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Cover: A fraction of a second after its birth, the universe may have ballooned to cosmic proportions. Astronomers are now on the brink of determining whether such a growth spurt, known as inflation, actually took place and whether subatomic ripples in the smooth, infant cosmos gave rise to today's lumpy collection of galaxies and galaxy clusters. (Image: H.T. MacGillivray, SuperCOSMOS project/Royal Observatory of Edinburgh; photo illustration and FX: Mark Gilvey, Design Imaging)



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Letters

Handed hygiene

The effect of handedness observed in Neandertal teeth ("Neandertal teeth get a hand," SN: 4/19/97, p. 240) has a modern counterpart.

Right-handed individuals tend to perform better oral hygiene on their left side; however, left-side teeth tend to suffer greater lateral surface abrasion as a result. These observations are consistent with studies that have documented a higher incidence of periodontal disease on the right teeth of right-handed individuals.

Paul J. Heins
Professor of Periodontology
University of Florida
Gainesville, Fla.

Questionable research ethics

"Release of Study Ends Drug Fracas" (SN: 4/19/97, p. 236) tells us that Flint Laboratories (later Boots) both paid \$250,000 for the

Dong team to study the drug Synthroid "and signed [the researchers] to a contract that barred them from publishing results without permission." The substantial theme of the story, however, is one of academic freedom of speech versus corporate greed, and the author leaves us in no doubt that the academic researchers are the good guys and the corporate sponsors are the bad guys.

I was appalled by the notion of the Dong team's taking Flint's money and then grossly violating their contract. Unless there is more to the story, clearly it is the Dong team, not the "profit-minded corporate executives," who are guilty of bad ethics.

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Anyone on the receiving end of corporate largess has to be aware that the company is not interested in publishing bad things about itself. Thus the researchers have to anticipate that, if their results are unfavorable to their sponsors' reputation, permission to publish will be withheld. Yet the Dong team signed the contract, then violated it.

Laurence N. Wesson
Blue Bell, Pa.

In 1979 and 1980 I was quality assurance manager for the company that manufactured Synthroid. Synthroid was then and still is a prescription drug that is regulated by the Food and Drug Administration.

Synthroid may have been exempt from the FDA's New Drug Approval process when it was first marketed (which was way before my time with the company), but it has never been exempt from regulation.

Lowell A. Howard
Merrill, Wis.