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February 4, 1969

Dr. Joshua Lederberg
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Dear Dr. Lederberg:

Thank you for your courtesy in sending me a clipping of your column on the question of the "Right to Breed." I do not think I will, at the present time, take advantage of your invitation to write a rejoinder for the Washington Post. Your critical points are quite well stated, and not easily answered. I will have to give a great deal more thought to the matter before I am willing to say anything in response.

In brief, of course, there is a semantic point at issue: the propriety or the wisdom of using the word "coercion." I deliberately chose this rather inflammatory word because I think I sense a widespread public suspicion of gentler words. I think the people have had enough of the Madison Avenue approach—of using words like "persuasion" to disarm defenses. Admittedly, the use of the word "coercion" almost predictably causes a reflex attack on the concept of "policing"—which I note in your column. Nevertheless, for reasons that I detailed in my essay, I think the only effective measures must necessarily be coercive ones. All taxes are coercive. Their effectiveness depends on effective policing, or (in a more peaceful, stable society) on the implicit threat of policing. I think it is regrettable when somebody introduces, in the present social scene, the word "police" or any of its derivatives. But there is no law against introducing such a word—and if some insist on introducing it, the rest of us must simply face up to it honestly.

Sincerely yours,

Garrett Hardin

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