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COVER: Negotiating directly with Moslem militants at the U.S. Embassy in Tehran appears to be impossible. But in a growing number of hostage-taking situations, law enforcement officials are beginning to seek the help of psychiatrists, creating perplexing ethical problems in the psychiatric profession. See p. 308. (Wide World photo.)

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LETTERS

The survey continues

I am making an instant response to your editorial note, Reader: Know Thyself (SN: 5/3/80, p. 275). The results of that survey: most interesting. The age bracket, 25 to 49, doesn't include me. I can't speak for all oldsters, but I can speak for me. I am an avid reader of SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN, SCIENCE, QUEST 80, PSYCHOLOGY TODAY, READERS DIGEST, SMITHSONIAN, PREVENTION, three newspapers, and books without end.

But when SCIENCE NEWS arrives, I read it first. In retirement, beginning in 1964, I have traveled 141,500 miles, giving my Electrostatics Lecture-Demonstration throughout the United States, many times in Canada, and in three trips overseas. This activity continues. In 1970 I founded the Electrostatics Society of America. Three books have been published in retirement;

a fourth is being written. I have retained my large laboratory on the campus, and when not away lecturing am in it seven days a week. And at age 85, I continue to find SCIENCE NEWS indispensable. I only wish it were twice as thick! Keep up your good work!

A. D. Moore
Professor Emeritus
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, Mich.

Science and taste

I suppose it is a scientific fact that there is no accounting for taste: I refer to the letter from a reader who did not approve of the Ingres painting on the cover of the 5 April SCIENCE NEWS. I found it both beautiful and fascinating, one of your most striking covers. I'm certain Ingres would have enjoyed being controversial 113 years after his death.

On the subject of your excellent publication, you might like to know that I'm having trouble donating my several years' worth of issues — even the smallest schools and libraries I've contacted so far already receive it!

Rae Ladore
Bayville, N.Y.

Our protective instincts

Re: "Your foot's on fire... Nice shoes" (SN: 4/26/80, p. 266), I know why I would choose the bad news first! Knowing beforehand that I would be receiving both good and bad news, my anxiety level would be raised to such a degree by the threat of unknown bad news that I would not even be able to hear the good news first, much less enjoy it. Our protective instincts at work again?

Mary E. R. Knowles
Los Angeles, Calif.

Why not mutual annihilation?

The last paragraph of John Blethen's letter (SN: 4/5/80, p. 211) regarding "Gravity's Repulsive Side" (SN: 3/8/80, p. 148) is a perceptive comment, within limits. He asked: "If an equal amount of matter and antimatter were created simultaneously and homogeneously in the big bang, then why did not mutual annihilation occur in fairly short order as matter and antimatter coalesced gravitationally?"

Nobel Prize-winning physicist Arno Penzias proposed one possible answer in a guest lecture at Northern Illinois University. He believes most matter and antimatter did annihilate each other very soon after the original creation. Basing his reasoning on the fact that such annihilations produce light particles known as photons, he compares the number of photons in the universe to the number of particles of matter — which is a billion to one in favor of the photons.

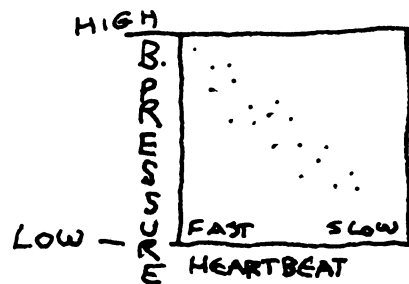
Penzias's explanation is that apparently a billion and one matter particles came into being for every billion antimatter particles. The imbalance meant that after the mutual annihilation, some matter particles survived.

David Fisher
Wheaton, Ill.

A cautionary tale

The Hertzsprung-Russell diagram is the bulwark of present concepts of stellar evolution. Consider this little story:

An umpire is standing in a crowded stadium. Upon his nose is an intelligent wart. This wart desires to know the process of evolution of its host, the umpire. To aid itself in this quest, the wart observes the other people in the stadium. Although the wart cannot see, it is able to monitor the heartbeats and bloodpressure of the people present. Armed with this information, the wart constructs a graph upon which it places this data:



The wart now mistakenly believes that by comparing people in this manner, it has acquired a system that displays a sequence of evolution from youth to old age. The graph displays no such information; it merely describes the momentary state of excitement of the people in the stadium.

I urge that the Hertzsprung-Russell diagram be taken with a pinch of caution.

Stephen Goodfellow
Detroit, Mich.

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