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## Science Proves . . .

One need watch television only briefly to learn that scientific instruments, phrases, and symbols are being used—and misused—to promote a wide variety of products. If the listener reacts as the advertiser wishes, he smokes the cigarette chosen by “more scientists and educators” than any other brand, dresses his hair with the preparation that does not evaporate in a solar heater, shaves with the blade that “engineers” call a “scientific breakthrough,” and then, for he probably needs it, takes the pill recommended by “three out of four doctors” and follows it with the one shown in blown-up cross section and improved by its “enteric coating.”

This din of pseudoscientific chatter has nothing to do with the brilliant generalization or the careful collection of data by which science advances. But for scientists it has two meanings: (i) “science” is a useful sales gimmick, now apparently on a par with endorsement by a pretty girl; and (ii) the public, including children, is given a false and misleading impression of the methods, character, and integrity of scientific work. Against this result there is growing revolt.

What can be done? First, protest. Specific ads that are false or misleading can be protested to the Federal Trade Commission, which invites such reports, and to the advertisers and TV chains, which should receive them whether invited or not.

FTC chairman Earl W. Kintner recently told the Association of Consulting Chemists and Chemical Engineers that scientists and consulting laboratories should extend the scope of their professional responsibility to insist that their findings be properly reported in any commercial usage made of them. Advertisers and advertising agencies, he continued, also have a professional responsibility, and warned them that if they abdicate self-discipline, they invite the imposed discipline of tighter government controls.

Ridicule is also useful. A *New Yorker* cartoon shows an executive blasting as “absolutely unscrupulous” an ad in which SCIENCE, in large caps, is paired with a bottle of unknown content, and adding, “Why didn’t we think of it first?”

But attacking misleading ads alone is like treating symptoms; TV ads reflect the state of television as a whole. The widely syndicated critic John Crosby, in a roundhouse swing at the whole industry, recently announced that television has become so bad that it no longer merits a daily column; he will write about it only once in a while. The 1 January 2000 issue of the *Seattle Daily Galaxy* (a publicity paper for the Century 21 International Exposition to be held in Seattle in 1962) discusses tariffs on Mars imports, regrets surplus production of sea farms, and reports low morale at the moon colony. In contrast with these indications of how the world is sweeping on, and in a transparent jibe at the state of television, the day’s TV program ends with a movie that was grade B 57 years earlier. Perhaps television executives should be included among the groups that need to develop professional attitudes and self-discipline; TV advertising is not likely to exhibit high standards until TV producers gain respect for the taste and intelligence of their audience.

In the meantime, we can protest and we can ridicule. TV commercials too frequently deserve both.—D.W.