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IN YOUR REPLY PLEASE QUOTE
FILE NO.

ATOMIC ENERGY OF CANADA LIMITED

BIOLOGY AND HEALTH PHYSICS DIVISION

CHALK RIVER, ONTARIO

29 September 1964

Prof. Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics
Stanford University
Medical Center
Palo Alto, California

Dear Joshua:

I was delighted to get copies of your reprint from Nature and of your letter to Dr. Hayward concerning the Institute for Cybercultural Research. You have said clearly something that needed to be said, in emphasizing that "the most revolutionary application of science has been and will be the alteration of man himself".

Your question, however, (i. e., What are our goals?) might perhaps be preceded by two others: 1) What information do we need in order to choose specific goals wisely? and 2) By what machinery might agreement be reached concerning the information that is most needed?

These questions arise because even in some familiar areas there is little agreement as to the answers. For example, selection pressures are known to be altering man now, and we are in turn altering selection, albeit unconsciously. Presumably this is important, but there is no general agreement concerning a) the urgency of the matter (if any), b) what might be accomplished if we knew more, c) what we need to know in order to decide what would constitute an "improvement", or d) how to achieve some effective uniformity of opinion even on measures required in order to get information of the strictly relevant kinds.

Committees tend to bog down all too readily when they attempt to achieve a measure of agreement over questions that are tricky and that involve a wide range of personal opinions. The only exceptions I know of are committees whose work has been continued over many years,

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who have the backing of rather large bodies of people who want to know the answers, and who have the services of paid scientific secretaries to keep the ball rolling and to provide technical drafts for further discussion.

Do you feel that we are now at a stage at which it would perhaps be possible, and worthwhile, to study in such an expensive manner the question you pose, and those questions which might precede it? If so, I wonder if there are some concrete proposals regarding ways and means that might be put forward.

Sincerely,



HBN/r

H. B. Newcombe
Head, Biology Branch