

I thought I had committed this to type long since but failing to find that purported record, I thought I had better dictate a fresh note.

Sputnik was launched on October 4, 1957. At that time I was visiting Melbourne on a Fulbright lectureship. As it happens, Sputnik was for some time observable only from the southern hemisphere and we were lucky to get an early look at it within a day or so of its launch. The excitement that this event generated throughout the world is well documented in the press and corresponds to my own vivid recollection. I had, I should stress, long since been interested in speculations about planetary life in the light of their relationship to the problem of the origin of terrestrial life. So, I had been following the course of rocket technology with some moderate but not intense interest up to that point. It seems obvious to me that this launch would be followed very, very quickly by very rapid further technological progress and I began to think immediately of the implications for planetary traffic, the cautions of other observers notwithstanding.

In early November we left Australia on an itinerary that would take us to visit Haldane in Calcutta for a round-the-world return to Madison, Wisconsin.

Fortunately, I have been able to find a letter to Haldane (which is only tentatively dated February 1959) which helps to document my personal recollection of that experience. I also have a fragment of another letter to James F. Crow which corroborates that impression. These documents are attached.

The night of our arrival was the occasion of a lunar eclipse which was regarded as an important religious festival in Calcutta. It was also the occasion for a good deal of dinner table conversation (besides the Haldanes Rana Mahalanobis, there were one or two other guests including a herpetologist, I believe, called Patterson). Many members of the group were quite strongly pro-Soviet in their inclinations and they were almost gleeful at the prospect that the Soviet Union would follow up its October 4th triumph with another launch perhaps even directed at the moon during the lunar eclipse. So, even stayed up to see if there would be such a demonstration although we were well aware of the physical difficulties of arranging for something that could be visible from earth. That occasion led me to think very sharply about the extent to which political motives would outweigh scientific ones in the further development of the space program - which is of course precisely what has happened to a very large measure.

As soon as I returned to Madison, I began to think what ought to be done about the situation and I drafted a number of letters and memoranda, eventually directing them to the National Academy of Sciences urging a more deliberate look at the problem. These documents are also attached.

The consequences of these initiatives as are well documented now in the official history were the establishment by NAS of an official position on the question of quarantine, some encouragement to the formation of Cetex, and some support for the establishment of one and then later two committees in the US which came to be called Westex and Eastex because of their geographical locals. (This was very much at my own initiative since I was as uninterested in frequent transcontinental travel then as I am today).

These events preceded the official reconstruction of NASA from the NACA which tended to give the NAS a remarkable degree of influence in establishing preliminary policy.

Once these committees were established I did not feel there was a great deal more that I needed or indeed would be able to do about the situation but I did accept membership on a number of the related panels and in due course felt that I had to respond to the challenges of planetary biology in a more constructive way than merely to attempting to dampen exploration in the name of contamination problem. So I have been a member of advisory groups to NASA since that time including the Space Science Board; I have also undertaken technological development programs in my own laboratory that were intended to lay the groundwork for planet-based biological investigation and to assist in offering wise critical counsel about national policies. In that vein I have been a member of the Mariner and now of the Viking experimenter teams.

In addition, the technological orientation of these efforts - which was very different from my scientific work up to that time - led in a very direct fashion to my interests in the uses of computers in scientific methodology and eventually to my current interests and activities in artificial intelligence.

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