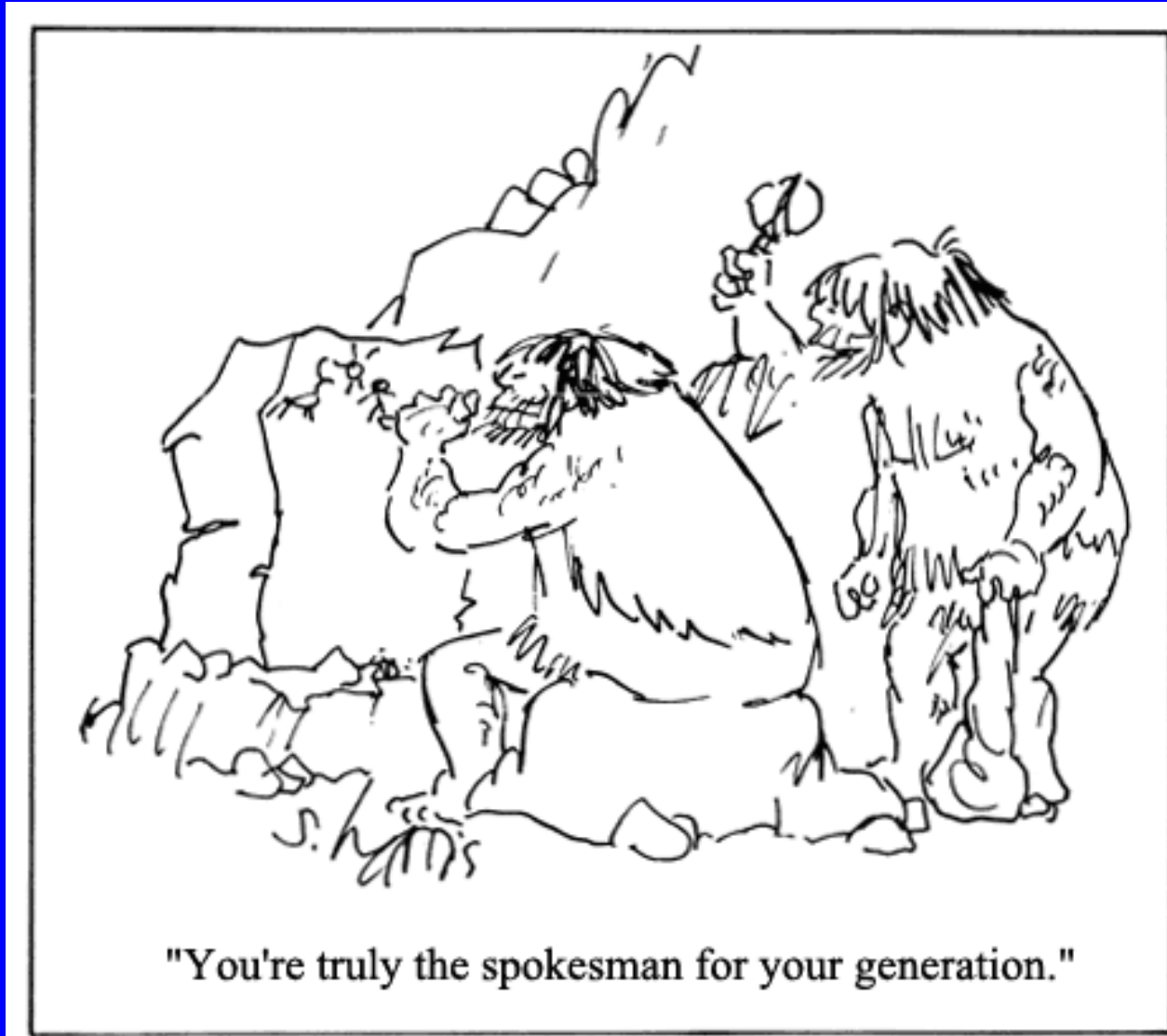


We've come some way since...



Cartoon: Sidney Harris

The Journal Glut: Scientific Publications Out of Control

- On an average day a medical school library receives 50 new journal issues, taking up a total of 2 ft. of shelf space.
- Academic journals are increasing in size with a doubling time of about a decade.



"What do you expect, since 90% of all the scientists who ever lived are alive today?"

Why is there
a glut of
journals and
papers?

Cartoon: Sidney Harris

The purpose of scientific writing

Yann Martel's prescription:

'It was my good luck to have a few good teachers in my youth, men and women who came into my dark head and lit a match.'

Life of Pi

The purpose of scientific writing: for others or for self?

- Language is only the instrument of science, and words are but the signs of ideas.

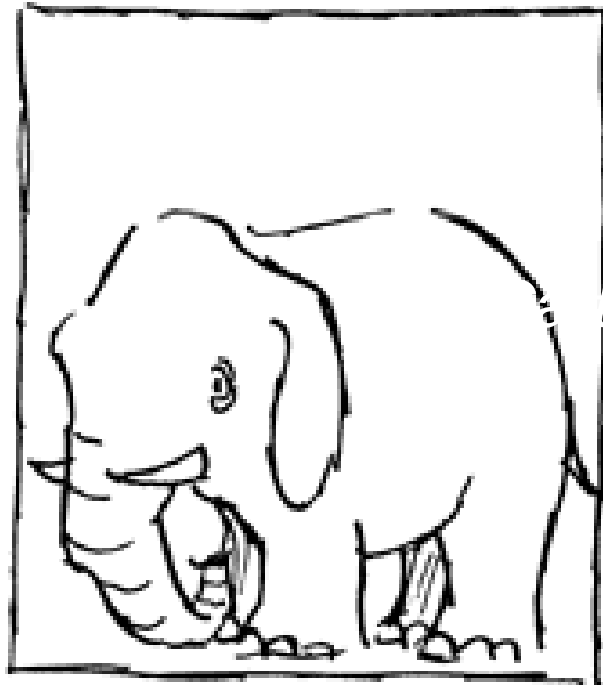
Samuel Johnson, introduction to *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755)

- I should like to find a way of discouraging unnecessary publications, but I have not found a solution, save the radical one... that all scientific papers be published anonymously.

Erwin Chargaff

To place on record...

- Facts and data that add to the existing store of knowledge on the subject, recorded accurately and efficiently.
- These will serve others wishing to confirm them or proceed beyond them to further understanding on the subject.



NEVER FORGETS



SOMETIMES FORGETS



ALWAYS FORGETS

Cartoon: Sidney Harris

To inform...

- Peers welcome information pertinent to problems.
- Policymakers require information and guidance from experts.
- The lay public needs information in order to make crucial decisions.

To educate...

- Review, analysis and interpretation of existing information.
- Highlighting areas of ignorance, lacunae in our knowledge.
- Proposing studies to improve our understanding.

To stimulate and inspire...

Words are things; and a small drop of ink falling like dew upon a thought, produces that which makes thousands, perhaps millions think.

Lord Byron, poet (1788-1824)

The skill of writing is to create a context in which other people can think.

Edwin Schlossberg, cultural historian 1945-

To provoke...

In questions of science, the authority of a thousand is not worth the humble reasoning of a single individual.

Galileo Galilei, physicist and astronomer (1564-1642)

An additional purpose in medicine

- Whenever a doctor meets a new patient or a new problem, he ought to have at his disposal every known fact that may help him.

Sir Theodore ("Robbie") Fox in *The Lancet*

Summing up the purpose of scientific writing

- Place on record: facts, findings, techniques, ideas
- Inform: peers, administrators and policymakers, the lay public.
- Educate: students, the lay public
- Stimulate and inspire: Emulate the example set by Sir William Osler.
- Provoke: discussions, thought, ideas, re-thinking, challenging long-held beliefs. Andreas Vesalius is an excellent model.

Cautionary notes

Of someone who published a large number of papers: “His work is not so much the product of fecundity as of incontinence.”

reviewer in *Le Monde* (*TIME* 7 May 1990, p 42)

The dust of dead words clings to thee,
wash thy soul with silence.

Rabindranath Tagore

Another form of waste is expenditure of words
beyond the income of ideas.

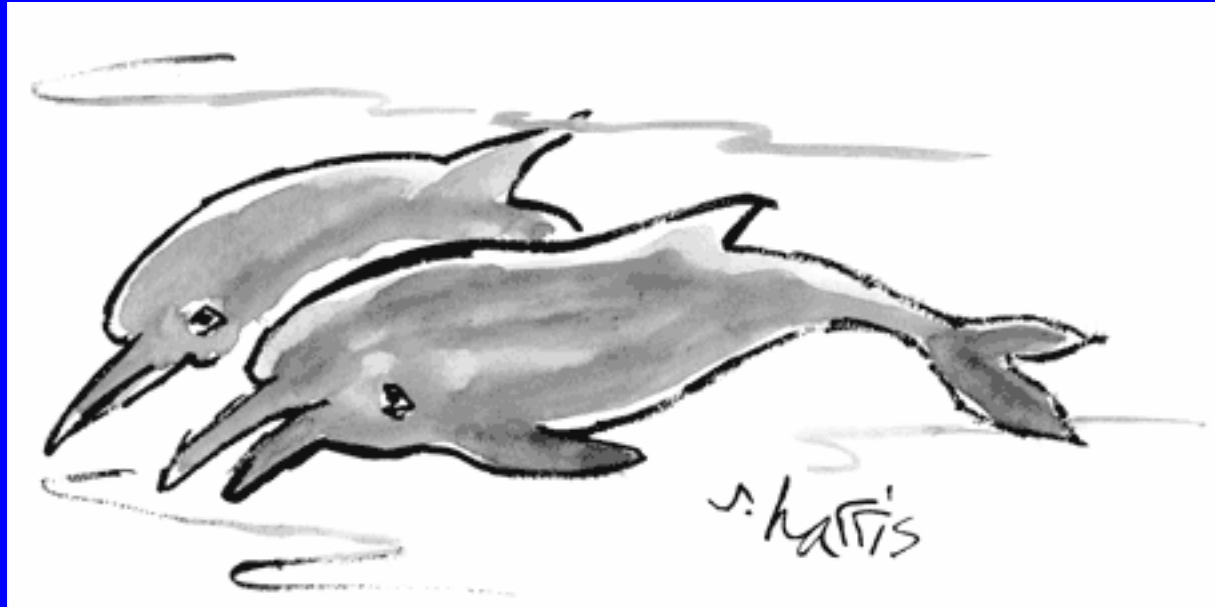
Christopher Morley

Cautionary notes... (contd)

The end result of most research;
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

T.S. Eliot (1888-1965)

Cautionary notes... (continued)



‘Although humans make sounds with their mouths at conferences and publish papers there is no solid evidence that they actually communicate among themselves.’

Modified cartoon by Sidney Harris

A final thought...

Ink- n. A villainous compound of tanno-gallate of iron, gum-Arabic and water, chiefly used to facilitate the infection of idiocy and promote intellectual crime...

□ Ambrose Bierce *The Devil's Dictionary*