



The Newsletter of The North Texas Skeptics

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Creationism lies

by John Blanton

OK, that's redundant. But let's get to the story.

I have been called down for being "soft on creationism." Folks, that's a serious charge out here in Texas. It's like being accused of riding side saddle. We'll put this old mare out to pasture right now!

In a previous issue of this rag (*The North Texas Skeptic*, February 2001) I stated rather carelessly "I don't have the missing text associated with the ellipses in the above quotes, but I am sure Dr. Morris did not distort Dr. Lewin's meaning by omitting critical wording." Well of course, Skeptics, I should have mentioned that if Henry Morris, founder of the California-based Institute for Creation Research, passed up the opportunity, he was probably having an off day. In the past he and other creationists have seldom had "off days."

Talk.Origins

The Talk.Origins archives at <http://www.talkorigins.org> has a collection of creationist's "whoppers." Max Webb has compiled a few for your reading pleasure. Various authors contributed.

Jim Lippard has provided a couple of entries, one of which notes Henry Morris' use of selective quoting in his book *Science, Scripture, and the Young Earth* (page 12):

The catfish range in length from 11 to 24 cm., with a mean of 18 cm. Preservation is excellent. In some specimens, even the skin and other soft parts, including the adipose fin, are well preserved ...

... strongly suggests that the catfish could have been transported to their site of fossilization.(19)

As Lippard points out, the note "refers to an article in the journal *Geology* by Buccheim and Surdam, which says:"

The abundant and widespread occurrence of skeletons of bottom feeders, some with soft fleshy skin intact, strongly suggests that the catfish were a resident population. It is highly improbable that the catfish could have been transported to their site of fossilization. Experiments and observations made on various species of fish have shown that fish decompose and disarticulate after only very short distances of transport (Shafer, 1972).

Being a novice with the English language, I am having difficulty trying to figure out what Henry Morris was trying to accomplish here. He seems to have made up his own text—text that supports his contention that all these fossils were formed in the mythical Flood of Noah. He then attributes the text to two real scientists to give it the kind of legitimacy he never could on his own. In the mean time, it's obvious Buccheim and Surdam meant about the opposite of what Morris was trying to communicate.

Famous whopper: This one's got whiskers, but it's one of my favorites.

Rob Zuber has written this (at <http://holysmoke.org/cretins/whoppers.htm>). Back in 1961 John C. Whitcomb and Henry M. Morris published in *Genesis Flood* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co.) their claim that fossils are often found "out of order." The implication is that "evolutionists" use the fossil record to deduce the evolving sequence of life from ancient to modern times. However, if creationists can demonstrate the sequence is not always so, then they will argue evolution isn't either.

Real scientists know of instances where fossils are out of sequence—old fossils on top, new fossils on bottom. These are often where the sedimentary rock has been folded double due to tectonic movement or where an old layer of rock has been shoved sideways on top of a newer layer.

Whitcomb and Morris extracted the following words from a paper by C. P. Ross and Richard Rezak ("The Rocks and Fossils of Glacier National Monument". U.S. Geological Survey Professional Paper 294-K (1959)):

Most visitors, especially those who stay on the roads, get the impression that the Belt strata are undisturbed and lie almost as flat today as they did when deposited in the sea which vanished so many million years ago.

Whitcomb and Morris have obviously quoted out of context, because the original text from Ross and Rezak is:

Most visitors, especially those who stay on the roads, get the impression that the Belt strata are undisturbed and lie almost as flat today as they did when deposited in the sea which vanished so many million years ago. Actually, they are folded, and in certain places, they are intensely so. From the points on and near the trails in the park, it is possible to observe places where the Belt series, as revealed in outcrops on ridges, cliffs, and canyon walls, are folded and crumpled almost as intricately as the soft younger strata in the mountains south of the park and in the Great Plains adjoining the park to the east."

It's impossible to escape the conclusion that Whitcomb and Morris have deliberately omitted text that would have shown the quote means exactly the opposite of their argument.

Meanwhile back at MIOS

A few years ago Jeff Umbarger and I followed up on this theme of creationist lies after attending a session with the Metroplex Institute of Origin Science (MIOS). Speaker Don Patton entertained us that evening with a presentation of his arguments for a young Earth. MIOS, it must be remembered is a young Earth creationist (YEC) group that meets monthly in Dallas.

Don, who to our knowledge has never obtained a degree from an accredited academic institution, carries business cards that appear to make him a Ph.D. geologist. This night his presentation included a number of quotes from legitimate scientists to give his talk a little more credibility. We obtained a copy of some of these quotes, and afterwards Jeff

dropped into the UT Dallas library to run them down. He found out of context and misleading to be the prevailing adjective applying to Don's quotes of famous scientists. I will bore you by repeating my favorite, which appeared in the May 1992 issue of [The Skeptic](#), the previous version of this newsletter.

From the MIOS text headed "DATING OF MOON SAMPLES: PITFALLS AND PARADOXES" we have:

What complicates things for the uranium-lead method is that non-radiogenic lead 204, 206, 207 and 208 also exist naturally, and scientists are not sure what ratios of non-radiogenic to radiogenic lead were early in the moon's history. ... The problem of how much lead was around to begin with still remains. ... If all of the age-dating methods (rubidium-strontium, uranium-lead and potassium-argon) had yielded the same ages, the picture would be neat. But they haven't.

The quote is from *Science News*, and it appears to be saying radiometric dating of moon rock samples is flawed due to the indeterminate amount of non-radiogenic lead. The numerous ellipses (...) were puzzling at first. They certainly represented omitted text, but what had been left out? Jeff filled in the gaps from the original issue. As we did in 1992, I am putting the *quoted* text in **bold**. I even left out some of the original just to save ink. See my own ellipses:

Trying to unravel lunar history by long distance, or even by sampling six or seven areas of the surface, is a precarious job and subject to much interpretation. Much controversy during the past two years has centered around the interpretation that should be given to the ages of the lunar material — ages yielded by studying its radioactive history. **If all of the age-dating methods (rubidium-strontium, uranium-lead and potassium-argon) had yielded the same ages, the picture would be neat. But they haven't.** The lead ages, for example, have been consistently older.

...

In addition to uranium 238 converting to lead 206, uranium 235, with a half-life of 713 million years, decays to form lead 207, and thorium 232, with a half-life of 14 billion years, decays to form lead 208.

What complicates things for the uranium-lead method is that nonradiogenic lead 204, 206, 207 and 208 also exist naturally, and scientists are not sure what the ratios of nonradiogenic to radiogenic lead were early in the moon's history. Wherever there is nonradiogenic lead 204, however, there is usually nonradiogenic lead 206, 207 and 208.

To arrive at the percentage of nonradiogenic lead present on the early moon, one can take the ratios of nonradiogenic lead 206 to 204, 207 to 204 and 208 to 204 found in meteorites (these ratios are 9.5, 10.5 and 20 respectively); but the question unanswered is, are these meteoric lead ratios the same as those that existed on the moon? Those scientists who are willing to accept the 4.6-billion-year-old age of meteorites and apply that to the moon are often not willing to apply the lead ratios found in meteorites to the moon.

...

Another example is with sample 14163. This sample, says Silver, has already shown that some parts of the lead could not have formed more recently than 4 billion years ago, and it probably includes some components considerably older than 4.0 billion years. Silver heated the sample. At 550 degrees C. the lead that came off had very high lead 207 to 206 ratios. One would have expected to see a ratio of 0.6 lead 207 to 206 for lead that had been forming continuously since 4.5 billion years ago. But what he saw were ratios of 1.2 or 1.3. "This isotopic composition has never been observed anywhere in the material of the solar system," says Silver.

If these lead ratios were interpreted as other ratios, the lead would have apparent ages as high as 5.5 billion years. But, says Silver, "We are probably looking at lead 207 made very early in the solar system before it could be diluted with lead 206, and this large amount of lead 207 has had more time to move around." Lead

that is similarly bound comes off at the same temperatures. There is usually a correlation with the age of the lead, but the implications of this are not fully understood.

Tatsumoto and Doe have been working with lead at different temperatures (1,000 to 1,350 degrees C.), and they are getting similar results. The most significant has been isolating lead that consistently dates at 4.6 billion years old (SN: 12/18/71, p. 423).

The Problem of how much lead was around to begin with still remains. This could be partially solved by dating all of the soil samples from the moon, determining the over-all effects on each soil sample and getting a convergence point.

The broader implications of the history of volatile metals are apparent even if not all of the results and answers are yet. Volatile metals such as mercury, lead, zinc, cadmium, bismuth, rubidium and potassium are important to man. If scientists could unlock the history of these chemical reservoirs — what the chemical pot started from, how it evolved and what makes it work — says Silver, and if they could understand these processes on the moon, they might know how to use them today on earth and predict for tomorrow. "We don't know the total chemistry for the earth, but our best chance of understanding it is on the moon."

I don't want to be picky, but creationist Don Patton has not only omitted text that would further bring out the author's intended meaning, but he has rearranged the quoted parts to make his own story out of it. The man is definitely presidential material.

I've been in the creationist tracking business for about 12 years and have found this phenomenon to be creationism's drumbeat. I've occasionally heard the term "telling lies for Jesus," but I generally attempt to avoid the anti-religious tone that goes along with it. However, it's hard to explain this any other way. There must be a mind set that the means justifies the end. It's OK to violate one of the principal codes of Christianity in order to prop up its mythical underpinnings.

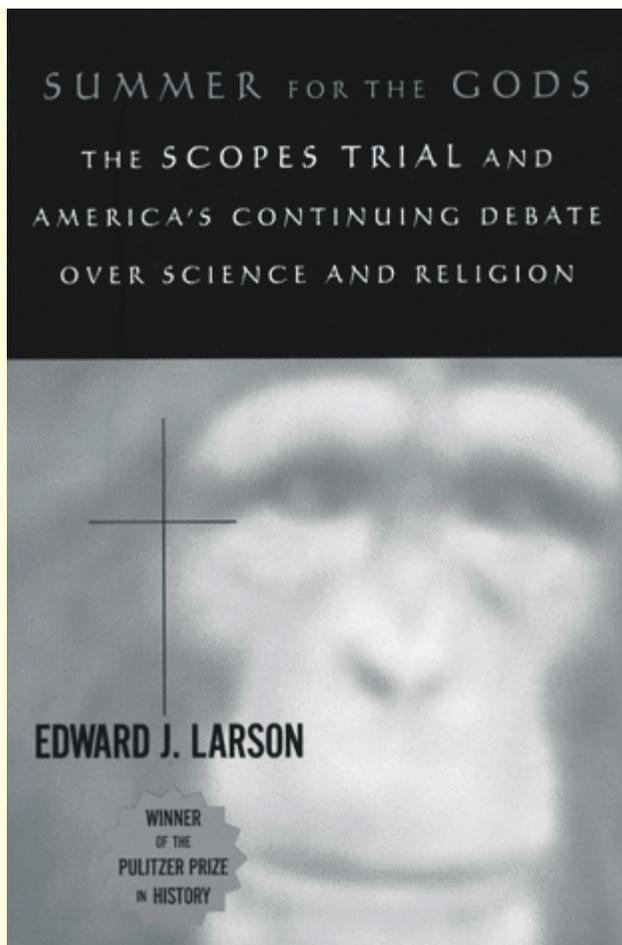
There are a number of citations of creationists' lies on the Web, and I am not going to include them in the newsletter hard copy. I have found that Web links often go stale after a few years (sometimes sooner), so the links will be posted with the on-line copy of this issue on our Web site at <http://www.ntskeptics.org>. As soon as you get this newsletter, just log on and click on the links. In the years ahead we will endeavor to keep a collection of fresh links for those wanting to follow up this topic.

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Summer for the gods

by John Blanton

[Summer for the Gods](#): the Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate over Science and Religion, by Edward J. Larson (Harvard University Press), 318 pages.



Portrayed by actor Dick York, John Scopes stands at the front of the Dayton, Tennessee, classroom and instructs his pupils in the science of evolution while the forces of right stand ready to arrest him and carry him off to jail. In jail he is comforted by his true love, who visits him surreptitiously, mindful of the hostility of the townspeople and her firebrand preacher father. Meanwhile, that champion of morality and 19th Century science William Jennings Bryan, played by Fredric March, has stepped forward to prosecute Scopes, and famed bleeding heart defense lawyer Clarence Darrow (Spencer Tracy) has offered to defend him. Gene Kelly as acid-penned journalist H. L. Mencken stretches the whole episode out for the world to see and ridicule.

But wait. This isn't the Scopes Trial. It's Bert Cates on trial. And it's Matthew Harrison Brady coming to prosecute and Henry Drummond coming to defend. E. K Hornbeck is the thorn in the side of the Hillsboro (not Dayton) conscience. This is [Inherit the Wind](#), a 1950s play by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, later made into a [movie](#) by Stanley Kramer.

But I'm getting ahead.

Edward J. Larson is Professor of History and Law at the University of Georgia. We have seen him before in the NOVA documentary *God, Darwin and Dinosaurs*, and he has previously written on the creation/evolution controversy in [Trial and Error: the American Controversy over Creation and Evolution](#) (Oxford University Press).

His more recent book is *Summer for the Gods: the Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate over Science and Religion*. He presents the story in the light of the shift in civil liberty law that started during the First World War and continues up to the present. A key player in this shift has been the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), and in the Scopes trial the fledgling organization was looking for its first victory.

Bryan had been a champion of civil rights during his thirty years in politics, and it may seem strange to find him on the side of the antievolutionist in this case. However, he perceived evolution to be not only false—a contradiction to the Bible—but also the root of much social injustice by way of "social Darwinism."

Bryan's address repeated the three main points of his standard argument for antievolution laws: evolution theory lacked scientific proof; teaching it to school students undermined their religious faith and social values; and most important, that the "Bible-believing" majority should control the content of public school instruction. To this he added two new warnings. First, widely publicized ridicule of the Tennessee law was eroding public support of such statutes elsewhere. "People who hold the Bible dear should make themselves heard. Recently a lot of [University of Tennessee] students ridiculed the Legislature of your state for passing a bill to prohibit teaching evolution," Bryan observed. "I saw large [newspaper] space given the ridicule but small space given to the noble act of governor Peay in signing the bill." Second, court challenges posed a further threat. "I notice that a case is on the docket for trial involving the evolution statute of your state. I certainly hope it will be upheld. It ought to be," he concluded. Bryan quickly perceived the pending trial as a vehicle for making himself heard—a "battle royal" in defense of the faith, as he would call it.[pages 98-99]

For a number of years Bryan had been warming up to the antievolution cause, and by 1925 he was its most effective proponent.

Bryan played on this common understanding in his public addresses, often repeating the popular applause line, "How can teachers tell students that they came from monkeys and not expect them to act like monkeys?"[page 116]

Bryan's entry into the case caused great consternation on the part of the ACLU. They had advertised for a test case soon after the Butler Act became law in early 1925, and John Scopes, at the urging of local civic boosters hoping to pump up the town's reputation and economy, volunteered to be sacrificial lamb, though it is doubtful he actually taught evolution.

In a stroke, the ACLU lost control of what it initially conceived as a narrow constitutional test of the statute. With Bryan on hand, evolution would be on trial at Dayton, and pleas for individual liberty would run headlong into calls for majority rule.[page 100]

In the mean time, Dayton was getting some notoriety it had not anticipated. World opinion, not all of it secular, was weighing in on the Scopes case.

When asked for his opinion of the Tennessee law, Albert Einstein replied, "any restriction of academic freedom heaps coals of shame upon the community."[page 112]

Shailer Mathews of the University of Chicago divinity school volunteered as a defense witness. He noted:

"We have to live in the universe science gives us. A theology that is contrary to reality must be abandoned or improved."[page 118]

And there was more:

Evolution is not on trial; Tennessee is," a California Congregationalist preacher added. "And the judgement has already been given by the high court of public opinion. The people of Tennessee are the laughing stock of the world." Suddenly for a few weeks, ministers could grab headlines anywhere in the country simply by asserting that the theory of human evolution did not conflict with the Bible.[page 118]

The sectarian side of the case had its roots in a cleavage between "modernist" and "fundamentalist" factions of American Christianity.

During the twenties, these two extremes gained adherents at the expense of the middle — and each claimed to represent the future of Christianity. Their clash spawned the antievolution movement and well deserved the attention it received during the Scopes trial.[page 121]

Bryan was disinclined to compromise on this issue. Moreover, the nature of the case forced him into a more extreme

position:

The results of the San Francisco debates suggested that, in the spirit of liberty, people who doubted the theory of evolution might still tolerate the teaching of evolution. Perhaps Bryan sensed this all along and only campaigned to prohibit the teaching of evolution as true; but now he had to defend a broader law that barred all teaching about human evolution, while the defense simply followed Shipley's approach by pleading for individual liberty to learn and teach about scientific theories.[page 124]

Scopes was for Bryan the launching point for a national campaign to eradicate the evil of evolution once and for all. That it was to be end instead of the beginning, nobody could foresee at the time. As he went into the last fight of his life, the history of his campaign against science began to drag on him:

Editorial cartoons inevitably depicted the Great Commoner embroiled with monkeys—and the monkeys usually winning. Syndicated political humorist Will Rogers brushed aside an invitation to Dayton with the comment, "Bryan is due back here in the New York zoo in July." [page 138]

Darrow was an unwelcome addition to the defense team. Their hopes to try the constitutional issues were dimmed by Darrow's own moral agenda:

"Scopes is not on trial. Civilization is on trial," Darrow said upon leaving for Dayton. "Nothing will satisfy us but broad victory, a knockout which will have an everlasting precedent to prove that America is founded on liberty and not on narrow, mean, intolerable and brainless prejudice of soulless religio-maniacs." [page 146]

City of Dayton boosters had hoped for a glut of tourist dollars and were anticipating as many of 30,000 visitors. Instead, more like 3000 were in town at any one time, and these were generally local country folk come to see what the excitement was all about.

Scopes was convicted, to be sure, just as Cates was in the movie. After all the hoopla. After millions of words were telegraphed around the world from Dayton. After over a week of some of the most spectacular legal wrangling ever in a scenario that had Bryan called as a defense witness and grilled mercilessly for hours by Darrow. After all this Scopes was fined \$100. Of course he appealed.

Eventually even this conviction was thrown out by the appeals court on a technicality, and the issues was never re-tried. The State of Tennessee had not the stomach for another Scopes trial.

It was the end for Bryan, too. Visiting back in Dayton five days after the trial, he died in his sleep.

The death of Bryan helped sap what moral victory the defense had gleaned from the case. The martyrdom of Bryan helped refuel the antievolution movement that continues to this day. Fans built Bryan College in Dayton, and this institution continues to serve those holding to his views. At the same time, it is a bipartisan repository for historical information about the trial.

Scopes had been billed as "the trial of the century," in competition with Sacco and Vanzetti, Lindbergh, Rosenberg, and Simpson. It almost did not live up to that claim. However, a best selling book about the era of the 1920s [Only Yesterday](#) by journalist Frederick Lewis Allen repopularized the trial. In 1931 Allen's journalistic treatment of the case gave it a perspective that persisted for nearly thirty years.

Inherit the Wind was not so much about creation/evolution. It was a response to the Hollywood blacklists that came out of the 1950s McCarthy anticommunist hearings. Forty years later this purpose is not apparent to viewers unfamiliar with that era's political climate. Many mistake the plot for a faithful rendition of the case, despite the obvious points of departure and the renaming of all associated persons except for Charles Darwin. Creationists attempt to paint evolutionists as deceptive by pointing to these differences as inaccuracies, a tactic that should easily be turned against them.

In all of this, the main character has gotten lost. What of John Scopes? After collaborating with the defense in the appeal of his case he went his own way. Far from the innocent pawn drawn into the intrigue between the opposing forces, Scopes was the ideal radical protagonist. It's hard to imagine a more apt representative for the cause of scientific truth and the teaching of evolution. Working as a geologist after attending graduate school, he often spoke on the issue. In his autobiography in later years he looked back on the remarkable events of 1925. It was a "summer for the Gods" he said.

Authors note: This book and others related to story can be obtained from Amazon.com through the NTS Web site at <http://www.ntskeptics.org>. Go to the on-line edition of this newsletter and click on the links.

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What's new

by Robert Park

[Robert Park publishes the What's New column at <http://www.aps.org/WN/>. Following are some clippings of interest.]

Cold fusion? Supreme Court gives it the cold shoulder.

Last fall, the US Patent Office denied a "cold-fusion" patent to Mitchell Swartz, on the grounds that it lacked "operability" (WN 10 Nov 00). Despite testimony by cold-fusion gurus, a federal appeals court upheld the Commissioner of Patents, ruling that the patent failed to convince sensible people that the idea could work.

Undeterred, Swartz appealed to the US Supreme Court. The highest court in the land is unlikely to review the case, which has the effect of upholding the appeal court ruling. After twelve years, cold fusion still has trouble being taken seriously.

EMF: Power lines make it back into the news — sort of.

When the National Cancer Institute released its 1997 study showing no link between residential exposure to EMF and childhood leukemia, there was reason to hope power line paranoia might at last die (WN 4 Jul 97). Certainly, no tort lawyer would take it to court again; it's mostly cell phones now (WN 9 Feb 01). But in the UK, a report by the National Radiological Protection Board found a trace of a pulse (<http://www.nrpb.org.uk>). Headed by Richard Doll, the first to implicate tobacco smoke in lung cancer, the report said SOME studies have found a POSSIBLE small risk from exposure to fields FAR stronger than most people are ever exposed to, but no plausible mechanism exists. Even this wimpy statement was enough to elicit a "we told you so" from the fear mongers.

Double anniversary: Promises were made to change the world.

On 23 March 1983, President Ronald Reagan announced the Strategic Defense Initiative. He called on scientists, "those who gave us the atomic bomb," to turn their great talents to developing a missile defense that would render nuclear weapons "impotent and obsolete." Six years later, on 23 March 1989, the discovery of "cold fusion" was announced. Coincidence? Either that or Nancy Reagan and Stanley Pons used the same astrologer. Remarkably, there has been equal progress on missile defense and cold fusion.

Climate change: New MIT study calculates the odds.

The MIT Joint Program on the Science and Policy of Global Change has released an "Uncertainty Analysis of Global Climate Change Projections." The study is meant to improve public understanding of the climate issue. It assumes that the public can grasp a prediction given in terms of the odds. For example: "the median projection shows a global mean surface temperature rise from 1900 to 2100 of 2.5C with a 95% confidence interval of 0.9C to 4.8C." Just how this will fly with a public that is willing to stand in line for hours to buy lottery tickets is yet to be seen.

Budget resolution: Who's giving the President science advice?

Well, apparently no one, which would account for the grim science budget figures, among other things. This week, Rush Holt (D-NJ), a physicist, sought to amend the budget resolution, adding \$1B to function 250 which includes science. The amendment failed on what I assume was a straight party-line vote. When the budget is completed before a new President names a Science Advisor, the consequences for the science budget are usually devastating. So far, there are not even many credible rumors.

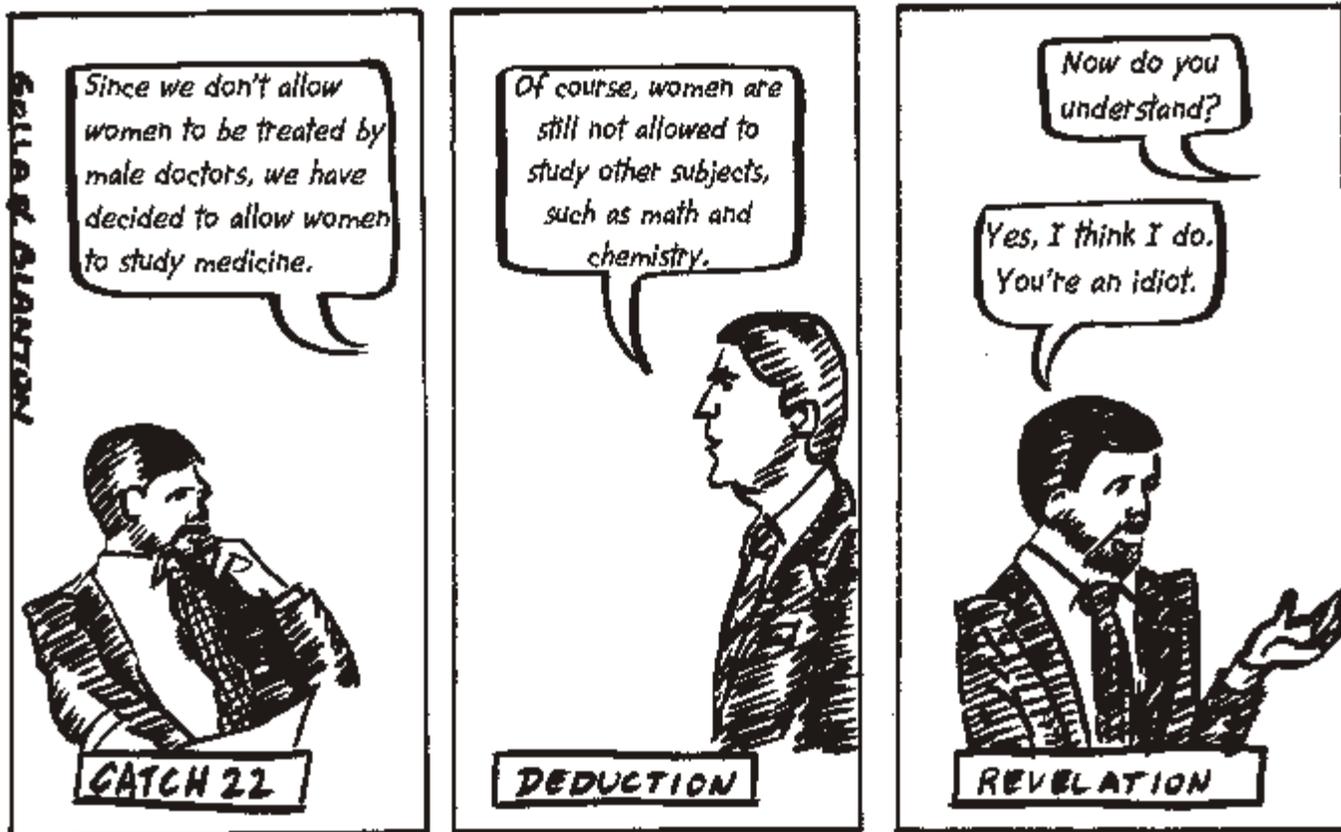
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Skeptical ink

By Prasad Golla and John Blanton

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