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Who Speaks for Whom or for What?

DURING the period when Bentley Glass was so ably giving the AAAS temporary editing service, he sent me a letter from a reader who raised interesting questions about the general problem of active participation of our journals, editorially or otherwise, in the lively contemporary issues that involve scientists. My reply to Dr. Glass, slightly emended and enlarged, follows. It touches, of course, only a few of the issues and procedures that connect with the broader question: How can the AAAS properly and effectively play a much more active role in controversial matters of concern to scientists?

Some persons seem to think that *Science*, and particularly the editorial matter therein, ought to "speak for Science." This seems to me an untenable idea, and a bad one. Just who would then be speaking for whom, or for what? By what authority would he speak? If the editor waited until he had the approval of the Board of Directors, the published statement would suffer considerable delay, and it would very likely also suffer considerable dilution in content.

In commenting on any such proposal I would want first to remark that I personally much prefer the word "science" to the word "Science." For we are dealing not with some mysteriously revealed body of absolute truth that deserves the deification of capital letters; but rather with that amazingly successful, interesting, intriguing, elusive, and rewarding human process by means of which, within one particular framework of reference, men approach truth.

This process moves in the direction of increasing precision and validity, but it does not reach perfection. It deals with certain very important aspects of experience—chiefly those that lend themselves to classification through quantitative regularities—but it excludes many other important aspects of experience. And science is developed by individual men, with all their bewildering and valuable individual differences. In some fields of science the techniques and criteria are so maturely developed that the influences of the individual origins have largely averaged out. But it remains true, and how fortunate that it does, that

scientists do not all think alike even about science. When the issues involve science and other aspects of life as well, then it is almost notoriously true that scientists do not think alike!

Thus there just is not any such thing as the "Voice of Science," and anyone who pretends to speak with that voice is in for a row. What there is, and let us be thankful for this, is a large set of voices of individual scientists.

If you give these voices an open forum, conducted with reasonable rules of decency and freedom, I happen to be convinced that the statistical results would be excellent. You would not get unanimity, but you would get clarification, illumination, awareness, and concern.

I entirely agree that "if the AAAS is to be a vigorous force for the betterment of science, it cannot continue in the face of crucial situations with closed eyes and a dumb mouth." This means, of course, running various risks. Some scientists will say that science should stay right inside laboratories; just as some persons think that religion should stay inside churches. The liberals who disagreed would get angry; the conservatives, whether they agreed or not, would get worried. The AAAS would have little flurries of outraged resignations from time to time. But I am even more sure that there would be a steadily rising stream of new membership.

It is even possible, as the reader in question suggested, that we would need to protect our journals with some insurance against libel suits. If that should turn out to be necessary, then I think we ought to recognize that as a faintly nasty and irritating but necessary expense—sort of like having the grease trap cleaned at one's house or the garbage hauled away.

I do, however, think that we should proceed by offering a forum, rather than by pretending that we speak from the throne. I think that the editor, as an individual, should have free access to that forum. I think any other member should also.

WARREN WEAVER

President of the American Association for the Advancement of Science

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