



The North Texas

Skeptic

Volume 20

August 2006

Number 8

<http://www.ntskeptics.org>

Day-old Bread

by John Blanton

Ann Coulter writes things designed to bring distress to liberals. Her comments typically contain enough truth to make liberals squirm but not enough to make them change their evil ways.

Coulter's latest book, *Godless: The Church of Liberalism*, hit the *New York Times* Best Seller List at number one on June 25th this year. If liberals are no longer squirming as much it could be because *Godless* takes an unfortunate detour into the real world and steps on some land mines that should be on everybody's maps by now. It's also a bunch of day-old bread.

I am not one of those who believe all conservatives are like Coulter and are willing to drop off their intellect at day care while they pursue an ideology. To be sure, many conservatives were not comfortable with Coulter to begin with, and they will not be storming out to buy this book. So, why did I? We shall see.

Robert Savillo has written a nice critique of *Godless*, and I am going to draw shameless on it for the following.¹

Two chapters of *Godless* take on the matter of evolution, or, rather, not evolution. Chapter 8 is "The Creation Myth: On The Sixth Day, God Created Fruit Flies." It begins:

Liberals' creation myth is Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, which is about one notch above Scientology for scientific rigor.²

This sets the tone and at the same time showcases classic Coulter: Evolution is a myth (gets evolutionists hopping), and Scientology lacks scientific rigor (inescapable). The conscientious reader implicitly signs off on the first part in order to accept the second part.

Nobody expects a political writer to be science savvy, and Coulter did get expert scientific advice for this book:

EVENTS CALENDAR

August Program

**Saturday, 2 p.m.
August 12, 2006**

Center for Nonprofit
Management
2900 Live Oak Street in Dallas

The Ex Gay Movement

Is the "ex gay" movement for real? The religiously motivated ex gay movement holds that homosexuality is a matter of lifestyle choices. Is this for real? We're going to take a look at this latest silliness. Kristine Danowski will give the lowdown.

**NTS Social Dinner
/Board Meeting**

Saturday, August 26 at 7:p.m.

Good Eats
6950 Greenville Avenue in
Dallas

Check the **NTS Hotline** for more
information at
214-335-9248.

North Texas Skeptics

Officers

President John Brandt
 Vice President Pat Reeder
 Secretary Mike Selby
 Treasurer Mark Meyer

Staff

Newsletter Editor Keith Blanton
 Webmaster John Blanton
 Meetings and Social Director Mike Selby

Board of Directors

Laura Ainsworth, Daniel Barnett, Virginia Barnett,
 Erling Beck, John Blanton, John Brandt, Prasad Golla,
 Elizabeth Hittson, Jack Hittson, Claudia Meek,
 and Mike Selby

Directors Emeritus Tony Dousette, Ron Hastings,
 Mark Meyer, John Thomas, Joe Voelkerling, and Mel
 Zemek

Scientific and Technical Advisors:

Joe Barnhart, Professor of Philosophy
 Raymond A. Eve, Ph.D., Professor of Sociology, UT
 Arlington
 Timothy N. Gorski, M.D., Physician
 Ronnie J. Hastings, Ph.D., Science Teacher
 Anthony P. Picchioni, Ph.D., Licensed Professional
 Counselor
 James Rusk, Director, Russell Planetarium
 Lakshman S. Tamil, Ph.D., Engineer
 John Thomas, Attorney

The North Texas Skeptics is a tax-exempt
 501 (c) (3) scientific and educational organization. All
 members receive the NTS newsletter and may attend
 NTS functions at which admission is charged at no or
 reduced cost. In addition, members will receive mailings
 on topics of current interest or social events.

Our newsletter, *The North Texas Skeptic*, is
 published monthly by The North Texas Skeptics,
 P.O. Box 111794, Carrollton, Texas 75011-1794.

Permission to reprint: Articles in *The North Texas
 Skeptic* may be reprinted without further permission,
 provided that *The Skeptic* is credited as the source, the
 mailing address above is listed, and a copy of the
 publication containing the reprint is sent to the Editor.
 Opinions expressed in *The Skeptic* are those of the
 individual authors and do not necessarily reflect the
 views of The North Texas Skeptics. Contents and logo
 © 2006 by North Texas Skeptics.

I couldn't have written about evolution without the generous tutoring of Michael Behe, David Berlinski, and William Dembski, all of whom are fabulous at translating complex ideas, unlike liberal arts types, who constantly force me to the dictionary to relearn the meaning of *quotidian*.³

I guess we see the problem right here.

Behe, Berlinski, and Dembski are all fellows of the Discovery Institute, the kind of creationism Coulter seeks to appreciate. The scientific inadequacies promoted in *Godless* can usually be palmed off on the Discovery Institute's own brand of truth management. Particularly, Coulter seems to have studied under creationist Jonathan Wells. Wells laid out Coulter's agenda in his book *Icons of Evolution*. Coulter takes the icons at face value.

Archaeopteryx

We can start with Archaeopteryx:

For over a hundred years, evolutionists proudly pointed to their same sad birdlike animal, Archaeopteryx, as their lone transitional fossil linking dinosaurs and birds.⁴

Coulter points out that Archaeopteryx seems to have been a failed bird that, by design, could not fly well. She concludes it "is no relation of modern birds."

Archaeopteryx is no relation to modern birds in much the same sense Australopithecus africanus is no relation to modern humans. While Archaeopteryx may not be (or may be) in the direct line of descent to modern birds, it certainly has characteristics of both reptiles and birds and thus represents a transition between the two. Coulter does not attempt to explain the existence of Archaeopteryx, because doing so would require dipping into evolution or else magic as an alternative.

Peppered moth

Dark versions of the peppered moth came to predominate industrial regions of England when soot from factory chimneys darkened tree trunks. When the factories cleaned up their stacks, tree bark in those regions lightened up, and the lighter moths came to the fore again. Evolutionists point to this as an example of a changing environment skewing the gene pool.

Coulter notes:

Ted Sargent and others pointed out that peppered moths do not rest on tree trunks, but on the undersides of the high branches. Not only that, but the peppered moth sleeps during the day, coming out to fly only at night when the birds are asleep.⁵

This pretty much parrots what Wells says in *Icons*. The problem is Wells and Coulter skip over some inconvenient truths. Particularly, they do not expose their readers to contradictory information. Now for some day-old bread. We have already printed the following in *The North Texas Skeptic*:

For example, Michael Majerus has published the details of a study in his book *Melanism: Evolution in Action*:^[11]

Resting positions of moths found in the wild in studies between 1964 and 1996

Exposed trunk: 6
 Unexposed trunk: 6
 Trunk/branch joint: 20
 Branches: 15
 Summary: 32 of 47 moths (68%) were found on tree trunks

Resting positions of moths found in the vicinity of traps between 1965 and 1996

Exposed trunk: 48
 Unexposed trunk: 22
 Trunk/branch joint: 66
 Branches: 20
 Foliage: 22
 Man-made surfaces: 25
 Summary: 136 of 203 moths (67%) were found on tree trunks.

What is curious is that in *Icons* Wells quotes from the Majerus book to make his point. Majerus called attention to the “artificiality” of much of the earlier moth studies and included the statement “peppered moths do not naturally rest in exposed positions on tree trunks.”^[12] Wells seems to have picked up on that statement and has ignored the data. Also, he does not particularly emphasize the fact that Majerus and others support the peppered moth evidence of natural selection.⁶

Jonathan Wells treats the study of the peppered moth as a case of scientific malfeasance.

What the textbooks don’t explain, however, is that biologists have known since the 1980s that the classical story has some serious flaws. The most serious is that peppered moths in the wild don’t even rest on tree trunks. The textbook photographs, it turns out, have been staged.⁷

Coulter writes:

But what about those photos? The famous photos of the peppered moths were staged, often by literally gluing dead moths to tree trunks.⁸

We have written:

Yes, the photos being used in textbooks are faked – *faked!* The photos showing two moths side by side on a tree trunk, one light and one dark, are staged—using dead moths stuck there by the photographer. Wells and the creationists would like you to believe this is evidence of scientific fraud perpetrated to support evolution.

Moths don’t tend to park themselves in front of a camera to have their picture taken, and the obvious solution to the photographer’s dilemma is to kill the moths and stick them on the bark.

Neither Wells nor Coulter seems to have picked up on the obvious—that the purpose of the photos was to make the point that dark moths will be more visible on light-colored bark, and pale moths will be more visible on dark-colored bark. Moths don’t tend to park themselves in front of a camera to have their picture taken, and the obvious solution to the photographer’s dilemma is to kill the moths and stick them on the bark. Life seems to be cheap for little moths. Sort of like the truth for some writers.

Haeckel’s embryos

Ernst Haeckel developed a theory popularly verbalized as “ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny.” It means that embryonic development rehashes prior phylogeny—evolutionary development. He produced some famous drawings of various embryos, from fish to human. He fudged the drawings to reinforce his view.

That was over a hundred years ago, and the scientific community soon disavowed Haeckel’s theory and his drawings. Still, the drawings continued to pop up in biology texts until recently.

To give you a sense of the mountains and mountains of evidence supporting the theory of evolution, until Haeckel’s drawings turned out to be frauds, his crackpot theory constituted one of the main pieces of evidence in support of evolution. Charles Darwin himself said the “facts” in embryology were “second to

none in importance” and “by far the strongest single class of facts” supporting his theory.⁹

Coulter’s Darwin quotes could be taken as strong evidence that Darwin relied on Haeckel’s work to support his theory. Could be, that is, if Haeckel had done his work before Darwin wrote those words. As it is, the first quote is, according to Coulter, from *Icons*, quoting Darwin from *Origin of Species*, which was published in 1859. The second quote is again from *Icons*, this time quoting a letter to Asa Gray in 1860. Haeckel came up with his theory about 1866 and the drawings about 1874.

Coulter next goes on to take down Haeckel, Darwin, and the whole rotten scientific establishment:

And then, in the 1990s, British embryologist Michael Richardson was looking at vertebrate embryos through a microscope and noticed that they look nothing at all like Haeckel’s drawings. Richardson and this team of researchers examined vertebrate embryos and published actual photos of the embryos in the August 1997 issue of the journal *Anatomy & Embryology*. It turned out that Haeckel had used the same wood cuts for some of the embryos and doctored others to make sure the embryos looked alike. “It looks like,” Richardson said, “it’s turning out to be one of the most famous fakes in biology”—which, in a field crowded with other evolutionary “proofs,” was quite a claim.¹⁰

These are Coulter’s words, but the obvious inspiration is *Icons*. See *Icons* page 92. Wells, and subsequently Coulter, apparently took liberties in their reading of Richardson. He had this to say about Wells’ interpretation of his work:

A recent study coauthored by several of us and discussed by Elizabeth Pennisi (*Science*, 5 Sept. 1997, p. 1435) examined inaccuracies in embryo drawings published last century by Ernst Haeckel. Our work has been used in a nationally televised debate to attack evolutionary theory and to suggest that evolution cannot explain embryology. We strongly disagree with this viewpoint. Data from embryology are fully consistent with Darwinian evolution.... the mixture of similarities and differences among vertebrate embryos reflects evolutionary change in developmental mechanisms inherited from a common ancestor... Haeckel’s inaccuracies damage his credibility, but they do not invalidate the mass of published evidence for Darwinian evolution. Ironically, had Haeckel drawn the embryos accurately, his first two valid points in favor of evolution would have been better demonstrated.¹¹

There is no room to recapitulate all of Savillo’s critique here. Readers of creationist literature will find a familiar

pattern. Please pursue Savillo’s piece at Media Matters and follow the links for a complete read. You can also borrow my copy of *Godless*. There is a waiting list.

One observation is interesting. Coulter calls evolution a creation myth and labors through many pages and much sarcasm to pull it down. However, she never offers an alternative explanation. It may be she believes in the six-day creation myth, but she never signs up to it. And she never denounces it either. In this respect she completely understands her reading audience.

We are left to wonder what Coulter really thinks about the issues. Take the speaking engagements and the book sales off the table, and what would she be saying about evolution? If she does not subscribe to the six days of creation, then all those ancient life forms she discusses in *Godless* really existed, and they had parents, and those parents had parents, and so on. When and how did we go from no mammals to mammals, and when and how did we go from no humans to humans? Is this something never discussed in her world?

In the mean time, Coulter needs to do more of her own research and to quit leaning on those jokers from Discovery institute. She runs the risk of making right-wing, neo-fascist, scum sucking political pundits look foolish. See what I mean? Now she’s got me doing it.



References

- 1 Ann Coulter’s “Flatulent Raccoon Theory,” Media Matters for America, June 2006
<http://mediamatters.org/items/200607070010>
<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2006-07-19.htm#coulter>
- 2 Page 199.
- 3 Acknowledgements following page 301
- 4 Page 219
- 5 Pages 236-237
- 6 The North Texas Skeptic, August 2003.
- 7 Jonathan Wells, *Icons of Evolution*. Regenery Publishing, Inc., Washington, p.138, 2000.
- 8 Page 237
- 9 Page 239
- 10 Page 239
- 11 Michael K. Richardson, et al., “Haeckel, Embryos, and Evolution,” *Science (Letters)*, Vol. 280 (May 15, 1998), pp. 983-985. (quoted from <http://www.nmsr.org/jonwells.htm>)

Web News

by John Blanton

The World Wide Web is a wonderful source of information and news. Some of it is true, and some of it is not.

Yogic flyers build 'shield of invincibility' around Israel

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2006-07-26.htm#yoga>

http://news.yahoo.com/s/afp/20060726/lf_afp/mideastconflictisrael_060726151442

by Rory Mulholland Wed Jul 26, 11:14 AM ET

What if John Hagelin won the presidency for the Natural Law Party? What if you could levitate while sitting on your butt? What if a former army colonel decided yogic flying were the answer to Israel's security?

TIBERIAS, Israel (AFP) - Reuven Zelenkovsky was a colonel in the Israeli army, but now he has renounced military might to join a squadron of yogic flyers at the Sea of Galilee to throw a "shield of invincibility" around the Jewish state.

Rockets rained down and Zelenkovsky recruited fliers on both sides of the border to hop for peace.

Hop for peace. You didn't believe these guys actually levitate, did you? A little explanation: This is Transcendental Meditation, and the flying is more like hopping around on your butt. I won't elaborate. James Randi has previously described the practice in his classic book *Flim-Flam*.

A scientifically crafted mathematical formula specifies that the square root of one percent of the Israeli population is required to participate in the hopping in order to produce a "shield of invincibility." That's 265 butts.

Unfortunately, Zelenkovsky was able to get only 65 volunteers off their cans, so the killing continues.

Surprising Finding: Acupuncture May Not Help Stroke Patients

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2006-07-26.htm#stroke>

<http://www.hbns.org/getDocument.cfm?documentID=1320>

Release Date: July 24, 2006

By Glenda Fautleroy, Contributing Writer Health Behavior News Service

Who would have thought?

Modern medical theory holds that a stroke involves loss of brain function due to oxygen starvation due to loss of blood flow to the brain. Traditional Chinese medicine holds that "meridian points" on the human body correspond to twelve inner organs plus the spine and the abdomen. Sticking needles in specific meridian points will beneficially affect the related body function.

Apparently not.

Although acupuncture has been used in China for hundreds of years and more frequently in Western countries to treat chronic stroke, there is no clear proof that the therapy improves patients' rehabilitation, a new review has found.

This finding appears to cast some uncertainty on a commonly accepted medical intervention for one of the most disabling health conditions of older adults worldwide.

"The results of the systematic review are really surprising to me," said lead author Hongmei Wu, M.D., of the West China Hospital in Si Chuan. "In China, acupuncture has been well accepted by Chinese patients and is widely used for stroke rehabilitation."

According to the authors, the review's intent was to provide evidence that acupuncture should be routinely used to rehabilitate patients with subacute or chronic stroke. Acupuncture has been used to improve patients' motor, sensation, speech and other neurological functions — but the available research failed to offer sound evidence of the effects of this therapy.

Welcome to the real world. I have seen a world war, a moon landing, and a presidential impeachment. Long time ago I discovered I can't always have my candy, and the facts don't always fit my fondest wishes.

Lubbock, Texas, plans to pray for rain

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2006-07-26.htm#rain>

<http://upi.com/NewsTrack/view.php?StoryID=20060724-063818-3430r>

OK, Lubbock didn't get the message. Please read again the item above.

LUBBOCK, Texas, July 24 (UPI) — Public officials in Lubbock, Texas, are organizing a day to pray for rain.

"Nobody is going to tell God what to do and what not to do, but we are in a serious drought in West Texas and since he is the man who controls the rain clouds, we're

asking him for his mercy and his help,” Mayor David Miller told the Lubbock Avalanche-Journal.

Proposed Template for Ohio Teachers Ignites Intelligent Design Debate

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2006-07-26.htm#ohio>

<http://www.wdcmedia.com/newsArticle.php?ID=1522>

WDC MEDIA NEWS Christian News and Media Agency

Creationism may not be science, but evolution is, and the Ohio Board of Education wants to be sure students know that this science is controversial.

(AgapePress) -- A proposal before the Ohio Board of Education has rekindled the debate over how evolution should be taught in the classroom.

Conservative Board member Colleen Grady recently floated a proposal that would create a “template” teachers could use for classroom discussions on issues such as evolution, global warming, stem-cell research and cloning. However, liberal groups like Americans United for Separation of Church and State have raised concerns about the plan.

Some sourpuss critics are griping that this will allow for intelligent design to be taught. *Au contraire* says Roddy Bullock of the Intelligent Design Network of Ohio, a group that has no vested interest in this dispute. Bullock says “the plan would simply allow for criticism of Darwinian evolution.”

Ken Ham talks about the creationist perspective

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2006-07-26.htm#ham>

<http://news.cincypost.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20060722/NEWS02/607220325>

By Kevin Eigelbach Post staff reporter

Ken Ham got fed up with secularism in Australia and came over to the U.S. to found Answers In Genesis, a young-Earth creationist (YEC) organization.

Earlier this month, Answers in Genesis launched a magazine called *Answers*, whose first issue featured articles such as “The World: Born in 4004 BC?” and “Bird Flu: Has it Evolved?”

Post religion reporter Kevin Eigelbach sat down with Answers in Genesis President and CEO Ken Ham, the Australian-born defender of the literal truth of the Bible’s Book of Genesis, to talk about the quarterly magazine, the museum and the creationist perspective.

Q: Why this magazine?

Ham: We look on this ministry as like a big reservoir. We’ve got all this information, that many people in the public don’t have. So we look for every means by which we can get that information out to the public. The magazine is another way of doing it.

Ham talks of “the need for a magazine that deals with the Christian worldview, deals with the culture war.”

AiG has a mailing list of 40,000, and they expect the numbers to climb. *Answers* is currently a quarterly, but by this time next year Ham expects it to go bi-monthly.

The creationism museum in Kentucky, near Cincinnati, Ohio, is expected to open sometime in the future. AiG continues to collect funds for the project.

Creationist’s fight with Uncle Sam may evolve into painful defeat

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2006-07-19.htm#hovind>

<http://www.pensacolanewsjournal.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20060719/NEWS01/607190343/1036>

Published - July, 19, 2006

Mark OBrien @PensacolaNewsJournal.com

We first met creationist Kent Hovind in 1994 when he gave a talk at the Canyon Creek Baptist Church in Richardson. See the story on-line in the December 1994 issue of *The Skeptic*, as this newsletter was called at the time. This newsletter is now called “The North Texas Skeptic,” and Kent Hovind is now called “Dr. Dino.”

Hovind obtained a masters degree and a Ph.D. from Patriot University in Colorado. See a short note on this plus a photo of Hovind’s *alma mater* in the March 2000 issue of *The North Texas Skeptic*.

[Hovind is] squaring off against Uncle Sam on charges of tax fraud. Hovind has lost before — with the U.S. Bankruptcy Court and with Escambia County’s [Florida] right to require building permits for his Dinosaur Adventure Land, a park just east of Car City.

We hope we don’t lose Kent Hovind to the U.S. judicial system. He is such a joy to write about.

At least we won’t lose Dr. Dino to South Africa. His plans to travel to there to deliver his message have been put on hold. A Florida judge has agreed Hovind is a potential flight risk and has ordered him to turn over his passport. □

Skeptic Ink

by Prasad Golla and John Blanton.
© 2006. Free, non-commercial reuse permitted



What's new

By Robert Park

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

BLEEP: IT IS PHYSICS THAT UNLEASHED THIS PLAGUE ON MANKIND.

Some suggested that I take refuge behind the Geneva Convention or the Eighth Amendment rather than watch the film *What the Bleep Do We Know*. It was penance for allowing myself to be used on ABC's *Primetime*, where Adam Dreamhealer attributed his awesome power to "quantum mechanics." In "Bleep" every spiritual claim becomes an example of "consciousness" acting through quantum mechanics. In physics, unfortunately, the word "consciousness" is invariably followed by bullshit. Having found a way to make incredibly precise predictions at the atomic level, we chose to ignore the fact that we don't understand it. After all, QM has transformed the world. We now flaunt the fact that no one understands quantum mechanics. We have begun to enjoy being high priests of a mystical religion. It's like giving Mass in Latin.

THE CAST: PHYSICS IS NOT AN INOCULATION AGAINST FOOLISHNESS.

Nor does it rule out mendacity. Two Ph.D. physicists, William Tiller and John Hagelin, who were in "Bleep," are afflicted with both conditions, and have been in WN in the past. Just look for them in (<http://bobpark.physics.umd.edu/search.html>). In "Bleep," Hagelin again claimed, as he has countless times, to have reduced violent crime in Washington, DC in the summer of 1993 by the meditation of 1,000 TM "experts" in unison. I was at the press conference a year later

when he reported that the reduction was 18%. "18% relative to what" a puzzled reporter asked? "Relative to what it would have been if they had not been meditating," he replied. In fact the DC murder rate during that period was the highest ever recorded. More on Tiller and Ramtha next week.

KANSAS: WILL VOTERS WAKE UP FOR TUESDAY'S PRIMARY ELECTION?

Voters don't pay attention to School Board elections unless there is a problem. Well, there's a problem: Creationists have a 6-4 majority. It can be solved; 4 creationists are up for election.

GLOBAL WARMING: PASSING THE HAT FOR A FOSSIL FUEL APOLOGIST.

AP today reports that Patrick Michaels, one of the last global warming deniers, told officials of Western coal-burning utilities that he's running out of money to "analyze" scientific critics. He's professor of environmental science at U. Virginia and senior fellow of the libertarian Cato Institute. It's OK to be a lobbyist, as long as you don't pretend to be a scientist.

Bob Park can be reached via email at opa@aps.org.

Future Meeting Dates

September 9, 2006 November 11, 2006

October 14, 2006 December 9, 2006

North Texas Skeptics
P.O. Box 111794
Carrollton, Texas 75011-1794

FIRST CLASS

Address Correction Requested

Application for Membership

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
E-Mail address _____
Home Phone _____ Work Phone _____
Occupation _____
Special expertise and/or interests _____

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Membership agreement:

Yes, I agree with your purposes in exploring paranormal and pseudoscientific claims from a responsible and scientific point of view, and while I do not endorse the a priori rejection of paranormal phenomena and pseudoscientific claims, I believe that such claims must be subjected to the fair and systematic testing which rational enquiry demands.

Signature _____ Date _____

Indicate your choice:

Member: A voting member and newsletter recipient. Family privileges included. Annual dues \$35.00

Newsletter recipient: No membership privileges. Annual subscription rate \$15.00

Receive a \$5 discount on either of the two newsletter subscription levels above by choosing to receive your newsletter by e-mail only.

Introduce a friend to *The North Texas Skeptic*: Let us send a **FREE** three-month gift subscription of *The Skeptic* to this individual (or institution).

Enclosed is a tax-deductible donation to The North Texas Skeptics in the amount of \$_____.

Bill me: Please bill me for the choices I have made above.