

# dear residents

**Classification, Separation, and Reconnection**

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**Dear Residents,**

When I first discovered biology as a teenager, I was captivated by the elegance of its classification system. The world suddenly made sense through patterns and partitions: eukaryotes and prokaryotes, monocotyledons and dicotyledons, vertebrates and invertebrates. There was something deeply satisfying about naming, sorting, and drawing clean lines through the living world. It was how I first came to believe that understanding was possible - that knowledge was the act of giving things order.

For much of our history, knowledge has been built on classification. Linnaeus ordered life into species; Descartes separated mind from body; physicians divided diseases by organ and system. Even the concept of race was given the false authority of biology in an attempt to explain human difference through categories that science itself would later dismantle. **Stephen Jay Gould**, in [The Mismeasure of Man](#), warned of the lasting harm of such thinking: “We pass through this world but once. Few tragedies can be more extensive than the stunting of life, few injustices deeper than the denial of an opportunity to strive or even to hope, by a limit imposed from without, but falsely identified as lying within.”

Those limits, the ones we once mistook for truth, are dissolving. [Despite Descartes' idea of mind-body dualism](#), mind and body are inseparable, connected through the shared languages of neurobiology and cell-signaling. The one gene—one protein—one disease model has yielded to a far richer story: of networks, regulation, and epigenetic influence. We now understand that genes carry histories, but not destinies; that environment, experience, and inequity can mark our biology as deeply as DNA. In [The Social Genome](#), Dalton Conley delves into the growing science of sociogenomics, pushing beyond the old nature-versus-nurture divide to reveal how genes and social environments continually shape one another.

The immune system, once our model of defense and distinction, now unites cancer, autoimmunity, and inflammation. Every rheumatologist wrestles with the enigma of mixed connective tissue disease, a condition that seems to exist in the borderlands of autoimmunity. It borrows features from lupus, scleroderma, and polymyositis, yet belongs fully to none of them. We wonder where it blurs into lupus, when it begins to harden into scleroderma, and whether its shifting boundaries reveal a failure of our classifications or the fluid nature of disease itself. We are reminded that our taxonomies are often more rigid than biology, that the immune system recognizes no such neat divisions.

Philosopher [Donna Haraway](#) writes that nothing makes itself alone... “We become with.” Medicine, too, is learning to “become with.” The boundaries between teacher and learner, administrator and resident, are more porous than we often admit. Each of you reshapes how we teach, how we design the program, how we balance rigor with restoration. You bring questions that make us reconsider what we thought we knew. Our program, like our

science, is a living system, constantly reinterpreting itself through the people within it. The work of leadership is not to enforce borders, but to make the walls porous enough for ideas, compassion, and growth to pass through.

We were trained to classify and dichotomize. Now we are learning to connect. And in that connection, between patient and physician, teacher and trainee, genome and environment, individual and system, we rediscover the pulse of what makes medicine human. Medicine, like life itself, is sustained not by boundaries but by exchange. We are, after all, membranes, not walls.

Warm regards,

Dino Kazi