

Re: Why scientists should not set science policy

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From: Paul Bramscher (*brams006_nospam_at_tc.umn.edu*)

Date: 07/12/04

Date: Mon, 12 Jul 2004 10:48:20 -0500

Doug Haxton wrote:

> *On Fri, 09 Jul 04 15:16:02 GMT, lparker@NOSPAMemory.edu (Lloyd Parker)*

> *wrote:*

>

>

>>*In article <n6kre054oe6pjdt6s1u10r92kecloiloab@4ax.com>,*

>> *Doug Haxton <hal@oa.com> wrote:*

>>

>>>*On Thu, 08 Jul 2004 17:39:19 -0500, Paul Bramscher*

>>>*<brams006_nospam@tc.umn.edu> wrote:*

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>>>>*You're describing the Bush administration or religion more accurately*

>>>>*than science. Science presents falsifiable theories. The*

>>>>*religious-right and neocons present unalterable orthodoxy.*

>>>>

>>>>*As does the religious left...and environmental activists...and*

>>>>*Marxists...etc.*

>>>>

>>>>*Doug*

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>>>>

>>>>*Another science illiterate heard from.*

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>

> *You don't think that leftists have orthodoxy from which they feel*

> *pressure not to deviate?*

Sure. This is why science is neither rightist nor leftist. Yet it is the current Bush administration's extreme-right orthodoxy which is relevant. None of the branches of US government at the national level are leftist-driven in policy, dogma or orthodoxy today so to speak of them is a theoretical issue at this point.

Pick any politically neutral body (for example, the International Red Cross, Union of Concerned Scientists, etc.). Ignore their bi-partisan composition, and call them left-wing for taking issue with a piece of

policy which ignores their findings (be it either human rights with regard to detainees or environmental or other policy with regard to science).

Such an accusation will be somewhat a self-fulfilling prophesy. Certainly the Bush administration has done with with regard to science, and such an attitude will cultivate few friends this way. Compared to extreme right orthodoxy, everything is "left" -- even neutrality appears biased. I'm curious what a neocon would call a right-tilted slant. Or are they, indeed, so far to the right today that there is no legitimate organization, news outlet, or politician which warrants a "hey, he's too biased to the right" label?

Certainly the center-right democrats have taken issue with liberal democrats, with the Greens, Nader, etc. But there seems to be no entity further to the right than present neocons, and no movement within the Republican Party to return to the center.

Thus, the easy critique of anything left of far-right as being biased. It's not only self-fulfilling, it's also self-evident.

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> *James Lovelock (author of The Gaia Theory), beloved of Greens,*
> *recently advocated a massive shift to nuclear power to combat Global*
> *Warming. He was denounced by environmental groups worldwide.*

Lovelock had some interesting ideas, but he wasn't trained formally in ecology, the environment, etc. Also, his theory on self-maintaining systems is clearly an over-simplification with regard to the earth's complex dynamics. We know that complex systems can spiral out of maintenance mode, ice ages come and go, large meteor impacts occur, vulcanism, etc. can throw systems out of whack. And, in the end, the earth will be burnt as the sun goes supernova and there is no recovery from that. In a nutshell, he's had some interesting ideas but might consider going back to practicing medicine rather than dabbling in nuclear physics or ecology.

> *Greens, you see, have a pathological fear of nuclear power. It's part*
> *of their dogma that nuclear power is Evil.*

I went to Idaho last month and toured EBR-1, the world's first atomic reactor, now a national landmark. Nearby Arco, ID, has the dubious distinction of being the first nuclear-powered city. Since it's half ghost town now, with its river damned totally dry upstream and many closed store fronts, I don't think nuclear power is quite what Arco and cities like it need.

INEEL literally has a nearby city in the desert which is restricted, an active Naval nuclear reactor on obviously unstable geology, and up until even the 1980's the DOE and/or other agencies dumped contaminated water from nuclear plants directly into the underground aquifers.

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So — remote, secret, restricted, unstable geology, military, nuclear weapons, poisoned aquifer for a few centuries.

Calling such activity a "pathological fear" is a gross overstatement. Indeed, it's pathological fear that creates idiocy as nuclear power and its underlying motive: to produce weapons grade material. Any energy source which results in centuries-long custodial work to contain contamination, waste and byproducts is not the sort of legacy we need to pass onto our descendants.