

# Ruminant

Jon Garvey  
chews the cud



## The Total Incredulity Syndrome

It was interesting to see on the television news a ceramic-lined caravan being lowered by crane into the back garden of a young lady said to be suffering from Total Allergy Syndrome. It appears that everything she approaches—even tap water, even spring water—induces immediate allergic symptoms which, though ill-defined, require stretchers and oxygen.

To my surprise, I find that some of my colleagues are less than convinced by the explanation of her symptoms given in the Press. Some of them have even been heard to murmur “hysteria” as they watch elaborate preparations being made to insulate the patient from the poisonous twentieth century, while she keeps out of status asthmaticus by staying in a sixteenth century country cottage (though allergic to milk, she appears to be OK with house dust, wool, dry rot and grass pollens).

It is certainly fortunate that this rare syndrome has only emerged towards the close of the offending twentieth century, when the speciality of clinical ecology has provided the means of dealing with it. It is even more lucky that there never seems to have been a *fatal* case of Total Allergy Syndrome, while numbers of unfortunates have died each year from boring old allergies to *Dermatophagoides pteronyssinus* or gerbils.

Clinical ecologists (who are not, by the way, to be confused with those people who introduced myxomatosis into Australia to correct the ecology there) must be admired for their pioneering spirit. In what other branch of medicine would a doctor have the courage to say to a patient’s parents: “I’m afraid your

daughter’s got a big problem here. I suggest you line her bedroom with Bacofoil.”

As for me, I have none of the doubts of my sceptical peers. In fact, I have even done research to explain some of the more bizarre manifestations of the disease. Apparently, this young girl has an allergy to being photographed, according to the BBC, which has caused some to harbour disbelief in their hearts. But I can reveal, from my studies using Kirlian photography of the Whole Person, that the act of taking a photograph causes the absorption of a greater number of photons from the subject’s body surface than would otherwise be the case.

Thus, there results an overall positive charge on the subject, which in the susceptible individual, interferes with the metabolism of cyclic AMP, stimulates prostaglandin synthesis and results in the release of histamine and other mediators, triggering the allergic response. Obvious, isn’t it?\*

## Topical treatment

An American multicentre trial published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* has shown that the apricot extract, Laetrile, has no beneficial effect whatsoever in cases of cancer, and is unacceptably toxic in intravenous or oral use.

Unfortunately, these findings, being somewhat sensational, have tended to eclipse the research of Dr Stanislaw Yevrag, of Wichita, who has found that it may be a valuable topical agent in the treatment of piles.\*

## Adam and evolution

Even doctors have become aware recently of the second American Civil War, which has been raging largely in schools and courtrooms; that of Evolution *versus* Creation.

The latest move was a High Court ruling that the teaching of the Genesis creation story as science, alongside Darwinism, is unconstitutional. This momentous victory has been treated by the medical press as a storm in a teacup, though this has not prevented a certain amount of triumphant chortling showing through the dignified veneer of the scientific community.

I, however, think it is a pity that the enormously protracted dogfight between science and theology, which has continued unabated since Darwin first published his work, has driven

a wedge between two vital constituents of mankind’s perspective.

It is not, after all, that science is essentially irreligious, as scientists from Newton to Darwin himself have demonstrated. It is probably true to say that there are more practising Christians in the natural and medical sciences than in any other intellectual field, possibly including theology.

Evidence that the universe is much older and more complicated than we all used to think, could never be evidence against the existence of God, any more than it is evidence *for* it. But it does expand the concept of God held by someone who does believe to realise that not only is he intimately concerned with every small part of the universe, but has been for over five billion years.



Jon Garvey: “What has it all got to do with medicine?”

As for poor old Genesis chapter one, its meaning has been abused by both sides in the debate. The fundamentalist tries to use it as a textbook of palaeontology, while the exasperated scientist is wont to dismiss it as “just myth”. Whereas in reality it *is* myth. That is, it expresses far more fundamental truths than any mere account of who made what in which order. It has stood for 3,000 years, not because it describes the nuts and bolts of the universe, but because it explains its systems; its relationships. It casts light on *why* things are the way they are, why there should be suffering, why the material world exists at all.

And yet great minds are disputing how the fruit trees could have produced fruit before the bees were created. It’s as irrelevant to the human spirit as the number of angels on the head of a pin.

But what has it all got to do with medicine?\*

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