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Incorporating Science News Letter

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COVER: A garden grows in the 16-story atrium of the high-rise that houses the administration of the Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory. It's a long way from the first cyclotron. See p. 298. (Photo: FermiLab)

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November 9, 1974

To the Editor

Not room for expansion

In his letter to the editor (SN: 10/12/74, p. 227) Mr. Feinstein demonstrated his ignorance in so many areas of the human population problem that it is impossible to comment on all of them in a short letter. However, three points especially deserve comment. First, vast areas of the earth are uninhabited for the very good reason that the resources needed by humans do not exist there (i.e., suitable soil conditions for crops, available water, etc.). Second, technological developments have never kept up with the growth of the human population. To expect that technology will miraculously catch up is an exercise in self-delusion.

Third, the adverse psychological impact of crowded conditions, such as those envisioned by Mr. Feinstein, has been extensively publicized in many biological and psychological journals.

The earth, as is the case with smaller ecosystems, has a limited carrying capacity. We are approaching that limit more rapidly than many of us will admit.

Robert R. Hollenbeck, Ph.D.

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Mr. Feinstein's letter concerning human population density and food sources is a put on. Right? Farm in buildings hundreds of miles long and many miles wide? I hope that his belief is not too widespread. It leads to complacency and false security about population density and environmental problems. Engineering know-how will overcome natural biological laws! I think Mr. Feinstein has been living in Brooklyn too long.

Donald L. Inman, Ph.D.

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Lansing, Mich.

'Sinister' observations

Because of my left-handed or mixed-handed tendencies, R. J. Trotter's article "Sinister Psychology" (SN: 10/5/74, p. 220) attracted me more than casually. I have been watching people's character-

istics (particularly left-handed ones) for a number of years and would like to add a few observations. These are: A much larger number of practicing left-handed persons less than 30 years of age than older ones (probably a more friendly society toward sinistrals), a significantly greater number of college graduates in science and mathematics are left-handed compared to equivalent age groups of noncollege persons and, last but not least, seemingly left or mixed-handed persons appear to have many more hobbies (and sometimes more distractions) than right-handed persons—all age groups considered.

M. L. Moberg, President
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Significant figures

Even at this late date, I am still moved to comment on the article "QED" (SN: 7/27/74, p. 60). It gives predicted and experimental values for the anomalous part of the magnetic moment of the electron, giving "agreement to the tenth significant figure, a truly fantastic agreement." And it would be. Unfortunately the values he gives agree only to the sixth figure, albeit the tenth decimal place reported. (Even then, they stop agreeing at the eighth decimal: 0.0011596519 vs 0.0011596567). Put more simply, the numbers are 1.15965 × 10⁻³ plus or minus 1 in the last figure shown. Please, we have enough trouble teaching beginning chemistry students "significant figures" without such a prestigious and excellent magazine as SCIENCE NEWS compounding the confusion!

M. A. Merrill
Professor of Chemistry
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Viral transformations

I think the article describing our work on virus transformation (SN: 10/19/74, p. 248) is very well done except for one point which could be a major issue. This concerns the second sentence regarding the gangliosides in cancer cells. This change occurs if the tumor is caused by an oncogenic virus. There are many spontaneous tumors where this change is not seen. This may seem to be a minor point but there is a lot of interest in this area and I would not like to mislead anyone regarding our findings, which are restricted to viral transformation of cells.

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More letters appear on page 302

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