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Press Contacts:

Dennis Wagner, Executive Director

Phone: 719-633-1772

Email: [dwagner@arn.org](mailto:dwagner@arn.org)

or Kevin Wirth, Director of Media Relations

Phone: 360-990-5422

Email: [kwirth@arn.org](mailto:kwirth@arn.org)

Website: see [www.arn.org/top10](http://www.arn.org/top10) for web version with hyperlinks to source information on the top ten stories of

## Top 10 Darwin and Design News Stories for 2008

**Colorado Springs, CO (Dec 22, 2008)** – Following are the Top 10 Darwin and Design news stories for 2008 as selected by the staff at Access Research Network.

**1. The Altenberg 16.** Freelance reporter Suzan Mazur ([Scoop, March 4](#)) pulls back the veil on one of evolution's little known secrets—Darwinism is dead as a theory of evolution: “It's not Yasgur's Farm, but what happens at the Konrad Lorenz Institute in Altenberg, Austria this July promises to be far more transforming for the world than Woodstock. What it amounts to is a gathering of 16 biologists and philosophers of rock star stature—let's call them ‘the Altenberg 16’—who recognize that the theory of evolution which most practicing biologists accept and which is taught in classrooms today, is inadequate in explaining our existence. It's pre the discovery of DNA, lacks a theory for body form and does not accommodate ‘other’ new phenomena.” Mazur explores the views of the Altenberg 16 “self-organization proponents” and their attack on Darwinism as they desperately search for another materialistic explanation for life in a six-part [E-Book](#). The Altenberg Summit Proceedings are to be published by MIT Press in 2009.

**2. Atheists and Agnostics Defend ID.** Darwin v. Design public debates took an interesting turn in 2008 as atheists and agnostics took up the torch for ID and Christians went to bat for Darwin. This surprising role reversal was most evident at a November 7 [debate in Texas](#) where agnostic Dr. David Berlinski, a well-know skeptic of Darwinism, and Dr. Bradley Monton, an atheist philosopher of physics both defended intelligent design while theistic evolutionist Dr. Denis Alexander, a biochemist and editor of *Science & Christian Belief*, and well-known atheist and physicist Dr. Lawrence Krauss defended evolution. Monton explains in a [podcast interview](#) why intelligent design deserves a place at the table in the scientific debate, despite extreme pressure to the contrary from his Darwinist peers. Another example of this trend was agnostic philosopher and sociologist Steve Fuller's defense of ID in his newest book [Dissent over Descent](#) and the ensuing [public debate](#) about the book in the online pages of the [New Humanist](#). Meanwhile atheist New York University Law professor Thomas Nagel authors an [article](#) defending the constitutionality of teaching ID.

**3. Expelled #1 Political Documentary of 2008.** Ben Stein's [Expelled](#) rolled out in 1,000 theaters across the U.S. on April 18 and quickly climbed to the [number 1 political documentary of 2008](#). Citizens across the nation learned the cold truth that academic freedom and free speech are not so “free” when it comes to doubting Darwin. While the major news outlets viciously attacked the movie (understandable since the film identifies the media as part of the problem), the film revealed a systematic, unfair, and deeply un-American suppression of criticisms of Darwinian theory and distortion of any alternative thought in the academy. In response to the film over 17,000 people have signed the petition at [www.academicfreedompetition.com](http://www.academicfreedompetition.com).

**4. Louisiana Academic Freedom Act.** Just two months after *Expelled* hit the theaters, the Louisiana state senate passed a landmark academic freedom bill with a 36-0 vote, protecting teachers that encourage critical thinking and objective discussion about evolution and other scientific topics. Known as the Louisiana Science Education Act, the bill was previously passed by the state's House of Representatives with a 94-3 vote. This year, [six states](#) have considered academic freedom legislation designed to protect teachers who teach both the scientific strengths and weaknesses of evolutionary theory.

**5. Biologic Institute Releases Stylus: A System for Evolutionary Experimentation.** Scientists working at the [Biologic Institute](#), where researchers are exploring intelligent design concepts in biology from experimental, computational, and theoretical perspectives, published a peer-reviewed paper in *PLoS One* (June 4) on their state-of-the-art open-source evolution simulation program, [Stylus](#). Over the past decade there has been considerable hype about computer simulations of Darwinian evolution. The most hyped is [Avida](#) at the MSU Digital Evolution Laboratory. Avida researchers [claim](#) their work is not a simulation, but actually is Darwinian evolution in action. Why is Stylus significant? Researcher Douglas Axe [explains](#) that if realism is important, Stylus shows how far Avida falls short as an "instance of evolution." Stylus is also going to open new avenues of research into how much or how little organisms can evolve and whether it really is possible to go from the simplest building blocks of life to the more complex and necessary functions of life without any guiding intelligence at all.

**6. A Molecular Clutch Discovered in the Flagella.** The rotary motor in the *E. coli* bacteria has long been the poster child of intelligent design theorists. Their case became more compelling in 2008 as scientists reported in the [June 20 issue of Science](#) the discovery of a nanotechnology clutch that disengages the bacterium flagellum's tail from the engine that powers its rotation. The clutch "solution" is a neat, effective and potentially reversible mechanism. The researchers have identified a gene *epsE* responsible for making the EpsE protein which engages with the critical protein transmitting torque to the flagellum and removing the link to the source of power. The measure of complexity is in the unique shape of the EpsE protein and its ability to engage with the torque-transmitting protein so that power is no longer transmitted. The team is now "looking for a protein that disengages the clutch and reconnects the motor." The science community is well aware that nanotechnology successes are achieved only by the application of sophisticated science and intelligent engineering design.

**7. Royal Society Expels Director of Education.** Illustrating that academic freedom regarding origins is a worldwide problem, the British Royal Society [expelled](#) its Director of Education in September for stating that [students should be exposed to concepts of creation and evolution](#). Professor Michael Reiss, speaking at the British Association Festival of Science at the University of Liverpool, estimated that about one in 10 children was from a family which supported a creationist rather than evolutionary viewpoint. He said his experience had led him to believe it was more effective to include discussion about creationism alongside scientific theories such as the Big Bang and evolution—rather than simply giving the impression that such children were wrong. Reacting to his stepping down, Lord Robert Winston, professor of science and society at Imperial College London, said: "I fear that in this action the Royal Society may have only diminished itself: "This is not a good day for the reputation of science or scientists."

**8. Leading Biologists Marvel at the "Irreducible Complexity" of the Ribosome.** In January 2008 the [transcripts](#) from the "Life: What a Concept" meeting at Eastover Farm in Bethlehem, CT the previous summer were released. Craig Venter, a leader in genomics and the Human Genome Project, stated: "We talked about the ribosome; we tried to make synthetic ribosomes, starting with the genetic code and building them—the ribosome is such an incredibly beautiful complex entity, you can make synthetic ribosomes, but they don't function totally yet. Nobody knows how to get ones that can actually do protein synthesis." George Church, Director of the Center for Computational Genetics, similarly marveled at the complexity of the ribosome: "The ribosome, both looking at the past and at the future, is a very significant structure—it's the most complicated thing that is present in all organisms. Craig does comparative genomics, and you find that almost the only thing that's in common across all organisms is the ribosome. And it's recognizable; it's highly conserved. So the question is, how did that thing come to be? And if I were to be an intelligent design defender, that's what I would focus on; how did the ribosome come to be?"

**9. Have Cosmologists Lost Their Brains?** Naked brains floating in space, disconnected from reality – this describes the minds of some modern cosmologists, lamented Dennis Overbye in a [shocking article](#) in the [New York Times](#) January 15. While attempting to be sympathetic to the smart guys who can cover a blackboard with equations about higher dimensions, it was clear he was about to call these guys nuts. His title: "Big brain theory: have cosmologists lost theirs?" Some of the ideas being seriously proposed by cosmologists include: disconnected observers in space (of which you might be one, imagining you really are here on Earth); universes bubbling off in all directions all the time; universes that make observers in a snap;

reincarnation; and the possibility of a quantum fluctuation leading to a bang that would destroy us and the universe in a flash. According to Overbye, "If you are inclined to skepticism this debate might seem like further evidence that cosmologists, who gave us dark matter, dark energy and speak with apparent aplomb about gazillions of parallel universes, have finally lost their minds." Yet the article describes the opinions of leaders in the field: Alan Guth, Andrei Linde, Leonard Susskind, Lisa Dyson, and others, who debate their paradoxes and imaginative scenarios in all seriousness, run impressive calculations, and deduce alternate realities that could not be scientifically tested even in principle. At least intelligent design scientists attempt to work within the bounds of observable evidence (fine-tuning, irreducible complexity, the design filter, etc).

**10. Design-based Biomimetics Yields Tangible Results.** Biomimetic research is based on the premise that the natural world is information-rich and that reverse engineering methodologies are likely to be fruitful. The significance of two articles in the [22 February 2008 issue of Science](#) is that the natural world does not just provide examples of materials that are interesting to scientists and engineers—they demonstrate "mechanical design principles". Meanwhile the July 8 issue of [ScienceDaily](#) reported that engineers are turning to marine biology for insight into building better turbine blades and wings: "the shape of whale flippers with one bumpy edge has inspired the creation of a completely novel design for wind turbine blades. This design has been shown to be more efficient and also quieter, but defies traditional engineering theories." Apparently small bumps on the leading edge of the flippers create vortices as the whale moves through the water, and this uneven flow "helps to generate more lift without the occurrence of stall, as well as enhancing maneuverability and agility." Design-based methodologies in biomimetics are yielding tangible results.

**Honorable Mention.** The following stories just missed the top ten list and deserve honorable mention:

**Darwin's 'Tree of Life' Declared Not Scientific.** Lars Vogt contributed a thoughtful analysis of contemporary evolutionary thinking in the February issue of [Cladistics](#) with a paper entitled: "The Unfalsifiability of Cladograms and its Consequences" where he concludes "seeking phylogenetic trees does not represent a scientific endeavor and cladograms represent no scientific but metaphysical hypotheses."

**Paley's Watch Found in Bacteria.** A review article in [Science](#) (October 31) describes what is currently known about the circadian clock present in cyanobacteria. Proteins are the "moving parts" of the clock. The Authors describe "cogs and gears" in the "clockwork mechanism" evident in the Kai-ABC proteins. It keeps an accurate 24-hour cycle, releasing its energy for the next round in conjunction with feedback loops from the nucleus and cytoplasm. A clock with cogs, gears and ratchets that keeps accurate time—what more could William Paley wish for?

**'Junk' DNA Proves Functional.** An article in [PhysOrg](#) (November 4) is one among many this year that have claimed 'Junk' DNA now proves functional. Repetitive strands of DNA, seemingly lacking in information, have been shown to be crucial either in regulating genes or providing binding sites for RNA transcription machines. Another article in [Nature](#) (May 22) indicates a function for mouse pseudogenes in regulating gene expression by means of the RNA interference pathway.

**Two-Stroke Machine Discovered in the Cell.** [Two new papers](#) in the November 6 issue of the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* by a team at University of Maryland and College Park reveal that the GroEL-GroES chaperone is a large, complex protein shaped somewhat like a barrel with a lid and is no passive cavity. The system acts like a two-stroke engine with two timers.

**The Rise of the Non-material Neuroscience Movement.** An article in [New Scientist](#) (October 22) described a battle brewing over what controls your brain: nature or your mind. The article reviews the work of non-materialist researchers and scholars Jeffrey Schwartz, Mario Beauregard, Angus Menuge, J. P. Moreland and the Discovery Institute. The author commented on an experiment Schwartz used to support the independent existence of mind, saying, "these experiments are entirely consistent with mainstream neurology".

These stories and many more about the Darwin and Design debate can be found at Access Research Network ([www.arn.org](http://www.arn.org)), Creation-Evolution Headlines ([www.crev.info](http://www.crev.info)), and Evolution News and Reviews ([www.evolutionnews.org](http://www.evolutionnews.org)).

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