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COVER: The Orion nebula is a kind of intermediate cosmological stage. It appears to be debris from objects formed early in cosmic history, and in it a new generation of stars seems to be forming. New millimeter telescopes (see p. 152) will eagerly observe it to test its origins and its processes of star formation, because it all comes back to the stars. For whatever the theories of the shape of the universe (see p. 142), its history (see p. 136) or the tortured question of galactic evolution (see p. 144), it's in the stars where the work gets done. (Photo: Courtesy of Lick Observatory, University of California, Santa Cruz)

ASTRONOMY

A SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE

It's been almost 50 years since Edwin Hubble's observations opened our eyes to an apparently ever-expanding and infinitely larger-than-thought universe. SCIENCE NEWS takes the opportunity in this year's special astronomy issue to look not only at the progress of cosmology since Hubble's time but at some of the current goings on in the field of astronomy.



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Editorial and Business Offices
1719 N Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

Subscription Department
231 West Center Street
Marion, Ohio 43302

Subscription rate: 1 yr., \$12.50; 2 yrs., \$22; 3 yrs., \$30. (Add \$2 a year for Canada and Mexico, \$3 for all other countries.) Change of address: Four to six weeks' notice is required. Please state exactly how magazine is to be addressed. Include zip code.

Printed in U.S.A. Second class postage paid at Washington, D.C. Title registered as trademark U.S. and Canadian Patent Offices.

Published every Saturday by SCIENCE SERVICE, Inc. 1719 N St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036. (202-785-2255) TWX 710-822-9433 SCIEN NEWS. ISSN 0036-8423

LETTERS

Diagnosis by prescription

"...1.9 percent of the prisoners suffer from seizure disorders (determined by the number taking continuous anticonvulsant medication)." (SN: 8/12/78, p. 101.)

It is marvelously unscientific to "determine" what someone is sick with by studying the medicine he takes.

In the human transaction of prison, medical practitioners overprescribe and prisoners overconsume drugs for a whole constellation of reasons other than the simple illness-treatment equation.

By overprescribing, the staff is rewarded with the appearance in the population of symptoms of increased tractability and lowered tension.

By overconsuming, with its attendant numerous trips through the institution, the inmate sees friends otherwise hard to socialize with, transports contraband of varying degrees of prohibition, carries messages, does a little business, and passes time.

*Joseph Whitehill
Chestertown, Md.*

A medical fantasy?

Belief that medical doctors do not monopolize medical services because 200,000 physicians employ millions of nurses, aides, clerical, janitorial and administrative staff and other ancillary personnel in various capacities related to health services is an AMA-inspired fantasy. One need only compare incomes.

What I specifically proposed (SN: 6/10/78, p. 371), but which M.D.s Schaeffer and Branch appear to have missed (SN: 7/1/78, p. 3), is that training at many levels of competence and the ability to operate autonomously in the provision of limited medical treatments for payment proportional to the level of skill and value to the patient — as is beginning to occur in other countries — is (1) probably the best way to spread the availability of treatments to those who need them and (2) prevented in this and other Western countries by professional politics operating to protect the financial interests of the few, the physicians.

*Dorothy Tennov, Ph.D.
Bridgeport, Conn.*

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Please limit letters to 250 words.

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