13 May 1985

Dr Joshua Lederberg
President
Rockefeller University
New York City, NY

Dear friend:

Any author must feel complimented to have a whole page devoted to him in the New York Times Book Review. I am grateful indeed to you for taking the time to read my book as carefully as you have done. I always tell my students that an author is lucky if he gets a single review by a serious reader. And this has happened to me with the very first one.

I fear that I was misunderstood with regard to what I've called the ideological component of revolution in science. You are quite right, of course, to point out that DNA research has "brought an end to a long history of vitalistic speculation, namely the expectation that new principles transcending the existing framework of physics and chemistry would be needed to explain the vital phenomena." While this is truly an example of ideological fallout of tremendous intellectual significance, it does not affect the thinking of large numbers of individuals in the sense that relativity, psychoanalysis, and Darwinian evolution did. It is much the same with quantum mechanics, which had a short-lived ideological component among certain political philosophers in the Soviet Union. If there is a second edition, which I trust may be the case, I shall certainly discuss this question further in order to clarify my point of view and to take advantage of your important observation.

I think I must have been unclear with regard to "mythology," because the point I had meant to make (and evidently did not) is that myths in general are extremely important and that this is an area that merits further study. I, for example, believe that I am unique among historians of science in believing that the living mythology of scientists is a very important criterion concerning the revolutions and development of science.

In any event, these are small matters. I did want to thank you for your kindness in devoting so much time to my work.

I hope we may meet again soon.

Sincerely,

IBCohen

I. Bernard Cohen

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