

INTER-OFFICE CORRESPONDENCE

2057
Univ of Cal
Radiation

FROM:

DATE: September 12, 1945

TO:

RBF		ABZ
TBA		

COMMENTS:

SUBJECT:

8/20/45

Thank you for letting me read Lawrence's letter. The Applegets have always been conservative and I suppose my reactions are the same as my forbears when the world discovered fire, the wheel, gun-powder, the steam engine, the internal combustion engine or the airplane. The atomic bomb is just the latest in the series, no more significant, perhaps, than some of the others in their day. They all represent progress. None of them has added safety or happiness to the business of living.

The Foundation has been so inextricably involved in scientific development throughout the world that it was inevitable that we should have played, consciously or unconsciously, an important part in this latest advance. If it had to be, I am glad we were not in our ivory tower. But now we share in the awful responsibility for the future use of atomic energy. I should hate to think that the atomic bomb will be the only product of the atomic age. That, I fear, would be the world's obituary.

The control of the atomic bomb, at long last, depends on the intelligence and goodwill of humanity generally. I wish I had more confidence in the wisdom of that control. At all events, I see very little that the Foundation can do to help the situation.

The use of atomic energy for constructive purposes is, however, another matter and one, I think, providing opportunity for the Foundation. Should we not start again on the path from which science was diverted in 1940? Should we not explore every possibility of exploiting this new discovery for the betterment of mankind? It seems to me that the transmutation of matter into energy opens up vast new areas for pure scientific research and for new application. At last we may be in a position for the final assault on the mystery of the Universe. From the standpoint of application, we may have new and inexhaustible sources of heat, light and power; new and highly effective therapies for disease. Some day, I hope, we may find that these latter applications may render the atomic bomb an incidental and relatively unimportant use of atomic energy. I hope we will share also in their advance.

Personally and confidentially, however, I regret that nature did not keep this one door locked until the world was wise enough to use what it found inside.

SBZ