



The North Texas

Skeptic

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<http://www.ntskeptics.org>

New for 2010

We just finished a year celebrating the 200th anniversary of Charles Darwin's birth. It was a great year for outing the creationists, who take great issue with natural processes as an explanation for nature. We will now return to our regular programming and elevate some skeptical issues that languished in 2009.

Alternative medicine is a popular topic with skeptics. It's replete with charlatans and true believers, and it's often intriguing to determine when it's driven by money and when it's driven by stupidity. This issue includes a note about an encounter with a chiropractor. It's from a reader, and it is very welcome. We enjoy receiving pertinent material from our readers, and we use it whenever we can.

We also have a short note about recent Challenge activity. The NTS Paranormal Challenge attracts a steady drip of respondents, some serious and some just nuts.

Creationism is not to be ignored, either. See the Skeptical News piece. Also we have another item with excerpts from Robert Park's *What's New* column.

Happy 2010 to all you skeptics out there and also to you true believers who happened to find a copy of this newsletter that somebody left at a bus stop. □

A visit from the chiropractor

I received this e-mail from a long-time correspondent. We appreciate receiving comments from readers, but we cannot always verify these submissions. Readers should take this as an unsubstantiated report. Direct all inquiries to me—John Blanton.

North Texas operator offers healing powers at a discount

I was alarmed one morning last month when I arrived at work and opened an e-mail from my employer. The monthly "lunch and learn" program, which educates employees on different subjects, was welcoming a local chiropractor.

The e-mail message explained that chiropractic "is a hands-on drug-free alternative medicine that restores your body's ability to heal itself." BS, of course, but clearly my employer believes.

I signed up for the class. I soon received notice that the presentation had been moved to a larger room. Interest was obviously high.

After years of reading about chiropractors and their wild claims, I was looking forward to hearing this stuff

EVENTS CALENDAR

NTS Board Meeting and Election

Saturday, 16 January 2010
at 2 p.m.

Center for Nonprofit
Management
2900 Live Oak Street in Dallas

The NTS is run by people who show up.

If you want to have your say in how the NTS operates, be sure to show up in January. We will be electing members of the NTS board of directors.

Operating officers will be appointed by the newly-elected board. There will also be snacks, drinks and maybe some creationist videos.

Let us know if you are coming. These meeting dates are sometimes changed.

214-335-9248

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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.

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firsthand from the horse's mouth. I resolved to go just for research and to keep my mouth shut no matter how much nonsense was presented as fact.

I sat down at a table and was soon joined by a co-worker. "Have you ever been to a chiropractor before?" I asked her.

"Oh, yeah," she answered. "I go all the time. I have lots of problems." That fit in exactly with my understanding of the business practices of chiropractors. The chiropractor identifies one or more problems and says you need to keep coming back.

Dr. B. arrived late and began his presentation immediately. He was slim and appeared healthy.

Dr. B. explained that people lose their mobility as they age. "We top out at 23 years old, and by age 50, we lose 50 percent of our maximum mobility." Wow, life is worse than I thought.

But there's hope! Dr. B. told us we are not "stuck with that. The goal of preventive chiropractic care is to extend vitality."

Then, a biology lesson. "Life starts as a single cell," Dr. B. explained. "It eventually becomes a human being. A force guides it. That force is going through our bodies right now. And the primary channel is the spine."

Pinched nerves, Dr. B. explained, are like rusty hinges. "I call it joint rust. The medical term is arthritis."

And then, he introduced his main theme: MDs are woefully inferior to chiropractors. "If you have a problem with a pinched nerve and see an MD, the MD can treat you, and the MD will say you're OK," Dr. B. said. "But years later, you develop ulcers. That can be because your spine is kinked up."

Then the tall tales began. Dr. B. explained how his mother's illness, or to be more precise, her healing, inspired him to become a chiropractor.

When Dr. B. was 19 years old, his mother developed epilepsy. MDs couldn't help her. "We don't know what is causing it," they told her.

"Mom took the courageous step and went to a chiropractor," Dr. B. explained. "The chiropractor found subluxations in her neck and he was able to free up her nervous system."

With regular visits to the chiropractor, Dr. B.'s mom was cured of epilepsy in one year. "A chiropractor saved my mother's life," Dr. B. announced proudly.

But hold onto your hats — his father's story was even more dramatic. Three years ago, Dr. B.'s father was thrown while riding a horse. According to Dr. B., he landed on his head and almost broke his neck. His father was paralyzed from the neck down and spent three

weeks in ICU. He was then sent to the Shepherd Center in Atlanta for rehabilitation and given drugs and physical therapy. After treatment there, his father could “move his limbs a little,” according to Dr. B., but he still had to be fed and needed assistance with hygiene. Doctors had simply given up and told him, “That’s the best we can do.”

Then, of course, his dad went to a chiropractor. After four months, his father was 90 percent better. Today, he is totally cured. “Dad would be in a wheelchair without chiropractors,” Dr. B. said. I resisted the urge to ask why he or one of his colleagues neglected to cure actor Christopher Reeve.

Then Dr. B. told us about his own healing touch. Ethan, seven years old, suffered from asthma. Dr. B. examined the boy and found Ethan’s vertebrae were “twisted out of place” and were affecting “the same nerves that go into the lungs.” Thanks to chiropractic and Dr. B., Ethan is now 90 percent better and no longer needs drugs or nebulizers.



Freebies from the chiropractor include a water bottle, stress ball, ointment, literature, and a magnetic business card.

Asthma appears to be a specialty.

Dr. B.’s assistant, Becky, used to suffer from an asthma attack every week. Now, after regular treatments by Dr. B., her attacks are down to about two a month “It’s been one and a half weeks since I used an inhaler!” Becky proudly announced.

Like all chiropractors, Dr. B.’s arch-rivals are MDs and medications. “The media says, ‘Something wrong? Take a pill!’ he complained. “It is important to find a drug-free approach. There are alternative medications for everything, and they won’t harm your organs.”

Dr. B. is not only a healer, but he is a giver, too. He has given clinics in the east African country Tanzania and he hopes to set up a chiropractic college there.

And now the good news.

Though Dr. B.’s practice is not part of my employer’s network coverage, Dr. B. will treat us for the network co-pay price now and in the future. And the news got better. The following

week was designated appreciation week of my employer. During appreciation week, full exams and consultations are no charge. That’s a \$200-\$300 value!

Dr. B. was done, and said he would welcome questions privately, one-on-one, to maintain medical privacy. Then his assistants leapt into action.

Cheana gave each of us a goody bag, which included a water bottle with the chiropractor’s logo, a brochure about neck pain, two samples of BioFreeze pain relieving gel, a stress ball, and two of his business cards, one affixed to a magnet.

With calendar in hand, his other assistant Becky, still showing no signs of asthma, worked her way through the room, visiting every table to schedule office appointments with Dr. B. It had been a fruitful hour for him.

In this report, details such as the author’s name and employer have been omitted. The writer appreciates being employed and would like to remain so.



Challenge activity

By John Blanton

My fault. I received a number of contacts in 2009 regarding the NTS Paranormal Challenge. However, last year I was continually on the road from February to December, and I could not engage any of the respondents on our home turf in Dallas.

As a reminder, a few of us have underwritten a \$12,000 prize for anybody who can demonstrate the paranormal. We have complete details on our Web site.¹

Here are some inquires of note:

Matthew Smith wrote to us:

Dear Sir/Madam,

I write this email on the behalf of a friend in regards to your paranormal challenge, as he offers to prove the paranormal on a reliable and repeatable basis. What he is able to prove, is that all humans are Spirit Beings, or Living Ghosts, that are capable of spiritually interacting within each other and making a real and measurable difference.

Ultimately, Matthew wanted me to watch a boxing match on TV and to notice that he was able to influence the moment-by-moment activities of the contestants. This seemed a little far-fetched to me and not a very good scientific test. I pointed out to Matthew that any reasonable test needs to be repeatable, and this test did not seem easy to repeat. No way was I prepared to watch 20 or more boxing matches on TV.

We have heard nothing from Matthew since November 2009.

Daniel Soto phoned me, and we picked up the correspondence by e-mail. Just as an aside, all communication regarding the Paranormal Challenge needs to go through e-mail. Daniel wrote:

You probably want to know a little about (so-called ability), so ok here we go. I don't know the term to describe this ability, but a number of voices come out of no where. Anyone one in the room would be able to here them, and engage in simple word exchange. It usually starts out as a humming sound, gets louder, and eventually voices come out(childlike with a little echo to them). I found the best set up for the voices to be most vivid is in a room with great acoustics(movie theatre, or studio).

Experience wise, when just going to a movie and trying to watch, the humming starts as I get relaxed then the voices come out. The other people in the theatre talk amongst themselves. Where's that coming from, who is that talking. then they engage in simple exchange such as who are you, what are you? The funniest part is they answer back either in an insulting way or ignore them. My proof is digital recording of this, I know for your point of view easy to say, but it would with you in the room as well. I am sure a simple, but very effective test could be conducted to satisfy everybody included.

One more thing I also possess a form of telepathy to project thought or words and other people can repeat them back. however, I can only send , not receive the other person's thoughts. This to can easily be tested, and to throw my voice without moving lips (not [ventriloquist]) but voice from nowhere a number of feet away, on the other side of a wall. A witness could stand and witness my mouth shut, and the projected sound on the other side. Please let me know if any of this interests you.

I told Daniel we could possibly devise a test for his abilities, and we will try to get something set up to test him in Dallas. Daniel lives in Seattle.

Raymond Powell is in Tennessee. He has phoned numerous times, but things have always fallen apart when it came to the

e-mail requirement. I have yet to receive an e-mail from Raymond.

James Underdown heads up the Center for Inquiry West in Los Angeles. Raymond previously contacted James and set up a protocol for testing him. However, James says that about two years ago Raymond abruptly withdrew from the proposed challenge.

Last summer I had a phone conversation with Tommy Cook. We got together on e-mail.

John, my name is Tommy Cook and my daughter Holly has been talking to you about our ability to walk a table. This is something that our family has been involved in for years and I would like to have the opportunity to demonstrate this ability to you. Please contact me at xxx-xxx-xxxx so we can talk about this. I look forward to hearing from you.

Tommy lives near Los Angeles, and I was staying in the area at the time. However, we were never able to get together. One sticking point may have been my reluctance to engage in any test that involved touching the table. The plan is to get back together with Tommy and perhaps work out a demonstration.

Over the years we have had many such inquires regarding testing for the Paranormal Challenge. Some respondents have actually gotten to the point of giving us a demonstration. Most pointedly, nobody who has given a demonstration has had anything to demonstrate. As we remind people, what they propose to demonstrate is the impossible. What is it they expect us to see?



References

- 1 See details on the NTS Web site at the following URL:
<http://www.ntskeptics.org/challenge/challenge.htm>

Future Meeting Dates

- **20 February 2010 (NTS program meeting)**
- **27 February 2010 (board meeting and social dinner)**
- **20 March 2010 (NTS program meeting)**
- **27 March 2010 (board meeting and social dinner)**
- **17 April 2010 (NTS program meeting)**

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.

Top Ten Evolution Creationism Stories of the Year

<http://www.infozine.com/news/stories/op/storiesView/sid/39311/>

InfoZine has published a list of the top ten stories about creationism from the year 2009. The source is the National Center for Science Education (NCSE).

Evolution fared well in 2009.

Oakland CA - infoZine - Newswise - The world celebrated the 200th anniversary of Darwin's birth and the 150th of the publication of his *On the Origin of Species*. Thousands of events, conferences, speeches, parties, magazine stories, blog postings, and other commemorations were held in his honor. Darwin even got the Hollywood treatment, with the premiere of "Creation," a moving (yet accurate) film portrayal of Darwin's married life, starring Paul Bettany and Jennifer Connelly.

The top ten are:

1. 200th Anniversary of Charles Darwin's birth

"Evolution in *Scientific American*"

<http://ncse.com/news/2008/12/evolution-scientific-american-003309>

2. 150th anniversary of the publication of *On the Origin of Species*

"The Origin sesquicentennial approaches"

<http://ncse.com/news/2009/11/origin-sesquicentennial-approaches-005154>

3. Ray Comfort is Bananas!

Don't Diss Darwin

<http://www.dontdissdarwin.com>

4. Texas Board Caves to Creationists

"Science setback for Texas schools"

<http://ncse.com/news/2009/03/science-setback-texas-schools-004708>

5. Louisiana Faces "Academic Freedom"

"A mixed result in Louisiana"

<http://ncseweb.org/news/2009/01/mixed-result-louisiana-003733>

6. Antievolution bills go down in flames

Chronology of "Academic Freedom" Bills

<http://ncse.com/creationism/general/chronology-academic-freedom-bills>

7. How is evolution treated in your state's science standards?

"Evolving standards"

<http://ncse.com/news/2009/08/evolving-standards-004990>

8. The Evolution of Evolution (and Creationism)

"Evolution in *Scientific American*"

<http://ncse.com/news/2008/12/evolution-scientific-american-003309>

9. A KiloSteve and Beyond!

The Project Steve list continues to grow. For the latest count and more, see our FAQ page.

"Project Steve: n > 1000"

<http://ncse.com/news/2009/02/project-steve-n-1000-004625>

And finally, from infoZine:

10. The envelope, please

A bit of horn tooting. Among all the ups and downs in the creationism/evolution controversy during the year, one bright spot (at least for us) was the recognition received by Dr. Eugenie C. Scott, NCSE's executive director for the last 25 years. Some of the more notable 2009 awards include: the Fellows Medal (California Academy of Sciences), the Stephen Jay Gould Prize (Society for the Study of Evolution), *Scientific American* 10 Honor Roll (which she shares with Barack Obama and Bill Gates), and a seat on *Scientific American's* revamped and expanded Board of Advisers.

Fellows Medal

<http://ncse.com/news/2009/10/eugenie-c-scott-honored-by-california-academy-sciences-005101>

Gould Prize

<http://ncse.com/evolution/eugenie-scott-wins-stephen-jay-gould-prize>

Scientific American 10

<http://ncse.com/news/2009/05/eugenie-c-scott-among-scientific-american-10-004783>

Scientific American board

<http://ncse.com/evolution/genie-grants-sciams-wishes>



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.]

Faith: do we need to have another talk?

On Wednesday in the NY Times an op-ed by Nicholas Kristof remarked on a new crop of books dealing with the war between science and religion. He describes this latest crop as "less combative and more thoughtful" than those by Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris and the like. He hopes this "marks an armistice in the religious wars." I hope not. Kristof is particularly taken by Robert Wright's *The Evolution of God*. I like it too. Wright is smart, and a really good writer, but he needs to be more like Dawkins, Hitchens and Harris. In his latest book he explores how religion has gotten "better" over time. People are no longer burned at the stake in the name of religion. No, now they are now blown to pieces with improvised explosive devices or flown into the side of public buildings. Different religion — same God.

Creationism: need a little help in spreading the word?

Thanks, but we'll take it from here. An evangelical Christian, Ray Comfort, is busy distributing more than 100,000 free copies of his personal edition of Charles Darwin's seminal work, *On the Origin of Species*, on college campuses. That's nice of him; I asked my students to pick me up a copy if they get a chance. Eugenie Scott, of NCSE, the National Center of Science Education, dealt with Comfort in *US News*. Nevertheless, I thought Comfort's argument that all species are fully involved was truly original: "Nothing we have in creation is half evolved," he wrote. "We don't find a half-evolved cow." You don't get that kind of thinking every day.

Malthus: a hero before his time.

Born in 1776 in Surrey, Thomas Malthus was well-educated in mathematics, but served as a gentle country parson, keeping the census in his parish. He observed that most animals bore offspring far beyond mere replacement. This would result in exponential growth of the population, eventually overflowing the boundaries of productive agriculture. His simple reasoning was dismissed by the mathematically challenged, and still is.

Divining: this time, it's a bomb detector.

There it was, on the front page of the *New York Times*; the Iraqi government has purchased more than 1500 devices known as the ADE 651 to use at checkpoints. That stands for Advanced

Detection of Explosives. The 651 is the latest detection device marketed by ATSC (UK) Ltd. It consists of a thin rod mounted on a swivel held by pistol grip, and is said to point to explosives. That's all it is, there are no sensors. According to Rod Nordland who wrote the article, a retired USAF officer said the device is nothing more than an explosives divining rod. The stupid Iraqis don't know this and paid \$16,500-\$60,000 each for them, even though American officers told them the devices are worthless. Boy, are they dumb! Wait, the *NYT* failed mention that the US Department of Defense was sold on these devices back in the 90s Although it was classified, they tipped off their favorite novelist, Tom Clancy, that the incredible device could detect people through thick walls by sensing their heartbeats. It was the basis of *Rainbow Six*, <http://bobpark.physics.umd.edu/WN98/wn092598.html>. It was a scam. Thousands of similar devices are still in use by local police around the country to satisfy "probable cause" requirements for a property search. ATSC also sells a narcotic detector, but it's exactly the same device with a different number.

Memory: why is it necessary to keep debunking this stuff?

Is there no memory? Where I grew up in Texas no one would think of digging a well until the local dowser using a willow fork approved the spot. Since then, dowsing for water has been debunked over and over, most thoroughly by James Randi. But dowsing is now used for everything. Last year, the power company needed to find a buried power cable on our road. I watched the lineman reach under the seat of his truck, pull out a stiff wire bent in the shape of a fork, and start dowsing for the cable. If it works for everything, there is no physical cause and it's not science.

Magnets: never pay another electric bill.

The first time I heard that promise it was made by Joseph W. Newman on the *CBS Evening News with Dan Rather* in 1987. A Mississippi backwoods-mechanic with a grade-school education, Newman took a course in electricity. When he heard that doubling the number of turns in a coil would double the magnetic field, he left to wind a mighty coil that would generate more energy than it took. Newman never got to Lenz's law, and CBS did not bother to check with a scientist. About every five years since, that machine is reinvented. You can now build your own "energy machine" with a kit from Magnets4Energy, but it still won't work.

Naturally: alternative medicine is in the health reform bill.

Sen. Tom Harkin, the Iowa Democrat also known as Senator Bee Pollen, could not let the Health Reform Bill go through without a provision mandating that insurers reimburse alternative medicine providers. It was Harkin, you will recall, who was responsible for creation of the National Center for Complemen-

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tary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM), forcing Harold Varmus to resign as head of NIH. NCCAM hasn't found any cures, but it has done a credible job of using rigorous placebo-controlled double-blind studies to demonstrate that one herbal remedy after another is totally ineffective. Presumably the alternative medicine providers will be reimbursed for applying the placebo effect.

Prayer: should prayer treatments be covered?

Some powerful members of the Senate propose language in the healthcare bill would prohibit discrimination against "religious and spiritual health care." The unstated purpose is to cover the cost of Christian Science prayer treatments in the healthcare bill. This shouldn't be a problem. The church, says the treatments are effective; if so these people will not need real medical care. If, on the other hand, prayer treatments are not effective, they are a subsidy to the Church of Christ, Scientist and the program should be reimbursed by that amount.

Warmer: the trend shows no sign of ending.

At the Copenhagen climate talks, Michel Jarraud, secretary general of the international weather agency, told a news conference that the period from 2000 through 2009 will almost certainly be the warmest decade in the 150 years of modern record-keeping. And with just a few weeks remaining, 2009 will likely be the fifth warmest year on record. But what about those hacked emails from the climate research unit at the University of East Anglia? Jarraud replied that there is no evidence that independent estimates showing a warming world are in doubt. The more interesting question is who was behind the break-in and why? The use of dirty tricks to cast doubt on the reality of global warming began with Kyoto.

Climate change: APS tells deniers to cool off.

Two years ago the elected council of the American Physical Society adopted a strongly worded statement calling for reduction in the emission of greenhouse gases. The statement called the evidence for global warming "incontrovertible," which is about as far as you can go in that direction. There are, however, eminent physicists who do not agree. They petitioned the Council for a reconsideration of its statement. APS president Cherry Murray appointed an ad hoc committee, chaired by Dan Kleppner, to consider whether the statement needed to be revisited. The council overwhelmingly rejected a proposal to replace the statement with one favored by those who deny anthropogenic climate change, but the society's Panel On Public Affairs will review it for "possible improvements."

Fuel : the most important book you haven't read.

When the ClimateGate story broke I immediately began digging through piles of paper on my desk to find my copy of *Doubt Is Their Product: How Industry's Assault on Science Threatens Your Health*, a 2008 book by David Michaels, an epidemiologist at the George Washington University School of Public Health. When scientific evidence of a threat to public health becomes overwhelming, government intervention can still be delayed for years by simply manufacturing uncertainty. That's where the global warming debate is right now. The fossil fuel industry is doing a job on us. □

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

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