

PHILOSOPHY

OF SERENDIPITY AND SCIENCE

23.10.2019

This article was really different to get as the only online version vanished from the internet: Arthur Kornberg "Of serendipity and science" Summer 1993, Stanford Medicine.

I like the story of the surgeon who," while jogging around a lake, spotted a man drowning. He dove in, dragged the victim ashore, and resuscitated him. He resumed his jogging, only to see another man drowning. After he dragged the second one out, and got him breathing, he again wearily resumed his jogging. Soon he saw two more drowning. He also saw a colleague, a professor of biochemistry, nearby, absorbed in thought. The surgeon called to the scientist to go after one drowning victim while he went after the other. When the biochemist was slow to respond, the surgeon shouted, "Why aren't you do something?"

The biochemist responded, "I am doing something. I 'm desperately trying to figure out who's throwing all these people into the lake."

This parable is not intended to convey a lack of regard for fundamental issues among clinicians, nor a callousness among scientists. Rather, it portrays the reality that a serious problem, a war on disease, must be fought on several fronts.

[Kornberg continues](#)

For thirty years, my research on biosynthesis of the building blocks of nucleic acids, their assembly in DNA replication and the training of over a hundred young scientists, was funded with many millions of dollars without any promise or expectation of marketable products or procedures.

