

A different perspective

Sir — I quote from Martin Kemp's article (*Nature* 390, 128; 1997) on *The Flagellation* by the artist Piero della Francesca: "Getting things right was integral to his contract with God's design of nature".

Unfortunately, *Nature* seems to have let its Designer down and to have broken the contract, by reproducing the picture the wrong way round.

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Saving British science

Sir — Yes, as you say in your leading article, science and engineering are centred on core disciplines (*Nature* 390, 101; 1997), each giving a form of identity to the members of their communities and making distinctive contributions to the advance of knowledge and its applications — but now in ways more multidisciplinary than ever before.

To take your example of molecular biology, the headlines it captures rest essentially on continuing advances in knowledge and technical developments in other areas of research such as physics,

chemistry and engineering, and will continue to do so.

Each discipline should ensure that its role in contemporary science is understood and properly valued, but it must not lose sight of the essential unity of 'science'. That unity must be promoted in coherent cross-disciplinary advocacy. If we, in the 'broad church of science', forget that, how can we expect the Treasury accountants to understand? Divided, we fall.

The Royal Society, the Royal Academy of Engineering and the Royal Colleges of Medicine have the authority and the responsibility to speak for 'science', in the broad sense (it is a pity they are three, not one). Save British Science (SBS) also tries. A very coherent message was recently given to John Battle, the minister for science, by a group of 20 senior academics mustered by SBS; it included a chemical engineer, an astrophysicist and a clinician.

Unfortunately your article's emphasis on discipline-based advocacy can too easily turn into a narrow, negatively competitive struggle for a share of inadequate resources. Speaking for science as a whole may be less easy, but it is essential if the long-term health of science is to be preserved — and truer to the spirit of *Nature*.

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Soddy's economics undervalued

Sir — I was interested to read A. G. Maddock's review of Linda Merricks' book *The World Made New: Frederick Soddy, Science, Politics and Environment* (*Nature* 389, 925; 1997).

I agree with the criticism that the book fails to give an account of Soddy's ideas on economics and monetary reform: Soddy gave up a distinguished career in research to elucidate and publicize, by both lecturing and writing, what he thought were the defects of the modern banking and monetary systems.

The New Europe Group and New Britain Movement: Collected Publications 1932–1957 (New Atlantic Foundation in association with the J. B. Priestley Library, University of Bradford; 1997) contains a section on "Professor Soddy: Lectures and Articles 1932–1957". These were all directed to a nonspecialist public and are very readable. Books by Soddy are held by the J. B. Priestley Library and are accessible for study on application to the librarian.

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