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Letters

The prime importance of planning

It was editorially astute of you to print "Dubner's Primes" (SN: 11/20/93) on a prime page: 331.

Chris Caldwell
Associate Professor of Mathematics
University of Tennessee, Martin
Martin, Tenn.

Bringing uncertainty to bear

"Chaos in Spacetime" (SN: 12/4/93, p.376) is very interesting, but I believe it is missing a big part of theoretical physics. Many answers were proposed to the question, "How did structure arise out of apparent uniformity?" Some included dark matter, and one involved Einstein's theory of relativity. A much more probable solution has to do with the uncertainty principle of quantum mechanics.

The uncertainty principle suggests that the early universe could not have been completely homogeneous or uniform because there must have been uncertainties in the positions and velocities of the particles that made up the

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Cover: An increasingly vocal effort to change the way that mental health clinicians think about and treat personality disorders comes from scientists who study five general dimensions of personality that, in their view, vary from person to person. (Illus: Biff Elrod, *Woman in the Mirror-Aurora*, 1985. Photo courtesy of Marvin Ross Friedman & Co., Fine Art, Coral Gables, Fla.)

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Science Service, which publishes SCIENCE NEWS, is a nonprofit corporation founded in 1921. It gratefully accepts tax-deductible contributions and bequests to assist its efforts to increase the public understanding of science, with special emphasis on young people. More recently, it has included in its mission increasing scientific literacy among members of underrepresented groups. Through its Youth Programs it administers the International Science and Engineering Fair, the Science Talent Search for the Westinghouse Science Scholarships, and publishes and distributes the *Directory of Student Science Training Programs for Precollege Students*.

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matter of the universe. These areas would have become more dense and eventually would have led to the formation of stars, galaxies, and other celestial bodies because of the force of gravity. This theory is supported by many theoretical physicists.

Brett L. Garrett
Lake Forest, Ill.

Fasting, fat, and cancer risk

As I read yet another article exploring the link between fat and cancer ("Saturated fats may foster lung cancer," SN: 12/4/93, p.373), I remembered several books I had read on fasting. They referred to autolysis as a process whereby the body recycles diseased or abnormal cells by digesting them.

For most animals (including man, until recently), fasting and limited intake of food are normal results of variations in the quality, type, and availability of edibles. Could it be that these periods of starvation are opportunities for selective autolysis and as such form part of the body's immune response to cell abnormalities?

Maybe the cancer link to fat could be that it shuts off autolysis, thereby leaving a greater number of abnormal cells to reproduce at will.

Daniel Johnston
Corfu, N.Y.

Bowl polls: Best left to chance?

In trying to predict the outcome of nine major bowl games played Dec. 31 and Jan. 1, you would have fared as well by flipping a coin as by using five of the six football ranking "systems" presented in "Who's Really No. 1?" (SN: 12/18 & 25/93, p.412).

Only the USA Today computer rankings, with six out of nine, managed to forecast the results more than half the time. The much-touted Keener method, missing on five of nine, was as bad as the media polls and coaches' poll. The Bradley-Terry model, misfiring on six of nine, often wildly, earns the booby prize. Which only goes to show, once again, that human affairs are not the métier of the exact sciences.

Roland N. Stromberg
Fox Point, Wis.

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