February 13, 1976

Dr. Eldon Sutton  
Department of Zoology  
University of Texas  
Austin, Texas 78712

Dear Eldon,

We have been very pleased with your book, "An Introduction to Human Genetics", and are using it in our (elementary) medical genetics course.

I also used your Chapter 5 in my course on "Health" and I have to say that I found page 479 (which I guess follows Swenson in NYAS 1970) to illustrate a common fallacy in cost-benefit analysis. Namely, you compare a 30 year cost stream totalling $150,000 with an investment of $20,000 per Downs found. But the present value of that 30 year stream, discounted at say 6% is only $70,000. So it is still a good bargain (if anyone doubted it!) but one should be careful not to exaggerate.

I think the (possible) residual risk of amniocentesis has to be counted as much as the cost in trying to decide on a reasonable cutoff age for the marginal benefit; and of course, this also fluctuates with each family's special perception about the prospective child.

I was sure you would welcome this comment, and I wish you many successful editions.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg  
Professor of Genetics

JL/rr