

Point/Counterpoint

Ulrich Pohl

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Point/Counterpoint

The important thing in science is not so much to obtain new facts as to discover new ways of thinking about them

(Sir William Bragg, Nobel Prize laureate in physics, 1915)

One of the most fascinating novels by the Swiss author Friedrich Durrenmatt is *The Execution of Justice*. The plot revolves around the reversal of the guilty verdict on a well established and wealthy Swiss politician who was witnessed to have shot a professor in a restaurant by the Chief of Police and many other diners. The delinquent, having been sentenced and imprisoned, hires a lawyer of questionable quality to investigate the possibility that he did not commit the murder in question. The story then plays out this possibility, which eventually ends in the acquittal of the murderer. It shows in a fascinating way that the same facts can be interpreted with a highly logical approach but in completely different ways.

This is a situation that can frequently be found in science. Two groups can interpret experimental results in a highly stringent manner but not necessarily arrive at the same answer. Very often, such seemingly contradictory views simply describe the complex nature of a phenomenon as, for example, in physics where light has to be described both as consisting of particles and representing a wave in order to understand all its effects. Sometimes there are also different experimental models, which lead to different observations that cannot be unified and generalized. More than anything else, such divergences shed some light on the difficulties that can be encountered whilst trying to ascertain the precise way in which Mother Nature organized biological processes. However, such differences and apparent contradictions also serve to enhance novel attempts and scientific approaches to find out the "truth." In that respect, our new section Point/Counterpoint reflects a familiar situation and depicts a momentary situation

on the difficult path between an observation and its full understanding.

It should be emphasized that the Point/Counterpoint invitations are expressly intended to hear specific points of view and to stimulate healthy debate among readers. Therefore, by necessity, the Point/Counterpoint articles are not comprehensive and are likely to be leaning toward one or the other side of the question. In this issue, two expert groups describe their findings and their present understanding of the way in which long-chain fatty acids make their way through the cell membrane. As one of the referees mentions, "both manuscripts clearly take the point of view that is consistent with results from the respective labs. Both points of view are consistent with the postulate that fatty acids are transported across the membrane via a process that requires protein involvement. The identity of these putative fatty acid transporters is the point of contention."

Point/Counterpoint is thus perhaps the most vivid reflection of ongoing research in any one field, and our readers may appreciate the insightful articles that, even for non-experts in the field, are a pleasure to read. ■