

SCIENCE

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LETTERS

A Reviewer's Obligation

As the editor of a major scientific journal, I want to respond to an allegation made by Rustum Roy (Letters, 1 Jan., p. 13) about publishing through the "traditional route" (peer-reviewed journals) rather than using the popular press. Roy complains that there is no "formal moral obligation" on the part of the referee of a paper to keep its contents confidential. While I'm not sure I understand what "formal" means in this context, the board of editors of the journals of the American Chemical Society (ACS) have adopted ethical guidelines that state, "A reviewer should treat a manuscript sent for review as a confidential document," and "Reviewers should not use or disclose unpublished information . . . in a manuscript under consideration, except with the consent of the author." These guidelines are published in the ACS *Style Guide* and periodically in ACS journals. Moreover, the *Journal of the American Chemical Society* and many other journals will honor an author's request not to send a manuscript to a certain referee if the author thinks that seeing the unpublished manuscript would give that referee a competitive advantage. In my experience as editor, I have not been informed of any cases where referees disclosed or improperly used information gleaned from an unpublished manuscript. There may be other reasons for announcing findings at a press conference rather than in the scientific literature, but I don't think defects in the peer-review system is one of them.

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Priorities in Research

In a mid-1992 report from the White House, Allen Bromley and the President's Council of Advisers on Science and Technology (PCAST) emphasized the importance of increased emphasis on basic research, defined as the search for understanding of natural laws without reference to the solution of practical problems. A more recent, "farewell" PCAST report, "Renewing the promise—research-intensive universities and the nation" (C. An-

derson, News & Comment, 1 Jan., p. 20) deemphasizes further expansion of "basic research" at the universities. A second report, from the National Science Foundation, indicates that "strategic research aimed at national industrial and economic needs . . . wins the day" (C. Anderson, News & Comment, 1 Jan., p. 20). All this has caused some concern in the academic scientific community.

Many years ago, the late Senator and Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey conveyed to me a different version of the problem. He spoke of "noncategorical basic research" as the search for understanding natural laws without reference to solution of practical problems, and of "categorical basic research" as the search for new knowledge needed for the solution of practical problems. The questions that are asked are necessarily different, but just as "basic." In his view, the National Institutes of Health were created as "categorical basic science" institutes, although when the going got tough, they engaged in much "noncategorical basic research."

The priorities of science as conceived by the founders of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences are of special interest in this respect: "To Science, pilot of industry, conqueror of disease, multiplier of the harvest, explorer of the universe, revealer of nature's law, external guide to truth" (1). There is no question that priorities, however difficult to arrive at (2), are needed for a proper division of labor and assignment of financial resources (D. E. Koshland, Jr., Editorial, 15 Jan., p. 291).

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References and Notes

1. Inscribed on the dome of the great hall of the National Academy of Sciences.
2. A. B. Sabin, *Science* 156, 1568 (1967).

We were sorry to learn of Dr. Sabin's death on 3 March.—Eds.

Availability of Taq Polymerase

The article "Roche gets tough on illicit sales of PCR reagent" by Peter Aldous (News & Comment, 4 Dec., p. 1572) discusses the use of Taq polymerase for polymerase chain reaction (PCR) analysis.