

Editorial

When we accepted a paper from South Africa¹ on its scientific merits, we were at first tempted to justify its inclusion in *Cognition* since many policies of that country are recognizably abhorrent. However, we concluded that it would be false liberalism to detail a defense of our editorial decision. Of course we deplore the regime currently governing South Africa, but then we are equally disturbed by policies of many other countries, e.g. the killing of Indians with modern warfare techniques for expropriation of land, the bombing of people fighting for their national independence, the penetration into underdeveloped countries by multinational trusts, the murder of political opponents, torture and persecution ... and let us not forget those countries that publicly voice their unerring pursuit of justice and morality while they quietly sell arms to any buyer.

'Liberals' are not the only ones who consider condemning individuals because of the country or group they belong to. In some countries, intellectuals who have been banned from the ruling party are not allowed to publish their scientific results in professional journals or elsewhere.²

Other examples could be brought to the reader's attention. In every case, we are confronted with actions that attempt to preserve the power of a State or cult without regarding individuals and the social nuclei in which they live and express themselves.

It is evident that most nations participate in the practice of power which leads to acts that would be considered immoral if carried out by individuals. This does not release individuals from sharing responsibility in the acts of the geographically defined countries where they happen to reside. However, it is a traditional argument of scientists to distinguish an individual's politics from an individual's behavior as a scientist. This is the essence of 'scientific neutrality'.

Thus it is clearly a mistake to judge an individual by the country in which he or she lives. However, we must raise the question of the scientist's social responsibility, the conditions under which scientific endeavours are harmful and the way in which such questions relate to the image that we have of ourselves as scientists.

We have all been taught to consider that great men of science are dedicated, totally

1. Miller, R., The use of concrete and abstract concepts by children and adults. *Cognition*,

2(1), 49-58.

2. *Le Monde*, December 27, 1972.

devoted, generous and untarnished by base political interests. There is nothing new about this 'pasteurized' conception of the Professor. Society has always had a dynamic need to preserve an image of the academy as a realm ensuring the unbiased evaluation of cultural knowledge and its applications. This image simplifies the complex motivations and contradictions which are embodied within each scientist and the scientific corporation. We do not deny that this conception may have been functional in the past; however it is being examined with increasing mistrust.

Today some people are so disgusted by the social uselessness of much research that they have turned against all science; others contend that science is totally political. Still others suggest that science reflects primarily its logistics e.g. the structure of the laboratories, the funding system, the manner in which promotions are decided. Though we may agree or disagree with these points, we must grant that this debate reflects a growing awareness that science does not function in a political vacuum, but in societies. The socio/political background is a major factor in the determination of the way in which theoretical problems are conceived and formulated and also determines financial and administrative decisions. New research ideas that receive support in turn provide new models for society to consider. But the dependence of these models on the existing social forms guarantees that they will not be 'new' but will be a superficial reorganization of the pre-existing socially determined structures.

Some scientists have adopted an odd way of extricating themselves from any debate on such issues. They claim that rational, scientific knowledge is neutral and that all the current doubts about science are triggered only by irresponsible applications. We even read that scientists themselves ought to oversee the technological applications of scientific knowledge and thereby play the role of apolitical and uninvolved judges. However, such a role would be false in many respects. In the first place, scientists work in the context of a competitive society, in competitive research centers where money is distributed according to goals that they rarely understand. In many such centers independence, criticism and questions are allegedly sought by all. However, 'new' ideas must fall within the pre-established limits of the subject under discussion and thus are emasculated from the outset. Questioning 'side issues' like the motivations behind considering specific theoretical or practical problems leads to the discovery that some questions are not as welcome as others. Clearly science is not as free to experiment as one would like.

In making such statements we do not pretend that we have an answer as to what constitutes 'socially valuable or valueless' research. What we want to stress is the necessity of understanding what motivates scientists to follow certain lines of research. If one never questions why one pursues one activity rather than another, if one does not examine the social context and the ideology behind one's work, the inevitable outcome is manipulation by those who have a clear intention to lead the community

in a particular direction. Social science is a particularly sensitive field when considered from this standpoint.

It is characteristic that many of those who insist on an apolitical conception of science emerge as major government advisors. On closer consideration of the political views of scientists, however, it becomes clear that they are willing to use the alleged sanctity of science as a political argument. For example, some 'apolitical' scientists have signed a petition maintaining that all research is neutral including that which explores 'racial' bases for individual capacity.³ They go so far as to claim that their most general interest is to protect academic freedom.

First they alarm the reader with a reminder of Hitler (who, ironically, in addition to everything else, passed the Eugenic Sterilization Act of 1933). They then argue that many of those who attack them today are 'militants' and even 'anti-scientists' and suggest that to express hereditarian views or recommend further studies of the biological basis of behavior today is similar to being a heretic in the Middle Ages.

One can argue with the petitioners quite vigorously on these matters. Rather than deplore attacks by militants and anti-scientists, we are more impressed by the fact that even when racism attained the hideous summit the apolitical scientists refer to, geneticists rarely spoke out: Though genetics were misused, geneticists remained silent. Why?⁴ 'The aversion of scientists for publicity and popularization is a long standing tradition in many countries. Those scientists who did go to the public were frequently suspected of charlatanism, weakness of character, and "irresponsibility".' It is still rare to find scientists questioning their own role. However, there is generally more awareness and response to such proposals by a number of serious researchers. It is striking that such reactions are perceived by the petitioners as the proposals of 'militants' and 'anti-scientists'.

Furthermore, the claim that those scientists who wish are not free today to investigate the influence of 'race' on behavior is absolutely false. In the past few years there has been a great deal of such research which presupposes racist and elitist ideas.

Often critics of the position that heredity is the necessary basis for social distinction are at the same time philosophical nativists. Chomsky, for example, one of the most coherent critics of Skinner and Herrnstein, is also known to most psychologists for his nativist theories. This demonstrates that an interest in understanding the psychology of humanity can lead to a nativist assumption about what *all* people have in common. Others are interested in finding out differences between groups of people which is a use of psychology that serves an elitist ideology by presupposing it. But, as a counter-petition has stated,⁵ 'theories of racial inferiority are rendered untenable by the

3. *The resolution on scientific freedom*, (December 1972) Encounter.

4. Carlson, E.A (1972) *A tormented history*

(Book Review). *Science*, 180, 584-586.

5. The Committee Against Racism at the University of Connecticut, Storrs, Conn.

evidence of human history: every population has developed its own complex culture. Contrary to the supremacist view, the people of Africa and Asia have, at various times produced civilizations far more advanced than those existing simultaneously in Europe. Moreover, the constant geographical shift of centers of culture is in itself proof of equal capabilities of all people. It is nonsense to suppose genetic superiority wandering about the world.' In itself the notion of superiority pertains to value judgments rather than to scientific enquiry. Although there are certain current theoretical proposals to turn psychology into a science of values,⁶ such a science is not only premature today but it will remain so until it is based on a theory of humanity.

It is in the context of such a controversy that the possible social applications of hereditarian views become most poignant. For example, we may decide as some societies have, that the ailing are to be suppressed, or, on the contrary, since they are less active physically, that they are to serve as the intellectuals. Other societies may decide that all heavy work should be produced by children since they are more docile than adults, while another society assumes that children should not have to work until puberty or adolescence. Thus the utilization of differences in humans is entirely based on a choice of values and cannot be scientifically decidable as an issue. But when any society is based on rewarding those who have the greatest socially defined 'ability', by placing them in a privileged position, social conflict is an internal necessity. To study the alleged genetic basis for social conflict simply diffuses attention from the real causes.

It is puzzling why there is so much interest today in this kind of research among otherwise serious scientists. There is no theory that unites the higher mental processes, so apparently mental tests are basically uninterpretable. Even the most general properties governing language and thought are still unknown to us; accordingly, how is it possible to engage in secondary enterprises such as 'studying' whether one group of humans is intellectually superior to another one, or to ask if 'race' (a difficult concept to define biologically) is a good indicator of success in this society for genetic reasons rather than for reasons of differential oppression. Given the current fundamental ignorance about cognition, a line of 'research' such as this can only be politically motivated, and it is with political arguments that it must be countered.

To return to our original issue – the acceptance of a paper from a politically unfashionable country. The considerations raised make it clear that within every modern society the structure of social and scientific enterprises presupposes a form of elitism, just as all modern countries act unethically. This could lead to a sort of perverse censorship if we examined every article for geographical and ideological cleanliness: Such is not our intention. Rather we believe that the only hope of pulling social science

6. Skinner, B.F., (1972) *Cumulative record: A selection of papers*. New York, Appleton Century Crofts.

out of the dilemma we have outlined is to increase public and private discussion of the new ways of using science as a force for change rather than as a force for maintenance of the *modus vivendi quo ante*.

No doubt we shall be accused of introducing political and social considerations into purely scientific debates. This does not disturb us; we hope that we have clarified why we cannot agree with the claim that science is apolitical and asocial.

However, we have certainly not given concrete answers to the issues raised at the beginning of the editorial. One reason is that the social responsibility of scientists is a dynamic concept that evolves every day: The debate must be expanded and continued as an intrinsic part of all future science.

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N.B. The above-signed editorial does not necessarily reflect opinions of the other members of the Editorial Board. We urge readers to

consider the issues we raise and respond to them.