

April 21, 1969

Dr. Martin Kaplan
World Health Organization
1211 Geneva 27 - Switzerland

Dear Martin:

I have no critical comments on the material with your letter of April 17. Have you given enough weight to the following idea (implied more weakly at several places).

The availability of specific antibiotics is the chief barrier against the threat of natural epidemics of many infectious agents. It may appear advantageous to a national military authority to develop mutant pathogens which are resistant to all conventionally available antibiotics save one intended for protecting the home population. The deployment of such an agent would plainly imperil the health of many other populations. The home population will also be imperilled if the multi-resistant strain spontaneously acquires one further step of resistance, or if the intended antibiotic is not freely usable, as often happens, for every individual.

Similar remarks about salt-independent cholera and mutant viruses selected for greater durability in free droplets.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

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KAPLAN