

## EXCLUSIVE



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The world's most notable physicists met in October 1927 in Solvay Conference to discuss the newly formulated quantum theory.

● BENJAMIN COUPRIE/INSTITUT INTERNATIONAL DE PHYSIQUE SOLVAY, BRUSSELS, BELGIUM



What do you do, if I may, to avoid that trap?

So, what I actually do is that I cultivate a practice. I think many of us do this. I have friends who will keep me honest. Those are the ones who were with me when I was just a little pipsqueak. They will say, "Hey, Sandy! Your argument there is really shoddy. I think you're actually not being careful!" They will be brutally honest with me. In fact, they do me a huge favor in doing that because that's great feedback. And I will cultivate and appreciate that.

The last comment that I'll make to you is kind of a slightly humiliating comment. I was at a conference a while ago where one of my dear friends told me that I was failing him in this regard. He regularly sends me papers. He said, "Sandy, you're not being brutally honest with me. I need you to be more brutally honest, and you have been failing me for the last year." And I think he was right. I decided I have to give him the same kind of effort that he gives me. Otherwise, that's a lack of reciprocity in our many, many decades of friendship.

A few months ago, I was trying to write a paper, and my friend was helping me. We were searching through journals and we came across a specific issue of a specific journal. There were some really good papers on that issue that were relevant to the argument I was trying to establish. And then there

was this one piece by a very famous person. I and several of my friends agreed that it revolved around an anecdote, at best, and a very poor one at that. By the way, it still managed to be on the front page of a very prestigious journal. This is somehow related to the earlier questions I asked. There is an Arabic saying that says, "The words of the rulers rule the words". I'll say something like that is happening right now in academia as well.

Absolutely. What this nice anecdote illustrates is the importance but also some of the limitations of peer review. I don't know if this was a peer-reviewed piece. Do you happen to know if this was peer-reviewed?

It was peer-reviewed. I don't know the inside workings of the journal, but the journal is advertised as doing double-blind review.

Double-anonymized means that the editor knows who the author is, but the peer reviewer and the author don't know each other. So, I actually

Northwestern University scholar Sanford C. Goldberg:

## Scholars need brutally honest feedbacks to keep them honest

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think best practice might be triple-anonymized where the editor doesn't know either.

I think you made a very, very nice point. I should say one of the lovely areas of social epistemology is the social epistemology of peer review. This is an area where I've had the great good fortune of having an undergraduate at Northwestern who became obsessed with this topic. So, we studied it for most of last year. There's excellent work on the various good-making and bad-making features of peer review and anonymity. Frankly, I don't think I would ever have to submit to peer review again in order to publish a lot of papers — and I think many of my friends are in the same boat. I'm very, very fortunate and privileged to be asked to write for a lot of edited volumes and edited journals. But at the same time, I have a requirement on myself that I will submit at least one and often more papers to triple-anonymized peer review because I feel like I want to keep myself honest. What you're talking about, I see all

the time, and I'm worried that I will become that guy. That's a real worry. So, to try to keep myself honest, I will send at least one paper every year for peer review. I will take the slings and arrows of peer review just to remind myself, "Hey, this is the kind of thing that one needs to undergo to keep oneself intellectually honest."

Let's get to Chapter 9, 'Should've Known'. What's it all about?

Of all of the papers that I've written, this is perhaps the paper that got the greatest uptake. What I wanted to try to argue in that paper is that we often talk about what we should have known. What struck me as interesting is that the way that people talk and the way that epistemologists talk was very different. When people talk about what we should have known, they don't care what evidence you had.

There are things you should have known, even though you didn't have the evidence on the basis of which you could