

DNA Memoir Stirs Furor at Harvard



F. H. C. Crick



J. D. Watson



M. H. F. Wilkins

Cambridge, Mass. Harvard president Nathan Pusey, backed by the Harvard Corporation (trustees), last spring forbade the Harvard University Press to publish *The Double Helix*, Nobel-prize-winner James D. Watson's 40,000-word memoir about the discovery of the structure of DNA in 1953. Pusey's action was revealed last week by the *Harvard Crimson*, and a cross fire of contention has been under way ever since.

The book is highly personal in tone. It describes Watson's own emotions and the accidents of personal relations that affected exchanges of information leading to the discovery of the DNA structure. Parties, dinners, ski weekends, discussions of young women, Francis Crick's laugh, and Linus Pauling's circus-ringmaster speaking style are all introduced, as if the book were a novel.

After serialization in the *Atlantic Monthly*, *The Double Helix* is being published by Atheneum, which raised its initial print order for 13,000 copies to 23,000 when news of Pusey's action ran on the front page of the *New York Times*, under the headline "The Book that Couldn't Go to Harvard."

Pusey's action followed several months of consideration prompted by letters of protest from Crick and Maurice Wilkins, who shared the Nobel prize with Watson in 1962. Both held that the personal tone of Watson's references to them constituted invasion of privacy.

The news was first disclosed by the *Harvard Crimson*, which commented in an editorial: "Pusey jeopardized the Press' reputation for discriminating, in-

dependent judgment when he permitted Harvard to be pressured by scientists whose disagreement with Watson was purely personal."

A Boston *Globe* editorial commented that "the institution that blew the whistle on Sen. Joseph McCarthy 15 years ago has run up a flag, and it isn't crimson."

Watson's manuscript has been the subject of worldwide gossip among biologists for several years. Thomas J. Wilson, then director of the Harvard University Press—now at Atheneum, for reasons independent of the Watson dispute—approached Watson early in 1966. Ernst Mayr, a Syndic and head of Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology, had told Wilson about Watson's manuscript.

Wilson then began circulating the manuscript to nearly everyone mentioned in it, including Crick, Wilkins, Linus Pauling, and Sir Lawrence Bragg (who has written the book's introduction). Watson says "hundreds" of people read the book before publication, to check facts and to comment upon its tone. Many changes were made.

Late in 1966 Pusey received the letters of protest from Crick and Wilkins and informed Wilson he would have to consider the matter. While the consideration went on, Wilson announced his departure. Wilson also asked the Syndics to consider the book again. They reaffirmed the decision to publish. But Pusey and the Corporation finally decided against becoming involved in a "dispute among scientists."

—VICTOR K. McELHENY

with the aircraft at 2,000 miles per hour [and at an altitude of 70,000 feet], would be seeing new area at the rate of 100,000 square miles per hour or 750 million square feet per second. We cannot state today with any assurance that satisfactory equipment to perform this processing and display function in an RS-70 can be made operational by 1970, let alone by 1967, on the basis of any known technology, or whether the human interpretation job required of the operator can ever be done."

This proposal to leap far beyond the state of existing technology was in sharp conflict with McNamara's management philosophy. In his view, except for those relatively few weapons which might alter the strategic balance (an antimissile system, for example), development of a specific system should proceed by exploiting the potential of known technology—quite a different matter from starting with a set of mission "requirements" and then proceeding to create the necessary technology.

(The McNamara philosophy has been made explicit in the establishment of a series of R & D categories which begins with basic research, then proceeds through exploratory development, advanced development, and so on, until an operational system results. In short, an attempt to develop a weapon system normally awaits development of the "building blocks" which make it possible.)

To counter McNamara's refusal to bend to its will, the House Armed Services Committee resorted to what the Air Force might call a "show of force." The bill it first reported in 1962 did not simply authorize spending for an operational RS-70 but "directed" that this be done. This mandate, had it been followed, would have undercut not only McNamara's authority as Secretary of Defense but President Kennedy's as Commander-in-Chief.

No doubt realizing he had gone too far, Chairman Vinson allowed Kennedy to persuade him to rewrite his bill, dropping the mandatory language, and to count on the Administration to give the RS-70 a thorough restudy. Whatever face-saving value the promise of a restudy may have had for Vinson, it was clear that the most likely result of further analysis would be to confirm McNamara in his view that to develop the RS-70 would be folly. And so it did. Reoriented to a modest experimental effort, the project gradually faded from congressional and public