

# Why I march



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There have been many discussions about the march for science, pro and con. Some of them have made me doubt the utility of the march, some have made me fear unintended consequences, again others seemed tangential and petty. In these past months, I have struggled to articulate my own reasons why I feel the urge to march for science. Today, I start to see two main reasons to march for science. I am still unsure if these are the right reasons and if they justify my presence or if they can be used against me. Be that as it may, they are what motivates me the most to take a stand this coming Saturday.

As a student, I studied a winter-term abroad, in northern Sweden. I spent my postdoctoral fellowship, almost four years, in Houston, Texas. I am now a professor of neurogenetics in Germany. Over the years, I have worked with colleagues from more countries than I can count. One thing that has become clear to me in this time is that difficult problems need to be tackled from all angles, if they are to be solved. To tackle problems from all angles requires a diversity of thought and creativity. Diversity of thought can only be maximized by a diversity of backgrounds. I therefore strive to make my lab as diverse as I possibly can. Science is both the child and the mother of diversity. Science is successful because of diversity. Any political confinement is hence necessarily detrimental to science.

Enthusiastic, creative individuals from all walks of life, countries, ethnicities, orientations and abilities are the most powerful resource science can tap into for progress. Conversely, all of humankind stands to benefit from science, which is why I have been active in the Open Science movement for over a decade now.

One reason I march for science in Munich on April 22, 2017 is because I firmly believe in open science serving an open society.

There is a second reason why I march for science. Not unlike other times in history, fringe movements have recently emerged which excel at using new media to manipulate a society not yet accustomed to these media. Then as now, one tool wielded by these movements is to spread uncertainty and doubt, lest their incompetence go unnoticed for as long as possible. Then as now, one target is the common reality derived by evidence and reason. Science is a formalized method of combining evidence and reason. Both in itself and through the scientific thinking which it emanates, science has now become a cornerstone of a modern, pluralistic democracy. Any attack on evidence and reason can only be seen as an attack on science and the democratic society it serves. With recent direct verbal attacks on science and scientists, I believe it is time to stand up in defense of science. Science is worth defending not only for its own sake, but because I believe a society which does not support science and scientific thinking can never be a functioning democracy.

I hence march for science in Munich on April 22, 2017, because I see science as a diverse, global endeavor benefiting all humankind, but also because I fear scientific knowledge and scientific thinking as fundamentals of a modern democracy, may be in jeopardy.