



The North Texas

Skeptic

Volume 20

November 2006

Number 11

<http://www.ntskeptics.org>

Stump the skeptic

by John Blanton

In my heart I know there is a loving God who cares about me and who watches over me. If not, then why, after all my sins, after all my transgressions, after all the times I have taken His name in vain and denounced Him, would He still continue to make life so easy for me?

I speak of events over the last few weeks.

We all know The North Texas Skeptics as a public service organization, founded to enlighten the unthinking and to challenge the outrages of the dangerously stupid. Most often it's been like dropping a coin into a deep well and waiting for the splash. And waiting.

Apparently the wait is over.

It's as though a heavenly tap has been turned on. The terminally misinformed have started beating down our door. I'm going to keep their names private, just to show I can be loving and caring, as well:

One of the first to play *Stump the Skeptic* was Mark. Mark was pleasant enough. Like many creationists, Mark also has a *laissez faire* spelling style:

Skeptic

1) Do you believe in supernatural intelligence? Supernatural: outside of nature, above nature, superior to nature.

The intelligence of man is superior to nature, it is supernatural, there is nothing in nature that comes close to it, or it's abilities.

The intelligence of man cannot be attributed to evolution, evolution is supposed to be a natural law, not a supernatural law.

EVENTS CALENDAR

November Program

November 11, 2006

Saturday, 2 p.m. at the Center for Nonprofit Management
2900 Live Oak Street in Dallas

The Great Monkey Trial

John Blanton will present a review of L. Sprague de Camp's famous book about "the trial of the century."



NTS Social Dinner /Board Meeting

Saturday, November 18 at
7:p.m. at
Good Eats
6950 Greenville Avenue in
Dallas

Dr. Wesley Elsberry, Information Project Director at the NCSE, will join us for dinner.

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.

2) It is not possible for man to comprehend nothingness, man
 can only comprehend existence, therefore man is incapable of
 atheism, how can a man describe non-existence? He cannot,
 but He can describe existence.

Try to describe an empty room, all you could say it that it is a
 room and the it is empty! You cannot describe emptiness.

Therefore you cannot believe there is not a God! You can only
 believe that there is a God!

I replied:

Mark,

I'm sorry, but your argument is not making sense. Can you
 explain your points at greater length. Try to give more
 explanation.

You see, Mark had laid a trap for me, and I walked right into it.
 Then he zinged me, but good.

Typical elitist snob!!!!!!

Ouch! That hurts.

Bruce, who has a B.S. in E.E., wrote "Huh?"

According to evolution we are just a random event, so why post
 a bin Laden cartoon, if fact why make any moral statments at
 all, since there is no right and wrong, why take any stand on
 issues like global warming, who cares if humans (random
 events) die off. Let chaos reign in the streets, fire the police,
 etc...

You are so inconsistent, stop making moral statements.

Most of the truly great scientists such as Newton and Maxwell
 were believers. So are you, except unlike them you believe in
 the false, discredited, unscientific "theory" of evolution.

Bruce referred to Prasad's bin Laden cartoon on our Web site a few
 weeks back. Of course, I had to agree that evolution is random, in the
 sense that I am not in charge of it. I also agreed a lot of scientists who
 contributed to our understanding of nature were "believers." I noted the
 theory of evolution was developed by creationists.

Then there followed an interchange with Bruce about absolute
 authority. What's going around is the idea that if the theory of evolution
 is true, then there is no absolute moral authority. Bruce explained this,
 and I, in turn, explained that our need for an absolute authority and our
 desire for an absolute authority in no way imply such an authority exists
 or that evolution is false. It seems I have to explain this several times a
 year.

Of those lining up to play, Bruce was the most tireless. And when he needed to take a break, his wife batted relief. She responded to something I sent to Bruce:

Hello,

I am Bruce's wife ... and I just have 4 quick observations.

... We believe absolute authority came from God (our creator) when he created the universe a little over 6,000 years ago. Third, I am glad you brought up the Nazis. Yes, they definitely had some distorted beliefs, which were the direct result in a belief/faith in Darwinsim. Their beliefs were a direct logical extension of belief in Darwinism.) Survival of the fittest) There are many quotes from advocates of Darwin, but I unfortunately don't have time to go there right now.

...In your last paragraph, if you are referring to the Scopes trial, then yes, the Christian "on trial" did make a mistake in defending his beliefs, and left an open door so to speak for his opponents to call him a liar, win the argument, etc. This was ONE incident. (One incident does not make the "rule")

Anyway, the Darwinists, and the Darwinists beliefs, are full of contradictions, not to mention the fact that to believe in Darwinism requires a "faith" of sorts. Look at any high school text on evolution and you will find multiple "We may suppose" and other phrases along that line. There is no direct proof in evolution (an in a sense for creationism either) because we weren't there. We have to look at the evidence and/or decide who we are going to believe (put our faith in) Are we going to believe God (His account) or are we going to believe the Darwinists. Either way, it's a matter of faith, and faith and reason go together. ...

Regards,

Yvonne []

It always happens when I get into one of these with the creationists. They run out of facts (doesn't take long), and they run out of excuses (could take longer). Didn't take long for Yvonne. Shortly:

You apparently have more time for this and/or it is more important for you. I have other things that are vying for my time. ...

So, Bruce took up the slack. They're a great tag team.

A partially functioning eye might be beneficial, but how many individual thousands (at least) of mutations would it take to get to "partially functioning", way too

many. And all along it would be either neutral or detrimental. Come on now!

And later:

I would recommend a book called "Reasonable Faith" by Jay Wile (Ph.D. Nuclear Chemistry - University of Rochester). He has published more than 30 articles in peer-reviewed journals in his field and is active in the Creation/Evolution debate.

I responded:

I couldn't find references to any of Jay Wile's peer-reviewed papers. Can you point me to some?

I notice that Jay Wile makes claims that radiometric dating is "unreliable." I take that to mean he thinks radiometric dates showing the Earth is billions of years old are false. However, Wile has not published any scientific papers to back up this claim. Is there a reason for that? By "scientific" I mean a real paper in a real science journal with appropriate peer review.

Oops. It's that time again. Out of facts and out of excuses, Bruce got back to me:

Here is his contact info, you can ask him yourself:

jwile@highschoolscience.com

I guess I will have to.

Joe Taylor runs the Mt. Blanco Fossil Museum in Crosbyton, Texas, so I won't be keeping him anonymous. He started off asking why we championed "global warming." Then he moved on to evolution. Why root for an idea that painted such a gloomy picture?

My point is that I don't think people who are convinced that evolution is true really consider the implications. I will bet anything that you want all your neighbors to live by the laws of the Bible, the Bible which says that Jesus is the Son of God and rose from the grave etc., the same Jesus who clearly listed two genealogies that when added up only total 6,000 years back to the first man created on the sixth day 6,000 yrs. ago. This is the same Jesus that condemns fornication, adultery and rape., and who taught the apostles, one of whom says that sodomites have brought the sentence of death on them. This is the same Jesus who condemns stealing, lying and selfishness. I'd bet that you like the law that allows us one day a week off to relax. And I'd bet that you wouldn't want someone to rape your wife, steal your car and lie about it in court. To wit, if evolution is true, then all the above is just repression by people trying to gain control over us who don't want us to enjoy sex

outside of marriage, and selfishness. If evolution is true, then Hitler was right to get rid of all of those who have not evolved as far as the master race.

When I see someone really live as though evolution were true, and not just use it as an excuse to have illicit sex, get drunk and feed their big ego, and whatever else suits them, I'll believe they really believe evolution.

We found collagen filaments in a t-Rex bone from a site in WYO. Soft tissue in a fossil that is supposed to be 65 million years old? Anyone who believes that is not facing reality.

Joe has picked up on the creationist argument that collagen (tissue) has been found with fossilized *Tyrannosaurus rex* remains. He pointed out that no way could a fragile thing like collagen remain intact for 65 million years. He sent me a link to some scans:

<http://mtblanco.com/MtBlancoNews/2005/MtBlancoNewsT.RexCollagen.html>

Here is a scan of the collagen. A paper was published on this. We also scanned a piece of the hip bone from Moab man (a female) as well as a hip bone from an East Indian who had died 15 years before (that was 1998) Armitage said that there was absolutely no collagen in the Moab man and that it was virtually impossible to tell the T-rex collagen from the East Indian collagen.

Joe's link traced to a paper by Mary Schweitzer in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. I responded:

I looked at the page from your Web site, and I tracked down some other chatter about the issue on the Internet. The work of Mary Schweitzer keeps coming up.

Here is the abstract from her paper regarding "blood" found in *T. rex* fossils.

In this case it was not blood, but "hemoglobin breakdown products" found in the fossil. That's not quite the same as finding blood cells in the fossil.

Also, what your Web page says is "scans" of collagen filaments. Again, this is not quite the same as saying chemically intact collagen.

Can you point me to some research that talks about intact tissue being found?

I will agree with you that it is not likely that intact tissue will be found after 65 million years in stone. Chemical activity will tend to mineralize organic tissue.

Even so, you still have the task of demonstrating that organic tissue cannot survive 65 million years. Although we both agree that we "strongly feel" this is not possible, our strong feelings do not count for scientific evidence.

What do the chemists say about this?

Finally, were unfossilized tissue to be found in a *T. rex* fossil, under the weight of other evidence it would only be evidence that the tissue can remain after 65 million years. So far, the other evidence for 65+ million years is compelling.

Any comments on this?

Here is a link to the Schweitzer abstract:

<http://www.pnas.org/cgi/content/full/94/12/6291>

Skeptics, the fun just keeps on coming. It's a good thing we don't get paid to do this. Somewhere there's the feeling that I have left out the really crazy stuff. Live with it.

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.

Polish minister says schools will keep teaching evolution despite deputy's comment

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2006-10-28.htm#polish>

http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2006/10/26/europe/EU_GEN_Poland_Evolution.php

Skeptics, this isn't Kansas and never was.

WARSAW, Poland Poland's schools will continue to teach the theory of evolution, the education minister said Thursday, distancing himself from a deputy who recently called Darwinism a "lie."

Deputy minister Miroslaw Orzechowski has been telling people evolution is a "lie" and a "fable of a literary nature." At least that's the way it was translated into English. In Polish it probably means "I don't understand all this scientific stuff."

Education minister Roman Giertych, leads the League of Polish Families, an ultra Catholic body, and he professes no heartburn with Darwin.

Giertych joined the socially conservative government of Prime Minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski when the ruling Law and Justice party forged a coalition with the League and farm-based Self-Defense party.

In Polish, the word “conservative” doesn’t mean the same as it does in Kansas.

Molecular Phylogeny and Evolution of Morphology in the Social Amoebas

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2006-10-28.htm#amoeba>

<http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/short/314/5799/661>

Science 27 October 2006:
Vol. 314, no. 5799, pp. 661 - 663
DOI: 10.1126/science.1130670

The social amoebas (*Dictyostelia*) display conditional multicellularity in a wide variety of forms. Despite widespread interest in *Dictyostelium discoideum* as a model system, almost no molecular data exist from the rest of the group. We constructed the first molecular phylogeny of the *Dictyostelia* with parallel small subunit ribosomal RNA and α -tubulin data sets, and we found that dictyostelid taxonomy requires complete revision. A mapping of characters onto the phylogeny shows that the dominant trend in dictyostelid evolution is increased size and cell type specialization of fruiting structures, with some complex morphologies evolving several times independently. Thus, the latter may be controlled by only a few genes, making their underlying mechanisms relatively easy to unravel.

Now, why doesn’t the Discovery Institute publish stuff like that about “Intelligent Design?”

Scientists push pro-evolution candidates for state board

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2006-10-28.htm#scientists>

<http://www.clevelandjewishnews.com/articles/2006/10/27/news/local/provevol1027.txt>

So, what are good scientists doing getting involved in this political poppycock?

By: Marilyn H. Karfeld, Senior Staff Reporter

Last February, the State Board of Education (BOE) voted to delete a controversial lesson plan that

required Ohio biology students to critically analyze the theory of evolution. Detractors said the lesson was a Trojan horse for intelligent design, just another version of creationism, which had no place in science class.

The BOE acted only after a federal judge in Dover, Penn., ruled that intelligent design was a religious teaching, not a scientific principle, and could not be taught in a public school science class. Intelligent design posits that life is too complex to be explained by the random, natural selection of Darwinian evolution and thus must be the work of a supernatural being.

OK, I get it. It’s either get involved now or face a bunch of blank stares in freshman biology class. So, what’s new about that?

Earlier this month, the BOE voted to end what has been a four-year debate on how to properly teach students about the origins of life. But some board members say they won’t give up advocating for a biology lesson to challenge evolution.

Thus, a group of scientists, concerned that Ohio’s biology education must properly prepare students for 21st century life, are working hard to elect pro-evolution candidates for the BOE. They have targeted Deborah Owens Fink, a University of Akron marketing professor and an eight-year member of the board. She is a strong proponent of intelligent design.

Hopefully Ohio voters will be getting informed debate on the creationism issue. Not that it has ever done much good in the past.

Evolution key to Ohio Board of Education race?

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2006-10-28.htm#ncse>

Here’s the scoop from the NCSE *Evolution Education Update* newsletter. You can read the entire article and more from NCSE on the NTS Web site.

The race for the District 7 seat on the Ohio state board of education is in the national spotlight, thanks to a story in *The New York Times* (October 26, 2006), focusing on the endorsement that Tom Sawyer received from seventy-five professors at Case Western Reserve University. Sawyer is challenging the incumbent, Deborah Owens-Fink, whom the endorsement criticized for having “attempted to cast controversy on biological evolution in favor of an ill-defined notion called Intelligent Design that courts have ruled is

religion, not science.” The Times reported that almost 90% of the science faculty on campus signed the endorsement.

Defending her support of the “Critical Analysis of Evolution” model lesson plan and the corresponding indicator in the state standards — both of which were rescinded by the board in February 2006 — Owens-Fink told the Times that the idea that there is a scientific consensus on evolution was “laughable.” The *Times*’s reporter, Cornelia Dean, correctly observed that “the theory of evolution is the foundation for modern biology, and there is no credible scientific challenge to it as an explanation for the diversity and complexity of life on earth,” citing the authority of groups such as the National Academy of Sciences — which Owens-Fink dismissed in the past as “a group of so-called scientists.”

Owens-Fink is facing three challengers for the District 7 seat (which encompasses Ashtabula, Portage, Summit, and Trumbull counties, including Ohio’s fifth largest city, Akron): John Jones, who works for the utility company Ohio Edison; Dave Kovacs, a philosophy student at the University of Akron; and Sawyer, a former teacher, mayor of Akron, and member of Congress, who enjoys the support of the pro-science-education coalition Help Ohio Public Education, organized by Lawrence M. Krauss and Patricia Princehouse at Case Western Reserve and Steve Rissing at Ohio State University.

Prompted by the *Akron Beacon-Journal* (October 23, 2006), the candidates discussed the proposed, modified, and abandoned “Framework for Teaching Controversial Issues” template, which was widely viewed as continuing the “Critical Analysis of Evolution” effort. Jones and Owens-Fink defended the template, Kovacs called instead for “elective classes in philosophy,” and Sawyer replied, “I support teaching evolution. It is grounded in numerous basic sciences and is itself a foundational life science. By contrast, creationism in its many forms is not science but theology. And while faith is important to most Americans, its interpretation is best left to our many diverse faith communities.”

The Newhouse News Service reports (October 26, 2006) that Owens-Fink “had raised nearly \$60,000 for the battle through September, according to state records,” while Sawyer “had raised less than a fifth of what Owens Fink had.” Still, Sawyer expressed optimism, commenting, “If I don’t get completely avalanched by money, I ought to be able to win this ... I don’t think anyone in Ohio brings a greater depth or breadth of experience than I bring to this.” And Kenneth R. Miller of Brown University, who testified for the plaintiffs in *Kitzmiller v. Dover*, will be

stumping for Sawyer and other pro-evolution-education state board of education candidates in Ohio over the weekend.

For the story in *The New York Times*, visit:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/26/education/26evolve.html>

For information about Help Ohio Public Education, visit:

<http://www.ohiohope.org>

For the story in the *Akron Beacon-Journal*, visit:

<http://www.ohio.com/mld/ohio/news/15826827.htm>

For the Newhouse News Service story, visit:

<http://www.newhousenews.com/archive/stephens102606.html>

For Miller’s speaking schedule in Ohio, visit:

<http://ohiohope.homestead.com/miller.html>

And for NCSE’s previous coverage of events in Ohio, visit:

<http://www.ncseweb.org/pressroom.asp?state=OH>

You can also join the National Center for Science Education. Your contribution supports the teaching of evolution in the public schools. It’s also a way to stick it to the creationists, but that’s another matter. Just follow the link:

<http://www.ncseweb.org/membership.asp>

There She Goes Again: *New York Times* Reporter Blind to Evolution’s Pitfalls

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2006-10-28.htm#discovery>

http://www.evolutionnews.org/2006/10/there_she_goes_again_new_york.html

Finally, some more fun with those guys at the Discovery Institute. Robert Crowther posted this on DI’s *Evolution News* site:

New York Times science writer Cornelia Dean continues to misinform the public about the debate over evolution, and I think she does so deliberately.

First, Dean mistakenly refers to intelligent design as the “ideological cousin of creationism.” It is not. Second, she makes this incredible assertion without anything to back it up:

Although researchers may argue about its details, the theory of evolution is the foundation for modern biology, and there is no credible scientific challenge to it as an explanation for the diversity and complexity of life on earth.

It seems Intelligent Design can’t get no respect. Especially from the liberal media. Certainly not from the *New York Times*.

Skeptic Ink

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



The problem is, everybody (liberal media) keeps calling ID “creationism.” They also continue take at face value the past 200 years of scientific research that demonstrates the validity of evolution.

Crowther says he previously answered Dean’s assertion, and he reposts his previous response:

This claim turns on a profound ambiguity. What does “evolution” mean when asserted to be a “fact”? If it simply means changes in species over long periods of time, there seems to be little doubt the claim is true. If it means universal common ancestry (UCA), the claim is more controversial; reasonable scientific evidence exists both in favor of and against it. But, if “evolution” means UCA plus the Darwinian mechanism of unguided natural selection acting on random mutation—together giving rise to all the complexity and diversity of the living world—then “evolution” is certainly not a “fact.” There is very limited scientific evidence supporting this view, and powerful evidence against it. (Six Myths About Evolution)

There are numerous scientific challenges to Darwinian evolution. Scientific literature is full of them. Those familiar with the debate in Ohio will remember that Discovery Institute submitted the “Bibliography of Supplementary Resources” to the Ohio State Board of Education:

The “Six Myths About Evolution” and “Bibliography of Supplementary Resources” are links to DI resources. Here they are:

<http://www.discovery.org/scripts/viewDB/filesDB-download.php?command=download&id=476>

<http://www.discovery.org/scripts/viewDB/index.php?command=view&id=1127>

The six myths are an easy read, but the bibliography is more intriguing. Stephen Meyer and Jonathan Wells of the Discovery

Institute submitted this list to the Ohio board of education in 2002 during their push against Darwinism that year. The note on the page says “These 44 scientific publications represent important lines of evidence and puzzles that any theory of evolution must confront, and that science teachers and students should be allowed to discuss when studying evolution.” I suggest the reader click on the link and follow the reasoning, maybe even read some of the papers.

I did just that, and came away thinking, “Where are these guys trying to go with this?” I certainly didn’t come away thinking these issues pose any problem for evolution. I did come away with the understanding that there is a lot of serious research going on that’s related to evolution. Imagine that. Real scientists doing real research. Too bad the Discovery Institute is not part of it.

Welcome back, Jack

Jack Hittson is a long-time NTS board member and one of the best friends skepticism ever had. When his doctor detected cancer Jack skipped over the faith healers and acupuncture clinics and went straight for the cure. Now he’s back, and we’re glad to see him.

Come out to the meetings when you can and meet Jack and Elizabeth Hittson and all the other crazy skeptics. And cancel your chiropractic appointment.



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 _____

The North Texas Skeptics, P.O. Box 111794, Carrollton, Texas 75011-1794 (972) 306-3187

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.

www.ntskeptics.org