

the Sorcerer's Apprentice



The value of science:

"The tragedy to me is that in the backlash to science, people have ignored the one rule science can offer — to view everything critically."

Genetics is one field where blind acceptance of scientific opinion can be particularly dangerous. Turn of the century eugenicists for example, wanted to breed a race of Nietzschean supermen by making the "superior" (read "rich" or "educated") have more children, or by stopping the "inferior" (read "poor," "non-white" or "diseased") from having any children at all.

Different definitions of superior and inferior would not have improved matters much. Any definition at all would have led to a desire for some standards, "superior" product. Uniformity, however, is dangerous in any biological system.

Today's geneticists are not much better, as Dr. Suzuki proceeded to prove.

A professor at the University of Ottawa said that people with university degrees should try to have as many children as possible, in order to improve the average intelligence of the population (although, as Dr. Suzuki noted, "Anyone who has ever been to a university knows that there is no connection between a degree and intelligence.")

One researcher recently concluded that social status is determined genetically - that the rich are rich because they are genetically superior to the poor.

A member of the Canadian Medical Association stated that all welfare recipients should be sterilized.

A UBC professor concluded, on the basis of FBI statistics, that blacks have an innate tendency to commit murder.

The above may be exceptional cases, but the fact that they exist at all is a little frightening. "The point of all

this," said Dr. Suzuki, "is that scientists should not be expected to have any special wisdom or insight."

But, while modern scientists have no more wisdom than their predecessors, they do have a great deal more information, which gives them "fantastic powers of control and



Understanding:

"When I need advice, I go to a man who never got through grade twelve — my father. He's Joe Lunchpail, but he has more wisdom than any dean or professor that I've ever met."

manipulation."

Thus, three facts - the scientist's great power, and his eagerness to use it, the fallibility of scientific judgement, and the willingness of the public to accept scientific judgement on faith - have combined to pose dangerous problems.

"Today's truth is likely to be tomorrow's superstition."

For instance, with today's medical techniques, it is possible to inspect a fetus before birth. It is becoming more and more common to have the fetus aborted if it is found to be "defective" or "inferior" in any way. (Just in passing, the Spartans of ancient Greece had their babies inspected by a military board. If the board decided that the infant in question was not up to the Spartan standard, then it was left to die.)

"It worries me when I hear it said that everyone has the right to a normal, healthy child ... The converse of that statement is that an unhealthy, abnormal child has no right to live."

And who defines normality?

"Where do we draw the line? If a mongoloid can be aborted, why not an albino? Suppose that the child is going to have a hair lip, or bad eyes, like me? How about a big nose, or hair of the wrong color?"

"I am amazed that we accept as a right - some kind of inalienable right - the choice of accepting or rejecting a baby on the basis of pre-natal inspection."

Dr. Suzuki did not state that abortion is never justified. The problem as he saw it lies with abortion becoming a casual thing. If the decision rests on some institutionalized definition of normality, Dr. Suzuki

then felt that selective abortion, guided by genetics and pre-natal inspection, could eventually squeeze humanity into one mold, destroying diversity and adaptability. He is very strongly against any government legislation requiring genetic counselling or pre-natal inspection, or any other step that would contribute to government controlled genetic uniformity.

"We are trying to create a homogenized society in which anyone who doesn't conform is a deviant. The danger is that a society that is intolerant to differences will try to put down those who are different."

"If you do a cost/benefit analysis, you could come up with the figures that would show that it costs a lot of money to support the Indians. So you would be better off to eliminate them, sterilize them. The same with all those poor people and the high cost of keeping them on welfare."

"I am very, very wary of cost/benefit analysis."

According to Suzuki, the decision to abort is a very important one that must be left to the couple concerned: "Abortion is not murder on one hand,

or the sole right of the woman over her body on the other. The power to destroy life is an incredible responsibility. I don't think people have accepted this."

Suzuki's message, in short, is that scientists, "inebriated with success," have tremendous powers, and, with all the best intentions, are "eager to play God." Unfortunately, their wisdom does not match their capability.

The public knows very little about the scientist and his weaknesses, and is all too ready to accept his advice on faith.

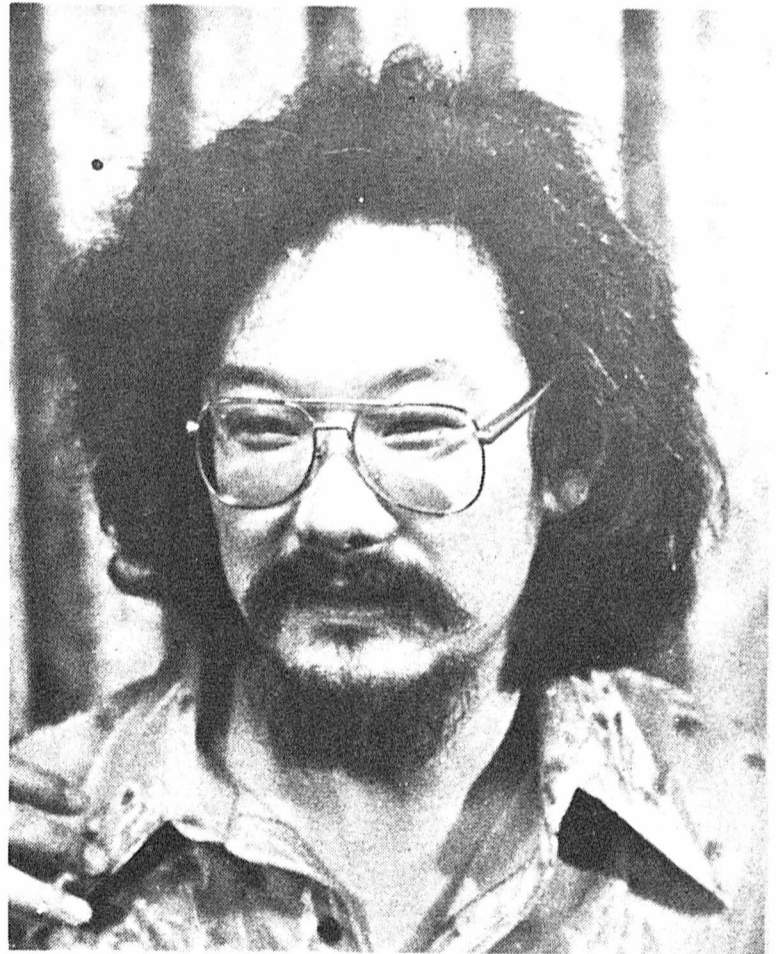
"People need to know about science to make decisions about airports, the pill, or nuclear power plants. They must understand or they won't be able to make the decisions that will affect their lives and the whole of society. ... someone has to promote science to make the public understand what is happening to them or what will happen to them."

Who is going to try to do this?

One guess.

And while you're guessing, put on some Dukas, and listen to "The Sorcerer's Apprentice".

Photos Greg Neiman



Personal responsibility:

"You have to get it all together with yourself, first."

On the food crisis:

"We've found a way of using up our bumper crops of grain — that is, by funneling them through cows, which take twenty one pounds of grain to produce one pound of meat."

Humanity:

"We have the strange quirks of love, compassion, and sympathy."