

The Impact of Genetic Engineering on Society

One of the profound challenges facing science today is to communicate its problems, its goals, and its achievements. A lack of understanding exists between scientists of distinct disciplines as well as between scientists and the public, and it is vital to remedy this lack, not only because of the need to justify the massive dollar expenditures required by modern science but also because science has and will continue to have profound effects on the life of each individual in our society.

With the goal of beginning to bridge this communication gap, on May 6 Caltech and the Caltech Y jointly sponsored an all-day conference on The Impact of Genetic Engineering on Society. The three-part conference included, first, speeches by Robert Sinsheimer, professor of biophysics and chairman of the division of biology, and by California's Senator John Tunney. These talks were designed to give information and to raise issues. Second, an open forum interchange between the speakers and the participants in the conference brought out further questions; and, third, small-group discussions of specific problems pinpointed some of the scientific, social, legal, and ethical intricacies of the potentials of genetic engineering.

This was the first in a series of similar conferences to be offered at Caltech, and while the format and subjects of future conferences will be different, the purpose will remain the same: to facilitate dialogue between members of all segments of the community—scientific and otherwise—on subjects of mutual interest and concern.

—Leroy E. Hood

