



# *The North Texas*

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## Creationism's *Wedge* project

by John Blanton

Phillip Johnson is considered the grandfather of the “intelligent design” (ID) movement. His iconic book *Darwin on Trial* came out in 1991 as a consequence of his intense religious conversion and his reaction to a pair of other published works. He read Richard Dawkins’ *The Blind Watchmaker* and Michael Denton’s *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*. Dawkins argued in his book that an intelligent being was not necessary to explain biological evolution, and Denton argued that the scientific basis for evolution is severely lacking.

Johnson, who taught law for thirty years at the University of California at Berkeley, previously served as law clerk for Chief Justice Earl Warren after graduating from Yale. Throughout the last decade of the twentieth century and forward to the present, Johnson has worked to promote ID, most recently in a project known informally as *The Wedge*.

Barbara Forrest is professor in philosophy in the Department of History and Political Science at Southeastern Louisiana University, and three years ago she authored a study of the *Wedge* project, which is available on-line. In collaboration with Paul R. Gross, she has published *Creationism's Trojan Horse: The Wedge of Intelligent Design*. Just about all of what follows is from Forrest’s on-line critique.<sup>1</sup>

According to Johnson:

The movement we now call the *Wedge* made its public debut at a conference of scientists and philosophers held at Southern Methodist University in March 1992, following the publication of my book *Darwin on Trial*. The conference brought together as speakers some key *Wedge* figures, particularly Michael Behe, Stephen Meyer, William Dembski, and myself. It also brought a team of influential Darwinists, headed by Michael Ruse, to the table to discuss this proposition: “Darwinism and neo-Darwinism as generally held in our society carry with them an a priori commitment to metaphysical naturalism, which is essential to making a convincing case on their behalf.”<sup>2</sup>

## EVENTS CALENDAR

### August Program

Saturday, August 14, at 2 p.m.  
Tom Siegfried – *Strange Matters*  
2900 Live Oak Street, Dallas

Science columnist for *The Dallas Morning News*, Tom Siegfried will discuss his new book, *Strange Matters: Undiscovered Ideas at the Frontiers of Space and Time*

#### From the Amazon.com Web site:

From mirror matter, super matter, and cosmic bubbles to branes, ghosts, and two-timing universes, theoretical physicists dream up the most bizarre concepts imaginable. New and radical ideas abound — science fiction on the verge of becoming scientific fact. One scientist may envision a whole new subatomic particle that finally explains a nagging cosmological conundrum while another may be chasing “funny energy,” which could be the key to the accelerating universe. These are indeed *Strange Matters*. A

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The conference Johnson speaks of was *Darwinism: Scientific Inference or Philosophical Preference*,<sup>3</sup> and it was organized by the Richardson, Texas, based Foundation for Thought and Ethics. FTE is the same group that puts out the book *Of Pandas and People*, a proposed high school supplement that promotes ID. At the SMU conference a number of those currently in the forefront of *The Wedge* project were first seen together in public. These included, besides Johnson, Michael Behe, Stephen Meyer, and William Dembski. Also present was Walter Bradley, who was chairman of the Mechanical Engineering department at Texas A & M University at the time.

All of those just mentioned are currently associated with the Discovery Institute's Center for Science and Culture (CSC). Add to those the following: Henry F. Schaefer III (University of Georgia), Robert Koons (UT, Austin), Paul Chien (University of San Francisco), John Angus Campbell (University of Washington), and Robert Kaita (Princeton University). It's a formidable array of academic talent working to defeat the common enemy, Darwinism.

The year following the SMU conference some key leaders of the ID movement met at Pajaro Dunes, California, and expanded on the ideas they had presented the year before. The California conference is featured prominently in the creationist video *Unlocking the Mystery of Life*, which is in the NTS library.<sup>4</sup>

In February 1997 Robert Koons hosted a conference titled *Naturalism, Theism and the Scientific Enterprise* at the University of Texas at Austin.

Sponsored by the Department of Philosophy at the University of Texas at Austin. Invited speakers included Michael Ruse (Philosophy, University of Guelph, author of *Darwinism Defended*), Alvin Plantinga (Philosophy, University of Notre Dame, author of *Warrant and Proper Function*), Frederick Grinnell (UT Southwestern Medical Center, author of *The Scientific Attitude*), and Phillip Johnson (Law School, UC-Berkeley, author of *Darwin on Trial* and *Reason in the Balance*). The conference opened a fruitful dialogue between methodological naturalists and intelligent-design theorists.<sup>5</sup>

By this time the ideas behind the *Wedge* were beginning to firm up. Forrest describes the genesis of the *Wedge*:

Although Johnson had begun thinking and speaking of the wedge strategy in 1997, there had been no detailed elaboration of the form its execution would take. Such elaborations were stated in a CRSC [Center for Renewal of Science and Culture, the former name for the CSC] strategy document which has come to be known informally as the "Wedge Document." It surfaced anonymously and was posted on the Internet in March 1999; various aspects of the document indicate that it was written in 1998. This document is the "Five Year Plan" of the Center for the Renewal of Science and Culture, although it includes goals which stretch into the next twenty years, indicating the CRSC's view of the strategy as a long-term commitment. Although Johnson has

talked openly about the existence of the strategy, he has not publicly elaborated upon its logistics, and the logistics are ambitious. The document, entitled “The wedge Strategy,” with the name of the organization, “Center for the Renewal of Science and Culture” beneath the title, explains what the CRSC is doing now as well as where they want to go; therefore, it is crucially important.

Since Forrest wrote the above, CRC director Stephen C. Meyer has confirmed the authenticity of the *Wedge Document*. The introduction to the document begins:

### THE WEDGE STRATEGY

#### CENTER FOR THE RENEWAL OF SCIENCE & CULTURE

#### INTRODUCTION

The proposition that human beings are created in the image of God is one of the bedrock principles on which Western civilization was built. Its influence can be detected in most, if not all, of the West’s greatest achievements, including representative democracy, human rights, free enterprise, and progress in the arts and sciences.<sup>6</sup>

Johnson has described the *Wedge* strategy in terms of splitting a log. Ray Bohlin is the Discovery Institute’s point man in the Dallas area, and, quoting Johnson, he provides the following explanation:

Darwinism is compared to a log that seems impenetrable. Upon close investigation, a small crack is discovered. “The widening crack is the important but seldom recognized difference between the facts revealed by scientific investigation and the materialist philosophy that dominates the scientific culture.” In order to split the log, the crack needs to be widened. Inserting a triangular shaped wedge and driving the pointed end further into the log can do this. As the wedge is driven further into the log, the wider portions of the wedge begin widening the crack.<sup>7</sup>

The *Wedge Document* outlined the strategy for achieving the ID creationists’ goals:

#### Phase I. Scientific Research, Writing & Publication

Individual Research Fellowship Program

Paleontology Research program (Dr. Paul Chien et al.)

Molecular Biology Research Program (Dr. Douglas Axe et al.)

#### Phase II. Publicity & Opinion-making

Book Publicity

Opinion-Maker Conferences

Apologetics Seminars

Teacher Training Program

Op-ed Fellow

PBS (or other TV) Co-production

Publicity Materials / Publications

#### Phase III. Cultural Confrontation & Renewal

Academic and Scientific Challenge Conferences

Potential Legal Action for Teacher Training

Research Fellowship Program: shift to social sciences and humanities

These phases are not to be viewed as a strict chronology. Even Johnson admits that research supporting ID is lagging, but he encourages continued progress on all fronts.

Using a grant from the John Templeton Fund (distributed through the Discovery Institute), Baylor University president Robert Sloan established the Michael Polanyi Center at Baylor University in the fall of 1999. The ostensible purpose of the center was to “advance the understanding of the sciences,” but President Sloan staffed it with creationists William Dembski and Bruce Gordon. Baylor is a church-supported school, but it is not Bob Jones. Baylor has a solid academic reputation, and many on the faculty saw the Center as a black mark on the school’s good name. An external committee was asked to review the situation, and it issued a report in October 2000, concluding, in part:

For the reasons stated above, the Committee believes that the linking of the name of Michael Polanyi to programs relating to intelligent design is, on the whole, inappropriate. Further, the Polanyi name has come by now in the Baylor context to take on associations that lead to unnecessary confusion.<sup>8</sup>

Dembski’s reaction to this report was less than collegial, and two days after it came out he was removed as director of the Center and made “associate research professor in conceptual foundations of science within the university’s Institute for Faith and Learning.” Additionally, “Michael Polanyi” was removed from the Center’s name, and Bruce Gordon was elevated to interim director.<sup>9</sup>

## Creationists Books.

You can purchase these priceless works from Amazon by linking through the NTS Web site. We get a commission.

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/books/creationists.htm>

Phillip Johnson: *Darwin on Trial*  
 Phillip Johnson: *Objections Sustained*  
 Phillip Johnson: *The Wedge of Truth*  
 Phillip Johnson: *Defeating Darwinism by Opening Minds*  
 Phillip Johnson: *Reason in the Balance*

Phillip Johnson, Nancy Pearcey: *The Right Questions*  
 William Dembski: *Intelligent Design*  
 William Dembski: *Mere Creation*  
 William Dembski: *No Free Lunch*  
 William Dembski: *The Design Inference*  
 William Dembski and Charles Colson: *The Design Revolution*  
 William Dembski, John Wilson: *Uncommon Dissent*  
 William Dembski, Benjamin Wiker: *Moral Darwinism*  
 Michael Behe: *Darwin's Black Box*

Michael Behe, et al: *Science and Evidence for Design in the Universe*  
 Jonathan Wells: *Icons of Evolution*  
 John Angus Campbell, Stephen C. Meyer: *Darwinism, Design, and Public Education*

Although the *Wedge* project has not been successful in producing a body of scientific research or in establishing itself on a legitimate college campus, its record for publication outside mainstream science has been outstanding. The sidebar lists books published by *Wedge* collaborators in the past fifteen years. These titles are aimed at comforting the committed and propagandizing the uninitiated. People who support legitimate science are encouraged to read some of them, as well.

The *Wedge* has had its most significant impact in its attempt to penetrate the public schools. The *Pandas* book mentioned above predated the *Wedge* movement, and an attempt to introduce it into the Plano, Texas, schools in 1995 failed due to overwhelming opposition from the local populace. In 1999 the Kansas State Board of Education, with coaching from *Wedge* activists, omitted some requirements related to teaching evolution. This action was rescinded the following year with the de-selection from the board of several fans of creationism. An attempt to include "intelligent design" in the Ohio school curriculum in 2002 failed when academics state-wide came out in opposition to the proposal. The *Wedge* team came to Texas last year to plead for dilution of Darwinism in the selection of biology texts, but they left empty handed after a grueling fourteen-hour presentation of arguments by both sides.<sup>10</sup>

While the *Wedge* has been rolling up a string of losses, it is also been getting its message out. News reports around the country are sprinkled with comments by parents, school officials, and teachers who have picked up the *Wedge* lexicon. We should keep in mind that Cranfills Gap is not the same as Aus-

tin, Texas. Few communities are lucky to have someone like Nobel physicist Stephen Weinberg who can drive a few blocks from his office to testify for science, as was the case in Austin.

To promote its penetration of the public school system, the CSC provides a trove of source material on its Web site. To enable creation-friendly teachers to counter evolution in the classroom, there are a number of helpful publications. Under *Ohio's Model Lesson Plan on "Critical Analysis of Evolution"* the CSC provides a tenth grade lesson plan. The summary reads:

This lesson allows students to critically analyze five different aspects of evolutionary theory. As new scientific data emerge, scientists' understandings of the natural world may become enhanced, modified or even changed all together. Using library and Internet sources, groups of students will conduct background research for one of the aspects of evolution in preparation for a critical analysis discussion. Students also will listen to, and take notes on, their classmates' critical analyses of evolution theory.<sup>11</sup>

The *Wedge* team is making its appeal to higher education, as well. IDEA (Intelligent Design and Evolution Awareness) clubs are now springing up on college campuses. Although the IDEA club template has all the markings of the *Wedge*, a direct connection is not readily apparent. However, *Wedge* speakers proliferate at IDEA conferences and seem to be available to speak at campus clubs.<sup>12</sup> We have previously noted Robert Koons' presentation at the UT Dallas IDEA meeting earlier this year.<sup>13</sup>

Interestingly, these college clubs may hand the *Wedge* a problem of unintended consequences. IDEA clubs in a college campus environment will expose the new creationism to a much harsher atmosphere than it currently enjoys at local school boards. For a long time the creationists from the CSC have complained that the academic forum excludes them—won't publish their papers, won't teach their "science." If clubs like the one at UT Dallas remain active, the *Wedge* may get more attention than it wants. We look forward to the prospect.



**References (unless otherwise noted, these links were current as of 17 July 2004):**

- 1 A copy is available at the following URL [http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/barbara\\_forrest/wedge.html](http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/barbara_forrest/wedge.html). There is also a copy archived at <http://www.ntskeptics.org/2004/2004august/forrest.htm>.
- 2 <http://www.touchstonemag.com/docs/issues/12.4docs/12-4pg18.html>
- 3 <http://www.leaderu.com/orgs/fte/darwinism/index.html>
- 4 A review is in the February 2004 issue of *The North Texas Skeptic* at <http://www.ntskeptics.org/2004/2004february/february2004.htm#unlocking>
- 5 <http://www.leaderu.com/offices/koons/menus/conference.html>
- 6 <http://www.antievolution.org/features/wedge.html>. Also archived at <http://ntskeptics.org/2004/2004august/wedge.htm>.
- 7 <http://www.probe.org/docs/philjohn.html>
- 8 <http://pr.baylor.edu/story.php?id=003015>
- 9 <http://pr.baylor.edu/story.php?id=002390>
- 10 Read about the Texas chainsaw massacre in the December 2003 issue of *The North Texas Skeptic*. <http://www.ntskeptics.org/2003/2003december/december2003.htm#chainsaw>
- 11 [http://www.ode.state.oh.us/academic\\_content\\_standards/sciencesboe/pdf\\_setA/L10-H23\\_Critical\\_Analysis\\_of\\_Evolution\\_Mar\\_SBOE\\_changes.pdf](http://www.ode.state.oh.us/academic_content_standards/sciencesboe/pdf_setA/L10-H23_Critical_Analysis_of_Evolution_Mar_SBOE_changes.pdf). Also archived at <http://www.ntskeptics.org/2004/2004august/plan.pdf>
- 12 <http://www.arn.org/docs2/news/ideaconference081202.htm>
- 13 Robert Koons' talk was reviewed in the April 2004 issue of *The North Texas Skeptic* at <http://www.ntskeptics.org/2004/2004april/april2004.htm#koons>

## A prayer a day

by John Blanton

In October 1999 the journal *Archives of Internal Medicine* published a report by a number of authors titled "A Randomized, Controlled Trial of the Effects of Remote, Intercessory Prayer on Outcomes in Patients Admitted to the Coronary Care Unit."<sup>1</sup> The principle author is William S. Harris, and the paper purports to demonstrate that in a "[r]andomized, controlled, double-blind..." test, "...prayer may be an effective adjunct to standard medical care." The experiment was carried out at the Coronary Care Unit (CCU) of the Mid America Heart Institute (MAHI), which is a private hospital associated with the University of Missouri in Kansas City.

Intercessory prayer is taken to mean prayer on behalf of somebody, but not in that person's presence and often without the person's knowledge or consent.

The test was conducted as a clinical trial involving 1013 patients admitted consecutively to the CCU over a twelve-month period. This group was obtained after eliminating 6 patients who were awaiting cardiac transplants. The final breakdown was 484 in the prayer group and 529 in the usual care group.

The hospital chaplain's secretary assigned newly-admitted patients to either group based on the last digit of their medical record number. The secretary provided only each patient's first name to a prayer team leader. The prayer teams prayed for each individual for twenty-eight days to ensure the prayers lasted the duration of the patient's stay in the unit. The prayer teams prayed for "a speedy recovery with no complications." They also prayed for whatever else seemed appropriate to them.

The secretary kept the assignments secret until the conclusion of the test, and, in fact, the entire experiment was kept a secret from patients and staff. One thing that was unusual about this clinical trial is that patients' consent was not sought by the experimenters, and the hospital's internal review board gave permission to bypass the usual requirements for informed consent.

This last may seem odd. When a new medicine is tested on patients, informed consent is traditional and usually mandatory. Imagine telling a patient "We have this new stuff that may cure you, and we are about to test it. Maybe you will get it, and you will live, or maybe you won't get it, and you will die." One has to wonder whether the review board considered prayer to be so neutral or benign that patients' consent would not be necessary. The authors state: "First, it was agreed that there was no known risk associated with receiving remote, intercessory prayer, and

no known risk for the patients in the usual care group associated with not receiving extra prayer.”

Prior to the beginning of the test the experimenters devised a scoring system that produced a continuous-variable assessment of the outcome of the patients' treatments. At the conclusion of the trial the scores were calculated, and the authors observed positive results. They wrote:

Using a severity-adjusted outcomes score, we found lower overall adverse outcomes for CCU patients randomized to the prayer group compared with those randomized to the usual care group. Lengths of CCU stay and hospital stay after initiation of prayer were not affected. These findings are consistent with those of Byrd, who reported that intercessory prayer for hospitalized patients lowered the hospital course score but did not significantly affect length of stay.

The Byrd reference pertains to a 1988 study by another group.

In June 2000 the same journal that had published the original report printed a number of responses, and they were generally ungenerous.<sup>2</sup>

Richard P. Sloan and Emilia Bagiella wrote:

The literature on religious activity and health outcomes is fraught with methodological difficulties. Regrettably, the article by Harris et al on the impact of intercessory prayer in the coronary care unit (CCU) continues this tradition.

Sloan and Bagiella also noted that the prayer and control groups stayed the same length of time in the CCU and showed a difference only in the “unvalidated Mid American Heart Institute–Cardiac Care Unit (MAHI-CCU) scale constructed for the purpose of this study.”

Other respondents commented on the study's lack of statistical rigor, as well. Robert Karis pointed out a miscalculation, one that gave the study's results more significance than warranted:

If our calculations are correct, the absolute difference between the control and prayer group is 0.22 instead of 0.30, and the relative difference is 8% rather than 10%. Assuming that the SEM [standard error of the mean] remains about 0.1, the corrected numbers would not result in a statistically significant difference between the control and prayer groups.

Donald A. Sandweiss took issue with the statistical significance, or P value, of the results. Statistical significance is a measure of the likelihood the results show chance and not some causal relationship. P values of 0.05 or lower are usually required in clinical trials before a medicine or procedure is considered worth using. The Harris study produced a P value of 0.04.

Harris et al draw an analogy between their study and James Lind's scurvy trials. If Lind's studies had been subjected to statistical analysis, I suggest that the P value would have been far more impressive. Such a P value would have probably justified a reevaluation of the then current theories regarding the mechanism of scurvy. However, Harris et al are not merely testing the efficacy of a medication. On the basis of a P value of .04, Harris and his colleagues are suggesting the need to reassess 500 years of scientific advancement in our understanding of how the physical world is organized.<sup>3</sup>

Others noted the lack of informed consent. Julie Goldstein questioned the wisdom of testing a procedure with a supposed therapeutic value on unsuspecting patients. The experimenters assumed the results of the test could only be benign, but they failed to consider that supernatural power can work both ways. “That there are no known risks to prayer is a given, a leap of faith. But could there be risks? Are the prayers reaching a Higher Power that might, upon having Its attention called to a nonbeliever, actually respond to the request unfavorably?”

Still others objected to the idea of putting religious precepts to a scientific test, one noting proscriptions within Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. More than one respondent saw the results as encouraging and a reaffirmation of their faith and the need for intercessory prayer as an adjunct to standard treatment. Nobody endorsed faith healing. Nobody suggested that prayer should replace traditional methods of treatment.

The Harris study did provoke a statistically significant response among the reading public. Newspapers carried accounts of the study, and people who hold to the value of prayer are quick to pull up this reference when debating religion. Usually it's the reference only that gets pulled out. Adherents seldom are able to cite any of the facts concerning the study.

More recently the *Journal of Reproductive Medicine* has withdrawn a September 2001 study that purported to show a benefit from prayer on fertility treatments. Charges of fraud are being considered in that case and one of the co-authors is facing criminal charges in an unrelated matter.

With all of this, public support for intercessory prayer remains strong. A survey published by the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (a government agency) this year found 36% of U.S. adults use some form of alternative medicine, and when prayer is included the numbers rise to 62%. Whether Medicare will someday pay for intercessory prayer has so far not been revealed. □

#### References (links current as of 26 July 2004):

1 Harris, William S., et al., *Archives of Internal Medicine*. Vol. 159, 25 October 1999.

See also:

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<http://www.ntskeptics.org/issues/prayer/prayer-pap-ioi90043.pdf>

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/issues/prayer/pray-icm00000.pdf>

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/issues/prayer/pray-ilt0626.pdf>

2 Archives of Internal Medicine, Vol. 160. 26 June 2000

3 James Lind's historic experiment is discussed briefly here:  
<http://www.people.virginia.edu/~rjh9u/scurvy.html>

## What's new

By Robert Park

[Robert Park publishes the What's New column at <http://www.aps.org/WN/>. Following are some clippings of interest.]

### Medicine: with friends like Prince Charles who needs enemas?

When the Prince of Wales can spare time from warning about the dangers of "grey goo", (WN 09 May 03), he promotes the use of alternative medicine. He now recommends that cancer patients abandon chemotherapy in favor of Gerson Therapy, a controversial alterna-

tive treatment. In addition to vitamin injections and a fruit juice diet, Gerson Therapy calls for "coffee enemas", but the American Cancer Society warns that coffee enemas have been associated with infections, constipation, colitis, and even death. Gerson therapists claim it strips harmful bacteria and pollutants from the colon, which suggests what Charles should do with this nonsense. 1

### Prayer therapy: unrelenting inquiry into a fraudulent study.

*Time Magazine* this week has a scathing account of a study by researchers at Columbia published in a prestigious journal three years ago. It claimed intercessory prayer helped infertile women conceive (WN 04 Jun 04). The case is a growing embarrassment for Columbia, the *Journal of Reproductive Medicine*, the authors, one of whom was chair of obstetrics and gynecology, and even media outlets like ABC *Good Morning America* and the *New York Times*, who embraced the story without checking. *Time* credits exposure of the fraud to the persistence of Bruce Flamm, a clinical professor of obstetrics at UC Irvine.

*Paul Gresser contributed to this week's issue of What's New.*

*Bob Park can be reached via email at [opa@aps.org](mailto:opa@aps.org)*

## References

See also "The Gerson Cancer Cure" in the July 1992 issue of *The Skeptic* at <http://www.ntskeptics.org/1992/1992july/july1992.htm#veggies>

## Future meeting dates

Unless otherwise indicated, all our meetings will be held at—

Center for Nonprofit Management  
2900 Live Oak Street in Dallas  
(corner of Live Oak Street and Liberty Street)

August 14, 2004  
Tom Siegfried - Strange Matters

September 11, 2004  
October 9, 2004  
November 13, 2004  
December 11, 2004 (Party)  
January 8, 2005  
Board meeting only  
February 12, 2005  
March 12, 2005  
April 9, 2005  
May 15, 2005  
June 11, 2005

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