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COVER: R stands for reality. Quantum physics has always disturbed classical ideas of reality. Perhaps in the end what we think of as real is no more than a papier maché construction that our imaginations erect between the solid pillars of observation. See story p. 332. (Drawing courtesy of Joseph Henry Laboratories)

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LETTERS

Cyclical variation of G?

In reference to your article "Complicating the Law of Gravity" (SN: 4/17/76, p. 244), I would like to point out that in 1967, L.M. Stephenson at University College, London, showed that the anomalies noted in the last two redeterminations of the universal gravitational constant G by P.R. Heyl in 1930 and 1942, at the National Bureau of Standards, could be eliminated if one assumes an annual cyclical variation of G, as measured on the earth's surface, with a maximum for G occurring at the vernal equinox and a minimum at the autumnal equinox.

Surprisingly, the slope of G(R) given by Long's experiment coincides with the combined spreads obtained by Heyl in his 1930 and 1942 measurements of G. Since Long collected his data over a period of about a year, it should be relatively easy to determine if a similar annual cyclical variation manifests itself in his results. Should this prove to be the case it would be highly unlikely that the reported anomaly in the value of G stems from a failure of the universal square law at laboratory dimensions.

*Joseph F. Messina
Chicago, Ill.*

FDA logic naive?

I have just read Mr. Weber's letter on chloroform (SN: 5/1/76, p. 275) and was driven to comment. I wonder why this simplistic and naive statement was printed here at all when it would better belong in a politician's campaigning speech where the public is more accustomed to hearing rash statements. To correlate a quick rinse with a dilute solution of chloroform on the surface of a vegetable with reducing the food to "rat poison" would be laughable if it were not for the fact that he is apparently serious. This is the sort of "logic" that the government has been dispensing disguised as scientific responsibility when it is, in fact, quite the opposite. I can only expect in the future that water will be banned when some FDA official finds that it causes drowning in large quantities. Perhaps they will solve the problem of risk by banning births since 100 percent of them eventually result in death. The elimination of unnecessary risk is one thing; the extrapolation of data from one area to another completely unrelated is unforgivable.

*Robert R. Schoettker
Cincinnati, Ohio*

Science and metaphors

There isn't a computer analysis on earth that could "prove" T. S. Eliot to be "correct" about April and cruelty (SN: 4/10/76, p. 233) because Mr. Eliot was writing about the human perception of April and cruelty. I just don't think "April" can be successfully coded into a computer. Probably what you meant to say was that the existence of T. S. Eliot's poem indicates that the computer's calculation may have revealed something perceptive human beings have known all along.

I hope you take this criticism as constructive. Humanistic and scientific concerns should be—must be—melded together rather than artificially kept apart, and it is the artifice of "professionalism" that keeps them apart. I sincerely hope that SCIENCE NEWS can do even more to help bridge this gap.

*Andrew P. Mayo
Riner, Va.*

Conservation was mentioned

The lead sentence in SN's report on Exxon's energy outlook (SN: 3/27/76, p. 202) seems to imply a disregard for conservation on the part of the company. As an Exxon employee, I can assure you that the implication is entirely false. A comparison of verbatim excerpts suggests that your reporter was less than diligent in seeking out references to "conservation." Incidentally, the word appears at least twice more in the Exxon report's conclusion, once cited as a beneficial result of free market oil pricing, and again identified as an "important national priority."

*E. K. Wiley
Fanwood, N.J.*

Survival in the subway

I cannot believe the validity of the results of Arthur Sackler and A. Stanley Wiltman, who say that many of the rats exposed to conditions simulating those in the New York subway system died (SN: 4/24/76, p. 266). On the contrary, I have seen innumerable rats in the New York subways, and they seem to be doing just fine.

*Jed Laderman
Great Neck, N.Y.*

Teller on technology

Great article on Teller (SN: 4/17/76, p. 253)! He is a good common sense scientist—with a practical approach to our energy problems!

*Paul Hoffman
Bethesda, Md.*

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