



The North Texas

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Free to think

by John Blanton

We don't have a copy of Caroline Crocker's book, but you can get Chapter 6 from the publisher. Follow the link in the footnotes, give them your name and e-mail address. They will send you a copy in easy to read PDF.¹

You can also order the book from Amazon. If you use our link Amazon will pay a sales commission to the NTS.²

I first encountered Caroline Crocker's story in the video *Expelled*, featuring actor, economist and creationist Ben Stein. In *Expelled*, Crocker is one of several telling their story of being expelled for doubting Darwin. She has a Ph.D. in immunopharmacology from the University of Southampton in England, and in 2004 she was teaching a second year cell biology course at George Mason University (GMU) in Fairfax, Virginia. Subsequently her supervisor accused her of teaching creationism, and her teaching contract was not renewed at the end of the term. According to *Expelled* she was blacklisted and "unable to find a job anywhere."

I feel sure that Crocker never actually taught creationism to her students. She apparently did much more than that. As Crocker has demonstrated, it's possible to create a lot of mischief without actually teaching creationism. Some have noted that Crocker is not so much the victim that is painted in *Expelled*. But she is still worth a book.

Free to Think is Crocker's story of her ordeal with GMU, and more. The following is from the publisher's Web site.³

The heart of the book covers how she impartially presented the students with the scientific evidence for and against evolution and the scandalous reprisals that resulted. It continues with the saga of the attempted lawsuit and ends, triumphantly with a call to action.

After you have read the book you are invited to return and to post a comment. Being over-eager, I posted a comment before I even received a copy:

EVENTS CALENDAR

September program

Saturday, September 18, at
2 p.m.
2900 Live Oak Street in Dallas

Skeptical Origins

Where did we come from, and how did we get here? NTS founders will discuss the history and the legacy of the NTS.

NTS board meeting and social dinner

Saturday September 25,
at 7:00 p.m.

Veracruz café

408 North Bishop Avenue
Dallas, TX 75208-4806

If you plan to attend, please call. We sometimes cancel or change these events.

214.335.9248

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 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
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I reviewed the *Washington Post* item from 5 February 2006
 that included an interview with Crocker. It appears she freely
 admits to promoting what are distorted and incorrect views
 about the science behind biological evolution. Only a single
 example here: She repeated claims by Jonathan Wells about
 the peppered moth experiments:

“The experiment was falsified. He glued his moths to the
 trees.”

I am a photographer, and if somebody wanted photographs of
 moths for a book or a magazine or a paper, this is exactly
 what I would have done. I would have glued the moths to the
 trees. Students hearing Crocker’s explanation would be left
 with the conclusion that real scientists are lying to them in
 this case. That was obviously the point Crocker was trying to
 get over. She was, in effect, deliberately lying to the students.

How can a teacher who does this expect to keep her job?

After posting my comment I received a response from Kevin Wirth.
 He reminded me that comments were solicited only from people who
 had read the book and wanted to discuss the book. He said he was going
 to move my comment to the blog section.

That started a nice dialog with Kevin Wirth. Besides being the CEO
 of Leafcutter Press, Crocker’s publisher, he appears to support Crocker’s
 cause and also to oppose the science behind biological evolution. His
 position is not surprising. A little Internet research reveals that Kevin
 Wirth is also the name of the Director of Product Development for Ac-
 cess Research Network (ARN). From the ARN Web site: ⁴

Seattle area resident Kevin Wirth is a founding member of
Students for Origins Research (now known as Access Re-
 search Network) and is the CEO of a micro-publishing firm
 called Leafcutter Press. He has been conducting research on
 viewpoint discrimination against students, educators, and sci-
 entists who are Darwin skeptics for over 25 years, and just
 recently collaborated with Dr. Jerry Bergman in the publica-
 tion of a groundbreaking book on this topic titled *Slaughter
 of the Dissidents*. Kevin seeks to create greater public aware-
 ness of not only the plight of dissenters who have been dis-
 criminated against for harboring doubts about Darwinism,
 but also provides access to vital information supporting a ra-
 tionale for skepticism about evolution-related issues.

Kevin wanted to make an issue of the pepper moths glued to trees,
 but there was no basis for his argument. Bernard Kettlewell did glue
 moths to tree trunks for various reasons, one being perhaps to take pho-
 tographs. No secret was made of this, and if any experimenting was fal-
 sified (using Crocker’s language), this was not it. Crocker was wrong to
 make this statement in class, either through design or ignorance. Neither
 instance would be commendable.

A single case could be excused, but this was a pattern with Crocker.
 Her statements in the *Washington Post* story, plus other data, point to a

deeper problem. The *Post* story is informative beyond the peppered moth remarks:⁵

But this highly trained biologist wanted students to know what she herself deeply believed: that the scientific establishment was perpetrating fraud, hunting down critics of evolution to ruin them and disguising an atheistic view of life in the garb of science.

Also:

Before the class, Crocker had told me that she was going to teach “the strengths and weaknesses of evolution.” Afterward, I asked her whether she was going to discuss the evidence for evolution in another class. She said no.

The National Center for Science Education (NCSE) has put up a Web site in response to the *Expelled* video, and this includes a section devoted to Crocker.⁶

The late D. James Kennedy produced a video featuring Caroline Crocker. The video is posted on the Coral Ridge Ministries (CRM) Web site, and it contains samples from Crocker’s classroom presentation at Northern Virginia Community College (NVCC).

One slide says this:⁷

Scientists are Confused

Scientists have differing opinions on this issue; intelligent design model is gaining ground.

Gould and Eldridge [sic] (evolutionists) “There is no validation of the position that speciation causes significant morphological change.”

Werner von Braun (rocket scientist), “It is unscientific to teach evolution only.”

Another slide features Archaeopteryx and Eohippus:⁸

Presumed Transitional Forms

Archeopteryx [sic]

Birds there in same layer.

Is a bird (like an ostrich), not a reptobird.

Only one complete fossil and has been questioned as a fraud.

Horse

Eohippus is found in the *same* layers as the modern horse.

Eohippus is the same as modern-day hyrax.

I am certainly confused. “Scientists having differing opinions” is a standard part of main stream science and is not peculiar to biological evolution. Also Crocker’s statement “intelligent design model is gaining ground” is overly optimistic on her part. The modern Intelligent Design conjecture has been kicking around since about 1990, and in this time no serious research has come out supporting it. *Science* magazine is the premier American professional science journal. What mention I have found of Intelligent Design (disregarding letters to the editor) in *Science* has been derogatory.

The Gould and Eldredge quote is addressed on NCSE’s *Exposed* site:⁹

Gould actually said “But continuing unhappiness, justified this time, focuses upon claims that speciation causes significant morphological change, for no validation of such a position has emerged.” (Gould, SJ and Eldredge, N, “Punctuated equilibrium comes of age” *Nature* 366, 223-227, 1993). In other words, there is a question of the order in which speciation and physical diversification take place, not “confusion” over whether any link exists between such diversification and speciation. Crocker’s erroneous quotation and mischaracterization of the author’s intent show poor scholarship, and encourage her students to misunderstand key concepts.

I am glad that Crocker mentioned von Braun’s disdain for teaching only evolution. That pretty much settles the issue, because we all know the great rocket engineer held the ultimate truth on all other matters under his consideration. No, seriously, this is not an argument from science. It’s an amateurish attempt at argument from authority.

I don’t know what a reptobird is, but Archaeopteryx had features common with some dinosaurs that modern birds do not. I will go Crocker one better on the “one complete fossil” claim. A review of the ten known Archaeopteryx fossils indicates every one of them is missing at least some small part (or much more). Too bad for Crocker; after she made her wild claims about Archaeopteryx in 2004-2005 another fossil was assigned to *Archaeopteryx siemensii* in 2007. It is the “the most complete and well preserved” yet.¹⁰

It was easy for Crocker to make the claim “has been questioned as a fraud.” All she has to do is to assert that Archaeopteryx is a fraud, and the foregoing statement becomes true. In fact, astronomer Fred Hoyle and physicist Lee Spetner also made this assertion. What Crocker failed to mention is that these claims were refuted by scientists familiar with archaeological research and not so familiar with cosmology.¹¹

I could find no research that backs up Crocker’s statement that “Eohippus is found in the *same* layers as the modern

horse.” A FAQ entry on the Talk Origins site gives the following possible origin:¹²

...Eohippus fossils have been found in surface strata, along side two modern horses, *Equus nevadensis* and *Equus occidentalis*.

The quote is from *The Neck of the Giraffe* by Francis Hitching, who does not provide a justification for the statement. Talk Origins traces the statement back to a book by creationist R.L. Wysong. Crocker appears to have lifted a bit of myth from creationist literature and used it in class with no attempt at confirmation.

The statement that “Eohippus is the same as modern-day hyrax” is amateurish and unbecoming of someone holding a Ph.D. in the life sciences. Eohippus is not the same as a hyrax. The rock hyrax is the closest living relative to the modern elephant.

Crocker has another interesting slide in the CRM video:¹³

Charles Darwin (1809-1882)

Failed at medical school (could not dissect).

Had some training as a clergyman.

Rich kid who enjoyed partying, drinking, and gambling.

Went to Galapagos Islands.

Father was not pleased.

That settles it for me. If Darwin was such a slacker, then the whole science of biological evolution is worthless trash. Anyhow, this seems to be Crocker’s argument, and it lacks a certain amount of scientific and scholastic rigor.

A closer look at the Kettlewell research story finds little actual controversy within the scientific community, Crocker and Wells notwithstanding.

Laurence Cook has posted his lecture on *The Rise and Fall of the Peppered Moth*. I have copied his text for you to read, but you can follow the link to see the complete presentation.¹⁴

Michael Majerus wrote *Melanism: Evolution in Action*, and biologist Jerry Coyne reviewed the book in *Nature*. Coyne’s review was critical of Kettlewell’s experimental technique, but Majerus disputes Coyne’s interpretation and has emphasized support for Kettlewell’s conclusions. Others have been critical of Kettlewell and the peppered moth research, including a book by journalist Judith Hooper titled *Of Moths and Men*. Regardless, all critiques of moth research have been refuted by those scientists who actually do the research. See the Wikipedia page for the whole story.¹⁵

What has *not* happened is that Jonathan Wells and others critical of peppered moth research have *not* gone into the field

and done their own research and published the results in a peer-reviewed scientific journal. It has become apparent that the *science* of Intelligent Design does not involve any actual *scientific research*.

If arguing against Darwinian evolution is what Crocker was paid to do for NVCC (and possibly GMU), then they should have hired me for the job, because I could have done it better. Had GMU hired me to disparage Darwinism I would have pulled up the work of someone like Michael Behe. Behe’s argument from irreducible complexity has some semblance of a scientific basis. If there is no Darwinian pathway leading from an ancestral feature to a modern feature, then something else must account for the modern feature besides Darwinism.

Behe has been pitching this argument for about fifteen years, but he has not been making any headway. So far irreducible complexity exists only as a conjecture with no scientific research to back it up. Unlike the arguments put forward by Crocker, irreducible complexity more closely resembles real science. If Crocker had wanted to argue against Darwinism in her GMU class, she could have cited Behe, but she also would have had to note that irreducible complexity has not in any way been demonstrated. Obviously she did not bother to do any of this.

I may have been the first to post a comment about *Free to Think*, but the first comment to stick was posted by Ray Bohlin.¹⁶

Great Read! As is usually the case, the full story is even worse than the abbreviated version in *Expelled*. Her book will not only help you see how unseemly academia can be, but also inspire you with personal stories of Caroline’s impact on students.

Of course, *Ray Bohlin* is our own Ray Bohlin. He has a Ph.D. in biology from the University of Texas at Dallas and currently heads up Probe Ministries in Richardson, Texas. Probe Ministries was co-founded by Jon Buell, founder and president of the Foundation for Thought and Ethics (FTE), also in Richardson. FTE is the publisher of the book *Of Pandas and People*, the original “text” book geared toward Intelligent Design. Despite having a Ph.D. in biology, Bohlin has a curious view of biological evolution. At the Texas Faith Network conference on 3 November 2003 in Dallas he addressed those in attendance and stated he believes all modern life forms have a common ancestor. All except humans, he said. We do not share ancestry with those other creatures. Bohlin is a fellow of the Discovery Institute Center for Science and Culture, the principal organization promoting Intelligent Design in the United States.

Both *Expelled* and the CRM video feature some glowing testimonials by students. Crocker also mentions these in the book. So, why was such a popular teacher expelled? GMU stated that student complaints kicked off the process. Who is to

know? I don't have an official poll of Crocker's popularity with students at GMU, but there is an on-line survey from NVCC students. Some of them gave her good reviews. Others, not so good. Readers should be wary of any negative comments posted by students, even assuming the posts are by actual students. A failing student can use such a vehicle to even the score with a teacher.¹⁷

There is another Web site called *N.C.S.E. Exposed* that purports to correct "errors in the National Center for Science Education's fact-free attack on *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed*." The section pertaining to Caroline Crocker emphasizes the high praise she received as a teacher but does not dispute that she taught creationism or even Intelligent Design. The page contains several links to external material. A linked page discusses the *Washington Post* story, and it quotes text favorable to Crocker. However, it omits Crocker's incriminating remarks, previously mentioned. There is a link to a page attempting to refute the Miller-Urey experiment (one of the Jonathan Wells icons). Another linked page tells of rave reviews for *Icons of Evolution*. Crocker has written her own rebuttal to the "false claims" about her, but the link to that page is broken.¹⁸

Besides *Free to Think*, Crocker has written *Guide to Cell Structure and Function* (2005) and has authored a chapter in *The Immunopharmacology of Allergic Diseases* (1996). In addition to a number of peer-reviewed papers, the page claims she has contributed magazine articles to *Salvo Magazine*, including "What Exactly is the Problem with Evolutionary Theory" and "Do ID Proponents Get Persecuted in the Academy?" The first is nowhere to be found but the second is in the 4-2008 issue. She has contributed "Intellectual Freedom Must Include Conservative Professors, Scientists" in *Washington Examiner*, 30 June 2008.¹⁹

You can view the video that started the whole *expelled* business back in 2008. It runs about an hour and 38 minutes, and the screen is small, but it's free. Get some popcorn.²⁰

Leafcutter Press has a press kit for *Free to Think*. Besides a rundown on the book, the kit provides extensive biographical information on Crocker.²¹



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Book Review

by John Blanton

Evolution writ large

At the Water's Edge

Carl Zimmer

The Free Press, 1998, 290 pages, including index

Animal life began in the sea, and the story of how it came onto the land is also the story of the science behind the evolution of animal life. A popular creationist mantra is that micro evolution by Darwinian processes is feasible, but not macro evolution. By *Darwinian* processes the creationists mean evolution by natural means involving random mutations coupled with natural selection. By *micro evolution* they mean small changes that can be accomplished by one or two random mutations in a genome. This would be a change in eye color, for example. By *macro evolution* they mean the origin of a species, likely involving the fortuitous mutation of multiple genes.

Additionally, embryonic development plays a significant role. A genome is not a blueprint. A blueprint will say, "Drill a hole right here of this size." A genome is a recipe that says, "Make this protein, then make this one, then this one depending on something else." Embryonic development involves how the zygotic cells interact with each other, sometimes traveling to other parts of the embryo and affecting the development of other cells. On a larger scale the environment within the egg shapes the final organism. A bird's shin has a ridge on the front, but this ridge will not form unless the chick threshes about within the egg.

Carl Zimmer wrote *At the Water's Edge* twelve years ago, pulling together a vast body of science behind the evolution of fish to mammals. The book also covers the reverse process that involved the development of whales from a hoofed artiodactyl, whose fossils were discovered in Pakistan within the previous twenty years.

Multiple, contributing gene mutations are rare, because each single mutation is rare, and the simultaneous occurrence of several has the probability of the product of the separate probabili-

ties. Multiple, contributing mutations are feasible under the Darwinian mechanism if they occur in progression and each stage in the progression is persistent in the population. An exaptation is a trait that persists in the population because it is beneficial and is still around when it becomes useful for another function, thus allowing Darwinian processes to build on it. Such was the case with fish limbs that were useful in water and required little modification to become useful for moving on land.

Early paleontologists wondered at such creatures as the lungfish. Here was a creature which appeared to be a transition between a fish and a land animal. British paleontologist Richard Owen found Darwin's ideas about evolution thoroughly repugnant, and the lungfish gave him considerable heartburn.

Lungfish seemed to signal a transition between breathing in water and breathing air, but there were other hurdles. Walking has already been mentioned, but there was also the problem of eggs that needed to thrive outside the water environment. In conjunction with all of this, methods of interpreting sound evolved as reptilian jaws morphed into mammalian jaws, and leftover bones morphed into the bones in our inner ears. Creationists' statements to the contrary, the transitional fossils linking reptiles to mammals are extraordinarily ample to demonstrate the process.

Mammals existed alongside dinosaurs for millions of years before the dinosaurs went extinct about 65 million years ago. There followed an explosion of mammalian life, and by 40 million years ago some had migrated back into the water to become the ancestors of modern whales.

The ancient Tethys Sea once stretched from Spain to Indonesia, but the movement of Africa and the Indian subcontinent choked it off until all that is left today is the Mediterranean. On the eastern end of the Tethys, in what is now Pakistan, lived an animal with hoofs that ate meat and learned to feed in the inlets of this sea. Paleontologist Phillip Gingerich identified its first fossils and named it Pakicetus, the whale from Pakistan. It marks the transition from land animals to whales.

Future Meeting Dates

- 18 September (NTS program meeting)
- 25 September (NTS social dinner)
- 16 October (NTS program meeting)
- 23 October (NTS social dinner)
- 13 November (NTS program meeting)
- 20 November (NTS social dinner)

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Becoming a whale involves more than just swimming and feeding in the ocean. Adaptations must also accommodate the need to hear and to see under water. There is also the matter of diving thousands of feet below the surface and enduring the crushing pressures. The evolution toward the modern whale is amply demonstrated by a progressive lineage that includes:

Pakicetus
Ambulocetus
Dalanistes
Rodhocetus
Takaracetus
Gaviocetus
Basilosaurus
Dorudon

and finally Mysticetes, the baleen whales, and Odontocetes, the toothed whales. It's enough to make a creationist cringe.

Zimmer's book is a *tour de force* of modern paleontology, geology, embryology and genetics. Since the publication of *At the Water's Edge* science has gone forward, generally confirming the conclusions of those twentieth century scientists and sometimes making corrections and extending their conclusions.

The book is a must for anybody who debates Young-Earth Creationists, and I have used its material for just this purpose. Advocates of Intelligent Design will not be amused. They are willing to accept the facts of evolution but will continue to insist a supernatural process is at work. To defeat them other work will be necessary.

The book is still available on Amazon. Use the following link to get your copy:

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0684856239/thenorthtexaske>



Some announcements

The Texas Freethought Convention will be in Dallas this year.

October 8 – 10th, 2010

Sheraton Grand Hotel at Dallas/Fort Worth Airport
4440 W. John Carpenter Frwy.

Irving, Texas 75063

Tickets and schedule at

<http://texasfreethoughtconvention.com/>

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Although it might be a bit late for people to schedule a trip, SkepTrack at Dragon*Con is coming up

September 3 – 6, 2010 in Atlanta.

Details at:

<http://www.skeptrack.org/>

Video from Skeptrack might be streamed live on the internet. The stream will be announce at the SkepTrack web site if available.

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Skepticon 3 will be November 19-21, 2010 in Springfield, MO.

<http://skepticon.org/>

It may have more attendees than The Amazing Meeting.

Admission is free.

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