

You Whining at Me?

Dear Editor,

Last August, you complained in an editorial about the language and tenor of the times and quoted 2 dead malcontents—Orwell the loser and Weiner the whiner—who said the same sort of things 50-odd years ago. You could just as easily have gone back further and found similar quotes decrying industrialization, the freeing of the serfs, and the consequent loss of spiritual grounding.

You asked whether our leaders are talking to you. Thickheaded and retro as you are, the answer has to be “Obviously not.” They’re talking to sources of money in the language of postindustrialism. As our own Professor Wagstaff has said, “In these critical times, peer review is not enough. We can no longer leave it to scientists to determine scientific goals. All stakeholders deserve empowerment. . . . It is up to those entrusted with leadership to provide the kind of organizational structure that plays such a vital, perhaps the most vital, role in scientific discovery. . . . It is important to see the future, to make science useful, to provide purpose and direction. And, as NASA has shown us, there will be benefits not only to large companies (e.g., contracts) but also to ordinary citizens (e.g., Tang).”

You even bemoaned the excessive role of money in science today. How childish! How medieval! Who is it that owes you a good living doing what you please? When did this become your right—as if scientists are, or should be, members of a priestly aristocracy exempt from the struggles of the world? Don’t let euphemisms mislead you. As administrators know, creativity can be measured by the number of job offers, innovation by the number of invitations, and contribution by the number of papers multiplied by impact factor. In the end, however, your value, whether it’s claimed to be based on scientific leadership, creativity, contributions, teaching, or service, really boils down to how much money you bring in. This is because we

are approaching the end of the age of universities as secular monasteries, even to their sense of sanctuary and mystery, their righteousness and absolution of sins for major donors. Handouts for secular salvation have fallen behind. Our leaders have to bring in more money and, to do so, must make new, improved promises in the scramble to find new patrons.

And how are they to fulfill these promises? With large visions, large budgets, large organizations, and the kind of leadership that simplifies resource allocation and maintains accountability. By deploying the power of modern management: quantifying tasks, performance, and progress; expanding the recognition and protection of intellectual property; rewarding efficiency and productivity; and fostering competition as well as cooperation.

A bit of rough and tumble competition is good for society, even if it hurts some individuals. I, for example, am pleased that some Swede has published the hypothesis that bad footwear causes schizophrenia (*Medical Hypotheses* 2004;63:740-747), even though I’ve been working on the idea for more than a decade. I, like Darwin, aimed for a grand synthesis and postponed publication—a mistake in these fast-paced times. Now I will just have to work harder to bring my superior quality, mission-oriented, integrative, interdisciplinary, translational research to fruition. Fortunately, I started talks with some well-known, socially conscious makers of fine shoes some years ago.

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