

July 25, 1968

Dear sir:

Please accept my apologies for not having written to you sooner. It has taken time for me to educate myself on the subjects of concern in this communication: the draft and U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Indeed I feel most fortunate in having been granted the time to be influenced by teachers and friends whose opinions have been more educated than the ones which I had when first I became subject to the draft.

The necessity for a military draft is something which I understand now only in cynical terms. Presumably, if a war is justified, as would be the case if one's homeland were in imminent threat of destruction, then, since everyone would want to defend themselves effectively, they would join forces for their mutual defense, and there would be no reason for a draft. Perhaps education on the nature and danger of the threat or an appeal to one's patriotism might be used to aid in the gathering of men but certainly not a draft. I believe that a campaign of education and an appeal to patriotism would have raised more than enough men to defend America and her allies against the scourge of Nazism in World War II.

It seems that the only circumstances under which a draft might of necessity be employed would be those in which the threat to a country is vague and questionable or in which the motives of that country are illegitimate and not to be openly upheld. Clearly in such cases education would not work for, if honest, it would only serve to inform the people of the true state of affairs. An appeal to patriotism might raise questions as to just why one should be patriotic and might be regarded as offensive by those to whom love of country is a serious matter. Being forced in such cases to join the militia places a young person who is unaccustomed to making compromises in his ideals in a serious bind. He is called upon by his government to act in a way that would endanger the foundations of the government and violate his sense of what is right. That is a necessary consequence of using a compulsory call to duty when the facts deem that a war cannot be publicly defended. There is, of course, another far more serious consequence of this procedure, namely, that it places men on the battlefield to kill and be killed for a cause they can't understand. Obviously, if these pitecous creatures had had the time to consider what they might be doing and had stood their ground before being drafted, the entire fallacious enterprise could not have been sustained for want of personnel.

Unfortunately, it has taken a while for some of us to wake up, and the bloody and iniquitous war that is Vietnam has been sustained.

The Viet Cong, who ostensibly are our enemy, are composed of landless peasants, who comprise over ninety per cent of the population of Vietnam. These people are fighting for a better way of life than they have ever known under their unprincipled and worthless aristocratic landlords who are our allies. The Vietnamese have historically not been friendly with the Chinese and have refused to have Chinese soldiers on their soil aiding in their struggle, for they are aware after centuries of foreign domination that if China helped to repulse the United States from their country, they would then have to fight for China's withdrawal. Thus, they are not allied militarily with China and have in common only the nature of their cause, which is liberation from slavery to a better way of life, a goal which China has dramatically achieved in recent times. If these are indeed the facts, then where is the threat to the United States? It would seem that the prime motive of the U.S. is to maintain its hegemony in S.E. Asia regardless of the cost, even if it means defending the freedom of those who oppress and stifle freedom. The threat is questionable and our motives are illegitimate. That is why we must in this war resort to a draft.

Before I close I should acquaint you with my own situation. The last three years I have been studying neurophysiology and mathematics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Massachusetts. I have been kept too busy until recently to take part actively in the growing dissent to the war and the draft. One, however, finds it difficult to stay aloof when one's friends are forced to leave the country or go to jail for what they earnestly believe is right. Since I plan to attend medical school to pursue my study of neurophysiology, it seems that I shall again be entitled to a deferment, but when the time comes I shall be only less willing to abet this evil war in my capacity as a doctor. To do so would only aid in its sustenance. In case there is yet some confusion I wish to make it clear that I would willingly participate in some activity which was genuinely of benefit to the United States and not for two years but for all my life. If my government wishes to advise me as to its needs that is fine and I will respond in so far as I am able to do so, but I cannot tolerate being forced to do its bidding, especially when it comes to laying down my life.

I realize that you are not responsible for the American foreign policy or for the draft system, and therefore hope that you have not construed my letter as a personal attack.

But, as I can be understanding of your position, I would hope that you might try to see things from the point of view which I have here presented; certainly a better United States must emerge if we try to work together. I am deeply interested in your own sentiments and advice and expectantly wait for a reply.

Sincerely,