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Letters continued from p. 275

I would regard a nation (including our own) that feeds its hungry as worthy of commendation, not condemnation. Furthermore, how do Busey and Holmes account for the drought in 20 other African nations, nonsocialist, two of them (Sudan and wealthy Zaire) among our foremost allies? It seems odd to blame a government for a natural disaster, but then, as always, *delenda* Marxism, valid or not.

Leonard T. Boyer
Flushing, N.Y.

On suicide and natural selection

Drs. Salk and Lipsitt are to be applauded for publicly concluding (albeit indirectly) that humans are subject to the same selective pressures that invigorate other species in the absence of tampering ("Birth trauma linked to adolescent suicide." SN: 3/23/85, p. 183). It may be unpleasant to realize but it is no less true that elimination of maladapted people strengthens the surviving gene pool. Nature upgrades by producing variations and weeding out those that falter, especially during reproduction. Enlightened laypersons understand the herdsman's explanation of rigorous culling of animals that experience difficulty bearing or rearing young: "I may ship some good cows but I can't afford to keep any bad ones."

Thus one may, as an academic pursuit, seek causal relationships between "birth trauma" and ultimate success of a particular gene line.

But surely there is nothing "strange" (Salk's word) about the consequence of reproductive dysfunction. Strange it is when clinicians articulate the adaptive value of death and question the wisdom of its postponement through medical intervention. And the conditions cited are benign compared with the genetic burden imposed by a host of insidious syndromes human society has lately retained in its breeding population. Lipsitt's concluding remarks are profound, courageous and a breath of fresh air. Would that they be heeded.

Gil Dryden
Slippery Rock, Pa.

For decades researchers have been finding that poverty, perinatal stress and constitutional predisposition strongly dispose individuals to mental illness, criminality, systemic disease, violence or other morbidity. It is not surprising that suicide should prove to be a function of perinatal near-death.

What is surprising is that at least two respectable health scientists should mutter that old cliché of horror movies, "Nature has been violated." Any of us who have benefited from antibiotics, modern hygiene, postindustrial distribution of food or other "miracles" of science have benefited from a violation of nature. Isn't it time respectable men of science cried "shame" whenever this teleological absurdity is pronounced? Perhaps we should invite our colleagues to live, with their children, in some

third-world nation where nature reigns undisturbed.

George von Hilsheimer
Maitland, Fla.

What Lipsitt says about late prenatal care indicating unwanted pregnancy sounds reasonable at first; but I think low income and/or an unfriendly feeling toward some doctors has more to do with it these days. I saw doctors very late in both of my pregnancies because I was well read, well educated and knew my own body better than anyone else. In my reading and listening to reports of Lipsitt's findings I didn't hear these possibilities taken into account.

Karen Jackson
Jaffrey, N.H.

Scapegoat for stress

I question the "mild but nagging stress reaction" results with regard to the Three Mile Island-2 accident ("Chronic stress still lingers near TMI," SN: 4/6/85, p. 214). How does one choose a "baseline stress," then attribute additional stress to an accident that caused no casualties?

I envision TMI as a scapegoat for everyday stress and a field day for lawyers exploiting such conclusions. There may in fact be a beneficial stress relief in blaming TMI for everyday woes, instead of our neighbors.

J. Flack
Burke, Va.