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## Conflict of Interest

One hears an occasional disturbing comment about the advantage taken of a government appointment by a man whose long-term loyalties are to academic or industrial life. A recent example: "I was startled to hear \_\_\_\_\_ say baldly that if he didn't do anything else while in Washington he was certainly going to get some grants for his own laboratory." This attitude may be atypical, for one also hears such comments as: "I've sat on a large number of advisory councils, panels, and committees, but never yet have I seen my colleagues take advantage of their membership on these bodies. In fact, it seems to me that they lean over backwards to avoid favoring their own institutions." These contrasting observations may represent the range of behavior of consultants—or perhaps they represent the range from suspicion to charity of different observers.

The law on conflict of interest has recently been revised. When consultants and members of advisory groups receive instructions concerning the new regulations, they will find that they have a bit of work to do and certain actions to take or to avoid taking during and after their periods of government service. The new regulations are reasonable, and they clear away a good bit of the ambiguity concerning conflict of interest which has plagued many an adviser in the past.

Legislation, however, cannot deal with the most pervasive and deep-seated source of conflict. A scientist who comes to Washington to advise a government agency can absent himself when a grant to his own institution is being considered, and he can do a number of other things to avoid the deliberate misuse of his power. But he cannot forget his loyalties to his discipline, his institution, and his professional colleagues. Legislation cannot deal with this problem; it can be handled only by high standards and good conscience on the part of the adviser and his fellows. (Scientists are not alone on this matter. The new legislation applies generally; the *Saturday Evening Post* of 17 November considers the conflicting interests of congressmen; Chief Justice Warren recently suggested that modern society needs professional consultants on ethics.)

Conflict between the public interest and the proper but special interests of the institution to which an adviser will return tonight or next year there certainly may be. How often this conflict leads to the misuse of power we do not know. But the danger is being quietly talked about, and opportunity and temptation grow as the number of advisers and the amounts of money involved continue to increase.

In *Science and Human Values*, Bronowski asserts that honesty and objectivity—reliance on the evidence rather than upon bias, wish, authority, or personal advantage—is one of the greatest gifts that science has given to society. Even though such utter honesty does not result wholly from the personal virtue of scientists, and even though there is not the same degree of objectivity of evidence in giving advice or in making grants as there is in conducting research, the tradition of complete honesty provides a high standard to aspire to and a warning to anyone tempted to adopt a different course.

One obvious thing that scientists can do about this matter is to discuss it. If the integrity of science is in danger, we should recognize the danger and consider possible countermeasures. If the fears are groundless, that too we should know so that we can go about our business. Candid discussion of the problem would be a sign that the scientific conscience is still healthy—D.W.