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**COVER:** In the late fifth century, southern Japan was ruled by an aristocratic class of horseriders. Evidence of their arrival is found in grave goods like this replica *haniwa*, or clay effigy, of a horse with saddle, bridle and stirrups. The argument over where the horseriders came from is perhaps the most controversial topic in Japanese archaeology and history. See p. 364. (Photo: John H. Douglas)

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# LETTERS

## Score one for black holes

The letter of Mr. Ray Benton, (SN: 5/6/78, p. 291) can not go unanswered.

No one has ever claimed that black holes are anything other than a theoretical concept. However, as a theoretical concept their possible effects may be able to be observed, if we know what to look for. The approach being used in discouraging the possibilities of black holes is the same, I might point out, that gave us such intriguing items as the neutrino. The characteristics of this particle are every bit as strange as are those of the black holes. Who, at one time, could have conceived of a particle that with an apparent unconcern wanders through light years of material. We have also never "seen" these particles, only the effect they have on either other particles or the medium in which they travel. Perhaps Mr. Benton would have us deny the existence of these objects along with black holes.

Mr. Benton is very much entitled to his opinion however much it contains that with which I, and so many others, so violently disagree. When he commits this opinion to the finality of the printed word he should expect the criticism I am sure is now crossing the desk of the editor of SCIENCE NEWS.

H. R. Rymer  
San Luis Obispo, Calif.

## Spare the child

William B. Elmer (SN: 4/8/78, p. 211) is quite right. "Spare the rod and spoil the child" is indeed an English obsession. The quote is straight out of Samuel Butler (1600-1680) Hudibras, Part 2, Canto 1, line 843, and not, as so often claimed, from Proverbs. The Yankee heritage is the English heritage is the Roman heritage. The father has the right of life and death over his children.

I am glad he has set the record straight because Afro-Americans, Mexicans and Latino-Americans often claim that beating their children is *their* cultural heritage unmindful of its social history of containing slaves less brutally than by death, castration or amputation.

As a psycho-biologist, however, I must point out to Mr. Elmer that the child, in climbing into the father's lap after spanking and murmuring love and confessional sounds, is adapting his behavior to the survival demands of his environment. He is appeasing the source of danger in an effective way; he will live to adopt the aggressive ways of his father. This does not mean that he likes it, or him....

One presumes Mr. Elmer has a scientific bent or he would not be reading SCIENCE NEWS. Yet regarding the most important aspects of his

own family he is content to fall back on his feelings. "I am *persuaded*," he wrote, "that the modern scourge of delinquency and rebellion ... is the direct result of ... the bankrupt philosophy that corporal punishment ... should not occur." Persuaded by what? Every research project (Glueck and Glueck, Murray Strauss, Langner, Welsh, etc.) that has seriously studied the effect of violence against children has come to the same conclusion: Violence begets violence; blows upon the person of the child are banked, as it were, and spent later on others who are smaller, weaker, more helpless. A scientist should be persuaded by facts, not folklore....

As for horsewhipping horses, and children, to make them go where you want them to go, has it ever occurred to Mr. Elmer that there are higher goals for one's sons than becoming obedient draft animals hauling someone else's beer?

Adah Maurer  
Berkeley, Calif.

## Vitamin B-6 and autism

The SCIENCE NEWS article on the report by myself and my colleagues on the use of vitamin B-6 in treating autistic children (SN: 5/13/78, p. 308) was generally correct, but omitted one important point that could have significant implications for any of your readers who might want to try this treatment on an autistic child. The children used in our study had participated in a previous study in which large amounts of vitamin C were given to each child along with a multiple-B tablet and some minerals, particularly magnesium. For the purposes of the study described in SCIENCE NEWS, all of the other vitamins and minerals were held constant, and only the B-6 was experimentally added or withdrawn. If the child is very well nourished to begin with, adding the B-6 by itself might quite possibly cause significant behavioral improvement. If the child is not adequately supplied with the other B vitamins, it is quite possible that the B-6 would not have the desired effect. If the child is only marginally supplied with magnesium (and most of us are very short on magnesium in our diets), the B-6 could very well cause irritability.

It is important to understand that vitamins are quite unlike drugs in their effect upon the body. Vitamins are given to *facilitate* the normal metabolism of cells, whereas drugs are given to *interfere* with normal metabolism. A drug can be given all by itself and will do its job of interfering when given alone, but the vitamins act synergistically with other vitamins and minerals in order to perform their facilitatory function, and therefore it is generally unwise to experiment by using just one vitamin or one mineral in isolation from the other members of the nutrient team.

Bernard Rimland  
San Diego, Calif.

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