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ties ranking equally. Nothing so crude enters Fancher's book; rather, there is an elusive subtlety to the drift of the narrative that no review can hope to capture.

It is all the more unfortunate, then, that the last chapter reads like a hurried afterthought. In attempting to come to a balanced view of the current state of the debate, the author steps outside his role of historian and immediately becomes unconvincing. This is a pity, but a small blemish. As the origins of intelligence testing recede beyond living memory, this book does a real service by reminding us that present academic fisticuffs have their origins in an honest but often naive and blinkered struggle to make sense of human variability. No doubt future historians will judge present efforts to have been equally blinkered: but in what proportions are we now naive and honest?

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## Go for Valhalla

Michael Spencer

**The Joy of Science: Excellence and its Rewards.** By Carl Sindermann. *Plenum: 1985. Pp.259. \$16.95, £16.15.*

SAMUEL Smiles, the Victorian author of such uplifting texts as *Self-Help* and *Men of Invention and Industry*, has been enjoying a revival of esteem on the New Right. Britain's Prime Minister has told unemployed teenagers to go out and start their own businesses, while one of her ministers has coined the immortal phrase "Get on yer Bike". We are urged to model ourselves on those who pursue success with relentless enterprise and determination.

Carl J. Sindermann is the Samuel Smiles of science, and has followed his earlier book *Winning the Games Scientists Play* with a further guide on *How to Get On*. His technique is modelled on that of Smiles: to examine in detail the upward climb of those who have achieved success. By "success" he means not the winning of Nobel prizes (a chimera that motivates more scientists than would ever admit it), but a job-satisfaction extending to administration and the manipulation of grant-giving bodies.

He cheerfully admits in his preface that the prospect of such a book did not endear him to his colleagues, who may have suspected that their own careers (thinly disguised under fictitious names) would be dissected for all to see. Undaunted, at late evening cocktail parties and professional meetings he pursued his chosen paragons long after their normal bedtimes, so as to analyse what made them tick.

The chapter on "The Ascendant Female Scientist" was, says the author, written against the strongly stated advice of all his female acquaintances, who were still smarting from a section entitled "Sex in the Laboratory" in his previous book. None of them, he says, would admit to the classification of "friend" after it was published.

Why, then he do it? The answer appears to be that Dr Sindermann is an old-fashioned scientific optimist who believes that all science is exciting and wonderful, and that anyone who succeeds in it is to be applauded and emulated. (In this he may have something in common with the august figure who once opined in print that it would be a pity for the world to blow itself up with nuclear weapons because that would halt the onward march of science.) Hardly anywhere in the book — whether discussing choice of research topic, career transitions or interactions with the outside world — does he discuss the problem of deciding whether a project is socially desirable. The word "ethics" does not appear in the index.

Dr Sindermann has little time for the also-rans, except as examples of where one can go wrong. He would certainly not agree with a friend of mine, who emerged limply from a two-hour session with a visiting celebrity to remark that the failures were much more interesting to talk to. He has harsh words to say about the Burnout, the Fade-out and the Guaranteed Loser. The latter category includes the Unwary Activist, who may (he says) damage his or her scientific credibility by espousing causes for social reform. The author classes such misguided people along with the Dilettante, the Hobbyist and the Chronic Underachiever.

Since most of us (by definition of that uncompromising word "excellence") are not going to reach Dr Sindermann's Valhalla of success, why should anyone read his book? The upwardly mobile graduate student with a taste for ruthless self-advancement will have his own ideas on how to make it. For those who have reached what the author calls the "midlife crisis" it is probably too late. The ageing scientist (to whom a chapter is devoted) is not going to believe a word of it.

Perhaps the most interesting thing about the book is what is missing from it. There is the same moral vacuum in the Royal Society's message to scientists, that they should learn how to manage the media in support of their chosen way of life. It is possible — just possible — that the current public mood of suspicion and alarm about the outcome of some scientific research is due not to inadequate public relations, but to a failure among scientists to think about the repercussions on ordinary people. Politicians have made the same mistake. □

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