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COVER: The labyrinth of schizophrenia has puzzled researchers for more than half a century. Not only are scientists unsure about the way out of the maze, but they have few clues as to how a victim gets into it in the first place. Recent longitudinal studies, however, point to certain genetic and environmental precursors of the disease. Investigators hope the findings will lead to prevention programs for potential schizophrenics. See p. 394. (Photograph: Volker Zinser)

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LETTERS

Psychosurgery: Carte blanche?

Psychosurgery (SN: 5/14/77, p. 307) is frightening, not merely in its implications for society but, more important, in the ignorance of human behavior displayed by its proponents. As a clinical psychologist with nine years practical experience, I have always felt that electroconvulsive shock therapy is analogous to sending a bull into a china shop in hopes that he will break a particular tea cup. Psychosurgery might be compared to giving a monkey a scalpel and carte blanche to the human brain.

The proponents of such drastic therapy ignore two basic aspects of human behavior. First, they make the assumption that alteration of brain function is going to affect only socially undesirable behavior. I doubt very much that we will ever find an area of the brain labeled "socially undesirable behavior" since such judgments are culturally, not physiologically, determined. Second, such surgical procedures totally ignore the entire environmental experience of the individual over his lifetime. If surgeons argue that they are in fact changing the individual's perception of his environment, they are again saying that they are able to alter perception in such a way as to produce only socially acceptable responses to this environment. As long as society continues to determine what is, and is not, acceptable behavior, I doubt that any surgical intervention can have more than a placebo effect on human behavior or perception.

I hope that we can nip this resurgence in the bud and send psychosurgery back to the animal laboratories until we know more about what we are doing.

Frank I. Dougherty
Columbia, S.C.

Swine flu: A reaction

In your article on swine flu (SN: 5/21/77, p. 324) you said that "it was shown that the deaths of some older persons were not due to the vaccine." I couldn't disagree with you more. That was never shown or proven. They tried to prove it with statistics, but they failed.

The facts are as follows: Fact 1: 35 older persons (age 65 or older) died within 48 hours after receiving the vaccine. According to the so-called "experts," it was their opinion that these deaths were not caused

by the vaccine—rather, they attributed these deaths to normal statistics.

Fact 2: After receiving my swine flu shot I felt extremely exhausted within the first 48 hours. It took several days for my exhaustion to go away, but it was most severe during the first 48 hours.

Fact 3: Since I wrote my letter to you last December informing you of my reaction to the shot (note: you didn't print my letter), I have since learned of another person in my area who also got extremely exhausted from the swine flu shot.

So the fact is that there were at least two people who got extremely exhausted from the swine flu shot. If there were two people who got exhausted from the shot, there may have been others.

My point is this: If I had been older (I'm 32) and had a weak heart, I think the swine flu vaccine would have killed me, because that shot really made me exhausted. It is my suspicion that those older people who died probably had the same type of reaction to the shot that I had—except, they died because they had weak hearts.

Richard Wisniewski
Saginaw, Mich.

Planetary comparisons

Jonathan Eberhart's article (SN: 5/14/77, p. 313) on what can be "seen" on Venus, is incredible. But he slights the earth in the Planetary Guinness Book of Records. I think the correct comparison between the big rifts on Venus and Mars is not the earth's Grand Canyon, which is not a tectonic feature at all, but the Great Rift Valley of East Africa, a tectonic feature extending 2,000 kilometers.

The earth can do better. Strip away the oceans, and what might the Java Trench look like to radar from Mars? It is 4,500 km long, 8 to 9 km deep and wide enough to make quite an impression. Or how about the feature that begins near Alaska and extends 15,000 to 20,000 km to Tierra del Fuego? Near Lima, Peru, the vertical drop in the land from mountain top to trench bottom is 11 km, and further south in Chile, the drop is over 13 km.

I have seen the Grand Canyon comparison made by several articles recently, and felt the time had come to return some dignity to our planet.

C. David Fischer Jr.
Phoenix, Ariz.

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