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Letters

Objects to objections

You recently published two letters expressing ethical objections to experimental use of human fetal tissues to treat Parkinson's disease (Letters, SN: 1/9/88, p.19; "Cell grafts proceed, value uncertain," SN: 11/28/87, p.341). Neither was explicit as to the nature of the objections; one author (Szabo) focuses on ignoble motives to ignore ethical issues generally, while the other (Foreman) fears the advent of those who might see an autistic child as a collection of spare parts.

I object to Szabo's bland assumption that an issue exists to begin with. The normal rate of miscarriage and abortion is surely enough to supply any realistic experimental demand level; it is extremely unlikely that this work provides added incentive for abortions (if that is the assumed issue).

I object to Foreman's implicit characterization of the researchers. Results of their work will be transformed in ways beyond imagining before a cure becomes widely available. Reference to "people who think nothing of the destruction of millions of helpless people" in this context is demagoguery.

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Cover: Yucca Mountain, an unimposing ridge in southwestern Nevada, has become the prime candidate for housing the nation's high-level nuclear waste. The waste, expected to remain radioactive for more than 10,000 years, will be stored underground, deep within the heart of the mountain ridge (center of photo). Federal scientists are in the process of investigating Yucca Mountain to determine whether this site will remain safe over the millennia. (Photo: Adapted from DOE)



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Finally, I object to SCIENCE NEWS's editorial treatment of the matter — or the lack thereof. Unbalanced publication of such attacks is irresponsible. It creates a question as to the ethics of the researchers, without justification.

Steve Channon
Hightstown, N.J.

Death tolls misleading

In "Aspirin cuts risk of first heart attack," (SN: 1/30/88, p.68), you say, "[American Heart Association] officials released figures indicating that the annual U.S. mortality figures due to heart and blood vessel diseases exceed the total death toll of U.S. soldiers in the two world wars, Korea and Vietnam combined."

Everyone born must die. Death is postnatal, not preventable. So such a statement is an appeal to emotion, not to reason, and is unworthy of a scientific organization.

The average soldier killed by war is deprived of several times the number of years of life lost by the average person dying of heart disease, so the proper comparison is not of

numbers killed but of life-years saved.

To emphasize the difference between preventable and postnatal, you merely have to realize that any reduction in the number of deaths assignable to heart disease this year has to result in an increase in the number assigned to other causes (and to heart disease) next year and the year after, as those saved by aspirin from appearing in this year's death statistics show up in coming years.

Edgar R. Jones
Englewood, Fla.

Suicidal species?

SCIENCE NEWS tells us that *Eretmochelys imbricata*, a turtle, risks extinction because it is killed for its shell ("Glass-eating turtle fills unique niche," SN: 1/30/88, p.70). We wish to propose a better theory. *E. imbricata* eats "razor-sharp" barbed-glass spicules liberally spiced with deadly neurotoxins and then passes "incredibly abrasive" solid-glass feces. Clearly, this turtle faces extinction because it so passionately wants to become extinct.

Emory Kimbrough
Montgomery, Ala.

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