



The North Texas

Skeptic

Volume 23

May 2009

Number 5

<http://www.ntskeptics.org>

Intelligent creationism

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.

This continues the special series of *Web News* devoted to the 200th birthday of Charles Darwin. 150 years after Darwin published his seminal work *On the Origin of Species*, his ideas and those of scientists who do research into evolution continue to come under attack.

Opposition to evolution comes partly from those who sincerely dispute the idea that natural selection is the complete answer. Most opposition, however, comes from creationists, who believe only supernatural forces can account for the origin of life and the diversity of modern life forms.

Some opponents to evolution proudly call themselves creationists, but a growing number, in the interest of advancing their cause, distance themselves from the absurdities of Genesis. *Intelligent Design* is the name preferred by these modern day creationists, who need to maintain an appearance of objective science. No matter. An analysis to any depth reveals a religious basis.

Twenty-two years ago the creationists lost a big court fight. The case was ultimately appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court as *Edwards v. Aguillard*. The Court ruled seven to two that a Louisiana law requiring public schools to teach creationism was illegal. The law had required teaching creationism, or *creation science*, whenever evolution was taught. The law's title was "Balanced Treatment for Creation-Science and Evolution-Science in Public School Instruction Act," and the advertised intent was *academic freedom*. Readers may want to review our previous discussion of *academic freedom*.

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/2009/2009march/march2009.htm>.

EVENTS CALENDAR

May Program

Saturday May 16, 2009

2 p.m.
Center for Nonprofit
Management
2900 Live Oak Street in Dallas

Nutrition myths

John Brandt will present a talk
on food and nutrition myths.

NTS Board meeting and social dinner

Saturday May 23, 2009

7 p.m.
Sweet Tomatoes
15225 Montfort Dr.
Dallas, TX 75248

Phone (972) 385-7160

North Texas Skeptics

Officers

President ····· John Blanton
 Vice President ····· John Brandt
 Secretary ····· Mike Selby
 Treasurer ····· Barbara Neuser

Staff

Newsletter Editor ····· Keith Blanton
 Webmaster ····· John Blanton
 Meetings and Social Director ····· Claudia Meek

Board of Directors

Erling Beck, John Blanton, John Brandt, Elizabeth Hittson, Jack Hittson, Claudia Meek, Barbara Neuser and Mike Selby

Directors Emeritus Tony Dousette, Ron Hastings, Mark Meyer, John Thomas, Joe Voelkering, 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 © 2009 by North Texas Skeptics.

The Court ruled the *intent* of the law was to promote religion, specifically the religious view that somebody's favorite god was responsible for the origin of life. The Constitution of the United States requires, and court rulings have affirmed, that government agencies must not promote religion.

Proponents of the law had denied any religious intent, but legal findings in the case revealed that religious intent was exactly on the minds and in the actions of those who crafted the law and pushed its passage in Louisiana. The proper term for someone who says what he knows not to be true is *liar*, and the whole situation makes a statement of sorts about a belief system that accommodates lying.

About the dissent in *Edwards v. Aguillard*, Wikipedia has this to say, in part:

Justice Antonin Scalia, joined by Chief Justice William Rehnquist, dissented, accepting the Act's stated purpose of "protecting academic freedom" as a sincere and legitimate secular purpose. They construed the term "academic freedom" to refer to "students' freedom from indoctrination", in this case their freedom "to decide for themselves how life began, based upon a fair and balanced presentation of the scientific evidence".

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edwards_v._Aguillard

Following *Edwards v. Aguillard*, it became apparent that *creation science*, relying as it did on biblical accounts of life's origins, would not stand in a court of law. Creationists needed a new vehicle, a *Trojan horse*, to sneak religion into public education. The horse they rode in on was *Intelligent Design*.

Intelligent Design makes no outward claim for religious intent. Filtering through all the rhetoric from multiple sources, the theme of Intelligent Design boils down to this: Life and living forms are too complex, too well-designed, to have come about by purely natural means. Some *Intelligent Designer* is behind everything.

The new creationists need to avoid entanglement with religious purposes and find it continually necessary to get some distance. Hints are dropped all around.

David K. DeWolf, John G. West, and Casey Luskin wrote a critique of the Dover school board case and responded in the *Montana Law Review* to an article by Peter Irons. DeWolf and West are fellows at the Discovery Institute, and Luskin is Program Officer in Public Policy and Legal Affairs.

Irons repeatedly falsely insinuates that we misrepresent quotations through omissions, but he misrepresents through creative quoting himself. For example, Irons claims William Dembski takes the position that "I am a Christian, therefore I reject evolution," but ignores Dembski's actual position: "Intelligent design . . . has no prior religious commitments and interprets the data of science on generally accepted

scientific principles.”[35] It is Irons who has attempted to “swift-boat” the character of ID proponents through selective citations.

<http://www.umt.edu/mlr/DI%20Rebuttal.pdf>

Footnote 35 is William A. Dembski, *The Design Revolution: Answering the Toughest Questions about Intelligent Design* 41 (InterVarsity Press 2004).

The new creationists claim: a) They are only advocating valid scientific explanations. b) There is no back-office religious intent. c) They make no attempt to identify the designer. The problem is, these new creationists often slip and spell *Designer* with a capital D.

One has to wonder, if they really believe there is no religious connection, why religious references keep popping up in posts by the creationists. Discovery Institute founder Bruce Chapman has a post on the Evolution News site that is revealing. It’s about Darwin’s nose and dips into Darwin’s religious faith. You can see it here:

http://www.evolutionnews.org/2007/04/darwins_nose.html

Medical doctor Michael Egnor is one of the heroes of the *Expelled* video. Egnor, like many of the new creationists, equates naturalistic evolution with atheism. In a post on Evolution News he has this to say:

I also believe that teaching public schoolchildren and students that...

The diversity of life [all life] on earth is the outcome of evolution: an unsupervised, impersonal, unpredictable and natural process of temporal descent with genetic modification that is affected by natural selection, chance, historical contingencies and changing environments...

or

[references to Marx and Freud]

or

Darwin knew that accepting his theory required believing in philosophical materialism, the conviction that matter is the stuff of all existence and that all mental and spiritual phenomena are its by-products.

is unconstitutional, because it is teaching atheism on the public dime.

<http://www.evolutionnews.org/2009/03/>

Egnor disagrees with the young Earth creationists. He believes the universe is billions of years old. He also believes young Earth creationism is a religious proposition, and it would be illegal to teach it in public schools.

Phillip Johnson is sometimes called the godfather of Intelligent Design. His book *Darwin on Trial* seemed to really get the Intelligent Design movement going eighteen years ago. He and other Intelligent Design advocates presented their ideas at SMU in March 1992. The venue was a conference titled “Darwinism: Science or Philosophy,” and it turned out to be the first public gathering of the new creationists.

<http://ebd10.ebd.csic.es/pdfs/DarwSciOrPhil.pdf>

While other creationists may be more circumspect when talking about the basis for Intelligent Design, Johnson blows their cover in a post on the Discovery Institute’s Web site:

I had hoped that the mainstream scientific profession could be persuaded to consider objections to Darwinism that rely solely on empirical evidence and logic and were directed only to the adequacy of the Darwinian mechanism, rather than to defending the chronology of the Book of Genesis. This was not to be, however. Darwinists, including many in positions of authority in science, reacted by stigmatizing the concept of intelligent design in biology as “creationism,” as if it were another attempt to defend the literal creation chronology of the Book of Genesis, rather than a scientific movement that relies only on scientific evidence and logical analysis. Although the IDM did not identify the designer as anything more than a source of biological information, there was little doubt that believers in the Christian God, including me, would find scientific acceptance of ID highly encouraging.

<http://www.discovery.org>

If Johnson is Intelligent Design’s godfather, William Dembski can be called its brain. He is also one of its most blatantly religious advocates. Dembski continually puts the D in Design, either by accident or by design. I am not prepared to say which.

If the new creationists don’t claim a religious intent for Intelligent Design, they see an anti-religious motive behind attacks on it. Mark Perakh mentions Dembski’s comments on Perakh’s own book, *Unintelligent Design*.

Dembski writes: “Prometheus Press (sic) is one of the most militantly atheistic and ideologically driven presses around.”

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2004-11-02.htm>

<http://www.talkreason.org/articles/reviews.cfm>

The book was published by Prometheus Books, and Dembski was likely reflecting on the publisher's connection with Paul Kurtz and, by implication, the American humanist movement and the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, CSICOP.

Parekh provides the following footnote:

On March 7, 2004 Dembski gave a talk at the Baptist Fellowship Church in Waco, TX. The lecture was taped and the tape is available on request. Among other things, Dembski said in that lecture, "When you are attributing the wonders of nature to these mindless material mechanisms, God's glory is getting robbed." He continued, "And so there is a cultural war here. Ultimately I want to see God get the credit for what he's done — and he's not getting it."

Ever mindful of *Edwards v. Aguillard*, the standard-issue creationists are loathe to admit any religious motive. They just will not come out of the closet. Dembski is different. Apparently he never went in.

Some years ago the new creationists set down their goals and their plan for achieving them in a manifesto that has come to be called the *Wedge Document*. Then somebody cruelly posted a copy on the Internet. The creationists will not disclaim it, and the *Wedge Document* stands as an indictment of their motives. A critical paragraph sums up the new creationism:

Discovery Institute's Center for the Renewal of Science and Culture seeks nothing less than the overthrow of materialism and its cultural legacies. Bringing together leading scholars from the natural sciences and those from the humanities and social sciences, the Center explores how new developments in biology, physics and cognitive science raise serious doubts about scientific materialism and have re-opened the case for a broadly theistic understanding of nature. The Center awards fellowships for original research, holds conferences, and briefs policymakers about the opportunities for life after materialism.

Critically, prior to *that* paragraph is the following text:

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.

Yet a little over a century ago, this cardinal idea came under wholesale attack by intellectuals drawing on the discoveries of modern science. Debunking the traditional conceptions of both God and man, thinkers such as Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud portrayed humans not as moral and spiritual beings, but as animals or machines who inhabited a universe ruled by purely impersonal forces and whose behavior and very thoughts were dictated by the unbending forces of biology, chemistry, and environment. This materialistic conception of reality eventually infected virtually every area of our culture, from politics and economics to literature and art.

<http://www.antievolution.org/features/wedge.html>

From this it is hard to escape the conclusion that rigorous science was not foremost in the minds of the authors—the founders of the Intelligent Design movement.

The example of the Discovery Institute is not always perfectly clear to pedestrian creationists.

In 2004 certain members of the Dover (Pennsylvania) Area School District determined the science curriculum needed some old time religion, and they saw Intelligent Design as the vehicle. We have previously covered the case of board member Bill Buckingham. His appearance on the PBS *Nova* program "Judgment Day: Intelligent Design on Trial" was revealing:

Bill Buckingham is shown early in the program:

Intelligent design, in my way of thinking, is, states that life is too complex to have happened at random, that there had to be a designer—uh, something to shape how things went, so to speak. In the Book of Genesis, the designer would be God.

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/2007/2007december/december2007.htm>

It would have been better for Buckingham and his cause if he had paid more attention to the Intelligent Design playbook. Both Buckingham and fellow board member Alan Bonsell made similar statements early in their curriculum action, and these words came back like a counterfeit bill when members of the community sued over the board's actions.

The case was *Tammy Kitzmiller, et al. v. Dover Area School District, et al.*

Federal Judge John E. Jones III ruled against the school board and acknowledged the creationists' duplicity in his 139-page opinion (starting on page 25):

Although proponents of the IDM occasionally suggest that the designer could be a space alien or a time-traveling cell biologist, no serious alternative to

God as the designer has been proposed by members of the IDM, including Defendants' expert witnesses. (20:102-03 (Behe)). In fact, an explicit concession that the intelligent designer works outside the laws of nature and science and a direct reference to religion is Pandas' rhetorical statement, "what kind of intelligent agent was it [the designer]" and answer: "On its own science cannot answer this question. It must leave it to religion and philosophy." (P-11 at 7; 9:13-14 (Haught)). A significant aspect of the IDM is that despite Defendants' protestations to the contrary, it describes ID as a religious argument. In that vein, the writings of leading ID proponents reveal that the designer postulated by their argument is the God of Christianity. Dr. Barbara Forrest, one of Plaintiffs' expert witnesses, is the author of the book *Creationism's Trojan Horse*. She has thoroughly and exhaustively chronicled the history of ID in her book and other writings for her testimony in this case. Her testimony, and the exhibits which were admitted with it, provide a wealth of statements by ID leaders that reveal ID's religious, philosophical, and cultural content. The following is a representative grouping of such statements made by prominent ID proponents. [footnote 5]

In footnote 5, Judge Jones discusses arguments concerning the origin of the new creationism (see *Edwards v. Aguillard* above):

Defendants contend that the Court should ignore all evidence of ID's lineage and religious character because the Board members do not personally know Jon Buell, President of the Foundation for Thought and Ethics (hereinafter "FTE"), the publisher of *Pandas*, or Phillip Johnson, nor are they familiar with the Wedge Document or the drafting history of *Pandas*.

Defendants' argument lacks merit legally and logically. The evidence that Defendants are asking this Court to ignore is exactly the sort that the court in *McLean* considered and found dispositive concerning the question of whether creation science was a scientific view that could be taught in public schools, or a religious one that could not. The *McLean* court considered writings and statements by creation science advocates like Henry Morris and Duane Gish, as well as the activities and mission statements of creationist think-tanks like the Bible Science Association, the Institution for Creation Research, and the Creation Science Research Center. *McLean*, 529 F. Supp. at 1259-60. The court did not make the relevance of such evidence conditional on whether the Arkansas Board of Education knew the information. Instead, the court treated the evidence as speaking directly to the threshold question of what creation science was. Moreover,

in *Edwards*, the Supreme Court adopted *McLean's* analysis of such evidence without reservation, and without any discussion of which details about creation science the defendant school board actually knew. *Edwards*, 482 U.S. at 590 n.9.

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/creationism/Dover/Dover.pdf>

The judge refers to Discovery Institute fellow Michael Behe, who is an actual professor of biochemistry at Lehigh University. Henry Morris (now deceased) was the founder of the young Earth creationism Institute for Creation Research, and Duane Gish has been the ICR's long-time brain trust and prime debater for *creation science*. The FTE is based in Richardson, Texas, and is the publisher of both editions of the book *Of Pandas and People: The Central Question of Biological Origins*, an initial thrust in the campaign to recast *creation science* into a more respectable form. The reference to *McLean* is to *McLean v. Arkansas Board of Education*, a trial in federal court in 1981 which ruled *creation science* is religion and should not be taught in public schools.

Any more, and I will be beating a dead Trojan horse.

Wrapping up, Intelligent Design is religiously motivated, and protests by the Discovery Institute and its agents to the contrary are outright lies.

And what to make of these agents for Intelligent Design? At best, their pants are on fire.



Psychic vision

by John Blanton

Homer Webb phoned from Austin and discussed his device for inducing psychic visions. He says the device can be made by any skilled individual with just a few dollars worth of parts, and he sent design plans.

Homer is a retired electrical engineer, and he is very interested in and believes in *psychic phenomena*. He says the device allows users to experience conversations with the dead as well as to perform feats of remote viewing.

We will be working with Homer Webb in the future, and we will pass on to our readers anything interesting that comes from this collaboration.



Evolutionary psychology

by Rodrigo Neely

At the NTS meeting in April Rodrigo Neely presented a talk on evolutionary psychology. Here are some of his remarks on the subject:

I was honored to be able to give the April presentation at the North Texas Skeptics.

I wanted to discuss something that was a legitimately debated topic in science, so I covered evolutionary psychology.

Darwin's theory of evolution is not considered controversial in science. But many legitimate critics consider its implications on the development of the human mind over time controversial.

To recap, evolution by natural selection is essentially the process by which organisms change over many generations. In principle, when a trait allows an organism to maximize its offspring it gets passed down.

Evolutionary psychologists say that this process has to have built significant aspects of the current human mind.

There a lot of claims made in the name of evolutionary psychology. Some more controversial than others.

In the article *Ten Politically Incorrect Truths About Human Nature* (Miller & Kanazawa, 2007) the claim is made that evolutionary psychology explains why most suicide bombers are Muslim. I, personally, consider this claim to be absurd.

The beautiful thing about studying a field like evolutionary psychology is that one can remain skeptical and yet still be surprised by the truth revealed in this burgeoning field.

I discussed *The Evolution of Desire* (2003) by David M. Buss. David Buss is a well respected evolutionary psychologist who has shown through cross cultural surveying that men's and women's mating strategies follow a pattern which was initially predicted according to evolutionary psychology. The finding, at the risk of oversimplifying, is that women like resources and men like the appearance of fertility.

I also discussed Stephen Pinker's *The Blank Slate* (2002), which is not so much about evolutionary psychology *per se* as a discussion of the implications of genetics to psychology, and beyond that to its implications for society. Pinker discussed



Rodrigo Neely presents Evolutionary Psychology at the April meeting

Photo by Prasad Golla

evidence for all matter of controversial findings for the power of genetics in making both the mind and human society. I tend to think of Stephen Pinker as the Carl Sagan of evolutionary psychology.

Evolutionary psychology is generally considered controversial because of a sordid past of science making claims about the heredity of mental phenomena. Most notable is the ideas behind eugenics, and its disastrous consequences in Nazi Germany.

Yet the critiques go beyond merely saying that evolutionary psychology is a slippery slope.

There are good reasons to tread carefully with any scientific debate, including this one.

The most famous critic of evolutionary psychology is probably the famous paleontologist Stephen J. Gould. I discussed his book *The Mismeasure of Man* (1981). This book does not attack evolutionary psychology *per se*, but it does discuss its implications and the specific notion of the heritability of intellect.

The idea that intellect is genetic is a proposition of deep political consequence. It has implications for human potential,

and the American Dream itself. I would argue: how can people rise beyond their status in life if their status is the by-product of genetic inheritance.

Gould's critique does not attack the basic premise of evolutionary psychology. Essentially both sides agree that evolution has to have shaped our minds over time. But Gould, and those who share his opposition, say that we should be cautious and that we over step the predictive power of evolutionary psychology.

Gould begins the book with a long and extensive study of racist ideas in behavioral science. He provides many examples of how well-meaning scientists had misguided assumptions about race that were prominent in their time in history. The research is wrought with confirmation bias, and in some cases basic statistical error.

Gould also discusses I.Q. at great length, which could easily be the topic of its own presentation. The take home message for our discussion here is that to think of I.Q. trends as evidence for hereditary intellect would be a stretch at best. Gould shows this by discussing the history of the I.Q. test itself and its limitations, in conjunction with weaknesses in trying to study the heritability of mental traits.

Good evolutionary psychologists are aware of these limitations and critiques and take them into consideration for their own research.

Personally I find evolutionary psychology to be an exciting field, which has already produced compelling findings with a bright future. It is also a hot new science with plenty of good opportunities for even the seasoned skeptic to practice their critical thinking skills.



Future Meeting Dates

16 May 2009	12 September 2009
13 June 2009	10 October 2009
11 July 2009	14 November 2009
8 August 2009	12 December 2009

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.]

Dateline: a new wrinkle on the hydrogen-fuel scam.

Last Sunday, NBC Dateline exposed the Hydro Assist Fuel Cell, sold by Dennis Lee, as a scam. It seemed like such a simple idea: powered by the alternator, the HAFC decomposes water into hydrogen and oxygen and adds a whiff of hydrogen into the combustion mixture, supposedly extending the mileage you get. There are two small problems: it takes more energy to decompose water than you get from combustion of the hydrogen, and Dennis Lee is notorious for his scams. The hydrogen fuel scam has been fooling the scientifically ignorant, including George W. Bush and former congressman Robert Walker, for at least 40 years. This time, however, Lee was up against tough Dateline investigators aided by the indefatigable Eric Krieg of the Philadelphia Association for Critical Thinking, and a cameo appearance by Bob Park. Lee got clobbered. I think.

Dennis Lee: top dog of the perpetual scam.

In July of 1997, I was invited to go with an NBC Dateline camera crew to cover a demonstration of a perpetual motion machine in Hackensack, NJ. You don't get a chance to do that everyday. "Put one in your home and you will never have to pay another electric bill," an ad in the Wall Street Journal said. But Lee doesn't sell perpetual motion machines; he sells dealerships for perpetual motion machines. The machine turned out to be the Gamgee Zero- motor, invented in 1880 by John Gamgee who managed to sell it to the Navy; it didn't work then either [<http://bobpark.org/WN97/wn071897.html>]. The idea is to use a liquid that boils at room temperature to drive a piston, thereby extracting energy from the ambient. Gamgee tried ammonia, but only confirmed the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Lee solved that by using carbon dioxide, which is liquid only under pressure. Thus the machine actually ran on compressed carbon dioxide; not quite perpetually, but long enough for a demonstration. NBC decided it was too technical for the Dateline audience and it was never used. Two years later, I was a consultant for ABC Good Morning America at a Lee demonstration in Columbus, Ohio. He now had a perpetual-motion machine that used permanent magnets (the 1870 Paine machine). By the time he got to Spokane in 2002 it was "the principle of counter rotation." Only the scam was perpetual.



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

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