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THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY

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November 14, 1979

JOSHUA LEDERBERG

PRESIDENT

Dr. Barton J. Bernstein  
Department of History  
Stanford University  
Stanford, California 94305

Dear Bart:

Thank you for the reprint on 1945.

I was fascinated to learn that you are looking into medical technological history and suspect that you already know much more about the artificial heart program than I do. Also although my correspondence files are in pretty good shape here, there were several feet of technical reports and miscellaneous evanescent literature that have become disaggregated in the move and to which I do not have ready access. I doubt actually that there is much there that you could not find quickly yourself.

Actually I did not play any significant political or operational role, although the possibility of an artificial heart pump seemed to me a technological inevitability and I was quite surprised that its pursuit was deflected in a number of ways. It never did engage very much basic scientific interest and in fact the extent to which the engineering work -- development of new materials etc. -- might compete with funding for more basic approaches may have been one of the problems in trying to develop the program. I would hardly want to defend the pump versus better preventive measures but, it seemed to me, almost anything would be better than relying heavily on heart transplants. We are likely to need a substantial number of devices for a life saving role no matter what else we do in other directions. I do not really have any inkling as to what went on in the higher councils; but it is hard for me to believe that the technological obstacles would really be so insurmountable if a concentrated effort could be mobilized.

Dr. Barton J. Bernstein  
November 14, 1979

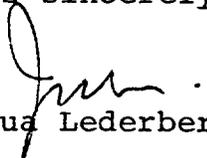
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I suspect that some of the moral and economic questions that I raised in my column have entered into social choice. In fact -- and I'll try to dig out the letter if I can -- I had one attorney challenge me as to whether "society had given its informed consent" (sic!) for the development of a technology that was inherently not equally available to all at least during its early stages. These programs were then viewed as "taking bread out of the mouths of the poor" competing with primary care and so forth. \*

I'll be quite interested to know what conclusions you reach yourself and am sorry I'm not able to be of more help.

I am sure you've seen the existing works, especially by S. P. Strickland.

Yours sincerely,

  
Joshua Lederberg

*Installation address*  
Encls. ARP &  
*natural or artificial organs*

P.S. When I looked in the files, I found much I had forgotten about. Most important items (and more) have been copied and are enclosed.

\* And, of course, Viet Nam put the quietus on technological optimism

*copy in artificial organs file*