Letters

Pruning in Academia

In his 30 April editorial (p. 429) Etzioni points to the need for presidents to exercise strong leadership in pruning university budgets.

In our new togetherness engendered by austerity, poverty, and "pruning," amid the rhetoric of budgeting that characterizes academia, we who head colleges and universities have discovered a few things worth noting: (i) the enormous cost of sustaining failing departments, at the expense of departments that are growing rapidly; (ii) the weight of tenure and high rank, with their resultant restriction on faculty improvement; (iii) the extensive development of services—for students, for faculty, for alumni, for seemingly everybody—that has pushed overhead to the point where non-teaching costs claim two-thirds of all expenditures; (iv) the inability of participatory democracy to develop budgets, prune budgets, or set standards except at the lowest levels; (v) the degree to which some faculty members fail to carry their fair share of the work, and the willingness of their colleagues to support them in their parasitism. Trying to "prune" such budgets is a matter for much more than the "mobilized consensus" that Etzioni talks about. It requires the acceptance of heavy responsibility at every level of the decision-making process, and our democratic procedures discourage those who would take that responsibility. Department chairmen who are elected and reviewed by their colleagues are unwilling to pass harsh judgments on their constituents. Deans who hold office by similar process are no more likely to challenge vested interests in establishing academic priorities. Presidents, insofar as they are captives of the populist practice, hold an empty power whether they are "political" presidents or not.

The traditions of peer judgment, of collegial association, of responsible faculty participation depend, it seems to me, on the willingness of those participating to find ways to share the responsibility as well as the power. That means a willingness to pass the same kind of objective judgment on the performance of peers that we are ready to pass on students. The understandable reluctance to make such judgments effectively compromises the making of difficult decisions and of organizing the "consensus" we think we'd like to have.

I have yet to see the representatives of any discipline take action to phase themselves out of existence, to treat themselves as having lower priority, or to urge higher priority and greater subsidy for other disciplines. If trustees and faculties join hands, as Etzioni suggests, "with an eye to the shaping of a greater university," they will find, as others have, where the buck stops.

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Etzioni's prescription for pruning is precisely the bold stroke needed to shear away the dense accumulation of academic deadwood. But who is to do the pruning? Certainly not the tenured faculty, who have a corner on the entire stock of deadwood; nor the administration, the product of many past prunings of the tenured. Clearly, the lecturers, instructors, and assistant professors form the only uncontaminated reservoir of live wood in academia. And given this golden opportunity to hack out their own future, they would find it in their hearts to wield the pruning knife with "an eye to the shaping of a greater university" that might now include them.

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What Price the Perfect Baby?

In defending himself against the charges made by Rudolf Steinberger (Letters, 9 April), Bentley Glass states that he was merely predicting and not advocating that future state of affairs in which babies would be conceived in laboratories and parceled out, as young embryos, to foster parents. Glass's article (8 Jan., p. 23) offered no such disclaimer, nor did it provide any hint that Glass considers such a future state undesirable. Indeed, those who have heard Glass present these views in public (as I have on two occasions) can testify that his tone as a prophet has been enthusiastic, not to say jubilant. Yet even without this extraneous evidence, one might well say that a man who neutrally describes and predicts a horrible future event cannot complain if his description is mistaken for advocacy. Glass's attempt to compare himself to George Orwell simply fails. Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a biting political satire, not a detached and neutral prediction.

A more telling argument can be made even on the assumption that Glass was simply predicting a future which he might not altogether welcome. In supporting his position against Steinberger he quotes from his earlier writings: "The right that must become paramount is not the right to procreate, but rather the right of every child to be born with a sound physical and mental constitution, based on a sound genotype. . . . every child has the inalienable right to a sound heritage." Notice that he talks about "inalienable rights," and not just about some attractive and desirable condition. But one man's right implies another man's duty. Whose duty will it be to guarantee that only such unblemished children are born? How will this duty be fulfilled? To achieve the requisite quality control over new human life, human conception and gestation will have to be brought into the bright light of the laboratory, beneath which it can be fertilized, nourished, pruned, weeded, watched, inspected, prodded, pinched, cajoled, injected, tested, rated, graded, approved, stamped, wrapped, sealed, and delivered. Doing our duty to make good such an "inalienable right" means converting human reproduction into manufacture; there is no other way to achieve the flawless baby. Bentley Glass convicts himself by his own defense. Neither he, nor we, can have our cake and eat it.

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Mea culpa! Since I have been writing on the dangers and difficulties of eugenics programs, either negative or positive, for upwards of 20 years without a fundamental alteration of my position, I indeed neglected to add to my AAAS address in December 1970