

CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY  
PASADENA, CALIFORNIA

DIVISION OF BIOLOGY

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Dr. J. Lederberg  
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Palo Alto, Calif.

Dear Josh,

Thanks for your memo (Westex 5-1) and draft copy of "Exobiology." I could, if necessary, attend the meeting at Stanford on Feb. 29, but it would entail some difficulties, and I would therefore prefer not to come unless, as you say, some urgent exobiological business is to be considered.

I have read "Exobiology" and think it is a very good summary of the position and program. I am still unconvinced of the danger of back-contamination. Three improbable assumptions are involved here: (a) that microorganisms will be found on the planets, (b) that they will be dangerous to man, and (c) that we would be unable to cope with them if they escaped. The product of these 3 terms is so much smaller than anything else we have to consider--in particular, the danger of "forward" contamination--that I think it detracts from the plausibility of the program as a whole to give it much weight. Personally, I would be willing to run the risk involved in a premature return trip, if a less bold schedule meant that a sample of Martian soil could not be brought back to earth in my lifetime.

Looking forward to seeing you and Esther here in March.

Best regards,

  
Norm Horowitz

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