

Slaughter of the Dissidents: The Case of Iowa State University Professor

Guillermo Gonzalez Ph.D.

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Introduction

In the spring of 2007 Iowa State University (ISU) President Gregory Geoffroy denied Dr. Guillermo Gonzalez's application for tenure, which means he was terminated. In contrast to Gonzalez's supporters, the president of Iowa State claimed that Gonzalez was not denied tenure due to his research into the view that the earth holds a very special place in the universe, a hypothesis called the Privileged Planet theory. A review of the e-mails from Gonzalez's department colleagues, though, clearly proves otherwise. The attitude expressed toward intelligent design by many ISU faculty eloquently documents the fact that Gonzalez was evaluated unfairly on illegal criteria and denied his academic freedom.

The evidence also labels a lie Gonzalez's department chair, Eli Rosenberg's claim that "the decision had nothing to do with Gonzalez's support of intelligent design" (Green, 2007, p. 15). Rosenberg himself said in Gonzalez's tenure dossier that Gonzalez's problem is "Intelligent Design is not a scientific theory" and the "fact that Dr. Gonzalez does not understand what constitutes both science and a scientific theory disqualifies him from serving as a science educator" (quoted in Green, 2007, p. 15).

Below are reproduced a set of e-mails that eloquently document the fact that Gonzalez was let go due to his support for the view that the earth exists for a purpose, a view held by over 90 percent of the American population and close to this number world wide. All information in brackets was added, as was the bold for emphasis. One of the first persons at IUS to object to Gonzalez's research interest was Curtis Struck. He wrote that he was very concerned about Gonzalez's support for the "Earth's privileged place in the universe and intelligent design" view:

Guillermo has a book coming out in April on ... Earth's privileged place in the universe and intelligent design. **Steve K. is very upset about possible impacts.** ... I'm rather sad that he wants to be so very public about something that **I see as intellectually vacuous, though it may be spiritually satisfying.** I think I will talk to him about it at some point (E-mail dated February 17, 2004).

It is irresponsible to claim the conclusion that the earth has a privileged place in the solar system is “intellectually vacuous.” It is, rather, a fact documented. Lee Anne Wilson wrote in reply to Dr. Struck, that it was clear Gonzalez’s support of this view would jeopardize his tenure and that he was clearly qualified:

I am aware of this and not exactly thrilled. **I talked with him last year about perhaps waiting with the public bit until he gets past the tenure review**, but I gather he feels strongly enough to be willing to take the risk. **George Wallerstein calls him “the best post-doc I ever had”** and it took me 24 hours to realize that the special look he gave along with that statement could be interpreted “including present company.” Who knows how this will go. At least it will get full daylight at the 3yr review, not hit folks as a surprise at the final tenure decision. **Actually, I think it is more than just vacuous; he is supporting a movement that is endangering science** (E-mail dated February 17, 2004).

Where in the world does she get this idea? How in the world could the view that the earth has a privileged place in the cosmos endanger science? This view is irresponsible, akin to the conclusion that Jewish science is corrupt and must be expunged from Germany as happened a few years ago by firing all Jewish professors. He then claimed that the organization(s) that sponsor this work are also busy in the courts challenging evolution. In fact, I do not know of a single example where the Discovery institute has challenged evolution in the courts. Bruce Harmon wrote that:

Under medication I decided to watch “The Privileged Planet” last night. Wow. Really glossy, professional filming, with a nice British accent to add authority. It saved the message until the last minute, when **the argument became “all this neat stuff just could not happen by accident ... there must be an intelligent designer; now we can rejoice that there is a meaning to everything.” I suspect that is how primitive humans explained things, and then rejoiced.** It is a long way from science, although the package is disguised to copy a Disney approach to dispensing science to the public. Gonzalez is right up front, nearly holding hands with the Discovery Institute guru. This one could approach a supernova during and particularly after the tenure meetings. I bet ISU even makes the international press (how many days?). Maybe we should help Eli gird his loins before he loses them. (E-mail dated July 20, 2004)

My response is 90 percent of Americans believe there is an intelligent designer, and it seems the only view Dr. Harmon will accept is dogmatic atheism. He later wrote that he knows full well what he and his peers are doing is illegal:

I was very pleased to see you, “produced the best letter to the editor on intelligent design.” It is a topic that is simmering in my blood I am uncertain of how best to react. He will be up for tenure next year, and if he keeps up, it might be a hard sell to the department (but maybe not so difficult for his lawyers, who will certainly be retained by the Discovery Institute) (E-mail dated September 23, 2005).

Dr. Harmon then quoted an announcement about Gonzalez’ presentation, which is reprinted below:

INTELLIGENT DESIGN SPEAKER: The UNI Chapter of Sigma Xi, the Research Honor Society, presents Guillermo Gonzalez, Senior Fellow of the Discovery Institute and assistant professor of Astronomy at Iowa State University, speaking on Intelligent Design (ID). He will review the leading ideas proposed by ID theorists and explain why they believe ID is properly a branch of science. He will end with a brief description of the evidence for design which he presented in his book, “The Privileged Planet.” Wednesday, September 28, 7 p.m. in MSH Lantz Auditorium.

Harmon then wrote that Gonzalez’s support of ID will surely cause him to be denied tenure:

Gonzalez has given permission to tape the talk, so I guess we will see. ... I don’t have trouble voting for tenure based on his astronomy (I don’t yet know the quality), but here he is **claiming ID is a proper branch of science**, and so I think he opens it up in his tenure consideration. **I would have thought an intelligent person would have at least kept quiet until after tenure. Then you can advocate blowing up the moon.** (E-mail dated September 23, 2005)

Bruce Harmon wrote two months later that he was concerned about allowing someone to question the view that no purpose exists behind the universe. He felt it could actually alienate potential students who presumably cannot deal with this view:

There have been a **number of potential candidates for our CMP and Bio positions who have called asking about the climate in the department relative to ID. Who knows how many simply decided not to apply** or to inquire? And what about prospective graduate students? (E-mail dated November 21, 2005).

In other words, because Iowa State University has an ID friendly professor, some students will not want to study at this school. The same problem existed a few years ago—if blacks can join a club, some whites would not join. This is classic bigotry that the university should oppose.

In response to Behe’s testimony, colleagues at Leigh were quick with a **statement in an attempt at damage control**. [This is like saying we do not admit blacks, but one got in by

mistake, and we can not do anything about it now, but will insure it does not occur in the future.] I'm afraid we have not been quick enough to avoid damage, but I'm afraid further delay will lead to much more. If we have to take on the Discovery Institute, let's do it before we have an incoming class of ID students. The issue is not going away, and it may get worse. A few of us over the weekend crafted a statement which we would like you to see before we send it on to the higher administration, and probably the local press (E-mail from Dr. Harmon dated November 21, 2005).

Steve Kawaler's response also shows that he knew full well that what they were doing was illegal:

I think it is a big mistake for anyone in our department to go on the record on this issue, given the upcoming (next year) up-or-out decision regarding our most vocal advocate for the use of ID to guide scientific inquiry. We will at that time (next fall) be taking on not only that faculty member, but advocates for his position with deep pockets and significant influence. [The statement is clear: we cannot support ID, nor can we accept anyone who does support ID.]

Yes, it will get worse before it gets better. But circulating such a statement could accelerate the process and could easily play into the hands of your perceived adversaries. For example, it could be used to justify a legal claim of a 'hostile work environment' that could be ammunition in any appeal of a tenure decision. [This is exactly what they have produced, and it is clear that they were fully aware of this fact.]

Damage has been done, and more will happen—we need to minimize that damage. Pushing ahead with this statement will serve no purpose but to increase the damage, I feel. Simply put, next year's tenure review will be very closely scrutinized by the public and the press—and we must do whatever we can to make it a fair process [i.e. cover-up their true motives.] An unprecedented step such as a statement, signed by members of the department doing the tenure review that the science being done by the candidate is no good, works directly against our need to ensure, and [display? i.e. put on a show.] a fair tenure review. If you think things are tough for us now, imagine what things will be like under those circumstances. I would be happy to talk with you and the others about this—you'll probably find **Eli feels even more strongly about this** but that he and I have different perspectives.

I fully understand your collective frustration over this—and share it. Behe has tenure, so Bucknell's [sic] bio folks **have freedom to express their opposition without worry**. Isn't tenure a wonderful thing? [He seems to be saying with tenure we can express bigotry and intolerance without worry!] (E-mail dated November 21, 2005)

Behe is not at Bucknell, but Leigh University. Bruce Harmon then responded to the problem of "how do we let someone go on illegal grounds who is clearly qualified?" by stating:

I don't see how waiting until a year from now for a tenure decision is going to make things easier. Do we do everything at **secret meetings** and then hope the Discovery Institute lawyer's don't subpoena our records? [The fact is, it is clear that the petition was directed at Gonzalez in spite of their denials.] If I were Gonzalez, I would prefer my colleagues were honest and forthright in their opinions, as he seems to be with his. [It is clear that his colleagues were not honest with him.] Anyway, I've not talked with Eli or had a response from him yet. I will test a few more waters...it will help to have as many signatures as possible (E-mail dated November 22, 2005).

Marshal Luban then wrote that ID needs to be clear—people who doubt that evolution can explain all of life are not welcome here and will be censored:

...I believe that it is time for the department to take a stand, **HOWEVER** I think that it would be best to **LIMIT** public statements pertaining to our department and ID, rather than jump to endorse a host of organizational proclamations of a broad nature...unless people **VERY** carefully go through and carefully consider the details of these grandiose proclamations, and then debate in the dept. Whether we as a dept. **NEED** to be so specific, that ID is not "science." Instead I would suggest that our department go officially on record with a very simple and clear declaration, such as: We do not offer, nor will we offer any course on ID, nor will we sponsor or advocate any lecture or debate or public forum on the subject of ID. [i.e. freedom of speech does not exist here at U.I.] (E-mail dated November 22, 2005).

Bruce Harmon then responded that the department should be less blunt:

I don't think the department should take a stand. This was an effort to release the enormous frustration that a number of us are feeling as individuals to the onslaught of national publicity. I think **phone calls from prospective candidates and the Wall Street Journal article last Monday were the final straws.** [We cannot allow any Darwin doubters any of their rights.] We will think some more about it before proceeding (E-mail dated November 22, 2005).

Vladimir Kogan wrote that the department needs to openly and aggressively attack those who support ID, and that they are not welcome at ISU:

Any simple idea can be turned around by a shrewd enough lawyer. In my view the best publicity ISU can dream about is a direct and open confrontation with Discovery Institute and alike, even in the worst situation of the court turning against the Dept. On the other hand, **our open statement signed and put in a visible place, will show to GG that this is not a friendly place for him to develop further his ideas.** [Here they are open about their intolerance.] He may look for a better place as a result. Also, I agree with Bruce: it is not nice to discuss all this behind his back, after all he probably honestly believes in what he is doing and he is certainly a courageous man. An open statement will clear up the air (E-mail dated November 22, 2005).

Bruce Harmon then wrote:

He has crossed the line in a few places where he has admitted that he uses ID to do “science.” [Is this a crime? Is it Illegal?] I think he is sincere, so perhaps he would not mind talking and discussing it so that he could learn where the faculty stood (E-mail dated November 22, 2005).

Steve Kawaler acknowledged that they knew full well that what they were doing to Gonzalez was illegal:

We should expect that the DI (or whoever comes to Guillermo’s aid) will be subpoenaing our records and anything else they can get (including copies of the e-mails that are being exchanged between all of us). So with that in mind, keeping the process as fair as possible should be utmost. [i.e. we need to cover our tracks better, and practice more subterfuge.]

Before doing anything further on this, you should get some sort of advice from Tanaka’s office [their lawyer]—see my previous note, which reflected discussions I have already had with the former employment lawyer that I sleep with each night. [A sexist way to describe his wife.]

And remember that every member of the tenured faculty votes on tenure decisions for assistant professors, so unless the signatories on any statement are ALL retired faculty, the issues I raised earlier will be up front. (E-mail dated November 22, 2005)

John R. Clem then wrote that it looks like IU has produced a hostile work environment:

I had a discussion yesterday evening with my son Paul, who has had management training at Sandia. I told him about the current situation and the concerns about “hostile work environments.” His opinion was that indeed **lawyers might well be successful in convincing a jury of average Americans that publication of our statement was responsible for creating a hostile work environment.** He even thought that **if Eli got a written opinion from the university attorney, this might be offered as further evidence of collusion to create a hostile work environment.** (Paul thought that the farthest he would go is to have Eli ask the university attorney off the record for what courts have considered as hostile work environments.)

As strong as my feelings are on this matter, I have come around to Steve Kawaler’s point of view. I now feel that **publication of such a statement might become the most important piece of evidence in a successful court case to guarantee tenure to the person whose scientific credibility we would be attempting to discredit...** I fear that a published statement from a group of scientists closely connected to the department, might put the whole situation in jeopardy. I therefore wish to withdraw my name from any public statement from a group of scientists closely connected to the department.

As for candidates for faculty positions, I think it is best to simply reassure them on a one-one basis that the highly publicized views of one untenured faculty member are not at all typical, and that, to the contrary, **no other faculty members in our department inject their religious views into their scientific research in this way.** [How does he know this?]

As for the unfortunate publicity we are receiving and the embarrassment we feel as a department, I think the best policy is just to grin and bear it for the next couple of years (E-mail dated November 27, 2005).

Joerg Schmalian wrote in response that, even if their actions make it clear that we are creating a hostile work environment, we should not let this stop us from doing so:

As much as I understand and respect John's point of view, I think we should nevertheless proceed. What we plan to do is to endorse a statement made by the APS, explaining clearly that we strongly support each person's right to express their points of view. This isn't hostile as far as I am concerned.

I honestly hope Gonzalez' promotion will be **based on his abundant measurements of metallicity in planet carrying stars.** [It was not.] As I pointed out earlier, **our statement may well convince him to base his case just on this. He may well have a solid tenure case then.** If he will be promoted based on this, fine. I only want people to know that I disagree with him on other issues, something that does not exclude to work in the same building and to deal with respect with each other.

Let me turn it around. If it becomes clear that there were efforts to write such a statement and that the statement was not made only to avoid the impression of a hostile environment, isn't this strong evidence for secrecy in the department? It may be argued that this proves that **we wanted to have him out all along, and only kept it quiet to make a false impression.** [Is this not what happened?] Maybe this is constructed, but I am sure good lawyers can make this one work as well as any other option. Thus, I prefer to be more naive, go ahead with this or a modified statement and see whether there actually is support in the faculty.

John Hauptman then wrote:

However, and this is critical, the basic principle is that during this period **there must be no persecutions or even reprimands that would tend to diminish freedom of inquiry to any degree. This principle has been violated massively** in the physics department [Which is where Gonzalez taught] and, concerning my use of the word reprehensible, was violated by your petition. [The truth comes out!]

Denial of tenure in this case is not a penalty, but a judgment. This is the ideal, although **I suspect many voted for other reasons,** [then the proper ones] and I suspect the Discovery Institute will drag these people out in court. **Your petition was more than "merely saying ID is not science." It did not spontaneously arise from your outrage over ID,** although

the coincidence with Bush's speech supporting ID was helpful. **It had to do with Guillermo.**

There are thousands of outrages (I have a long list) **and ID is one of them, but a university is still a place for free inquiry no matter how unpopular or even wrong some ideas may be.** [Very well put! Excellent!] Likewise, we have an obligation to criticize and, for example, I criticize what I think is garbage physics in my department, and in the public arena **I criticize those who support fascist policies.** [What would you call what is occurring at IU?]

I believe the **religious nutcases should be challenged at every opportunity**, but in ways that do not hand them more free publicity. [No one even knew what Gonzalez' religion was, so they had no basis to criticize his religion. They just knew that he was religious]. I copied [for] you ... an email [I sent] to Hector Avalos which may relate to your comments, in particular the question of "aimed at Gonzalez." I am not a lawyer, but be prepared for the Discovery Institutes' lawyers to hone in on this one.

In my letter I wrote that the petition, primarily its timing and in my mind its intent, was reprehensible. You are quite right to be sensitive to the issues of ID among your students, but you needn't be reminded that these are "teaching moments" and you have the upper hand holding vastly more knowledge and information. [Is this not indoctrination?] If you handle this well, you win by a large margin.

If you start talking about "methodological naturalism", you lose by a large margin. You say that your "job [is] made more difficult" by these ID notions, but I would say it makes your job more important and more interesting. **I also face students in my Newspaper Physics class who espouse ID and creationist notions**, and I handle them like a scientist. It doesn't take much. (E-mail June 5, 2007)

Jim Colbert then wrote:

I won't comment further on being called "reprehensible" in the Des Moines Register other than to affirm that you have the right to hold that belief if you wish. I feel, however, that your comment "obviously aimed at Gonzalez" requires a response. As you can see in the letter (below) we did not:

1. Mention Dr. Gonzalez by name.
2. Make any comments regarding tenure decisions for assistant professors in natural science departments at ISU, or elsewhere, who choose to espouse "intelligent design" ideas as science.
3. Restrict our objections regarding "intelligent design" to the astronomical arguments advanced by Dr. Gonzalez (and others), but also included the much more common and widespread "intelligent design" claims made about the

complexity of the biological organisms present on Earth. [Are you saying biological organs are not complex?]

On a personal note, at the time we wrote this statement (August 2005) I was aware of Dr. Gonzalez in only a very vague way and had never looked at “The Privileged Planet.” As a biological scientist I was, however, very aware that about two weeks prior President G.W. Bush had been quoted by the national media as saying we should teach both evolution and “intelligent design” as science in public schools.... After 20 years (in 2005) of being a college biology professor and **having my job made more difficult by many students under the misimpression that there is a substantial (or any) body of scientific evidence supporting the idea that a supernatural being must be responsible for the origin and diversity of life on Earth**, [Is this not open atheism that he is espousing here?] but a conspiracy of “secular scientists” represses this evidence, I am very sensitive to these issues.

Conclusions

I can think of no other description that applies to this situation except that the University administrators openly lied in claiming that the ID issue had nothing to do with the reason why Gonzalez was fired from ISU. Martha Stewart and many other persons have been convicted of perjury for lying and, yet, what clearly seems like lying in this case has been ignored. Universities must be held accountable for their illegal and immoral conduct, and it is about time the public who pays their bills demand they do so. Furthermore, academic freedom as defined by leading authorities does not exist at ISU (Menzie, 2006)

References

Green, Jocelyn. 2008. “ID Tagged: Faculty member at Iowa State University Denied Tenure for Supporting Intelligent Design.” *Christianity Today*, 52(2):15-16.

Menzie, Kathy. 2006. “Academic Freedom: Illusions, Allusions, and Conclusions.” *Democratic Communique*, 20:69-107, Spring.