

Dear Ms. Levy and Ms. Smith:

Please don't worry. Academic freedom and freedom of speech are very much alive and well here at Southern Methodist University. It turns out that even scientists have a First Amendment guarantee to the right to express themselves, and not surprisingly, some of us even exercise this right. It seems you are worried that some members of the science faculty here at SMU raised an objection to the administration that the Darwin vs. Design event will be held in McFarlin Auditorium next week.

Before I start to look at this issue, I think it is important to point out that one does not have to make a choice between religion and science. For many people of many beliefs, science and religion are very compatible with one another. There are in fact many expert, practicing scientists that are devoutly religious. Dr. Francis Collins, the director of the Human Genome Research Institute, is an evangelical Christian biologist. A look at his recent book (THE LANGUAGE OF GOD, Simon and Schuster, New York, 2006) may serve to convince those with strong religious beliefs that modern science and modern biology are very compatible with religion. Dr. Collins last year in Religion and Ethics Newsweekly was quoted as saying, "the evidence that we are all descended from a common ancestor is overwhelming. Some might wish that not to be so. It is so. Does this conflict with Genesis 1 and 2? I don't believe it does." (See <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week947/profile.html> for more from Dr. Collins.)

So why did some of the faculty object to the upcoming intelligent design event being held at SMU? One of the objections was made because the event is attempting to promote religious belief as objective science. This is deceptive. The statement that intelligent design is not science but rather a faith-based, religious belief system reflects the opinions and decisions of the overwhelming majority of America's best scientists and highest courts. (See <http://nationalacademies.org/evolution/> and http://www.pamd.uscourts.gov/kitzmiller/kitzmiller_342.pdf.) The organization behind the upcoming event, the Discovery Institute, has a political agenda that is attempting to replace objective science with their version of faith and this is disturbing to many of us in our society, not just scientists. (See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wedge_strategy for the Discovery Institute's political agenda.)

Why is this disturbing? Because it is important to separate what is knowable through science from that which is not knowable by science. We can use science for useful and important things, from cancer therapy to influenza vaccines to space exploration. Explanations and discoveries drawn from the material world, actually work in the material world. That is the utility of science. That is why our society spends billions of dollars every year on science. It works. It improves our condition. If you doubt this, you doubt the validity of modern medical science, airline travel and everything useful science has produced. Science and its derivatives are arguably America's most important domestic product. But if you blur the lines between what is science and what is religious belief, you will undermine the usefulness of science.

Sean Carroll, one of the leading geneticists in the world, and a number of other evolutionary biologists have recently discovered, using the scientific method, one of the great evolutionary explanations in biology. After many difficult years of tedious, hard work and study, these scientists have accumulated massive evidence through analyses of DNA found in living species that explains in rational material terms the wonders of the Cambrian Explosion. The Cambrian Explosion, as Dr. Carroll so elegantly phrased it, was the " 'Big Bang' of animal evolution" (see ENDLESS FORMS MOST BEAUTIFUL, Sean B. Carroll, Norton and Co. N.Y., 2005, page 138). The Discovery Institute still believes that the Cambrian Explosion occurred because an intelligent designer directly interceded in the biology of the planet and made it happen by divine intervention. Dr. Carroll has explained it in the useful, scientific

terms of natural selection without any magic tricks or supernatural intervention. Which description is more useful? Dr. Carrell's description even helps us understand more deeply certain developmental defects (birth defects) that happen in our own human species. I ask again, which description is more useful?

Beyond the utility question, there is an even more pressing issue: If Dr. Carroll and all the other people involved in scientific research would indeed take the intelligent designer's way out, then the logical consequence would be to simply stop looking for these amazing, beautiful, useful, factual answers. It is easy to say the supernatural did it. But it is not useful to our understanding of the natural world and it is counterproductive to the practice of science.

Scientists like Professor Carroll do not take the easy way out. They keep looking, keep working, and never ever give up in their search for natural explanations for natural phenomena. Should we also stop looking for answers to AIDS and cancer and every other approachable question in our natural world, simply because a few people *believe* these things have been intelligently designed? No, we should not stop the practice of science. It is useful and it reveals an elegance and beauty in nature that is observable and testable.

As I pointed out in detail in my 2005 Daily Campus article, intelligent design has many, many flaws. As the U.S. Federal Courts and our best scientists have repeatedly pointed out, intelligent design is not science, it is religion. I believe there is a place for both science and religion in our world, and like Dr. Collins, I believe one person can do science and be religious without conflict. But I also believe they are aimed at different realms, the spiritual and the material, and that deliberately diluting one with the other is counter-productive at best.

So yes, some of the faculty here at SMU objected quite passionately to the event sponsor's attempt to promote faith-based, religious beliefs as objective science. I would never deny anyone his or her right to believe, speak out or worship as one sees fit. That is a basic American right. But if I believe a deception is involved, I think I have not only the right to speak out against it, but also the duty to do so. If you want to deny me my right to stand up and speak out when such things occur on our campus, then I suggest that it is you who are putting open debate and free speech in jeopardy.

Sincerely,
John Wise, Ph.D.