

Smithsonian in Uproar over Intelligent-Design Article

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The career of a prominent researcher at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History in Washington is in jeopardy after he published a peer-reviewed article by a leading proponent of intelligent design, an alternative to evolutionary theory dismissed by the science and education establishment as a tool of religious conservatives. Stephen Meyer's article advocates the theory of intelligent design.

Richard Sternberg says that although he continues to work in the museum's Department of Zoology, he has been kicked out of his office and shunned by colleagues, prompting him to file a complaint with the U.S. Office of Special Counsel. Sternberg charges he was subjected to discrimination on the basis of perceived religious beliefs. "I'm spending my time trying to figure out how to salvage a scientific career," Sternberg told David Klinghoffer, a columnist for the Jewish Forward, who reported the story in the Wall Street Journal.

Sternberg is managing editor of a nominally independent journal published at the museum, *Proceedings of the Biological Society of Washington*. His trouble started when he included in the August issue a review-essay by Stephen Meyer, who holds a Cambridge University doctorate in the philosophy of biology. Hans Sues, the museum's No. 2 senior scientist, denounced Meyer's article in a widely forwarded e-mail as "unscientific garbage."

According to Sternberg's complaint, which is being investigated, one museum specialist chided him by saying: "I think you are a religiously motivated person and you have dragged down the Proceedings because of your religiously motivated agenda."

Sternberg strongly denies that. While acknowledging he is a Catholic who attends Mass, he says, "I would call myself a believer with a lot of questions, about everything. I'm in the postmodern predicament."

The complaint says the chairman of the Zoology Department, Jonathan Coddington, called Sternberg's supervisor to look into the matter. "First, he asked whether Sternberg was a religious fundamentalist. She told him no. Coddington then asked if Sternberg was affiliated with or belonged to any religious organization...He then asked where Sternberg stood politically...he asked, 'Is he a right-winger? What is his political affiliation?'"

The supervisor recounted the conversation to Sternberg, who also quotes her observing: "There are Christians here, but they keep their heads down."

The complaint, according to the Journal column, says Coddington took away Sternberg's office, which prevents access to the specimen collections he needs. Sternberg also was assigned to the close oversight of a curator with whom he had professional disagreements unrelated to evolution. "I'm going to be straightforward with you," said Coddington, according to the complaint. "Yes, you are being singled out."

Meyer's article, "The Origin of Biological Information and the Higher Taxonomic Categories," cites mainstream biologists and paleontologists from schools such as the University of Chicago, Yale, Cambridge, and Oxford who are critical of certain aspects of Darwinism. Meyer – a fellow at Seattle's Discovery Institute, a leading advocate of intelligent design – contends supporters of Darwin's theory cannot explain how so many different animal types sprang into existence during the relatively short period of Earth history known as the Cambrian explosion. He argues the Darwinian mechanism would require more time for the necessary genetic "information" to be generated, and intelligent design offers a better explanation.

The Journal notes Meyer's piece is the first peer-reviewed article to appear in a technical biology journal laying out the evidential case for intelligent design. The theory holds that the complex features of living organisms, such as an eye, are better explained by an unspecified designing intelligence than by random mutation and natural selection.

Klinghoffer notes the Biological Society of Washington released a statement regretting its association with Meyer's article but did not address its arguments. Klinghoffer points out the circularity of the arguments of critics who insisted intelligent design was unscientific because it had not been put forward in a peer-reviewed scientific journal.

"Now that it has," he wrote, "they argue that it shouldn't have been because it's unscientific."