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Cover: Spectacular distortions of celestial objects, such as this rare, emerald-crowned sunset, have inspired astronomical investigations into atmospheric refraction. New findings reveal that the air's crowd-pleasing, light-bending tricks disturb astronomical precision near the horizon more severely than previously realized. Modern astronomers thus find themselves less sure of their predictions of exactly when the sun will rise or set, and more certain than ever that ancient skywatchers made only crude horizon observations. (Photo: Pekka Parviainen)



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# Letters

## Science in the daylight

A subtle distinction is often overlooked in discussions of peer vs. media review of scientific research. John R. Saylor's argument (Letters, SN: 8/25/90, p.115) regarding cold fusion experiments is a case in point.

Saylor is undoubtedly correct that it is inappropriate to use the news media to garner popular support for a scientifically untested hypothesis. However, he is incorrect to imply that the public should be informed of scientific ideas only after scientists have concluded their intramural debates.

If a politician today were to argue that the public be spared the facts of intricate social problems in the name of political efficiency, I hope we would be alarmed. If a church official were to assert that a debate on a delicate moral issue should occur only among those pure enough to deal with it, I know what the response would be. When, then, is it too early to inform "those not versed in our work" of science?

Objectivity is best served by the widest dissemination of information, not by exclusivity and censorship. It is appropriate, if ironic, that Saylor chooses to argue his point in SCIENCE NEWS, which is, after all, part of the media.

Barry N. Bishop  
Lewisburg, Pa.

Had Pons and Fleischmann presented their cold fusion research through "established channels," as Saylor would prefer, the work would have been hidden by a cloud of conservative reaction and the present level of research on this vital potential source of energy would be even less than it is now.

Let scientists work in the daylight like politicians, economists and lawyers. Let the media report as completely and as interestingly on science as they do on politics and sports.

What are the scientists afraid of?

M. S. Cahn  
Aeronautical Research Scientist  
Lander, Calif.

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