

Libel case against the scientific journal *Nature* begins

November 14 2011, by Bob Yirka



(PhysOrg.com) -- The British science journal *Nature*, which publishes both purely academic papers and editorial pieces, is being sued in a British court by a former editor of the theoretical physics journal *Chaos, Solitons & Fractals*, for libel. In the suit, Mohamed El Naschie, an Egyptian mathematician and engineer, alleges claims made by *Nature* in an article published back in 2008, damaged his reputation.

The case highlights a growing concern in the [scientific community](#), at least in Britain, that individuals or corporations are increasingly turning to libel suits to prevent information about them being released. The end result, some worry, is that it will lead to less scientific debate, and subsequently sloppy science that will serve no one but those conducting science purely for the purpose of profit.

In the case of Mr. Naschie, *Nature* pointed out in the article in question what it had come to learn from speaking with various sources in the scientific community, namely that Mr. Naschie was using the journal he was working for to further his own career by publishing his own articles, rather than other's in the field as is traditionally done in other such journals. The point being, that such articles wouldn't necessarily have to pass a stringent [peer review](#) process before being printed, which might lead some to suggest that they weren't up to snuff. Which is pretty much what *Nature* wrote.

But in printing such assertions an article, the publishers at Nature chose to attack an individual, which they knew would severely damage his reputation. They stuck their necks out for what they believed was a noble cause: exposing a research scientist who was side-stepping the time-tested process used by scientists the world over to maintain trust in the scientific community, the peer review process. Without it, journals would be filled with articles claiming all manner of nonsense forcing those interested in serious science to seek more private avenues to discern what was actually being achieved in any particular field.

Thus, the case is not just about *Nature* and Mr. Naschie, it's about the rules of law and whether they can or should be used by those seeking to subvert the peer review process or whether journals such as *Nature* should be allowed to lay claims against an individual in such a public and sometimes humiliating way.

Of course this one case won't settle the matter once and for all; law is a constantly evolving process. But whichever side wins in this case, it's likely to serve as a very important precedent in future lawsuits.

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