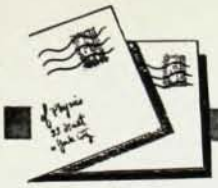

LETTERS to the EDITOR

Holier than Who?

Sir:

For some time I have been quite concerned about the fish-eyed stares the applied research men receive from those who are engaged in "pure" research. Too often a scientist speaks of returning to pure research after working on applied research with the air of a penitent sinner returning to the ways of godliness. By implication or expressed opinion, one is led to believe that there is something not quite clean about applied research and that if fundamental research is *pure*, then applied research is *impure* and unclean.

Let us eschew the words pure and basic and use only the term *fundamental* research. This is closer to the facts. Consider, for example, the arguments by which the use of Federal funds for the support of fundamental research—through a National Science Foundation or otherwise—is favored. It is contended that by subsidizing fundamental research something useful may be discovered which would not be found under a system which subsidizes only applied research. It is the utility of fundamental research that is called upon here! If one were to define fundamental research as work directed without regard to the use of the findings, their practical application, or immediate profit, and applied research as work directed toward some immediate and practical end, the difference between the two is reduced to one of practical and immediate utility.

Let scientists rid themselves of any idea that there is a taint to applied research or something holy about fundamental research. If applied research yields benefits to mankind, then its pursuit is as noble as any.

State College, Pa. ERIC A. WALKER

Add

Sir:

The Research Corporation also contributes to the financial support of coronographic research, an acknowledgment regrettably omitted from the article, "Astrophysicists Watch the Sun," which appeared in your March issue. . . .

Cambridge, Massachusetts DONALD H. MENZEL

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