

SCIENCE

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LETTERS

An Active National Institute of Mental Health

Eliot Marshall's article about the National Institute of Mental Health ("NIMH: Caught in the line of fire without a general," *News & Comment*, 5 May, p. 632) may leave readers with several misconceptions. One concerns the role of Chairman John Porter (R-IL) at the appropriations subcommittee hearing in the U.S. House of Representatives. When a citizens' watchdog group challenged the value and relevance of a small number of NIMH's basic science grants, Porter took a leadership role befitting someone who is both a representative of the American taxpayer and a strong supporter of biomedical research: He raised the group's charges in a straightforward and thoughtful manner and provided the institute with an opportunity to respond to allegations about the grants. His actions—and subsequent coverage of these issues in the press and on ABC's Prime Time Live—afforded NIMH an opportunity to highlight the work of several distinguished grantees and to explain the importance of basic science research to millions of citizens.

A second source of possible misinterpretation is found in the suggestion that "acting" leadership necessarily implies an institute in "disarray." Under acting director Rex Cowdry's leadership, NIMH's response to the allegations was swift, vigorous, professional, and effective—hardly indicative of an institute in disarray. Beyond that particular instance, NIMH is actively addressing critical scientific and management issues, including impending changes in its peer-review system and a review of its distinguished intramural research program in mental health.

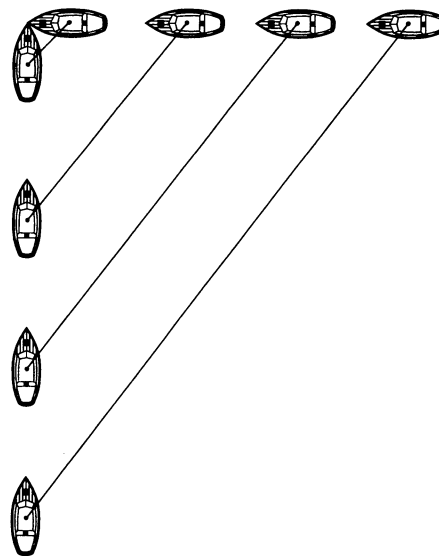
Harold Varmus

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Play Ball!

The analysis by Michael K. McBeath and his colleagues, "How baseball outfielders determine where to run to catch fly balls" (*Reports*, 28 Apr., p. 569), illustrates a geometric solution, as opposed to a dynamical solution, to the problem of the outfielder catching a fly ball. The geometric approach is conceptually similar to the two-dimen-

sional situation of ships on a collision course at sea. A collision course is recognized as one in which two ships approach each other so that the bearing of one as viewed from the other remains constant as the distance between them diminishes (see figure).



Collision course. Does outfielder seek collision between ball and glove?

If no course or speed alteration takes place, the ships will collide. That is precisely what the outfielder is seeking: a "collision" of his glove with the ball.

Henry N. Pollack

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I was delighted to see in the report by McBeath *et al.* that psychologists had solved the problem of catching fly balls, a problem that I had too often *not* solved as a youth playing baseball. And when I found the report difficult to understand, I sought Barry Cipra's explanation (*Research News*, 28 Apr., p. 502), which immediately provided me with a strategy. Cipra quotes McBeath as saying, "If you're running along a path that doesn't allow the ball to curve down, then in a sense you're guaranteed to catch it." So when I played centerfield and a ball was hit toward me, I should have run like mad toward second base thus keeping the ball from curving down. I recall doing just that on occasion, turning an easy out into a double as the ball landed behind me. I guess I missed something in the translation.

I see that all is solved if I keep Ψ , the