



The North Texas

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Outside Discovery Institute

The public face of the CSC

by John Blanton

If you're just back from a 10-year safari I need to tell you who or what the Discovery Institute is. Most have a good idea already.

When skeptics talk about the Discovery Institute (DI) we usually mean the Discovery Institute Center for Science and Culture (CSC). While the DI concerns itself with a number of social issues, it's the CSC arm and its support for creationism that intersect our principal skeptical area of interest.

The National Center for Science Education (NCSE) is approximately the polar opposite of the CSC. It promotes the teaching of evolution in public schools and opposes the efforts of groups like the DI. An item posted on the NCSE Web site takes special note that despite its opposition to evolution, the CSC's own title and banner have evolved to more closely align with the CSC's public posturing.¹

The first illustration shows the CSC's Web banner as it existed from November 1996 to April 1999. The full title then was "Center for Renewal of Science and Culture," and

for those lacking the patience to stand in line to see the original, CRSC illustrated their theme with a copy of

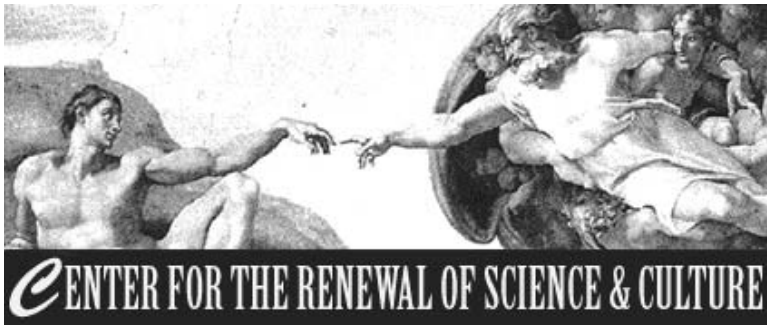


Illustration #1

EVENTS CALENDAR

July Program

**Saturday, 2 p.m.
July 8, 2006**

Center for Nonprofit Management
2900 Live Oak Street in Dallas

Subject to be announced.



**NTS Social Dinner
/Board Meeting**

Saturday, July 22 at 7:p.m.

Good Eats
6950 Greenville Avenue in Dallas

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

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Michelangelo's famous painting on the Vatican's Sistine Chapel ceiling. It shows God reaching out and touching Man to give him life and, supposedly, knowledge.

Once the CRSC saw the benefit of portraying its goals as purely secular, the biblical theme of Michelangelo's painting stood out as a



Illustration #2

contradiction and possibly a source of embarrassment. The next generation of CRSC's banner toned down its biblical implications by replacing Adam with a DNA molecule. God is no longer touching Adam. God is now touching nature. God is working through nature. The Bible is now in a desk drawer. CRSC's followers understand this slight of hand and also the need for a secular public face. They know what's in the desk drawer.

As critics continued to call out the CRSC's religious motivation, the CRSC sought to slip from this noose. Advocacy of creationism in public schools and attacks on evolution are more seemly and gain more traction with existing law if the CRSC can successfully deny any religious agenda. Today the CRSC is simply the CSC, and God is gone. Perhaps



Illustration #3

to his own desk drawer. The third illustration shows the CSC's new face.

The need to satisfy two masters—a supportive religious base and the imprimatur of secular science—has produced some disquieting posturing by the DI. We may take some examples from their Web log, which appears to be their most voluble outlet.

Constance Holden, discussing a court ruling on the Georgia biology book sticker case, wrote in the 2 June 2006 issue of *Science*:²

Both sides seem pleased with the decision. It's "a victory as it throws out the problematic ruling [made by] the trial court," says Casey Luskin, a lawyer at The Discovery Institute, creationism's main think tank in Seattle, Washington.

It would appear Holden's characterization of the DI was too close to the mark, because Casey Luskin responded quickly for the DI.³

Science Editorializes over Discovery Institute

The current issue of the journal *Science* gave us further proof that the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) has no interest in being a neutral or fair participant in the debate over ID and evolution. In what purports to be a news article, Constance Holden wrote...

By labeling Discovery Institute "creationism's main think tank," Holden engages in blatant editorializing and abandons her role as reporter for that of mouthpiece for ID's critics.

Despite Holden's editorializing, ID is not creationism because creationism always postulates a supernatural creator, and/or is focused on proving some religious scripture. But intelligent design does neither. As a passage from the early pro-ID textbook *Of Pandas and People* explains, there is "intelligence, which can be recognized by uniform sensory experience, and the supernatural, which cannot.... All [ID] implies is that life had an intelligent source." (Pandas, 2nd ed., pgs. 127, 161). ID does not postulate a supernatural creator, and it is not focused on proving any kind of religious scripture.

Luskin can choose to reject the notion that Intelligent Design is religiously-based, if that is his meaning. However, a quick check of the DI's roster discloses few without religious encouragement. Two come to mind:

David Berlinski is a DI senior fellow with no outward religious affiliation. He is a Ph.D. in mathematics (Princeton) who has also done studies in molecular biology (Columbia University). His main motivation seems to be some heartburn with "Darwinism."

Jonathan Wells is also a DI senior fellow, and he holds two Ph.D.s. One is in molecular and cell biology (UC Berkeley). The other is in religious studies (Yale). Apparently Wells is not a mainstream Christian. He follows the Reverend Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church.

OK, maybe Wells doesn't count.

However, senior fellow Michael Behe, who teaches biological sciences at Lehigh University, is a devout Catholic. While acknowledging his conviction that religion trumps science, he continues to insist he has no religious purpose in promoting Intelligent Design.

Senior Fellow William Demski has developed the concept of "specified complexity," whereby it should be possible to infer an intelligent factor by observing the complexity of an entity. His religious background and motivation are little concealed, and he is now research professor of philosophy at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, after a stint at Baylor University, and as professor of theology and science at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville where he was also the school's director of the Center for Science and Theology.

Intelligent Design's godfather, Phillip Johnson, when he is not pushing for "Defeating Darwinism by Opening Minds," likes to remind us of the place for Christianity in science. In his book he talks of the benefits of abandoning materialism:⁴

If the materialistic domination of the intellectual world is seriously called into question, it will be possible for the next generation of Christians to enter the universities as participants in the search for truth, not as outsiders who have no choice but to submit to materialistic rules.

...

The main thing Christian parents and teachers can do is to teach young thinkers to understand the techniques of good thinking and help them tune up their baloney detectors so they aren't fooled by the stock answers the authorities give to the tough questions. When high-schoolers hear the word evolution, particularly in one of those public television science programs, the indicator screens on their baloney detectors should display "Snow Job Alert!..."

You get the picture. The claim that Intelligent Design has no religious backing and is not, therefore, creationism wears a little thin. Even so, the DI misses a fine point, or rather, it wants readers to miss the point. Something doesn't have to support the Genesis story of creation to be creationism. Scientists and other opponents of Intelligent Design see creationism as any story that involves supernatural creation of the universe. While the DI continues to assert they aren't pushing Jehovah, the God of Abraham, or even Jesus, they *are* pushing an overdressed form of creationism.

All their efforts are not without reward. A recent DI press release tells the glad news: ⁵

Discovery Institute Is Think Tank Increasing Fastest in News Coverage, According to FAIR Media Report

SEATTLE, June 16 /PRNewswire/ — According to a report issued by a liberal media resource, FAIR, the Discovery Institute has become one of the most sought after think-tanks in the country, with greater percentage growth in news notice than any other think tank. Discovery, founded in 1990, is a non-partisan public policy center specializing in issues surrounding transportation, technology, and the scientific theory of intelligent design.

The story concludes:

Discovery Institute's Center for Science and Culture has more than 40 affiliated biologists, biochemists, physicists, philosophers and historians of science, and public policy and legal experts, most of whom also have positions with colleges and universities. Over 500 scientists have signed the Institute's Scientific Dissent From Darwinism statement.

(www.dissentfromdarwin.com)

Even so, the DI is not the heavy hitter it aspires to be. At its most recent at-bat in Texas, they sent their best guns down to Austin to plug their case. Unfortunately, some real scientists also showed up. By *real scientists* I mean people who actually do scientific research and publish their research in peer-reviewed science journals. And win Nobel Prizes. On that occasion the DI left town empty-handed. ⁶

In a more recent opportunity to state their case, the DI declined to step up to the plate. When the Dover, PA, school board voted to sanction Intelligent Design in science classes, the DI saw the impossibility of the situation. The Dover board, though inspired by the DI's rhetoric, failed to pick up on the essential point. They forgot to hide the Bible.

With the game already lost the DI stayed on the sidelines, and only Behe, Dembski, and Stephen C. Meyer, CSC director and senior fellow, spoke for Intelligent Design in the ensuing lawsuit. Once again the nasty scientists showed up and took down all of the DI's crafted arguments. On 20 December 2005 Judge John E. Jones III wrote in his opinion what was apparent to all. Intelligent Design is creationism under another name.

The DI immediately thanked Judge Jones by calling him an "activist judge." Some find this hard to swallow, since Jones is a Republican and was appointed to his post by President Bush.

However, the DI continues this critique, now over six months after the ruling. Casey Luskin, along with David K. DeWolf, John G. West, and Jonathan Witt have co-authored a book on the Dover trial. The following is from the DI Web site: ⁷

Traipsing Into Evolution: Intelligent Design and the Kitzmiller vs. Dover Decision (DI Press 2006) is the first book to critique federal Judge John E. Jones' decision in the Kitzmiller v. Dover case, the first trial to address the constitutionality of teaching intelligent design in public schools. In this concise yet comprehensive response, Discovery Institute scholars and attorneys expose how Judge Jones' decision was based upon faulty reasoning, non-existent evidence, and a serious misrepresentation of the scientific theory of intelligent design. Despite Jones' protestations to the contrary, his attempt to use the federal bench to declare evolution a sacred cow turns out to be a textbook case of good-old-American judicial activism..

The now-famous Wedge project of Intelligent Design involves a plan to perform research and to publish results. This was to be followed by a push to gain public acceptance for Intelligent Design. Book publicity, seminars, and publicity materials would be involved. ⁸

The DI grew impatient with the research and scientific publication phase, and they launched into the public relations phase in short order. They have been there ever since. It seems that's what they are best at. □

References

- 1 http://www.ncseweb.org/resources/articles/8325_evolving_banners_at_the_discov_8_29_2002.asp
- 2 Court Revives Georgia Sticker Case, *Science*, 2 June 18, 2006. Vol. 312, p. 1202.
- 3 http://www.evolutionnews.org/2006/06/science_editorializes_over_dis_1.html
- 4 Phillip Johnson, *Defeating Darwinism by Opening Minds*, pp 115, 116. InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL. 1997. Also available at http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0830813608/the_northtexaske
- 5 http://www.evolutionnews.org/2006/06/discovery_institute_becoming_o.html
- 6 http://www.ntskeptics.org/2003/2003december/december_2003.htm
- 7 <http://www.discovery.org/scripts/viewDB/index.php?command=view&id=3364>
- 8 <http://www.ntskeptics.org/2004/2004august/august2004.htm>

Letter to the Editor



Scientific Evidence for the Existence of God

A scientific approach to the existence of God appears to be impossible at the onset. The existence of God defined as a Creator or Supreme Being would on the surface seem to require pure “faith” and without considering scientific evidence. Since no one was around when the initial event occurred, no one is able to use the five senses to explain or document what occurred. However, one current theory with a great deal of evidence that can be analyzed, and one theory that has been proven mathematically can be utilized for a scientific review of the beginning of the Universe.

In the last half a millennium, a chasm has been created between theology and science. Nearly 400 years ago Galileo was tried and found guilty by the church for breaking his pledge not to support Copernicus again. Copernicus was a Polish astronomer and clergyman who proposed that the earth was not at the center of the universe. Galileo was considered a heretic by the Catholic Church for his efforts to show that the sun and not the earth is the center of the universe. Galileo, as well Copernicus, believed that the sun was the center of the universe (heliocentric) rather than the earth (geocentric).

Since the time of Galileo, pure “science” and the Bible have been considered at odds and in contradiction with each other with each requiring its own “faith”. Recent developments in physics have led to new discoveries in how the universe was created. Some of these discoveries have indicated that science may not be in contradiction with a proper exegesis of the Genesis account of the creation of the universe.

In the first verse of the Bible in Genesis 1:1, the word “created” in Hebrew means “bara” which is translated to English as “created out of nothing”. “The heavens and the earth” refers to the universe. The verse means that in the beginning of time, God created the universe out of nothing. In effect the creation of the universe through the Big Bang theory confirms that Genesis 1:1 is correct that a Supreme Being or creative force caused something to be created out of nothing. Most astrophysicists agree that there had to be something outside of the existing dimensions that created matter and energy out of nothing.

The first point of evidence has been named “The Big Bang” theory. A majority of astrophysicists and cosmologists now believe in “The Big Bang” theory of describing how the universe can into being. In confirming a Big Bang theory, tests with particle accelerators have shown that something the universe initially was created out of nothing in three spatial dimensions that expanded to at least at least nine spatial dimensions and then went back into fewer dimensions. In order for the universe to have been created, it is reasonable to deduce that something or someone greater than the created universe had to exist outside of the ten dimensions of space and with at least two dimensions of time. This Being could then be called “God” because it obviously required some type of creative force or being to initiate this action. Stephen Hawking, although not believing in a personal God, has inferred in his writings and lectures that some type of creative being exists. Other contemporaries of Stephen Hawking have also provided sufficient evidence to demonstrate the “Big Bang” theory is the mechanism for how the universe was “created”.

The space-time theorem of general relativity ($E=mc^2$) indicates that the universe comprised of all mass and energy along with the dimensions of space and time had its beginning beyond all known dimensions of space and time. Certainly Albert Einstein also believed in a Supreme Being, albeit he also did not believe in a personal God. Based on recent discoveries since the late 1970s, physicists generally believe in some type of Supreme Being or Creator but often do not believe in a “personal” God. The mathematical odds of the universe being created without an external being greater than the three dimensions of space and one dimension of time is confirmed by modern science to be astronomical.

The beauty and symmetry of equations in physics discovered by Albert Einstein lead to the belief in a Creator. In fact, the beauty and symmetry of many created objects to be discussed in a later article indicate another proof in the existence of a Supreme Being or God. A Supreme Being would then have existed in at least 10 dimensions of space and have at least two or more dimensions of time. A review of fractal geometry and the mathematical elements found in created nature may reveal more about what type of Supreme Being or Creator exists.

Chuck Gafford
Pastor, Praise Place, Oklahoma City, OK

[Chuck Gafford's letter is also posted on the NTS Blog. Please read it there and post your comments. The URL is <http://www.ntskeptics.org/blog/>.] -Ed.

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.]

Evolution in Georgia: Federal Appeals Court sends case back.

Since 1995, the Cobb County School Board had ordered pages on evolution torn out of science textbooks. But a new textbook in 2002 had too many pages to tear out, so they just added a sticker saying evolution is only a theory anyway. A federal District Court judge said the stickers violated the establishment clause of the First Amendment and told the school district to rip all 35,000 off (WN 14 Jan 05). Thursday, citing insufficient evidence, a Federal Appeals Court said put 'em back on until the District Court determines if the school board acted "religiously neutral," or the case is retried.

Conspiracies: physicist's new theory is as good as his first.

A few weeks ago a cab picked me up at the U. of Wisconsin Physics Dept. to take me to the airport. The driver began, "You a physicist? I like physics. You know this guy Steven Jones? He's a physicist. He proved the World Trade Center couldn't have fallen that fast on 9/11 unless it was rigged with explosives." I'd heard it before. Today there's a good story about

Jones and the 9/11 "conspiracy" by John Gravois in the Chronicle of Higher Education. Seventeen years ago Steven Jones imagined that cold fusion is responsible for Earth's molten interior. That's what led Fleischmann and Pons to rush into print with their dumb idea.

Heat: maybe global warming deniers are conspiracy theorists.

The 1999 Mann Report concluded that the 1990s were the warmest decade in a thousand years. It helped solidify public concern over warming. It also infuriated many Republican lawmakers and industry groups. At the request of the House Science Committee, the National Academies reviewed the Report, and agreed with the overall thrust. The same deniers objected to the review

Lies: replacing polygraphs with brain imaging is a bad idea.

WN has long recommended that the polygraph be replaced by a coin toss. It would catch half of the lies, which is a lot better than the polygraph. There would be a little "collateral damage" from false positives, but there's a lot of that anyway. However, the Wash Post on Tuesday had a story about discrepancies between polygraph results obtained by different federal agencies. Who could be surprised? We are forced to admit that the coin toss would suffer the same difficulty, presumably to the same extent. According to an editorial in yesterday's Nature, however, there are two start-up companies preparing to offer fMRI brain scanning devices as lie detectors. Many neuroscientists think the claims made for fMRI are overblown. Should company officials therefore be asked to submit to brain scans? That's the real problem. If it works, it would represent the ultimate invasion of privacy.

Skeptic Ink

by Prasad Golla and John Blanton.
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The ten commandments: playing now at the Supreme Court Theater

An evangelical Christian group in Washington, DC, Faith and Action, is erecting a stone monument to the stone tablets on the front lawn of a row house across the street from the U.S. Supreme Court building. The group does not have the approval they need according city officials, but perhaps they cleared it with a higher authority. The granite sculpture weighs 850 pounds.

Hulk Robertson: how do you handle an 850 pound religious icon?

Religious broadcaster Pat "The Hulk" Robertson, who had been pushing his "age-defying protein shake," should have no problem. On the Web site of his Christian Broadcasting Network, he says he has leg-pressed 2,000 pounds. When he proves he can do that, I'll convert.

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

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Future Meeting Dates

July 8, 2006	September 9, 2006
August 12, 2006	October 14, 2006
	November 11, 2006

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