Received at challenge@randi.org on 13 November 2008, unaltered except for removal of sender's name.

Hi,

I was thinking about your site, and thought what about the possibility of testing for GOD. And then coincidently I found the following article on your web site (point 2.5). It is very interesting. For the first part, GOD means different things to different people. Though most people around the world believe in some form of God, or Gods.

However, I actually believe that "GOD" has to be able to be detected somehow. And I don't mean the proof is "surviving a plane crash" etc.. There has to be a real "energy". Especially the more "spiritual" a person is, then there's got to be something bio-chemical or bio-electrical that can be detected in these individuals which is not in other people.

I am not sure whether this fits in with your view of a Challenge, as this is quite scientific. i.e. the possibilities are that we may or may not be able to detect the presence of this special bio-chemical, bio-electrical energy, or substance in the individuals. It's also presupposing that such energy does exist. But my opinion is that if these "substances" don't exist in the so-called spiritual individuals then there's no way that there is God in them. Perhaps God is all in their minds. Then you would have to question all our religious practices. But of course people would always declare that God can not be detected.

But on the other hand, if there was something that can be detected....what would that mean to humankind. If I had the resources that you guys have, I would try to find out the truth of it all scientifically. Out of this, you can then put those psychics etc.. into their proper perspectives as

well. -[NAME REMOVED]

Quote:

2.5 Why can't I submit a religious or spiritual claim?

Because they are, for the most part, untestable. For example, you can look at a series of events – say surviving an automobile crash, surviving a plane crash, surviving a near-drowning and say "This was the hand of God," but the point of the Challenge isn't to give anecdotal evidence. It is to give something testable. Most religious people believe it's impossible to test God. We're pretty sure they're right, though perhaps for different reasons.

Unquote:

Response sent 14 November 2008

Thank you for your interest in the James Randi Educational Foundation's Million Dollar Challenge.

The reason that the JREF does not accept Challenges related to the existence of God is more than just the examples given in article 2.5 of the Challenge FAQ. The examples given are meant to illustrate the problem of correlation vs. causation. Correlation vs. causation is meant to illustrate that just because two events happen in succession does not mean that they are related.

Therefore it would be impossible to say whether or not any observable changes in the human body, in the sense that you describe, were caused by a supreme being, nature, psychology, or eating a bad pizza. For instance, researchers have already used functional MRI machines to observe activity in the brains of individuals who were at the time meditating in a religious fashion. The individuals who were tested did appear to undergo changes in activity during religious meditation. However, from looking at summaries of the research done in this area, it does not appear that researchers guarded against any other possible explanations. For instance, they did not ask the volunteers to meditate about Mozart, their favorite book, or even imagine a beautiful landscape. Therefore it would appear that the researchers had set out to do one specific thing - prove that individuals meditating in a religious manner had changes in their functional MRIs. It would take further and more varied research to determine whether or not this

phenomenon was confined strictly to the religious.

And even if it was, there still remain two problems with drawing conclusions on that basis.

The first problem is that the term 'religious' is subjective and, for all practical applications, meaningless - as is saying someone 'believes in God'. As Jon Stewart said in a recent episode of The Daily Show, "The right in the country has got this mythology pinned down that being religious means you're good. It doesn't mean you're good, it just means you go to church." If we apply that line of reasoning to this discussion, then there is no objective way to measure someone's religiosity. We could do so based on ethical decisions (assuming we had all that information available), but saying that the religious people are the good people is also a fallacy, and there is no measurable way to determine someone's religious beliefs. We only have their word - which makes it entirely subjective - in the same way that an individual going to church doesn't prove that they believe in God.

The second problem with drawing conclusions this way is that there is no way of determining the reason behind a belief in God. For instance, there could be a perfectly logical evolutionary reason for a belief in God to develop in a society, which is part of the research of a European group called EXREL .

Let me give an example that creates a logical tie between evolution and a belief in God, rather than the actual hand of a supreme being washing over the minds of humanity.

Let's say that we have a group of proto-humans, and that their basic instincts are virtually indistinguishable from those of animals. Keep in mind that this is an overly simplified example. By total chance, one of these proto-humans has a genetic mutation that causes a sensation of being 'watched' by another, more powerful being. Imagine something like Diet Paranoia. Because this proto-human has the feeling of being watched by a more powerful being, they don't want to do anything that will make the being angry. Anything that this proto-human observes that has a long-term negative outcome will be associated with the unhappiness of this more powerful being. Because of this, the proto-human modifies their behavior to decrease the number of things that have a negative long-term outcome. And because of that, this particular proto-human lives longer with fewer negative outcomes and is therefore able to breed more and therefore able to spread the genetic mutation.

I'm not saying this is the reason so many indvididuals wordwide believe in God, but it is a logical *possible* reason, and my point is that there is no real way to determine whether my explanation is more or less right than anyone who says the reason for a belief in God is simply that God exists.

So, if we were to design a test to potentially illustrate that those who believe in God have different chemistry or biology than other humans, we could do it in a few different ways, none of which truly illustrate anything.

First, we could take a group of people who claim to believe in God and a group of people who claim to not and compare their biology and chemistry and look for differences. However, this

does not work because self-describing is subjective and therefore meaningless. The key word with both sets of individuals is 'claim.'

Alternately, we could note differences in brain function between individuals who were praying and individuals who were thinking about their grocery lists, which would also not prove anything as it is entirely possible that people are 'wired for God' and that others aren't, but there is no way of determining the cause.

Thank you again for your interest, and let me know if you have any further questions.