

On Use of "Epidemic" in the Broad Sense

From November 1930 to December 1971 I was what the United States calls an "extension worker," under various official employments in England. I was early hooked on the interest of our own technical words, and I acted as the convener of a small group, sub-sub to the then Council of the British Mycological Society (BMS) in the postwar 1940s, reacting to our own difficulties and to the recent committee report on the same subject in *Phytopathology* (30:361-368, 1940).

Our tiny group, soon reduced to four, worked by correspondence mainly, with few meetings. Our first list came out in the *Transactions of the British Mycological Society* (33:154-160, 1950). I wrote the explanatory effusion on orismology, to show "what we had been at" and some of the awkwardnesses involved. Later, our sponsoring body, the BMS Plant Pathology Committee, published nine further definitions without comment in the September 1953 issue of the *Transactions* (page 267), the leading pair being of "epidemic" and "epidemiology."

Years later, my attention was brought to the Letter to the Editor in the May 1978 issue of *Phytopathology* (page 681) recommending that "epiphytotic" and similarly derived words be used to replace "epidemic" and related words. In September 1978, I wrote to R. L. Millar, Editor-in-Chief of *Phytopathology*, stating I was strongly in favor of "epidemic" and "epidemiology" and against "epiphytology." I also pointed out that "epizootic" had two recognized meanings in modern technical use, with epizootic I meaning "dwelling on the surface of (an, the) animal."

Otherwise, the options seem to be as before and as I put them to Millar, ie, epidemic (sensu lato) (epidemiology—derived): (A) epidemic (sensu stricto), affecting human beings; (B) epizootic I, affecting other animals; (C) epiphytotic, affecting plants. The difficulty is that (A) and (B) affect populations of organisms capable of voluntary movement or of being moved about by man unless restraints are applied, whereas (C) are fixed in place, incapable of voluntary movement. Thus, the mathematics of (A) + (B) as against (C) can be different. Since it seems unlikely that the ancient Greeks thought of populations as other than human ones—but we do—it does not seem to break the parallel if we take their *demos* (the people) and use it to mean the "population" of animals or plants.

Now two correspondents to PLANT DISEASE, Victor E. Green, Jr. (June 1981,

page 459) and Demetrios G. Kontaxis (September 1981, page 704) have again raised the bogey.

In its early days I talked myself onto the Terminology Subcommittee of the Federation of British Plant Pathologists with the plea that our "ancient" little group under BMS auspices had never been officially disbanded by its sponsoring bodies. Their guide was issued in November 1973 as *Phytopathological Paper No. 17* under the auspices of the Commonwealth Mycological Institute. It describes "epidemic" and "epidemiology" in relation to populations of plants and gives a reasonable space to "epiphytotic," concluding that the "use of epidemic in a broad sense is recommended."

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Scientists: Trade Not Your Morals for Laurels

The proliferation of awards in the scientific community for the best "this, that, or the other thing" has assumed alarming proportions. Notwithstanding the ever presence of man's ego, I believe it is time to state a case for eliminating formal awards, such as those either in memory of some past "great scholar or scientist" or for society fellows, and replacing them with more meaningful personal compliments when in order.

The mere creation of some sort of special prize or award implies that such an award *should* be given to one who has done a decent job and not angered too many of his peers. Although politics are unquestionably involved, occasionally a recipient is chosen who has done excellent work. However, the question is: "Does the ardent, devoted scientist need these awards for his or her reward for doing a job which is in itself satisfying and rewarding?" If this is so, we really have a problem.

Is not the satisfaction or thrill of discovering, developing, or teaching new things ample reward? Is not science different enough from selling merchandise, where contests and prize giving commonly are used to stimulate sales, to allow the accomplishment in itself to be the scientist's reward? It seems that some administrators cherish such awards for their scientists, since awards not only bolster their own ego but provide them with material to convince a dean or director that his man should receive a well-deserved salary increase; this makes the administrator's job easier. These factors probably account for much of the award proliferation and are very difficult

to counteract, since administrators are highly influential.

Whether the scientist is above, below, or just average in her or his accomplishments is a personal affair between the scientist and the administration delegated to make this judgment. If one is truthful, the realm of scientific endeavor and its results should furnish ample material for the reasonable judgment of the scientist's value. The "honor" bestowed on recipients of these trite awards is like a foggy veil which soon vanishes in the light of reality. The average scientist is knowledgeable of how his peers are doing. An unsolicited, genuine compliment from one professional to another is one of the greatest occupational rewards which can be bestowed. Could formal awards which multiply in and permeate throughout our scientific societies be actually replacing these more personal, meaningful ways of expressing genuine human feelings?

This award trend has gained so much momentum that it seems scientific research and teaching are not in themselves admirable tasks unless a carrot is dangled out front in the form of an award. Our society reaches its nadir when graduate student papers are judged in competition. This gives the impression to the students that scientific results are comparable to sporting events and a winner can be judged "on the spot." Haven't we learned that many of the reports of the greatest scientific discoveries were discounted when they were announced? Important information in some papers by Mendel or Prevost were difficult to accept by the scientific community when presented and surely would have not received an award. Likewise, a good teacher often is not recognized by the students until long after the student has graduated, yet teacher awards currently given in universities are usually determined by students who have just finished the course.

The dignity of our science is in danger when it attempts to compete with the Motion Picture Academy Awards or Miss America beauty contests. It is very doubtful whether the scientific achievements of those individuals who relish these awards and purposefully strive for them really add any more significant bits of information to our knowledge than the achievements of nonrecipients. It is most important to consider that many who do not receive awards may become cynical and disillusioned, and hence awards may in fact have a negative influence.

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