Burke on Civil Liberty

Wolfle is to be commended for commenting on campus problems ("Beleaguered presidents," 22 Mar., p. 1309). To be sure, if we continue to experience strife on our campuses, the long-term result will be the imposition of undesirable restrictions on our educational institutions. The effect on the progress of our society could be tragic. I am reminded of a letter written by Edmund Burke in 1791 to a member of the French National Assembly. He said:

Men are qualified for civil liberty in exact proportion to their disposition to put moral chains upon their own appetites; in proportion as their love of justice is above their rapacity; in proportion as their soundness and sobriety of understanding is above their vanity and presumption; in proportion as they are more disposed to listen to the counsels of the wise and good in preference to the flattery of knaves. Society cannot exist unless a controlling power upon the will and appetite be placed somewhere, and the less of it there is within, the more there must be without. It is ordained in the eternal constitution of things that men of intemperate minds cannot be free; their passions forge their fetters.

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A Sport Worth Watching

In his acerbic review (29 Mar., p. 1448) of James Watson's *The Double Helix*, Erwin Chargaff speaks of "the degradation of present-day science to a spectator sport." Even if we accept Chargaff's conclusion that science has turned into a spectator sport, couldn't this simply mean that it's become worth watching again? . . . A more pertinent complaint about modern science was issued some years ago (in 1878, actually) by Jacob van't Hoff (*1*):

The number of those who are engaged in scientific research increases; previously, only irrepressible drive and extraordinary talents were able to overcome all difficulties which stood in the way of a scientific career. Today this road is open and the path well-trodden.

But the consequence of just this is that with the increasing number the mean value of the contributions is lowered; the rare gifts, among these, imagination, fall into an unfavorable relationship with those gifts which are more commonly distributed. This has changed the ways and means by which the scientific mechanism operates. . . .

Scientific discovery has now become