

Science or 'Nonscience'?

A question posed by **BRIAN FORD**

PERHAPS the day will come when society will be as opposed to the present almost total dependence of scientific research on industry as it is currently opposed to any move which might unite the makers of the law and those who dispense it.

It is not too difficult to look around on gloomy days and argue convincingly that the acquisition of knowledge should not be directly related to company profits. The amount of time and energy spent on every kind of research from opinion polls to new forms of packaging is a phenomenon of our age and one whose end results, an increasing number of people are beginning to believe, are either not worth the trouble or lead merely to the non-benefit of increased costs.

It is also easy to argue with equal conviction that research which leads to the manufacture of a new split-pin on a more potent antibiotic is just as valuable to humanity whether or not it is the result of the need for commercial gain or of pure altruism.

Either way, one spin-off of the great new people game called science is a massive

quantity of what Brian J. Ford would perhaps call pseudoism. As he rightly suggests in his new book, published last month by Wolfe Publishing Ltd., scientists were formerly regarded by the public as eccentric gurus who indulged in the search for knowledge for no reason other than the pleasure there is in travelling and arriving successfully. Entirely free to wander through the forests of knowledge somehow makes the discoveries of these gentlemen adventurers free from the taint which pervades those made by the present armies of commercial-orientated knowledge gatherers.

Science, Mr. Ford suggests deprecatingly, is not what it was. Indeed, he has entitled his book "Nonscience", pronounced by quick mutation "nonsense", which sums up his attitude to much of what exists under that name. He claims that science has become sullied by allowing itself to become a part of the establishment power game. One can enter it only through the accepted portals, and only after the right degree of status has been reached is one likely to be taken seriously. The aim, of course, is to become an

Expert. To achieve this end one has to have the right name (how Fred Hoyle made it to the astronomic top I—and probably Mr. Ford also—do not know), one has to have the right paper qualifications, one must know the right technical language and the right people.

Science, says Mr. Ford, is no longer, as its Latin root implies, a search for knowledge, but a race for material success, and his book is a sly, cynical textbook on how to get to the top and achieve the status of an Expert. I don't agree wholeheartedly with what Mr. Ford has to say possibly because destructive criticism has a negative value. Does he, through his book, become an Expert in nonscience and therefore a victim of his own argument? Anyway, I take the hopeful view that fortunately humanity has a multitude of built-in fail-safe devices which shield it from the excesses of its own folly. Perhaps "Nonscience" (priced at £2) is itself a fail-safe device by providing a warning that current trends bear the seeds of future danger.

David Le Feuvre

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