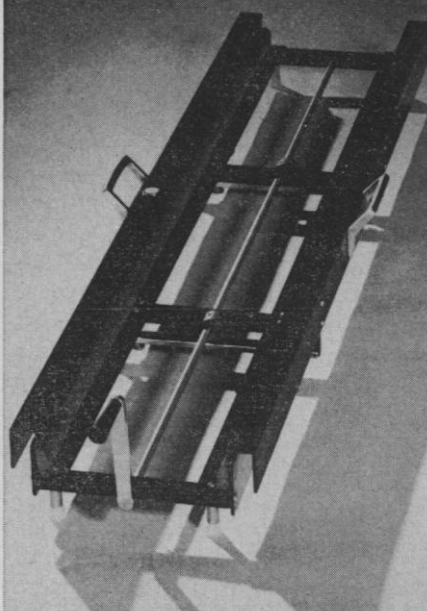


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of scientific purity, is not only spurious reasoning, but reveals a view of social science that is by no means uniformly shared.

Etzioni trots out familiar arguments about an educational system that for the first time, in part at least, has started applying the canons of social research to people who inhabit this country. The arguments that he adduces are no more, no less than those used in recent years by those who have opposed, on the basis of a Platonic theory of educational verities, the special programs that have enabled blacks to enter college. The penetration of racial minorities has not ruined the higher educational system in America. It might be argued that thus far it has not helped much and that special interest politicking is scientifically irrelevant. But I doubt that there is evidence that would show any actual measure of deterioration as a result of minority entrance into the higher educational sphere. If the alternative to benign neglect is an occasional serious injustice, this must be weighed against injustices committed on the side of neglect. Even if in this particular case there has been a possible injustice committed to Etzioni's graduate student, we can at least empathize with the reasons for this slight. In the past, the same kind of injustices have been committed for quite other reasons—not nearly as noble in purpose. If this was simply an isolated case, Etzioni had an obligation to engage in quiet diplomacy, or, in other words, not to transform an individual case into a universal condemnation. A personal grievance is not a social problem, and a unique example is not a law of nature.

IRVING LOUIS HOROWITZ
*Department of Sociology,
Rutgers University,
New Brunswick, New Jersey 08903*

Irony seems to be a dangerous way of making a point; both Preer and Horowitz seem not to address the issue I sought to raise (which naturally makes me grateful to Singh).

First, the Chicano's qualifications were compared to those of others, but the reason he was hired was the need to balance the color chart. That is the whole point of hiring by genes.

Second, the issue I raised was not protection of academic purity, which was never free of pecuniary and status considerations; surely it deserves to be diluted somewhat for greater social justice. What I fear is its destruction, as

master color charts, or quota systems, replace other hiring criteria. This tends to happen when "exceptions" made for one group (initially, chiefly blacks), are extended to many others. It is a sad truth that the academic system can live with concessions to one minority group but cannot survive the bending of standards for blacks and Chicanos and Indians and women and others.

As to how widespread the tendency to hire by race is, the reader can judge himself—is it an isolated incidence or a spreading practice?

AMITAI ETZIONI

*Center for Policy Research,
New York 10027*

Margin of Safety

The manner in which Swenerton and Hurley (2 July, p. 62) carried out their recent investigation into the teratogenic effects of ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid (EDTA) appears to be a well-executed, if uninspired, classical toxicological investigation. I do, however, question its applicability to reality. I would appreciate being advised of the circumstances under which a human being could ever be exposed, during pregnancy, to a chronic dietary intake of 2 to 3 percent (by weight) of EDTA, or its equivalent in strong chelators. Even if one includes nonchelating antagonists, the possibility appears to be exceedingly remote.

I am aware that a large margin of safety (a factor of around 100) is commonly employed in the certification of chemicals designed for human use. It seems to me that there is a large uninvestigated gap in this report between intake of 2 percent and intake of 0.02 percent. Indeed, to one used to dealing in microgram quantities of material, the range between 0 and 2 percent is simply enormous. If, as I suspect, this study represents the testing of "safety" factors far in excess of those commonly in use, then it serves little purpose save to alarm the uniformed. I believe that toxicologists have some responsibility to design their experiments to approximate reality. Should they fail to do so they must inevitably undermine their credibility not only with other scientists but, far more importantly, with the public at large.

R. D. HAMILTON

*Freshwater Institute,
Fisheries Research Board of Canada,
Winnipeg 19, Manitoba*

As Hamilton has pointed out so obviously, the chances are remote that a pregnant woman could receive an intake of EDTA equivalent to 2 to 3 percent of her diet. However, Hamilton has apparently missed the point of our report. We did not undertake the study in order to test the toxicological effects of EDTA. Indeed, as we mentioned, it was already known that EDTA would produce congenital malformations in pregnant rats. Rather, the purpose of our experiments was to elucidate the mechanism by which this disturbance of embryonic development occurred. Because of our previous work with zinc deficiency, we suspected that EDTA might act to produce a deficiency of this element in the embryo. It seems to us that this information is of scientific interest, even if not of direct practical application.

Certainly more experiments need to be carried out with respect to the effects of lower levels of EDTA, but Hamilton surely does not mean to imply that research should not be published unless it is directly translatable into practical terms.

LUCILLE S. HURLEY
HELENE SWENERTON

*Department of Nutrition,
Agricultural Experiment Station,
University of California, Davis 95616*

Committee on Chemotaxonomy

An ad hoc committee on chemotaxonomy sponsored jointly by the International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry (IUPAC) and the International Association for Plant Taxonomy (IAPT) has been formed to look into the organization of international collaboration in chemosystematics. The committee consists of W. F. Grant (IAPT), chairman; T. Swain (IUPAC), secretary; J. B. Harborne (IUPAC); A. Löve (IAPT); T. J. Mabry (IUPAC); and B. L. Turner (IAPT).

The committee solicits comments from interested persons in biological sciences, biochemistry, chemistry, and the pharmaceutical sciences. These comments may be sent to the undersigned.

W. F. GRANT

*Genetics Laboratory, Macdonald
Campus of McGill University,
Quebec, Canada*

T. SWAIN

*Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew,
Richmond, Surrey, England*

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