

December 22, 1969

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Dear Steve,

I've given your letter to Sam MacDowell, who is coordinating the applications for positions at Yale, but I think it makes sense to write you independently to say that the situation really looks hopeless. You ought only to come here with a position as assistant professor, and I don't see any position at that rank opening up for next year.

Your letter was formal and intended for general reading, but I would welcome a letter that could let me know what a thoughtful person like you finds himself thinking about as we enter the 1970's. I find myself quite introspective at this time, beginning to look at the period of my romance with pure knowledge as one that ought to come to a close. When I read Schweitzer's Out Of My Life and Thought ten years ago, the sentence lodged deep inside my head that this morning I shall copy out for you: "One brilliant summer morning.. in 1896 (at the age of 21)... I settled with myself ... that I would consider myself justified in living till I was thirty for science and out, in order to devote myself from that time forward to the direct service of humanity". Schweitzer, as you know, occupied himself with the study of the historical Jesus, and at thirty went to medical school. The psychological necessities which required of him both a.) a portion of life devoted to abstract thought, and b.) a

transcendence of this activity at a later time appear to be operating in me also. The question is how to translate this psychological necessity into contemporary terms.

I have in the past six months begun to see an answer to this compulsion in the area of environmental protection. I say this with some embarrassment, because it has become such a bandwagon. I am still very uneasy about abandoning the certainty of the Lorentz group and the frankness of the physics seminar for the imprecision of the salt marsh and the deviousness of the political compromise, and I am not sure I have the stuff to make the change. I also wonder about why I should give up a life in which I could gain the command over field theory and statistical mechanics that I now (after two years of teaching the subject) begin to feel I have over non-relativistic quantum mechanics. But the sense that it is time for a transition is upon me, shaped, to be sure, partially by external circumstances (I would almost surely have to leave Yale by 1972) but primarily by the psychological drives already alluded to.

Some of these drives, I guess, have been amplified by watching my son develop these last eleven months. This is a marvelous way to force one back to the earth from whence we came, and to render imperative the survival of the species.

In practical terms, I have been busy creating a program in environmental studies at Yale. This has been generally depressing, and the assumption outside the academy that inside the academy disciplines cannot be transcended may well be borne out. There are incredible resources here in both the social and natural sciences. There is also a great fear that thwarts the creation of a structure in which the individual faculty members might lose their professional identity.

I carry on, knowing that I am risking little and prepared to fail. I am working closely with John Harte, whom perhaps you remember from college; we both were greatly exhilarated by participating in the National Academy study of the Everglades last summer. We may never recover from it.

I write all this - out of the blue - partly in an attempt to convert you, partly in an attempt to comfort you. There is much work to be done, and society may have perceived the right priorities after all.

cc Best wishes to Margaret and yourself for Liz and me for the holiday season.

Yours,