The North Texas Skeptic

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The future in a black box

by John Blanton

"Can This Black Box See Into the Future?"

Now that's a line that will catch the attention of meddlesome skeptics. It's from the RedNova Web site, [1] and it caught the attention of others, as well. Besides getting bounced around the Skeptic Discussion List, it also garnered brief mention in The Dallas Morning News Daily Blog. [2]

> Now this is cool . There's a network of machines — "Eggs" — that seems to indicate when major world events (that is, those with strong emotional impact), are about to occur. This is not science fiction.

Well, maybe it is. Science fiction, that is.

A quick look shows the black box that can see into the future is really a rehash of PEAR, the Princeton Engineering Anomalies Research. Back in 1979 Robert Jahn, Dean of Engineering and Applied Science at Princeton, decided to undertake the study of the effects of human activities and thought processes on mechanical systems. The latest incarnation of this bit of foolishness is the Global Consciousness Project. [3]

> The Global Consciousness Project (GCP) is also known as the EGG Project. It does not have a corporate office, and is a volunteer collaboration involving about 75 researchers, analysts, and egg hosts. Some of us work at universities or institutes in various parts of the world, but these institutions are not funding sponsors or responsible hosts of the project. In particular, this project is not sponsored by Princeton University nor any of its departments or programs. Our funding comes from private donations generously given by a number of contributors.
>
> Dr. Roger Nelson is the author of most pages and analytical presentations on the GCP site proper…

The principle behind PEAR, and the GCP, is a Random Event Generator (REG) or a Random Number Generator (RNG). REGs/RNGs should not be confused with "random" functions in computer software. Computer software functions do not really pro-

EVENTS CALENDAR

March Program

Saturday, March 12, 2 p.m.
Center for Community Cooperation,
2900 Live Oak Street, Dallas

Check the NTS Hotline or our Web site for more information.

March Board of Directors/Social Meeting

March 26 (Saturday) at 7:00 pm

The March combined Board of Directors and social meeting will be held at the Black-Eyed Pea Restaurant, 7778 Forest Lane, Dallas. It is just west of Central Expwy.

Let us know if you are coming. Send e-mail to mselby@ntskeptics.org, or phone 214-335-9248. We sometimes cancel these events or even change the location at the last minute.

duce random numbers. They use computer algorithms that produce predictable sequences of highly uncorrelated numbers according to a mathematical formula. The pseudo-random number sequences can be used in simulations to produce inputs that mimic the unpredictable nature of the physical world. However, these algorithms use the previous state of the computer program to compute the subsequent system state and the next "random" number. The outputs of these programs cannot be influenced by outside events.

The REGs/RNGs used in PEAR and other applications do not rely on mathematical formulas to generate their outputs. Instead they use physical processes that are truly random. These processes are random and unpredictable in that they do not rely on past system states to determine which number to generate next. The heart of these devices is usually some implementation of quantum mechanics. Recall that quantum mechanics is one of the two hallmark discoveries of twentieth-century science. Quantum mechanics overthrew Isaac Newton's clockwork view of the universe, in which all events result directly from prior events, making the world as predictable as a clockwork.

Quantum mechanics produced the surprising conclusion that at the base of the physical world events occur according to the laws of chance. A prime example is radioactive decay. We can say that a particular atom will undergo alpha decay within the next second with a certain probability but never with any certainty. In fact, radioactive decay is one of the mechanism used to produce random events. Set an alpha particle counter next to a sample of billions and billions of radioactive atoms, and the counter will click in a truly random manner. On average there will be a "fixed" number of clicks each second, but the actual number of clicks will vary randomly about this average.

Well then, if these events are truly random, how can people affect the process? Remember, the secret to their randomness is that nothing causes them. *Nothing affects them*.

Whoa! This sounds like a case for the NTS Paranormal Challenge. I have not consulted the other underwriters, but I think they will go along with me in throwing down the gauntlet on this one. If human thought and disconnected human events can really alter the random outcome of an REG/RNG, then we will eagerly write the $12,000 check. Lest you think I am being overly generous, let me dispel any such thinking. I fully expect to retire in my old age still in possession of my money.

But what of the remarkable claims of PEAR and the Global Consciousness Project? What drives ordinarily level-headed scientists to take these notions seriously?

Opinion time: We note that what seems to produce these remarkable effects is *human* thought, *human* activities, and events that matter to *humans*. At the bottom of it all is *human* vanity—the idea that "this land was made for you and me." It's a close relative to "if a tree falls in the forest, and nobody hears it, does it make a sound?" That question has consumed the evening hours of college freshmen for probably centuries without anybody ever thinking to ask the bears who live in the forest.

Anyhow, the story is the researchers are seeing non-random swings in the outputs of their REGs/RNGs in connection with world events that are of great importance to your favorite species and mine. In the case of the GCP, the Indian Ocean tsunami of last December produced an effect, but not the gamma ray burst a day later, which released more energy in

one tenth of a second than the sun emits in over a hundred thousand years.

So. maybe if the gamma ray burst had been closer. Maybe not. A report by Jahn, Nelson, and others notes: [4]

> The dependence of the effect sizes on the distance of the operator from the machine could also be an important indicator of fundamental mechanism. Actually, no such dependence has been found over the dimensions available in the laboratory itself. More remarkably, these operator/machine aberrations continue to manifest in a substantial body of experiments wherein operators are physically separated from the devices by distances of up to several thousand miles, again with no statistically detectable dependence of the effect sizes on the degree of separation.

Generally, the writers are talking about events that are local to our planet, so they may want to discount celestial events like the gamma ray burst. Also, the gamma ray burst occurred 50,000 light years away, so it *really* happened 50,000 years ago, special relativity not-withstanding.

Time seems to matter to a diminishing degree, as well. Recall that Newton's clockwork view held that direct results follow *immediately* upon their cause. The PEAR researchers would like us to remember, as well, that quantum mechanics allows results to *precede* the cause to some degree. Maybe to a greater degree than is usually observed in the laboratory: [5]

> In a subset of this remote database, comprising some 87,000 trials per intention, the operators address their attention to the machine's operation at times other than those at which the data are actually generated. Such "off-time" experiments have ranged from 73 hours before to 336 hours after machine operation, and display a scale and character of anomalous results similar to those of the locally generated data, including gender effects and count population distortions.

You see the problem with this as well as I do. There are many human-significant events occurring every year. So, what's to show the correlation between anomalous behavior of the REGs and a significant event, particularly if so much latitude is given to time and distance? Are we just seeing the case of the Texas sharpshooter—where the shooter shoots first and draws a bull's eye later? Publications from PEAR and now the GCP indicate (as expected) that the observed effects are in the marginal range of statistical significance. In cases like this, there is a great opportunity for sharp shooting.

Over 50 years ago Nobel chemist Irving Langmuir provided an excellent description of pathological science. He listed six features to look for, one of which is: [6]

> The effect is of a magnitude that remains close to the limit of detectability; or, many measurements are necessary because of the very low statistical significance of the results.

It's hard to escape that PEAR and the GCP have achieved one of Langmuir's milestones and are probably knocking over several others, as well.

Wrapping up, the authors explain their attempts to theorize what they are observing: [7]

> Any attempts to model phenomena like those reported here must be immensely complicated by the evidence that human volition is the primary correlate of the observed anomalous physical effects, and thus that some proactive role for consciousness must somehow be represented. This challenge is compounded by the absence of clear-cut psychological or physiological indicators, and by the lack of demonstrable space and time dependence. While a variety of attempts to combine conventional psychological and neurophysiological concepts with established physical and mathematical formalisms, such as electromagnetic theory, statistical thermodynamics, quantum mechanics, geophysical mechanics, and hyperspace formalisms have been proposed [50], few of these propositions seem competent to accommodate the salient features of the empirical data, let alone to survive critical scientific and epistemological criteria.

(The citation refers to Schmidt, H. (1973). PK tests with a high-speed random number generator. *Journal of Parapsychology*, Vol. 37, p. 105.)

Again, the tone of this passage underscores the strong emotional draw of humanity on their thinking. "This land was made for you and me."

Moreover, we've heard this kind of phrasing in a previous life. It recalls the mindset of Russell Targ and Harold Puthoff, who did "remote viewing" research at Stanford Research Institute, and Rupert Sheldrake, famous for his promotion of "morphic resonance." Along this line of thinking the world seems to jump eagerly to the will of human observers, ignoring the needs of lesser creatures. The laws of nature bend to our slightest whim and ours, alone. The thinking seems to be that we are nature's darling and the world is our cradle. Would that the stock market were so accommodating.

We address the challenge posed by PEAR/GCP at two levels. The first is "Show us the evidence." The second is "Show us the reasoning." Can you think of any reason this could be happening that does not invoke our vanity. Maybe if the second level were addressed first we would never have to deal with the first. Then, otherwise earnest scientists would quit trying to put themselves at the center of the universe and get down to looking for real answers to real questions. I suggest we adopt a primary

truth: The universe is not designed with us in mind. We *are* just an accident of nature and after these many years we're very fortunate to still be here. We continue to survive at the whim of a stormy world that is not even aware of our presence. Most certainly, this land was *not* made for you and me. [8]

❐

References

1 http://www.rednova.com/news/display/?id=126649#121

2 Posted by columnist Rod Dreher at http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/blogs/opinion/

3 http://noosphere.princeton.edu/

4 R. G. Jahn, B. J. Dunne, R. D. Nelson, Y. H. Dobyns, and G. J. Bradish, "Correlations of Random Binary Sequences with Pre-Stated Operator Intention: A Review of a 12-Year Program." Princeton Engineering Anomalies Research (PEAR), School of Engineering and Applied Science, Princeton University. http://noosphere.princeton.edu/papers/pear/correlations.12yr.pdf

5 *Ibid*.

6 See Robert Hall's discussion of this topic in the October 1989 issue of *Physics Today*. There are many discussions on-line, as well: http://www.cs.princeton.edu/~ken/Langmuir/langB.htm

7 Jahn, *op. cit.*

8 With apologies to Woody Guthrie.

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.]

Science meets society: is science just another belief system?

The 11 Feb 05 issue of *Science* has an editorial by Alan Leshner, AAAS CEO, "Where Science Meets Society." That's also the theme of next week's AAAS meeting in Washington. Leshner contends that conflicts between science and "certain human beliefs" are on the increase. He thinks bringing scientists and religious leaders together to discuss the relation of scientific advances to "other belief systems" is helpful, and thinks we should "try diplomacy and discussion for a change." In the first place, conflicts are not increasing. Relations have never been better. Skeptics are no longer forced to recant, nor even denied tenure. And as for diplomacy, we could start by negotiating Intelligent Design Theory. Scientists might concede that God created Adam and Eve In exchange for a concession that the serpent evolved by natural selection.

Global consciousness: just ask your random number generator.

Did you know that we all sense the future? Did you know that our minds influence the functioning of machines? If you knew both of these things, you will not be surprised to learn that random number generators around the world anticipated both 9/11 and the Indian Ocean tsunami. The Global Consciousness Project, headed by Dean Radin http://www.aps.org/WN/WN04/wn080604.cfm found these events in the output of 65 RNGs in 41 countries. And this is just the start. Once they refine what constitutes an ano

maly in a random signal, they'll be able to predict even the most trivial events — after they happen. But a more ominous interpretation is that the RNGs are causing these horrific events. A sensible precaution would be to ban the use of all such devices.

Is "John of God" a healer or a charlatan? Is *ABC News* nuts?

In an hour long report last night, *Primetime Live* co-anchor John Quinones traveled to a remote area of Brazil to find out if "John of God" is really a miracle healer as his followers claim. Wake up ABC! It's the 21st Century. In a position to help millions of viewers understand that they live in a rational universe, ABC has chosen instead to tell them that their sad superstitions are open scientific questions. To give the program credibility they turned to "one of the world's most respected surgeons, Dr. Mehmet Oz." Oz is no doubt a fine surgeon, but he has touch therapists in his operating room helping patients "connect to the healing energy everywhere." When ABC dumped Michael Guillen as science editor, (WN 27 Dec 02) it seemed like a good sign. But it looks like they still don't get it.

Bob Park can be reached via email at opa@aps.org

Intelligent Design Symposium '05 at UT Dallas – The Case for Intelligent Design

From: "Wilston" wilston@student.utdallas.edu

The Intelligent Design & Evolution Awareness (IDEA) Club at the University of Texas at Dallas is hosting an Intelligent Design Symposium (Saturday, March 26th). For more details, please visit http://www.utdallas.edu/orgs/idea/symposium2005.

Feel free to spread the word.

Best Regards,
Wilston - IDEA Club President

Name of event: Intelligent Design Symposium

Presented by: IDEA (Intelligent Design & Evolution Awareness) Club at UT Dallas

Description: This event will be a symposium on the theory of Intelligent Design. Speakers include: Ray Bohlin, of Probe Ministries, Paul Nelson, of the University of Chicago, Bruce Gordon, of Baylor University, and Bill Dembski, of Baylor University.

Date of event:

Start date: March 26, 2005
End date: March 26, 2005

Time of event:

Session starts: 12:00 PM
Session ends: 6:00 PM

Location:

University of Texas at Dallas
800 West Campbell Rd.
Richardson, TX 75080

Admission price of the event:

Public: (Symposium Only): $15.00 Per Person - Prepay Only

Public: (Lunch Banquet & Symposium): $25.00 Per Person - Prepay Only

UT Dallas Faculty, Staff & Students: (Symposium Only): Free w/ ID

UT Dallas Faculty, Staff & Students: (Lunch Banquet & Symposium): $10.00 – Prepay Only

Walk-In Registration: $20.00 (cash only) – Applies to Public Only

Web site:

http://www.utdallas.edu/orgs/idea/symposium2005

Saturday, March 26th

Lunch Banquet

12:00PM - 1:00PM

Location: SU 2.512 - Student Union - Regency Rooms

Note: You must prepay to attend the luncheon. This will be a great opportunity to meet with the speakers.

Symposium

1:15PM - 6:00PM

Location: HH 2.402 - Hoblitzelle Hall - Auditorium

Note: Doors to the Karl Hoblitzelle Hall building will be open by 12:30PM for early seating and walk-in registration.

First Session

1:15 PM – Symposium Starts w/ Introduction of Panelists

1:25 PM – First Lecture (Paul Nelson)

2:10 PM – Second Lecture (Ray Bohlin)

2:55 PM – 30 Minute Break & Q/A Session (Nelson & Bohlin Only)

Second Session

3:25 PM – Third Lecture (Bruce Gordon)

4:10 PM – Fourth Lecture (Bill Dembski)

4:55 PM – 1HR Q/A Session (Bohlin, Gordon, & Dembski Only)

6:00 PM – Symposium Ends

Lecture Topics

Paul Nelson - Intelligent Design and the Cambrian Explosion

Ray Bohlin - Natural Limits to Biological Change

Bruce Gordon - The Incompatibility of Metaphysical Naturalism with Quantum Theory

Note: All lectures will be 45 minutes long.

Web news

by John Blanton

The World Wide Web is a wonderful source of information and news. Some of it is true, and some of it is not.

Design for living

http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2005-02-08.htm#behe

http://query.nytimes.com/mem/tnt.html?oref=login&tntget=2005/02/07/opinion/07behe.html&tntemail1

By Michael J. Behe February 7, 2005

Well, I guess he should know.

> Bethlehem, Pa. - IN the wake of the recent lawsuits over the teaching of Darwinian evolution, there has been a rush to debate the merits of the rival theory of intelligent design. As one of the scientists who have proposed design as an explanation for biological systems, I have found widespread confusion about what intelligent design is and what it is not.
>
> First, what it isn't: the theory of intelligent design is not a religiously based idea…

Of course, we always thought ID was religion and not science. But, Michael Behe is one of the few real scientists who support ID, and if he says it's not religion, then he must be right. After all, who would know better. I mean, if there were a religious motivation behind ID Behe would surely tell us. Wouldn't he?

Wait! I just remembered. We're The North Texas Skeptics. We tend to look sideways at people who issue self-serving public position statements. Some would even call us cynical.

Rather than question the integrity of an esteemed scientist like Michael Behe, I will only say, if ID is not driven by a religious agenda, then the religious club is missing a really great opportunity. In modern times there has never been a better vehicle for introducing religion (and anti-science) into the public school curriculum. So, what are these guys waiting for?

Full range of scientific views' includes theory of a creator

http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2005-02-08.htm#range

http://www.kansascity.com/mld/kansascity/news/local/10827796.htm?1c

Sunday, February 06, 2005

Vicki Palatas

Sounds like a good idea, to some.

> Legally speaking, intelligent design should be taught in Kansas schools to comply with the No Child Left Behind Act.

Wait, there's more.

> Intelligent design teaches the theory of a creator based on scientific observation and analysis, not the worship of one. By contrast, evolution has been propagated by those who believe in it despite mounting evidence against it. Francis Crick, who teamed with James Watson to identify the double helix of DNA, exhorted biologists "to constantly keep in mind that what they see was not designed, but evolved." Richard Dawkins, a leading evolutionary biologist at Oxford, has labeled critics of Darwinism "ignorant, stupid or insane." Not only does this obfuscate the scientific process, it actually redefines evolution as religion.

Palatas should know what she's talking about. She's a stay-at-home mom. Hey, wait. So was my mom (when she wasn't working), and my mom thought all this creationism stuff was a bunch of foolishness. Actually, my mom thought most stuff was a bunch of foolishness. But that's another story.

Evolution takes a back seat in U.S. classes

http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2005-02-08.htm#backseat

http://www.nytimes.com/2005/02/01/science/01evo.html

Tuesday, February 1, 2005

By CORNELIA DEAN

This is from our *What Else Is New* Department:

> Dr. John Frandsen, a retired zoologist, was at a dinner for teachers in Birmingham, Ala., recently when he met a young woman who had just begun work as a biology teacher in a small school district in the state. Their conversation turned to evolution.
>
> "She confided that she simply ignored evolution because she knew she'd get in trouble with the principal if word got about that she was teaching it," he recalled. "She told me other teachers were doing the same thing."

Anti-science elements in American politics and the public in general have long worked to keep the pressure on public school teachers. This teacher's situation is uncharacteristic in that resistance is originating from within the school system. If news reports are any indication, this kind of opposition typically comes from parents, usually in the form of one or two highly vocal individuals and a number of others who follow their lead.

Skeptic Ink

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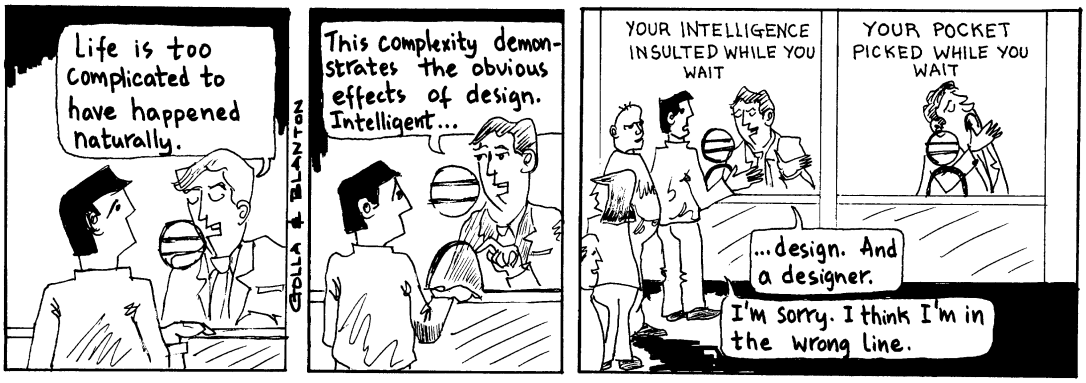

Generally the anti-science activists lose in the end. They lose, not because evolution is real science (and creationism is not), but because of the religious foundations of creationism. Suits brought by the ACLU and other organizations challenge any teaching of creationism and religiously-motivated suppression of science teaching. The basis of these suits is the Constitution's protection against government support for religion. Specifically, the suits generally do not involve the issue of quality education. The Constitution does not seem to provide us with any protection against stupidity.

While all of this is going on teachers have to endure the associated acrimony, and most don't consider the hassle worth while. The result is that American students slip through their high school years without learning one of the most basic principles of life on Earth. Since these students shortly become our voting public the result tends to be self-perpetuating.

BREAKPOINT: Sticker Wars: Intelligent design foes fight evolution sticker

http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2005-01-28.htm#colson

http://www.floridabaptistwitness.com/3746.article

By CHARLES COLSON

Published January 27, 2005

Flash news! The ACLU is at it again.

> Last week a federal judge, egged on by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), ordered a Georgia school district to remove stickers from biology textbooks.
>
> Why? Because, according to the judge, a simple statement written on the stickers—that evolution is a theory, not a fact—was an unconstitutional endorsement of religion. He held evolution as fact!
>
> This is just the latest example of a plague of intellectual blindness among our secular elites.

The former presidential aid is referring to scientific theories in competition with evolution. Well, not all competing theories, but you have to start somewhere. Chuck Colson will prefer to start with "Intelligent Design."

> The constitutional argument is phony. Honest observers quickly realize that the debate here over life's origins is not one of science versus religion, but of science versus science. Take the work of biochemist Michael Behe, a professor at Lehigh University. Initially, Behe accepted Darwinist teachings. But then he began reading articles questioning evolutionary theories. He found the arguments compelling. So he began to do research of his own.
>
> In his book published 10 years ago, *Darwin's Black Box*, he introduced a concept he calls "irreducible complexity." He argues that complex structures like proteins cannot be assembled piecemeal, with gradual improvement of function. Instead, like a mousetrap, all the parts—catch, spring, hammer, and so forth—must be assembled simultaneously, or the protein doesn't work.

Colson's willingness to dig in and master the complexities of modern molecular biology is highly commendable. If only more (ex)government officials were so earnest. He concludes by encouraging all of us to hold fast and not give in.

> Don't you be taken in. Keep demanding the truth, and in time, we're going to win an honest debate.

An honest debate. Now that's a thought. Skeptics, are you ready?

❐

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Signature _____Date _____

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