

nature

By now, the tragic story of Jason Arday is well-known. But it seems that many people are doing their best to not learn anything from it. In this case, “many people” seems to be the editorial board of *Nature*, perhaps the most prestigious scientific journal in the world (together with *Science*).

[Nature's editorial](#) discusses the horrific hounding and negative media coverage of Arday, which at least at some level led to him taking his own life. There is no question that Arday received far more critical publicity because he was a celebrated Black academic. (Recently, [Duke's Dan Ariely has had to retract yet another paper under a cloud of data fabrication](#) – it's not Ariely's first problem on these lines, but he is not being deluged as Arday was).

But when I first read the editorial, I kept thinking: what is missing here? Oh yes – what was missing was what got Arday into trouble in the first place, namely, that [he was a serial fabulist and plagiarizer](#) who had no business being a professor at Cambridge University in the first place. Eric Levitz of *Vox*, who certainly is no fan of the right in any way and can usually be counted on to defend left-liberal talking points, feels the same way. [He wrote](#):

This editorial is appalling. It omits any mention of Arday's serial fabulism or his attempt to intimidate — and direct law enforcement against — a journalist investigating his misconduct. It appears to characterize his fabrication of academic credentials and biographical details as aspects of

“how Arday conducted aspects of his personal life.”

The editorial also ignores that his plagiarism is an established fact that any truth-seeking publication could itself confirm by referencing publicly available documents. Instead, *Nature* chooses to ignore the observable realities, while inviting readers to conclude that the charges were trivial or false.

The British tabloid press is disgraceful. This story was grossly over-covered and the attention it attracted surely reflected racial resentments. But it's crazy that the editorial leadership of a flagship scientific journal would publish a willfully dishonest polemic on a culture war controversy.

Nature is effectively advertising a willingness to prioritize its political sympathies over factual accuracy. That undermines its own more essential work — along with the broader project of cultivating public trust in, and agreement upon, scientific truths.

He's not wrong. And raises a crucial issue about academia's role in the current crisis. The point of a scholarly journal is to confront difficult facts even if they undermine a preferred political program. And that is precisely what the *Nature* editorial refused to do.

Journals will make mistakes, but this represents a worrying trend. [The International Association of Genocide Scholars statement on the Gaza war](#), for example, was riddled with factual and legal inaccuracies, and quotes out of context – undoubtedly in order to reach its preferred conclusion that Israel's war in Gaza against Hamas constitutes a genocide. (For example, the statement said that the International Court of Justice had found it “plausible” that Israel had committed a genocide – which was false and [had been specifically denied by Jean O'Donoghue](#), the ICJ President when it issued its ruling for provisional measures. The Statement also falsely claimed that then-Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant had called Palestinians “human animals” — a grotesque distortion that [was well known when the IAGS issued its statement](#)). Whatever one's view of Gaza, a scholarly organization simply cannot conduct itself this way.

If academia will simply serve as a handmaiden of activism, then what is the point of it? It has no value-added if it does so. We are long past the time when we can look

to “objective,” “value-free” scholarship, but it is one thing to acknowledge this; it is quite another to cook the books in order to advance activism. That is what the IAGS did, and it is what Nature did here.

And it also means that Nature missed an opportunity to ask a central question about the whole Arday affair that so far has been swept under the rug:

Suppose that Cambridge University was just trying to hire Black professors. Suppose that it was committed to *only* hiring a Black professor in the Education faculty, which would be illegal under current US law (although perhaps not in the United Kingdom).

I would be willing to make a very large wager that one could find several if not dozens of Black professors of Education worldwide who are actually doing quality work in the field – work that far outstripped that of Arday. They have spent years laboring away, probably many in obscurity.

And yet apparently, none of them were even looked at.

One more absurdity and injustice in this whole sordid tale. Academia has a so very much to answer for.