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A CALL FOR A BAN ON GENETIC RESEARCH

A committee of molecular biologists, headed by Paul Berg of Stanford University and drawing its membership from such notable institutions as MIT, Harvard Medical School, John Hopkins, Yale and the University of California, has taken an unprecedented action by asking other scientists to join them in a self-administered ban on certain types of genetic research. The types of research involved are of three classes:

1. Those experiments which might result in the addition of genes for antibiotic resistance or for the formation of toxins to bacterial strains lacking these properties.
2. Those experiments involving the linking of DNA from cancer or non-cancer causing animal viruses to bacterial plasmids thereby increasing the probability of dissemination and subsequently an increase in the incidence of cancer.
3. Those experiments involving the combination of

animal cell DNA with bacterial DNA. Due to the similarity born by certain animal DNA bases to RNA tumor viruses, again there is a potential chance of the recombinants proving dangerous to life.

Berg went on to stress that the committees complaints were based on the methodological inability of our present technology to restrain such dangerous mutants as the infectious organisms which may result from pursuing recombinant experimentation. The committee feels that the scientific community should restrain itself from further experimentation with gene recombination until methods of isolating and restraining specific genes and their mutants can be perfected.

Although few laboratories are currently involved in recombinant research the dangers presented seem to be very real potential threats. But does the potential danger of such experimentation outweigh the possible benefits mankind could gain from this increased knowledge?