Correspondence

Make time for contemplation

Behind the satisfying hum of scientific progress, we hear the drumbeat of scientists pushing and shoving. Concerns surface constantly about research integrity, reproducibility and pressure to publish. We need to draw on the history of science and kindle the benefits of three contemplative but immensely practical ideals: reticence, intimacy and innocence.

To be reticent is to reflect on the significance of our work. Pausing can make for better science. Describing the 16-year delay in publishing his book on insectivorous plants, Darwin wrote that "…a man after a long interval can criticize his own work, almost as well as if it were that of another person". The advice remains good today: consider the alarms over human-genome editing.

The precept of intimacy lifts our research beyond the collection of measurements and data. Think of the gifted cytogeneticist Barbara McClintock, whose biography was entitled *A Feeling for the Organism*. Or the evolutionary theorist Lynn Margulis, who instinctively navigated the complex biological systems of Massachusetts' Sippewissett marshes (see D. Sagan (ed.) *Lynn Margulis: The Life and Legacy of a Scientific Rebel*; Chelsea Green Publishing, 2012).

Scientific innocence means that ideas — not money or fame — take centre stage. We are modest, open to fresh perspectives and new approaches. We take time for exploratory discussions and to listen. Let the conversation begin.

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South African hub tracks SDG research

South Africa is developing a coding system to track research progress towards the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs; see I. Capua and E. Giovannini *Nature* **572**, 178; 2019). Known as the South African SDG Hub, this national facility is hosted by the University of Pretoria (sasdghub.org). We invite other institutions, particularly those in Africa, to join us in unlocking the impact of research related to the development goals.

With the support of the national Department of Science and Innovation, the South African SDG Hub collects, classifies and disseminates publicly available peer-reviewed research from South Africa that stands to contribute to any of the topics covered by the goals' 169 targets.

The hub's first iteration, in 2017, was compiled manually, but it is now being automated. We are currently completing an SDG text classifier.

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Colombia: honour pollinator protection

Colombia faces substantial challenges associated with high deforestation rates and rapid sociopolitical transition in the wake of the 2016 peace agreement. We urge the government to avoid solutions that could be at odds with its international commitment to safeguard pollinators (see go.nature.com/2uzxyc1).

For example, Colombia plans to reintroduce large-scale application of glyphosate to destroy illegal coca fields — despite the damage that the herbicide causes to honeybees (E. V. S. Motta *et al. Proc. Natl Acad. Sci. USA* **115**, 10305–10310; 2018) and a previous nationwide ban on its use. This trade-off is unacceptable. Alternative measures must be taken to combat illicit coca production, such as those laid out in the Colombian Pollination Initiative (see go.nature.com/2uuycrc).

Over one-third of Colombia's beehives collapsed in 2014–17 owing to excessive use of agrochemicals. Proposed legislation for pesticide-free zones is pending in its Congress. However, deforestation will continue to destroy pollinator habitat — even though Colombia's 2019 Development Plan aims to cut the rate of deforestation by 2022 to 30% of that in 2018. The amount of rainforest lost each year by 2022 will still exceed that in 2017 (see D. Armenteras and T. Defler *Nature* **569**, 487; 2019).

Policies that create sustainable livelihoods without harming pollinating insects stand to strengthen Colombia's economy and so can help to counter illicit activities such as coca production.

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Contentious therapy and patients' voices

We wish to clarify two points raised by Eric Topol in his review of our book *Everybody Wants to Go to Heaven but Nobody Wants to Die* (*Nature* **572**, 308–309; 2019).

First, mitochondrial-replacement therapy is still banned by the US Food and Drug Administration, and we say nothing to the contrary. In the book, we note that "in 2016, committees in both the United States and the United Kingdom gave cautious green lights for mitochondrial replacement therapy" — not that any US regulatory agency had done so. The reports we cite were produced by the US National Academies and the Nuffield Council on Bioethics in the United Kingdom, where the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority regulates applications of the therapy.

Second, we do not argue that we have witnessed a complete collapse in the practice of medical paternalism. Rather, we document the many ways in which bioethics and popular American culture have challenged the prevalent view of half a century ago that 'doctor knows best'. The national conversation on bioethics can help to ensure that the voices of patients are increasingly heard.

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Identifying fossils from protein clues

You claim that the identification of a 160,000-year-old Denisovan jawbone from its proteins alone is a first for palaeoproteomics (*Nature* **570**, 433–436; 2019). This is not entirely true.

Jerold Lowenstein pioneered the detection and identification of proteins by immunological methods in fossils of hominins (a 0.5-million-year-old *Homo erectus* and a 1.9-million-year-old *Australopithecus robustus*) and other animal species (J. M. Lowenstein *Phil. Trans. R. Soc. Lond. B* **292**, 143–149 (1981); see also C. Borja *et al. Am. J. Phys. Anthropol.* **103**, 433–441; 1997).

Those immunological techniques relied on protein-binding information and so were less precise than mass spectrometry, which can directly provide the amino-acid sequence of fossil proteins such as collagen from the Denisovan mandible. Nevertheless, they were an important milestone in the history of molecular methods used to identify hominin fossils.

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