



## Interfaces

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:  
<http://pubsonline.informs.org>

## Letters to the Editor

To cite this article:

(1988) Letters to the Editor. Interfaces 18(1):84-85. <https://doi.org/10.1287/inte.18.1.84>

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## Letters to the Editor:

### To the Editor:

Jean-Baptiste Leon Say raises the question, "Is The Quest for Objectivity a Trivial Pursuit?" [*Interfaces* 1987] His subsequent exposition then answers this question rather firmly in the affirmative — although, perhaps, with some qualification. The argument, basically, proceeds as follows:

Subjective, qualitative factors will always be of considerable significance in any decision.

By their very nature such factors will not be quantifiable (that is, "objectifiable").

Quantification (or, "objectification"), therefore, will inevitably ignore significant factors and become a "trivial pursuit."

While I, for one, enthusiastically support the spirit of Mr. Say's conclusion, I must express some disagreement with the details of his logic. In particular, I see a clear — and extremely important — distinction between quantification and "objectification."

Quantification is the assignment of numerical measures to subjective, qualitative factors. It does not, in any way, ignore the significance of these factors. However crudely, it assigns to them a numerical measure, subscribing to the belief of Lord Kelvin that, "Everything that exists, exists in some quantity and, therefore, can be measured."

"Objectification," on the other hand, replaces meaningful goals and decision criteria with such ratios as "MIPS per megabuck" — in Mr. Say's terms —

purely on the basis that quantitative information already exists from which these ratios can be precisely computed. In this way any need for quantification is effectively bypassed!

Quantification will be a part of any serious management science effort — if not in the model itself, then in the quintessential post-optimality analysis. "Objectification" will, on the other hand, often be the hallmark of "pseudo"-management science — precisely the activity to which Mr. Say objects.

It should be noted, incidentally, that this distinction between quantification and "objectification" is what lies near the core of the long dispute between Bayesians and statisticians of the "pure" classical tradition. The Bayesian embraces the quantification of personal uncertainty and brings that personal uncertainty under analysis. Classical statisticians are more oriented toward "objectifying" that personal uncertainty, thus — in many situations — trivializing their efforts.

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### Reference

Say, Jean-Baptiste Leon 1987, "Is the quest for objectivity a trivial pursuit?" *Interfaces*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (January-February), pp. 126-128.

**A Response from Jean-Baptiste Leon Say:**  
*On the quest for objectivity*

Lord Kelvin, with whom I discuss these matters frequently, may say what

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he likes, but he has not yet told me how to measure joy, although he agrees that joy exists. My point, however, is not to object to quantification but to suggest that one should not include a factor merely because it can be quantified, nor should one neglect something only because it has not been quantified. Donald Wallace has made an interesting contribution to this discussion, and I am confident that he shares my concerns.

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### To the Editor:

The first three years of my teaching career have been a terrible learning experience. The teaching part has been wonderful but not so with the learning part. What did I learn? Most noteworthy, I learned not to break down when I received letters from my colleagues all over the US who were in the enviable position of reviewing my papers. Yes, most letters were rejections. I learned to grin and bear it. The old adage "publish or perish" became clearer to me. I had seen gruesome stories on television about people perishing in wars, in natural calamities and because of acts of terrorism. Another absorbing theme for a news story would be "The Perishing of a College Professor." I could see it in front of my eyes: all my academic credentials would soon be decimated, and I would vanish into oblivion. That would not be the end of the misery. Teachers cannot make both ends meet in good times; perhaps it would be worse now. I would soon join the ranks of the many indigents whose existence the president does not acknowledge for fear of swelling the budget deficit. However, all of this was not in line with my Hindu

belief in Karma: good efforts must be rewarded by a good life.

Recently, my reward came. I saw a large ad in the local newspaper. I understand that it also appeared in the *National Enquirer*. *The International Journal of Rejected Manuscripts* invited contributions for publication. IJRM was to be published once a month in a unique format. It would resemble a Roman scroll but would be narrower and printed on absorbent paper. To be submitted, a manuscript must have been rejected by some journal and would have to be accompanied by pungent referees' reports and photographs of the authors. When published, the photographs would have "DIDN'T MAKE IT" stamped across the faces. The refereeing process for IJRM would be stringent to ensure that no ordinary journal would ever have published the paper. I wondered, "Will publication in this journal count, and will it save my life?"

Once again, I was rewarded. Our aging dean (who was not fond of the esoteric material found in many journals and who had an excellent sense of humor) announced that the IJRM was to be added to the list of journals' recognized in considering tenure. I heaved a sigh of relief and said to myself, "Why perish when you can publish?"

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