

SCIENCE

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LETTERS

Distributed aggression

Vice President Al Gore's earlier editorial is critiqued by five writers, and the propriety of publishing an editorial in *Science* by a politician—whatever his office—is questioned. The criteria used to review whistleblowers' complaints are described. An earlier editorial that likened the foes of affirmative action policies to circling wolves elicits four vivid letters (at right, a hungry wolf). The experience of immigrant and American women in computer science classes, which are largely made up of men, is discussed. And the wisdom of throwing new Ph.D. recipients into schoolteaching positions without any job training is doubted.



DANIEL J. COX/ANIMALS ANIMALS

A "Learning Society"?

I began to read the editorial in the 12 April issue (p. 177), assuming that it was written by the president of the AAAS. As I read, I became increasingly alarmed, thinking the presidency had been captured by some sappy romantic from the liberal fringe. Thank God it was only the Vice President . . . of the United States.

I was also relieved to read that this was an adaption from the Vice President's original speech—perhaps hastily and carelessly done. How else to explain its being so full of so little understanding? It is a veritable lesson in what market economics in a democracy is not.

William Lasseter

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Gore warns us that "there are some in Congress who are threatening to turn the clock backward. . . ." Let me guess—could it be the *Republican* party that "retreats from understanding, flinches in the face of challenges, and disdains learning," which leads us to a "know-nothing society," and which supports "policies designed for Fred Flintstone"?

I realize that these views are widely held by government-funded researchers, who sit on each other's "peer-review panels" and distribute tax dollars to those of their colleagues who share their positions. But I have never seen this perspective so clearly enunciated in a scientific journal as in Gore's Fred Flintstone metaphor. As a researcher whose salary has been paid by non-governmental funds for 11 of the past 12 years, and whose work has been repeatedly rejected from the "best" journals in the world by my less dogmatically challenged "peers," I am clearly in no position to speak for the mainstream "scientific" community.

But in the unlikely event that there is an interest in my political opinion, I might be tempted to suggest that nongovernmental funding is frequently more "distributed," and occasionally even more "intelligent," than the governmental variety.

Are we now to abandon all pretense to objectivity and scientific detachment and turn the pages of *Science* over to political speechwriters?

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For an editorial whose focus is aimed at a scientific audience, Gore's remarks seem both offensive and inappropriate. The theme of "the metaphor of distributed intelligence" is a good example of the tools used by politicians who have been known to step into ideology as their political targets overtake their intellect; politicians through the ages have not been known for their modesty. To imply that we do not have an adequate "learning society" indicates resentment against the accomplishments of the past and undermines the credibility of those accomplishments.

The extreme accountability imposed by the increase in politically imposed rules and regulations is detrimental and counterproductive. The vital question should be whether scientific endeavor can be reshaped without losing the very characteristics that have made science so productive. The common purpose should be to use scarcer funds more productively to serve our needs and goals. Science, like culture, is the product of human toil; science influences culture as much as culture influences science. No one knows how to plan science with more confidence now than in the past.

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To my knowledge, Al Gore is not a member of *Science's* editorial staff, nor is *Science* or the AAAS a branch of the Democratic Party. Publishing Gore's remarks as an editorial (rather than in a news item) gives the impression, intended or not, that *Science* is extending its imprimatur to Gore and, by extension, to his party. There may be legitimate criticisms of the Republican plan to favor basic research at the expense of applied (and of many other Republican positions on science), and it is certainly in the purview of *Science* to air these criticisms and to take an editorial stance on them. To present the words of *any* politician as an editorial, however, is to go from being a disinterested contributor to political debate to being an implicit supporter of a political organization. The idea that science at least strives to achieve impartiality and objectivity (deconstructionism momentarily aside) is an important part of the scientific culture, and of whatever esteem and influence science enjoys in the larger community. As

such, particularly in an election year, any appearance of partisanship is inappropriate for the flagship journal of the U.S. scientific community.

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Help! We have been challenged by Gore to make something happen, but we don't have the slightest idea of what that something is.

A metaphor is apparently more than a figure of speech. Instead, it must be code for a new way of reasoning. Even several readings don't help: the editorial just doesn't make sense. We need better clues if we are to fulfill our obligation and make the "metaphor of distributed intelligence" do its stuff.

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Whistleblower Protection

Having failed to persuade Charles W. McCutchen in personal communication that he misunderstood the population surveyed

in the whistleblower study and the handling of queries by the Office of Research Integrity (ORI), I am obliged, as project officer for the study, to respond publicly to his comment (Letters, 29 Mar., p. 1793; Letters, L. J. Rhoades, 8 Mar., p. 1345; Random Samples, 5 Jan., p. 35).

In his letter, McCutchen seems to classify as a whistleblower anyone who ever contacted ORI about a potential allegation. The final study report clearly stated that "Only individuals involved in closed cases were contacted for the study." Whistleblowers in open cases were not included because in some cases there may have been insufficient time for them to experience the full consequences of being a whistleblower and their participation in the study might impact on the open case. Individuals who contacted ORI about a potential allegation were not included in the study unless their "query" resulted in a case that was closed before the study began.

A query represents the initial contact with a potential whistleblower to determine whether the concern being expressed falls under ORI jurisdiction. Each query is extensively reviewed to determine whether the following criteria for opening a case have been met.

1) The research in which the alleged

Patrik never fails to get a reaction

Patrik Samuelson is a molecular biologist at the Royal
Institute of Technology in Stockholm, Sweden.

Patrik uses Ready-To-Go beads to convert his
RNA samples into cDNA templates for PCR.*

* PCR is a patented process of Hoffmann-La Roche, Inc.

