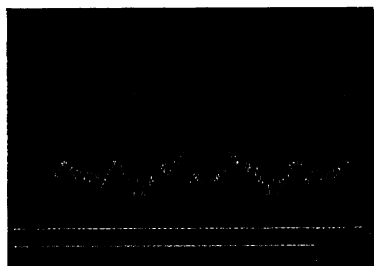
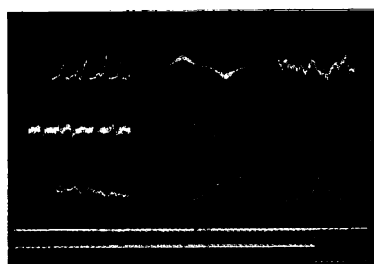


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ment of our "Benveniste affair" (Research News, 5 Aug., p. 658) are inappropriate?

If correctly reported, Relman believes that an editor's function is to ensure that contributions are "rigorously and fairly reviewed"; he refers darkly to the "conflict of interest" that, in his view, must arise when editors are more directly involved in assessing the quality of what they are asked to publish.

That recipe may suffice for archival journals, although even they have recently shown signs of alertness to their readers' interests. *Nature*, which is proud to publish much first-rate science, has always taken a more active role. Thus my first predecessor, Sir Norman Lockyer (editor, 1869-1919), was deeply engaged in the controversy on whether the solar corona is an attribute of the solar or terrestrial atmosphere (he backed the wrong side) and in 1904 commissioned from R. W. Wood a damning investigation of the spurious phenomenon of N-rays.

I believe our readers will have been instructed on three important points by the Benveniste paper and its sequel: how easily authentic science may be simulated by the careful selection of data and the judicious use of language, how even "rigorously and fairly" reviewed papers may embody defects recognizable even by people whom Benveniste (rightly, in the context) calls "amateurs," and—more alarming—how likely it is that much second-rate science finds its way into print somewhere.

But there is no reason why Benveniste should still be saying, as you report him, that he "would be happy" to learn of procedural errors accounting for his unbelievable conclusions. Our report gives a detailed and sufficient explanation. If Benveniste persists in counting stained basophils as a measure of anti-immunoglobulin E activity, he will avoid error only if he first acknowledges that sampling errors are unavoidable (not mere "theoretical objections," as he described them to us), if he controls sampling errors by the standard procedure of replicating measurements, and if he eliminates observer bias by arranging that everything is counted blind. Then, alas, as we found, his conclusions will be unremarkable.

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Erratum: In Gregory Byrne's Random Sample "Love story" (22 July, p. 420), the name of Acadia National Park was misspelled; in the same piece, the Cornell (University) Medical Center was incorrectly located in Queens, New York. The medical center is actually in Manhattan.

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