewhere, the article makes some of the points

that I have found myself trying to explain, such as noting, “until recently, much of evolution still felt to nonscientists like abstract theory, often presented in ponderous tomes.” Creationists

often come up to us and say, “Show us the evidence.” They want a single place to look.

Well, it isn't there. Instead, you have to look at years and years of scientific journals and/or books and/or talks if you really want *everything*. They don't want that answer of course.

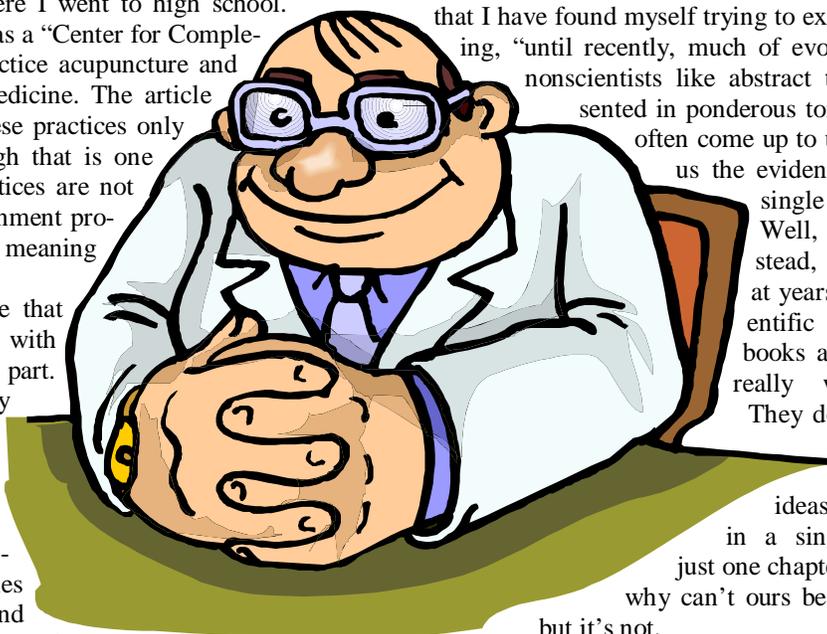
After all, their ideas are all contained in a single book—really, just one chapter of that book. So why can't ours be the same? Sorry, but it's not.

The article also addresses the creationists' oft-used example of asking what good half an eye is: “But ‘partial’ eyes turn out to be common in nature, and biologists can trace eye evolution from the lens-less flatworm eye-spot to the complex geometry of vertebrate eyes.”

In response to creationist claims that “organisms are too ‘perfect’ to have arisen by chance” by noting that “organisms don't work perfectly at all; they just work.”

Another point that is addressed is how a single gene change can have massive consequences. As examples, they cite the recent discovery that a few mutations on the Hox gene gave rise to a change from many-legged arthropods gave rise to six-legged insects. And just a week before going to press with this article, it was reported that a single mutation produced mice with large, wrinkled cerebral cortexes resembling ours. Unfortunately, creationists need to evolve a new mindset – one that allows them to actually process information that contradicts their preconceived notions – before we will make any progress on that front.

(“REALLity Check” continued on page 8)





## Our Next Meeting

### Stay Home and Relax! Again!



There will be no meeting in August, so stay at home and stay cool, then join us in September! Really! (Get it? "REALLY"! Sorry, I guess it's the heat.)

(*"REALLity Check" continued from page 7*)

### Creationism

The title article was not the only one in that issue to deal with the creationists. Unfortunately, the magazine also ran an article on "Intelligent Design." I say "unfortunately" not because it was horrible, but because it simply wasn't as good as the main article, which had already addressed many of the creationist claims.

The second article talks about how Intelligent Design proponents have been trying to get their beliefs taught in schools.

While it does address some of the points of the ID folks and rebut them, it simply does not do a very good job, in my opinion. It is written more as a "he said/she said" article that we so often see when addressing "controversies." The ID proponents say this; evolutionary scientists say the other. It ends with the worst way to deal with a scientific theory – talking about a poll of what general citizens believe. Yes, we need to educate the populace, but the media also needs to understand that science is not based on polling data. It really doesn't matter if 2/3 of those polled think ID is real. What matters is the scientific evidence, and in that arena, they are still just as lacking as they were when they called it "creationism" or "creation science" or whatever other synonyms they have used in the past. ♡

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Stay Home! Again!

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