

November 22, 1960

Dr. George A. Derbyshire
Space Science Board
1145 19th Street, N.W.
Washington 6, D.C.

Dear George:

Since you were away when I called you this morning this letter will catch up with you.

This is in response to your memorandum of October 25 relating to the preparation of a general survey of Board positions on biological questions. I think that it is certainly very valuable to make summaries of this kind from time to time as it is the one way of being sure that the miscellaneous fragments that we come up with will get some concerted attention. However, I believe that a new starting point may be desirable at the present time.

NASA is just completing work on its long range plans and I think that this document ought to be the starting point of any further commentary. I know that Homer Newell has had some trouble in getting this cleared but at the present time I think it is classified as 'For Official Use Only' and could certainly be circulated to the Board. In fact, I think it quite likely that he will be in touch with you about this and if not, it probably would do no harm to bring the matter up. I have been going over this document (~~in my capacity~~ as a consultant to the Planetary and Interplanetary Committee) and it is very obvious that NASA has benefited considerably from the deliberations that the Board had made before. However, so many of the remarks that are included in your summary have already been incorporated into the general plans that there probably would not be too much point in reiterating these at the present time. Instead, I think it would be desirable to go over the general plans document and to prepare a specific brief on Board positions on those items which are not yet represented in the plans. This would make for a very much briefer and I think very much more effective presentation. In practice I have actually been doing this as a sort of personal intermediary since I can hardly help but reuse the specific recommendations that have come up in Board Committee meetings as the basis for suggestions at the NASA committees.

To speak to some more specific issues, I think I would put the problem in a slightly different way. On matters concerning general policy, the transmittals to NASA and the other agencies ought now to be on specific questions that have, in fact, obtained specific Board approval. So I would like to

November 22, 1960

suggest that you circulate the document dated October 25, 1960 as it stands to Lambertsen and to Pittendrigh and meanwhile, obtain clearance for them, and possibly their full committees as well, to have the opportunity to review the short and long term planning documents that NASA is completing. Then the chairmen of the committees ought to prepare specific recommendations for Board action on those issues which they may feel are not yet adequately covered by the NASA program in its present form. If the paper that I mention, dated October 25, were to be transmitted directly to NASA, I think it would lose a great deal of its effectiveness since the people over there would look at it and could promptly conclude that most or all of the recommendations included in it have already been incorporated into NASA policy - so we really should emphasize those items which we feel need fresh attention or where we feel that the agencies have not yet come out with sound policy.

As the NASA organization itself develops in technical competence, it is obvious that the Board should come to function more and more as a Board of Visitors does to a University, to furnish the scientific conscience to help shape the major orientations of the program and, of course, to furnish the channel from civilian scientists to the programs. There is one other function which is complementary to the first one and that is, to put it bluntly, to serve as a kind of lobby for the promotion of space science as compared to other activities both in and outside the space field. Evidently we still have a tremendous job of education to do and I'm not sure that even PSAC has fully come to grips with the problem. On the whole, I think there is something of an analogy between what we are trying to do here and trying to maintain the academic stature of a university when most of the alumni and the general public may be more interested in the performance of its football team. At any rate, we should be thinking more and more seriously of what we can do in the realm of political action in order to implement the general technical objectives that we are all interested in. NASA itself is unable, of course, to give any cognizance to this kind of activity and we will have to do it on our own initiative to furnish the scientific point of view with regard to the advancement of the national interest.

I also have some rather minor technical points concerning the document but it would not be necessary to go into these if it is, as I now suggest, to be circulated within the Board Committees for present comparison with the NASA program.

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

JL/jh