recommended, however, by the British Paediatric Association as an acceptable minimum⁵ will leave many units unable to implement such a policy. It seems that more research is needed in this area, as at present either large numbers of babies are being subjected to unnecessary procedures or even larger numbers are being put at risk of a very serious and largely preventable disorder.

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Hidden cruelty in child rearing

Sir,

Professor Davis in his review of Alice Miller's book, '*For your own good. Hidden cruelty in child rearing and the roots of violence*', admits to a 'mistrust of the statistical approach of Professor Rutter and his disciples'.¹ Unlike some deviations in psychoanalytic thinking, the eclectic approach to child psychiatry here is not characterised by any quasi religious notions and the concept of a disciple is inappropriate.

The critical and analytic approach we find helpful in our work. The published reports on child development are not noted for their shortage of hypotheses and Professor Davis is correct in suggesting that a disproportionate number of these are attributable to psychoanalysis. Too many are untested and thus prove of little value to those advising others responsible for child rearing. If assumed by faith alone they may lead to the sorts of problems which Mrs Miller describes.

What is clear from careful and critical examination of the evidence is that violence arises not infrequently from within the home, from parental unhappiness and disharmony. Education is also critical and scientific studies carried out by Professor Rutter and his co-workers have done much to further our understanding and explain the mechanisms involved, as well as generating more realistic

hypotheses which are found to be of value to many paediatricians and others caring for children.

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Professor Davis comments:

I was surprised but not altogether displeased that an aside in my review of Mrs Miller's book¹ should have elicited a letter from the Maudsley, ostensibly reacting to my reference to the Maudsley school as 'Rutters' disciples'.

I had thought that the word disciple was related to 'discipline', which is what I understand that school prides itself on; but even if one accepts Dr Corbett's connotation, it is not altogether inapposite since, in my view, what unites it is a certain philosophical attitude rather than adherence to scientific method, which, as Karl Popper has made clear, is 'theory impregnated',—the theory being that human behaviour is intelligible in terms of deep structures. Why does Dr Corbett think that psychoanalysis has contributed a 'disproportionate' number of hypotheses for testing when I know of no other coherent theory based on an attempt to understand human nature as it is observed in close prolonged study of individual patients; or does he believe that surface phenomena will, if named and counted, generate theory by induction? Science is not eclectic except in the very particular sense of being able to tolerate apparently incompatible explanations such as the wave and particle theories of light; it involves discarding theories which can be disproved and depends on there being theories available for disproof that are reasonably coherent. Popper's criticism of psychoanalysis is that its theories are not susceptible to disproof; but, as I understand it, the Maudsley school claims, with whatever justification, to have disproved at least some of them.

What is needed is surely a fruitful marriage between theory and experiment (in the case of human studies, involving 'experiments of nature' as Harvey called them) not the dismissive attitude to ideas characteristic of a discredited philosophy (logical positivism), whose own principal tenet is itself not based on observable fact but dogma, as Father D'Arcy is supposed to have pointed out. There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in the Maudsley philosophy; but one does admire their skill and rigour used in the right context.

Incidentally, Dr Corbett apparently believes that a demonstrable association between reported cruelty to a child and that child's cruel behaviour, if it comes to light as an adult, represents a causal connection. This may well be the most likely explanation of the relation but it is not the only possible one.

Reference

- 1 Davis JA. Book review. *Arch Dis Child* 1984;59:94.