



The North Texas

Skeptic

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<http://www.ntskeptics.org>

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.

Creationists have long complained that their ideas are not given a fair shake in secular society. Particularly, public schools prefer to teach evolution and to ignore what the creationists call “facts” supporting the supernatural creation of the universe and life on Earth. In the past they demanded a public forum in which to present their ideas and to argue against evolution and “naturalism.”

They got the opportunity in 1981 in the court case known as *McLean vs. Arkansas Board of Education*. Witnesses for the defense, the Arkansas Board of Education, included members of the creationist Institute for Creation Research. The complaint was made that mainstream science refused to publish research supporting creationism. Later in his decision, federal judge William Overton pointed out that the creationists did not produce any examples of such papers that had been presented for publication. The creationists lost this case, and creationism was not taught in Arkansas public schools.

As a result of this case and a following one in Louisiana, creationism was deemed, for legal purposes, to be solely of religious content and purpose and therefore illegal to be presented at public expense.

The result was a change in tactics and a new name. The Intelligent Design movement got underway, if not coincidentally, right after the Supreme Court decision on *Edwards vs. Aguillard*. At this time there was a shedding of the overt religious trappings of creationism. The six days of Creation are not part of the new creationism. The new creationists even allow (sometimes) the common ancestry of living organisms. The miracles still remain.

This is the show the creationists brought five years ago to federal court, to the public forum they had long demanded. This was Dover, Pennsylvania.

EVENTS CALENDAR

January Program

Elections

Saturday, January 15
2 p.m.
2900 Live Oak Street in Dallas

On January 15 NTS will have our annual elections for the board of directors. There will be no other program.

To vote or to serve on the board or as an officer, you must be a full member with dues paid up as of 15 January. Others are invited to attend, watch the proceedings, and enjoy some snacks and pleasant conversation. Who knows? Somebody will bring a video.

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

214.335.9248

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 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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After 5 years, Dover intelligent design ruling's impact still felt

http://www.yorkdispatch.com/ci_16883908

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2010-12-17.htm#after>

ANDREW SHAW *The York Dispatch*
Updated: 12/17/2010 01:45:01 PM EST

"I still get my hate mail. I do hear about it. It's amazing to me how much it's still brought up." — Tammy Kitzmiller, one of the plaintiffs who fought to keep intelligent design out of science classes in Dover. Tammy Kitzmiller's family jokingly refers to Dec. 20 as "Kitzmas."

The story that played out in the court of Judge John E. Jones III was considerably different from its early life. Some evolution had occurred.

Dover board members William Buckingham and Alan Bonsell are creationists of the original kind. They wanted creationism taught to balance what they saw as favoritism toward natural causes and evolution in particular. Specifically they did not like biologist Kenneth Miller's and Joseph S. Levine's book *Biology*. It was "laced with Darwinism." They favored instead the creationist text called *Pandas and People*. What they eventually got was a reading of the following statement at the commencement of the biology class:¹

The Pennsylvania Academic Standards require students to learn about Darwin's theory of evolution and eventually to take a standardized test of which evolution is a part.

Because Darwin's Theory is a theory, it is still being tested as new evidence is discovered. The Theory is not a fact. Gaps in the Theory exist for which there is no evidence. A theory is defined as a well-tested explanation that unifies a broad range of observations.

Intelligent design is an explanation of the origin of life that differs from Darwin's view. The reference book, *Of Pandas and People* is available for students to see if they would like to explore this view in an effort to gain an understanding of what intelligent design actually involves.

As is true with any theory, students are encouraged to keep an open mind. The school leaves the discussion of the origins of life to individual students and their families. As a standards-driven district, class instruction focuses upon preparing students to achieve proficiency on standards-based assessments.

And that is what went to trial.

After years of protesting the denial of a public forum, the new creationists got what they asked for. But it was not what they wanted. The creationist Discovery Institute early on gave courage and advice to the defendants (school board) but backed out when they saw it was a los-

ing proposition. Buckingham and Bonsell had so tainted the case with talk of Jesus and biblical references that the floor dressing of Intelligent Design could not cover up the creationist mess.

Intelligent Design's brain trust, William Dembski, backed out of testifying when it became apparent he would not be able to have his own lawyer during discovery. Scott Minnich and Michael Behe, the only two creationists with academic standing, did testify, but to no avail. Behe's assertion that Intelligent Design was peer reviewed science fell flat when his prime example turned out to be his own book *Darwin's Black Box*. One of the "reviewers" turned out to be someone who recommended publication of the book after hearing a description of it over the telephone. When asked on cross examination during the trial to justify some of his assertions in *Darwin's Black Box*, Behe had to admit he never read the many scientific papers that contradicted his claims.

The battle ended with Jones banning Dover schools from ever enforcing an intelligent design policy and ruled intelligent design is religion, not science.

..

Michael Behe said he doesn't hear anybody talk about *Kitzmiller v. Dover* anymore.

Behe, a biochemist and professor at Lehigh University, testified as an expert witness in support of intelligent design. "I don't hear anybody talk about it ... except the guys on the side who won," Behe said.

"It's an interesting legal event," he said in reflection. "But it doesn't affect the science. The scientific case for intelligent design keeps getting stronger."

In the event you ever thought the issue of evolution versus creationism has no religious basis, turn your attention to someone who wants to convince you otherwise.²

Job candidate sues UK, claiming religion cost him the post

By Peter Smith • psmith@courier-journal.com • December 10, 2010

No one denies that astronomer Martin Gaskell was the leading candidate for the founding director of a new observatory at the University of Kentucky in 2007 — until his writings on evolution came to light.

Gaskell had given lectures to campus religious groups around the country in which he said that

while he has no problem reconciling the Bible with the theory of evolution, he believes the theory has major flaws. And he recommended students read theory critics in the intelligent-design movement.

That stance alarmed UK science professors and, the university acknowledges, played a role in the job going to another candidate.

Now a federal judge says Gaskell has a right to a jury trial over his allegation that he lost the job because he is a Christian and "potentially evangelical."

OK, Gaskell lost points on other issues, as well, but he seems to be contending it was his religious beliefs (creationism) that did him in. Supporters of evolution need to thank Gaskell and others like him who help remind people what the issue is really about.³

In case we ever reprinted some of the comments maligning Sir Peter Vardy, we feel obliged to undo some of the damage:

Sir Peter Vardy – an apology

<http://www.tribunemagazine.co.uk/2010/12/sir-peter-vardy-an-apology/>

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2010-12-17.htm#sir>

We have apologised to Sir Peter Vardy and have paid a sum by way of damages which Sir Peter Vardy has donated to charity

**by Tribune Editorial
Thursday, December 16th, 2010**

On October 5 2009 we published an article entitled "Creationist Claptrap that Beggars Belief". The article alleged that Sir Peter Vardy, by virtue of donating, through the Vardy Foundation, £2 million of the £22 million it costs the taxpayer to build an academy school, was imposing fundamentalist beliefs and pseudoscience on children attending these schools. It alleged that children are being taught in biology lessons that evolution is as much a theory as creationism and that everything was designed by a god creator as stated literally in Genesis.

We accept that these allegations are untrue and that the schools funded by Sir Peter Vardy are not faith schools and do not advocate creationism. We accept that Sir Peter Vardy is not a creationist and has not sought to advance the teaching of creationism by means of sponsorship of education in the UK.

We have apologised to Sir Peter Vardy and have paid a sum by way of damages which Sir Peter Vardy has donated to charity.

Some time back the nearby state of Louisiana enacted the Louisiana Science Education Act (LSEA). The law ensured that local school boards are allowed to use supplemental materials (and presumably instruction) to question evolution. The science of biological evolution was specifically mentioned, and this made it obvious to all who could read the intent was to give courage and backing to any teacher who wanted to buck the scientific consensus. With an amount of gall to which we have become accustomed, supporters of the act denied any such intent. Before my egg timer ran down supporters of creationism began to lean on this act in their attempts to introduce creationism into the biology curriculum.⁴

The good news is the rubber has met the road. These attempts have tended to fail, as illustrated in the following:

Textbook Case

[Http://www.bestofneworleans.com/gambit/textbook-case/Content?oid=1458772](http://www.bestofneworleans.com/gambit/textbook-case/Content?oid=1458772)

[Http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2010-12-17.htm#textbook](http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2010-12-17.htm#textbook)

by **Kevin Allman**

New science textbooks in Louisiana public schools will not have to present disclaimers about evolution in a roundabout acknowledgment of “intelligent design,” following an 8-2 vote by the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) on Dec. 9.

Hydrogen fusion holds great promise as a virtually limitless source of usable energy for modern society. It’s the same energy that powers the sun, providing almost all the energy that makes life and a modern society possible. It’s also the source of energy for the hydrogen bomb. Both processes involve tremendous heat and pressure. Cold fusion was proposed in 1989 by two University of Utah researchers. Their findings could not be reproduced by other scientists, and cold fusion died a quick and painful death.

Not for long, however. Mike Adams, who runs the Natural News site, has news to share. Adams writes as a contrarian who objects to all manner of scientific orthodoxy. His site particularly supports a vast area of alternative medicine, and he loves to point out any supposed shortcomings of modern science.

Cold Fusion Proven True by U.S. Navy Researchers - Will Suppression of this Science be Repeated?

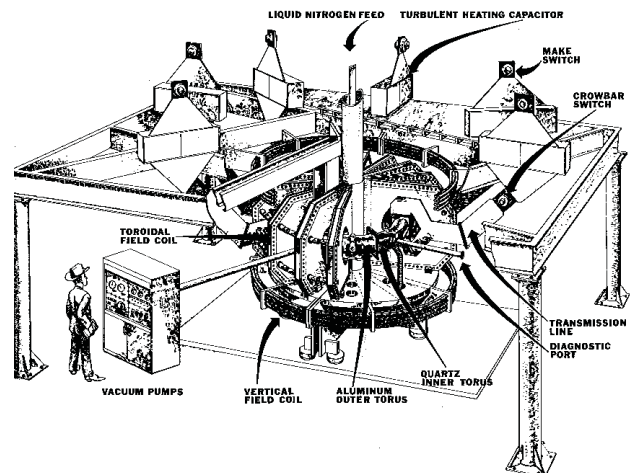
[Http://www.naturalnews.com/025925_cold_fusion_Amazon_research.html](http://www.naturalnews.com/025925_cold_fusion_Amazon_research.html)

[Http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2010-12-17.htm#cold](http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2010-12-17.htm#cold)

Wednesday, March 25, 2009
by **Mike Adams, the Health Ranger**
Editor of **NaturalNews.com**

(NaturalNews) The world owes Fleischmann and Pons a huge apology: The cold fusion technology they announced in 1989 — which was blasted by arrogant hot fusion scientists as a fraud — has been proven true once again by U.S. Navy Researchers. In papers presented at this year’s American Chemical Society meeting, scientist Pamela Mosier-Boss presented data supporting the reality of cold fusion, declaring the report, “the first scientific report of highly energetic neutrons from low-energy nuclear reactions.”

My reaction to spurious claims for cold fusion is to ask that the claimants show me their electric bill. If cold fusion is a reality, then they should not need to purchase power from the public grid.



Then, much the same can be said for hot fusion. Forty years ago research began in earnest to develop hot fusion as a source of electric power. About 1970 artist Tony Bell produced this drawing of the Tokamak device for the University of Texas Center for Plasma Fusion. The figure shown to scale is Ox-

ford-educated senior scientist Dr. Anthony Robson, here Texanized by Tony Bell.⁵

Despite forty subsequent years of research, no Tokamak or any other hot fusion device has produced usable power. Except for the hydrogen bomb. And that's the difference. After nearly 22 years Cold fusion has not even produced heat.

Mike Adams is not done. There's astrology, as well:

Principle of astrology proven to be scientific: planetary position imprints biological clocks of mammals

[Http://www.naturalnews.com/030698_astrology_scientific_basis.html](http://www.naturalnews.com/030698_astrology_scientific_basis.html)

[Http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2010-12-17.htm#principle](http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2010-12-17.htm#principle)

Saturday, December 11, 2010
by Mike Adams, the Health Ranger
Editor of NaturalNews.com

(NaturalNews) Mention the word "astrology" and skeptics go into an epileptic fit. The idea that someone's personality could be imprinted at birth according to the position of the sun, moon and planets has long been derided as "quackery" by the so-called "scientific" community which resists any notion based on holistic connections between individuals and the cosmos.

I don't have anything to counter this. There is no "hot" version of astrology. It's all cold, and it's been cold for thousands of years.

Wikipedia

This Skeptical News column draws a lot on the Wikipedia site. It's a bountiful source of useful (and some not so) information, and it's all free, so far. Think about doing something to keep Wikipedia alive and well:⁶

From Wikipedia Founder Jimmy Wales

I'm a volunteer.

Like the thousands of others who write and edit Wikipedia, I don't get paid a cent. But I have been

here from the beginning, and I can tell you, we weren't prepared to get this big.

We are a non-profit, but we are the fifth most visited website in the world. Last year we operated with around 30 staff and dangerously few servers. The other top ten websites are hundreds of times bigger than us.

This year we are finally adding critical technology and people we've needed for years. We can't wait another year to take this step.

Last year about one in 1,000 people who use Wikipedia donated. To reach our goal this year, we need two in 1,000.

It's a stretch. We're the only major website in the world that is primarily supported by its users. It's worked for 10 years, but this year we are struggling to reach our goal with only 6 days left of 2010.

Please help us keep Wikipedia free and stable with a donation of \$10, \$20, \$35 or whatever you can afford.

Jimmy Wales

Wikipedia Founder



References

- 1 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kitzmiller_v._Dover_Area_School_District
- 2 <http://www.courier-journal.com/article/20101210/NEWS01/312110011/Job+candidate+sues+UK++claiming+religion+cost+him+the+post>
- 3 also <http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2010-12-17.htm#christian>
- 4 little hyperbole here. I do not own an egg timer.
- 5 of the Tokomak and Robson are also available on the Web. Here are some screen shots:
<http://www.ntskeptics.org/2011/2011january/tokamak1.gif>
<http://www.ntskeptics.org/2011/2011january/tokamak2.gif>
- 6 http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/WMFJA051/en/US?utm_medium=sitenotice&utm_campaign=20101223_JA056&utm_source=20101223_JA028A_US&country_code=US

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.]

Integrity: White house guidelines on scientific transparency

In March 2009, newly-elected President Obama issued a memorandum on scientific integrity forbidding the distortion of science for political ends. The move seemed to signal a clear departure from the administration of President George W. Bush, which muzzled government scientists whose views departed from those of the White House. Last week, John Holdren, director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, issued a four-page guideline prohibiting political interference and assuring transparency. That's all that was needed, but it didn't seem to please anyone. Some thought it was too short, but more likely it was too long; the First Amendment to the Constitution after all is a single sentence. Transparency is good, but if the transparent medium is too thick the picture tends to be distorted by refraction.

Homeopathy: Fundamental laws of nature take precedence.

The Science and Technology Committee of the UK Parliament released a report urging the government to withdraw funding and licensing of homeopathy. It is unlikely to happen; even the Queen has her own personal homeopathist. This year is the 200th anniversary of Samuel Hahnemann's "Organon of the Medical Art." The prevailing philosophy of medicine at the time was "vitalism, the belief that life involves some spiritual essence." Medicinal energy," Hahneman wrote, "is most powerful when it communicates nothing material." He was unaware of the extent to which he achieved this ideal by sequentially diluting his medications. It would be another 50 years before Loschmidt determined Avogadro's number. It is now clear that Hahnemann was many dilutions beyond the dilution limit. Last week WN commented on the mistaken belief that cell phone radiation causes cancer. The photon energy in the microwave region of the spectrum is only about 1 millionth of the energy required to create a mutant strand of DNA, which is the initiation of cancer. There is no need to go any further. Epidemiology is expensive, time-consuming, and prone to statistical errors and faulty recall.

NTS elections for 2011

The North Texas Skeptics is an organization that is run by people who show up.

The NTS is a 501 (c) 3, non-profit organization incorporated in Texas. On 15 January we will hold elections for the NTS board. Board members will immediately vote/appoint officers of the NTS, who will then run the day-to-day business of the group for the year 2011.

To vote or to serve on the board or as an officer, you must be a full member with dues paid up as of 15 January. Others are invited to attend, watch the proceedings, and enjoy some snacks and pleasant conversation. Who knows? Somebody will bring a video.

Center for Communication

2900 Live Oak Street in Dallas

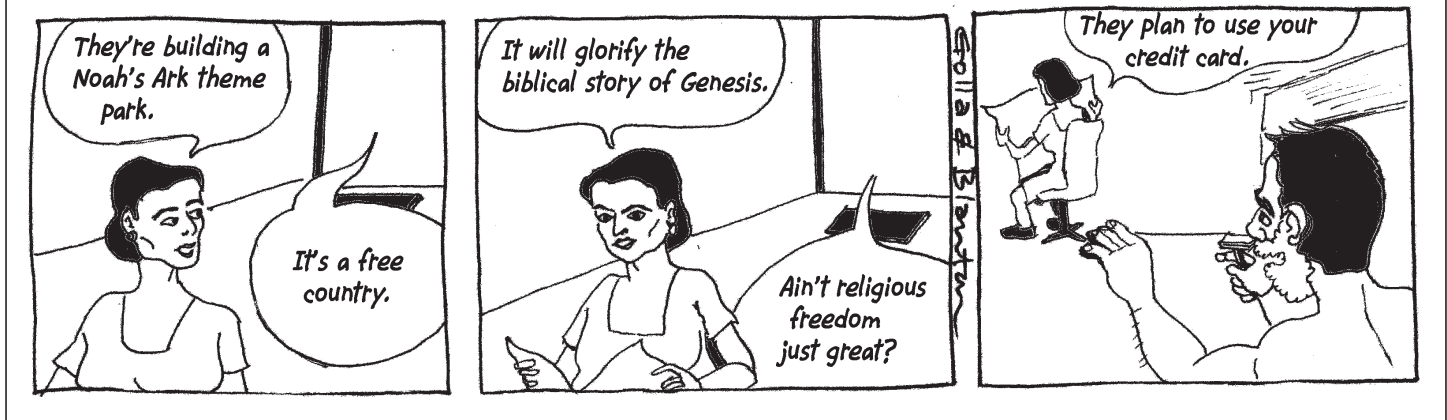
2:00 p.m.

Saturday, 15 January 2011

EMF exposure: Does waving of the trees make the wind blow?

Identifying the cause of disease is the first step in its treatment. Epidemiology, the branch of medicine concerned with causation, seeks to establish correlation between exposure to a possible cause and actual occurrence of the disease. Data must be taken over a period of years to allow for latency; if no effect is seen, a longer latency period is assumed. Since there is no record of individual usage, people are asked to recall what they did years earlier. Exposure to electromagnetic fields (EMF) in modern society is ubiquitous, but with the exception of a few crackpots it was not thought to be a problem until 1989 when the *New Yorker* ran a series of hopelessly misinformed articles by Paul Brodeur linking EMF to cancer. The articles were turned into a series of books with lurid titles like *Currents of Death*. Brodeur had zero background in science but he managed to arouse the anti-science monster that had been in hiding since World War II. The media, trained to give both sides of the story, even if one side is the babbling of an idiot, was no help. It did not end until 1996 when the National Academy of Sciences,

Skeptic Ink — by Prasad Golla and John Blanton. © 2011. Free, non-commercial reuse permitted.



persuaded that the public would not accept an argument based on quantum mechanics, released a three-year study that found no effect of EMF on the human body. Almost overnight power lines stopped causing cancer. The anti-science monster had been chained, but it was still alive.

Epidemiology: Fundamental laws of nature take precedence.

With the abrupt emergence of cell-phone technology a decade ago, the anti-science monster talked its way out of bondage. Devra Davis, who is not quite a scientist, but has a PhD in something called Science Studies, has donned the mantle of Paul Brodeur to write *Disconnect: The Truth About Cell Phone Radiation, What Industry Has Done to Hide It, and How to Protect Your Family*. What's missing is what was missing from Paul Brodeur: the universe is governed by quantum physics. Einstein pointed out a century ago that electromagnetic radiation behaves like units of energy called photons equal to Planck's constant times the frequency. They don't cause any trouble unless their energy matches some natural excitation. There isn't much to excite until they reach the energy of molecular vibrations in the microwave region. This is the part of the spectrum used in cell phones, so in principle your cell phone might cook your goose, but it would take a very long time. At even higher frequencies you reach the red end of the visible spectrum, then yellow, green and finally blue. Not until you reach the extreme blue end of the visible spectrum is there a problem. At that energy, photons can eject photoelectrons, creating mutant strands of DNA that can become a cancer. This is the lowest energy at which an incident photon can induce cancer. Photons of this energy are about a million times more energetic than a microwave photon, but cannot penetrate very deeply and therefore induce only skin cancers. However, in the last few days there have been reports that children exposed to cell phones radiation while in the womb have an increased risk

of behavior problems several years after birth. At this point we can expect a wilder and wilder claims of effects from cell phone radiation.

Flying saucers: Ballot initiative would welcome them to Denver.

Jeff Peckman, who proposed the plan, points out that the city is a mile above sea level, so why wouldn't travelers from the distant galaxy stop here first? A front page story by Stephanie Simon in this morning's Wall Street Journal covers the ballot measure to set up an Extraterrestrial Affairs Commission in Denver. Why should there be a government commission? Folks in Denver should be free to have affairs with anybody they want.

Astrology: Making medicine fit the stars—who knew?

An article by Eric Bellman in the Wall Street Journal last week may mark the birth of a new era of cooperation between modern medical science and the ancient wisdom of the East. Expectant mothers in India consult their astrologer to find the most auspicious day and time to enter the world, and schedule a C-section with their obstetrician for delivery at that moment. This is a breakthrough but why stop there? Why not learn the most auspicious time for conception? Perhaps there should be a staff astrologer



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

North Texas Skeptics
P.O. Box 111794
Carrollton, Texas 75011-1794

FIRST CLASS

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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 _____

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