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In this month's issue:

- [The Stargazers Strike Back](#)
- [MIOS](#)
- [Court Opinion Spoke Well for Science](#)

The Stargazers Strike Back

Astrologers Look Sharp and Play the Market

By Patricia King

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Nancy Reagan did a lot for astrology, and not all of it good. Once her penchant for stargazing became public several years ago, pundits everywhere placed tongues firmly in cheeks. And the cheeks of serious astrologists turned crimson. "The way the media deal with astrology," explains Robert Hand, president of Astrolabe, Inc., a company that develops computer software incorporating astrology, "is to put on the laugh track."

In the past astrologers would have simmered in silence. No longer. The 2,000-strong Association for Astrological Networking now reviews press coverage for derogatory comments and has sent the media lists of reputable astrologers who can cast the profession in a fairer light. Otherwise, says Hand, the press "seeks out the weirdest practitioners as spokespeople." By contrast, the new breed of astrologers boast of their staid offices and their decidedly nonmystical approach to their craft. "We are not," says Florida astrologer Jan Walsek, "women who hang onto superstitions and watch soap operas all day. We are professionals with a body of knowledge that enables us to render advice."

Nowhere is the new breed more in evidence than in business circles, where sophisticated software is stirring an astrological boom of sorts. At last month's Second World Conference of Astro-Economics in Chicago, the star was Astrolabe's new \$1,995 software that calculates "astro indicators" for every trading bent from gold to T-bills. Wall Street astrologer Arch Crawford has pioneered his own method. In 1987 Crawford warned that a "horrendous crash" would come after a market top around Aug. 24, when five planets formed a "grand trine" with Jupiter. The actual top was Aug. 25, followed by Black Monday in October.

Wall Street may be more tolerant than the law. Jolted into action in 1983 when a San Jose, Calif., astrologer was arrested on two charges of "fortunetelling," AFAN now provides legal counseling for astrologers who fight sporadically enforced laws that ban or restrict astrology.

Worst enemy: But there are limits to the mainstreaming of astrology. For one thing, astrologers resist the new button-

down image. Says Marion March, founder of Aquarius Workshops in Encino, Calif.: "We are our own worst enemy. We still have people running around making stupid predictions that are meaningless." AFAN monitors astrologers who promise instant wealth as zealously as it monitors the media.

But AFAN has not had much luck swaying scientists. "Whether they wear a business suit makes no difference," says Ivan Kelly of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal. "Scientists won't buy the new image." Maybe not, but a lot of other Americans do. A 1988 survey for the National Science Foundation found that 38 percent believed astrology to be "very scientific" or "sort of scientific." Six percent confessed to changing their plans to fit their horoscopes' omens. Of course many devotees, like Nancy Reagan, try to keep it quiet. One Colorado businessman says he wouldn't think of confessing publicly that he consulted the stars before starting several successful businesses. And it's not just that he's afraid of being labeled kooky. "You put [astrology] in perspective," he says, "it becomes a tool. If you have a competitive tool, why give it to someone else?"

[\[Back to top\]](#)

MIOS

By John Blanton

The Metroplex Institute of Origin Science (MIOS) is a local group that claims scientific validity for creationism. At every MIOS meeting there is at least one Skeptic, and we try to keep you informed of their latest claims and developments.

The April MIOS program was billed as a discussion by vice chairman Don Patton on "The Laws of Thermodynamics (devastating evidence against a naturalistic explanation of life, evolution, the universe.)" We were less than devastated.

Don, making use of a high quality, computer-generated slide presentation that would be the envy of a lot of corporate executives, ran up most of the arguments creationists use under this heading:

1. Things do not get better on their own, they get worse (implying, we were led to understand, that life might spontaneously get shabby and even disappear from this Earth, but it would not develop and thrive on its own).
2. Life forms represent thermodynamic systems which, according to the famous second law of thermodynamics, must not decrease in entropy (implying that developing life forms represent an increase in organization and a decrease in entropy, something which should not happen without an outside source adjusting the system with his finger).
3. The information needed to construct a living creature (said information being contained within the genetic material of the life form) is simply too complex to have been formed by accident from the disorganized elements in the atmosphere and the oceans (implying that life forms did not originate spontaneously from a lifeless environment).

Don's first point is unarguable, since it really does not make any scientific claims. It is just Murphy's law working.

Don's second point (as he stated it in his presentation) ignored the correct statement of the second law, which pertains to closed systems. I agree that if any life form is put into a closed box without any interaction with the universe outside of the box, that life form will (given time) decline and fail.

Don's third point seemed groundless to the Skeptics sitting in the audience. He depicted the spontaneous creation of the genetic code for a specific, highly developed life form as being improbable to the point of being non-existent. None of us disagreed (although Don's math seemed a little off, I could not follow it closely enough to tell what I was seeing), but none of us had considered that a life form would get started so dramatically. David Dunn took such strong exception to this numerical razz-ma-tazz that he rebuked Don Patton severely during the question and answer period and called him a liar, which accusation Don took quite calmly, to his credit.

John Thomas (who has a degree in physics) and I (with only a couple of B's in thermodynamics) talked to creationist Clyde McKnight afterward. Clyde exhibited a thorough comprehension of the scientific aspects of the evening's program, and later that week he sent me a copy of a paper from Physical Review that illustrated the tie-in between the classical second law of thermodynamics and Claude Shannon's information theory. I pondered how a man, who so had effortlessly put his hand on this technical paper, could hang onto conclusions that are in conflict with his scientific training.

At the May MIOS meeting, chairman Rich Summers announced that MIOS was planning to hold a debate on creation science with delegates from the NTS at one of their future meetings. "We enjoy a debate," he stated. So do we, Rich. No program was billed for the May meeting, but, after discussing organizational matters, vice chairman Don Patton announced startling revelations concerning the "Burdick Track."

The "Burdick Track" is a fossil track that was removed from the Glen Rose limestone in the 1940's by a local inhabitant and kept in his possession until he passed away. It is not supposed to be one of the fake tracks carved in the limestone to attract tourism during the 1930's. In any event, the implication is that this is the track of a human foot and that it demonstrates that people and dinosaurs lived at the same time. This was the fossil that would put the lie to scientific geology and, thereby, to evolution.

So that was it. Evolution was dead. Killed not by layer after layer of Permian sediment deposited on top of Jurassic stone, not by a fossil australopithecine skull lodged in the petrified jaws of a tyrannosaur, not even by the bones of a jawed fish embedded within a mass of Cambrian rock. No, modern geology, evolution, even large bodies of the sciences of physics and astronomy had been done in by a piece of stone that's presumably been kicking around somebody's garage for over forty years. Text books would have to be rewritten, research papers would have to be withdrawn (many posthumously), and geologists and biologists would have to find other lines of work. Provided this really were a human footprint in Cretaceous limestone.

In response to questions about the authenticity of this track, MIOS has had the fossil sectioned (using a lapidary saw) to demonstrate that the material under the pressure points of the footprint exhibits signs of being compressed (signs which are not likely to be there if the footprint were carved). On this night, Don was showing photographs of the fossil and the new cross-sections. Being a Skeptic, I was a little hard to convince. NTS Secretary Mark Meyer was sitting with me in the audience, and I told him, "That doesn't even look like a human footprint" (it was much wider near the toes, making somewhat triangular in appearance). Wrong again, Mr. Skeptic. Don next threw up a photo of a man with a foot that looked very much like the print. Well, what could I say?

The most startling revelation came after the meeting. I could contain my curiosity no longer. Where did this fossil come from? Is there a left foot to go with this right foot? Is there even a whole trail of footprints? Alas, there was no answer. Don just had the piece of stone (now several pieces) and no field notes from the 40's to guide paleontologist to the site. There must be some scientific data on this remarkable piece of evidence.

"How old is this footprint?" I asked finally.

"About 110 millions years."

I was astounded. "You think there were people back then?"

"Oh, no. I don't believe that."

"Then who made the footprints in that 110-million year old rock?" I finally got Don Patton to admit that he really thought the rock was only 4500 years old and that the various layers were laid down about twelve hours apart by the daily tides during the great flood (maybe I'm in the wrong business).

Later Mark and I talked to Clyde McKnight about methods for dating rocks. While we indicated we thought radioactive decay methods provided the most reliable approach to computing the age of rocks, Dr. McKnight discounted them completely. He expressed the opinion that radioactive decay rates in times past had been much faster, making the rocks appear much older than he thought they ought to be.

MIOS has since published the photos of this fossil in their newsletter *Dino Trax*, which is available for interested people at NTS meetings.

I consistently come away from these meetings wondering, "Where is the science in creation science?" I see an undocumented fossil that may or may not be a human footprint being touted as the death knell of biological evolution. I see a pop-culture presentation that purports to refute evolution using well-respected laws of physics. I see postulated historic events or even variations in physical laws being invoked to account for conflicts between hypotheses and data. And I see no real research being performed, no papers being published, nothing concrete being proposed. I invite MIOS vice chairman Don Patton to deliver to our hands, for our study and comment, any statement of scientific principle that has been derived from creation science and by which they are willing to stand.

[\[Back to top\]](#)

Court Opinion Spoke Well for Science

By John Blanton

The 1982 decision in the case of Arkansas' Act 590 stands as a recent landmark in the struggle to keep pseudoscience out of the public schools. In that case, known as *McLean vs Arkansas Board of Education*, Federal Judge William R. Overton ruled that Act 590, requiring the treatment of "creation science" in the Arkansas public schools, was unconstitutional because "creation science" was based on religion and not on science. In his written opinion, Judge Overton not only reaffirmed the First Amendment to the Constitution, but he expressed a refreshing respect for science. One could only hope that some public school science teachers had the grasp for the essence of science that Judge Overton exhibits in his opinion.

One particular passage from Judge Overton's opinion cites the attempts of Pulaski County Special School District science curriculum administrator Marianne Wilson to find some science to teach from the creationist literature. The following is a reprint of that section of Judge Overton's opinion.

The full text of the court opinion is available from the North Texas Skeptics. Additionally, the full text and a number of essays on *Science and Creationism* by authors such as Isaac Asimov, Stephen Jay Gould and others can be found in a book by that name edited by Ashley Montagu and published by Oxford Press. *Science and Creationism* can be purchased for \$13.95 at The Bookstop, Taylor's Books and other local book stores.

Judge Overton's opinion:

The testimony of Marianne Wilson was persuasive evidence that creation science is not science. Ms. Wilson is in charge of the science curriculum for Pulaski County Special School District, the largest school district in the State of Arkansas. Prior to the passage of Act 590, Larry Fisher, a science teacher in the District, using materials from the ICR, convinced the School Board that it should voluntarily adopt creation science as part of its science curriculum. The District Superintendent assigned Ms. Wilson the job of producing a creation science curriculum guide. Ms. Wilson's testimony about the project was particularly convincing because she obviously approached the assignment with an open mind and no preconceived notions about the subject. She had not heard of creation science until about a year ago and did not know its meaning before she began her research.

Ms. Wilson worked with a committee of science teachers appointed from the District. They reviewed practically all of the creationist literature. Ms. Wilson and the committee members reached the unanimous conclusion that creationism is not science; it is religion. They so reported to the Board. The Board ignored the recommendation and insisted that a curriculum guide be prepared.

In researching the subject, Ms. Wilson sought the assistance of Mr. Fisher who initiated the Board Action and asked professors in the science departments of the University of Arkansas at Little Rock and the University of Central

Arkansas³⁰ for reference material and assistance, and attended a workshop conducted at Central Baptist College by Dr. Richard Bliss of the ICR staff. Act 590 became law during the course of her work so she used Section 4(a) as a format for her curriculum guide.

Ms. Wilson found all available creationists' materials unacceptable because they were permeated with religious references and reliance upon religious beliefs.

It is easy to understand why Ms. Wilson and other educators find the creationists' textbook material and teaching guides unacceptable. The materials misstate the theory of evolution in the same fashion as Section 4(b) of the Act, with emphasis on the alternative mutually exclusive nature of creationism and evolution. Students are constantly encouraged to compare and make a choice between the two models, and the material is not presented in an accurate manner.

A typical example is *Origins* (Px 76) by Richard B. Bliss, Director of Curriculum Development of the ICR. The presentation begins with a chart describing "preconceived ideas about origins" which suggests that some people believe that evolution is atheistic. Concepts of evolution, such as "adaptive radiation," are erroneously presented. At page 11, figure 1.6, of the text, a chart purports to illustrate this "very important" part of the evolution model. The chart conveys the idea that such diverse mammals as a whale, bear, bat and monkey all evolved from a shrew through the process of adaptive radiation. Such a suggestion is, of course, a totally erroneous and misleading application of the theory. Even more objectionable, especially when viewed in light of the emphasis on asking the student to elect one of the models, is the chart presentation at page 17, figure 1.6. That chart purports to illustrate the evolutionist's belief that man evolved from bacteria to fish to reptile to mammals and, thereafter, into man. The illustration indicates, however, that the mammal from which man evolved was a rat.

*Biology, A Search For Order in Complexity*³¹ is a high school biology text typical of creationist's materials. The following quotations are illustrative:

"Flowers and roots do not have mind to have purpose of their own; therefore, this planning must have been done for them by the Creator."

-at page 12 "The exquisite beauty of color and shape in flowers exceeds the skill of poet, artist, and king. Jesus said (from Matthew's gospel), 'consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin ...'"

-Px 129 at page 363

The "public school edition" texts written by creationists simply omit Biblical references but the content and message remain the same. For example, *Evolution -- The Fossils Say No!*³², contains the following:

"Creation. By creation we mean the bringing into being by a supernatural Creator of the basic kinds of plants and animals by the process of sudden, or fiat, creation.

"We do not know how the Creator created, what processes He used, *for He used processes which are not now operating anywhere in the natural universe*. This is why we refer to creation as Special Creation. We cannot discover by scientific investigation anything about the creative processes used by the Creator."

-page 40

Gish's book also portrays the large majority of evolutionists as "materialistic atheists or agnostics."

Scientific Creationism (Public School Edition) by Morris, is another text reviewed by Ms. Wilson's committee and rejected as unacceptable. The following quotes illustrate the purpose and theme of the text:

"Forward"

"Parents and youth leaders today, and even many scientists and educators, have become concerned about the prevalence and influence of evolutionary philosophy in modern curriculum. Not only is this system inimical to orthodox Christianity and Judaism, but also as many are convinced, to healthy society and true science as well." -at page iii

...

"The rationalist of course finds the concept of special creation insufferably naive, even 'incredible'. Such a judgment, however, is warranted only if one categorically dismisses the existence of an omnipotent God."

-at page 17

Without using creationist literature, Ms. Wilson was unable to locate one genuinely scientific article or work which supported Section 4(a). In order to comply with the mandate of the Board she used such materials as an article from Readers Digest about "atomic clocks" which inferentially suggested that the earth was less than 4 1/2 billion years old. She was unable to locate any substantive teaching material for some parts of Section 4 such as the worldwide flood. The curriculum guide which she prepared cannot be taught and has no educational value as science. The defendants did not produce any text or writing in response to this evidence which they claimed was usable in the public school classroom.³³

{Footnotes from the original court opinion:}

30. Ms. Wilson stated that some professors she spoke with sympathized with her plight and tried to help her find scientific materials to support Section 4(a). Others simply asked her to leave.

31. Px 129, published by Zonderman Publishing House (1974), states that it was "prepared by the Textbook Committee of the Creation Research Society." It has a disclaimer pasted inside the front cover stating that it is not suitable for use in public schools.

32. Px 77, by Duane Gish.

33. The passage of Act 590 apparently caught a number of its supporters off guard as much as it did the school district. The Act's author, Paul Ellwanger, stated in a letter to "Dick," (apparently Dr. Richard Bliss at ICR): "And finally, if you know of any textbooks at any level and for any subjects that you think are acceptable to you and also constitutionally admissible, these are things that would be of enormous value to these bewildered folks who may be caught, as Arkansas now has been, by the sudden need to implement a whole new ball game with which they are quite unfamiliar." (sic) (Unnumbered attachment to Ellwanger depo.)

[\[Back to top\]](#)