

July 12, 1968

Dr. Henry David  
Division of Behavioral Sciences  
National Academy of Sciences  
2101 Constitution Avenue  
Washington, D. C. 20428

Dear Henry:

When Motulsky and I proposed that the Life Sciences Committee meet in Austin together with the American Society of Human Genetics, we had in mind only an informational and not a political purpose. We have, however, meanwhile, been wearing different hats for an ad hoc committee of the American Society of Human Genetics. This has concerned itself with the question of any role of advocacy that the Society might or might not play. A group of us finally did formulate the recommendations, a draft of which is enclosed herewith.

I am transmitting these to you now in a purely informal way, as part of a preliminary exploration of the feasibility of this kind of relationship between scientific societies and the Academy. As it is now constituted, the new committee on life sciences and social policy has decided to focus on the most central issues of bio-social policy, but there are many other concerns of a more immediate and a more highly technical nature that we probably should not neglect. I believe that the Academy would be a very appropriate agency to organize specialized studies in such fields. The attached proposal should be self-explanatory, and I am sending it to you at this time to be sure that it does not have irremediable built-in defects that would militate against its sober consideration. Since this proposal will be discussed at the meeting of the American Society of Human Genetics, that occasion might also be a very appropriate one for further discussion and negotiation of details of the way in which this relationship could be perfected.

One of the most important concerns that any single professional society must have is that its rather narrow outlook makes it an excellent source of expertise on specific technical questions, but not very effective or representative for dealing with larger social problems. But if the Academy doesn't pick up that ball, what else is it for?

Until there has been some formal action on these recommendations by the Society this can be regarded as a purely private inquiry, but there need be no particular secret about it.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg  
Professor of Genetics

H. DAVID