

October 20, 1966

Mr. Bruce Moholt
Department of Microbiology
Indiana University
Bloomington, Indiana 47401

Dear Mr. Moholt:

Your enthusiasm about participating in exobiology research is very engaging, and you should hardly think there is any presumption in writing to me about this.

My own views on the subject are perhaps rather pointed, but I do not see any particularly useful relationship between the astronaut program and the investigation of planetary life. I regard it as extremely unlikely that there will be a manned flight to Mars as soon as the next twenty years, not that this is necessarily beyond our technical capability, but there appears to be very limited scientific justification for such a major program. In any case, I do not believe that manned exploration is a particularly effective way of conducting the preliminary search.

On the contrary, the best way that I can advise you for participating in this kind of work is to continue with your plan for advanced training in molecular biology, and you could not readily have made a better choice than to go with Dr. Bertani in Stockholm. There will, it may be hoped, remain plenty of opportunity for the most extensive participation by the most advanced workers in molecular biology via the automated biological laboratory controlled and programmed from the earth. If you have not had the occasion to do it before, I suggest you familiarize yourself as far as convenient with computer technology. Also while you are in Stockholm you might do well to become acquainted with the work on instrumentation which is being done by Professor Caspersson and his colleagues at the Institute for Cell Biology there.

Sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

Encl: ABL = Automated Biological Laboratory (JL, Aug. 11, 1965)