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Editorial Responsibility

Practically every editorial that has appeared on this page has been criticized by one or more readers. (So far no one has protested our congratulations to *Nature* on the occasion of that distinguished journal's 86th birthday, but there is still time, for that editorial appeared only a short time ago.) Most of the criticisms express a point of view different from that of the editorial writer. Such letters are always welcome, for, if the topic is worth discussing, it is healthy to examine alternative points of view.

A few criticisms are written to correct errors. For example, several weeks ago we chided those few scientists who appear to be overeager for publicity and, in the course of the editorial, mentioned that one newspaper columnist had been critical of the television program *March of Medicine* for what he considered to be sensationalism. It was immediately pointed out to us that a number of other commentators had praised that particular program and that we had quoted only one man's view. This was correct, and if our comment harmed a worth-while program, we apologize.

An occasional letter takes us to task on the ground that no editor should be so presumptuous as to think that he can speak for American scientists. Right; none does. This is the reason why all editorials are signed. The author—sometimes an officer or staff member of the Association, sometimes a guest—speaks for himself. If he says anything of importance, fine; if he is provocative and stirs up a useful controversy, also fine; if he writes drivel or says something that is wrong, the error is his, not the Association's and not science's.

A newspaper can state its editorial opinions anonymously, for it is generally understood that a newspaper expresses the judgment of its owners and editors. *Science*, in contrast, is not a newspaper, and the Association that owns it is not a private enterprise. The Association is 50,000 scientists. Through its affiliates, it is the focus of some 260 scientific societies. Within its membership and its affiliates are many points of view, many interests, and many differences of opinion. On the rare occasions when the Association speaks formally, the statement is prepared by the Board of Directors, the Council, or both, for the formal expression of opinion of the Association should and does carry great weight and must therefore be prepared with great care.

An editorial, however, expresses the opinion of an individual and not of the Association as a whole. The author is responsible for being as accurate as his resources allow. He is responsible for electing topics that are worth discussing. And he should be provocative enough to make readers think about the problems involved in an issue. But he is not the voice of science. When we consider the implications of such a possibility, we can be thankful that he is not.—D. W.