

The Wikipedia Problem

Since 1981, Rupert Sheldrake, my friend, coauthor, and scientist, has written several books challenging the paradigms of science. The most recent, *The Science Delusion: Freeing the Spirit of Enquiry* (January 2012), questions ten specific beliefs, including materialist dogmas, held sacred by many modern scientists. All his books have generated some waves among scientists and the skeptical community, but none as much as this latest, possibly due to its title.

So it was no surprise that he was invited to speak at a TEDx event in London on January 13, 2013, *Visions for Transition: Challenging existing paradigms and redefining values (for a more beautiful world)*.

Videos of TEDx talks are routinely posted on the TED channel of youtube.com, and the Sheldrake talk, entitled *The Science Delusion* soon appeared there. Blog comments on TED and TEDx events are hosted on the TED official website.

In March, 2013, I learned from Rupert Sheldrake that there was a flaming blog-storm raging on the TED website and other blogs over his TEDx talk in London. On March 6, 2013, three stalwarts of the skeptical community had posted comments critical of the Sheldrake TEDx talk to different blog sites. The TED majordomos, already taking heat over alleged pseudoscience talks in earlier TEDx events, caved-in and removed the video of the Sheldrake talk from their youtube channel.

The firestorm followed, tens of thousands of blog comments were posted, the majority on the Sheldrake side of the controversy, and sales of Sheldrake's books surged.

Among the supporters of Sheldrake and open science was Craig Weiler, a writer on parapsychology and the psi wars. He became involved in the TED debacle in March of 2013, and eventually produced a book detailing the whole affair, *Psi Wars: TED, Wikipedia and the Battle for the Internet*.

I have just received and read this excellent book and am writing this blog in response to it. Its title reveals the deeper roots of the TED failure of March 2013: the Psi Wars ongoing since the 1930s, the falsifications of the Wikipedia that have been a topic of commentaries for a decade, as in *Wikipedia Review* and *Wikipediocracy*.

In this 250-page book, Weiler extensively documents the TED affair of March, 2013, while devoting only one chapter of his nineteen (32 pages of the 250 total) to the Wikipedia events, in which the page devoted to Sheldrake has been repeatedly vandalized and falsified by a group called the Guerrilla Skeptics. As for the battle for the internet, Weiler treats this as fallout from the Wikipedia guerrilla action only in the last chapter, comprising excerpts from his blog posted in April, 2013.

The main goal of this blog is to expand briefly on the seriousness of wikipediocracy.

I have an extensive library of books that I have read and annotated, since 1980, in text files in my computer memory. If I need the dates of Marsilio Ficino's life, for example, I can search my computer for the information, find the call number of the appropriate book on my shelf, find the book on my shelf, and go right to the page number for the dates.

However, as Wikipedia has grown in recent years, I find it expedient to search it first, before going to my own library. However, as Wikipedia now is marred by so many malicious edits and intentional falsifications, I cannot use any of its information without double checking in more reliable sources.

This problem has become much more of a concern to me since hearing from Sheldrake about the damage to his Wikipedia entry caused by the skeptics. Some information has been distorted so subtly that the innocent reader may be seriously misinformed.

Indeed, a battle for the internet, and for science as well, is underway. Weiler ends his book on an optimistic note, predicting the loss of the Psi Wars by the skeptics, as intelligent readers spontaneously detect their falsehoods. I am not so sure, but I am expecting that the Wikipedia will decline in its popularity in proportion to the decline in the reliability of its content.

With that goal in mind, I am putting an end to the financial support I have been regularly providing to Wikipedia, and recommending that you also think carefully of your contribution budget.