

U1 - "Awards"

May 4, 1984

Henry Blackburn's Comments

Regents' Award of Recognition to Ancel Keys

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Campus Union

Most people I know in the academic world have large and sufficient satisfaction in the pursuit of their curiosity and in the simple recognition and respect of a very few peers. Most academic folk, I suspect, pretty well know their strengths and their limitations. They are not likely to be self-deceived by awards, recognitions or blandishments. Surely the greatest reward is an understanding of one's own contributions to the times, to one's academic field, whether science or letters, and to one's contemporaries. These recognitions are surely ennobling enough and others are not needed. For their recipients, "Virtue is its own reward".

Nevertheless, it is important for us that a university recognize its leading contributors and that the university community know and say something about its distinguished faculty. It is also important that the public served by that faculty have the opportunity to recognize and understand special excellence and distinction in its institutions.

The Regents of the University of Minnesota have chosen this occasion, around the 80th birthday of Ancel Keys, for such a recognition of one of the outstanding researchers in the long history of the University. This, then, is the University Regents Award of Recognition in which we participate today. A couple of years ago, in the delightful environment of Anacapri, his colleagues internationally honored Ancel Keys in a major

scientific symposium, recently published. So we here today have little to add to that or to the Regents Award. I will say a very few words which will characterize inadequately his large contribution to the University and the public.

Ancel Keys did not spend large amounts of time in organizational matters or in building empires. Rather he spent his time implementing his ideas in what turned out to be the most effective ways. Maybe this is, after all, a hallmark of great research: its effectiveness and, in fact, its cost/effectiveness. Small budgets from the Quartermaster Corps during and after WWII sponsored his classic work on human starvation. Small grants from the American Heart Association supported his Minnesota Business and Professional Men's Study and metabolic studies at Hastings and Faribault State Hospitals where the Keys Equation for the effect of diet on blood cholesterol was derived. Relatively small awards from the newly organized National Heart Institute supported these studies and the development of the Seven Countries Study on what would be regarded now as a pittance, on the order of \$25,000 a year for each of the geographic areas surveyed. We might say then that great research is cost effective. In contrast, very good research costs millions! Misguided research costs the most, because it is wasted.

Dr. Keys' scientific publications span 56 years and the body of his work puts him in a leading role internationally as medical scientist and contributor to the public health. Scientific careers follow many courses: Ancel Keys' career has leapt from one idea to another major one and from one set of constructs to an ever broadening one. His academic life and contribution are broad, starting out in the anatomy and physiology of

May 4, 1984

3

fishes, moving on to body fluids, osmolarity, and homeostatis, then a pioneer in human work physiology, oxygen transport and the dissociation of oxygen from hemoglobin at high altitudes, then ever enlarging to the new ground of human starvation and the effects of re-feeding, body composition, weight loss/weight gain and their associated behaviors and physical characteristics, then on to fundamental clinical-metabolic issues in diet, lipoprotein regulation and atherosclerosis, and finally to initiate the study of cardiovascular diseases, correlates, causes and prevention, in whole populations! His has been the development of ecologic correlations in their most fruitful applications, that is, population differences -- with their great public health implications. This was followed by the pursuit of individual correlations to disclose important mechanisms of individual variation -- with their great implications for preventive care. In his most recent period, Ancel Keys has returned to fundamentals such as the prediction of death from all causes, and from cancer, as well as from cardiovascular diseases. He is the co-founder of the field of cardiovascular epidemiology and the founder of the concept of Physiological Hygiene.

His intellect, his no-nonsense style, his concise, elegant writings, his energy and efficiency -- have all been a model to dozens of collaborators over the years. The collaboration of these colleagues around the world, who admire him and his ideas, has enabled him to implement these far-seeing studies so effectively. His simple way of management has been to gather good people with varied skills in one institution or project and address them to large methodological, conceptual and public health issues. This is a strategy which we continue to try to emulate and exploit.

May 4, 1984

4

It is right and proper that today his present and former colleagues, his department, his school, his university and its governing Regents should recognize these many contributions and share with him an afternoon of reminiscences and conviviality. Ancel Keys is still most active intellectually, in researches and writing. All the while, he pursues, with his good wife, Margaret, those special civilized pleasures found in the planning for, growing and preparation of nature's food for their table of family and friends. We are happy to participate in this Regents Award to Professor Keys and we invite his close colleagues and friends to his old Laboratory of Physiological Hygiene library, in Memorial Stadium Gate 27, for refreshments following this ceremony.

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