

RANDOM SAMPLES

edited by CONSTANCE HOLDEN

Cattell Relinquishes Psychology Award

Psychologist Raymond B. Cattell last month asked that his name be withdrawn from consideration for a major award that was put on hold after after a historian alleged that Cattell's beliefs about eugenics align him with racists and anti-Semites.

Cattell, 92, is a towering figure in 20th century psychology, having made important contributions to measurement of personality and IQ. Last year, the American Psychological Association (APA), in what many psychologists saw as a long-overdue gesture, decided to give

him the 1997 Gold Medal Award for Life Achievement in Psychological Science at its annual meeting in August.

But the award was shelved at the last minute in response to concerns raised publicly by historian Barry Mehler, who runs the Institute for the Study of Academic Racism at Ferris State University in Big Rapids, Michigan. Mehler accused Cattell of being aligned with "fascist and eugenics causes," and cited writings espousing "Beyondism," a philosophy that calls on societies to use eugenic strategies to promote an

evolutionary leap in human brainpower. Awards committee chair Joseph Matarazzo of the Oregon Health Sciences University in Portland appointed a five-person panel to investigate Mehler's charges.

Cattell's daughter, Heather, a psychologist in Walnut Creek, California, says her father "did write some pretty terrible stuff" before World War II but that his views have since been modified. Cattell himself wrote APA that he "abhors" racism and wants only "voluntary eugenics."

Heather Cattell says her father has long wanted to withdraw from the controversy and

that his family finally went along with his wishes as he is ill and has little time to live. There will be no final report on the matter as the panel has been disbanded.

Former APA President Charles Spielberger of the University of South Florida in Tampa defends the decision to appoint a panel, saying that because "this is a lifetime award," Cattell's politics were relevant. But other psychologists are saddened by the affair. Asserts a former Cattell graduate student, psychologist Richard Gorsuch of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, "This is going to give an international black eye to psychology."

Fratricide Among the Plums

Most fertilized seeds never survive the earliest stages of development in a plant. Scientists have ascribed these "seed abortions" to chance and an undernourished environment. Now, however, scientists in India have found that in the Indian black plum tree (*Syzygium cuminii*), at least, sibling rivalry may work via a "death chemical" secreted by the first fertilized ovule.

The ovary of the black plum has about 30 ovules. All get fertilized during a single reproductive binge, but only one survives to become the pit of a cherry-sized fruit. That's usually the ovule closest to the flower's stigma, which receives the fertilizing pollen.

Hypothesizing that seed abortion may stem from competition

between fertilized seeds, a group led by evolutionary ecologist Kotiganaiah Narayanagowda Ganeshaiah of the University of Agricultural Sciences in Bangalore, India, exposed recently fertilized seeds to a solution containing ground-up "dominant" (that is, survivor) seeds. They found that uptake of sucrose, a nutrient, was inhibited and the seeds starved to death—an effect not observed in solutions containing other ground-up plant material, the researchers report in the 25 November 1997 issue of *Current Science*.

Ganeshaiah's group speculates that at a certain stage of maturation, a fertilized seed starts producing a plant growth substance that acts as a "death chemical." So the seed that gets fertilized first can kill off its less developed competitors.

Triangulated. This unique view comes from the Near Earth Asteroid Rendezvous (NEAR) spacecraft, as it swung by Earth (looking straight at Antarctica) late last month to pick up a gravity boost and calibrate its instruments before heading for a liaison with the asteroid Eros next January. In this picture, NEAR is 400,000 kilometers from both Earth and the moon—which is also about the distance between the two orbs.



This is the first evidence that a seed actively snuffs out siblings, according to Kamal Bawa, an evolutionary biologist at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, who calls the work "unique." Other explanations for seed abortion, Bawa says, fail to account for the fact that it occurs even in ideal conditions.

New Hubble Director

The Hubble Space Telescope will have a new captain in September. Steven Beckwith, managing director of the Max Planck Institute for Astronomy in Heidelberg, Germany, will be the new director of the Space Telescope Science Institute in Baltimore, which runs Hubble for NASA.

Astronomers say Beckwith, whose research interests include studies of young stars and galaxies based on their infrared light, will help shape the scientific goals for the rest of the Hubble telescope's mission. He is also expected to help persuade NASA that the institute should manage Hubble's successor—the Next Generation Space Telescope—planned for launch in 2005. Beckwith will replace Robert Williams, who is returning to research.

From Paleontologist to Parliamentarian

Famed paleoanthropologist Richard Leakey is now one of Kenya's newest members of Parliament. Leakey was appointed to a 5-year term on 23 January by Safina, a reform party that he helped found in 1995. The fresh parliamentarian, a longtime adversary of Kenyan President Daniel arap Moi, says he plans to stump for constitutional reform and for measures to enhance Kenyan science, "at the museum, in wildlife, and at our medical research institutions."



LIZ GILBERT/SYGMA

Such party appointees are expected to represent minority populations, and Leakey, who lost both legs in a 1993 plane crash, says with a wink that he's well qualified—"As a legless person, I'm representing the physically handicapped and as a white, I'm representing those who are challenged in their pigmentation." Kenya has one other white member of Parliament. Before entering politics, Leakey directed Kenya's National Museums and later the Kenya Wildlife Services.