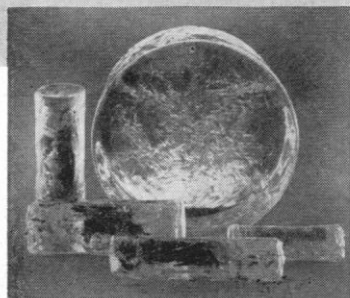


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Letters

Role of Scientific Societies

I was interested in the editorial in the 10 January issue of *Science* [127, 57 (1958)]. We are particularly sensitive to the point which you mentioned of the difficulty of knowing just what one can say for science as a whole. It seems to me, however, that there are certain things which can be said upon which all scientists agree—things that should be said.

I have in mind, for example, the importance of a rigorous basic education in science, which a large portion of our informed citizenry should have. Further, all scientists will probably agree on the need for greater emphasis on basic research and a better understanding on the part of the public of the importance of basic research. Unless the scientist, or an organization representing scientists, speaks out for such things, scientific progress is very likely to suffer. In other words, it seems to me that scientists, with the special training and talents that they have, should combat, in some form or other, the great anti-intellectual forces which seem to develop almost automatically in a free society.

ELMER HUTCHISSON

American Institute of Physics,
New York, New York

Double Standard?

The recent editorial in *Science* entitled "The Horse's Mouth" [127, 57 (1958)], which distinguishes, by inference at least, between the validity of scientific data and the theories logically derived from them and the validity of opinions of scientists concerning the social and other nonscientific implications of their observations, is most timely indeed. Unfortunately, preeminence in science may lend unwarranted weight to the publicized opinions of scientists on completely nonscientific matters regardless of the subject or the qualifications of the individuals who are expressing their views.

Despite the propensity of some members of other professional groups to make ill-considered and inaccurate statements to the public press concerning matters in which they have no special competence, we might reasonably expect scientists, who are supposedly trained in the discipline of objectivity, to restrain themselves in this respect. Unfortunately, this is not the case, as is witnessed, for instance, by the recent address given at the meeting of a national scientific society to the effect that now that man has launched a world satellite, man can dis-

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card the idea of God. Similarly, a Nobel Prize winner in microbiology is currently reported in the public press to have stated that, inasmuch as immortality cannot be demonstrated by science, it cannot be held to be true. That, insofar as the pertinence of scientific data is concerned, these conclusions are *non sequitur*, that the scientific method is not designed to consider these matters, and that the authors of these opinions have no formal knowledge of metaphysics or theology, is little realized by the general public nor, I suspect, adequately appreciated by the authors themselves. However, being human, scientists will very probably continue to release through the public press their private views on any and every subject if given the opportunity, and it is their democratic privilege to do so. Whether they are justified in representing such opinions as "scientific" is quite another matter.

This brings me to the main point of this letter; that is, that in the scientific press, at least, articles expressing personal opinions on nonscientific matters should be so labeled and should be clearly dissociated from objective technical reports and reviews. *Science* and *The Scientific Monthly* [now combined with *Science*, the joint journal continuing in the *Science* format] have been particularly remiss in this respect, due, perhaps, to the broad nature of their coverage. During the last year, for instance, in the journals cited above, there have been published a number of feature articles dealing detrimentally with our traditional systems of politics, morals, and religion. That the intellectual precepts of these aspects of our culture should be critically scrutinized, I grant without reservation. I maintain, however, that we may rightly demand that, even though those who undertake to write on such subjects in scientific journals be eminent scientists, they should still be required to have some competent technical knowledge of their subjects and should treat the latter with the same logic and objectivity that they are required to use in their scientific publications. No journal of ethics or moral philosophy, for instance, would accept some of the articles you have published simply because the authors were renowned biologists or physicists. And of particular importance, incidental private judgments on such matters should not be allowed to appear in articles which profess to be technical in nature. One of your recent features, supposedly a discussion of theoretical biology, contained a diatribe of dogmatic and unsubstantiated statements to the effect that scientists who believe in the reality of supernatural phenomena are schizophrenic in their reasoning, and that such irrational beliefs preclude the scientific study of biological phenomena! This sort of thing has no rightful place in a technical ar-

ticle, whether or not the editors disclaim responsibility for the opinions of the author. Since *Science* and similar journals reject scientific articles and reviews unless evidence is presented substantiating the data presented and the reasonableness of the conclusions drawn therefrom, I urge a tightening of editorial policy to raise the standards of articles on nonscientific matters as well.

WILLIAM B. ATKINSON


College of Medicine,
University of Cincinnati,
Cincinnati, Ohio

Meetings

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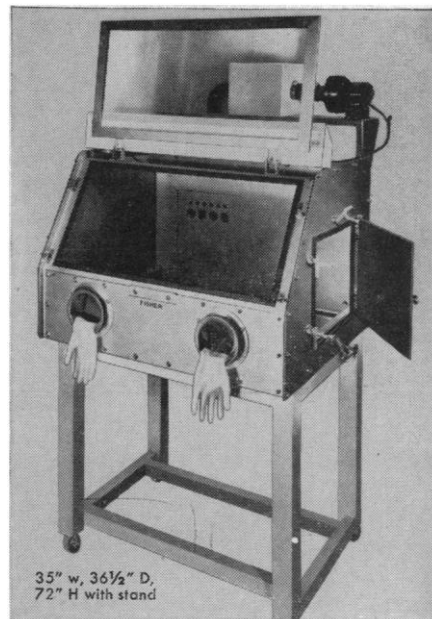


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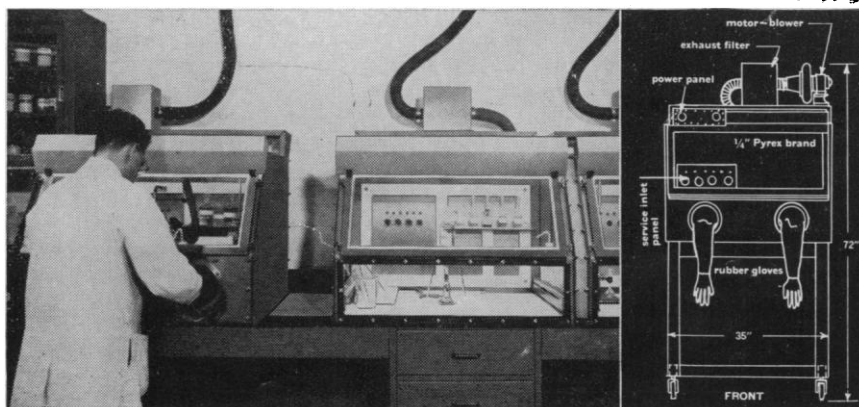
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