

Psychologists for Social Responsibility Statement of Solidarity with the March for Science

Psychologists for Social Responsibility (PsySR) has joined the organizational supporters of the March for Science in Washington D.C. Saturday April 22, 2017. We strongly endorse the various missions of the March, including:

- Greater involvement of scientists and other knowledge workers in conscious collective political action
- Resistance to political agendas that restrict the ability of scientists to communicate the findings of their research—we are particularly aware of the recently-intensified political barriers to acknowledging and communicating the findings of climate science, barriers that are a grave threat to human welfare
- Support for science in the public interest, rather than in the interest of those with the most power and money in the current political-economic climate
- Support for public investment in scientific research so that the work of science is accountable to all people, and not only to private interests
- The encouragement of greater ties between scientists and the communities potentially served (or harmed) by certain applications of scientific knowledge.
- The encouragement of scientific knowledge to be widely available to all who wish to access it, including those without sufficient funds to subscribe to scientific journals.

It is particularly important and urgent to articulate the best ways that science and scientists can be “politicized.” Scientists often encourage each other not to become political, or to separate their politics from their scientific work. The idea that science is objective while politics is subjective can lead to the stigmatization of political and moral engagement by scientists.

We stand with the March for Science in affirming that moral activism challenging the current relations of power does not automatically taint one’s ability to make an important scientific contribution. Individuals of any and all ideologies can competently gather empirical facts and make appropriate inductive logical inferences. *Ad hominem* is a logical fallacy in all domains, and particularly unsuited to the scientific domain. To the extent there is any ideological test for doing science (including a test for having no apparent ideology at all) that does science a great disservice. And—as the March for Science makes clear—when science itself is under political threat, scientists face little choice but to become political.

We do agree, however, with keeping science independent of politics to the extent that science should never be a tool only for the empowered elites of a society—like big business, industry and finance, the military industrial complex, the criminal justice system and intelligence

agencies. These concentrated powers often abuse science by using it to ends that are oppressive, impoverishing, ecologically destructive or otherwise violent. Indeed, when the power of science becomes concentrated in the hands of those unaccountably monopolizing other more coercive forms of power, science itself suffers as popular perceptions of it become grossly distorted. When science is publicly-rooted, publicly-funded and publicly-accountable, however, then it should be especially responsive to important and widely-shared human needs.

At PsySR, we have often found ourselves in conflict with those who have defended oppression, violence or top-down theft under the guise of science. We have stood in opposition to nuclear proliferation and nuclear weapons generally, and thus opposed the use of science to these ends. Likewise, we have opposed torture and psychologists' involvement in ongoing interrogations of detainees (though, in the interests of science, we do not oppose ethically appropriate research with informed and consenting participants on the effectiveness of various interrogation methods).

Our stance against psychologist "consultations" on detainee interrogations arguably illustrates the broader goals of the March for Science. We took this stance partially on ethical principle. Psychologists—whether health professionals, teachers, or research scientists—are ethically obliged to benefit those with whom they work, not manipulate, exploit or harm them for the interests of other parties. Psychologist involvement in ongoing detainee interrogations was also a structural foundation of the post-9/11 U.S. torture regime, and thus a means of legitimizing the morally and legally illegitimate--and horrific. We are likewise opposed to consent-bypassing "resilience" experiments on soldiers and unethical interrogation experiments on War on Terror detainees. In addition to affirming ethical principles though, we consider our stance against scientists abetting torture and abuse as fundamentally pro-science.

Science grounded in good ethics is science that serves the public interest and the long-term interests of science itself. Science that cuts ethical corners and participates in violence and oppression not only does potentially great harm to humanity but can also abridge its own potential for illuminating the kinds of truth that matter to most humans. Ethically-impoverished science thus threatens the sustainability of science as an institution with high public regard and widespread public engagement. Those who would use science to torture, oppress, steal, retard, poison, destroy ecologies and kill may use scientific tools effectively, but we believe the long-term impact of such uses for science damages the institutions that sustainable science relies on.

We thus necessarily reject the idea that our opposition to, say, nuclear weapons is an attack on nuclear science. We also reject the idea that more involvement of psychologists in ongoing detainee interrogations and consent-bypassing interrogation experiments on detainees can improve the "science" of interrogation and thus increase its "effectiveness".

We seek an end to the toxic concentration of scientific power in the hands of those who would do irreparable harm with it and to it. We support the spread of scientific knowledge and engagement as far and wide as possible on a fully egalitarian basis, and particularly for peaceful and justice-serving purposes. We hope the March for Science brings us a big step forward towards achieving this worthy goal.