

The REALL News

The official newsletter of the Rational Examination Association of Lincoln Land
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Electronic Version

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In This Issue:

From the Editor -- Bob Ladendorf

From the Chairman -- David Bloomberg

The Five "Laws" of Quack Science -- Roy Auerbach Pseudo-Science Terminology -- David Bloomberg REALLity

Check -- David Bloomberg

Purpose:

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

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

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

The REALL News is its official newsletter.

Membership information is provided elsewhere in this newsletter.

Board of Directors: Chairman, David Bloomberg; Assistant Chairman, Prof. Ron Larkin; Secretary-Treasurer, Wally Hartshorn; Newsletter Editor, Bob Ladendorf; At-Large Members, Prof. Steve Egger, Frank Mazo, and Kevin Brown.

Editorial Board: Bob Ladendorf (Newsletter Editor), David Bloomberg (electronic version editor), (one vacancy).

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

From The Editor -- Bob Ladendorf

Since February, when REALL was started, we have published an issue a month. At the risk of patting ourselves on the back, it's an accomplishment rarely done in my experience. More often than not, newsletters have been more "periodic" than regular.

With 1994 about to burst upon us, I wanted to thank our readers, supporters, and colleagues for encouraging our skeptical inquiries. I also want to let you know that the best is yet to come—we're planning a special, 12-page anniversary issue in February, a full index of the first year's writings, and lots of new articles on a range of subjects, from "alien suckers" to an encouraging update on the CBS/Sun "documentary" controversy.

Speaking about the coming year and REALL's second year, I wanted to mention that there is a third constant besides death and taxes—it's renewal time! Yes, please save some of that holiday money for a renewal to The REALL News. Just check the expiration date on your newsletter label and renew as early as you can.

With the start of the new year, we are making our January newsletter as the first issue of Volume 2. So don't look for a Volume 1, #12. You won't miss an issue.

Happy Holidays!

/s/ Bob Ladendorf

From the Chairman -- David Bloomberg

Membership renewal time is drawing near for many of us. I can tell because the REALL bank account is steadily getting tinier and tinier (it was never very large). Also, my renewal date is stamped on my mailing label. This will be an important time for REALL, since the number of you who renew will tell us how good a job we've been doing and will determine what kind of activities we can engage in next year.

We'd like to continue to bring you a high-quality monthly newsletter, help educate the public through outreaches such as the Illinois State Teachers Association conference, and bring in speakers and presentations of interest to our members. We'd also like to expand our membership, become an official non-profit organization, and engage in special projects to help educate the public. For all of these things, we need money. (Yes, we even need to pay to become a non-profit organization!)

I don't want to turn this column into a plea for extra donations, and I've never even considered sending out fund-raising letters (you probably get enough of those pleas and letters during this season anyway). I just want to ask you to remember to renew your membership if you have enjoyed this newsletter and/or our meetings and share our goals. If you have the capability, I'd also like to ask you to consider becoming a Patron member of REALL. As the membership form says, we will be eternally grateful!

On a related topic, REALL is always looking for ways to expand our membership to include everybody in Central Illinois who is interested, but may not even know we exist. Our members are probably the best judges of who may or may not be interested. We have offered a gift or trial subscription from our inception, but have not talked much about it. Recently, a few people have taken advantage of it to let their friends know about REALL.

For only \$3, you can get a 3-month subscription for your child's science teacher, your friend who shares your views but keeps forgetting to borrow your issues of The REALL News, your younger brother who is just starting to learn about science, or anybody else you think might be interested. The gift recipient will receive a letter from me telling them who bought it for them and explaining what REALL is all about. Gift subscriptions are probably the best way to reach potential new members, as you can act as the judge of who may be interested, rather than the "usual" method of simply taking names off a mailing list.

Well, I think I've preached to you long enough. So, bye for now, and I'll talk to you again next year!

/s/ David Bloomberg

A Nod to Our Patrons

REALL would like to thank our patron members. Through their extra generosity, REALL is able to continue to grow as a force for critical thinking in Illinois. Patron members are those giving \$50 or more. To become a patron of REALL, please see the membership form at the end of this issue. Patron members are:

Alan Burge, D.D.S., Pekin Wally Hartshorn, Springfield David Bloomberg, Springfield Bob Ladendorf, Springfield

The Five "Laws" of Quack Science by Roy Auerbach

[Editor's Note: This article is a summary of remarks given by Roy Auerbach, a member of the Executive Committee of The Association for Rational Thought in Cincinnati, Ohio. Permission to edit the remarks for readers of The REALL News was given by the organization.]

Quackery and sound science are not clearly distinguishable categories. Although some sciences are easy to assign to one category or the other, some contain elements of both, and sorting them out requires careful investigation. Mere weirdness does not automatically consign a science to quackery -- legitimate science considers such far-out topics as alternative universes and wormholes.

The first law of quack science is **Think Big**. Quack sciences rarely concern anything less expansive than a theory of the origin of the universe, or least the solar system. Another favorite target of quack science is the discovery of extraordinary significance, for example, an anti-gravity device, or cold fusion, touted as the solution to the world's energy problems. Quack sciences are also likely to take on the giants of sound science, rarely attacking the lowly assistant professor, preferring instead to claim that Einstein (or Newton, Pauling, or Feynman) was wrong.

The second law of quack science is **Think Difficult**. The laws of a quack science are usually claimed to be very difficult to verify. Some researchers may be able to detect the effect, others are not. The effect appears to be sporadic for undetermined reasons. Equipment that detects the effect reliably seems to be hard to come by. The claim is often made that the effect is just beyond the reach of current scientific technology. These same problems occur in sound science, too. But in time, they vanish from sound science as better methods are developed. Quack science is rarely blessed with such progress, and the difficulties persist.

The laws proposed by quack science may be difficult to verify for other reasons -- equipment may be unavailable for inspection, procedures may be unobservable, raw data may be missing, and summary data may not be published in a usable form. Such weaseling occurs in legitimate science, too. It is occasional rather than systematic, however, and is not tolerated by an alert scientific community. Research which is unavailable for thorough inspection and replication is eventually discarded by sound science.

The third law of quack science is the **Rule of Paranoia**: "I'm a genius and they're out to get me." Often the quack scientist views himself or herself as brilliant, which may explain the characteristic tendency to take on the giants of science like Einstein. They are also likely to view themselves as victims of persecution. Fellow scientists are seen as dishonest blockheads who reject the quack scientist's papers, grant applications, and requests for promotion. Huge organizations--the government, business, the "Eastern Establishment," the Trilateral Commission_repress his work. This is a fairly reasonable position to take, considering the reaction of sound scientists to quack efforts. The quack may not be a genius, but legitimate scientists may very well be out to attack her or his research. The uproar over cold fusion is a good example of this characteristic of quack science.

Fourth, quack science is likely to adhere to a characteristic law of dissemination: **No Criticism Allowed**. A typical maneuver is to release the astounding findings to the press before they are available to the scientific community in standard refereed journals. The refereed journals may be passed over in favor of self-publication, where no hyper-critical fellow researchers can slow the flow of information by objecting to the methods used. Publication in conference proceedings, also unrefereed, is another typical path for the dissemination of quack science. The common effect shared

by these methods is the production of citable, quotable, published research unimpeded by peer review. This allows the public to absorb the new alleged findings in the absence of immediate critical response.

And finally, the quack scientist is typically a *Lonely Hero of the Laboratory*, isolated in his or her discovery. Scientific advances normally are produced through a social process that involves communities of scientists over time--new findings are often not unexpected and are usually compatible with earlier work. The quack scientific discovery, however, is likely to arrive out of the blue, unsupported by previous research. The isolation of the work is often apparent in the exclusive lingo used to clothe the research--terminology unheard of in mainstream science.

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Pseudo-Science Terminology

by David Bloomberg

Several months ago, we here at The REALL News heard from some REALL members that we were tossing around terms that weren't necessarily commonly known. Our original intent was to provide a glossary of terms. Due to the size of the project, and the size of other projects at the same time, we haven't been able to put this together yet. However, the reader may consider this the first of an irregular series of articles discussing terms used frequently in the skeptical literature and debate.

Young vs. Old

While we have a tendency to paint all creationists with the same brush, they are actually quite a varied bunch who often argue as much among themselves as they do with scientists. They can generally be broken down into two main groups: young-earth and old-earth.

Young-earth creationists generally believe that the universe was created exactly as the Bible states. They are also often referred to as Bible literalists. In other words, the universe, earth, man, etc. was created in six days. Period.

Old-earth creationists are not as literal. They still believe that man was created as-is, without evolution, but they admit the scientific evidence showing that the earth is a great deal older than 6,000 years or so. They generally reconcile this with their religious beliefs by assigning each "day" of biblical creation to an "age" lasting millions of years.

To some young-earth creationists, old-earth creationism is simply a "cop-out." This was the response I received when talking to the young-earth creationist I met at the Illinois Science Teachers Association annual conference in October. Indeed, as I mentioned, young-earth creationists often spend as much time attacking the old-earth creationists as they do evolution.

It should be noted that both of these groups are totally against evolution and differ mainly in their acceptance or rejection of geological evidence. Both reject fossil and biological evidence.

I hate to further confuse things, but I feel I must make one rather long side note. A well-known creationist recently polled American citizens and claimed that 80 percent of them were "creationists". The survey's question, however, was something similar to: "Do you believe in a creator God?" He assumed that anybody who answered positively was a creationist. This is a false assumption. It is quite possible to believe in a creator God without rejecting evolution. There are many people who believe that God created the universe through the Big Bang (or a similar method) and then created man through evolution. Creationists, both young-earth and old-earth, would certainly never accept this. But this is a belief, and as such, has no place in scientific argument. Did God create the Big Bang? It is quite impossible to say scientifically. Since REALL only deals with scientifically-testable claims, this falls outside the boundary of our area.

There are mounds of scientific evidence to support evolution. There is no scientific evidence to support creationism. The Supreme Court has ruled that the teaching of creationism is tantamount to the teaching of religion, and thus forbidden in public schools. When creationists, whether young-earth or old-earth, attack evolution as "another belief system," they ignore these simple facts.

REALLity Check

by David Bloomberg

For a welcome change, there are a lot of "hurrahs" to go around in this edition of "REALLity Check."
College Campus Cults

The first of our "hurrahs" goes to the Illinois Times, which reported about the Champaign-Urbana Church of Christ (Oct. 21), a group widely considered to be a cult. 20/20_ also did a similar story a few weeks earlier on the national group related to the C-U one. The article discussed some of the methods used by the group to ensnare new members, along with the general spread of cults on college campus.

Cults on campus feed on the insecurities of new students out away from home. They use this to make students feel more secure in their group, often having them sever all ties besides those to the cult.

In fact, the Daily Illini had done a lengthy investigative report on the C-U Church of Christ approximately four years ago. At the time of that article, I had a letter to the editor published about my next-door neighbor, who had been a member of the group for a school year. This neighbor told me of how the group instructed members to ignore outsiders, including friends and family. They also, according to the article and my friend, practice what I would call "seedy" recruiting tactics, including getting a recruit to spill his or her guts to a church member, who then would tell the Bible-study leader. The Bible-study leader would then pick out appropriate passages for that recruit, but act as if they were random, or straight from God. In this way, it would seem to the recruit that God was speaking directly to him or her.

So, if this cult was exposed four years ago, why are they still around, continuing the same practices? This is not an easy question to answer. For one thing, colleges always have a continuing influx of possible new recruits. It's unlikely that even seniors now remember the story done by the Daily Illini so long ago. I would probably not even remember it if it hadn't struck so close to home.

Also, cults seem, in many ways, like con games. We may be able to teach a few people to avoid them, but there are still far too many out there who fall prey. Education is the best weapon against cults, but we cannot educate those who refuse to learn.

It seems that cults are on the rise, and this is something that will become especially widespread as we approach the year 2000, which seems to hold a magical significance to many cults.

In response to this article, the Illinois Times_ published my letter in the next issue, which contained much of the information above.

In related news, the Chicago Tribune reported (Dec. 8) on an Illinois Senate Education Committee public forum dealing with cults on college campuses, mainly focusing on the same group discussed above. Former church members, including one whose parents had him wrested away, testified, calling it "abusive" and "destructive" and claiming that "mind control" was used.

Illinois Creationism

The Illinois Times receives a second "hurrah" for their November 24 cover story on the evolution/creation debate in Illinois public schools. REALL member Professor Malcolm Levin was among those interviewed for and quoted in the story.

They did a great job in presenting the facts of the issue (National Center for Science Education Director, Dr. Eugenie Scott, gave it a thumbs up) and highlighted the fact that anybody who realizes that evolution is the key to biology is not automatically "anti-God." Unfortunately, this fact seems to have been missed by at least one letter writer (Dec. 2), who stated in a letter in the following issue that evolution is a godless religion. But a later long letter (Dec. 9) made a number of very good points about science and creationism. In addition, a letter from REALL was printed, describing our group and how we can help get out information on creationism and other pseudo-science to anybody who is interested.

Spirits or Parents?

The Chicago Tribune reported (Oct. 9) that an Arizona psychologist lost his license to practice after he used exorcism as a "treatment" for a 10-year-old boy.

The boy had allegedly been beaten, tortured, etc. by his parents, and is now in the care of a foster family. The psychologist claims it was his exorcism that "cured" the boy. I tend to think it more likely that it has something to do with being away from the torture and beatings.

This psychologist had actually been given a warning and probation for using exorcism as treatment in the past. He even says, "It's a sad state when the board can't recognize prayer as treatment." No, it's a sad state when a psychologist, who should be trained in such matters, thinks that prayer is a valid treatment. Hurrahs to the state board!

Dateline Does It Again

Our fourth "hurrah" of this issue goes once again to Dateline NBC for coverage of a story on alternative medicine (Nov. 2). Earlier this year, Dateline exposed homeopathy and some homeopathic practitioners for selling water and ethanol as "medicine." This time, they hit a specific doctor, Kurt Donsbock (I'm not really sure if that's the correct spelling, but that's the way I'm going to spell it for this article) for selling his supposed cancer cure south of the border.

Dr. Donsbock claims that he has been persecuted by the medical profession, and law enforcement apparently things he is a quack, so he moved to Mexico to build his own hospital. There he charges \$10,000 for a three-week treatment, apparently mostly consisting of hydrogen peroxide "therapy" that is supposed to give the body more oxygen to help fight the cancer. The American Cancer Society, however, says there is no evidence that such "therapy" helps; in fact it may hurt!

So how can Donsbock make those claims? He has a video claiming a 70 percent remission/recovery rate. But those people featured in the video as success stories don't seem to be as successful as he would like us to think. One, in fact, does seem to have gone into remission, but there are cases of spontaneous remissions in medical history. The other 4, however, all used conventional treatment in addition to Donsbock's "therapy." In fact, one is a paid employee of his, and one has died from the cancer that he implies was cured in the video.

That would seem to close the book on Donsbock -- but wait, there's more! It seems that Donsbock is not actually an M.D., but a "graduate chiropractor" with a doctorate in naturopathy. Do you think that's bad enough? It gets worse. According to Dateline NBC, there were no such courses at the college from which he claims to have gotten his degree at that time. He, however, insists his degree is valid. The authorities in Oregon seem to disagree with him, and claim his degree is counterfeit, and suspect that two other medical certificates that he has are also counterfeit. For one thing, his name is misspelled exactly the same on each of those three (now you see why I don't know how to spell his name).

When confronted by this evidence during his Dateline_ interview, he denied it and then got up and walked away, saying the interview was over, and kicking the reporter out.

Surely, that had to be the end of it? Nope, there is one more straw on the camel's back. One of Dateline's_ producers ordered some "nutritional supplements" from a company that, according to the report, is associated with Donsbock's hospital. That supplement was tested and found to be about 50 percent methamphetamine (speed). When Dateline_ presented this evidence to him as they were being kicked out, he called the reporter a liar and, later, his lawyer wrote to them saying he had no connection to the mail order business.

So he continues to complain that he is being persecuted. Dateline showed some footage of him speaking to his patients, and he acted more like a preacher than a doctor. I expected them to break out in song, "We will overcome...". But perhaps he needs to learn the difference between persecution and prosecution.

High Profile FMS

I have often wondered what it would take to bring something like false memory syndrome (FMS) more into the public eye and had thought that a high-profile accusation was probably what would do it. Little did I know that such a case was right around the corner.

For those of you who have been out of the country in recent weeks, Cardinal Bernardin, of Chicago, has been accused of molesting a man some 20 years ago in Cincinnati, but the man claims he just recently remembered the incidents under therapy. I would not dare to say whether the charges are true or not--that's what our court system is for--but the charges have brought media focus on the issue of FMS.

For two Sundays in a row (Nov. 14, Nov. 21), the Chicago Tribune featured front-page articles on FMS. These articles featured interviews with psychologists examining FMS cases, as well as with people who had undergone therapy and are now claiming that their therapist caused the formation of false memories.

So, a conditional "hurrah" goes to the general media for finally realizing that there is something strange going on in these cases. But it is unfortunate that a high-profile case is necessary before the media and public even realize that a controversy exists. There are already probably innocents in jail for molestation that simply never happened, while some therapists continue to tell their patients that, "If you think you might have been molested, you have been."

A special membership survey was included in the regular version of this issue. Since members are the ones being surveyed, and it is highly unlikely that they will be reading this version instead of the paper version, the survey has not been reproduced here.

Predictions for Future Issues * Who Is Ray Hyman? * Alien Suckers
Skeptics Online

If you have a computer and a modem, you owe it to yourself to participate in the skeptic message areas on the computer BBS networks. Here in Springfield, call The Temples of Syrinx at (217) 787-9101. David Bloomberg operates this BBS, which carries the FidoNet SKEPTIC, EVOLUTION and UFO conferences, internationally distributed message areas for discussing topics of interest to skeptics. He is also carrying ParaNet conferences, all dedicated to UFO and paranormal topics. You can also find a wide variety of skeptic text files. The Temples of Syrinx -- (217) 787-9101
Membership Form

Regular membership includes The REALL News and all of the benefits of membership. A subscription to The REALL News, without membership, is available. Full-time students can join at the discounted rate. A patron membership includes all of the benefits of a regular membership, plus a listing in The REALL News and our eternal gratitude (where "eternal" is defined as "one year").

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, ZIP: _____

Phone: _____

Interests: _____

- Regular Membership (\$20/Year)
- Student Membership (\$15/Year)
- Family Membership (\$30/Year)
- Patron Membership (\$50 or more/Year)
- Subscription Only (\$12/Year)
- Trial or Gift Subscription (\$3 for 3 issues)

Bring to a meeting or mail to: REALL, P.O.
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