



THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY

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October 31, 1978

JOSHUA LEDERBERG

PRESIDENT

Dr. William Estes
Chairman
James Murray Luck
Selection Committee
The Rockefeller University

Dear Bill:

I was delighted that you have accepted the Chairmanship of this Committee and that it is possible to proceed according to the schedule that you outlined, although I agree that it may be a shade on the optimistic side. I am sure that the latter motif of "critical and integrative reviews....for scientists" was the primary intention of the donors; and in fact I thought this had been made clear in the letter of offer to the Academy and its response. In any event, I would be glad to have this corroborated if the Committee agrees that this is the more pressing requirement. Without suggesting that the works are comparable, for example, I would not want to exclude either the Origin of Theses or Sociobiology from consideration solely on the issues of definition!

Indeed, of course, we will have to solicit nominations: my own first preference would be a series of letters to experienced editors of major scientific publications. In addition, I trust that Gene Garfield will be able to give us a listing of "high impact" reviews: in fact this is already tacitly available by the identification of his already published series of "high impact articles" which happen to be reviews. I am sure that he would agree that there is nothing automatic in the application of that criterion but it is one that certainly could be helpful to all of us.

Dr. William Estes
October 31, 1978

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My own personal preferences were to give more weight to review articles and a consistent series of them over a period of years -- rather than to a single public volume. One reason is that successful monographs have already harvested a certain degree of prestige and monetary reward. Another reason is that it is not the isolated article but the vocation of reviewing that, in my own view, deserves reinforcement.

Although it would not be too difficult to meet even twice, I suspect that a single meeting would be more fruitful as the ultimate or penultimate one for selection once we had worked our procedures and gone through some of the preliminary selections by mail and telephone. Perhaps a couple of conference calls could be set up that could push the ball rolling even faster.

We should be careful not to exclude individuals who have made important experimental contributions themselves as well as contributed more comprehensive reviews. Nevertheless, other things being equal, our award would have a more significant impact if it honored someone who was not already well known for original scientific work. Also I guess there is or rather ought not to be anything in the statutes to prevent us from making a joint award in certain circumstances. Given that option I think I would certainly want to see Van Neil and Stanier in any list I would submit in biology. But I have quite purposely not thought very much about it until a more objective set of nominations has been presented and I look forward to our agreeing upon a procedure for that.

The task would be hopeless if we try to define it as the choice of some optimum performance in review writing. But as a matter of common sense if any of you are aware of other media by which selections of this kind have been made in the past they might be helpful in guidance to us either for reexamination or for some of the pitfalls of the task that has been assigned to us.

Yours sincerely,


Joshua Lederberg