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Incorporating Science News Letter

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COVER: Minute magnetic fields in the brain can yield important information about biological and psychological processes. The measurement is done with superconducting quantum interference devices. Such devices are proving useful in a number of areas of medicine, psychology, geophysics and metrology where measurement of minute magnetic fields can yield information. See p. 236. (Photo: New York University)

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LETTERS

Recombinant gene experiments

I am a recent subscriber to SCIENCE NEWS, and am greatly impressed by the excellence of the reporting. I am planning to enter college in physics and math in a few months, and I appreciate the articles.

I am writing to ask what has happened to the freedoms we Americans hold so dear. I am referring to "Recombinant DNA: Clashing Views Aired" (SN: 3/19/77, p. 181). What is going to happen to other areas of science if the legislature steps in and puts controls on recombinant DNA? What will happen to the right to free inquiry when one area of science is taken out of the hands of experts and put in the hands of politicians? I would be the last to say there is no danger, but what about the possible benefits?

Roger Van Scoy
Greenwich, Ohio

I was appalled by the seemingly irresponsible antics of Mayor Alfred Vellucci which you reported (SN: 3/12/77, p. 165) concerning the recombinant DNA conference. I have seen the Vellucci act before, but had written it off as just a natural reaction of a concerned layman. But evidently Mayor Vellucci has turned out to be a regular cheerleader. I cannot believe that a man of such responsibility could be so misinformed, or worse, totally uninformed. Vellucci's remarks are typical of those who have always plagued the advance of science in order to protect their own uncertain power. If Vellucci had been at Kitty Hawk, and if the Wright Brothers had failed, no doubt he would have applauded: "If God had meant man to fly, he would have given him wings!"

Fred R. Monaco
Long Beach, Calif.

I am surprised that great concern is shown about the possible consequences of recombinant gene experimentation, but no concern at all is shown about hybridization. Hybridization experiments have been made for years with the same hypothetical consequences.

By the way: The tragic results from recombinant gene experimentation can be hypothesized also from chance mutation, and that without interference of man. No safety rules possible can prevent that from happening.

Bernard Foster
Bronx, N.Y.

Gullis's faked data

The article "Researcher Admits He Faked Journal Data" (SN: 2/5/77, p. 151) was most interesting and I should like to comment on the content.

You gave Dr. Gullis credit for admitting his errant ways in publication, then damned him without recourse, a fate we do not reserve for even our worst criminals in the United States. Second, there was not the slightest consideration of conditions which exist today in our scientific academic community that promote this type of behavior.

I feel that you have done your readers and Dr. Gullis an injustice. A far more serious question should have come to light in this exposure. There is a deadly tendency in our colleges and universities not to train our scientists to be honest, but to achieve results. The value of an individual's work is often placed upon the number of publications behind the name, almost never upon the number of times a particular publication is quoted or used in other works.

At a time when general belief in the credibility of the academic scientific community is suffering, I should like to suggest some serious thought concerning the above-mentioned problems.

Patricia Howe
Bigfork, Mont.

Your article on Robert Gullis, the biochemist who admitted fabricating experimental data, concludes that "Faking of results is . . . a scientist's greatest sin. . . . The scientific career of Gullis is ended."

Despite your earlier article on the desirability of exchange between science and the humanities, you seem unaware that no system which employs the notion of "sin" is without the correlatives of forgiveness and redemption.

Your writer, moreover, is predicting far ahead of evidence, perhaps in hopes of influencing that evidence by hypothesis, which was Dr. Gullis's sin.

Richard Bready
Chicago, Ill.

(In his statement, Gullis referred in the past tense to "my short research career." He explicitly stated that he published imaginary results because he was so convinced his ideas were right, "not because of the tremendous importance of published papers to the career of a scientist."—Ed.)

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