

Debunking the commercial press and why scientists hate to talk to the media

October 29 2007, by Mary Anne Simpson



Bravo Evolution Story. Credit: Bravo Entertainment

The popular press ran a story over the weekend about the eventual split into two species of the human race. The sources cited were the preeminent London School of Economics and the work of Professor Oliver Curry. The story published as scientific fact is rebuked by Dr. Curry and this article explains how it all happened.

A wildly interesting story about the eventual division of mankind into two species by the year 3000 caught my eye over the weekend. The story originally published by the Daily Mail authored by Niall Firth on October 26, 2007 provided astounding predictions for the future of mankind. It was also given a top position in the American news index Drudgereport. The Daily Mail story has graphic displays of the evolution of mankind and film clips of the classic work by H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine*.

Further, the story piqued my interest because the sources cited were from the eminent London School of Economics. Specifically, a professor, Oliver Curry who received his PHD from the London School of Economics. His dissertation concerns Morality as Natural History: An adaptationist account of ethics, published in 2005. In essence Professor Curry interests are about values and attitudes and where do they come from.

He is a research associate affiliated with the Centre for Philosophy and Natural and Social Sciences. He is a member of the Darwin@LSE group. He currently teaches Political Theory at New York University in London.

The Daily Mail article stated in pertinent part:

"The alarming prediction comes from evolutionary theorist Oliver Curry from the London School of Economics, who says that the human race will have reached its physical peak by the year 3000."

"These humans will be between 6ft and 7ft tall and they will live up to 120 years."

"Physical features will be driven by indicators of health, youth and fertility that men and women have evolved to look for in potential mates," says the report, which suggests that advances in cosmetic surgery and other body modifying techniques will effectively homogenize our appearance."

"Men will have symmetrical facial features, deeper voices and bigger penises, according to Curry in a report commissioned for men satellite TV channel Bravo."

"Women will all have glossy hair, smooth hairless skin, large eyes and

pert breasts, according to Curry."

"Racial differences will be a thing of the past as interbreeding produces a single coffee-coloured skin tone."

"The future for our descendants is a long life, perfect bodies and chiseled features, however, while humans will reach their peak in 1000 years' time, 10,000 years later our reliance on technology will have begun to dramatically change our appearance."

"Medicine will weaken our immune system and we will begin to appear more child-like. Dr Curry said: The report suggests that the future of man will be a story of the good, the bad and the ugly."

I read these astonishing predictions from an eminent professor educated at the preeminent London School of Economics and something looked fishy. It was enough to make anyone take notice. As it turns out selling papers and hyping an upcoming Bravo episode was the purpose of the article. It was not to educate the public at all.

In fact Dr. Curry has renounced any conclusions or mis applications of his work on the evolution of values, moral choices and the like. He is currently awaiting publication of his recent research, *Patience is a Virtue*: cooperative people have lower discount rates.

In response to the press releases mentioned in the Daily Mail article, Dr. Curry released the following explanation on October 17, 2007.

"In the summer of 2006 I was commissioned by Bravo Television to write an essay on the future of human evolution. The essay was intended as a science fiction way of illustrating some aspects of evolutionary theory."

"Bravo then sent out a press release on the essay, but did not release the essay itself. As a result, a wildly distorted version of what I had written ended up being reported as science fact in the media. I do not endorse the content of these media reports."

To read the original essay, please see below.

In essence Dr. Curry was asked to write a fictional account of what if and make some projections about some 1,000 years in the future for an episode of a popularized series on Bravo. He never intended that his Essay for Bravo be presented as scientific evidence. An examination of the quotes made in the Daily Mail article referring to a report confuses the peer review research he is conducting and an entertaining essay he never intended to have published as scientific evidence. His words and work are taken out of context.

Is it any wonder scientists and academics are skeptical of the popular media. In this instance, Bravo knew the basis of the Essay, it was for entertainment. The Daily Mail and other popular news services saw fit to publish a highly sensational headline that failed to mention the context of the words and works.

More information:

homepage.mac.com/scottukgb/publications/bravo.pdf

Citation: Debunking the commercial press and why scientists hate to talk to the media (2007, October 29) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2007-10-debunking-commercial-scientists-media.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private

study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.