



Selected articles from  
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## Hardly a prayer on ABC-TV's *20/20 Downtown*

by Gary P. Posner

(Posted [here](#))

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## Teaching Evolution

Jack H. Robinson, Ed.D.

In a recent editorial entitled "Darwinian Theory and Its Critics," the *Tampa Tribune* concluded, "We are not suggesting that evolution should not be taught; indeed we believe anyone ignorant of evolution cannot understand science. But if science is a method of seeking knowledge, it seems clear that the study of different theories explaining the origins and evolution of life is nothing to fear."

This conclusion was based in part on polls showing that a strong majority of people "support the teaching of evolution," but almost as many people say that "biology teachers should teach both Darwinism and scientific evidence against Darwinian theory." The *Tribune* also cited [A Scientific Dissent on Darwinism](#), a declaration by 100 scientists who are "skeptical of claims for the ability of random mutation and natural selection to account for the complexity of life."

These 100 scientists "accept the idea that the Earth is billions of years old." Nevertheless, in spite of this long time for natural selection to work, "they theorize that Earth must be the work of an intelligent designer," called God by some people.

The *Tribune* admits that "some of these scientists are motivated to seek explanations out of religious

devotion," but "their theory makes no overtly religious claims."

However, the assumption of an intelligent designer/God is a religious claim! It's not a rational, scientific inference because there is no way to test it.

Why should skeptics be suspicious that the 100 dissenting scientists may be motivated primarily by religious bias? One clue is that their spokesman, Henry Schaefer, is a chemist, not a biologist or paleontologist.

Now, what about the *Tribune's* assertion that "there seems little to be gained from not also teaching theories critical of evolution"? If there were truly scientific theories critical of evolution, not just religious "theories" in disguise, that would certainly be desirable. Nowadays, however, thousands of biologists, paleontologists and other qualified scientists agree that evolution did take place, and that Darwin's theory plus recent additions and amendments to it do successfully explain the origin and evolution of life on Earth. The general opinion of qualified scientists is that the evidence in favor of Darwinism is overwhelming.

There is no need to assume the existence of a designer/god. In fact, such an assumption begs the question and tends to stifle fruitful research. Anyone who understands "Occam's razor" would agree on this point.

William of Occam advocated one of the ideas most useful to modern science: "Entities should not be multiplied unnecessarily." Or, as Isaac Newton expressed the same idea, "We are to admit no more causes of natural things than such as are both true and sufficient to explain their appearances."

On the other hand, maybe there would be some benefit in teaching about arguments against Darwinian evolution as well as arguments in its favor -- if these lessons also included arguments for and against the other "theories" proposed to explain the development of life on Earth, e.g., arguments against creationism.

This would be a good way to teach how scientists think and how science works.

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## **Miss Cleo in more hot water**

As reported by the Associated Press on October 31, the Florida company responsible for the "Miss Cleo" psychic infomercials and hotlines continues to run afoul of the law. Access Resource Services, also known as the Psychic Readers Network (PRN), has now been accused of violating New York's "Do Not Call" telemarketing law more than 100 times in the past seven months, and may be subject to as much as \$224,000 in fines.

Access-PRN is accused of misleading customers into thinking they can get a "free" psychic reading. But the "psychics" can only be reached by dialing a "900" number at \$3.99 per minute. "This so-called 'psychic' service appears to be a scam to keep people on the telephone for as long as possible," said C. Adrienne Rhodes, executive director of the Consumer Protection Board. New Yorkers can

sign up on a registry that prohibits unsolicited calls from marketers at certain hours, and also prohibits companies from making aggressive, confusing sales pitches over the telephone.

## Snippets



Despite Don Addis' cartoon (above), in an article entitled "Psychics join the manhunt," a major British newspaper reports that U.S. intelligence agencies are reactivating some of their old paranormal spies from the 1970s "Stargate" program, which was an attempt to utilize "remote viewers" in the fight against communism. The job now at hand: finding Osama bin Laden and predicting future terrorist attacks. Prudence Calabrese, whose Transdimensional Systems employs 14 remote viewers (who claim to be able to visualize happenings in distant places), confirmed that the FBI had asked the company to predict likely targets of future terrorist attacks. "Our reports suggest a sports stadium could be a likely target." The FBI and CIA refused to comment but confirmed investigators have been told to "think out of the box." Angela Thompson-Smith and Lyn Buchanan, former members of Stargate, said that they, too, had been approached. Stargate, based at the Stanford Research Institute in California, was shut down in 1995 after the end of the cold war.

(*London Sunday Times*, Nov. 11)

You may wish to catch a haunting glimpse of Thomas Rowe and his lover Lucinda at the Don Cesar hotel on St. Pete. Beach. And if you see them, be sure to capture the moment on film or tape, because you would qualify for TBS's "\$1,000 Challenge" prize, since both died long ago. Ditto the little boy haunting the Bruklis family's home in Tampa. You can read all sorts of *True Stories of*

*Hauntings Across America* in a new book by that name.

(*St. Pete. Times*, Oct. 28)

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Agents from several government agencies, including U.S. Customs and HHS, seized boxes of "alternative cancer therapy" materials from the Medical Center for Preventative and Nutritional Medicine, located in Carrollwood. Dave Levi, owner of the clinic, observed, "It seems the medical establishment does not like what's being done [at the clinic]. It's a shame, because they help a lot of people." The forms of "help" offered by the clinic include, among other modalities, chelation and colonic therapy, therapeutic massage, and bioenergetic medicine.

(*St. Pete. Times*, Oct. 12)

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The September 11 terrorist attack spurred all sorts of spurious claims and urban legends, most of which were quickly debunked in the press with the assistance of organizations such as CSICOP. A [dubious image of "Satan"](#) in the smoke of the World Trade Center received 10 column-inches on page A-3 of the Tampa Tribune, perhaps in part because it was taken by former Tribune photographer Mark D. Phillips. "The idea of me concocting this to create hysteria is not something I would ever consider -- ever," said Phillips, after selling the photograph (which he took from his New York home) to the Associated Press.

(*Tampa Tribune*, Oct. 1)

Update: The photographer, Mark Phillips, informs TBS of the following:

I sold the photograph to the AP as a news photograph of the worst event I ever shot, and none of us saw the "face" in the photograph when I first sent it. It wasn't until it was published in numerous newspapers (including the Tampa Tribune) that anyone realized there was anything odd in the photo - - beside the fact that it showed the World Trade Center afire.

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"I don't see dead people. But I'm getting a letter. It's an F . . . a word that starts with F. Fat? Fools? Fraud?" So began TV critic Walt Belcher's column about the Sci-Fi Channel's *Crossing Over with John Edward*. Observed Belcher, "The charismatic Edward channels vibes all the time that aren't so clear. He will see a 'B' and ask if anyone in his audience has lost a relative whose name starts with B. Sure enough, there will be an Uncle Bob, or Aunt Beatrice or Cousin Betty. It seems the spirit world can't send out a whole name at once. The letters trickle out until the full name is supplied by the living, who are eager to believe that Edward sees dead people." But Belcher isn't buying: "I admit it. I'm a skeptic. I think Edward is a slick artist who is gifted at what is known in ghostbusters circles as 'cold readings.'" He then cites CSICOP's Joe Nickel, who has thoroughly debunked Edward in the pages of *Skeptical Inquirer* and elsewhere. Yet, not only is Edward's Sci-Fi show thriving, it is being syndicated to other stations around the country (including Ch. 44 locally), and he has a yearlong

waiting list of private clients who pay \$300 per session.

(*Tampa Tribune*, Sept. 4)

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And as for those who aren't quite dead, Barbara Rommer, a Fort Lauderdale physician, has written a new book, *Blessing in Disguise*, about near-death experiences (NDEs) gone awry. "If [in their religious beliefs] they're threatened with hellfire and brimstone," says Rommer of those patients who have experienced less-than-positive NDEs, "subconsciously that's what they project to the cosmos [during their NDE]. If you expect it to be fearful, it will be fearful." So, Rommer believes NDEs to be fantasies, right? Wrong: "I feel there absolutely is another realm. I really feel so sad that in this day and age, most people really, really fear death. It makes such a difference when you know that you don't die."

(Cox News Service via *Tampa Tribune*, Sept. 4)

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## **TBS in the Media**

Gary Posner has been interviewed about "Past Lives" for a PAX-TV series called *Forbidden Secrets*, which is supposed to air this fall or winter.

While recently in Atlanta for a conference co-sponsored by CSICOP, Posner was interviewed on several topics for an upcoming TV series about the paranormal, to be carried on the Discovery Science Channel. CSICOP is playing an integral role in the production of the series.

The *Ladies' Home Journal* article about prayer studies, mentioned last time, was originally slated for publication in the December issue, but has been delayed. The writer says that the article may appear in a later *LHJ* issue, or perhaps in a different periodical.

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