

**“Social butterflies’ and ‘open skies’
are equally important for the
transmission of HIV.” Karunesh Tuli, page 594**

its investigation, requested by the rector of the Medical University of Innsbruck, on hold following the announcement by the university council that the rector would shortly lose his position (which has since happened). However, the investigations mandated by the rector are still under way, although no externally visible measures have yet been carried out. His withdrawal will not terminate or otherwise influence the investigations.

The academy has declined to make any pronouncement in advance of a verdict by a formal enquiry because the affair’s scientific, ethical, legal and political issues must all be taken into consideration. A premature statement would not help to clarify the situation and would encourage accusations that its release was politically motivated.

We consider that it is of the utmost importance for the scientific community in Austria to investigate the case in an impartial and unprejudiced way, which will allow us to draw valid and independent conclusions. Individuals being chosen for the investigation will be completely independent and selected for their high scientific competence and moral integrity.

We therefore strongly reject your implication that the Austrian Academy of Sciences could be directly or indirectly involved in any political moves that might promote scientific misconduct and corrupt the scientific community.

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Science journals have been slow to make themselves audible

SIR — Podcasting has become very popular, mainly as a medium for entertainment. But it also holds huge potential for the visually impaired and others, such

as dyslexics, who have reading difficulties. Simultaneously reading and listening to read-aloud news articles and scientific papers, for example, could increase readers’ concentration and absorption of information. Such audio files would open a new world for the blind or partially sighted.

Software is available that translates text from digital files or directly from the Internet into a listener-friendly audio file, but it is expensive. Some freeware has built-in ‘read out-loud’ functions, but the quality is generally inferior.

Several newspapers and magazines already offer subscribers podcasts containing complete and navigable issues in read-aloud format. But the scientific press seems to be lagging behind. The *Nature* podcasts are a good start, but when shall we be able to listen to sections such as Research Highlights, News and Correspondence as downloadable audio?

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Don’t forget people and specimens that make the database

SIR — Further to points raised in your Feature ‘The future of biocuration’ (*Nature* **455**, 47–50; 2008), an example of the inadequate state of biocuration is to be found in the large number of entries in GenBank listed as “unpublished”. In many cases, a quick online search of journal listings turns up the publication. Obviously, the journals and GenBank are not communicating as well as they ought.

It’s also important not to lose sight of the underlying need to curate biological specimens and materials, a function that needs much more support. Biology deals with actual organisms, so proper curation of voucher specimens

and reference cultures, or their equivalent, is essential to confirm, test and build on previous studies.

There is also a lack of support for many of those taking time to build up data sets. “I spent lots of time online editing a database” doesn’t get you anywhere on a resumé or tenure review, or help an unpaid volunteer make a living.

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Religion and science: a guide for the ‘perplexed’

SIR — There is no need for Matthew Cobb and Jerry Coyne (*Nature* **454**, 1049; 2008) to be “perplexed” by your Editorial concerning the funding of science and religion (‘Templeton’s legacy’ *Nature* **454**, 253–254; 2008). As their Correspondence implies, the scientific study of religion is itself an important topic, and the Templeton Foundation gives grants for such work, for example in the field of cognitive psychology and the evolution of religious belief.

There are many reasons why the funding of academic research in this arena should be supported. Far from being in “fundamental conflict”, history shows that there has been a constant traffic of ideas between science and religion, which provide complementary accounts of the same reality. In Stephen Hawking’s colourful words, religion addresses the question “Why does the Universe go to all the bother of existing?”. Boundary disputes arise when science claims too much (as in the philosophy of ‘scientism’) or when religion encroaches on science (as in so-called intelligent design, or creationism).

One pragmatic reason for supporting good academic

science–religion research is that most of the world’s taxpayers, who fund science, have religious beliefs. Pitting science against religion in that context is not a smart move for the future of science.

Next year is the bicentenary of Darwin’s birth and also marks 150 years since the publication of his *On the Origin of Species*. It would be great if atheists, agnostics and religious believers alike could celebrate Darwin as the brilliant biologist he was, not as the icon of a particular ideology.

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Religion and science: separated by an unbridgeable chasm

SIR — In his Correspondence ‘Religion: science is partially based on faith’ (*Nature* **455**, 26–27; 2008), Jonathan Cowie argues that science and religion are more similar than often thought, suggesting that experimental application of the scientific method involves faith. However, he is conflating two different meanings of ‘faith’.

Cowie’s inherent definition of faith pertains to scientists’ hopeful expectations that experiments will verify their (rational) hypotheses, whereas the definition relevant to religion is belief without evidence.

Insisting on evidence-based beliefs separates science starkly from religion. Contrary to Cowie’s assertion and to the goals of the Templeton Foundation, the chasm between science and religion is fundamentally unbridgeable.

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