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COVER: Advances in genetics and related fields are raising complex moral and legal questions with which lawyers, geneticists, moral philosophers and others are only starting to cope. See p. 154. (Illustration: Dale Appleman)

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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., \$15.50; 2 yrs., \$27.00; 3 yrs., \$37.50 (Add \$3 a year for Canada and Mexico, \$4 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

Baroque brain drain

Holding the United Nations Conference on Science and Technology for Development (UNCSTD) in opulent Vienna (SN: 8/18/79, p. 126) points out why so many meetings between "have and have-not" nations end up a farce. The conference would have been far more relevant were it held in an underdeveloped country where the problems to be discussed would have greater immediacy.

No doubt the food and wine in Vienna will be exquisite along with the entertainment; nevertheless, such surroundings do not lend themselves to the subject of technological and physical starvation. Furthermore, it is just this type of approach that encourages the "brain drain" so many of the poorer nations suffer from.

Hopefully, this Marie Antoinette and Louis XVI attitude toward our less fortunate neighbors will one day end.

Rosalind Nester Ellis
New York, N.Y.

Contraception and cancer

The data of Swan and Brown, summarized in "Cervical cancer and vasectomies" (SN: 7/14/79, p. 23) are open to an equally plausible alternate interpretation. Before indicting sperm as the carrier of a carcinogenic virus, perhaps synthetic contraceptive media should be given consideration as a cancer cause. Could the lower cancer incidence in the control group with vasectomized sexual partners be related to abstinence from the use of intravaginal foam and gel spermicidal chemicals?

Patrick and Normajean McClellan
Palo Alto, Calif.

(According to researcher Shanna Swan, such methods of contraception are also associated with a lower rate of cervical cancer. —Ed.)

Sacrificing smoke for gas

Regarding gasohol and its production using too much of our grain supply (SN: 7/21/79, p. 41): Why can't acreage now devoted to tobacco be changed to crops that can be used to produce alcohol or food? Surely gasohol and food are a higher national priority than tobacco!

Kathleen Schreiner, RN
Woodridge, Ill.

A mountain out of a telescope

A fifty-million-dollar ten-meter telescope (SN: 7/28/79, p. 76) would have twice the resolution it could use, through the atmosphere, and would be a monster to mount, stabilize, and aim.

The cargo bay of the Shuttle is only five meters, but a Shuttle launch only costs about thirty million dollars. Why bother with mountains?

Neil Rest
Chicago, Ill.

Happy hunting

Re: Your spacelike article "Skylab Isn't All That's Falling" (SN: 6/30/79, p. 424). Imagine the impact of a 44,000,000-ton, 10,000-meter (or larger) diameter asteroid on the world of the time, if said object terminally flared at 1 km or less from ground level or actually impacted the glacial covering of the target area at about the time of the biblical flood or perhaps that day in Norse mythology when Fire met Ice and produced Chaos and Fog.

Is there such a spot evidenced on earth? Perhaps — look at the raised rim crater 400 km in diameter which appears (or seems to) in Hudson Bay. The eastern edge of this crater (?) is indeed raised and the Belcher Islands could easily represent the last returning parts of the cooling molten rock that would have resulted from such an impact — not unlike the small droplet formed when a drop of water impacts a body of water as seen through very rapid time-lapse photography.

If that's not the answer to such an obvious surface feature, perhaps some informed reader could enlighten me. In the meantime, good hunting, Dr. Hindley and others with similar interests.

Raymond A. Pohl
Slidell, La.

Remembering too much?

The report by Prof. Huttenlocher about the complexity of an infant's brain, with 50 percent more synapses than an adult (SN: 8/4/79, p. 89) may lead to an explanation of a child's disappearing memory.

It has long been a wonderment why the experiences of infancy and childhood seem to vanish from memory during adulthood. Could it be that the disappearing synapses, which were used to acquire and store millions of "bits" of knowledge, are no longer available during maturity to achieve easy recall? Could it also lead to the answer of why hypnotism can sometimes unearth memories from infancy?

On the other hand, could it be that an autistic child is remembering too much?

Robert E. Ross
Howard Beach, N.Y.

Correction: The percent of infants with Down's syndrome born to women over 44 years of age (SN: 8/18/79, p. 117) is 2 percent (one out of 50). Of all the infants born with Down's syndrome, 40 percent are born to women over 40 years old. —Ed.

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