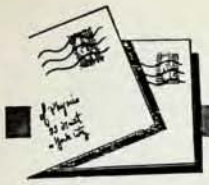

LETTERS to the EDITOR

Sirs:

The article in the December Physics Today on Science and Reparations by Mr. J. C. C. Edelstein contains many enlightening facts. The problem of how to treat German scientists—whether to forget the past or whether to punish them for it—is full of thorny moral issues. How much were the German scientists to blame for the crimes of Nazism? Were they unwilling tools, or active opponents, or willing collaborators? Or did they simply not care?

It appears that there *is* a general answer to these questions. They certainly were not active opponents, nor do most of them now have the honesty to admit having been Nazis. German scientists, owing to their privileged position in the Reich (where they had for 100 years been granted far more honors, recognition, and influence than is usual in other countries) cannot plead to having been mere tools of the Nazis. Many plead that they did not actively further Nazi practice but this does not absolve them from the charge of gross moral obtuseness. In fact, the bulk of German scientists had little difficulty in adapting themselves to the Nazi creed, and some even managed to become authorities on Nazi folklore turned into a science. Heisenberg's account of the German atomic project has been characterized by S. Goudsmit in his report on the Alsos Mission as disingenuous at the very least. Mr. Edelstein admits that some German scientists of questionable background were put through denazification procedures and cleared in order to be made available for work in the U.S. He makes the curious point that this was not worth while in many cases because these were inferior scientists. There is no question of facing the principles involved. In the case of first rate scientists questions of moral stature become secondary. It is clear that this is basically an amoral position. Incidentally it reduces to a farce the socalled denazification courts.

The fact that some German scientists did oppose Hitlerism and lost their livelihoods and sometimes their very lives only underlines the failure of the majority to oppose fascism. German scientists were particularly to blame for the looting of scientific institutions and the destruction of centres of learning and culture in the conquered countries, not to mention the scientific experiments in the extermination camps. Some of Hitler's henchmen who devised the V2 which terrorized London have been brought to this continent to teach us the ways of science!

Where expediency is the overriding factor, cynicism thrives; the time may come when this expediency, having played its part in destroying the moral fibre of our society, will turn out to have been most inexpedient.

PAUL M. PFALZNER

National Research Council of Canada
Ottawa