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From: Robert Esbjornson, Chairman  
Nobel Conference XIX

I am pleased to announce that the panel of lecturers for the Nineteenth Annual Nobel Conference, October 4-5, 1983, is now complete, and we are beginning a process of interchange with participants that we hope will give significant shape to the conference. This letter is a move in that direction. We are particularly indebted to each participant for what you have already done to shape our thinking by your writings and conversations and invite you to share in this interchange.

We have chosen "Manipulating Life: Medical Advances and Human Responsibilities" for the theme. The range of inquiry is the area of life processes--research and development in genetics, molecular biology, developmental biology and fetal psychology. Since the Nobel Conference here in 1965 on "Genetics and the Future of Man," developments have come faster than was then anticipated, and we are interested in the current state of knowledge and its potential applications that could have significant consequences for medical practice and human betterment.

The term "manipulating life" was chosen because of its provocative connotations. It could indicate dexterous and intelligent human efforts to take things in hand--to shape things, environments and humans themselves; but it also suggests shrewd, insidious tactics to control people for advantages not for their benefit but for one's own advantage and in ways that degrade human dignity and limit human freedom. It also suggests the masculine style of control more than the feminine style of care and thus raises some significant questions about basic relationships between persons and between humans and their environments.

BY "MEDICAL ADVANCES" WE MEAN:

- 1) increasing knowledge of the chemistry and structure of life gained through research and diagnosis;
- 2) increasing ability to use the knowledge for alleviating major human ills and for the betterment of human life;
- 3) changes in emphasis in medical practice in the direction of dealing with causes of disease and with preventive medical practices.

By advances we do not mean to imply automatic good since advances in science and medical practice are fraught with mixed consequences. Therefore, human responsibility for the advances and the ways they are directed and used is inescapable.

BY "HUMAN RESPONSIBILITIES" WE MEAN:

- 1) inescapable obligations that follow upon attaining new knowledge and power;
- 2) unavoidable decisions about:
  - a) using or not using advances,
  - b) for what purposes,
  - c) by whom,
  - d) for whom,
  - e) how soon,
  - d) where in the world, and
  - e) how.

- 3) those (obligations and decisions) of scientists who do the research, medics who apply the knowledge, people who receive the care, others who do not receive the benefits but are affected indirectly, policy makers at various intersections in the traffic routes of power, and neglected people.

We see the Nobel Conference built around the 1) advances in knowledge that provide 2) increasing powers which add to 3) responsibilities that cannot be evaded and call for 4) adequate policies and for 5) considerations of the compulsions and coercions that limit fitting responses and for 6) reflection on and articulation of the convictions that should guide us.

The skeleton of the program may be described as follows:

- 1) Knowledge: what we know and want to know.
- 2) Power: what we can do with what we know and what we would like to do.
- 3) Responsibilities: what we carry as inescapable burdens of choices in scientific research, medical care, public policy and personal action that accompany increasing knowledge and power.
- 4) Purposes and principles: clarification of fundamental ethical issues and of purposes and principles that should be articulated in relation to the advances we will consider.
- 5) Barriers: consideration of the compulsions and coercive factors that inhibit fitting action -- familiar, deeply embedded habits, fears and insecurities, political pressures, limiting assessments of resources, etc.

Your participation will begin Monday evening with dinner and an occasion for getting acquainted. We have tentatively settled on the following order of events for the Conference program:

#### TUESDAY

- 10:00 a.m. - Lewis Thomas  
 1:30 p.m. - Karen Lebacqz  
 3:30 p.m. - Christian Anfinsen

EVENING: Concert - Art Exhibit - "Firing Line"  
 for high school students.

#### WEDNESDAY

- 10:00 a.m. - Willard Gaylin  
 1:30 p.m. - Clifford Grobstein  
 3:30 p.m. - Conversations at Nobel: Exchanges of participants with each other and the public.  
 7:00 p.m. - Nobel Banquet - June Goodfield, speaker, and concluding exchanges by all participants.

Instead of prescribing topics for each of you, we have chosen to share with you our perception of the scope of the topic and to ask you for your reactions. We would like to see the program develop from your exchanges with us and with each other.

It would be very helpful for us as we plan if your initial reactions and preliminary plans for presentation could be in our hands by May 1, 1983. We will distribute your statements to the other participants.

I am beginning the interchange by sharing some of my personal reflections, which are enclosed. I offer them, not to delineate the parameters of further discussion, but as statements of my standpoint at present.

It is with much pleasure that my colleagues and I anticipate your presence and participation at this Nobel Conference. Already much interest in the event has been generated, although we have not yet begun our formal publicity.

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