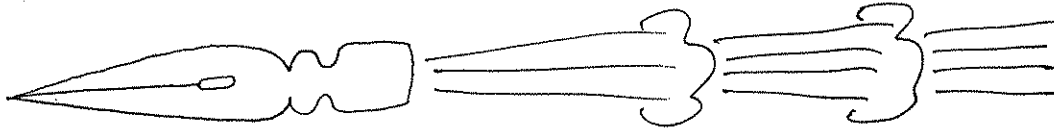


LETTERS



EUGENE MIBESCO

BELL CURVE: NO BELL, NO CURVE, NO...*Berkeley, Calif.*

■ If I were king, I might well order scientists to find genes for kindness, as Patricia Williams suggests ["Diary of a Mad Law Professor," June 15/22]. Unfortunately, I'm only the editor of *Psychological Science*. When I received a paper by Chorney et al. reporting a gene implicated in IQ, the decision to publish was easy. IQ is to some extent heritable, so it is of theoretical interest to know what and where those genes might be. And it was also easy to make my prediction about genetic testing for IQ genes. We're already well along the road to designer babies, after all. But even from a strict scientific viewpoint, testing people for this gene would be a crummy idea.

By Chorney's estimate, the gene in question, IGF2R, accounts for approximately 2 percent of the variance in IQ. But IQ accounts for only about 10 percent of the variance in important social outcomes. That means that IGF2R accounts for only about 0.2 percent of the variance in educational achievement, socioeconomic status and the like. The major sources of social inequality lie not in IQ, much less in IQ genes, but in the social environment (see Fischer et al., *Inequality by Design*, 1996).

So if I were an intelligence researcher, I would be mighty interested in recent research by Myerson and his colleagues, also published in *PS* in March. Myerson re-analyzed *The Bell Curve's* data and found, despite Herrnstein and Murray's denials, that there are returns to schooling after all. While college-educated blacks, on average, don't get as much out of their high schools as their white counterparts, they get much more out of college, so that a college education cuts in half the black-white disparity in IQ scores apparent at the end of junior high. A better scientific justification for improving inner-city high schools and for affirmative action in college admissions would be hard to find.

It is perhaps not surprising that the *New York Times*, which seems obsessed with the biological substrates of personality and social behavior, would ignore this work. But if I were a columnist for this country's most important progressive journal of politics and culture, I'd certainly be interested. JOHN F. KIHLMSTROM

WILLIAMS REPLIES*New York City*

■ If I am the columnist to whom John Kihlstrom refers, let me assure him that I do not take issue with his decision to publish. Nor, certainly, am I uninterested in studies like Myerson's. I remain, however, pretty put out that as we stand

at the door of the twenty-first century, society should still be questioning, and "intelligence researchers" should still have to address, whether "there are returns to schooling after all." Indeed, Chorney's study apparently relied upon SAT scores as the measure of IQ among his subjects, and there are abundant data showing that SAT scores can be raised significantly by coaching and study techniques.

PATRICIA J. WILLIAMS

REDBAITED AFTER ALL THESE YEARS*Pleasantville, N.Y.*

■ Does *The Nation* read *The Nation*? In Eric Alterman's well-meaning editorial, "Redbaiting Stone" [July 20], he seems unaware of information that we provided nearly two years ago in *The Nation* ["Stone Miscast," Nov. 4, 1996], discrediting reckless accusations that I.F. Stone was "a paid Soviet agent." Thus Alterman does not mention that former KGB general Oleg Kalugin, cited as the primary source for this allegation, has offered not only private denials but, more important, an unambiguous public refutation in his 1994 memoir, *The First Directorate*. Nor are readers informed of what the Venona intercepts actually reveal. The Soviet agent Vladimir Pravdin, code-named Sergei, who approached Stone in 1944, did so under the identity of a correspondent for TASS and in this guise also met with many other US journalists, including Walter Lippmann, Raymond Gram Swing and reporters for the *Baltimore Sun*, the *Washington Star*, the *Chicago Sun*, *Newsweek* and *Reader's Digest*.

WALTER SCHNEIR, MIRIAM SCHNEIR

Aventura, Fla.

■ Eric Alterman repeats Robert Novak's groundless claim that my late husband, John Gates, was "a paid FBI informant" who "identified [I.F.] Stone as a party member in the thirties." Alterman goes on to say, "But Gates offered no proof and neither does Novak," taking at face value, instead of refuting, Novak's scurrilous claim.

John would have had to be a miracle man to offer any proof, because he died in 1991. Furthermore, the timetable of his activities is completely inconsistent with Novak's claim. In the early thirties he joined the Young Communist League as a City College student when he was 18 and shortly thereafter went to Ohio to help in the steelworkers' organizing drive. At 20, he went to Spain to fight against fascism (and became leader of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade). He returned to New York in 1939 and was elected leader of the New York State Young Communist League. He volunteered for the US Army in 1941 and served for four years.

He eventually became the editor of the *Daily Worker* (this brings him up to the fifties and sixties). It is really stretching all bounds of truth to claim that he had anything to do with the FBI as an informant.

I am deeply concerned with all our progressive press because what we have today in our country, aided by red baiters like Robert Novak, is a new version of the McCarthyite onslaught. There must be some way that we can cooperate to check this. To begin with, *The Nation*, and Alterman, must refute the charges of people like Novak. LILLIAN GATES

ALTERMAN REPLIES*Aspen, Colo.*

■ Do the Schneirs read *The Nation*? I cited Kalugin's public refutation, both to Don Guttenplan and to myself. Citing yet another version of it hardly seems to add much to the story.

I do, however, apologize to Lillian Gates for my foolishness in failing to question Robert Novak's charge against her late husband. I have since done my best to try to corroborate it and have come up empty-handed. I therefore conclude that, barring any further evidence, it is every bit as groundless a lie as that with which Novak attempted to smear Izzy Stone. Again, my apologies. ERIC ALTERMAN

ROBESON ON RECORD*Kalamazoo, Mich.*

■ I happily endorse everything Eric Alterman says about Moe Asch and the Smithsonian Collection of Recordings ["republic opinion," June 29] but have to correct him about the availability of Paul Robeson recordings. Several imported discs are around, and among the US issues are *Ballad for Americans* (Vanguard VCD 117/118) and *Live at Carnegie Hall* (Vanguard VCD-72020), which may be filed with folk music in stores. A very impressive new release is in the Sony Classical Masterworks Heritage series: *Songs of Free Men* (MHK 63223). It includes labor union and Spanish Civil War songs, Russian and American folk songs and Jerome Kern, along with a fully illustrated booklet. ART HILGART

Washington, D.C.

■ I don't know where Eric Alterman lives, but on my lunch hour I went to my nearest record store, looked in *Phonolog* and found thirteen entries under Paul Robeson. I then went to the popular music section, where there were no Robesons, but in the classical section I found thirteen different Robeson CDs.

PHILIP ZARABOZO
(Continued on Page 44)

PATRICIA J. WILLIAMS

Invictus

"If I wuzza king," begins my son's puppet-show adventure.

"...were a king," interrupts the mean old witch, whose role I assume with an eager regularity.

"Poor kid," clucks a friend who happens to be a linguist. "Do you realize that by the time your child grows up, the subjunctive will be as archaic as 'thou'?"

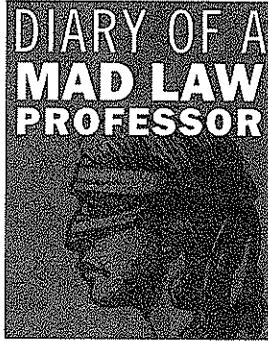
It's true, I suppose, that the subjunctive mood has fallen out of common parlance in recent years, and that I am perhaps among the few eccentrics who notice, let alone mourn, its decline. There are bigger calamities. Yet the sheer unqualified confidence of the perpetually non-subjunctive bothers me—as though the brain were always hopped up on the arrogance of too many management seminars, admitting of nothing but absolute assurance, like salesmen on Viagra.

Without the deferential wistfulness of the subjunctive mood, speech becomes all-knowing, too powerful, as though fiction were but a nascent form of fact, one's every wish an abracadabra away. The mind abandons itself to Purpose Unadorned, unplagued by doubt, desire or dread. In the world beyond subjunction—where tenses are employed like mere shelves upon which to lodge the choice of this certainty or that destiny—there is no mode for prayer. The future is what had to be. The past will be indefinitely. "If" becomes a matter of will so pure as to exclude all notions of contingency. Banished is any sense of the tentative; gone even is the ability to express it.

Forgive me. My kite gets tangled up in language whenever the forces of determinism begin to blow nuance to the winds. So let me spool myself backward to the moment in mid-May when it was widely broadcast that Dr. Robert Plomin, a behavioral geneticist, had isolated a gene that would be the first "plausible candidate" establishing a hereditary basis for intelligence. Technically speaking, the finding will require much more proof, since at best the gene would account for a 2 percent variation in human intelligence, and as yet the data are slim: a "statistical association" between the presence of the gene and the high S.A.T. scores of only fifty subjects.

Preliminary as this research is, the study has nevertheless been hailed as key to the future understanding of learning disabilities, Alzheimer's disease and mathematical precocity. Unmoored by any sense of the hypothetical or utopian, commentators have been crowing with the unmuzzled intensity of the strenuously indicative mood: no *woulds*, just *wills*; no *coulds*, all *cans*. "I confidently predict that within two months there will be genetic centers set up for profit to test parents for this gene," stated Dr. John Kihlstrom, the editor of *Psychological Science*, the journal that published the results of the study, even though he went on to concede that such centers are "a crummy idea."

How I searched for some sense of hesitant subjunction in Dr. Kihlstrom's syntax! As a lawyer, I am one who believes that language affects outcomes. Conditions in contract law, for ex-



ample, operate as a rough practical equivalent to the subjunctive; as such, they affect whether and when a party may expect performance, who bears the burden of proof and how risk of loss is assigned. The absence of conditions in the legal arena—and I daresay the medical—lends sleek immediacy to a transaction, an easy can-do-itiveness, the gloss of high commercialism.

Please don't misunderstand me: I love science and its vast potential as much as the next person, but I must say there are times when I worry that we

humans are too stupid to handle much more in the way of intelligence. From thalidomide to phrenology, from alchemy to World War II, medicine and myth have been too breathlessly intertwined for us not to have a greater sense of pause in the face of our wretched history of attempts to alter biological destiny. The very last thing we need is another center dedicated to the joys of genetic "improvement"—to the druggy high of DNA so pedigreed that no one ever again dares to cross you or your over-the-top powerball *smack* of purchased and paid-for intellect.

And yet the dream of a big-brained race has long been a feature of the most popular sci-fi literature in our culture, from *The Wizard of Oz* to *The War of the Worlds*. For the past several centuries, the grammar of eugenic inevitability has chased science in ever-headier pursuits, with the aim, it seems, of setting the balloon of the brain free at last from the ballast of the body. With a literalism that is positively Puritan, whole industries have been put in place catering to the anxieties of such self-division, industries dedicated to medicalizing mental uplift and pathologizing the weaknesses of the flesh.

It takes only the slightest parodic twist to imagine our mad scientists laboring furtively toward their real goal—that of abolishing bodies altogether, of tinkering their way toward the perfection of the world's first freestanding brain. It has been amply demonstrated, after all, that brains grow bigger when the body is restricted to a light diet of air kisses, black coffee and toast points, and that reproduction is ever so much more neatly accomplished with drugs and dishes and needles and incubators. Indeed, those saddled with messy, old-fashioned mammalian bodies already seem to have sensed their own obsolescence, and they spend a lot of time repenting and apologizing for the simply astonishing rate at which they expand and multiply. With such ease! From each and every orifice! Much profit is gained devising ways to rein in their breeding and brawling and gobbling of chicken wings.

Seriously. We spend an amazing amount of the earth's resources gazing through the microscopic cross-hairs of scientific inquiry, stalking our genes, snaring our dreams with the butterfly nets of the soon-to-be-present. Again, I do not wish to disparage the enterprise of knowledge-seeking—I for one can hardly wait until those busy engineers have mapped and trapped the notoriously elusive gene for kindness—but...it's just that in the hot pursuit of all that we can be, it sometimes seems to me as though we have forgotten who we are. ■

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