

Why Do Scientists Commit Fraud?

By David N. Brown

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It is clearly very important in the minds of those who perpetuate the myth of vaccine-caused autism and other vaccine-related paranoia to “show” that those most directly responsible for vaccination are not just doing harm, but doing so knowingly for the sole purpose of monetary gain. No other explanation is necessary or sufficient for their ubiquitous and (by any informed analysis) preposterous assertion that vaccines are economically profitable. The most fundamental way to challenge their delusion is to ask just one question: If advocates of vaccines did engage in fraud, would they do so whether or not they gained any money from it? The most direct way to answer is to look at cases where fraud by professional scientists has been proved beyond reasonable doubt, and decide whether money was a primary motive for the perpetrator. Three especially notorious cases will serve for the purposes of discussion:

Charles Dawson- While the name is not familiar, this man is by strong consensus the creator of the most notorious hoax of modern science, “Piltdown Man”. Dawson does not entirely satisfy the description of “professional”, having minimal formal training, but he clearly had little or no trouble convincing the undisputably qualified to accept him as their peer. It appears that he committed several minor hoaxes before embarking on the elaborate and ambitious Piltdown scheme. He forged two specimens, using fragments of recent human and orangutan remains, which had been doctored with chemicals to appear ancient and chiseled to remove key features that would have shown the specimens to be composites of two species. He also fabricated an assemblage of fossils and artifacts at the same site, which were either forged or introduced from elsewhere. Dawson died before his most elaborate and ambitious hoax received more than guarded interest from scientists.

One of the less explored issues of Piltdown hoax is Dawson's motive. It has been taken nearly as a given that he did not commit any of his hoaxes for monetary gain, and it is easy to rally arguments against any such notion: As a son of a successful lawyer, Dawson would have had no compelling need to earn money for himself. While he sold several forged “artifacts”, and would have been paid for his articles, the money therefrom might well have been less than he spent creating them. Finally, even if he did initially hope to become wealthy through his frauds, nothing short of self-deception could have sustained such a belief in the face of experience. All serious discussion has focused instead on an argued desire for social recognition (consistent with clinical narcissism), with admittance to the Royal Society and knighthood being offered as his ultimate objectives. However, this may be overestimating his desire for personal attention. In the Piltdown affair in particular, he led two distinguished scientists to his forged assemblage, thus effectively giving others the chance to take credit for his “discovery”. I suspect that Dawson was less like the narcissist than like Shakespeare's Iago: Content to appear to be only a humble subordinate, he stealthily supplied scientists of more legitimate distinction than he could ever have achieved the means and opportunity to humiliate themselves.

Paul Kammerer- Kammerer's claim to infamy is the last serious and seriously noticed defense of Lamarckism. He reported that, when the “midwife toad” was forced to mate in water instead of on land, they developed “nuptial pads” for breeding in the new environment that were passed on to resulting progeny. In 1926, critics examining his specimens found evidence that their toes had been treated with ink, and so argued that the “pads” did not exist and that Kammerer was engaging in intentional deception. Relatively soon afterward, Kammerer killed himself. Historians of science have

been relatively lenient with Kammerer. That the toads' toes were indeed dyed intentionally has not been questioned, but it is disputed whether Kammerer did this himself. Far more importantly, it has been accepted that the nuptial pads Kammerer claimed to have produced may have existed in fact (with the caveat that such a development can be accounted for by conventional genetics and evolutionary theory). In this case, the ink can be given a relatively benign interpretation, as an effort to make the pads more visible, and by at least some analyses photographs of Kammerer's specimens show possible "pad" tissue beyond the portion of the toe marked with ink.

In the final analysis, even if Kammerer's activities are not judged outright fraud, he clearly stepped well beyond what his peers would accept as made in good faith. This lost him the good will of the scientific establishment, and he exacted the greatest price of all from himself. (Incidentally, I am satisfied that he must at least have known of the use of ink on his specimens, otherwise he would have protested the report.) Given that he clearly knew what discovery would have done to his professional standing, and his clear sensitivity about his reputation, it is inconceivable that he would have undertaken the misadventure for material gain alone. In any event, since midwife toads are not raised for food or any other use, Kammerer's work had no immediate application of economic significance. (In contrast, Lysenko, best characterized as an amateur who got in over his head before descending into fraud, claimed to have bred a superior form of a wheat staple crop.) Ultimately, there is simply no explanation available for what Kammerer did (or allowed to be done), and even if he had lived to give a full and honest account of his actions, it might still be comprehensible only to himself.

Cyril Burt- Burt was a psychologist active until around the time of his death in 1971. He had long been respected as a leading authority in psychology. In 1943, 1955 and 1966, he wrote and published a series of studies of IQ in identical twins. His claimed "results" aroused suspicion, particularly after all three studies produced nearly identical correlation coefficients (.770 in the first and .771 in the latter two) for IQ and heredity despite allegedly much larger samples. Soon after his death, critics openly argued that his final research was fraudulent. Some went so far as to argue that his data, the alleged "twins" and even the assistants said to have collected the information were only inventions of Burt's mind. Further reconsideration has refuted or challenged the harshest charges against him (particularly by plausibly identifying real persons as his assistants). However, there can be little doubt that he did, at a minimum, consciously manipulate the linear regression of his data in the last of the disputed studies.

Even more than in the other cases here, Burt's actions cannot be accounted for by anything as simple or "logical" as monetary gain. Professional status, in this case, is also easily discounted. The rewards of his previous research, including knighthood, had been great enough that he had nothing left to gain at the time of his most suspect work. In a further wrinkle, by ca. 1966, he was probably well aware that he would be dead (of cancer) within a few years, leaving him no opportunity to enjoy anything he might gain by dishonesty. The standard appraisal is that his slide into fraud was a result of his mental state deteriorating along with his health. While there is nothing to be said against this appraisal, it should also be noted that he likely felt (when sufficiently lucid) a need to make a final achievement to secure a legacy beyond his own lifetime, and quite possibly to keep earlier, less brazen misconduct from being exposed.

There we have it: The three most notorious cases of fraud in the last century, and the most obvious common denominator is the absence of monetary gain as primary motive. So why do vaccine critics even bother with nonsense about the corrupting influence of "vaccine profits" which, by any serious appraisal, are at best small and at worst wholly imaginary? Undoubtedly because they have little real knowledge of science, because their hostility toward vaccination is so great that they refuse to admit that it is even an unintentional evil, and because those who need vaccines as scapegoats for their

problems also need scapegoats for vaccines. I think there is also at work an unconscious choice between kinds of villains.

In private discussions, I have outlined the idea of two types of villains: “super villains” and “prosaic villains”. I define both on motive rather than considerations of ability and vulnerability. The prosaic villain is motivated purely by self-interest, and what he seeks is mostly what anyone in the audience would desire themselves: money, fame, power, etc. My pick for the quintessential example of prosaic villainy would be the gangsters of *RoboCop*, played by Kurtwood Smith and three strong supporting cast members: This wonderfully repellent bunch would be equally at home as jocks in the locker room or office workers around the water cooler. My idea of a super villain is one with motives no one in the audience can easily relate to. Rather than pursuing universal goals in an immoral way, they do harmful things for reasons outside any shared framework of logic and reality. Iago easily fits this description. Other examples are Sterling Hayden's delusional general in *Dr. Strangelove*, the cheerful psychotic in the original *Dirty Harry*, and Heath Ledger's turn as the Joker in *Dark Knight*- in my own judgment among the most memorable and disturbing villains of American cinema.

The “super villain” is clearly more frightening than the “prosaic” villain, in large part because the motives of the prosaic villain imply a certain level of self-restraint. The prosaic villain will at least do no harm, and may choose to do “good”, when doing evil does not serve his own interests. There is also an implication of predictability: If one knows what a prosaic villain is interested in, it is much easier to anticipate what he will do. Finally, the evil of a prosaic villain does not challenge the power of reason and virtue to prevent evil or at least keep the seemingly intelligent and decent from joining in. One would be safer from Clarence Boddicker or Dr. No than from the Joker or General Ripper. And, if one considers oneself both reasonable and virtuous, it is that much easier to believe that one could never become like the villain oneself. In the end, those who justify cynicism with the supposed “profit motives” of others fall easily into backhanded naivete. *How often does evil **really** need a reason?*

David N. Brown is a semipro author, diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome as an adult. Previous works include the novels *The Worlds of Naughtenny Moore*, *Walking Dead* and *Aliens Vs Exotroopers*, and the nonfiction ebook *The Urban Legend of Vaccine-Caused Autism*. This and other articles related to autism are available free of charge at evilpossum.weebly.com.