



STANFORD UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER

STANFORD, CALIFORNIA 94305

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STANFORD UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
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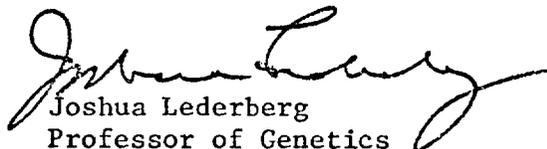
Editor
Fortune Magazine
Time and Life Building
New York, New York 10020

Dear Sir,

In your editorial comment "Truth and Consequences on Frontiers of Science" you assert a Frankensteinian model of science that may be widely held but has a dubious foundation in fact. Your remark was "a doctrine that is widely and sometimes passionately avowed in the scientific community - that scientists should be free to pursue the truth all the way, and that any attempt to set a limit or call halt represents intolerable interference with scientific freedom."

I question whether you can find a single instance of the assertion of such a claim. There can, of course, be many controversial arguments about the factual expectations of scientific work, including the possibility of predicting whether the net consequences will be favorable or not in any particular circumstance. But that is hardly a claim that science may be pursued with total and utter disregard of the interests of other human beings or of society at large. It is true that there are few special restraints that single out scientists from other people in the pursuit of their life and work, just as there are even fewer restraints on the practice of journalism in a society that prides itself upon a free press. But before quoting a myth of this kind, I would hope that you would undertake as a matter of your own professional responsibility to ask whether there was indeed one authentic example of it. I am hard put to find a single instance where it had been claimed that "material consequences of the search for truth" should be judged any less critically if they are a side-effect of scientific investigation than if done in any other context. Tragically, we are in an era today when experimentation is being adjudged guilty until proven innocent in a fashion that is scarcely applied to other lines of work. I believe that you are well able to foresee the consequences of the continuation of such repressive policies and for this reason ask your attention in avoiding contributing to them.

Sincerely yours,


Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

JL/rr

LT. J. P. KENNEDY, JR. LABORATORIES FOR MOLECULAR MEDICINE, DEDICATED TO RESEARCH IN MENTAL RETARDATION

MOLECULAR BIOLOGY

HEREDITY

NEUROBIOLOGY

DEVELOPMENTAL MEDICINE