



The Crime of Reason: And the Closing of the Scientific Mind

Robert B. Laughlin

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We all agree that the free flow of ideas is essential to creativity. And we like to believe that in our modern, technological world, information is more freely available and flows faster than ever before. But according to Nobel Laureate Robert Laughlin, acquiring information is becoming a danger or even a crime. Increasingly, the really valuable information is private property or a state secret, with the result that it is now easy for a flash of insight, entirely innocently, to infringe a patent or threaten national security. The public pays little attention because this vital information is “technical”—but, Laughlin argues, information is often labeled technical so it can be sequestered, not sequestered because it’s technical. The increasing restrictions on information in such fields as cryptography, biotechnology, and computer software design are creating a new Dark Age: a time characterized not by light and truth but by disinformation and ignorance. Thus we find ourselves dealing more and more with the Crime of Reason, the antisocial and sometimes outright illegal nature of certain intellectual activities.

The Crime of Reason is a reader-friendly jeremiad, *On Bullshit* for the Slashdot and Creative Commons crowd: a short, fiercely argued essay on a problem of increasing concern to people at the frontiers of new ideas.

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