



Debye

the German Physical Society] was known to historians, and I would say it's not definite proof that he was a collaborator. How many people were real heroes in those days?"

Mark Walker, a historian of Nazism who is based at Union College in

Schenectady, New York, notes that by the mid-1930s, all official correspondence had to be signed "Heil Hitler." "It doesn't mean anything," he says. "Debye is a typical scientist in a position of authority in Nazi Germany. He's unusual only because he is Dutch." (See Walker's article on the history of the German Physical Society in *PHYSICS TODAY*, December 2004, page 52.)

The American Chemical Society, which awards a prize in Debye's name, is monitoring the situation, but at this point has no plans to strip Debye of that honor. Similarly, Cornell University, where Debye worked from 1939 until his death in 1966 and which has a lecture series and an endowed chair named for him, "is currently investigating the allegations," Peter Lepage, the dean of arts and sciences, said in the university's official statement on the matter. "We will decide what to do once we finish our investigation."

Debye won the 1936 Nobel Prize in Chemistry for his studies of molecular structure. The unit for measuring the electric dipole moment is named for him. The importance of his scientific achievements is not in question.

As for Rispens, he says the actions of the two Dutch universities came as a "complete surprise" to him. His book looks at why Einstein turned his back on Debye. The answer, Rispens says, was that Debye was an "irresponsible opportunist." **Toni Feder**

Bodman Disbands DOE Advisory Board

Samuel Bodman, secretary of the US Department of Energy, has disbanded the Secretary of Energy Advisory Board (SEAB), DOE's highest-level independent scientific advisory panel. Several weeks ago, after talking with his senior advisers within DOE, Bodman sent "thank-you" letters announcing the end of SEAB to the board's 28 members, which include two Nobel laureates in physics.

The independent advisory board is no longer needed, said DOE spokesman Craig Stevens, because the "course for the department has been pretty well set by White House priorities." With the administration's unveiling its Advanced Energy Initiative and the broader American Competitiveness Agenda, Bodman "believes that, for at least the foreseeable future, our course is set," Stevens said. Because of that, he continued, "there is nothing that the secretary wanted from the board."

SEAB member Burton Richter, director emeritus at SLAC, said he learned the board was being disbanded when he read about it recently in the news. "Then I got a letter [from Bodman] thanking me for my service," he said.

Richter didn't bemoan the end of the board, saying he believes it "became useless" when DOE's attorney put restrictions on how SEAB could deliver its controversial nuclear-weapons infrastructure report last year. In the past, Richter said, dissenting opinions were allowed and reports could simply be presented. With the weapons-complex report, which recommends the immediate design of a reliable replacement warhead, "we couldn't just [present] the report, we had to endorse it," Richter said.

Those members who didn't endorse the report's findings were put in an uncomfortable position, he said. The new policy changed the nature of the board and "wrecked it," he said. Richter said he didn't know of a direct connection between the problems with the weapons report and the decision to end SEAB.

Stevens said disbanding the board is not "exclusionary," and that Bodman will still be getting advice, "solicited and unsolicited," from scientists and others both inside and outside the department. "He appreciates the efforts and expertise of the board, and if there is a reason to reconstitute it for any particular study or research endeavor, the secretary has agreed to do that," Stevens said.

SEAB was established in 1990 as a replacement for the Energy Research Advisory Board, which began in 1978. There are several lower-level outside advisory boards for DOE science programs, and Stevens said they will continue. **Jim Dawson**

Cosmologist Wins Religion Prize

John Barrow, a cosmologist at the University of Cambridge, has won the 2006 Templeton Prize for Progress

Toward Research or Discoveries about Spiritual Realities. Founded by global financier John Templeton, his foundation says the prize is intentionally larger than the Nobel Prize "to underscore that research and advances in spiritual discoveries can be quantifiably more significant than disciplines recognized by the Nobels"; this year the purse is about \$1.4 million.

The focus of Barrow's current research is on possible time variations in the fine-structure constant. "I am primarily engaged in developing self-consistent theories in which the fine-structure constant and the electron-proton mass ratio and other traditional constants are actually varying," he says. One consequence of a varying fine-structure constant, he adds, would be violation of the equivalence principle: "If you drop two different materials in a gravitational field, they will accelerate at slightly different rates."

Astronomy, Barrow says, "breathes new life into so many religious questions of ultimate concern and never-ending fascination. Many of the deepest and most engaging questions that we grapple with . . . about the nature of the universe have their origins in our purely religious quest for meaning."

Beginning in 1983 with *The Left Hand of Creation: The Origin and Evolution of the Expanding Universe* (Heinemann), Barrow has published a total of 17 books. "I have written, for example, about all aspects of infinity and of nothing, the void, zero. These ideas cover mathematical, physical, theological, philosophical, literal aspects," he says.

"One doesn't want to turn science into a religious quest," Barrow says. "But people are interested in whether the view they have of the universe is inconsistent with a religious view they might have of the universe." In physics and astronomy, he adds, "it's not."

The Templeton Prize was created in 1973. Among past laureates are Mother Teresa and Billy Graham; 6 of the last 10 winners have been physicists. **Toni Feder**



Barrow

News Notes

NASA scientists free to talk. In the wake of complaints that a Bush administration political appointee was