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Cover: A biographical study of eminent people in a variety of fields—including the painter Paul Gauguin, shown in a self-portrait—concludes that great innovations spring from a template of personality traits and personal experiences. The findings suggest that manic depression and other mental disorders play a smaller role in creative achievement than some scientists have proposed. (Paul Gauguin, *Self-Portrait* (1889), courtesy of National Gallery of Art/Chester Dale Collection, Washington, D.C.)



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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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Letters

Orang harangues

Your article on the hybrid orangutans is very disturbing ("Caste-Off Orangs," SN: 3/25/95, p. 184). There are already too few of these animals left in the wild or in captivity for us to be playing games with their futures.

Curtailing the gene pool comes perilously close to ensuring eventual extinction. What, after all, is more important: to have discrete populations of highly speciated orangutans to look back on or to have orangutans, period?

It is unnecessary to look beyond the cheetahs to see the effects of a limited gene pool. Haven't these people ever heard of hybrid vigor?

Carol Epstein
Fresno, Calif.

The classic definition of a species has been related to the ability to produce fertile offspring.

Chihuahuas and St. Bernards, though quite different in appearance, are of the same species (though their mating challenges the imagination!). Horses and donkeys, though closely related and similar in appearance, belong to different species because their offspring, the mule, is sterile.

Since the Bornean and Sumatran orangs produce fertile offspring, it would appear obvious that they are of the same species.

If we are going to use sophisticated DNA evidence to decide this question, where (in either direction) might this slippery slope lead? Just how does a subspecies differ from a race or a breed?

People and chimpanzees share 98 percent of the same genome. Perhaps chimps are a different race of human, not a different species.

Stephen G. Hayes
Rosemead, Calif.

Using the ability to produce fertile offspring as the criterion for being of a single species,

the Bornean and Sumatran orangutans qualify. They don't mate because of geographical inaccessibility. In the zoos, they mated voluntarily and their offspring are fertile.

Bonnie Schaffer
Schenectady, N.Y.

No buts about it

Keith Baker is in error in his letter (SN: 2/18/95, p.99) stating that the "side effects" of the surgery in the ACAS (asymptomatic carotid atherosclerosis study) trial must be added to the event rate for the surgery group, thereby reducing the surgical advantage. The event rate for the surgery group includes perioperative strokes or deaths as well as arteriographic complications, so no such recalculation is needed.

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