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Letters

Socially negative discoveries

William Hoskins's letter (SN: 8/25/84, p. 115) succinctly states the dilemma that so many great and not-so-great scientists have found themselves in over the centuries — namely, that their superior intellect produces weapons and technologies which are then used by men of less intellect and usually less morality for their own aggrandizement. Many scientists have lived to regret that they ever participated in developments that were ultimately socially negative for man-

This Week

- 196 Visible Pulsar Found in Large Magellanic Cloud
- 196 Studies help scientists home in on the genetics of alcoholism
- 197 Daybreak triggers demise of weeds
- 197 AMPTE: Tagging the solar wind
- 198 Building a chemical transistor on a chip
- 198 Radar polarizes weather community
- 198 Hormone markers for homosexuality?
- 199 Artistic chemistry: East meets West

Research Notes

- 204 Environment
- 205 Biomedicine
- 205 Earth Sciences

Articles

- 200 Super Problems for Supercomputers
Cover: Supercomputers are playing an increasingly important role in scientific and engineering research reaching into fields like chemistry and fluid dynamics. The computer-generated image shown, for example, illustrates how a carbon dioxide molecule (represented by the large yellow-green sphere and two smaller bright blue spheres) nestles within a small polypeptide. (Illustration: Du Pont)



Departments

- 194 Science on the Air
- 194 Books
- 195 Letters

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kind as a whole.

In a mass media democracy, where professional politicians acquire most of the power, scientists, however gifted, must remain servants rather than masters. Because the study of experimental and theoretical science and its concurrent technologies has a fascination and seduction all its own, there will always be scientists who contribute toward such projects as the "Star Wars" weaponry (SN: 7/14/84, p. 26; 7/21/84, p. 42) with little sense of responsibility for its practicality or morality. The military power of politicians must always ultimately rest on the unquestioning

compliance of these technocrats. Unfortunately, the moral searchings usually come after the discovery has been misused in some dramatic way, even though the potential for that may have been recognized long before.

Until scientists and technologists accept moral responsibility for their work and its corollaries, or politicians develop a unitarian point of view for the human race, I for one am not participating in basic research that leads who knows where.

David S. Starr, M.D.
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