

PALMER PHYSICAL LABORATORY

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

Dictated from Holland
Received by MBP 22 May, 1956

Hugh Everett
Palmer Laboratory

Dear Hugh:

Professor Hamilton tells me that you wish -- or that it appears that you may wish -- to remain registered as a graduate student until your 26th birthday, November 11. He asks me my understanding of this point. I think you had better check this important issue with him directly, and let me know the outcome. I didn't realize you had this in mind.

In our discussions in Princeton on April 9-10, and on the train to the MATS terminal in Washington April 13, I understood you prefer to go with the operations research group in the fall rather than take an academic position then (a) because of draft problems (b) because of desire anyway to do your bit for national defense (c) because equipment in Washington would allow you to do some special projects you are interested in. I respect all three wishes, but feel that in the following year you ought to start working towards a first class academic position that will allow you to stand with full freedom for a cause and subject of your own. You have something original and important to contribute and I feel you ought not to let yourself be distracted from it.

The bound copy of the second version of your thesis I sent to Aage Peterson in Copenhagen shortly before I went there two weeks ago, for review with Niels Bohr. After my arrival the three of us had three long and strong discussions about it. I will send you separately notes about specific points. Stating conclusions briefly, your beautiful wave function formalism of course remains unshaken; but all of us feel that the real issue is the words that are to be attached to the quantities of the formalism. We feel that complete misinterpretation of what physics is about will result unless the words that go with the formalism are drastically revised.

I hope you will accept the points that I will list in a separate note; also those that Bohr promised to write me about this week. (He was arranging when I left for Stern to give last week a seminar report on your thesis, so it could be thoroughly reviewed before he wrote.)

However, I feel that the issues are too complex to be cleared up by correspondence. I told Bohr I'd arrange to pay from the Elementary Particle Research Fund half your minimum rate steamship fare New York to Copenhagen; I think there's an appreciable chance Bohr would take care of the other half, according to what he said. He would welcome very much a several weeks' visit from you to thrash this out. You ought not to go of course except when he signifies to you that you are picking a time when he can spend a lot of time with you. Unless and until you have fought out the issues of interpretation one by one with Bohr, I won't feel happy about the conclusions to be drawn from a piece of work as far reaching as yours. Please go (and see me too each way if you can!)

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Hugh Everett -2-

So in one way your thesis is all done; in another way, the hardest part of the work is just beginning.

I would like to feel happier than I do with the final product; then I would like to see it published in the Danish Academy in full -- that's the perfect place for it.

How soon can you come?

Sincerely,

John Wheeler
mbr
John Wheeler

P. S. Let me know the result of your discussion with Professor Hamilton. I would like to see your final exam scheduled for Friday afternoon September 14 or September 28, but I think it is foolish of me to talk about dates until this whole issue of words is straightened out.

cc: Professor Hamilton
Professor Shenstone