

February 28, 1967

Miss Ruth Adams  
Co-Editor  
Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists  
935 East 60th Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60637

Dear Miss Adams:

Dr. Ornstein has very articulately expressed the anxieties of the movement for genetic improvement. I understand them, but if I no longer share the intensity of his reaction, it is because I set 100 years, not 10,000, as the maximum scale of short-run concerns in human biology. Within that time we will have experienced so many revolutions in scientific insight that our present concerns will seem totally irrelevant. For example, until we fully understand the pathogenesis and population dynamics of diabetes, I would hesitate to invoke any socially stressful policy to deal with it as a eugenic rather than a medical problem. I would simply urge that we concentrate our efforts on getting more scientific information about this disease, and why the genes for it are so prevalent. When we can be reasonably certain about the ultimate values, and not before, is time enough to consider trying to manage other people's reproductive habits.

I do agree that the mutational load is a fundamental biological problem for the species. While our scientific and technical resources for dealing with this are growing very rapidly (witness protein biochemistry), it is hard to disagree with Dr. Ornstein's prescriptions for pursuing conservative aims of maintaining the status quo "provided the individual and social costs are not excessive." I am concerned that opening the door to "rational" control of differential reproduction will let in administratively easier criteria like skin color or educational achievement tests, with insufficient understanding of the complexities of human development.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg  
Professor of Genetics

P.S. If I may also comment on my own article, I may have been too conservative about algeny as discussed in a recent annotation: (see next page)

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