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Letters

Ethics of fetal experimentation

How ironic the last sentence in Rick Weiss's article on fetal cell grafting: "... U.S. scientists remain split on the ethics of using human fetal tissue for experimental purposes, and ... resolution of the issue will likely await the outcome of experiments in other countries" ("Cell grafts proceed, value uncertain," SN: 11/28/87, p.341).

Alas, it is no doubt true. If experiments elsewhere succeed, it will quickly become "okay" to do them here too — *not* because the ethical question is resolved in principle at all, but because of two things. First, our faith in pragmatism (if it works, it must be good) leads us to mistakenly believe that ethical questions can get their answers from experimental results. Second, a pragmatism "derivative" (you must succeed to be good) is instilled in so many of us. The pressure to be the first with a cure, to publish first, get the grant, get the Nobel Prize and so on is too great for most of us, and ethical considera-

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Cover: How does the brain learn and remember? Computer models are helping scientists see some of the steps taken by the brain's neural network in organizing information for storage. These maps of neuron activity are from a study investigating how rats learn to discriminate odors. (Illustration: U.C. Irvine)



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tions too often get swept under the rug in the rush for success.

*Barbara Szabo
Borrego Springs, Calif.*

I cannot even begin to tell you how agitated I become whenever I read in your pages about yet more experiments to discover cures for Parkinson's disease and others by using human fetal cells.

The kind of people who think nothing of the destruction of millions of helpless people a year will in the future be the kind of people who will see in my autistic daughter only a collection of spare parts.

*Lelia Foreman
San Antonio, Tex.*

Ho hum

It continues to amaze me that so much scientific inquiry and energy is spent analyzing yawns ("Are we boring you?" SN: 12/5/87, p.360). The great minds spend huge amounts of research money and energy postulating that yawns represent such various esoterica

as silent screams from oxygen-starved tissues or Freudian responses to boredom. I hereby submit an entirely new, revolutionary theory: A yawn just may be a signal from Central Control that some additional shut-eye would be greatly appreciated.

*John C. Stevens
Fort Worth, Tex.*

Correction: The adolescent sample discussed in "How effective are bulimia treatments?" (SN: 10/31/87, p.278) consisted of 18 women between the ages of 15 and 23 at the study's start, not 15 and 19. An older group of 12 women ranged from the 20s to one subject in her 50s.

Although each patient was given a treatment recommendation, many did not follow that recommendation and two did not receive any treatment, says project director David B. Herzog of Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. Even among women who retained the core symptom of binge eating by the study's end, he notes, other bulimia symptoms were often less frequent.

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