
Letters to the Editor

Need for Whistleblower Protection

The AMS Ethical Guidelines (*Notices* 42 (1995), 694-696 and <http://www.ams.org/committee/profession/ethics.html>) contains a paragraph about whistleblowers.

"When mathematical work may affect the public health, safety or general welfare, it is the responsibility of mathematicians to disclose the implications of their work to their employers and to the public, if necessary. Should this bring retaliation, the Society will examine the ways in which it may want to help the 'whistleblower', particularly when the disclosure has been made to the Society."

AMS members might like to have a real-life example of the reason for the inclusion of this paragraph in the Guidelines. While the following example concerns physicists, there is no doubt that mathematicians are not immune to this kind of nonsense.

The affair was succinctly described in the APS e-mail column "What's New" by Robert Park, April 19, 1996. He reported:

JUST BECAUSE EVERYONE KNOWS DOESN'T MEAN IT'S NOT A SECRET. Two physicists who published classified information obtained from public sources are seeking whistleblower protection from DOE se-

crecy zealots. Hugh DeWitt at Livermore, who once helped to expose the Star Wars X-ray laser fraud, quotes open congressional debates. Alex DeVolpi of Argonne cleared his paper with his lab. DeWitt was slapped with a Category A infraction; DeVolpi lost his clearance. Both are Fellows of the American Physical Society.

More details can be found in the Federation of American Scientists' Secrecy and Government Bulletin #57, April 1996.

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Platonic Beliefs

Verena Huber-Dyson commented on my review of Roger Penrose's book *Shadows of the Mind* as follows: "First, direct perception—or intuition—of the infinite sequence of natural numbers need not commit you to Platonic beliefs. Of course you are right; how

can we talk about true but unprovable statements if we don't have some native concept of Mathematical Truth to base all this talk on? The fascinating questions are, how we find those truths, where we take our axioms from. Maybe Penrose does have something to say to these questions."

Indeed he does have something to say. According to Penrose, "We shall find ourselves driven towards a *Platonic* viewpoint of things. According to Plato, mathematical concepts and mathematical truths inhabit an actual world of their own that is timeless and without physical location. Plato's world is an ideal world of perfect forms, distinct from the physical world, but in terms of which the physical world must be understood. It also lies beyond our imperfect mental constructions; yet, our minds do have some direct access to this Platonic realm through an 'awareness' of mathematical forms, and our ability to reason about them." The nature of this access is acknowledged to be a "mystery". However, as my review made clear, the author of *Shadows of the Mind* is a Platonist.

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