

# In Defense of Wilhelm Reich: An Open Response to *Nature* and the Scientific / Medical Community

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## Summary

A recent technology-comment article in *Nature* magazine (Glausiusz 2012) exemplifies a growing problem in the sciences, in the reliance upon unfactual material sourced only to popular literature or to the “skeptical” press and generally written by prejudiced journalists, for evaluations of controversial scientific findings. There is no greater example of this than how the biography and work of the late Wilhelm Reich continues to be maliciously distorted and attacked. Reich’s writings and research on emotions, human sexuality, bioelectricity and biogenesis originally triggered a massive attack with sexual slander, in the German and Norwegian press in the 1930s lead-up to Hitlerism. These slanders were repeated and amplified in the American press after 1947, after his findings on bioenergetics and claims of a specific life-energy, the orgone energy, were publicly announced. A terribly biased US Food and Drug Administration investigation and alarming judicial reaction was triggered by the media assault, resulting in Reich’s death in prison, and the most outrageous episode of government-ordered book burning in American history. Reich’s life and research findings thereafter became a target for repeated slander and defamations. (Wolfe 1948, Baker 1972, 1973, Blasband 1972, Greenfield 1974, DeMeo 2012a, 2012b, Web Reference 1)

*Nature* and journalist Glausiusz (2012) repeated some of these same discredited pop-media slanders against Reich, along with inaccurate history. A rebuttal article was submitted to *Nature* in response, but was refused within 24 hours, the on-line submission also deleted, making appeals impossible. A subsequent short Letter to the Editor was submitted, and was also refused. While *Nature* did eventually print their own minimalist correction of a few of the errors in the Glausiusz article (anon.

2012), the very fact that sexual slander and falsehood could appear in *Nature* in the first place demonstrates how widely-believed popular fictions can undermine authentic peer review. Here, we have updated the original article submitted to *Nature*, and wish to sound an alarm on the dangers of combined popular media distortions, government censorship and book burning, and academic/medical scientism.

## Brief Overview of Reich and Confirmations

Wilhelm Reich was a central figure in Freudian psychoanalysis during the period of Weimar Germany. His therapeutic work contributed to, but later departed from traditional psychoanalysis, (Reich 1967) leading to an entirely new set of approaches for dealing with emotional, family and sexual problems. This part of his early work, while controversial, was historically adopted by various health practitioners and today is sometimes called (with greater or lesser accuracy) *orgone therapy*, *Reichian therapy* or *body-oriented psychotherapy*. His methods are practiced in many nations by various health practitioners including psychologists, general practitioners and board-certified psychiatrists, as an alternative to psycho-pharmaceuticals. (Baker 1967, Hochberg 1977, Von Uexkill 1990, Herskowitz 1998)

Reich’s larger *sex-economic theory* on human behavior (Reich 1942, 1945, 1953a, 1967) has also been confirmed outside of clinical contexts, via anthropological cross-cultural evaluations. His therapeutic, sexual-reform and experimental work argued for a social causation to neuroses and mental illness, addressing how people were driven into miserable situations by such things as traumatic childhoods, compulsive shipwrecked marriages, multiple unplanned pregnancies, loveless ungratified sexuality,

and socio-economic factors (*i.e.*, the forbiddance of contraception or divorce, or deep poverty) which exacerbated all other problems. Societies that were heavily burdened with pain inflicting, pleasure destroying and sex-repressive rituals and social institutions developed inevitable sadism and violence, which welled up inside individuals and entire cultures. Such emotive content was typically scapegoated and periodically expressed in the outbreak of aggressive wars or ethnic genocides. These relationships as detailed by Reich for Nazi Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union (Reich 1945, 1946, 1953a) were systematically evaluated and confirmed in later years, by two separate and robust cross-cultural studies applying standard ethnographic data as widely used for social theory testing. (Prescott 1975, DeMeo 1986, 1991, 2006) The largest of these studies, undertaken at the University of Kansas by DeMeo (1986, 2006), reviewed 63 different variables for over 1100 individual world cultures, and revealed a high degree of positive correlation for factors predicted by Reich's theory to be coherent and causally associated. *High-violence societies are characterized by high levels of infant trauma, child-abuse, sexual repression and subordination of women.* Low-violence societies have low levels of trauma, abuse and repression, with a more equal status for women. World maps developed from the variables in that study revealed additional new geographical-historical findings, notably in how the world regions of large harsh deserts (Sahara, Arabia, Central Asia) are characterized by the highest global levels of social violence and war within their tribal subsistence-level cultures. The geographical patterns thereby affirmed Reich, in that human violence did not develop from anything genetic or inherent to the human species.

Reich also undertook the first-ever

bioelectric studies on human sexuality and emotions, at the University of Oslo Department of Psychology. (Reich 1937) His work remains unique in the field of sexual research, even today, in his focus upon the *antithesis between pleasure and anxiety*, or *parasympathetic versus sympathetic* nervous excitation. Reich's specific experiments were recently confirmed in an investigation undertaken at the University of Vienna. (Hebenstreit 2010)

Reich's discovery of the *bions*, transitional micro-vesicles standing between the worlds of the living and non-living, provided critical clues on the origins of life question. (Reich 1938) Bions could be produced from either disintegrating organic materials, or from incandescently heated rock, sand or metal powders which were then plunged into sterile nutrient broths, with additional freezing and thawing. Today the bions would be classified as *extremophiles* or possibly *Archaea*, while for biological processes his *bionous disintegration* discovery finds parallels in the modern concept of *apoptosis*. His findings on bionous disintegration of inorganic materials, such as sand, rock and metals, pre-dated similar work by modern investigators of biogenesis and astrobiology, and anticipated such discoveries as the deep-ocean hydrothermal vents, or life-like structures in Martian meteorites. These findings also lay at the foundation of Reich's later work on the cancer process (Reich 1948, Dew 1981), and also provided a bridge into the discovery of the orgone energy. The bion experimental proofs have been widely repeated under sterile conditions, with many published microphotos of the bions. (duTeil 1938, Grad 1955, Dew 1989, Shanahan 1993, Snyder 1997, DeMeo 2002a)

Unfortunately, Reich's therapy methods, sexual theories, bioelectrical experiments and bion discoveries were all slandered and

attacked in the German and Scandinavian press of the 1930s. The same slanders, spiced up with new ones, were repeated in later decades within the American press. (Wolfe 1948, Sharaf 1983, Web Reference 1)

As to the *orgone energy* and *orgone accumulator*, these are authentic and bona-fide scientific discoveries, worthy of serious investigation. The orgone accumulator has similarities to a Faraday cage, as well as to a large hollowed-out capacitor in that it is composed of metal conductive material layered with dielectric insulation. Its material composition is just as exacting as any Faraday or capacitor device (Reich 1951a, DeMeo 2010a), and is not some cobbled-together “metal lined wood cabinet” as is widely misreported by the many non-scientists in the newspapers or “skeptical clubs”. By analogy, can a neutrino detector be dismissed as “a metal tank covered with dirt, filled with water, and into which a camera is poked”? Or a telescope as “a worthless hollow tube containing some blobs of glass”?

Reich, for example, published experimental results indicating a 3-times extension of the life-spans of cancer mice charged up daily inside an orgone accumulator, versus control mice who were not so charged. (Reich 1948) Other investigators have reported orgone accumulator stimulation of cancer mice life-span extensions from 1.6 to 2-times over controls. (Blasband 1973, 1984, Trotta & Marer 1990)

Two double-blind and controlled experiments have verified the overall bioenergy-boosting and parasympathetic stimulus of the orgone accumulator on human subjects, one undertaken at the University of Marburg, Germany (Muschenich & Gebauer 1986, 1987), the other at the University of Vienna (Hebenstreit 1995), showing results in support of Reich (1948). Special narrow

tube-type orgone accumulators have also been demonstrated to stimulate the effects of acupuncture needles, but without physical contact to the body. (Senf 1979, Southgate 2009) The orgone accumulator has also been demonstrated to stimulate the larger bioelectrical functions in the body, as determined through acupuncture meridian evaluations. (Mazzocchi & Maglione 2010) And there are simply too many clinical studies to list here, of independent physicians applying the orgone accumulator to various illnesses and conditions, showing pronounced life-enhancing and symptom-reducing benefits. (Kavouras 2005, Müschenich 1995, Web Reference 2)

The biological effects of the orgone accumulator appear to be produced by an energetic boosting of the immune system, an influence that is objectively documented in the *Reich blood test*. (Reich 1948, Raphael & MacDonald 1952, Baker et al 1984) Daily treatments with the orgone accumulator have been shown to visibly increase the turgidity, charge and resistance of erythrocytes to stress-deterioration within physiological saline solutions. Orgone accumulator influences have similarly been observed in the standard erythrocyte sedimentation test (Bauer 1987), suggesting an increase in the z-potential of cells. Overall, the findings demonstrate an increased bioenergy level and vitality from the orgone radiation, which is communicated through skin and into the blood, affecting the organism systemically. (Reich 1948)

Effects upon plants have also been noted since Reich's time by many independent investigators, showing an increase in overall growth, flowering and fruiting, including by organic gardeners. (Courie 1955, Lance 1977, Espanca 1981-86, Claymond 1987) A recent multi-year controlled laboratory study of sprouting mung beans showed a significant growth-enhancement inside the



accumulator over controls, with an average 34% increase in sprout length ( $p < 0.0001$ ). (DeMeo 2010b)

There are also measurable physical anomalies within the orgone accumulator, most of which were firstly reported by Reich, and nearly all of which have been independently verified. The natural leak of a charged static electroscope can be slowed when placed inside an accumulator as compared to the outside air, even when the same outside air is freely mixing inside the accumulator. (Reich 1948, Baker 1969-1970, Maglione 2012) A thermal anomaly was also observed by Reich, wherein the accumulator spontaneously developed a slightly higher temperature of around 0.1 °C than its environment. (Reich 1948) This experiment has been confirmed repeatedly, in more recent years using thermally balanced control enclosures or elaborated shading structures. (Blasband 1971, Seiler 1982, DeMeo 2009, Maglione 2012) One multi-year investigation of this phenomenon, isolated inside a shaded insulated hut with rotating platform, demonstrated a pulsatory thermal effect of up to 0.7 °C peaking out at solar noon and with a minima around midnight. This was suggestive of gravitational tidal functions but not diurnal air temperature variations. (DeMeo 2009) High vacuum tubes charged inside the accumulator were observed by Reich, confirmed later by others, to yield increased ionization effects; orgone-charged GM tubes may yield very high CPM from normal background radiation. (Reich 1951b, Milian 2002, DeMeo 2011a, 2011b, Maglione 2012)

Water charged up inside an orgone accumulator has been observed to evaporate more slowly than control water samples (DeMeo 1980, 2011a). Similarly, orgone-charged water has been observed to develop a higher UV absorption over control samples in the 220-280 nm range.

(DeMeo 2011a, 2011b) Even Reich's frequently ridiculed *cloudbuster* device, which is grounded into water and aims to influence the distribution of moisture in the atmosphere, has shown positive results in systematic field experiments for increasing rains in drylands. These experiments include a two-year field study carried out at the University of Kansas, (DeMeo 1979) drought-abatement tests supported by the governments of Israel (DeMeo 1993a) and Namibia (DeMeo 1993b), and a five-year program of testing sponsored by the government of Eritrea (DeMeo 2002b). Maglione (2007) has surveyed the work undertaken on this important subject going back to Reich's first experiments.

Space limitations prevent elaboration on these findings, especially for Reich's own extensive publications. (Web Reference 2) It should nevertheless be obvious even to the rational skeptic that, if true, Reich's work constitutes a major breakthrough in various fields, and his *orgonomy* – the science of life-energy functions in nature – would be equal to any major science controversy as seen over the last several hundred years. *The history of science suggests, we should therefore not be surprised to see such anger, slander, defamation, biased government investigations, and even imprisonment and book-burning as a consequence.*

## The Glausiusz Nature Errors

In *Nature*, Glausiusz wrote:

*Another misconceived machine ... created by psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich in 1940, is the Orgone Energy Accumulator, a wooden cubicle lined with sheet metal and steel wool. A follower of Freud, Reich believed that a concentration of "orgone", which he conceived of as a primordial form of energy, would increase "orgastic potency". This would, in turn, relieve pent-up psychic*

*and physical tensions, promoting general health and vitality, and even playing a part in curing cancer. Reich offered the box for testing to Albert Einstein, who pronounced it a dud. Among those treated with orgone therapy was British computer-science pioneer Alan Turing, who was forced into treatment to “cure” his homosexuality.* (Glausiusz 2012)

This statement has a number of glaring errors and slanderous comments.

Glausiusz misrepresented the orgone accumulator as a mere “wooden cubicle lined with sheet metal and steel wool”, and then repeated the widely-parroted slander claiming Reich said the orgone accumulator would “increase orgasmic potency” or was used for “curing cancer”. But Reich never said any such things. Those words are lies generated by his sex-anxious critics in the popular press of the mid-20th Century, designed to promote instant disbelief among ignorant others. (Wolf 1948, Baker 1972, 1973, Blasband 1972, Greenfield 1974, Sharaf 1983, DeMeo 2012a, Web reference 1) *Nature* never corrected or retracted those comments by Glausiusz. (anon. 2012)

Reich also did not merely “offer the box for testing” to Albert Einstein, as claimed by Glausiusz. *Einstein invited Reich to his home* and, when firstly shown the orgone accumulator and several of its anomalous properties during their *5-hour meeting*, Einstein declared that, if true, it would be “*a great bomb*” for physics. After independently testing the orgone accumulator for several weeks, Einstein wrote to Reich on 7 February 1941: “*I have now investigated your apparatus... [and] made enough readings without any changes in your arrangements. The box thermometer showed regularly a temperature of about 0.3 - 0.40 [degrees C.] higher than the one suspended freely.*”

(Einstein 1941, Reich 1953)

Einstein thereby *confirmed* Reich on the thermal anomaly. It was, and still is, a real phenomenon. While Einstein finally concluded the thermal anomaly was due to convection currents in the room, Reich wrote to him a few days later outlining a series of necessary control experiments by which the convection argument would be ruled out. (Reich 1953) Einstein never undertook those control experiments, but as noted above, others have, re-confirming the Reich orgone accumulator thermal anomaly. *Nature* did partly correct the Glausiusz error on Einstein, (anon. 2012) in that there is no evidence he ever pronounced the orgone accumulator “a dud” – those were Glausiusz’s words, not Einstein’s. However, *Nature* failed to mention Einstein’s open and serious interest in Reich’s findings, his willingness to invite Reich to his home, to spend hours with him in discussions, and then to study the orgone accumulator over several weeks, with his eventual confirmation of the thermal anomaly. (Reich 1953)

As given in the above quote, Glausiusz also implied that Reich and the orgone accumulator had something to do with the 1954 suicide of Alan Turing, mixing it up with sexual slander. This was apparently based upon something she saw or heard at a *New Museum* exhibit in New York City. Turing was one of the famous code-breakers of British Intelligence during World War 2, who came under public scandal when newspapers reported he had sexual relations with a 19-year old male. The courts sentenced him to medical hormone treatments (chemical castration), and he allegedly committed suicide about two years later. (Leavitt 2006) This history is easily available from his biographies, but Glausiusz managed to bungle it and imply that Reich and the orgone accumulator

were somehow involved in Turing's forced therapy and suicide.

To be clear about it, there is firstly no evidence Turing was ever treated with Reich's therapy methods, either voluntarily or by court orders. Reich had no therapy trainees in the UK at that early date. Nor is there any evidence Turing even knew about the orgone accumulator, much less owned one. Secondly, Reich had been active in the European sex-reform movement prior to his flight to the USA in 1939, promoting a social-reform platform that included the decriminalization of homosexuality. (Reich 1931, Sharaf 1983) There is nothing in Reich's biography to suggest he or any of his trainees would have agreed with the chemical castration of homosexuals, nor to offer the orgone accumulator for similar agendas. *Nature* magazine minimally corrected this error in their article, indicating that Turing had been "treated with hormones".

However, the more egregious slanders and omissions were never corrected by *Nature*, as noted above, and by refusing to publish the longer response article, clarifying that Reich was a decent and serious natural scientist with many confirmations of his work, the overall false impressions of Reich as cooked-up by his many detractors, were left standing.

Nevertheless, the weight of studied and authentic scientific and medical opinion, based upon renewed direct experimental investigations and clinical applications by professionals within more recent decades, *supports* Reich. His widely-ridiculed *orgone* is not merely conceptually similar to the older and once-respected *cosmic ether*, (Miller 1933, Munera 2011) but runs parallel to many modern physical theories which speak to a still-mysterious medium that fills all of space, such as *neutrino sea*, *dark matter*, or *interstellar media*.

The scientific reception process utterly failed in Reich's case, in a degeneration towards crude scientism, accompanied by public hysteria fanned by salacious yellow journalism in the popular media. Today, a tidal wave of slander and distortion floods over Reich's grave, from mainstream journalism and internet sites, authored by hostile non-scientists in "skeptical clubs", sometimes wildly exaggerated by ignorant lay-enthusiasts, or as found in arts or literary journalistic hit-pieces, aping as "history". (Baker 1972, 1973, Blasband 1972, DeMeo 2012a, 2012b, Greenfield 1974, Web Reference 1, Web Reference 2)

The Reich legal case has similarities to the Scopes "monkey trial", but was far worse in malicious intent, in the willingness of Reich's persecutors to openly lie, and in the final outcome. Reich's persecution is only truly comparable to Scopes, if Darwin himself had been dragged into court, slandered as a sexual pervert, thrown into prison on a technicality with his laboratory violated by federal police, followed by the axing of his research instruments, and his books and journals carried off for burning – and then for poor Darwin to be continually held up for public scorn and ridicule, including within the scientific and medical community, over many decades after his death. All that happened to Reich. And the public ridicule and misrepresentations are still happening today, some 50+ years after his death, as revealed most recently in the Glausiusz *Nature* article.

A review of the actual facts of Wilhelm Reich's life and work suggests a tragic historical-scientific misjudgment and prejudiced dismissal. It is well past time for serious physicians and natural scientists to ignore the court jesters and skeptic clubbers, and take a fresh and unbiased look at Wilhelm Reich's actual work, from

his *original sources*, as well as from the scientific and experimental replications by other professionals who have made a *careful and responsible study* of his findings.

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## Web References

**Web Reference 1.** There have been over 130 major anti-Reich attacks published in books, magazines, newspapers and in avant-garde films, in the English language alone, following his arrival in the USA in 1939. This does not include the many similar attacks against Reich that appeared in the Nazi and Communist Party press in Germany, Denmark and Norway during his European period (1925-1939). These were nearly all "opinion articles" containing slander and falsehoods, written by journalists or other non-scientists without serious reference to original source material and frequently making deliberate lies. Of the very few written by people with scholarly training, in all but two, no experiments were undertaken to test Reich's ideas. In the two cases where claims were made to have undertaken testing, nothing of detail was ever published and when privately requested to share the details of their findings, the reply back was silence. <http://www.orgonelab.org/bibliogPLAGUE.htm>

**Web Reference 2.** The on-line *Bibliography on Orgonomy*, listing various research papers by Wilhelm Reich and his associates, as well as those undertaken in the decades after his death. <http://www.orgonelab.org/bibliog.htm> ■