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July 24, 1979

Maxine Singer
Room 9N-119, Building 10
National Institutes of Health
Bethesda, Maryland 20014

Dear Ms. Singer:

In reading John Lear's RECOMBINANT DNA published in 1978 I find various citations of what can only be interpreted as a generally suicidal tendency of the scientific community, specifically that of molecular biologists.

Among these I refer to various plans to set up experimental facilities in buildings or areas that were obviously unsuited to the potential hazards (already specified in Asilomar guidelines), the overbearing desire of many scientists to press on with research in areas they admitted were beyond control and extremely dangerous, the focal point of large areas of research on bacteria that inhabited the human intestinal tract (with which if something dangerous were created in the area of tumor virus, diarrhea bacteria, or the Asilomar prohibited category six example -- botulinum toxin -- terrible epidemics might result).

Under the guise of preparing various contributions to humanity that are potentially beneficial (most of them at best only marginally so), they would appear to be preparing the most devastating forms of self-destruction.

Barry Commoner wrote in THE CLOSING CIRCLE: "I trace the environmental crisis from its overt manifestation in the ecosphere to the ecological stresses which they reflect, to the faults of productive technology -- and in its scientific background -- that generate these stresses, and finally to the economic, social, and political forces which have driven us down this self-destructive course."

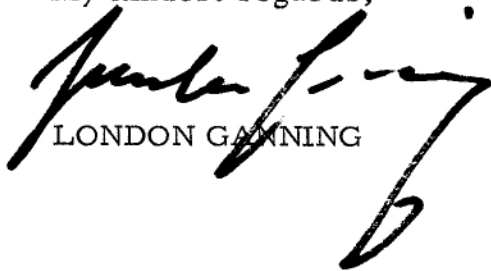
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Is my reading of Mr. Lear's book incorrect? Or, on the other hand, is there even wider evidence of this tendency evident in the scientific community which Mr. Lear did not include?

If one hundred years of psychological insight (and four thousand years of philosophy) have pointed to this same all but innate tendency of human beings, among which we must categorize as yet the scientists who have not been able to alter their own human nature, to destroy themselves -- can we attribute some (or a large degree) of the problems with recombinant DNA research to this?

I wonder if it is asking too much for your reflection and response on this, and any worthwhile reading that might serve to widen and enlighten the viewpoint of an extremely dedicated observer?

My kindest regards,



LONDON GANNING

LG/pbb

:For ease of quick reply merely note in the margins anything that comes to mind and return the letter in the enclosed envelope.