

letters

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(*Physical Review Letters* 54, 2692, 1985) should have been inserted as reference 7 in the discussion on conductance fluctuations. As mentioned in the Physics News section (page S-20) of that issue, it was Stone who clarified the effects of the magnetic field on the conductance fluctuations in the wires, and his calculations were critical to the interpretation of the experiments.

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Physicists' terminology

Over the years there has been a steady accumulation of properties that help to distinguish physicists from mathematicians. I wish to add to this list by defining a physicist as someone who uses the word "finite" when he really means "nonzero." I have discovered that while physicists universally acknowledge the incorrectness of this choice of words, they are just as universally surprised when it is pointed out to them. The use of expressions such as "finite temperature" and "finite frequency" is extremely widespread even though the point of these expressions is not the exclusion of infinity. This implied meaning of "nonzero" comes through quite clearly in the phrase "small but finite temperature," which is taken directly from a conversation I overheard yesterday.

I can offer no theory on how this misuse of words might have arisen. I also doubt very much whether the awareness raised by this letter will change the situation; the probability of that event I confidently predict to be "not finite!"

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Extraterrestrials

Apropos of Eric Jones's letter (August, page 11) I propose an answer to Enrico Fermi's alleged question in reference to extraterrestrial intelligence, "Where are they?"

Being more intelligent than we, "They" have long ago achieved population equilibrium on their own planet and implemented an economy in harmony with their environment based on recycling nonrenewable resources, and thus need not export surplus population into space nor seek raw materials. They are, of course, motivated by scientific curiosity to explore, but (unless our estimates of interstellar distances

are drastically wrong, and assuming relativity—and a lot of other physics as well—cannot be "beat") simply have not made it this far—at least not with "manned" vehicles. Having achieved planet-wide respect for "human" rights besides, they have no volunteers willing to spend lifetimes in space cooped up on craft that, whatever advance amenities they might be equipped with, are about as interesting as sealed-in shopping malls on a spring day, just to look for life on other planets.

On the other hand, "We" have a long history of always fouling one nest and then moving on to another: Old World-New World, Snow Belt-Sun Belt, Cities-Suburbs-Exurbs. Are we now to have space refuges from our polluted planet, "undesirable" races (the ultimate in apartheid) or perhaps fallout shelters for those who can pay (they won't be cheap)?

The more appropriate question is, "Where are we?"

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APS instrument group

Devlin M. Gualtieri's comment (December, page 11) regarding the formation of the Instrument and Measurement Science Group, to the effect that this topic should be the province of IEEE, would be appropriate if instruments and measurements were limited to those that are electrical. Important classes of instruments and measurements are not, although electrical and electronic techniques may be useful in their implementation.

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Journals for the needy

In the January 1985 issue of PHYSICS TODAY (page 125), there was a brief letter from William Foland offering his back issues of journals free to anybody for the cost of packing and shipping. As I wrote to him, informing him of the longstanding program of shipping such surplus journals to libraries in the developing countries, I had a feeling of discouragement and futility.

The program for channeling such journals to developing countries, managed by the International Centre of Theoretical Physics in Miramare 34100, Trieste, Italy, and at present handled there by H. Dalafi, has been successful to the extent of tens of tons of journals. The tens could, however, be easily hundreds or more except for one factor: publicity.

Those of us interested in placing science on an equal footing around the world have been asking PHYSICS TODAY for years to place, perhaps three or four times a year, an inch or two of reminder of this journal distribution program. We have been unsuccessful in our request. Isn't it discouraging that a professional organization like AIP, whose member society APS even has a committee for international activities, is unwilling to take full advantage of such a ready opportunity to benefit both the donor and the recipient of much-wanted back issues of journals?

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THE EDITOR REPLIES: This magazine does not have sufficient space to cover many worthwhile activities repeatedly.

Scientific communication

A recent editorial by Robert R. Wilson (July, page 128) begins with the sentence "The American tradition of freedom of scientific communication is seriously threatened." The threat, he claims, is due to the restraints placed on the scientific community by the US government. It seems that Wilson has not been reading the Letters columns concerning the restraint of communication by the reviewing process of this scientific community.

Most recently, Robert C. Stabler (February 1985, page 107) complained that he had lost a seven-month battle with *Physical Review Letters* without receiving a single comment on the accuracy of the results in the manuscript. In a rebuttal letter the editors claimed that "the refereeing his paper received, which was expert and thorough, was also unanimous in recommending that it not be accepted." This is an interesting statement, considering that Stabler received no comment on his results.

Stabler can take comfort that it took him only seven months to lose. I recently lost a 17-month (February 1984 to July 1985) battle with *Physical Review*, also without seeing a single comment on the results in the manuscript. It began with a three-sentence "review," one sentence of which was the rejection. With the first "review" in hand, the second referee agreed that it should not be published. In the formal appeal process, the editorial-board member could not bring himself to give a signed opinion for a year. The editor in chief finally sent it to a second board member, who submitted an opinion not on the manuscript, but rather on my published work upon which the