

January 11, 1972

Mrs. Wm. J. Newton
26595 Franklin Road
Southfield, Michigan 48076

Dear Mrs. Newton,

Cryobiology is not a central facet of my own research, although we make routine use of cryogenic preservation for important biological specimens. However, I had been following some aspects of purported uses of cryonics in relation to public policy with considerable interest and often chagrin.

One of the important moral issues connected with this subject is the promise implicit in the title "immortality" of the publication of the Cryonics Society of New York, 9 Holmes Court, Sayville, L.I., New York 11782. Were such procedures for the preservation of human personality in fact tenable, we might, of course, face even more serious moral and policy questions. These are mentioned in the book by R.C.W. Ettinger "The Prospect of Immortality", but have, perhaps appropriately, not received very much analytical attention in view of the actual technical status of the field.

As to the sperm banks, these afford no very strident technical problems not, apart from the state of self-delusion about immortality that the promotion of such banks may induce in a few people - do I really see very much moral mischief. They are connected with the very serious proposals for "germinal" choice" that were advocated by H.J. Muller and Julian Huxley. I see little danger that this will become a popular movement unless it should get in the hands of a totalitarian state. I have addressed this question in some of my writings (enclosed). However, I do not see any greater mischief in sporadic recourse to germinal choice than I do in the other experiments in human reproduction that are part and parcel of the life of the species.

Notwithstanding the futility of current efforts at preserving mammals in tact, there is nothing in principle to say that this can never be accomplished, and the event will certainly reopen many vexing questions about the right of any individual to demand social support for the indefinite prolongation of his own personality in conflict with other purposes of human existence. But I would view the issue as a very important metaphor rather than as a policy challenge that requires an early concrete resolution.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

Encloses
JL/tr

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P.S. You may also want to see Farrington's book "The Immortalists" and perhaps also the novel by the Russian physician N.N. Amosoff "Notes from the Future".

I also just noticed the title of an article in "Natural History", December 1971, "Immortality and the Freezing of Human Bodies" that you might wish to see. The last issue of "The American Naturalist", for November-December 1971, also contains an article by John H. Crowe, "Anhydrobiosis: an unsolved problem" at page 563 which reviews a certain amount of the relevant literature. Dr. Rinfret can certainly bring you up-to-date on the general status of research in preservation of cells and tissues, to which he has made substantial contributions. For a general overview of cryobiology you may wish to see the monograph edited by H.T. Meryman, Academic Press 1966, a journal of the same name that I believe he edits, and a review paper by Peter Mazur that appeared in Science, May 1970, Vol.168, page 939. I also note a discussion by G.M. Martin in Perspectives in Biology and Medicine 14:339, 1971.

If you generate a general bibliography on the policy issues that are relevant here I would appreciate having a copy from you.