

Supporting Information

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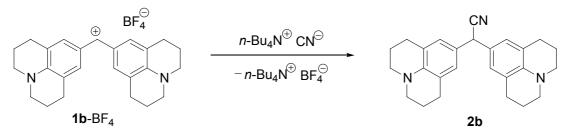
Ambident Reactivity of the Cyanide Ion:

A Failure of the HSAB Principle

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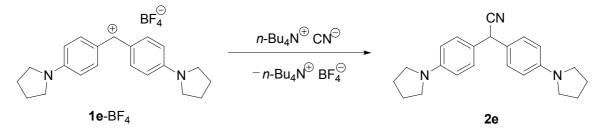
Department Chemie und Biochemie, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München Butenandtstr. 5-13 (Haus F), D-81377 München (Germany) Fax: (+49) 89-2180-77717 E-mail: Herbert.Mayr@cup.uni-muenchen.de Synthesis of bis(julolidin-9-yl)acetonitrile 2b



To a stirred solution of n-Bu₄N⁺CN⁻ (54 mg, 0.20 mmol) in dry MeCN (4 mL) a solution of **1b**-BF₄ (0.04 g, 0.1 mmol) in dry MeCN (1 mL) was added dropwise. The solvent was removed in vacuum and the residue was extracted with Et₂O (3 × 5 mL). The combined extracts were filtered through Celite and evaporated in vacuum to give a crude product, which contained **2b** and traces of an unidentified substance (¹H NMR control). Column chromatography (silica gel, EtOAc/*n*-hexane 1 : 5 + Et₃N (5 % v/v)) provided pure **2b** as colorless oil (35 mg, 90 %).

¹H NMR (300 MHz, CDCl₃): δ = 1.85 (m, 8 H), 2.62 (t, 8 H, *J* = 6.5 Hz), 3.02 (t, 8 H, *J* = 5.5 Hz), 4.64 (s, 1 H, Ar₂CH), 6.62 (s, 4 H). ¹³C NMR (75.5 MHz, CDCl₃): δ = 21.9 (CH₂), 27.6 (CH₂), 41.2 (Ar₂CH), 49.9 (CH₂), 121.2 (C_q), 121.8 (C_q), 123.5 (CN), 126.0 (CH), 142.4 (C_q). MS (EI), *m/z* (%): 383 (M⁺, 100); HRMS (EI) calcd for C₂₆H₂₉N₃: 383.2355; found: 383.2333.

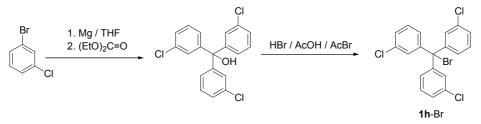
Synthesis of bis[4-(N-pyrrolidino)phenyl]acetonitrile 2e



To a stirred solution of n-Bu₄N⁺CN⁻ (54 mg, 0.20 mmol) in dry MeCN (4 mL) a solution of **1e**-BF₄ (0.04 g, 0.1 mmol) in dry MeCN (1 mL) was added dropwise. The solvent was removed in vacuum and the residue was extracted with Et₂O (3 × 5 mL). The combined extracts were filtered through Celite and evaporated in vacuum to give a crude product, which contained **2e** and traces of an unidentified substance. Column chromatography (silica gel, EtOAc/*n*-hexane 1 : 5 + Et₃N (5 % v/v)) provided **2e** as white powder (27 mg, 82 %); mp. 148–150 °C (*n*-hexane/EtOAc).

¹H NMR (300 MHz, CDCl₃): $\delta = 1.92$ (m, 8 H), 3.19 (m, 8 H), 4.90 (s, 1 H, Ar₂C*H*), 6.44 (d, 4 H, *J* = 8.7 Hz), 7.08 (d, 4 H, *J* = 8.7 Hz). ¹³C NMR (75.5 MHz, CDCl₃): $\delta = 25.4$ (CH₂), 40.9 (Ar₂CH), 47.6 (CH₂), 111.8 (CH), 121.0 (C_q), 123.2 (CN), 128.5 (CH), 147.4 (C_q). MS (EI), *m/z* (%): 331 (M⁺, 100); HRMS (EI) calcd for C₂₂H₂₅N₃: 331.2043; found: 331.2051.

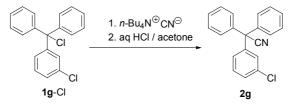
Synthesis of bromo-tris(3-chlorophenyl)methane 1h-Br



To magnesium turnings (0.80 g, 33 mmol) in dry THF (20 mL) one forth of a solution of 3-bromochlorobenzene (3.60 mL, 30.7 mmol) in dry THF (20 mL) was added. The exothermic reaction started after a few minutes. The rest of the halogenated arene was slowly added to the reaction mixture, maintaining a gentle boiling. After the addition, the reaction mixture was refluxed for 1 h and cooled to ambient temperature. To the resultant brown solution of the Grignard reagent, (EtO)₂CO (0.75 mL, 6.2 mmol) in dry THF (5 mL) was added dropwise, refluxed for 1 h, and quenched after cooling with a cold saturated aqueous solution of NH₄Cl. Et₂O was added, the organic layer was separated and successively washed with a saturated aqueous solution of NH₄Cl, water, and brine, dried over CaSO₄ and concentrated in vacuum at 100 °C/0.05 mbar. The resultant crude tris(3-chlorophenyl)methanol was dissolved in 33 wt. % solution of HBr in AcOH (4.64 mL, 25.6 mmol). After 1 h of reflux, acetyl bromide (0.92 mL, 12 mmol) was added. After refluxing for 1 h, the volatile components were removed in vacuum and the residue was recrystallized from *n*-hexane to give **1h**-Br (1.57 g, 60 % with respect to (EtO)₂CO) as a brownish powder; mp 88–90 °C (*n*-hexane).

¹H NMR (300 MHz, C₆D₆): δ = 6.57 (t, 3 H, *J* = 7.8 Hz), 6.87 (dd, 3 H, *J* = 7.8, 2.0 Hz), 7.44 (t, 3 H, *J* = 2.0 Hz). ¹³C NMR (75.5 MHz, CDCl₃): δ = 74.2 (C_q), 128.5 (CH), 128.57 (CH), 130.1 (CH), 134.1 (C_q), 146.4 (C_q). MS (EI), *m/z* (%): 347 (M⁺–Br, 37), 345 (M⁺–Br, 38). Anal. calcd for C₁₉H₁₂BrCl₃: C 53.50, H 2.84; found: C 53.64, H 3.10.

Synthesis of 3-chlorophenyl-diphenylacetonitrile 2g

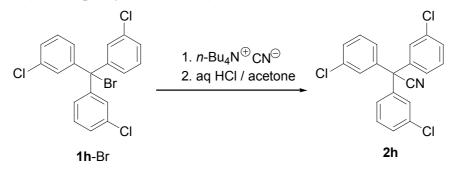


To a stirred solution of n-Bu₄N⁺CN⁻ (0.81 g, 3.3 mmol) in dry acetonitrile (30 mL) **1g**-Cl^[S1] (0.34 g, 1.1 mmol) in dry benzene (1 mL) was added. After stirring for 15 min, the reaction mixture was evaporated in vacuum. The residue was extracted with *n*-hexane (5 × 5 mL), and *n*-hexane was removed in vacuum to give a mixture of **2g** (85 %) and **3g** (15 %). The isocyanide **3g** was hydrolyzed by refluxing this mixture with 6 M HCl (2 mL) in acetone (10 mL) for 10 min. Acetone was then evaporated, and the aqueous residue was extracted with Et₂O. The organic layer was washed successively with a saturated aqueous solution of NaHCO₃, water, and brine, evaporated in vacuum and the residue, a mixture of **2g** and 3-chlorophenyl-diphenylmethanol, was subjected to a flash chromatography (silica gel, EtOAc/*n*-hexane 1 : 5 + Et₃N (2 %)) to give **2g** (0.20 g, 66 %) as a sticky colorless oil.

¹H NMR (300 MHz, C₆D₆): $\delta = 6.64$ (td, 1 H, J = 8.0, 0.4 Hz), 6.92 – 7.0 (m, 7 H), 7.02 (ddd, 1 H, J = 8.0, 2.0, 1.0 Hz), 7.30 (td, 1 H, J = 2.0, 0.4 Hz); ¹³C NMR (75.5 MHz, CDCl₃): $\delta = 57.2$ (C_q), 122.9 (CN), 127.1 (CH), 128.4 (CH), 128.5 (CH), 128.7 (CH), 128.9 (CH), 129.0 (CH), 129.9 (CH), 134.8 (C_q), 139.5 (C_q), 142.3 (C_q). MS (EI), m/z (%): 305 (M⁺, 34), 303 (M⁺, 100); IR (CCl₄): v (CN) = 2240. Anal. calcd for C₂₀H₁₄ClN: C 79.07, H 4.65, N 4.61; found: C 79.12, H 4.64, N 4.53.

^[S1] C. S. Marvel, F. C. Dietz, C. M. Himel, J. Org. Chem. **1942**, 7, 392–397.

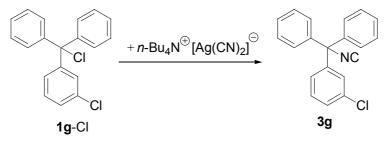
Synthesis of tris(3-chlorophenyl)acetonitrile (2h)



To a stirred solution of n-Bu₄N⁺CN⁻ (0.19 g, 0.70 mmol) in dry acetonitrile (100 mL) **1h**-Br (0.20 g, 0.47 mmol) in dry benzene (2 mL) was added. After stirring for 1 h, the reaction mixture was evaporated in vacuum. The residue was extracted with *n*-hexane (5 × 10 mL), and hexane was removed in vacuum to give a mixture of **2g** and **3h**. The isocyanide **3h** was decomposed by refluxing this mixture with 6 M HCl (2 mL) in acetone (10 mL) for 10 min. Acetone was then evaporated, and the aqueous residue was extracted with Et₂O. The organic layer was washed successively with a saturated aqueous solution of NaHCO₃, water, and brine, evaporated in vacuum and the residue was subjected to a flash chromatography (silica gel, EtOAc/*n*-hexane 1 : 10 + Et₃N (2 % v/v)) to give **2h** (0.08 g, 46 %) as a sticky colorless oil.

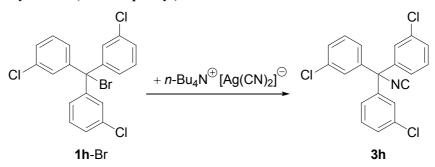
¹H NMR (300 MHz, C₆D₆): $\delta = 6.57$ (td, 3 H, J = 8.0, 0.3 Hz), 6.78 (ddd, 3 H, J = 8.0, 2.0, 1.0 Hz), 6.88 (ddd, 3 H, J = 8.0, 2.0, 1.0 Hz), 7.22 (td, 1 H, J = 2.0, 0.3 Hz). ¹³C NMR (75.5 MHz, CDCl₃): $\delta = 56.5$ (C_q), 121.9 (CN), 126.9 (CH), 128.7 (CH), 129.1 (CH), 130.2 (CH), 135.2 (C_q), 140.8 (C_q). MS (EI), m/z (%): 373 (M⁺, 69), 371 (M⁺, 71), 262 (C₁₄H₈Cl₂N⁺, 38), 260 (C₁₄H₈Cl₂N⁺, 57), 224 (68), 190 (100); IR (CCl₄): v(CN) = 2242 cm⁻¹. Anal. calcd for C₂₀H₁₂Cl₃N: C 64.46, H 3.25, N 3.76; found: C 64.59, H 3.70, N 3.63.

Synthesis of isocyano-3-chlorophenyl-diphenylmethane 3g



To a stirred suspension of AgCN (0.12 mg, 0.90 mmol) in dry acetonitrile (10 mL) a solution of n-Bu₄N⁺CN⁻ (0.22 g, 0.82 mmol) in dry acetonitrile (2 mL) was added. The mixture was stirred for 1 h, and **1g**-Cl (0.17 g, 0.54 mmol) in dry benzene (1 mL) was added. After stirring for 1 h, the reaction mixture was evaporated in vacuum. The residue was extracted with *n*-hexane (10 × 10 mL), *n*-hexane was removed in vacuum, and the residue was subjected to flash chromatography (silica gel, EtOAc/*n*-hexane 1 : 10 + Et₃N (2 % v/v)) to give **3g** (0.14 g, 83 %, contains traces of isomeric nitrile, that has been formed during the chromatography) as a sticky colorless oil.

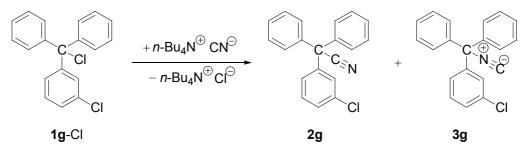
¹H NMR (300 MHz, C₆D₆): $\delta = 6.66$ (td, 1 H, J = 8.0, 0.4 Hz), 6.89 – 6.98 (m, 7 H), 7.02 (ddd, 1 H, J = 8.0, 2.0, 1.0 Hz), 7.09 – 7.16 (m, 4 H), 7.35 (td, 1 H, J = 2.0, 0.4 Hz). ¹³C NMR (75.5 MHz, CDCl₃): $\delta = 74.5$ (C_q), 126.4 (CH), 128.5 (CH), 128.53 (CH), 128.7 (CH), 128.8 (CH), 128.81 (CH), 129.8 (CH), 134.5 (C_q), 140.9 (C_q), 143.6 (C_q), 158.3 (NC). IR (CCl₄): v (NC) = 2126 cm⁻¹. MS (EI), *m/z* (%): 305 (M⁺, 27), 303 (M⁺, 82), 279 (C₁₉H₁₄Cl⁺, 34), 277 (C₁₉H₁₄Cl⁺, 100); HRMS (EI) calcd for C₂₀H₁₄ClN: 303.0812; found: 303.0844. Synthesis of isocyano-tris(3-chlorophenyl)methane 3h



To AgCN (0.19 g, 1.4 mmol) a solution of n-Bu₄N⁺CN⁻ (0.28 g, 1.0 mmol) in dry acetonitrile (20 mL) was added. After stirring for 1 h, **1h**-Br (0.30 g, 0.70 mmol) in dry benzene (1 mL) was added. The reaction mixture was stirred for 1 h at ambient temperature, evaporated in vacuum. The residue was extracted with *n*-hexane (3 × 10 mL). *n*-Hexane was removed in vacuum and crude product was subjected to flash chromatography (silica gel, EtOAc/*n*-hexane 1 : 7 + Et₃N (2 % v/v)) to give **3h** (0.21 g, 79 %) as a sticky colorless oil.

¹H NMR (300 MHz, C₆D₆): $\delta = 6.56$ (t, 3 H, J = 8.0 Hz), 6.76 (ddd, 3 H, J = 8.0, 2.0, 1.0 Hz), 6.88 (ddd, 3 H, J = 8.0, 2.0, 1.0 Hz), 7.25 (t, 1 H, J = 2.0 Hz). ¹³C NMR (75.5 MHz, CDCl₃): $\delta = 73.6$ (C_q), 126.2 (CH), 128.1 (CH), 129.2 (CH), 129.9 (CH), 134.9 (C_q), 142.3 (C_q), 159.8 (NC). MS (EI): m/z (%) 373 (M⁺, 96), 371 (M⁺, 97), 262 (C₁₄H₈Cl₂N⁺, 38), 260 (C₁₄H₈Cl₂N⁺, 57). IR (CCl₄): v (NC) = 2125 cm⁻¹. Anal. calcd for C₂₀H₁₂Cl₃N: C 64.46, H 3.25, N 3.76; found: C 64.62, H 3.45, N 3.63.

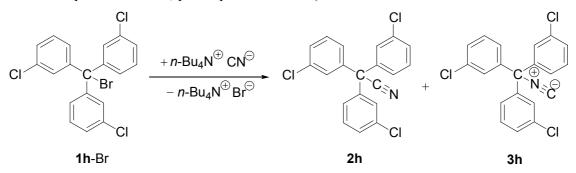
Reaction of chloro-(3-chlorophenyl)-diphenylmethane 1g-Cl with tetra-*n*-butylammonium cyanide ($[n-Bu_4N^+CN^-] = 7.1 \times 10^{-3} \text{ M}$, $[1g-Cl] = 4.7 \times 10^{-3} \text{ M}$)



To a stirred solution of n-Bu₄N⁺CN⁻ (0.64 g, 2.4 mmol) in dry MeCN (100 mL) a solution of **1g**-Cl (0.15 g, 0.48 mmol) in dry benzene (1 mL) was added at 20 °C. After 1 h of stirring at 20 °C, the reaction mixture was evaporated and the residue was extracted with *n*-hexane (10 × 5 mL). The combined *n*-hexane extracts were filtered through Celite and evaporated in vacuum to give a mixture of **2g** and **3g** in a ratio 5.8 : 1 (0.14 mg, 98 %).

The components of the product mixture have been identified by comparison of their ¹H, ¹³C NMR, and IR spectra with the spectra of pure 2g and 3g (see Figure 1).

Reaction of bromo-tris(3-chlorophenyl)methane 1h-Br with tetra-*n*-butylammonium cyanide $([n-Bu_4N^+CN^-] = 7.1 \times 10^{-3} \text{ M}, [1h-Br] = 4.7 \times 10^{-3} \text{ M})$



To a stirred solution of n-Bu₄N⁺CN⁻ (0.19 g, 0.71 mmol) in dry MeCN (100 mL) a solution of **1h**-Br (0.20 g, 0.47 mmol) in dry benzene (1 mL) was added at 20 °C. After 1 h of stirring at 20 °C, the reaction mixture was evaporated and the residue was extracted with *n*-hexane (10 × 5 mL). The combined hexane extracts were filtered through Celite and evaporated in vacuum to give a mixture of **2h** and **3h** in a ratio 3.7 : 1 (0.17 g, 96 %).

The components of the product mixture were identified by comparison of their ¹H, ¹³C NMR, and IR spectra with the spectra of pure **2h** and **3h** (Figure S1).

The same product ratio was obtained, when the reaction was carried out with $[n-Bu_4N^+CN^-] = 2.4 \times 10^{-2} \text{ M}$ and $[1h-Br] = 4.7 \times 10^{-3} \text{ M}$.

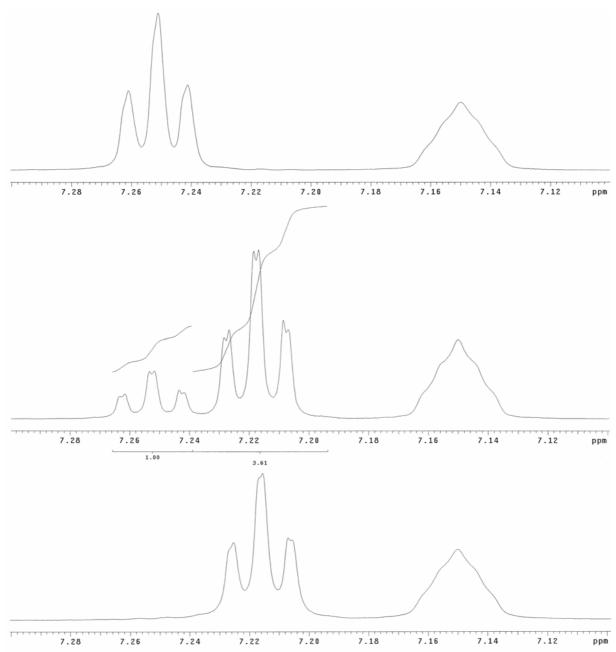


Figure S1. Comparison of the ¹H NMR spectrum (200 MHz, C_6D_6) of the product obtained from the reaction of 1h-Br with *n*-Bu₄N⁺CN⁻ (middle) with that of pure isocyanide 3h (top) and nitrile 2h (bottom).

Reaction of trimethyloxonium tetrafluoroborate with tetra-n-butylammonium cyanide

$$n-\mathrm{Bu}_{4}\mathrm{N}^{\oplus}\overset{\odot}{\simeq}\mathrm{C}\equiv\mathrm{N} + (\mathrm{CH}_{3})_{3}\mathrm{O}^{\oplus}\mathrm{BF}_{4}^{\ominus} \xrightarrow{\mathrm{CDCI}_{3}} \mathrm{H}_{3}\mathrm{C}-\mathrm{C}\equiv\mathrm{N}$$
95 %

To solid Me₃O⁺ BF₄⁻ (15 mg, 0.10 mmol) a solution of *n*-Bu₄N⁺CN⁻ (90 mg, 0.34 mmol) in CDCl₃ (1 mL) and standard (0.05 mL of 1.39 M solution of CH₂Cl₂ in CCl₄) was added. After the dissolution of Me₃O⁺ BF₄⁻ (ca. 10 min) the ¹H and ¹³C NMR spectra were taken, which showed the peaks of MeCN [¹H NMR (200 MHz, CDCl₃) δ = 1.94 ppm, yield 95 %, ¹³C NMR (75.5 MHz, CDCl₃) δ = 1.8 (CH₃), 116.5 (CN)] and Me₂O [¹H NMR: δ = 3.21 ppm, yield 95 %, ¹³C NMR: δ = 60.4 (CH₃)]. No peaks of MeNC [¹H NMR: δ = 2.85 ppm; ¹³C NMR: δ = 26.8 (CH₃), 158.2 (NC)] could be detected.

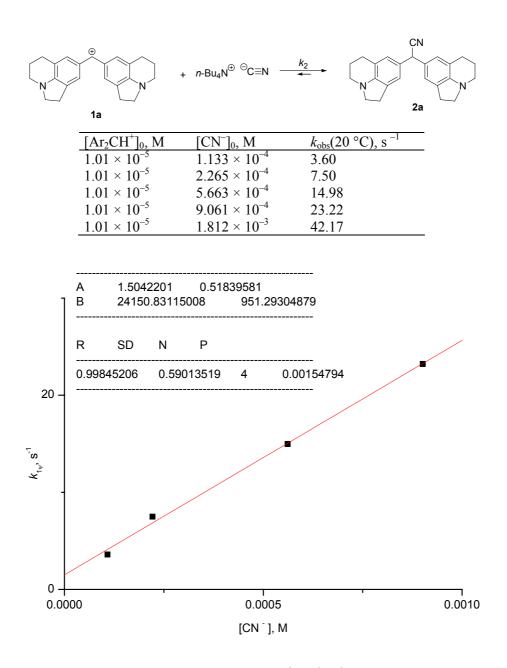
Reaction of methyl triflate with tetra-*n*-butylammonium cyanide

$$n-\operatorname{Bu}_4 N^{\bigoplus} \overset{\bigcirc}{\subset} \equiv \mathbb{N} + \operatorname{H}_3 \mathbb{C} - \operatorname{O} - \overset{\bigcirc}{\overset{\boxtimes}{\overset{\boxtimes}{\operatorname{S}}}} \mathbb{C} \mathbb{F}_3 \xrightarrow[]{\begin{array}{c} \operatorname{CDCl}_3 \\ 20 \ ^\circ \mathbb{C}}} \operatorname{H}_3 \mathbb{C} - \mathbb{C} \equiv \mathbb{N}$$

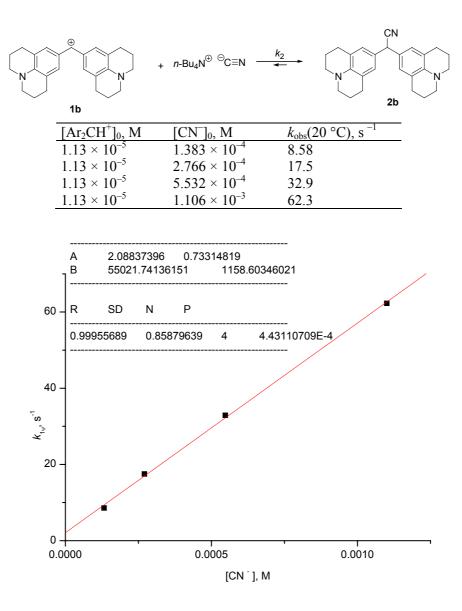
quant.

To a solution of n-Bu₄N⁺CN⁻ (90 mg, 0.34 mmol) in CDCl₃ (1 mL) neat MeOTf (20 mg, 0.12 mmol) and standard (0.05 mL of 1.39 M solution of CH₂Cl₂ in CCl₄) was added. After 5 min ¹H and ¹³C NMR spectra were taken, which showed the peaks of MeCN. No peaks of MeNC could be detected.

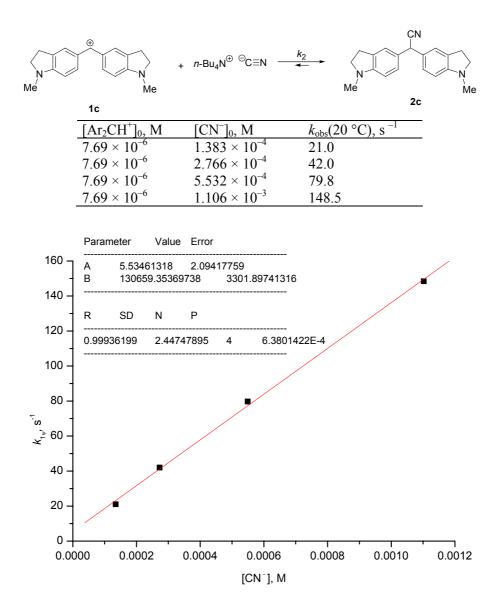
Rate constants for the reactions of benzhydrylium tetrafluoroborates with tetra-*n*-butylammonium cyanide in acetonitrile (20 °C, stopped-flow)



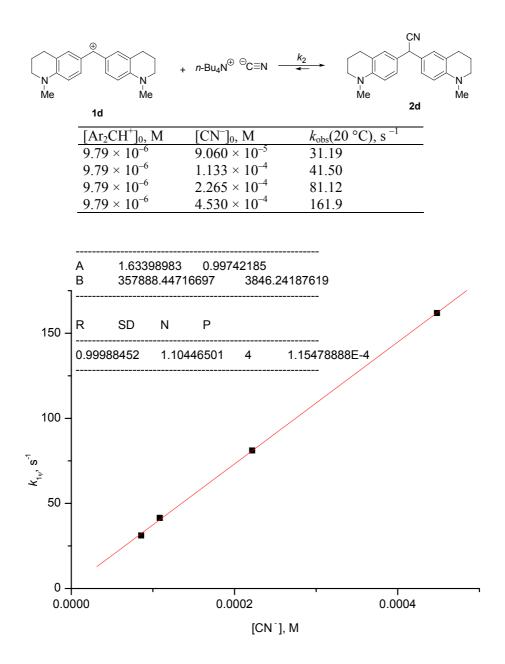
 $k_2(20 \text{ °C}) = 2.42 \times 10^4 \text{ M}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$



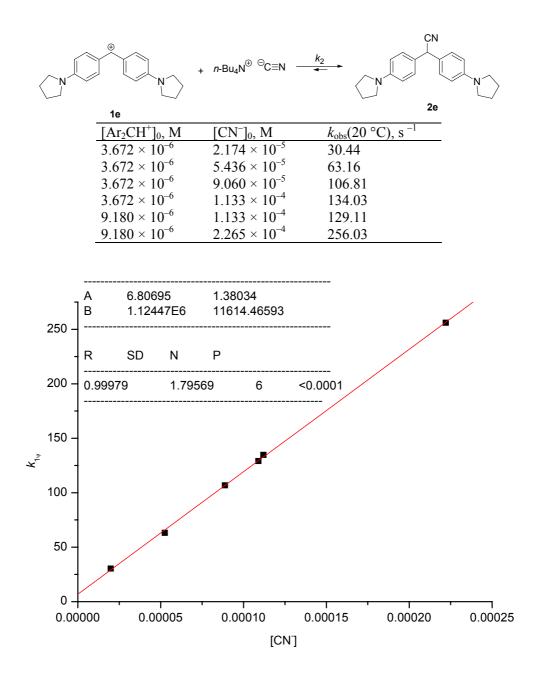
 $k_2(20 \text{ °C}) = 5.50 \times 10^4 \text{ M}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$



$$k_2(20 \text{ °C}) = 1.31 \times 10^5 \text{ M}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$$



 $k_2(20 \text{ °C}) = 3.58 \times 10^5 \text{ M}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$



 $k_2(20 \text{ °C}) = 1.125 \times 10^6 \text{ M}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$