

[Government funding for science is flat earthism](#) [1]

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It's no surprise that scientist lobby groups are [protesting cuts in funding](#) [3] for science in Britain, but it is disappointing. Government funding for science is pointless and the protests against these cuts are deeply misguided at best and rent-seeking at worst.

As the great philosopher of science Michael Polanyi observed, it is impossible to anticipate where scientific breakthroughs will occur, and so government money for science is akin to an extremely expensive game of pin the tail on the donkey. Government funding can distort the science as scientists aim their research towards media- and politician-friendly areas of study. This can be seen in the disproportionate amount of research that goes into environmental issues, for instance, because of the political hot-button that that presses. To assume that politicians direct science funding driven by enlightened altruism and not the desire to win the next election strikes me as being naïve.

Furthermore, scientific breakthroughs rarely give the country in which they are made much of a competitive advantage. Thanks to the academic practice of sharing knowledge freely, a discovery made in Perth, Australia, won't take long to make its way to Perth, Scotland, through academic journals and the like. The argument that is sometimes made for the government funding 'public goods' like parks are the 'neighbourhood benefits' that people around the parks gain, making such funding worthwhile. Whatever you think of this argument, it does not apply to funding in the sciences, where the benefits are global.

Turkeys won't vote for Christmas. Scientists won't support cuts in science funding. This should not stop the government from doing the right thing and cutting this pointless area of expenditure.

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