

# Ian Plimer's Bloopers (a selection)

## Scientific bloopers

**Blooper:** 'Brimstone (sulphur) is solid below 444 degrees C' (*Lies* p. 21).

**Fact:** This is the **boiling** point of sulphur. Somehow, Plimer has confused melting point and boiling point. Sulphur actually melts at 119 °C. Next will he be telling us that water is solid below 100 °C?

**Blooper:** 'Every organism contains coil-like amino acid structures which are left-handed and right-handed. During life, there is a constant balance between the number of left-handed and right-handed coils, but upon death this balance is not maintained and the coils all slowly invert to the same direction. This dating technique (amino acid racemisation) ...' (*Lies* pp. 29-30).

**Fact:** This is an error in basic chemistry—Plimer gets racemisation **round the wrong way**. Racemisation is actually going **from** pure right or left-handed forms **to** a 50/50 mixture. It also refers to the **individual amino acids**, not to 'coils'. He might be confusing the handedness of the double helix ('coil') structure of DNA or the alpha helix in many proteins with the handedness of the individual components.

**Blooper:** 'This process of radioactive decay involves the release of energy and atomic particles (alpha particles) ... This method of radioactive [*sic*] dating uses well-known physics. This physics is tried and proven. It is the same physics which enables us to make nuclear reactors and nuclear bombs. If such a process did not work or was wrong, then nuclear reactors would not work (as they utilise the known rate of energy released from uranium 238) and our solar system's giant nuclear reactor (the sun) would not warm the earth.' (*Lies* p. 25).

**Fact:** Most high-school physics students know that the power source of nuclear reactors is actually **fission** (not alpha decay) of uranium **235** or plutonium 239, **not** uranium 238. They also know that the sun's source is **fusion** of **hydrogen** atoms. It's no wonder that the scientist Ian Hore Lacy, an anti-creationist himself, says that Plimer 'displays a surprising ignorance of nuclear physics' (*Anglican News*, May 1995, p. 9).

**Blooper:** '... if evolution did not exist, then blood types could not be measured, diseases could not be detected and parentage could not be determined.' (*Lies* p. 54)

**Fact:** Why on earth not?? *Lies* is littered with unsupported assertions like this.

**Blooper:** 'The first genes on the planet were RNA.... As a scientist, I would be prepared to predict that within the next 50 years a self-reproducing RNA molecule will be manufactured. This will be the test for various ideas on the origin of life.' (*Lies* pp. 290–291)

**Fact:** Plimer is very dogmatic to claim that the RNA-first idea is proven fact—it is only one idea as Plimer admits later. In fact, many evolutionists are critical—one of the leading researchers into 'RNA World' models, Gerald Joyce, wrote ('RNA evolution and the origins of life.' *Nature* **338**:217–224, 1989):

The most reasonable assumption is that life did not start with RNA.... The transition to an RNA world, like the origins of life in general, is fraught with uncertainty and is plagued by a lack of experimental data.

Plimer's prediction 'as a scientist' has no value, since he is a geologist with no qualifications or experience in biochemistry. Also, if it will take another 50 years of intelligent input to **manufacture** a self-reproducing RNA molecule, it will hardly prove that no intelligence was necessary in the beginning.

See also:

- [The RNA World: A Critique.](#)
- [Self-replicating enzymes?](#)
- [Cheating with Chance](#)
- [Could Monkeys Type the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm?](#)

**Blooper:** 'Kuru is **only** transmitted by cannibalism, by eating the brains of another human afflicted with the disease' (*Lies* p. 125)

**Fact:** 'Kuru was transmitted through handling and **possibly** eating tissue from infected corpses during funeral rites in Papua New Guinea' (*New Scientist* **142**(1927):36, May 28, 1994 — emphasis added to both 'blooper' and 'fact'.)

## Errors in factual matters

**Error:** 'Dawkins used a line from Hamlet, "Methinks it is like a weasel" A computer statistical experiment showed that if there was a random selection of the 23 letters of the alphabet, the chance of getting the entire phrase of 23 characters correct is exceptionally small.' (*Lies*, p. 224).

**Fact:** Which three doesn't Plimer accept?

[**Ed. note:** a critic responded:

'Plimer doesn't say the alphabet has 23 letters; he is relating Richard Dawkins' idea that a chance of a monkey toying with a typewriter successfully arriving at the phrase from Hamlet, "Methinks it is like a weasel", is exceptionally small. The phrase has 23 letters, not the alphabet ...'

We can only go by what Plimer *said*, not what his hero-worshippers claim he meant. And the above quote is accurate. The rationalisation is ludicrous anyway, since the phrase involves the right sequence of 28 units with 27 possible types of character *including the space*. Dawkins' starting sequence always had 28 characters in various combinations of letters and spaces, such as 'WDLMNLT DTJBKWIRZREZLMQCO P' typed by his baby daughter.

While salesmen have the motto "the customer is always right", Christians should have the motto "the skeptic is always wrong"! Not absolutely of course (even a stopped clock is right twice a day), but it is a good rule of thumb, as shown here. After all, if evolution were true, why should their thoughts be true as opposed to merely having a survival advantage, and what is wrong with lying since there is no God who forbade it?

The fact remains: The whole wording is sloppy in the extreme. The plain meaning is that he wrote that there was only a 23-character sequence to select from 23 different types of letters. Wrong on both counts!]

**Error:** 'Not once has [Creation Ex Nihilo](#) published a letter critical of an article in the creationist literature despite the fact that comments are submitted' (*Lies* p. 163).

**Fact:** *CEN* 17(1):5, December–February 1994 printed a letter from Mike Shermer, publisher of the *Skeptic* magazine. *CEN* 12(3):8-9, June–August 1990 printed a long letter from sceptic Colin Groves, and the gist of a letter from the President of the Australian Skeptics, Barry Williams. *CEN* 13(2):8 March–May 1991 published a letter from Jim Lippard of the Arizona Skeptics.

**Error:** 'In today's world of science and technology, there is not one item in use derived from scientific research undertaken by creationists.' (*Lies* p. 12)

**Fact:** The creationist Dr Raymond Damadian developed the magnetic resonance imager, a life-saving piece of diagnostic equipment, which won the USA's highest honour in technology (see [Super-Scientist Slams Society's Spiritual Sickness!](#)). Sir Ambrose Fleming, a founder of the Evolution Protest Movement, invented the thermionic valve which made radio broadcasts possible. Wernher von Braun was probably the person most responsible for sending men to the moon. Faraday and Maxwell invented electromagnetic theory. Pasteur disproved spontaneous generation, invented pasteurization and was responsible for the germ theory of disease. Forrest M. Mims III has 'invented an atmospheric haze sensor [that] could revolutionize this important field of study' according to *Scientific American* (May 1997—ironically, *Scientific American* previously refused to hire Mims solely because he was a creationist!). See [Mims Invention](#)

There are many more examples. In fact, Plimer ignores the [The Christian origin of modern science](#). It is thus no accident that there were many great [creationist scientists in the past](#), and there are a large number of qualified [creationist scientists in the present](#).

**Error:** 'If creationists knew that the Hebrews regarded only animals and not plants as living (hence the olive was able to remain green and survive the global flood) part of their problem would be alleviated' (*Lies* p. 115).

**Fact:** for over thirty years creationists have pointed out that plants do not have *nephesh* life (See *The Genesis Flood* by John Whitcomb and Henry Morris, 1961). However, this does not mean that plants are non-living in the biological sense. Whitcomb and Morris point out that plants could have survived as seeds or vegetation mats, so would not need to be kept aboard the Ark. So Plimer appears not to have read that which he criticises so vehemently.

## Mathematical Mistake

**Mistake:** 'In 1 Kings 7:23, an altar font in Solomon's Temple was ten cubits across and thirty cubits around. This means that the mathematical constant  $\pi$  is exactly three. All school children know that  $\pi$  is not three but 3.14159 and there is nothing to suggest that the Hebrew author was approximating' (*Lies* pp. 17–18).

**Fact:** Plimer is wrong— $\pi$  ( $\pi$ ) is not 3.14159 either—that is also an approximation.  $\pi$  is an irrational number, that is, no matter how many decimal places you use, it would still be an approximation.

Also, there is **every** reason to believe that the author was approximating, despite Plimer's assertion to the contrary. His argument might have a little plausibility if we assume that the Bible writers measured everything to the nearest tenth of a cubit, but the text only implies that they measured to the nearest cubit. If the diameter was 9.7 cubits, the circumference would be 30.47 cubits, which

would be 10 and 30 to the nearest cubit. Plimer must also assume that the 'round' brim was perfectly circular for his argument to work.

Further, even if all these presumptions of Plimer were granted, the description of the 'sea' describes an outwardly turned brim in 1 Kings 7:26 (NIV)

'It was a handbreadth in thickness, and its rim was like the rim of a cup, like a lily blossom. It held two thousand baths.'

So the 10 cubits across describes the brim-to-brim measurement, and the 30 cubits describes the circumference of the main part of the sea, with a diameter  $30/\pi$ .

See also [Does the Bible say pi equals 3.0?](#) and [Pi Gets In Your Eye: Does the Bible Give a Wrong Value for Pi?](#)

## Biblical Blunders

**Blunder:** 'In Ecclesiastes 1:5 we learn that "the sun also riseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to the place where he rose" which can only be interpreted to mean that the sun rotates around a flat earth. We still today talk of sunrise and sunset suggestive of a flat earth.' (*Lies* p. 19)

**Fact:** The second sentence gives it away. When we talk about sunrise and sunset today, we are clearly not asserting a flat earth, but using the **language of appearances**. Obviously Solomon was doing the same. By the way, the correct word is 'orbits' or 'revolves', not 'rotates'. See [Flat earth myth revisited](#)

**Blunder:** '... in the Genesis creation story we learn that the earth is covered by a vault and that celestial bodies move inside this firmament.' (*Lies* p. 19)

**Fact:** The word translated 'firmament' in the KJV is *raq'ia*, and means 'expanse' (cf. NIV).

**Blunder:** 'The Bible is very clear (Genesis 4:7, 23) that it was a case of all aboard [the Ark] without exceptions.' (*Lies* p. 115).

**Fact:** Genesis 4:7 and 23 say:

<sup>7</sup> "If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."

<sup>23</sup> Lamech said to his wives, "Adah and Zillah, listen to me; wives of Lamech, hear my words. I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me." (NIV)

Plimer's proof-reading in his book has room for improvement, yet he often chides creationists for the same fault. He is probably referring to Gen. 6:7 and 7:23.

Creationists have also pointed out that the 'all aboard' included only land vertebrate animals, not marine creatures, plants, invertebrates or microbes.

See John Woodmorappe, [Noah's Ark: A Feasibility Study](#) for answers to all Plimer's attacks on the Noah's Ark account in Genesis. See also [How did all the animals fit on Noah's Ark?](#)

**Blunder:** ‘Does modern biology agree with inerrant biblical biology which states that bats are birds (Lev. 11:13, 19; Deut. 14:11, 18); some fowls have four feet (Lev. 11:20–21); camels do not have cloven hooves (Lev. 11:4); a mustard seed is the smallest of all seeds and grows in [sic] the greatest of all plants (Matt. 13:31–32); turtles have voices (Song of Sol. 2:12); some four-legged animals fly (Lev. 11:21); and a foetus can understand speech (Luke 1:44)?’ (*Lies* p. 17).

**Fact:**

*Bats are ‘birds’?* The Hebrew word translated ‘bird’ is ‘ôwph, and simply means ‘winged/flying creature’—it is derived from ‘ûwph meaning ‘to fly’.

*Fowls have four feet?* ‘Fowl’ is again ‘ôwph, and is translated ‘winged insects’ in the NIV and NASB. Plimer should have checked more modern translations.

*Camels do not have cloven hooves?* The Bible is right. Camels have an elastic pad at the bottom of their hoof, which helps prevent it from sinking into the sand. This pad means the hoof is not fully divided.

*Mustard seed?* Taking it in context, which Plimer rarely does with the Bible, the parable refers to the smallest seed that a **Jewish farmer would sow in his field**. Plimer has misquoted the latter verse, which says that it would grow into the greatest of all **herbs** (KJV) **or garden plants** (NIV, NASB), **not all** plants. Plimer is missing the point anyway. Jesus was teaching that out of something tiny, something huge can grow.

*Turtles have voices?* If Plimer had consulted a modern translation, he would have found out that the verse is referring to *turtledoves*.

*Some four-legged animals fly?* The Hebrew idiom ‘upon all fours’ simply means ‘on feet’.

*A foetus can understand speech?* First, the verse Plimer cites (Luke 1:44) doesn’t say that, but that the unborn John the Baptist leapt in his mother’s womb when he heard Mary’s voice. Second, John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit while still in the womb (Luke 1:15, KJV, NASB), so who knows what he understood?

## Logical Lunacy

**Absurdity:** ‘In my view, the Bible is not true. However, it is the Truth.’ (*Lies* p. 289)

**Fact:** This is logically contradictory.

## Christophobic Clanger

**Clanger:** ‘Furthermore, 27 percent (of 150 medical students at Monash University) think humans did not have ape-like characteristics, 21 per cent believed that Eve was created from Adam’s rib, and 54 per cent believe in life after death!

‘It is clear that school children are not being taught how to think.’ (*Lies* p. 278)

**Fact:** Plimer here shows his true anti-Christian colours, since he claims that belief in life after death shows that one has not been ‘taught how to think’. This is worthy of a man who is a member of the

Humanist Society of Victoria. Its membership application (1994) says 'I subscribe to the objects and rules of the Humanist Society of Victoria in order to create a society in which a person may reach their full potential **free from supernatural beliefs**' (emphasis in original). Plimer is in fact effectively King Atheist of Australia, since he was proclaimed Humanist of the Year in 1995. And make no mistake: [humanism is a religion!](#)

The real clanger here is that Peter Hollingworth, Anglican Archbishop of Queensland (and who was later disgraced as the first Governor General who had to resign), wrote the foreword to the book, and the skeptic Ken Smith, a professing Baptist, praised it to the skies.

## Conclusion

Plimer has an unparalleled talent for packing many mistakes into a small amount of text. The above examples are only a few of the many mistakes in *Lies*. To respond to most of them would take over 100 A4 pages. But in fact we have done just this—see [Our point-by-point rebuttal of Plimer's book](#).

It should also be noted that many Australian sceptics, academics, and sadly, clergy have reviewed *Lies* favourably. The fact that they overlooked the many demonstrable clangers in the book means that the Australian anti-creation lobby is incompetent in science, mathematics, biblical exegesis and logic. The only alternative is that they think that attacking creationism justifies any means, no matter how inaccurate or scurrilous.

This should not be surprising: see [How Religiously Neutral are the Anti-Creationist Organisations?](#)

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