

letters

To the Editor:

Your article on "pulse studies" (Fall 1983 issue) made me think of T.C. Chamberlin's classic paper "The Method of Multiple of Multiple Working Hypotheses." It first appeared in the *Journal of Geology*, Vol. V (1897), pp. 837-48, under the heading "Studies for Students." It was repeated in the *Journal of Geology*, Feb-Mar 1931. Chamberlin read a paper on the subject before the Society of Western Naturalists in 1892. I like the connection and share it with you for what it's worth.

"In developing the multiple hypotheses, the effort is to bring up into view every rational explanation of the phenomenon in hand and to develop every tenable hypothesis relative to its nature, cause, or origin, and to give to all of these as impartially as possible a working form and a due place in the investigation. The investigator thus becomes the parent of a family of hypotheses; and by his parental relations to all is morally forbidden to fasten his affections unduly upon any one. (pp. 160-161).

"In practice, it is not always possible to give all hypotheses like places, nor does the method contemplate precisely equable treatment. In forming specific plans for field, office, or laboratory work, it may often be necessary to follow the lines of inquiry suggested by some one hypothesis rather than those of another. The favored hypothesis may derive some advantage therefrom or go to an earlier death, as the case may be, but this is rather a matter of executive detail than of principle.

"A special merit of the use of a full staff of hypotheses coordinately is that in the very nature of the case it invites thoroughness. (pp. 162-163)"

I have always loved and respected these words of wisdom (and wish I paid more attention to them). They, and the "pulse" studies, smack of comprehensive critical rationalism (CCR), the contention that "all one's beliefs should be open to criticism." For William Bartley (*The Retreat to Commitment*), "the rationality of a belief will be related to its success in weathering criticism."

Hope you like Professor Chamberlin. I like the beat of a pulsing science.

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