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LETTERS

Recombinant DNA Research: A Faustian Bargain?

In all the controversy over recombinant DNA research, no one seems to have come to grips with what I think is the major issue: Should the acquisition of new knowledge, for whatever purpose, be the ultimate and sole criterion in the pursuits of biological research? If the answer is "Yes," then it should be incumbent upon those who advocate this position to expound to society the grounds-philosophical, ethical, social, or legal-upon which they base their conclusions. If the answer is "No," it should be incumbent upon those advocates to clearly delineate what they think are the limits to the freedom to conduct research, and also to define these limits in philosophical, ethical, social, or legal terms. In the case of the present controversy, those who would answer, "Yes" have really limited their discussion to what may be called cost-benefit analysis and have not spelled out the reasons for their beliefs; this absence has led to a degeneration of the arguments so that personalities and motives have replaced rational discussion.

Therefore, I would like briefly to state the case against untrammeled freedom to do research, and I hope that further arguments, for or against, can be based on this discussion. I base my arguments on two grounds, one ethical-social and the other scientific. No one should have the absolute right to do anything he or she wants; I think this is self-evident no matter what the political organization of the society. But here too there are limits to this statement: one can shout "Fire" in one context and yet should not shout "Fire" in another context. In biological research, one can conduct drug trials on humans, a form of research, under certain conditions, and yet may not use human beings as research subjects in another context. The fact that biological researchers now have to sign statements regarding research on humans should be a clear indication that the freedom to do research is not absolute, and the observation that no disavowals to this obstacle have been registered is to me clear indication that biological researchers explicitly recognize this action as a restraint on their research freedom. In other words, what goes on in our laboratories is, and I believe should be, modified by ethical and social consideration of the society in which we live, as pursuant to the laws of our society. This being the case, then it should come as no surprise that biological scientists cannot set them-

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selves up as being the sole judges of the kinds of research they do. This is implied in our country, for most of us attain our research funding through the cooperative endeavor of our scientific peers and of publicly responsible legislators. To state otherwise, and I get the strong impression that this is what the advocates of recombinant DNA research state, is to go against the historical precedents already legalized in our country.

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My scientific argument can be stated within the context of a few questions. Do we really know that much more about the world that we can definitely state, or even state with reasonable doubt, what scientific research will lead to? Are we really that much further along on the path to comprehensive knowledge that we can forget the overwhelming pride with which Dr. Frankenstein made his monster and the Rabbi of Prague made his Golem? Those who would answer "Yes," I would accuse of harboring that sin which the Greeks held to be one of the greatest, that of hubris, of overweening pride, even of arrogance. Like the physicists before us, we have entered the realm of the Faustian bargain, and it behooves all of us biologists to think very carefully about the conditions of these agreements before we plunge ahead into the darkness.

PHILIP SIEKEVITZ Rockefeller University, New York 10021

Computers: Minis and Maxis

Arthur L. Robinson's article discussing the increasing use and apparent cost advantage of minicomputers for chemistry computation (Research News, 6 Aug., p. 470) is an incomplete report on trends in computing support for American science. Some time ago the issue passed beyond a simple competition between minis and maxis. The problem now is how universities and research laboratories can best enable scientists to conveniently and economically exploit a rapidly developing technology. The complete story includes considerations raised by Robinson but also the following.

1) Minicomputers can be brought into production by their manufacturers with a development cycle of less than 2 years, compared with the 5 to 6 years required for large, full-range systems. This means that, on the average, manufacturers of minis can make use of components and fabrication techniques 3 years newer than those for large-scale computers.

2) There is no dichotomy between minis and large-scale machines. Some

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so-called minis are really quite large and powerful (what Robinson calls "highperformance minis"), differing from the machines usually considered large only in that they come from a less established manufacturer who has selected a more specialized market and provides fewer customer support services. In particular, there are limits (at least very long delays) in the software provided-manifested, for example, in operating system capabilities. The greatest costs these days in computer system manufacturing are for software design and development. Any vendor who wants to avoid these areas can sell at lower prices, whether he is selling small or large machines. But that means that the machines must be functionally equivalent to machines for which software already exists: otherwise, the customer must be in a position to develop his own software, or his application must be one that doesn't need a lot of sophisticated and complex software. This is the case for scientists needing to do large but straightforward numerical calculations, such as some of the work of the chemists discussed by Robinson.

3) Most university campuses have inadequate computing power and services, especially in areas which depend on recently developed hardware or software technology, for example, graphical input and output, archival data storage, data base management systems appropriate for research uses, and operating systems which economically support large-volume time-sharing. Increased dependence on minis (probably managed in a decentralized way) will meet some of their needs, but far from all of them.

4) Given their traditions of minimal cost accounting, unpaid and underpaid student labor, and the expectation that faculty members will do many things for themselves, autonomous university departments tend to be self-sufficient: they have trouble acquiring services (of any kind) from a service center that must fully and explicitly charge back all its costs.

In their glee at finding apparent large cost differences between their own minis and centrally managed service-center computers, scientists are overlooking significant differences in the type of service obtained. Should research scientist (or apprentice scientist) manpower be devoted to procuring, operating, and repairing computers? It was sad but revealing, the day after the Wisconsin chemistry department's machine was approved, for us to receive a call from a member of that department asking for our help with the acquisition process.

Those of us who have evolved item-SCIENCE, VOL. 194 ized billing schemes over the years rankle at charges that they subsidize special groups and force some customers to pay for a lot of equipment they don't use. Research scientists often end up using more than they think they need, for example, development software, differential scheduling by job size and job urgency, high-quality mathematical software, and a reliable file system.

A scientific computer center in the future will have to offer a variety of services from several kinds of machines, achieving economies by combining newer technology with specialization of function. It is likely that there will continue to be demands from scientists for the service of a large, general-purpose system as well.

Finally, there is an apparently unintended irony in the accompanying article by Robinson (Research News, 6 Aug., p. 471) reporting that the chemists expect to have their cake and eat it too. They are acquiring their own minis, yet they are arranging to have access when needed to what may be the biggest center of them all, the National Resource for Computation in Chemistry.

TAD PINKERTON LARRY TRAVIS Academic Computing Center, University of Wisconsin, Madison 53706

Earthquake Light in Focus

In his letter on earthquake lights, J. J. Llovd (17 Sept., p. 1070) cites obsolete speculation with facetious effect. This is a field of mystifying and elusive observations (only some of which appear to be erroneous or misinterpreted), discussed briefly in my textbook (1). Not cited there are observations (2) of numerous luminous phenomena ("total or partial illumination of the sky, the ground, the mountains, and lines of electrical connection and transmission; luminous tongues, sparks, falling balls . . . of prevailingly reddish color") for the Rumanian earthquake of 10 November 1940, which originated at a depth of about 100 kilometers. The Chinese, with their current large earthquake program involving many observers, are in a good position for investigation.

C. F. RICHTER

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National Paralysis on Energy

Three years after a third and highly successful oil embargo the United States continues to behave as if future supplies of oil were assured for decades. Almost every relevant segment of society has reached high levels of effectiveness in stalling or stopping development of new energy sources. Public interest groups, environmentalists, the courts, Congress, some of the Administration, and even the oil companies are diligent in finding and expounding reasons for inaction.

The public shuns the small automobiles, and its consumption of both gasoline and electricity is at record levels. Domestic production of oil is down 12 percent from 1973 and now meets less than 60 percent of consumption. Production and reserves of natural gas have decreased steadily. During the past 3 years the United States has become much more dependent on the abundant reserves of the Arabian peninsula. This dependence will increase greatly during the next decade; reserves elsewhere are limited and production from them will be leveling or declining.

Part of the difficulty in gearing up to meet future energy needs is that few people seem to grasp the magnitude of the problem. The domestic oil and gas that we are now enjoying were discovered and developed relatively inexpensively and they have been produced with only localized environmental impact. Unless our people are prepared to pay a much higher price for energy in monetary terms and to some extent in environmental factors, they must be prepared to face a drastic change in their standards of living.

Those who campaign for strong negative positions toward various energy sources rarely seem to consider the total problem. They seldom devote comparable positive effort to conservation or to the development of alternative energy sources. The net result of their activity is almost totally negative.

The situation is exemplified by a recent incident related to me by a friend. He was approached at his home by a young man seeking signatures to a petition aimed at nuclear power plants. My friend queried the petitioner about the use of other fuels. Both agreed as to the necessity of reducing imports of oil. The young man, when questioned about coal, denounced pollution arising from burning it. My friend then asked, "If we stop nuclear power, where will we get our electricity?" The reply was, "Oh, they'll take care of that." Thereupon the young man took his petition elsewhere.

Presumably the "they" that the young man was referring to was the federal government. But the power of the government, while great in some directions, is limited in others. It can smother the country in red tape. It can levy taxes. It can have at its disposal as much money as it wants merely by running the printing presses. But Congress itself cannot produce one gallon of gasoline. While Congress could in principle provide the funds or guarantees necessary to get a program on synthetic fuel rolling, it has refused to do so. Instead, we face an absurd situation in which 35 committees and subcommittees maneuver for a piece of the energy action, often making conflicting decisions. The Administration is not much better. Half a dozen agencies impinge, usually negatively, on the Energy Research and Development Administration.

The oil companies are beset with threats of divestiture. This, added to environmental problems and the near certainty of financial loss, has virtually killed the shale oil program. Liquids from coal are far distant, will be very costly, and are not readily compatible with existing refineries and distribution systems. On the other hand, the oil companies can make a profit without enormous capital investments merely by using existing facilities to process domestic and imported oil. Under the present circumstances they have little incentive to take initiative.

During the past 3 years we have experienced the paralyzing power of negative thinking. Sooner or later, the dominant national mood must shift to a more positive attitude if the nation is once again to function effectively. —PHILIP H. ABELSON

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Literature

Controlled Temperature Baths are described and illustrated in a brochure that details specifications and suggests applications. Bench Scale Equipment. Circle 723.

Instruments for Environmental and Scientific Measurements lists pH and specific ion meters, controllers, electrodes, and oxidation-reduction controllers. Chemtrix. Circle 724.

Buffers is a short bibliography devoted to zwitterionic or Good buffers in biological applications. Amersham/Searle. Circle 725.

Clean Room Equipment and Accessories is an extensive catalog that features laminar-flow work stations, furniture, clothing, and other apparatus. Laminaire. Circle 726.

Microwave Instruments and Components includes thermoelectric power meters, attenuators and modulators, and many other items. General Microwave. Circle 727.

Laboratory Supplies is profusely illustrated and cross-indexed. Interex. Circle 728.

Newly offered instrumentation, apparatus, and laboratory materials of interest to researchers in all disciplines in academic, industrial, and government organizations are featured in this space. Emphasis is given to purpose, chief characteristics, and availability of products and materials. Endorsement by *Science* or AAAS is not implied. Additional information may be obtained from the manufacturers or suppliers named by circling the appropriate number on the Readers' Service Card (on pages 250A and 346A) and placing it in the mailbox. Postage is free. —RICHARD G, SOMMER



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 Suppl. 1, 55, (Abstract only) 1974.
 TERENIUS, L. and WAHLSTROM, A., Acta Physiol. scand.. 94.74-81.1975

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NEWS AND COMMENT

(Continued from page 306)

eventually approved Kennedy's vision of the program while the House approved the more modest plan, setting the stage for conflict when representatives from each body met in conference committee to try to iron out differences between the two versions of the legislation.

After months of haggling, the conferees agreed on a compromise program which was considerably scaled down and hedged in from what Kennedy had envisaged. The conferees recommended that \$1.2 million be authorized to support the program. In deference to the concerns of the House, they set certain restrictions on how the money can be disbursed. All grants and contracts must be approved by the National Science Board, which is often skittish about getting involved in touchy political issues. No funds can be given to registered lobbying groups. And funds that are given directly to other public groups can only be used to support forums, conferences, and workshops. Nevertheless, depending on how NSF interprets its mandate, the legislation could still provide significant aid to public interest groups.

The lobbying restriction will not affect most citizen groups, since those that lobby generally set up separate units to do so. But funding of workshops could greatly assist poverty-stricken groups that have difficulty assembling scientific advisers to work jointly on a problem. And another provision of the lawauthorizing NSF to support the participation of experienced scientists and students in helping the public understand issues involving science and public policy-could give some groups a new cadre of talent. The Kennedy forces view that last provision as authorizing a fellowship and internship program that would support scientists and students while they work on public policy issues. That work could be carried out in conjunction with public interest groups, state and local governments, or other appropriate bodies, thus providing an indirect form of assistance to the groups involved.

One leading public interest scientist— James B. Sullivan, codirector of the Center for Science in the Public Interest called the legislation "a step in the right direction" toward enabling citizen groups to redress the imbalance between their technical resources and those of industry and government.

But Representative McCormack expressed fears that the new program might prove a windfall for some groups that oppose programs he favors. McCor-15 OCTOBER 1976





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mack, who is an ardent advocate of nuclear power, suggested that the Union of Concerned Scientists or the Natural Resources Defense Council, two groups critical of nuclear power, might stage a conference on "why nuclear power is so dangerous to the country" or "why crime rates are increasing around nuclear reactors." He also suggested that some groups might try to subvert the program by using funds intended to support forums as a device for paying off scientists who assist them in other activities. As an example, he suggested that a group might pay \$1000 to a scientist for a half-hour speech at a forum, then gratefully accept the "free" service offered by that scientist in preparing a case against nuclear power. McCormack said he would use his position as a member of the House committee with legislative jurisdiction over NSF to "encourage" the Foundation to "screen the applicants so the money goes where Congress intended." By that, he means to "a public education program" rather than to support of groups that intervene in regulatory actions against the government.

Officials at NSF are somewhat baffled as to what mandate they have been given. Alexander J. Morin, director of NSF's Office of Science and Society. says he would "personally like to find a way to enable scientists to contribute to the resolution of public policy issues." But he adds: "I'm not certain at this point how to do that. I don't know what the legislative mandate allows me to do." Morin is not certain, for example, if the program would award fellowship support to a scientist who, in turn, would intervene in a regulatory case. Thus he will shortly be making the rounds of both House and Senate to get a reading from all parties as to how they interpret the legislation. The Senate will argue for a broad, aggressive program. The House will urge caution.

At the same time, budget specialists from NSF will try to divine how much money Congress really wants spent on the program. Although the authorization legislation earmarked \$1.2 million for the program, the appropriations bill did not specify an amount; it simply put the program in with other science education activities under a lump sum. On a pro rata basis, it appears that Science for Citizens would receive maximum funding for fiscal year 1977 of \$1 million. How well it does in future years will depend in part on the results of a "comprehensive analysis and assessment" of the program which NSF will conduct at the direction of Congress.

-Philip M. Boffey

BOOKS RECEIVED

(Continued from page 314)

Handbook of Industrial Toxicology. E. R. Plunkett. Chemical Publishing Co., New York, ed. 2, 1976. iv, 552 pp. \$27.50.

Handbook of Solid-State Troubleshooting. Hershal Gardner. Reston (Prentice-Hall), Reston, Va., 1976. xii, 318 pp., illus. \$15.95.

Herbal. Joseph Wood Krutch. Godine, Boston, 1976. 256 pp., illus. Cloth, \$27.50; paper, \$10. Reprint of the 1965 edition.

History of the Coniferous Forests, California and Nevada. Daniel I. Axelrod. University of California Press, Berkeley, 1976. vi, 62 pp., illus. Paper, \$5. University of California Publications in Botany, vol. 70. Infrared. The New Astronomy. David A.

Allen. Halsted (Wiley), New York, 1976. 228 pp., illus. \$12.

Intermediate Mathematics of Electromagnetics. Donald G. Stinson. Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1976. xii, 290 pp. \$18.95. Prentice-Hall Electrical Engineering Series.

Intermediate Politometrics. Gordon Hilton. Columbia University Press, New York, 1976. x, 282 pp., illus. \$15.

International Environmental Law. Bo Johnson. LiberFörlag, Stockholm, 1976. 226 pp. Paper, Sw. Cr. 40.80.

Introduction to Computers. Alton R. Kindred. Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1976. vi, 538 pp., illus. \$14.95.

An Introduction to Hydrodynamics and Water Waves. Bernard Le Méhauté. Springer-



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Introduction to Mathematical Physics. Charlie Harper. Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1976. xviii, 302 pp. \$16.50. Prentice-Hall Physics Series.

Introduction to Partial Differential Equations. Gerald B. Folland. Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., and University of Tokyo Press, Tokyo, 1976. vi, 352 pp. Paper, \$8.50. Mathematical Notes, 17.

An Introduction to Program Evaluation. Jack L. Franklin and Jean H. Thrasher. Wiley-Interscience, New York, 1976. xii, 234 pp. \$12.50.

Introductory Plant Physiology. G. Ray Noggle and George J. Fritz. Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1976. xvi, 688 pp., illus. \$17.95. Prentice-Hall Biological Sciences Series.

Ionic Polymerization. Unsolved Problems. Papers from a seminar, Fuji Hakone, Japan, Oct. 1974. J. Furukawa and O. Vogl, Eds. Dekker, New York, 1976. xii, 450 pp., illus. \$45.

Island of Isis. Philae, Temple of the Nile. William MacQuitty. Photographs by William and Betty MacQuitty. Scribner, New York, 1976. 192 pp. \$14.95.

Journey to the Green and Golden Lands. The Epic of Survival on the Wagon Trail. Raymond N. Doetsch. Kennikat Press, Port Washington, N.Y., 1976. viii, 112p., illus. \$9.95.

The Joy of Chemistry. Stanley M. Cherim and Leo E. Kallan. Saunders, Philadelphia, 1976. x, 408 pp., illus. \$12.95. Saunders Golden Sunburst Series.

Kremer and Urdang's History of Pharmacy. Revised by Glenn Sonnedecker. Lippincott, Philadelphia, ed. 4, 1976. xvi, 572 pp., illus. \$24.

Learning COBOL Fast. A Structured Approach. Claude J. DeRossi. Reston (Prentice-Hall), Reston, Va., 1976. xii, 212 pp., illus. Paper, \$8.95.

Life Sentences. Aspects of the Social Role of Language. R. Harré, Ed. Wiley, New York, 1976. xvi, 178 pp. Cloth, \$12.50; paper, \$4.95.

Lifeboat. Man and a Habitable Earth. Ken Hewitt with Edward J. Hallewick, Michael R. Bevan, and L. Brian Hill. Wiley, Toronto, 1976 (U.S. distributor, Wiley, New York). viii, 336 pp., illus. \$11.75.

Lipid Chromatographic Analysis. Vol. 3. Guido V. Marinetti, Ed. Dekker, New York, ed. 2, 1976. xii pp. + pp. 713–1000, illus. \$35.

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