



The North Texas

Skeptic

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<http://www.ntskeptics.org>

Wakefield

by John Blanton

The announcement was brief:

We are excited to be able to have Dr. Andrew Wakefield in Dallas this month. He has graciously agreed to talk at a special luncheon sponsored by us – Texans for Health Freedom. At this meeting he will discuss his own experiences and answer your questions. I know this will be a “Don’t Miss” kind of event.

...

I hope you are able to etch a little time out of your day to come here about the controversy and concerns facing medical research and science today. I know you will come away with new and valuable information.

It sounds like good fortune for Dallas unless you know something about Andrew Wakefield.

An item by Susan Dominus in *The New York Times* provides clarification:

As people streamed into Graceview Baptist Church in Tomball, Tex., early one Saturday morning in January, two armed guards stood prominently just inside the doorway of the sanctuary. Their eyes scanned the room and returned with some frequency to a man sitting near the aisle, whom they had been hired to protect.

The man, Andrew Wakefield, dressed in a blazer and jeans and peering through reading glasses, had a mild professorial air. He tapped at a laptop as the room filled with people who came to hear him speak; he looked both industrious and remote. Broad-shouldered and fair at 54, he still has the presence of the person he once was: a conventional winner, the captain of his medical school’s rugby team, the head boy at the private school he attended in England. Wakefield was a high-profile but controversial figure in gastroenterology research at the Royal Free Hospital in London when, in 1998, he upended his career path — and more significant, the best-laid plans of public-health officials — by announcing at a press conference that he had

EVENTS CALENDAR

May Program

Saturday, May 21, 2011
at 2:00 p.m.

Community Center
2900 Live Oak St.
Dallas

Skype conversation hosted by Jamye

Johnston with Richard Saunders of the Australian Skeptics and host of the Internationally popular "Skeptic Zone" podcast. Well known for his investigations into such scams as the Power Balance Band and other charlatans, he works to educate both adults and school children about real scientific investigation and the importance of critical thinking.

Board Meeting and Social Dinner

Saturday, May 28, 2011
at 7:00 p.m.
Ryans Buffet, 909 Tripp Rd.
Mesquite, TX

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It is easy to consider Wakefield to be the problem, and there is little doubt he has been a malicious player in this situation. In the end, however, it is the parents of autistic children and others in our society who have to make the choice of whether to believe something that, while true, is uncomfortable.



References:

The item in the *New York Times* is on-line here:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/24/magazine/mag-24Autism-t.html>

Daniel Willingham's item in *Scientific American* is also on-line at:

<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=trust-me-im-a-scientist>

Web news

by John Blanton

Last month we featured some writings by creationist David Klinghoffer, who blogs for the Discovery Institute.

http://www.ntskeptics.org/2011/2011april/april2011.htm#web_news

Klinghoffer blogged "[NO PEER-REVIEWED I.D. RESEARCH. Just ask Lauri Lebo!](#)" for Evolution News, which speaks for the Discovery Institute's Center for Science and Culture. At this point Klinghoffer provided a dozen links to demonstrate peer-reviewed research by and for Intelligent Design.

I picked two at random—actually the first two I clicked on, and followed them out. The result was, I felt, not all that good for Klinghoffer. I was thinking things might go better for creationism if I picked two more. Here they are:

Last month I skipped over the second of Klinghoffer's links and picked up the third one, instead. I am taking the opportunity now to look at Klinghoffer's link number two. It leads here:

The Capabilities of Chaos and Complexity

David L. Abel

Int. J. Mol. Sci. **2009**, *10*, 247-291; doi:10.3390/ijms10010247

<http://www.mdpi.com/1422-0067/10/1/247/pdf>

Without completely digesting all 45 pages and 344 reference citations, I note that the paper appears to be thorough. Abel is not one of the CSC fellows, so this does not actually qualify as a peer-reviewed publication by the CSC. Abel does express serious doubts about the ability of natural processes to generate life as we know it, and the paper deserves a look. Abel concludes:

“Physicodynamics cannot spontaneously traverse The Cybernetic Cut [9]: physicodynamics alone cannot organize itself into formally functional systems requiring algorithmic optimization, computational halting, and circuit integration.”

A single exception of non trivial, unaided spontaneous optimization of formal function by truly natural process would falsify this null hypothesis.

At least here is a paper whose stated conclusion is substantial to the issue of Intelligent Design.

Another of Klinghoffer's links:

The coherence of an engineered world published in WIT Transactions on Ecology and the Environment, Vol 114

D. Halsmer 1, J. Asper 2, N. Roman 2 & T. Todd 2

1 Dean, Science & Engineering, Oral Roberts University, Tulsa, OK, USA

2 Undergraduate Honors Students of the Department of Engineering

& Physics, Oral Roberts University, Tulsa, OK, USA

<http://library.witpress.com/pages/dlfreepaper.asp?pID=19279>

Now this is refreshing. I was not aware that ORU had become interested in serious science, but if David Klinghoffer sees fit to cite their research then who am I to question?

I also notice this is the second of Klinghoffer's "peer-reviewed" papers available from WIT Press Journals. WIT Press appears to be fertile ground for the CSC fellows. Given Dean Halsmer is not one of the fellows, it is also a squeeze to count this contribution as CSC peer-reviewed science.

In any event, the authors reach this conclusion favorable to Intelligent Design:

An interdisciplinary study of the cosmos suggests that a transcendently engineered world may be the most coherent explanation. E.O. Wilson recently revived the term "consilience" in reference to the unity of knowledge; 'literally a "jumping together" of knowledge by the linking of facts and fact-based theory across

disciplines to create a common groundwork of explanation.' [32] This phenomenon is currently being realized across the physical, life, and social sciences within the context of an engineering mindset. The universe displays a beautiful functionality which seems to automatically deploy for the benefit of life and mankind in particular. Even so, humans are largely able to comprehend the workings of the cosmos, and recognize widespread technological attributes that dovetail into a consilience that is best explained by the wisdom of a transcendent engineer. The idea of transcendence indicates that we detect an engineering capability that is above and beyond the limits of our ordinary experience and possibly beyond our material existence. The discerned laws that govern the behavior of matter, energy, and information over space and time display a sublime ingenuity and intentionality that many (especially scientists and engineers) recognize as significant for worldview considerations.

Ok, Skeptics, I am going to agree this is not *Nature*, this is not *Science* and this is not the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. But Intelligent Design has got to start somewhere. In the mean time I intend to allow David Klinghoffer to crow boldly that Intelligent Design is not creationism and that all claims are false that the CSC does not do peer-reviewed science. In the mean time I will be taking a look at the next two of Klinghoffer's links.

It's going to be interesting to see the remainder of what Klinghoffer has promised us. If past experience is a measure, we do not plan to be amazed. I find my habit of low expectations helps me avoid disappointment.

The problem these new creationists have and those of the young Earth had before them is respect. They can't get any from those who count in mainstream science. Respectable journals won't publish their "research."

I can only surmise the creationists don't get published because reviewers require too much documentation, experimental evidence or a sound basis of argument. I can only surmise, because I don't have access to the reviewers' comments, and I have not seen any of the papers these creationists have submitted. This is assuming the creationists actually do submit their work to respectable journals.

In 1981 a number of plaintiffs sued the Arkansas Board of Education over a law that favored teaching "creation science." In the trial of *McLean vs. Arkansas Board of Education* one of the creationist witnesses complained that mainstream science is biased against creationism and that was the reason respectable journals would not publish their work. However, federal judge William Overton noted in his written opinion striking down the law that the creationists failed to present any papers that had been submitted for publication.

"Creation science" has given way in the last twenty years to "Intelligent Design," due apparently to the stigma that has

become attached to "creation science." The new creationists are in the same dilemma as those of the young Earth—how to get respect without earning it. Publication in a real science journal with real peer-review would go a long way toward obtaining this "respect."

It brings to mind a tale by James Randi from his book *Flim-Flam*. Russell Targ and Harold Puthoff submitted a paper titled "Information Transmission Under Conditions of Sensory Shielding" to the prestigious journal *Nature*, and it was published in 1974. Great respect attached itself to Targ and Puthoff, and they prominently boasted the worth of "psi." Not advertised by these two was that they had previously shopped their paper around to other respectable outlets and had been roundly rebuked. Even *Nature* held its nose at the publication, printing in the same issue an editorial calling the item "'weak,' 'disconcertingly vague,' 'limited,' 'flawed,' and 'naïve.'" *Nature* had published the work to illustrate the quality of work being done in the dubious field of parapsychology.

All that notwithstanding, multitudes who read little gained a favorable impression of junk science.

So, the new creationists have tried. And they have succeeded in at least one instance. In 2004 CSC fellow Stephen C. Meyer published a paper advocating Intelligent Design in the *Proceedings of the Biological Society of Washington*, an actual peer-reviewed science journal. The fact that the journal's editor, an Intelligent Design sympathizer and subsequent CSC fellow, handled the entire matter without consulting other editors of the journal tended to take some of the shine off this otherwise sterling accomplishment.

Another detraction was the lack of substance presented by Meyer. Typically a substantive scientific paper will exhibit new research by the author. Meyer's submission was somewhat less. If a piece of investigative journalism in a newspaper counts as newsworthy, then Meyer's work would count as an op-ed piece. It was a survey of others' work with a conclusion favoring supernatural causes.

Afterwards the creationists continued to mine the incident by claiming that journal editor Richard Sternberg's career had been ruined because he stood up for the publication of fresh ideas. The claim that Sternberg had to give up the keys to his lab at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington was factually accurate. Also factually accurate was that *everybody* had to give up their keys. The laboratory area went to a keyless security system, and researchers were issued key cards. It is significant that Meyer repeated this tale with *the rest of the story* omitted in his recent book *Signature in the Cell*. In this regard the new creationists have this same sometime relationship with the truth that their young Earth forebears had. If change is not for you, the study of creationism is.



Challenge activity

by John Blanton

In our March issue we commented on an e-mail from Kariei Robinson:

.. I would like to take you up on your challenge as a telepathic... I can send messages and thoughts...similar to voice overs and I work with N.a.s.a.... I have about 4/6 ratio .. after dealing with a guy ..who is somewhat renown.. his name is john benneth and I believe i can perform the task formerly in front of you and your team for the 12,000.

Robinson went on in more detail about this ability to communicate by telepathic means. I proposed a simple test and invited Robinson to journey to Dallas and give a demonstration. It's a good thing this invitation went unspent, because I would have been considerably embarrassed.

I had assumed from the spelling of the name that Kariei was a girl. Was I wrong! But, how was I to know? I'm not *psychic*.

An e-mail from Bruce Press quickly set me straight.

...

I did a cursory Google search on Mr Robinson and as I found reference to his claims in your newsletter, I thought it would benefit you to have a report of our interactions with him.

I'll start with the end, however, after numerous communications and a scheduled demonstration date/time agreed on, Mr Robinson was a no-show. He is now prohibited from applying to us again for at least a year.

...

Bruce Press

Chair, Independent Investigations Groups DC Affiliate

<http://www.centerforinquiry.net/dc>

<http://www.iigwest.com/>

Bruce and also James Underdown of the Center for Inquiry-Los Angeles have suggested that organizations that offer prizes, as does the NTS Paranormal Challenge, should share information on cranks who just want to have a little fun at our expense.

I am in agreement with this approach. While we have had a number of serious challengers, some applicants appear to be in need of professional help. In such cases, our methods would do more harm to the individual than we care to be responsible for. For the others, we need to show them the door as quickly as possible.

Additional information about the NTS Paranormal Challenge and some interesting exchanges can be found at the links below.



References:

Challenge from Kariei Robinson:

<http://ntskeptics.org/2011/2011march/march2011.htm#challenge>

NTS Paranormal Challenge:

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/challenge/challenge.htm>

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.

Good Friday: marking the death of Tennessee senate bill 893.

The date of its resurrection cannot be foretold, but its inevitable. After all, Tennessee is where John Scopes was convicted of teaching Darwin's theory of evolution 86 years ago. Had it been enacted, Senate Bill 893, would have required state and local educational authorities to "assist teachers to find effective ways to present the science curriculum as it addresses scientific controversies" and permit teachers to "help students understand, analyze, critique, and review in an objective manner the scientific strengths and scientific weaknesses of existing scientific theories covered in the course being taught." Hmm! I could do that, depending on exactly what theories were talking about, and what is meant by "an objective manner," and I wouldn't need any help. The only theories the bill mentions are biological evolution, the chemical origins of life, global warming and human cloning. I could certainly teach those in an objective manner. What's more, the bill says it would protect teachers from discipline if

they "help students understand, analyze, critique, and review in an objective manner the scientific strengths and scientific weaknesses of existing scientific theories covered in the course." Hey, I'm a perfect fit.

Martin Rees: the Templeton Prize continues to evolve.

First awarded to Mother Theresa in 1972, the Templeton prize is awarded annually to a living person for "affirming life's spiritual dimension. Winners were typically well-known religious figures such as Billy Graham. The prize was established by Sir John Templeton, an American-born British investor who moved to Bermuda to avoid the income tax. He was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II in 1987 for his philanthropic efforts. Currently at 1,000,000, it is the largest annual financial award to an individual for intellectual accomplishment. Templeton, who specified only that it be larger than the Nobel Prize, apparently had an epiphany in 1999 when the prize went to physicist Ian Barbour. Almost every recipient of the prize since has been a physicist or an astronomer. Templeton died in 2008. There was speculation that his son would return to more conventional religious figures, but it continues to go almost entirely to physicists and astronomers. The winner this year is astrophysicist, Martin Rees, Baron of Ludlow, and President of the Royal Society. But Rees takes the prize one step further, describing himself as "not-religious." Others describe him as an atheist.

Cell phones: FCC chairman says they pose no health risks.

Julius Genachowski made that assertion to the Economic Club of Washington when asked whether he was worried about health risks from close contact with cell phones. Although the Wireless Association also insists that mobile phones are safe, the major cellular carriers continue to warn consumers of possible risks. This is known as "covering your ass." Even Deborah Davis, author of *Disconnect*, acknowledges in the last page that there is "no epidemic of brain tumors", but insists more research is needed. As an experimental physicist I would never argue against more research, but neither would I write a book on the risk in the absence of any evidence.

Microwave radiation: do cell phones cause brain cancer?

I've been living in the past, grouching about the failure of "the media" to expose the public to the facts about cell phone radiation and cancer. That used to mean a trusted figure like Walter Cronkite on the evening news, a segment on *60 Minutes* or *Sunday Morning*, and an in depth feature in the *New York Times*. Television news is now kept busy keeping us informed about celebrities checking into rehab; print news now means an army of bloggers. The best coverage of the cell phone thing so far was an article this week in the *New York Times Magazine* by Siddhartha Mukherjee, "Do Cell Phones Cause Brain Cancer?" In the age of twittering I don't know if

anyone still reads 17 page articles, but Mukherjee remains calm through it all and in the end concludes the evidence is far from convincing. That's the way it is with epidemiology, always a little wishy-washy. It's like deciding the winner of the Super Bowl by a show of hands from the crowd.

Help me doctor! My brain is activated and I don't even own a cell phone.

My problems started a week ago when I read an article by Kate Murphy in the *New York Times*, "Cell Phone Radiation May Alter Your Brain. Let's Talk." I'm ready Doc. It began with a study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* last month that found that using a cell phone held against your head "activates" your brain. What does that mean? Maybe I should look into it, I thought. I found thousands of papers on brain activation but I didn't know where to start. Are we talking about the right brain or the left brain? I hope it's the right brain. It contains the fifth brain circuit which is a holistic, superconscious state and is a major goal of Tantric rituals. I can't go into those rituals here. Let's just say my interest was, uh, aroused (ha-ha!). Opening the fifth brain circuit, represented by Tiphareth in the Tree of Life, brings the feeling of bliss, a vision of wholeness, and the ability to see holistically. Uh, I don't think this is helping.

Cell phones: environmental health trust mocks Albert Einstein.

It's not exactly a work of art, but I recently came across an image taken from the famous photo of Albert Einstein sticking his tongue out at the cameraman. A different gesture would be used today. The caption was, "CAN'T CALL IT A SMART PHONE, IF IT KILLS BRAIN CELLS." I wasn't amused. It was put out by the Environmental Health Trust, a nonprofit educational foundation founded by Devra Davis. She is the author of *Disconnect* a recklessly irresponsible book that falsely claims that radiation from cell phones causes serious health problems, including cancer. It is particularly offensive that Einstein's image was used for such a purpose. It was Einstein who pointed out in 1905 that microwave radiation is not ionizing, for which he was awarded the 1921 Nobel Prize in Physics. I pointed this out 10 years ago in an editorial I wrote at the request of the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*, "Cellular Telephones and Cancer: How Should

Events Calendar

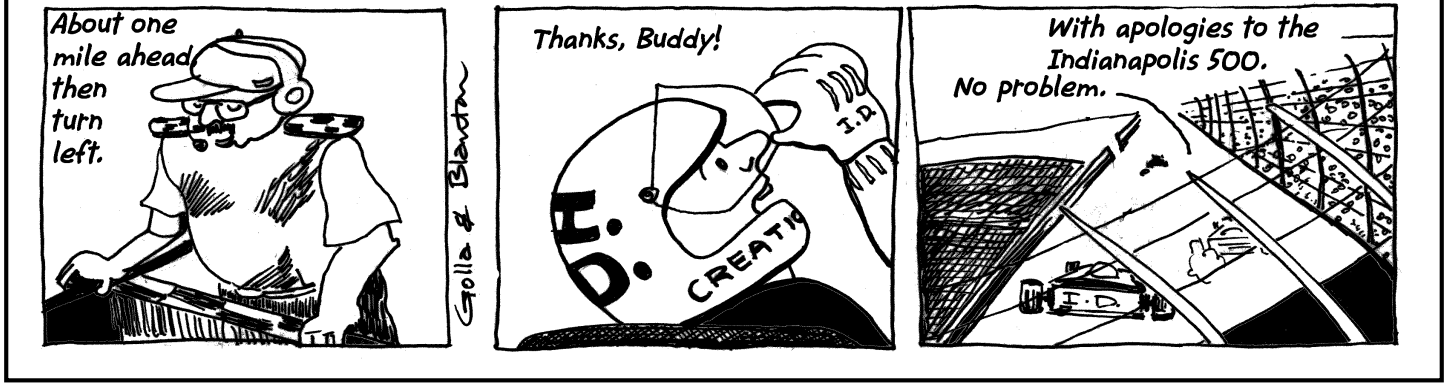
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If you plan to attend, please call or use the Web link: <http://www.meetup.com/North-Texas-Skeptics/>

We sometimes cancel or change these events.

214.335.9248

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Science Respond?" It is too late to apologize to Dr. Einstein, but I expect a full apology from Dr. Davis.

British UFO files: the truth is still out there -

Yesterday, the British National Archives released thousands of pages of files related to UFO sightings. The only mystery is why this crap was kept secret or kept at all. It served only to fuel the UFO myth. Within hours of the release, a new cover-up had emerged. The British government admitted that the files on the Rendlesham Forest Incident have disappeared. That must be the file with the unequivocal evidence of a space-alien conspiracy. I was sympathetic. A decade earlier, pressured by Rep. Stephen Schiff (NM), the US Air Force sent everything it had on UFOs, to the US National Archives in a number of huge wooden crates. Along with a historian, I was asked to be present when the crates were opened and verify that the contents were not tampered with. In addition to paper, there were films and photographs and some hardware. Much of it seemed to have little or no connection to the UFO controversy. That so much could have been made of so little, indeed of nothing at all, continues to amaze me.

Epidemiology: relatively inexpensive UK study says it all.

There has been no increase in brain cancers in the UK since the proliferation of mobile phones in the 1990s. This firm conclusion comes from a study released by the University of Manchester this week. All the researchers required were laptops to access publicly available data from the UK Office of National Statistics. Contrast that with the 10 year, \$14 million case-control study of cell phone use in 13 countries carried out by the World Health Organization. The costly study seemed unable to draw any firm conclusions, <http://bobpark.physics.umd.edu/WN10/wn052110.html> . An important branch of medicine, epidemiology is concerned with the distribution of disease, but in the case of electromagnetic radiation (EMF) it got off to a bad start. In 1976 an unemployed epidemiologist, armed with a list of addresses of childhood leukemia victims, drove around Denver looking for

common environmental factors. She saw a lot of power lines. Environmentalists saw brain cancer. Tort lawyers saw class-action lawsuits. Epidemiologists saw full employment. But cell-phone radiation just doesn't cause cancer. Do cell phones have any observable effect on our brain? Let's see.

Microwaving the brain: is there an observable effect?

Cell phones went from zero to ubiquity in a single decade. *The Journal of the American Medical Association* this week reported an NIH study of 47 healthy recruits injected with a glucose solution and then exposed for 50 min to radiation from a hand-held mobile phone. The side of the head the phone was held against was switched randomly. Positron Emission Tomography (PET) scans exhibited changes associated with glucose metabolism on the side of the brain closest to the cell phone. This was said to demonstrate that exposure to cell phone radiation activates the brain, but "the clinical significance of this finding is unknown." Hmm, that's sort of limp. I am hopeful that someone will explain to me how the effects of metabolism are distinguished from changes in blood flow associated with thermoregulation. The only effect of microwave photons is to excite molecular vibrations (heat). Blood serves as a coolant to keep the temperature of the brain nearly constant in spite of cell phone radiation.

Monarchy: is there no cure for this affliction?

In seeking news on the Endeavor non-launch I found the US news media almost totally focused on the royal wedding. It particularly pains me to watch Americans fawning over the monarchy we fought a war to get rid of, and if I hear "fairytale" mentioned one more time I may become violent.

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

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