

Creationist deception: a response

Barry Williams

In September *the Skeptic* (18/3 pp.7-10) published an article of mine entitled "Creationist Deception Exposed", in which I accused the producers and the marketers of a creationist video tape, *From a Frog to a Prince*, of distorting an interview for crude political propaganda reasons, of seeking to damage the reputation of Professor Richard Dawkins and of betraying the trust of their own followers.

The producer of the video tape, Gillian Brown of Keziah Video Production, has written to *the Skeptic*, claiming that my article misrepresented her involvement and requesting a right of reply. Naturally, as a responsible publication, *the Skeptic* does not refuse anyone the right of reply if they claim we have misrepresented them. (I might add here that in this we differ markedly from creationist publications, which have on more than one past occasions, flatly refused to publish letters from me, correcting misrepresentations they have made of Australian Skeptics.)

Ms Brown has also published her complain on the internet and had part of it published in the November edition of *Prayer News*, a tabloid (in all senses) sheet produced by Answers in Genesis, the Australian distributors of the offending video tape. Curiously, this latter piece omits all questions from No 4-7 and 11-15 inclusive, for reasons that are not apparent. (That's the second point 11 in Ms Brown's complaint, not the first one. I intend to publish her complaint in full and unedited, except for an insertion Ms Brown had included after Q 16, concerning a conversation she had with another individual and his quite long response. This referred to something which I do not believe is in issue. As I have no authority to publish the other person's response, I told Ms Brown that I would delete this piece and she did not demur.)

In what follows, Ms Brown's words are heralded by the letter B., while the items of which she complains are in italic type and introduced by a number. My response follows her complaint.

Response from Gillian Brown, Keziah Video Production.

B. *The first to present his case seems right, until another comes forward to question him. (Proverbs 18:17)*

B. You have written an article, published in the Skeptics journal, which claims to "demonstrate the depths to which the creationist movement will stoop in order to try to discredit its critics", in which you denigrate my character and work, and that without having spoken to me at all. In respect of fairness I would request that you publish my response in full.

Your article recounts Prof Dawkins' recollection of an interview, which is included in the video *From a Frog to a Prince*, which I produced, in which Dawkins is seen to pause for 11 seconds, and evade a simple question. As you yourself say, "It beggars belief that someone of Richard Dawkins' stature in the field would have been stumped by such a simple question or would have evaded it." So, you conclude that Dawkins was "set

up", with "malicious intent", in "a piece of crude propaganda", "deliberately manipulated" with "deceitful intent".

Firstly, I would like to say that if you are going to publish a slanderous attack against someone, it is considered responsible journalism to at least inquire into both sides of the story, and in this case, before making accusations regarding the circumstances of an interview it would have also been circumspect to have viewed the unedited tape. That way you could have presented a serious investigation of the matter, and avoided making illinformed and false assertions.

You state in the article that, "perhaps it could be argued that Prof Dawkins' memories of the events might have deteriorated with the passage of time since the interview..." In fact, whether from memory lapse or for other reasons, the recollection of Dr Dawkins is riddled with inaccuracies and some downright untruths. Following is an accurate account of the interview, which may be confirmed by viewing the unedited video tapes.

Dr Dawkins makes a number of incorrect statements:

1. *On September 16, 1997, Keziah Video Productions, in the persons of Gillian Brown and Geoffrey Smith, came to my house...*

B. I was accompanied by a former geologist, Philip Hohnen, not Geoffrey Smith.

2. *...I was challenged to produce an example of an evolutionary process which increases the information content of the genome. It is a question that nobody except a creationist would ask...*

B. That question actually came at the end of the interview. At the beginning, Philip Hohnen asked several general questions on the origin of new information. These questions are recorded on tape and may be viewed, either on tape or transcribed, by anyone interested in the exact nature of the questions. Dawkins objected to the questions and stopped the recording. He claimed that questions on the origin of new information were invalid, and that nobody ever asked him such questions. I responded that the question of information was perfectly valid, and very important to the evolution-creation debate.

3. *The tape having stopped, I explained to them my suspicions, and asked them to leave my house.*

B. This is untrue. At no time did Dr Dawkins ask us to leave his house. A second camera, (newly purchased, which we were testing), was inadvertently not switched off until later, so it recorded most of the ensuing conversation. This remains on record to expose such false statements and clarify supposed "lapses of memory".

4. *Gillian Brown pleaded with me, saying that she had flown all the way from Australia especially to interview me.*

B. Actually that was a comment made by Philip.

5. *She assured me that they were not creationists...*

B. We were not asked if we were creationists. I made no assertion or denial regarding our personal views.

6. *...but were taking a balanced view of all sides in the debate. Like a fool, I took pity on her, and agreed to continue.*

B. I stated that our production was looking at both sides of the debate, and named the other people who were being interviewed. Dr Dawkins objected that he was the only anti-theistic evolutionist in the production, but agreed to participate.

7. *I remember that, having had quite an acrimonious argument with her, when I finally agreed to resume the interview I made a conscious effort to be extra polite and friendly.*

B. This is untrue. There was certainly no “acrimonious argument”, the conversation was at all times courteous.

8. *As it happens, my forthcoming book, Unweaving the Rainbow, has an entire chapter (‘The Genetic Book of the Dead’) devoted to a much more interesting version of the idea that natural selection gathers up information from the environment, and builds it into the genome. At the time of the interview, the book was almost finished. That chapter would have been in the forefront of my mind, and it is therefore especially ludicrous to suggest that I would have evaded the question by talking about fish and amphibians.*

B. After he asked for the camera to be switched off, Dawkins asked that his answers to the first few questions would not be used (and they have not been used). He then agreed to make a statement, but refused to take more questions from Philip. We resumed recording, then after he finished his statement I asked for a concrete example in which an evolutionary process can be seen to have increased information on the genome. The long pause seen on the video immediately followed my question, he then asked me to switch off the camera so he could think, which I did. After some thought he permitted the camera to be switched on again and his final answer was recorded, the answer which appears in the video, which, as can be seen, does not answer the question. Because my question was off-camera and off-mike (though clearly audible on the tape), it could not be used in the finished production, that is why the presenter was recorded later, repeating my question as I had asked it. Your concern is that the pause was fabricated. No, the pause followed by an irrelevant answer was in response to that exact question, a question which Dr Dawkins could not answer and would have preferred not to even discuss. “Ludicrous” perhaps, but the question was indeed evaded. If you would care to view the unedited tape you will be able to confirm my account.

9. *If I’d wanted to turn the question into more congenial channels, all I had to do was talk about ‘The Genetic Book of the Dead’. It is a chapter I am particularly pleased with. I’d have welcomed the opportunity to expound it. Why on earth, when faced with such an opportunity, would I have kept totally silent? Unless, once again, I was actually thinking about something quite different while struggling to keep my temper?”*

B. Whatever he may have been thinking about I don’t know, but it is clear that he did not answer the question.

10. *If it had been left at that, it might merely have been evidence of professional incompetence on the part of the producer and editor of the tape....*

B. Barry Williams, before making charges of “incompetence” the original tape should be viewed.

11. *Further evidence of incompetence includes the tape showing the male “interviewer” in a completely different room from the Dawkins’ drawing room where the interview took place, and with entirely different lighting. Moreover, the person who interviewed Prof Dawkins was named as Geoffrey Smith, while the “interviewer” shown in this clip is identified as Chris Nicholls, the narrator of the entire tape. However this, of itself, is not evidence of malice. While it is doubtful if any professional video producer would inadvertently leave a silence of that length in a tape, the fact that the long silence ends with an answer to an entirely different question, one about fishes, amphibians, and common ancestry, speaks strongly of malicious intent.*

B. The question, asked by myself, (not Geoffrey Smith) was off camera, and that’s why the question was rerecorded by the narrator, the pause and the answer which follows is exactly the response from Prof Dawkins. The actual pause was in fact shortened from 19 seconds to 11 seconds, and Dawkin’s request to switch off the camera so that he could think was also cut out. So, there was no malicious intent whatsoever, what is seen is Dawkin’s exact response, with a shortened pause,

and the (merciful not malicious) removal of his request for time to think.

11. *Richard does not react as one would expect him to, had he merely been asked a difficult question; his reaction is much more believably one of someone who has just realised he has been conned into giving an interview he would not normally have given, ie he doesn’t look nonplussed, he looks angry... Such is the dramatic change in Richard’s demeanour between the two segments, that it is utterly inconceivable that the second piece of tape followed immediately after the first.*

B You’d better believe it... angry silence and an inappropriate response was Prof Dawkins’ answer. I suggest you view the original tape.

13. Your article continues:

...the Keziah tape... purports to show that there is no biological evidence for evolution.

B. Have you even watched the tape? It purports to show no such thing. The video presents two opinions on the question of the origin of biological information, the evolutionist perspective and the creationist perspective, the viewer can weigh all the evidence and decide which opinion appears more credible.

14. *By selectively editing this tape, the producer clearly seeks to show:*

a) *that Richard Dawkins, an eminent biologist, was unable to answer a question he was asked about biology; and*

b) *that he then evaded the question by answering a completely different one.*

This tape seeks to denigrate Professor Dawkins’ professional reputation, and it is difficult to believe that it was not deliberately done.

B. Perhaps if you had taken the trouble to view the unedited tape you would see that, eminent as he is, Richard Dawkins was, on that day, entirely unable to answer the question.

15. *In recent times, both the Australian Skeptics web site and at the Skeptic office, we have fielded questions from a number of individuals who have posed questions couched in the terms, “Can you give one example of new information being added to the genome by mutation today?”*

B. Doesn’t this suggest to you that this is a valid question worthy of serious consideration?

16. *Certainly this is by no means the first occasion on which the creation ‘science’ movement has sought to misrepresent the words of eminent scientists to bolster their own inept grasp of scientific matters, and to mislead their own unfortunate followers.*

B. This accusation is beneath contempt now that the your willingness to make accusations without doing your homework has surfaced.

[Reference to a third party’s correspondence deleted]

17. *So much for the supposed impartiality of Gillian Brown, the producer of the tape, or for her protestations of “balanced view”, of which she assured Professor Dawkins when seeking to continue taping in his home.*

B. Please take the trouble to view the video and notice that there are two sides presented, both represented fairly and with impartiality. How impartial are you being in your consideration of this issue, Barry Williams?

18. *This is, sadly, typical of the less-than-honest political propagandist approach creationists use in their “mission”.... they resort to ad hominem attacks on the genuine scientists who have exposed their myths.*

B. These are the biased accusations of an uninformed Skeptic who falsely charges others with misrepresenting facts, while blindly refusing to consider the evidence on both sides of the question with appropriate partiality.

19. *This is not the way of science - it is the way of political propaganda -yet another blatant example of “telling lies for God”.*

B . “Who’s telling lies?” You may view the unedited, original video tape of our interview with Richard Dawkins in order to establish the truth in this matter.

Barry Williams, in your article you accuse me of a

“resort to trickery in order to denigrate critics, and to mislead unsophisticated minds.” May I suggest that you check your “facts” more carefully and draw your conclusions on a less biased view of a one-sided and distorted account of events.

Behind the smokescreen thrown up by your cry of “lies, lies” is a very important question: What is the origin of new information? We do know that great variation within species results from rearrangement or loss of genetic information, but this does not explain macroevolutionary transition from simple life forms to complex ones with far greater genetic information. Clearly, if new functional information cannot be shown to come through evolutionary mechanisms, then the only alternative is intelligent design.

I just have one final question: Could you give any example of an evolutionary process or mechanism which can be seen to create new functional information at the genetic level?

Now where should we begin to respond to this complaint? Perhaps we should start a little before the beginning. It is no secret that Richard Dawkins refuses to give interviews to creationists. He does so for the reasons he enumerated in a letter to me (see my original article in 18/3 p.8), and, as subsequent events have shown, his reasons now seem to be very well justified. How, then, did he allow himself to be drawn into this interview? Perhaps the fax to Richard’s secretary, dated 27/8/97 (shortly before the interview), on Keziah Video Production letterhead and over the name “Gillian Brown, Producer”, the text of which is reproduced below, might help answer this question:

Geoffrey Smith spoke with you this week regarding an interview request. I spoke with Richard Dawkins last year by phone, and he agreed to an interview, however we had difficulty scheduling a date.

Keziah Video Production is producing a documentary series on the question of origins. One of the programmes will look at the biological issues, and in this programme we would like to feature Dr Dawkins. In the interview we are interested in the question of how Darwinian evolution can explain the transformation of simple organisms into complex ones, the role of natural selection and the way in which genetic mutations passed from one generation to the next can bring about evolutionary change.

The documentary series will be distributed by an independent distributor, Discovery International (not associated with the Discovery Channel), based in Melbourne, Australia. The interview will be conducted by BBC producer Geoffrey Smith, who is acting as an independent producer on our behalf.

I do understand that Dr Dawkins has a very busy schedule, so I hope the interview will be possible, and I look forward to scheduling at your convenience.

All fairly innocuous; carefully worded topics so they look like the sort of things an independent producer making a genuine documentary about “biological issues” might be expected to ask a biology professor, and a reference to a “BBC producer” to add an air of respectability. No reason to suspect a set-up there (although one can’t help gasping at Ms Brown’s sheer nerve in accusing Dawkins of ‘inaccuracy’ when he assumed, as it now turns out wrongly, that the male interviewer who turned up with her was indeed the promised BBC producer. But what the fax carefully does not say, but what is given away in the caption to a photograph of Ms Brown in the November issue of *Prayer News*: “Gillian Brown of Keziah Productions, who were contracted to produce the video *From a Frog to a Prince for us*”.

Ms Brown, who seeks to lecture me on responsible journalism, makes no mention of her inexplicable failure to include the important information about her employers in her fax seeking an interview. One has to wonder why?

In other correspondence to me in which she seeks to justify her actions, Ms Brown, says that Prof Dawkins had “...a mistaken presumption ... about my own personal bias”, a presumed presumption that she did nothing at all to allay. She went on with the extraordinary claim, “It is generally assumed that producers hold evolutionist convictions”.

Well, I can’t speak for Richard Dawkins’ presumptions, but I have met and worked with quite a few producers over the years, and I have never once presumed anything at all about their “convictions” on any scientific subject. I may have assumed that if they said they worked for the ABC or the 9 Network, then they probably did, but that is about all. Ms Brown is being disingenuous here.

Ms Brown makes much of the “inaccuracies” and “downright untruths” in Prof Dawkins statement about the interview, but in large part what she adduces is mere trivia, or disagreement about individual interpretations of what happened. It wasn’t Geoffrey Smith, it was Philip Hohnen! So what? Richard obviously looked up his records and saw the name of the BBC producer who was supposed to be doing the interview, rather than the “geologist and antique dealer” (as Ms Brown described Mr Hohnen to me) who actually turned up. It is irrelevant to the story who it was; it wouldn’t have mattered if it had been Henry Kissinger. Richard hasn’t sworn on a stack of *Origin of Species* that every minute detail of the interview was fixed in his memory, he described it as he remembered it, a year later. What he did say he remembered was the incident as a whole, and the anger he had felt when he realised he had been duped. That this is an entirely normal reaction, anyone can judge from their own experience. It is Ms Brown who should apologise for substituting Philip Hohnen in place of Geoffrey Smith, the respectable-sounding “BBC producer”.

Ms Brown may put whatever spin she cares to on the disagreements about how various incidents were perceived by the participants: “There was certainly no ‘acrimonious argument’, the conversation was at all times courteous”, but perceptions is all they are. Ms Brown knows what she thought and felt, and Richard Dawkins knows what he thought and felt. Perhaps in the circles in which Ms Brown moves she doesn’t often run up against people who merit the title “gentleman”, but no one who knows Richard Dawkins would expect him to be less than courteous at all times. Just as no one who knows Richard Dawkins could be in any doubt that his reaction shown in the infamous pause was caused by anger; it certainly was not caused by an inability to answer a question in his own field.

Ms Brown’s whole complaint rests on her conviction that she had posed a question that Prof Dawkins could not answer, and she goes to extraordinary lengths to cling to that belief - one might almost say that it has become an article of faith for her. Perhaps, had she taken the time to explore the issues more fully with Prof Dawkins, she *might* have understood why her question made no sense to him, and posed it in a more sensible way.

There are genuinely interesting questions that can be explored about information and evolution, and they

are explored and answered fully and lucidly by Prof Dawkins in his article on page 21 of this issue. This article, of course, gives the lie to the canard "he couldn't answer the question", that forms the whole basis of Ms Brown's complaint. Richard not only *can* answer the real questions about information and evolution, but he *has* answered them very elegantly indeed. I commend it to Ms Brown and AiG and suggest that, in the interest of fairness and balance, they should bring it to the attention of those who have been misled by their advertising and bought the tape.

Now I am not blaming Ms Brown for the fact that she did not know it was a foolish question; ignorance of biological mechanisms is hardly a cardinal sin. But she really should have consulted someone who did have some understanding of the subject, before she rushed in. Or at least she should have, if, as she claimed in her request for an interview and in subsequent self-justification, her aim was to present a balanced and objective documentary on the topic of origins. However, we have now learned that she was working under contract to Answers in Genesis, and the very last thing that that organisation would want was a balanced and objective view of origins. Her "consultants", as noted on the tape itself, were the executive officers of two Young Earth Creationist organisations, the very last people anyone would consult for an objective opinion of biology (or any other scientific topic, for that matter).

Complaints against my reporting

Again, Ms Brown's whole argument and her accusations against me of "irresponsible journalism" seem to revolve around one central issue; that I had accused her of inserting a different question into the tape from the one asked of Prof Dawkins. But that is not the case, and my charges against her and, more particularly, against Answers in Genesis (the organisation that markets the tape) do not at all depend on the insertion of a different question. What they do depend on is a whole series of events and actions whose culmination is a distorted presentation of Richard Dawkins' position. I did not accuse her of inserting a dummy question, though I did canvass that proposition in general discussion of the many ways in which interviews can be manipulated.

When Richard first heard of the tape from a friend in the USA, he contacted me to see if I had any information about Keziah or Gillian Brown. At the time Richard and I did canvass the possibility that a dummy question had been inserted into the tape and that his reaction may have been to something else, but concluded it was unlikely that even the most bigoted and ignorant of creationists would have left themselves open to legal redress on that score. They may be ignorant, but that is not synonymous with stupid.

It was when I purchased a copy of the tape and viewed it that I came to a full understanding of just what a crude piece of propaganda it is, and wrote my article to that effect. Ms Brown has since kindly supplied me with a copy of her unedited tape of the interview with Prof Dawkins. It confirms that the question she posed and the question asked by the interpolated "interviewer" are essentially the same, but that only serves to confirm my suspicion that no matter how ignorant they may be, creationists are not stupid.

Incidentally, the unedited tape also shows that Richard was becoming increasingly irritated as he began to suspect that he had been wasting his time talking to

people whose interest in exploring scientific matters was, at best, minimal. It also shows, much more clearly than the final edited version, that his angry pause at the end was not a sudden reaction to a question he could not answer, but his reaction to having his suspicions that he had been played for a sucker, confirmed.

But that is not what was at issue in my story. My claim is that *From a Frog to a Prince* is crude propaganda that has been manipulated to present a political point; Ms Brown's claim is that it is a balanced documentary about origins. In correspondence with me she says "I really believe that our production didn't misrepresent Dawkins." Well, there would have been one easy way for a "responsible" journalist to find out. She could have asked him. She is quick to question why I didn't contact her for her side of the story, but she makes no mention of contacting Prof Dawkins to ask whether he was happy with the way his position was portrayed in the edited version, nor, apparently, did she send him a copy of the final version of the tape. (To forestall trivial objections from Ms Brown that she was not legally obliged to clear the final version with the participants, I am well aware of that. However, any balanced documentary maker who found she had a participant whose reactions were so obviously out of character should have done the "responsible" thing and checked.) It seems this "irresponsible journalism" is awfully commonplace.

She goes on to say in the same correspondence, "Certainly it was not 'kind' to show Dawkins lost for words, but journalism is not meant to be 'kind' unless you are promoting propaganda". Quite so! No balanced documentary on origins here; balanced documentaries are supposed to present the views of the proponents fairly, not to rely on misrepresentations gained by opportunism. That really is "promoting propaganda".

The real point at issue is not what the question was, but that the question appeared in the tape at all. The tape consists of three other scientists (apart from Richard Dawkins) speaking about their views on the topic of information and evolution. In each case, the scientists make statements of their views, with no sign of an interviewer. Interspersed with the statements are some nice pictures of animals and iterations of the party line by the narrator, Chris Nicholls and Don Batten, a biologist who works for AiG. (To any knowledgeable viewer, these latter add nothing of substance to the tape, serving as little more than commercials.)

But anyone who has ever taken part in interviews for documentaries will know that there is always an interviewer present to feed in questions and to keep the speaker on topic. Nothing wrong with that, it is normal practice for documentary makers. The same technique applied in the first three statements by Dawkins.

Then came a critical moment - Richard Dawkins, having had it confirmed that he had been played for a sucker, lost his temper. Any balanced documentary maker, responsible journalist, or other genuine seeker after knowledge, would have paused at this point, sought to find out what had upset the subject and tried to find a way the interview could continue so that information could be imparted. But for a propagandist it must have seemed like a "gift from God"; a way to make the "enemy" look bad. Opportunism, pure and simple, and an opportunity that was not rejected.

Of course you can't just insert a clip into a documentary, showing someone looking uncomfortable for no apparent reason, so the question had to be inserted

to give the clip some “provenance”. Remember that this is the only such question in the whole “documentary”, a point I made very clearly in my original article.

That manipulation clearly takes this tape out of the field of balanced documentary and places it firmly in the camp of political propaganda. If Ms Brown thinks that she was presenting a documentary on a scientific subject, then she is clearly naive indeed about science.

There is much stronger evidence in her correspondence that suggests scientific naivete on her behalf: “We showed four different views on the subject of information: antitheistic evolution, theistic evolution, creationism and judaism.” What? Have we stumbled into a Monty Python script here? (Here to discuss the Theory of Relativity we have Fidel Castro, the Chairman of Westpac, a lady from the corner shop, and a duck.)

Evolution is a scientific theory; antitheism and theism are broad religious positions which have nothing to do with science; creationism refers to a whole range of religious positions, none of which has anything to do with science (though a minority version of it is espoused by her mentors in AiG, who pretend they are involved in science); and Judaism is specifically the religion practised by Jews, which also has nothing to do with science. What on Earth did she think her video tape was about? Is she suggesting, for example, that there is such a thing as Jewish Science? (I would have hoped that sort of thinking had been laid to rest at the Nuremberg Trials.) Was it supposed to be a scientific discussion, a theological discussion, or what? If so, the science was peripheral, and the theology rudimentary, at best. No, the truth is it was none of those things - what the scientists had to say was irrelevant to the purpose of the tape - it was the propaganda in the “commercials” that was the important message.

I will concede Ms Brown one point. In my article I said “...the Keziah tape... purports to show that there is no biological evidence for evolution”, which she denies. I confess that I was in error on this point and apologise to her. I can only plead that my known distaste for a diet of pap misled me on that point.

However, if she is scientifically naive, I am surprised at her cavalier approach to laws that definitely do affect her profession. I must admit I was astonished by her confession “A second camera, ... was inadvertently not switched off until later, so it recorded most of the ensuing conversation”, and even more so by her offer to publish the information from that tape. She is fortunate that she was not in NSW when she “inadvertently” taped a conversation without the permission of the other party, or she would have been facing serious criminal charges. Penalties might have been mitigated by the “inadvertence”, but the offer to publish would almost certainly have attracted the full measure of the law. She may be lucky, as privacy laws vary in severity and extent from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, but it is, at the very least, ethically dubious behaviour.

Incidentally, the positions put by the other three scientists interviewed seem to reflect the idea of a “design inference” which, while it has not attracted widespread support among biologists, is at least an arguable position. Strange to say, it offers little or no support to the pseudoscientific positions proposed by Young Earth Creationists, which have been exposed as vacuities many times, by many scientists, in many different disciplines.

Why then would it have been included?

You have to remember that the target of the YEC’s marketing strategies are scientifically unsophisticated people, and particularly children. The statements made by the scientists would undoubtedly have gone right over the heads of the target market, and the fact that they could market a tape showing three scientists seeming to oppose evolution and only one supporting it, may well have been the sales pitch, had they not fortuitously managed to secure a piece of embarrassing tape of one of their enemies.

Ms Brown passionately denies that her intent was malicious, and, while I do think that she should have exercised a far more responsible approach to her journalistic activities, given her evident lack of understanding of scientific matters I am prepared to withdraw that implication from her involvement in this tape. It may well be that Ms Brown is yet another victim of the propaganda promoted by the people by whom she was contracted to make this tape.

No such excuse can be made for the marketing organisation that contracted for and sells this tape; Answers in Genesis does employ a few people who actually have qualifications in scientific disciplines. It is hard to believe that they could be unaware that their main selling point is a misrepresentation, at the very least.

That this organisation is resolute in its espousal of ignorance can be confirmed from the very same issue of *Prayer News* mentioned above. In an article headed “The Skeptics and their ‘churchian’ allies”, the author, one Jonathan Sarfati, PhD, aims the usual load of semi-factual bile at the Skeptics, but reserves his real vitriol, heavily larded with biblical quotations (which is what passes for scholarly discourse in creationist circles) for our “allies”. These allies (of whom I was unaware until I saw *Prayer News*) belong to an organisation known as the Institute for the Study of Christianity in the Age of Science and Technology (ISCAST) which is composed of evangelical Christians who do real work in the sciences. It would appear that the heinous “sin” of ISCAST is that these scientists, who take both their science and their religion seriously, have rejected the primitive versions of both being pushed by AiG.

To put the issue beyond any doubt, *Prayer News* carries a warning to its readers about an Australian Museum travelling exhibition entitled “More than Dinosaurs: Evolution of Life”. Obviously living in terror that the children of their deluded followers just might be exposed to scientific knowledge, AiG advises readers to “forearm their children” by buying “Ken Ham’s booklet *Dinosaurs and the Bible* which costs only 75 cents”. Readers who doubt that this particular collection of rubbish is grossly overpriced should read Sir Jim R Wallaby’s review of it in “Ham boners exposed” (*the Skeptic*, 14/4).

Finally, Ms Brown, you charge me with bias and partiality in my dealings with creationist propaganda. I make no secret of my biases: I value scholarship, knowledge, critical thinking and understanding. I dislike ignorance, while recognising that simple ignorance is curable. But I abhor wilful ignorance and have nothing but contempt for those who peddle it, and that contempt is magnified many times when the targets are children.

You started with a quotation and I will end with one. I believe mine to be the more apt.

...there is no sin but ignorance (*The Jew of Malta: Marlowe. 1592*)

