In the thirty-five years since I first visited and worked in Mexico, Central America, and South America as both a newspaperman and a scientist, many Latin Americans have honored me with not only their technical cooperation but also their warm friendship. I have come to understand the deep significance of the expression *mi casa es su casa.*

My house has been their house. More important, their house has been mine. And now I have learned that, beyond any question, their house is being despoiled by the great multinational drug companies. In the promotion of drugs to Latin American physicians, the values of these products have been grossly exaggerated and their hazards glossed over or totally ignored.

The companies involved are not only those based in the United States. Some have their headquarters in Western Europe. When called upon to explain the inconsistencies in their promotional campaigns, their standard defense is "we're not breaking any laws." But in some Latin American countries, some of these global companies have been breaking laws. They have been lying.

The companies whose products are considered in this report are not the only offenders. Other firms, both international and domestic, have been performing in a similar fashion.

When the so-called morals of the marketplace are applied to drugs that can be invaluable when used properly, the result is not only the prostitution of science. It also means that physicians and pharmacists are uninformed or misinformed. Moreover, it means that patients are needlessly harmed.

Some of my scientific colleagues in the drug industry are already aware of the double standard of drug advertising—full disclosure in
the United States, less than complete disclosure in the developing countries—and are appalled by it. Few seem to have known that the failure to reveal hazards to all physicians may represent a violation of national laws.

There is yet another aspect. In the United States, the major pharmaceutical companies have long and vociferously assailed the laws which now require them to restrict claims of efficacy of their products to those they can support with substantial scientific evidence and to inform physicians fully of all hazards. These rules, the companies have argued, are excessively harsh. They represent an interference in the sanctified doctor-patient relationship. Further, the industry has proclaimed, the laws and regulations are not necessary because the industry recognizes its social responsibilities and would live up to them, laws or no laws. The information presented here is at least a partial reply to such an argument. It demonstrates how some companies comport themselves when there are no restrictive laws, or when the laws are not enforced.

Solving the problem will be neither simple nor painless. No action by the Food and Drug Administration or the Congress of the United States, or by governmental bodies in Switzerland, France, Germany, and other drug-manufacturing countries, can yield an instant answer. In Latin America, more rigorous laws can be enacted, but these will be meaningless unless they are rigorously enforced. The global corporations, with or without pressure from their stockholders, should be induced to face up to their true social responsibilities. Physicians and scientists themselves should take a hand.

Regardless of the eventual solution, the first step must be the demonstration that the problem exists.

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Milton Silverman

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