


Bigelow Institute For Consciousness Studies Essays

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COMMENTARY

The 2021 Bigelow Institute for Consciousness Studies (BICS) Essay Contest


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HIGHLIGHTS

The BICS essay contest successfully increased attention to the latest and perhaps most compelling scientific research on the topic of "life after death."

ABSTRACT


BICS was founded in 2020 to communicate, facilitate, educate, and organize scientific research and exploration into the survival of human consciousness (SOHC) after permanent bodily death. In early 2021 BICS announced an essay contest on the best evidence for survival of human consciousness with \$950,000 in prizes. Essay contestants were tasked to present evidence for SOHC after death beyond a reasonable doubt. "Beyond a reasonable doubt" is the most demanding and rigorous burden of proof in the criminal justice legal system and BICS challenged essay contestants to achieve this very high bar in order to maximize the focus on presentation of evidence from as many directions and sources as possible. By December 2020, seven respected judges from the research and academic communities were recruited. BICS received 1300 applications from all continents and invited 264 authors and groups of authors to submit essays. 204 essays were received from 38 countries. Following an intensive five-month judging process, a large group of essays was down-selected. So high was the standard among the dozens of essays that the judges had difficulty in choosing three essays for the top prizes. After several more rounds, eventually 29 essays were chosen and the prize money was increased from \$950,000 to \$1,800,000. Prizes were awarded at a gala in Las Vegas on December 4, 2021. Following the conclusion of the BICS essay contest, the organization is preparing for another major program. On September 1, 2022, BICS will unveil "Challenge 2023," which is a targeted grants program that is aimed at funding research proposals on SOHC with a particular focus on contact and communication with the afterlife.



Robert T. Bigelow

INTRODUCTION

The Bigelow Institute for Consciousness Studies (BICS) essay contest that was held in 2021 was arguably the most successful essay contest in the history of Survival of Human Consciousness (SOHC) research, both in the United States and internationally. By awarding a total of \$1,800,000 in prizes to 43 essay authors for 29 essays, the contest became a global phenomenon and galvanized more than 1300 contestants to submit applications to enter the

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Bigelow Institute for Consciousness Studies essays represent a significant contribution to the ongoing discourse surrounding consciousness and its mysteries. Established by Robert Bigelow, a prominent entrepreneur and advocate for the study of consciousness, the institute aims to foster research and dialogue on the nature of consciousness, particularly in relation to the phenomena surrounding near-death experiences, life after death, and other related topics. This article explores the origins of the Bigelow Institute, the structure of its essay competition, the themes covered, and the implications of the findings presented in these essays.

Origins of the Bigelow Institute for Consciousness Studies

The Bigelow Institute for Consciousness Studies (BICS) was founded in 2020 with a mission to investigate the nature of consciousness and its potential survival beyond physical death. Robert Bigelow, who has shown a longstanding interest in the paranormal and metaphysical realms, established the institute to support rigorous academic research and to encourage critical discussions about consciousness.

Bigelow's vision stemmed from a personal interest in the implications of consciousness beyond the physical body. His previous investments in aerospace and real estate, coupled with his fascination with the unknown, provided a unique backdrop for founding an organization dedicated to exploring one of humanity's most profound questions: what happens after we die?

The Essay Competition

One of the flagship initiatives of the Bigelow Institute is its annual essay competition, which invites scholars, researchers, and thinkers from around the world to submit their work on specific themes related to consciousness. The competition is designed to stimulate intellectual inquiry and to gather a wide range of perspectives on the topic.

Structure and Guidelines

The essay competition is structured to ensure that submissions are of high quality and relevance. The guidelines typically include:

1. **Eligibility:** Open to individuals of all backgrounds, including academics, independent researchers, and enthusiasts.
2. **Themes:** Each year, the institute announces specific themes or questions related to consciousness that participants must address in their essays.
3. **Length and Format:** Essays are usually required to be between 1,500 and 3,000 words, adhering to a specified formatting style.
4. **Judging Criteria:** Submissions are evaluated based on originality, clarity of thought, depth of research, and overall contribution to the understanding of consciousness.
5. **Prizes:** Winners receive monetary awards, as well as opportunities for publication and further engagement with the institute.

Past Themes and Topics

The themes for the essay competition have varied, reflecting the diverse aspects of consciousness studies. Some notable topics include:

- **Near-Death Experiences:** Exploring accounts of individuals who have had near-death experiences

and what those experiences reveal about the nature of consciousness.

- **Consciousness and Survival:** Investigating the possibility of consciousness existing independently of the physical body.
- **Philosophical Perspectives:** Engaging with philosophical arguments regarding the mind-body problem and the implications for understanding consciousness.
- **Scientific Approaches:** Analyzing how contemporary science, including neuroscience and quantum physics, intersects with the study of consciousness.

The Contributions of the Essays

The essays submitted to the Bigelow Institute for Consciousness Studies not only contribute to academic discourse but also offer fresh insights into fundamental questions regarding existence and the nature of being.

Interdisciplinary Perspectives

One of the most compelling aspects of the essays is their interdisciplinary approach. Contributors often draw from various fields, including:

- **Philosophy:** Providing a theoretical framework for discussions on consciousness.
- **Psychology:** Exploring human experience and cognition.
- **Neuroscience:** Investigating the biological underpinnings of consciousness.
- **Parapsychology:** Examining phenomena that challenge conventional scientific understanding.

This multidisciplinary approach enriches the conversation and allows for a more comprehensive understanding of consciousness.

Key Findings and Implications

The essays often highlight several key findings and implications that spur further inquiry. Some of these include:

1. **Evidence for Survival:** Many essays present arguments and anecdotal evidence supporting the notion that consciousness may continue after physical death.
2. **The Role of Experience:** Personal narratives and case studies are frequently used to illustrate how individual experiences can lend credence to various theories of consciousness.
3. **Challenges to Materialism:** Several contributors critique the materialist paradigm that dominates much of modern science, advocating for a broader understanding of consciousness that includes non-material dimensions.
4. **Future Research Directions:** The essays often conclude with suggestions for future research that could provide deeper insights into the nature of consciousness and its implications for humanity.

The Broader Impact of the Bigelow Institute for Consciousness Studies Essays

The essays produced through the Bigelow Institute initiative have broader implications beyond academic discourse. They contribute to a growing cultural and scientific movement that seeks to understand consciousness from multiple perspectives.

Fostering Public Interest and Debate

By making the findings of these essays accessible to a wider audience, the institute helps foster public interest in the study of consciousness. This can lead to:

- Increased Awareness: More people becoming aware of consciousness studies and the questions surrounding it.
- Public Discourse: Encouraging public discussions about the nature of consciousness, spirituality, and the afterlife.
- Community Engagement: Building communities around shared interests in exploring consciousness and related phenomena.

Challenges and Criticisms

Despite the positive contributions of the Bigelow Institute and its essays, there are challenges and criticisms to consider:

- Skepticism from the Scientific Community: Many empirical scientists remain skeptical of research into consciousness that delves into metaphysical territory. This skepticism can hinder broader acceptance of the ideas presented in the essays.
- Methodological Concerns: Critics may argue that some approaches to studying consciousness lack rigorous scientific methodology, leading to questions about the validity of findings.

Conclusion

The **Bigelow Institute for Consciousness Studies essays** represent a vital intersection of inquiry, exploration, and dialogue about one of the most profound questions faced by humanity: the nature of consciousness and what may lie beyond. Through its essay competition, the institute encourages a diverse range of voices to contribute to an evolving understanding of consciousness, fostering interdisciplinary research and public interest in a subject that has captivated human thought for centuries. As the body of work continues to grow, the implications for science, philosophy, and personal belief systems are profound, inviting us all to ponder the mysteries of existence and our place within it.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Bigelow Institute for Consciousness Studies?

The Bigelow Institute for Consciousness Studies (BICS) is an organization established to explore and promote research into consciousness, particularly related to the nature of consciousness and its potential survival after death.

What are the main themes of the essays submitted to the Bigelow Institute?

Essays submitted to the Bigelow Institute often explore themes such as the nature of consciousness, near-death experiences, the relationship between mind and body, and evidence for consciousness surviving physical death.

How does the Bigelow Institute encourage research on consciousness?

The Bigelow Institute encourages research by offering grants and organizing competitions for essays that provide compelling arguments and evidence regarding the nature of consciousness and its possible continuation beyond physical existence.

What is the significance of the essays published by the Bigelow Institute?

The essays published by the Bigelow Institute are significant as they contribute to the ongoing dialogue in the fields of philosophy, science, and spirituality regarding the understanding of consciousness and its implications for life after death.

Who can participate in the essay competitions held by the Bigelow Institute?

The essay competitions held by the Bigelow Institute are open to anyone interested in exploring the topic of consciousness, including scholars, researchers, students, and the general public.

What type of evidence do essays submitted to the Bigelow Institute typically include?

Essays typically include a variety of evidence such as scientific studies, anecdotal accounts of near-death experiences, philosophical arguments, and theoretical frameworks that support the exploration of consciousness beyond the physical body.

What impact has the Bigelow Institute had on the study of consciousness?

The Bigelow Institute has had a significant impact on the study of consciousness by fostering academic inquiry, promoting interdisciplinary research, and bringing attention to the possibility of consciousness existing independently of the brain.

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