

Bringing Science into Political Issue Debate

Forward:

Due to the constraints of putting out a journal, there are limits to what we can publish both in articles and comments. In terms of the articles, we are fortunate to receive many more than we can publish but unfortunate that we can select only a few. Our issues are already full of accepted articles for the next year.

We also receive hundreds of emails each week, many appropriate for our Comments Section. But alas, here too we must be selective merely due to the capacity of our staff and volunteers. Because there is no way that we can publish all the comments we receive, even as an e-journal, we do try to publish those that are well written, have a significant import, and are representative of other emails that we received but were unable to publish due to various constraints.

One would think from reading our Comment Section, that we get about equal amounts of positive and negative comments. In reality though, only about 10% of the emails that we receive take issue with a position of the Journal or myself, but being a big advocate of debate and learning from such debate, a negative email actually has a greater chance of publication. (Now don't go and send us a negative email, now that you know the statistics of our publication acceptance.)

There are a few issues that we have broached from a scientific perspective that also have political ramifications and we have been deluged with email on. The largest two were concerning my paper on smoking ([Smoking Does Not Cause Lung Cancer](#)) and more recently a footnote to an editorial, where I stated my political positions on several issues. The latter was done, because I believe that much of the scientific (and lay) press have a political bias, yet try to portray themselves as being unbiased. Though I strive to be as unbiased as possible, I am human and realizing that, I put a footnote on my editorial "[Politically Correct Science?](#)" briefly noting my political leanings. That footnote listed among several positions that I was pro-death penalty.

The email stirred up a hornet's nest among those who do not believe in capital punishment. Interesting, not a one was able to give me any logical argument or scientific basis for their position. I did try to engage some of the more coherent in a logical debate via email such as I did and continue to do with those who disagree with my article on smoking. The results of such debates are mixed, but I did want to show you the reader, the results from two such discussions. Though they both started out on an adversarial stance, one did not progress from his emotional position while the other had a far better outcome that I had initially hoped for.

Below are but two examples of such debate but with decidedly opposite outcomes. As always, I'll present the information but you will need to decide its significance.

A Debate on "Smoking Does Not Cause Lung Cancer (According to WHO/CDC Data)"

Reader:

Sincerely,ear Sir,

Your article is lame, and research is actually amusing. My nother in law dies 8 months ago of lung cancer. SMOKING killed her. Several doctors told us this. You obviously smoke, otherwise you wouldnt write such an atricle unless you were defending your bad habit. Thats fine, one day a doctor will tell you that you have two months to live like she told my mother in law and you will eat your words.I pray you never go through what she went through. May god give you the strength to not only quite to save your own life, but to be there for your family also.

Sincerely,

Family of a lost loved killed by smoking

Dr. Siepmann:

No I do not smoke cigarettes and never have. I too have lost family relatives to cancer, but I don't go around trying to blame others for it. I understand that cancer is a multifactorial problem and needs to be addressed as such, hence my article. Also personal responsibility and risk acceptance need to be considered. Your mother knew that smoking was a risk factor in lung cancer but she still smoked. Your emotions are inappropriately placed.

I write about the TRUTH, and do not irrationally blame others or things. While my article is an argument based in the facts, yours below is nothing but name calling. Who is taking the higher road? I'll base my views on scientific evidence and the facts; not unfounded emotional rantings.

Reader:

Emotional Rantings? I hardly believe that the point I was trying to make was ranting. And you base all of your article on facts? Please!! Where did your information come from? And yes my mother did know that cigarettes were harmful... BUT NOT when she first began smoking!! The cigarette companies kept that information private for years!!! You should know that with all of your "research". Her personal

responsibility does not make up for the time that we and our daughter will never have with her. There would be no responsibility if these horrible murderers took tobacco off the shelf. You can believe what you want, but a REAL doctor told us she was died of cancer because she smoked. And unfortunately it is the truth. You dont print the truth you write GARBAGE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Dr. Siepmann:

Long before your mother started smoking, cigarettes where commonly known as “death sticks” and in the 1960s the Surgeon General started writing warnings on each and every pack of cigarettes. If you mother had stopped smoking as little as 10 years ago she would not have developed lung cancer (a smoker's risk of lung cancer goes back to normal after having stopped smoking for 10 years). The longer she smoked though the greater the chance was that she would fall into the <3% of lifetime smokers that develop lung cancer. It is unfortunate that she fell into that <3% group.

As to taking it off the shelf, it is has always been a legal substance which congress could have made illegal at anytime over the last century but they are truly addicted to the tax money raised by the sale of cigarettes. I do not exonerate tobacco executives who did anything wrong but they were selling a legal product.

Everything I have told you has been factual and unbiased. I realize that the emotional situation of losing a loved one is powerful and we try to find someone to blame, but sometimes people fall on the wrong side of statistics. Everything has a risk benefit whether it is driving a car, drinking alcohol, or smoking. It is therefore up to people like me to educate others about the risks and then let the individual determine if benefits outweighs the risks.

P.S. My numbers come from the CDC and WHO (hardly cigarette friendly organizations). You can find these and other reference sources at <http://www.journaloftheoretics.com/Editorials/Vol-1/e1-4.htm> .

Reader:

[Never heard from again....]

A Debate on Capital Punishment

Reader:

The dead do not learn from, nor do they profit from their mistakes. And capital punishment is a form of homicide. It says so right on the death certificate of every executed prisoner. It is also a well-documented fact that in places with the death penalty, the rate of murder is higher than places without. Rather than act as a deterrent, the death penalty encourages individuals to more violent and more prolific acts of barbarism.

Execution is many times more sinister a form of murder than any other form of homicide. It is the cold, calculated, ruthless act of the members of a state who claim that killing is illegal. It is the chilling outcome of unreason on a social, and sometimes a national scale. It may well be said that a state is judged, not only by the manner in which it treats its poor, but by the manner in which it treats its criminals. No state that commits murder in the name of justice can be trusted to uphold the sanctity of life before it looks to its own self-interest. For a state to lie to itself that capital punishment is not murder, is to allow that state to operate from the unspoken license of a hidden agenda that runs contrary to human dignity and decency. Capital punishment is advocated only by those who are too dishonest and too cowardly to admit to their own desire to commit murder.

P.S.: Your statement that innocent people have not been executed in the US is erroneous. When DNA testing was first brought in, random retesting of evidence as part of trial studies clearly demonstrated that a disturbing number of innocent people have been wrongly put to death, the greater number of which were poor citizens who did not have access to highly trained and qualified legal counsel, both in case preparation and defense, and in detailed forensic evaluation. Soon after the early stages, authorities at various US legal and judiciary levels tried to slam the proverbial lid on further retesting, but thankfully were thwarted. Though DNA retesting must now be done by request, still a number of innocents have been exonerated, putting the lie to your claim that no innocents have been executed in the US. I am forced to wonder about any individual who advocates the taking of life, for whatever reason, for life is the value from which all other values are derived. Therefore, the desire to take life is tantamount to spitting in the face of life itself.

Dr. Siepmann:

You are confusing people who were on death row with those who were executed. Again NO innocent person has ever been put to death in the United States. Please know what I wrote as well as the facts before throwing irrational emotion and erroneous insinuation around.

Reader:

I am confusing nothing. I have not time nor patience with pointless emotionalizing, in this case your own. There are well-documented cases of people having been but to death, and who have been subsequently and posthumously exonerated due to DNA testing and other new forms of forensic evidence-testing. Those put to death, quite obviously, did their time on death row.

The US has a pathetic track record where capital punishment is concerned. No civilized country in the world still subscribes to this barbaric practice. As well, those proponents I am acquainted with show a disturbing propensity for unreason in face of the facts, which are widely known and available to all.

Dr. Siepmann:

If there have been so many innocents put to death, surely you can give me a few names and references showing such evidence. DNA exonerations to the best of my knowledge have been for some who were only on death row. But with so much evidence out there, it should be easy to site just a couple of references and prove me wrong.

Reader:

My humble apologies- it turns out the information I was relying on was dead wrong. I've since done a little digging subsequent to your last communication, and got the facts, which were exactly as you presented.

There is a great deal of anti-US sentiment out there which colours the judgment, opinions and perception, of various doings in the US, including such emotionally charged topics as abortion and capital punishment. It is often very difficult for outsiders to distinguish between real information and poisonous, misinformed opinionating.

Dr. Siepmann:

It takes a great man to admit that they are wrong, but I am even more impressed that you were able to revise your position after looking into the facts and science of the issue. You are indeed right about emotional and false information out there about many such issues. Society's only hope is that people like us take the time and effort to look into the issues and try to glean the truth. It is the most principled and honorable position to take.

Reader:

As an amateur researcher and historian, I've learned that in the pursuit of truth, though scientific truth is inherently and necessarily prone in nature, it must nevertheless always be rigorously defended, and that in that process, one can not afford the luxury of buying into one's own feelings and reactions, or else genuine respect for the truth becomes compromised, leading in turn to information that is fundamentally corrupted.

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