

group that Afghanistan and we, their colleagues, can ill-afford to spare. We ask all governments and international bodies, such as Amnesty International, to be persistent in protesting these violations of human rights. We urge our colleagues and others who deplore such suppression to demand information about these arrests and to protest as individuals or groups to the officials and diplomats of Afghanistan and the Soviet Union. Join with us to secure the release and safety of these Afghan scholars and their families.

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#### References and Notes

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  3. M. Bechtel, *New World Rev.* **49**, 6 (January/February 1981); L. Dupree, "Red flag over the Hindu Kush" (American Universities Field Staff, Hanover, N.H., 1980), Nos. 28 and 29; A. Hyman, *Index Censors*, **11**, 8 (April 1982).
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#### Ethical Issues in Medicine

In July 1982, a small group of people\* familiar with the history and work of the program on Ethical and Value Issues in Science and Technology of the National Science Foundation (NSF), was asked to review the work of that program and provide consultation on possible future directions for it. During the course of the consultation on 12–13 July, it became evident that the available level of federal support for research programs on ethical

issues in science and technology and, in particular, for research programs in biomedical research and clinical medicine was clearly below the need. A chief reason is that the major biomedical research and health-care delivery agencies do not support such research. Accordingly, the ad hoc advisory group has prepared the following resolution on the subject representing the views of the individual signers and not those of the NSF or the institutions of which the signers are a part. The resolution states that support for research on the ethical problems of biomedical research, clinical medicine, and health care delivery should be accepted as a major responsibility by such agencies as the National Institutes of Health, the Alcohol, Drug Abuse and Mental Health Administration, and other health agencies; and that this be accomplished by means of separate study sections, by the awarding of separate research grants, and by sharing with NSF and NEH [National Endowment for the Humanities] appropriate joint research support.

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#### Darwin Centenary

Roger Lewin's otherwise excellent review of the Darwin Centenary held recently at Cambridge University (Research News, 20 Aug., p. 717) does not correctly reflect the substance of my remarks at the conference. I did not suggest that traditional evolutionary biologists had nothing new to contribute. I certainly do not believe this. I did say that speakers representing population and evolutionary biology at the meeting, themselves major contributors to their fields, had largely chosen to emphasize philosophical topics rather than the products of current research. In a meeting designed to build bridges between molecular and evolutionary biology, they had failed to communicate to the molecular half of the meeting the progress and excitement so evident in the major journals in our field, such as *Evolution* or the *American Naturalist*. It was apparent that a substantial portion of the audience agreed with my remarks.

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Lewin describes the centennial conference commemorating Darwin's death as having taken place in the "gentle surroundings of Darwin and Queen's Colleges" (italics mine). Did he really mean *gentile* (non-Jewish, non-Mormon, heathen); or perhaps *gentle* (noble, honorable, docile, refined); or possibly *genteel* (polite, well-bred)?

In evolution of word meanings, mutation—yes; transmutation—no.

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He meant "genteel."—EDITOR

#### Nonquantification in Economics

The concisely stated and documented complaint of Wassily Leontief (Letters, 9 July, p. 104) struck a responsive chord with this reader. Hopefully, I am not alone in joining Leontief's condemnation of the nonquantifiers among my colleagues in economics.

Having trained as both engineer (mechanical) and economist, I am particularly upset by the lack of substance and precision in much current economic literature. I once described this phenomenon to some graduate students as a procedure of piling estimate on top of conjecture, declaring the whole to be an axiom based on the author's reputation, and then using this "base" to launch still further estimates and pseudo-precise conjectures. A harsh appraisal but I fear not an inaccurate one.

I applaud Nobel laureate Leontief's courage in writing as he does. Unfortunately, new thought and new theory are nearly as rare in current economic literature as are new and original data sets. But to be completely fair, there are still heavy "publish or perish" pressures on many economists, and the costs associated with the collection of original data are often found to be out of financial scope in today's economy. It is a true dilemma for many. Personally, I tend to opt for the philosophy that less may be better under these circumstances.

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*Erratum:* The risk figures for a severe nuclear accident assuming 1000 reactors in operation given in the News and Comment briefing "Using experience to calculate nuclear risk" (23 July, p. 338) did not accurately reflect the probabilities cited in the NRC report. An accurate rendition is as follows: With 74 reactors in operation (the present number) and if the lower risk rate (0.0017 per year) is used, a severe accident could be expected on the average of once every 8 years.