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THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY

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November 3, 1978

JOSHUA LEDERBERG

PRESIDENT

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Dear Irv:

Thank you for your letter of October 19th and its proposal about the establishment of a Journal of Environmental Epidemiology. My instinctive reaction is that this is an excellent idea although one might want to give some thought to the rehabilitation of one of the existing media that aspires to a similar role (and quite obviously does not succeed at it). One other pertinent datum is that Annual Reviews is about to establish a series in Public Health that Les Breslow has agreed to edit and which assuredly would pay substantial attention to the same area, but more by way of annual retrospective critiques. If you think there is enough current research material to warrant a journal, that appeared from four to six or more times per year, then there would be no conflict and no inefficiency at all as between these efforts. Given that assumption I will then proceed to a) happily accept your flattering invitation to join the editorial board; b) make a few suggestions of people to approach as either primary or secondary resources; most of them will be much more familiar to you than to me in all likelihood anyhow: Joel Cohen, here at the Rockefeller; Fred Mostiller; Kruskal; Jim Crow at Wisconsin, Sam Karlin and Luca Cavalli-Sporza at Stanford, and Walter Bodmer at Oxford. You can hardly have overlooked Greenberg. There are a few people in differential psychology who deserve your attention and might not have been thought about: Lee Cronbach at Stanford is certainly one of the stalwarts and most trustworthy people in that area.

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I do not know the genetic anthropologists as well as perhaps I should but W. J. Schull at Houston is one of the people you would want to think about. Let me also recall Seymour Kety and Herman Witkin (now at the Educational Testing Service) who has done important work in psychiatric and psychological epidemiology involving twin studies.

I have wanted to get this letter back to you as quickly as possible although it may be a little below par: if I do get some better thoughts I will be glad to write you again.

In fact here are a few Treppendenke: by segregating the most critical contributions into a specialists' journal, of presumably narrower circulation, we may achieve the paradoxical result of degrading the quality of environmental epidemiological work that receives public attention in places like Lancet and Science. I am not sure of all the steps that could be taken to forefend this; but I would certainly not want to diminish efforts to improve the critical quality of what does appear in the wider scientific press. Perhaps also, if it is successful in its own way, the Annual Review of Public Health can play a part in that intermediation as well.

As to the journal itself I would strongly recommend that we adopt a procedure like that used by Current Anthropology in which important papers are accompanied by one or more signed critical reviews particularly on the methodology of the paper. This greatly accelerates the dialogue, compared to waiting for a publication and then a counter publication that may take many months before it appears; and by then the issue may have been forgotten or made moot.

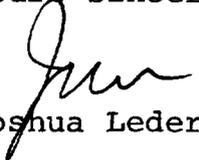
There unfortunately is no very good way by which brief notices of important detailed, critical studies can be guaranteed to appear in journals of wider circulation, although Nature does something in this direction. Perhaps some direct liaison with Nature or Science for their News and Notes section could somehow be established.

It would be tragic if all of the really good critical work ended up being segregated in a journal that only specialists read!

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Yours sincerely,



Joshua Lederberg

P.S. Please see the New England Journal of Medicine
for October 12 for another discussion about the
need for more critical use of statistical meth-
odology.