

SCIENCE NEWS

The Weekly Newsmagazine of Science

A Science Service Publication
Volume 123, No. 24, June 11, 1983

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Subscription Department
231 West Center Street, Marion, Ohio 43302

Subscription rate: 1 yr., \$27.50; 2 yrs., \$47.50; 3
yrs., \$67.00. (Foreign postage \$5.00 additional per
year.) Change of address: Four to six weeks' notice
is required. Please state exactly how magazine is to
be addressed. Include zip code. For new
subscriptions only call (1) 800-247-2160. 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)
ISSN 0036-8423

Letters

In defense of Mosher

I have no choice. I am not a letter writer, especially to magazines, but I simply must answer Mr. John Mangyn's letter as it appeared in SCIENCE NEWS (SN: 5/7/83, p. 291). As the subject of both "The Man Who Would Be Anthropologist" (SN: 4/16/83, p. 252) and Mr. Mangyn's letter, Mr. Mosher needs some defense.

To be a scientist does not relieve a man of his moral responsibility to speak out against that which is morally wrong. God does not care that "definitions of infanticide and abortion vary from culture to culture." He decreed that murder was wrong, no matter the age of the victim. It is the duty of any man to speak out against immorality whenever and wherever he observes it. Should Mr. Mosher have failed to expose such atrocities, he would have been in violation of the laws of morality and human rights, a far more important set of laws than the laws of scientific observation.

I would certainly prefer to have Mr. Mosher around if someone should attempt to take my life. Mr. Mangyn might just choose to "be a bit more scientific" than I would appreciate.

Joel Lichtenwalner
Anaheim, Calif.

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Condor update

In response to reader inquiries, we asked San Diego zoo representatives about the long-term plans for the condor chicks hatched in captivity (SN: 4/19/83, p. 229) (a third condor was hatched in captivity May 25). Their reply:

At this time, plans are to keep recent California condor hatchlings in a safe, captive flock where they may reproduce and replenish the wild with their progeny. Once the captive breeding flock is established — perhaps in three or four more years — condor eggs may still be taken for captive hatching in order to induce parents to double-clutch — that is, to lay another egg and thereby double their reproductive rate. These later, captive-hatched California condor babies would be puppet-reared for immediate return to wild habitat. Use of puppet parents is meant to block the condor baby's overall association with mankind. While this is an important step to facilitate captive breeding, it is also an integral part of preparations for returning captive-hatched condors to the wild. A condor which associates with human beings would stand a slim chance of survival if released.

Jeff Jovett, Bill Toone
San Diego Zoo and Wild Animal Park
San Diego, Calif.

Mr. Mangyn dismisses the issue of infanticide by saying, "People would agree that definitions of infanticide and abortion vary from culture to culture . . ." Does Mr. Mangyn really mean to imply that a difference of opinion on some moral restriction eliminates the validity of the restriction? Does Mr. Mangyn believe that the gathering of information is more important than human life? Clearly, this form of infanticide is not even acceptable to the local Chinese, but has been imposed on them from above, otherwise some women would not be fleeing to the hills to have their children.

Those scientists with courage will speak out against what is morally reprehensible. Those without it will consider their careers first.

Joel A. Faitsch
Pittsfield, Mass.

As I see it, Mr. Mosher's primary "fault" is his empathy and social conscience. If he were a journalist instead of an anthropologist, he would be applauded — not condemned.

Whatever our line of work, are we to be detached "professionals" before we are human beings? If so, what does that say about the value of the "profession"?

Edward J. Stone
New York, N.Y.

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