

Scientific Integrity - 2005

A truth, established by proof, does not gain in force from the support of scholars; nor does it lose its certainty because of popular dissent.
(Maimonides, Guide to the Perplexed)

Issue

The importance of sustaining reliable non-biased science and research programs conducted by the most qualified professional scientists to help individuals, businesses, and the government make informed, logical decisions.

Background

Many aspects of modern life, both private and public, require decision making which often relies on the interpretation of scientific data obtained through publicly and privately funded research. In the course of education, North Americans learn to respect “the scientific method” of doing research based on objectivity and freedom from bias. The successful application of science has played a large part in the policies that have made our nation strong and our citizens prosperous and healthy. Scientific research and application must be interpreted from an impartial perspective to avoid erroneous applications which might lead to harmful decisions that negatively affect our land and our people.

The integrity of science is a basic Jewish value. Maimonides notes that “The spiritual perfection of a person consists in his/her becoming an intelligent being – one who knows all that he/she is capable of learning. And such knowledge is obtained not by virtue or piety, but through inquiry and research” (Maimonides, Guide to the Perplexed). Such teachings about the ethics of scientific application have relevance to current trends in the misuse of scientific data in the corporate world and in the policy-making process of government. They serve as a warning against the potential misuse of science in policy-making processes which touch a broad range of private, corporate, and public policy issues.

Examples of the misuse of science in information dissemination have been observed. Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA) and Rep. Henry Waxman (D-CA) recently called for a review of the Department of Health and Human Services website www.4parents.gov because of reports that it included selective inaccuracies about contraception, abstinence, sex, and sexuality education, as documented by the non-partisan, nonprofit Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States. In addition, the press and the Union of Concerned Scientists have documented instances in which scientific findings on the environment that run counter to government policy have been deleted from official reports.

Science can never be free from the values or beliefs of those who conduct it or the socio-historical context in which it is conducted, but it is the least biased method for answering complex questions. North Americans, from the individual to the corporation to the government, traditionally have based important decisions on facts obtained through a reliable scientific method of research. Decisions on a personal level include eating and health habits, medical care, transportation, and other aspects of everyday life. Businesses and corporations rely on scientific information regarding working conditions for their employees, manufacturing procedures, technical equipment, and information specific to an industry, i.e., chemical processes. Government officials create laws and regulations regarding the environment, trade, working conditions, and energy policies, among other policies

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– all traditionally based on truthful reporting of unbiased scientific information interpreted honestly to reach impartial and beneficial decisions. Citizens should have faith that the government, with minimal political influence, selects the best-qualified scientists and encourages scientific exploration to find appropriate solutions in a continuation of the tradition of highly principled standards of science and research, which have served us well.

Resolution

In recognition of Jewish teachings to rely on inquiry and research for intelligent action, Women of Reform Judaism affirms its support of scientific integrity in research and policymaking. WRJ will:

- 1.1) Support the concept of federal funding of scientific research based on the merits of the proposal as established by peer review and oppose funding for that which promotes political or ideological objectives.
- 2.2) Support the appointment of scientists and physicians to government positions and advisory boards on the basis of their scientific expertise, accomplishments, and open-mindedness, without regard to party affiliation, ideological orientation or religious beliefs; and challenge the appointment of those who do not meet these criteria or who are not free of ties to industries with a vested interest in the subject of inquiry.
- 3.3) Call on public officials and appointees to government and advisory bodies to respect the integrity of the scientific process and not manipulate research data to achieve political and ideological objectives and to publish complete and unexpurgated findings.
- 4.4) Advocate that government-employed and government-funded scientists be free from threats and intimidation that might compromise their scientific integrity.
- 5.5) Call for appropriate regulations and laws to insure that the above principles are adhered to and valued.

WRJ urges its affiliated sisterhoods to:

- 1.1) Develop programs that provide resources and information about important science issues for effective advocacy with elected officials.
- 2.2) Monitor government websites, as urged by WRJ alerts, and compare the information contained to that sent by WRJ and our coalition partners. If there are inaccuracies or discrepancies, respond to the appropriate agencies, as requested by WRJ.