

May 14, 1970

Dr. Erbest C. Herrmann  
Department of Microbiology & Immunology  
Mayo Clinic  
Rochester, Minnesota 55901

Dear Dr. Herrmann,

Thank you for your letter of May 8th. No, I really don't see any incongruity, nor while I found your article to be an interesting review do I find it necessary in direct conflict with any of the views that I have held or expressed. I believe that we should make maximum use of whatever sources we have available to meet current problems and we also have to build for the future in as rational a way as we can.

You comment yourself about the essentiality of improving our diagnostic procedures and I really don't see how we will achieve really profound successes in that sphere without rather careful application of the molecular and cell biology that has been accumulated over the past 20 years.

I am sure you will find some more rigid dogmatists in favor of the monolithic pursuit of pure research who would be willing to take up the cudgels but I really don't think you and I have that much to fight about.

What may not have come through clearly enough in my necessarily abbreviated newspaper article was my concern about the origin of new viruses and the chance that we had to predict the possibility of the evolution of new kinds of human pathogens by mutation and recombination of other viruses in the environment, including recognized human pathogens, animal pathogens, and viruses now regarded as more or less innocuous.

Believe me, we are in common company in the way we have at times been treated by Science. I think I understand your grievance about contemporary communication with and yield from basic research but I think your point of view overlooks the indispensable contributions that have flowed from the aggregate of past years and decades, and I submit that this cannot be ignored in evaluating it.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg  
Professor of Genetics

JL/rr