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BioSCIENCE



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Dr. Joshua Lederberg
Dept. of Genetics
Stanford University
School of Medicine
Palo Alto, California 94305

Dear Dr. Lederberg:

With the recent monumental achievements in molecular biology, such as gene isolation and synthesis, many noted molecular biologists have alluded to the possibility of manipulating genetic material in mammalian cells, perhaps in man. Although usually discussed in muted tones, this subject is receiving increasing exposure and examination. Most of the discussion has been carefully couched in the more comfortable generalities surrounding the often talked about "social responsibility of scientists;" but a few, Beckwith, Shapiro, Luria, and Nirenberg for example, have raised ominous warnings of an Orwellian world if future genetic achievements are used as weapons by the Government.

As one who has presented the "positive" side of the picture, would you comment on your view of potential genetic engineering and how it may best be applied? What sort of safeguards could be developed to prevent any harmful uses of this knowledge? I realize that scientists are reluctant to delve into the realm of the subjunctive and they are prone to avoid such futuristic thinking, but your views would be greatly appreciated.

Would it be possible to send me a copy of your testimony presented before the House of Representatives on behalf of the proposed Task Force on human genetic diseases?

At the present time, I am collecting information for a possible feature on this subject.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Walter G. Peter III'.

Walter G. Peter III
Features & News Editor
BioScience

WGP:acm