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COVER: A significant neurochemical abnormality—a deficiency in the neurotransmitter acetylcholine—has been found to underlie senility, which strikes not only elderly persons but some younger individuals as well. The finding may possibly lead to an effective treatment for this otherwise incurable disease. See page 378. (Photo courtesy of the National Institute on Aging)

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LETTERS

Saying no to space cuts

That did it! No one, but no one threatens NASA's planetary exploration department (SN: 10/24/81, p. 260) without first having to deal with me. And I mean it! I would be more than happy to devote time and money to lobby against this unbelievable insanity. So first of all, who can I get in touch with to help combat this ignorance?

Second of all, it is simply inconceivable to me that anyone who is a product of the baby boom like David Stockman cannot see the importance, my God, the necessity of planetary exploration. Planetary exploration is not merely an outflow of cash, but rather a major capital expenditure in the future survival of mankind. Let's try to remember some basic microeconomics, which proves that sacrifice must occur in the present for continued growth in the future. Without the space program, the human race does not have any place to grow.

Furthermore, does anyone with an ounce of common sense really believe that the earth can continue to provide for future generations with our present rate of consumption of natural resources (not even taking into account the birth rate and increasing life span)?

An infinite number of resources are there for the asking in space, but in order to harvest them, we must first learn more about them. To do otherwise would be condemning the generations of the future to world-wide shortages in food, energy and room to live.

This short-sighted mismanagement must not be allowed to occur. If it is, we will all be guilty of the slow murder of the human race.

*Ann McDonald
Milwaukee, Wis.*

The most insane Reagan budget cuts of all are cuts in the space program. Unlike other agencies that promote waste and reduce productivity, NASA works to increase productivity, open up new industries and a new industrial revolution of products and services coming directly from space. Already, communications satellites bring in \$1 billion a year in revenues, and the economic payback from NASA has been \$14 for every dollar invested. Far from being reduced, the NASA budget should be greatly increased.

*Ted Apelt
Miami, Fla.*

Gender and salary

I have always been fascinated by the significant pay differences between men and women (SN: 11/7/81, p. 294). Your article indicates that even "closely matched" Ph.D.s share this problem. But why? Is it because of our psychological need to establish pecking orders? Is there a legitimate reason for the salary spread?

*Rennie Payne-Ayers
Sonoma, Calif.*

We are constantly reminded by the media that women are less dependable workers. The latest instance that I can recall appeared in a TIME article which said, "In the U.S. alone, menstrual problems result in the loss of 140 million hours of work a year. It is the most common cause for absence of women from work." It seems reasonable that female salaries are bound to suffer from such repeated pronouncements.

*Ronald DeLorenzo
Cochran, Ga.*

Inertial alternative

You report "rumors that the inertial confinement program will be shut down, at least, as far as civilian funding is concerned" (SN: 10/31/81, p. 276). With minor exceptions, the ICF program has been funded, since its inception, through the office of the Assistant Secretary of Energy for Defense Programs, and his predecessors in the ERDA and AEC. To my knowledge, there has never been a separate "civilian-funded" ICF program under government sponsorship.

The avowed objective of the ICF program is to develop inertial fusion for military applications, in the near term, and energy applications, in the long term. Present emphasis in the program is placed on the demonstration of ignition and scientific feasibility, a necessary precursor to any significant application of ICF.

The President's budget for 1981 calls for a significant reduction in the ICF program funding below the level of the previous year, but does not call for the program to be "shut down." I believe any decision to abandon ICF at this juncture would certainly be premature, and would represent the loss of approximately a billion dollars of cumulative investment by the U.S. government.

As a former participant in the ICF program at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, and a current participant at KMS Fusion, which pioneered ICF research, I strongly second John Nuckolls's defense of inertial fusion as a prospective energy source. I hope that the current emphasis on near-term objectives in the ICF program will not obscure the long-term objective of ICF research—fusion energy.

*Alexander J. Glass
Ann Arbor, Mich.*

Science and human activity

Maybe you were always this way and I just didn't notice, but you seem to have more awareness of connections between science and all the rest of human activity. The psychological trauma of A-bombs articles (SN: 10/31/81, p. 284; 11/7/81, p. 296), the female Ph.D.s not advancing as quickly (SN: 11/7/81, p. 294) and a number of other recent articles seem to introduce ethics into "pure" science much more than I recall in the past. Keep it up!

Correction: The correct name of the Columbia University researcher mentioned in the article "Poison of the bloom: Brevetoxin B" (SN: 11/28/81, p. 343) is Koji Nakanishi.

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