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LETTERS

Metric Slips

Science! Your metric system is showing! The cover of the 15 August issue features an Anangula core "... about 5 meters across." This would be more than 16 feet, quite something for a piece of stone from which blade tools were removed by the early Aleuts.

Now comes the Olmec stone sculpture pictured on the 5 September issue which is said to be "2.75 millimeters in height." Again, this is impossible. The sculpture is more like 2.75 meters in height.

EMIL W. HAURY

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I note that the tool core on the 15 August cover is presented as being 5 meters across. A blade from that core would not need to be very sharp. Lethal results could be obtained by simply dropping a multiton spearpoint on the quarry. Tough people, those Aleuts.

THOMAS G. PARSONS

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The Anangula core on the 15 August cover is about 5 centimeters across; the Olmec bas-relief carving on the 5 September cover is 2.75 meters in height.—ED.

Controversial Areas of Research

The generally admirable editorial "Freedom of inquiry" by DeWitt Stetten, Jr. (19 Sept., p. 953), perpetuates a common confusion between two nearly unrelated questions: (i) Is a certain experiment dangerous? (ii) Is knowledge of certain kinds dangerous or undesirable?

It is obvious that some experiments cannot, or should not, be performed because they are harmful, or merely too expensive. No scientist would defend an experiment which entailed the certain death of even one person. That is no reflection on the knowledge which might be obtained. If the knowledge appears worth pursuing, one looks for another way to find it.

There have always been some who maintain that knowledge in some areas is undesirable because it might destroy beliefs deemed salutary. The beliefs used to be religious; now they are more often political or racial. This position is seldom taken openly, because the mere attempt to impose censorship creates an immediate presumption against the censor. It is only falsehood, not truth, that need fear critical examination. Everyone committed to science must utterly reject and oppose the doctrine that ignorance is better than knowledge, self-deception better than intellectual honesty, faith better than thought.

Knowledge is logically prior to ethics because sound ethical decisions can be made only on the basis of truth. An ethical principle may preclude some means of obtaining knowledge, but it must not be allowed to suppress knowledge that might change the principle.

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I would like to take exception to Stetten's editorial, for I believe he has misconstrued the whole tenor of the arguments for and against the advisability of conducting various lines of scientific research. The furore is not over scientific research per se, but over scientific research in certain political and social settings. Stetten lists "lines of research against which voices have recently been raised," but most of these items involve not a "research line" but a social and political question.

1) No one is arguing that research should not be done on the genetic contribution to intelligence. What many of us are against is the linking of this question to the political and social question of race, à la Jensen and Shockley, when these latter do not even, and perhaps cannot, define race nor, for that matter, intelligence ("intelligence is what intelligence tests measure").

2) The kinds of experiments to be properly performed on consenting adults, minors, fetuses, and prisoners is not only a scientific question but involves important social policies, and the arguments in most cases are against the social policies which allow for the experimentation rather than the caliber of the science.

3) The screening of infants for a variety of genetic defects is not done in a vacuum, with results to be tabulated in a scientific publication, but with results which have important effects upon the views of a society with regard to disease, and life and death themselves.

4) Experiments in artificial insemination, abortion methods, cloning, and in vitro fertilization again take place in a society which has set standards and codes of behavior for its members, and any tampering with these must take in the views of all members of society, not just scientists.

In all the above examples, I disagree with Stetten that "judgments will surely be