

## WHAT IT MEANS TO BE AN ANTIDARWINIAN AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT

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In 1984 I published the first of a series of papers offering a new hypothesis of organic evolution: "Semi-meiosis as an Evolutionary Mechanism" appeared in the *Journal of Theoretical Biology*. 1984 also happens to be the title of George Orwell's novel, the significance of which will soon become evident.

I have always enjoyed teaching Introductory Biology and that experience has been instrumental in causing me to question the neo-Darwinian view of the evolutionary process. After leaving the staff of Biology 1 and 2, I introduced a new course designed expressly for non-science majors: Zoology 8 (The Animal World). This course proved to be popular and enjoyed enrollments of around 100 students. The last two lectures were concerned with the mechanism of evolution, and in those lectures I introduced the semi-meiotic hypothesis and contrasted it with the neo-Darwinian view.

Sometime in the fall of 1991 the chairman called a secret meeting of the tenured faculty at which he introduced a petition which served to eliminate Zoology 8 from the departmental offerings. He then exited the room leaving a majority of the faculty to sign the petition. I knew nothing of this until the newspaper appeared and Zoology 8 was missing. I was unable to have the course reinstated. As the course was outside the departmental curriculum, this action was a clear violation of not only my academic freedom but also that of those students who had chosen to study with me.

After the chairman left the university, he was succeeded by a member of the department who was a signatory to the Zoology 8 petition. At that time my salary became fixed and it has remained so ever since. The new chair is also an Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, a precedent which I regard as dangerous. The chair also arbitrarily relieved me of my two advanced courses, Biology 202 (Quantitative Biology) and Biology 255 (Comparative Reproductive Biology). These courses were electives which had been approved by the department and the Graduate College. I was able with some difficulty to get these courses reinstated only to discover that Biology 202 had been deleted from the catalog, resulting in an enrollment of 3 in contrast to 30 the previous year. The chair also capped the enrollment of Biology 255, an action I was able to reverse by informing the registrar. The chair refused to take responsibility for these actions. The chair introduced the hitherto unknown practice of "peer review", in which a colleague enters the classroom unannounced and later reports his impressions to the chair. The peer the chair chose to review me was a signatory of the Zoology 8 petition. You can imagine the rest! The chair also demanded of all faculty that they surrender to her on two weeks' notice copies of course syllabi and examinations. I am happy to report that I refused to comply. By now I hope you will have noted the identity of these policies with those of the dystopian government of Orwell's 1984: *the Thought Police, Big Brother is watching you*, etc.

In October 1997 a new president was inaugurated at the University of Vermont. Long before her arrival on campus I informed her of all of the foregoing and more, all of which was fully documented. I was confident that these policies would cease. I never received

any acknowledgement of my correspondence thus qualifying as an Orwellian **unperson**.

I warned the new president that if I should receive a zero raise for the fourth consecutive year, I would do everything in my power to expose the policies of this administration to the intellectual world. That unfortunately has now become necessary, and constitutes the sole motivation for this memorandum. What we are witnessing here is the enormous influence monolithic neo-Darwinism can have in at least one state university.

*Orthodoxy means not thinking -- not needing to think. Orthodoxy is unconsciousness.*

-- George Orwell, 1984

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### **Addendum**

**May 25, 2000**

We are now well into the new millennium and my salary remains frozen at the 1995 level. The department launched an inquiry (***the Thought Police***) into what was being taught concerning the origin of life. I happily supplied the pertinent material from my most recent effort, *An Evolutionary Manifesto: A New Hypothesis for Organic Change*. No action has as yet been taken but based on my experience, I must anticipate the worst. My chairperson, Judith Van Houten, has denied me the services of the departmental webmaster. Luckily, I was able to find other help for the recent revision of the *Manifesto*. She also felt it necessary to cancel my course code for the copy machine. I registered a complaint and that has now been rectified.

Being by nature curious, I am interested in the reasons for this special treatment. The following must be considered speculative as I can only base my interpretations on my experience here at the University of Vermont. It seems that chairpersons here are given unbridled authority to deal with their faculty as they choose. In Van Houten's case she is also an Associate Dean in the College of Arts and Sciences so she is in effect her own immediate superior! This raises a serious question as to the function of the academic hierarchy of Chair, Dean, Provost, President, the Board of Trustees and the Governor who is *ex officio* a member of that board. Is there really any need for this bureaucracy to exist? What is its function?

The issue resolves into a failure to understand what university life is supposed to be all about. A university should foster freedom of thought and make life as pleasant as possible for the faculty, the students and the community it serves. The University of Vermont has failed to implement those ideals. Quite the contrary, it has chosen to treat its faculty as if they were employees. I am reminded of the following anecdote. A few years before running for the presidency of the United States, Dwight D. Eisenhower was appointed president of Columbia University. In his opening speech to the faculty he addressed them as "the employees of Columbia University". A member of the faculty rose and interrupted him with the following: "Mr. Eisenhower, we are not the employees of Columbia University. We are Columbia University."

Of course, to be perfectly objective about this I really cannot place all the blame on Van Houten. It may well be that others in the bureaucracy are responsible for the intolerance that has come to prevail here. I can only say that, in my personal experience, it is of relatively recent origin. In any event, if there really is some sort of chain of command (I see no evidence that there is) then the responsibility rests squarely on the shoulders of each member of that chain as follows: Joan Smith, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences; Geoffrey Gamble, Provost; Judith Ramaley, President; the Board of Trustees; and Howard Dean, Governor of the State of Vermont.

It is painful for me to have to report that orthodoxy still reigns supreme here at the University of Vermont. The people of this great state deserve better from their educational servants.

**John A. Davison**

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