

Briefings

edited by IVAN AMATO

Abortion Law Fallout

Before Louisiana's state government enacted the nation's most restrictive abortion law (clearly permitting it only in cases of rape and when the mother's life is in danger), the American Psychological Association (APA) had been planning to hold its 1997 annual convention in New Orleans. But the APA's board of directors has canceled those plans. The basis for the decision: a 22-year-old APA resolution declaring that "termination of unwanted pregnancy be considered a civil right of the pregnant woman."

The decision to relocate the conference means that an estimated 14,000 attendees will take their convention dollars to another city. The ideological message will thus be underscored by a multimillion-dollar revenue loss for Louisiana.

The APA may soon be joined by other organizations. The American Institute for Ultrasound in Medicine (AIUM), whose 9000 members specialize in monitoring pregnancies, is weighing the possibility of pulling its 1993 meeting from New Orleans, a last-minute move that could be costly to the organization as well as to Louisiana. And according to AIUM's president, John C. Hobbins, a growing list of other professional societies may send Louisiana similar strong messages of disapproval.

Genes Score a New Point in Alcoholism

Are people destined from birth to become problem drinkers, or are tough times and other environmental factors largely responsible for alcoholism? In the ongoing debate over this question, the weight of evidence has swung like a pendulum between explanations



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Alcoholism. Is it in his genes?

based on nature and nurture. Last December, after a study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* apparently debunked a tantalizing link between alcoholism and a gene for a dopamine receptor, the pendulum rested in the environmental camp (*Science*, 11 January, p.163). Now, in the July issue of the *Archives of General Psychiatry*, two new studies of that same link are pulling the pendulum back toward genetics.

The studies, conducted by separate research teams—one at the Washington University School of Medicine and the other involving investigators from UCLA and the University

of Texas Health Sciences Center—do not peg the dopamine receptor gene as the cause of alcoholism. But they do report a statistical link between the presence of a specific form of the gene and the severity of the disease. The dopamine gene "...could be a cause of the progression of the disease in individuals genetically predisposed to alcoholism," notes Indiana

University geneticist Michael Conneally in an editorial accompanying the July reports.

Still, some researchers doubt the dopamine gene plays any role in alcoholism. "I see nothing that convinces me so far that it does," says Henri Begleiter, a neuroscientist at the State University of New York's Health Science Center in Brooklyn. But while Begleiter dismisses one gene, he doesn't dismiss the possibility that an undiscovered group of genes might play a role in alcoholism.

"There's going to be a lot of letters flying back and forth in the journals in the next couple of months," Conneally says.

Keeping Textbook Babble at Bay

With 20 states all setting their own standards for what should go into science textbooks, it's no wonder that the books often end up so crammed with definitions and facts that they read like dictionaries. In the end, everyone gets shortchanged.

Last month Texas and California—the two biggest buyers of science teaching materials—took a step toward solving that problem by coordinating their guidelines, starting with seventh-grade texts. "We've got to give a common message to the instructional material developers," says California director of science education Tom Sachse. "We can't continue to say different things to them, and then batter them" because they're trying to respond to irreconcilable requests.

California has learned the hard way that publishers won't follow educational guidelines unless it is worth their while financially. Several years ago, Sachse says, California rewrote its math guidelines, yet the state's large demand for texts still was not enough to convince a single publishing company to produce a text that met the new standards. "California is not—even with our buying power—going to get California-specific materials," he says.

Sachse and Texas director of science education Jim Collins hope that combining their clout will boost the selection of quality materials they have to choose from. "The fact that the two largest purchasers will be looking for common types of texts gives us the chance to influence a whole new generation of texts," Collins adds.

Johnson vs. Darwin

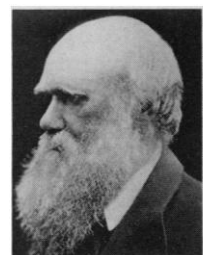
A new anti-evolution book appeared on the scene last month, and from an unlikely source—a University of California law professor. Phillip Johnson, of UC Berkeley's Boalt Law School, claims that he is "not a defender of creation science," but his book, *Darwin on Trial*, was nevertheless endorsed by the Institute for Creation Research and uses many of the same arguments that its leaders use.

Johnson admits that religion fuels his personal beef with evolution. "There is no room [in evolutionary theory] for a life force," he says, "for something...that cannot be perceived through the tools of science."

But like the creationists he dissociates himself from, Johnson claims to "examine the scientific evidence [for evolution] on its own terms." In an interview, Johnson blasted evolutionary theory for being "constantly reformulated, in the manner of Marxism, on account of the failure of its predictions to come true." The theory should be abandoned, he argues, and scientists should admit that the origin of species can't be explained without invoking supernatural processes.

Johnson's arguments demonstrate his misunderstanding of the scientific process, in which theories are continually tested and refined, says Eugenie Scott of the Berkeley-based National Center for Science Education. The problem, says Scott, is that Johnson is a lawyer, not a scientist. "Theory, proof, and law are different terms to scientists than to lawyers," she says.

Johnson is busy on the talk-show circuit publicizing his book, and Scott worries that his academic position and his approach will win him a wide following. "I hope scientists find out about this. They really need to know [the book] is out there and is confusing the public."



National Medical Library

Charles Darwin