

SCIENCE

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Information for Contributors appears on pages 36–38 of the 3 January 1992 issue. Editorial correspondence, including requests for permission to reprint and reprint orders, should be sent to 1333 H Street, NW, Washington, DC 20005. **Science Telephone:** 202-326-6500, TDD 202-408-7770. London office: 071-435-4291. **Subscription/Member Benefits Questions:** 202-326-6417. **Other AAAS Programs:** 202-326-6400.

LETTERS

Paleoanthropological Contexts

I can't stand it anymore! You're driving me and most of my colleagues crazy with your "Golly, Mr. Science!" approach to paleoanthropology. One would think that there is no epistemological infrastructure whatsoever to paleoanthropological research protocols and that the whole enterprise is entirely "discovery-driven."

Paleoanthropology is admittedly under-axiomatized, and there is no mandate for its practitioners to tell us where they are coming from conceptually or paradigmatically. However, some of us, at least, are aware of epistemological issues and of the necessity for making explicit the inferential basis for our claims of knowledge. This tends to be more of a problem in a nonexperimental field like paleoanthropology than it is in a "big science" context. Unfortunately, most of the workers who dig up the fossils are essentially strict empiricists who wouldn't recognize a paradigmatic bias if they tripped over one. However, this deplorable situation is not much helped by a tendency to deal with the "facts" as if they actually "spoke for themselves." Facts do not exist apart from the conceptual frameworks that define them. To paraphrase Milford Wolpoff, I have been in rooms with "facts" (data) and listened very carefully. They never said a word.

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Teraflop Computers

The arguments presented in Gordon Bell's Perspective on teraflop computing (3 Apr., p. 64) are based on two incorrect assumptions about massively parallel computers. First, massively parallel computers are not only applicable to "specialized, highly parallel applications." We now have experience with hundreds of massively parallel machines in thousands of scientific applications. Massively parallel computers have been successfully applied to almost all types of large scientific computations, including high energy physics, global climate modeling and geophysics, astrophysics, linear and nonlinear optimization, computational fluid dynamics and magnetohydrodynamics, electromagnetism, computational chemis-

try, computational electromagnetics, computational structural mechanics, materials modeling, evolutionary modeling, and neural modeling. They have also excelled in all the major categories of numerical methods, including finite difference and finite element schemes, direct methods, Monte Carlo calculations, particle-in-cell methods, and *n*-body problems. Experience indicates that massively parallel machines are applicable to any scientific problem that involves the processing of a large amount of data.

Second, massively parallel machines do not require special programming languages. Most applications on massively parallel machines today are written in FORTRAN 90, the International Standards Organization FORTRAN standard. It is also possible to program massively parallel machines in FORTRAN 77 (2). Massively parallel machines often require program restructuring to take advantage of parallelism, but they do not require special languages.

Bell also argues that large-scale teraflop machines should not be built because they will be less expensive if we wait a few years. This argument applies equally well to any type of computer. Applied in retrospect, it suggests that any computer purchase in the last three decades was a mistake.

The criteria for deciding whether to build teraflop computers should be the same as for any other large-scale scientific tool. Is the cost justified by the potential scientific and economic gains? In several applications, such as global climate modeling, quantum chromodynamical lattice calculations, and protein structure prediction, the answer is yes.

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Confidence in Science

Recent editorials by Philip H. Abelson (3 Apr., p. 9) and Norman Hackerman (10 Apr., p. 157) express concern about dimin-