Dear David:

Thanks for your good letter in response to my slightly confused and confusing one. I call it that because I was not very clearly focused on discussing your paper as a particular paper in my effort to be helpful in its revision, but let myself ramble over some of the issues that were touched on in it, and particularly in the first paragraph (the one you characterized as hammering on an open door). I was just talking out loud trying to pull together my own thoughts about some of these matters and re-stating some of your arguments for myself. Thus, I had no intention of accusing you of thinking that sensory deprivation would result in immediate destruction of structures; I only verbalized this for myself to bring it to mind that I had not made any provision for some continuing inner control. There is no “Vernon and Parry reference”; I was quoting from memory and trying to refer to the study by Hoffman and Vernon [1956]. I’m enclosing a little bibliography put together by Leo Goldberger, which contains this reference and others that you may not have run across.

I wasn’t seriously suggesting that you try to abandon the “apparatus” terminology for this paper, but I did want to raise for our consideration the question of what this terminology implies. You’re perfectly correct in saying that we have to consider also what would be implied by giving it up; this is something I certainly intend to do, but it is not easy nor the work of a few moments thought. I realize that you did not define autonomy from the environment in the way I did at the bottom of my second page; this was a definition I was proposing (as the final phrase of that sentence showed). I recognize your right to define it as you yourself wish, but I would like for you to consider whether there might not be advantages to doing it my way. The main such advantage is that it focuses our attention on structural determinants of which it is otherwise easy to lose sight.

I was a little disappointed that you did not go into the issue of nutriment. It was afraid that you would recommend the study of Piaget—a task for which I have little time and little appetite, since I find Piaget such hard going. I suppose there is no escape from it, however. Even before I do that, however, I wonder if
you could not comment on the issue I raised about nutriment versus external control. The critical question that I see here is: how can one distinguish between regressive and other effects due to a lack of nutriment and such effects when due to a failure of external control? I don’t see how they can be distinguished, myself.

Thanks, I’m going to write to Merton and make another attempt to get some manuscripts from him.

I agree that it is quite a tricky matter to decide when a concept should be used causally and when discussion of that kind should be reserved for more elementary structures or processes to which something like identity might be reduced. I don’t agree, however, that “the problem is: how identity itself is maintained.” That is a problem, but my acquaintance with the brainwashing literature and related stuff convinces me that your statement, “it requires a high level stimulus input” will not hold up if you are using the word “stimulus input” in the way it seems that you are. The whole question of the proper definition of stimulus is a very tricky one in these deprivation studies, however. I still remain impressed by anecdotal accounts suggesting that when identity is firmly grounded and well built, it not only has extraordinary resistance to the most determined and ingenious efforts to tear it down, but that it does seem to serve as a protection against other kinds of functional losses. And structural losses too, perhaps I should add.

I certainly share your gently expressed judgment that my brainwashing paper is theoretically weak. I am pleased that you managed to get anything at all out of it, and was not surprised to learn of your disappointment. I think I could do a better job on the theoretical aspect of it now, and could have done better then; but you must remember that I was able to read your paper only the day before I gave my own, after it was all written, and that I was talking to a lay audience and so felt that it would be inappropriate to try to go more than quite superficially into the theory of the phenomena.

We had our [staff] discussion [of his draft on autonomy]—a rather confused and rambling one, out of which I don’t think anything much came that will be helpful to you. I’m enclosing a copy of the minutes of this meeting [not preserved] that were taken by one of our research assistants. The main thing I
got out of this discussion was a realization (if I may use that term) that the concept of autonomy is not in itself an explanatory one with much “real metapsychological status.” I feel even more strongly about autonomy than I do about identity that it is a descriptive term summarizing a set of more specific considerations, which are the ones metapsychology needs to deal with.

I’m sorry that I was not able to digest your paper with a more positive attitude, but you must remember that I wrote you about the few points of disagreement or the points on which I was unclear, rather than about the great body of the paper, which I found helpful and useful.

We will not have a further discussion of the paper until the new version arrives, though we only began to get into it last time. Do you suppose that you could again send a least a dozen copies so that we could all read it? More important, would you consider coming down to meet with our group and discuss it after we have had a chance to read it? We would of course pay your travel expenses and a consultation fee. You may know that Peter Wolff is coming in a few weeks to talk with us about Piaget; I’m looking forward to that quite eagerly. Our group is thirsting eagerly for theoretical knowledge and stimulation, but they raise difficult basic questions that go beyond George’s or my capacity to deal with effectively and which make me long to have you on hand to clear things up.

I spent two nights the early part of this week completely absorbed in Alger Hiss’ book, In the Court of Public Opinion.¹ I found it fascinating in a blood curdling kind of way, and I am convinced that he is the victim of a monstrous miscarriage of justice. I strongly recommend the book and hope that it will get the widest possible reading.

Yesterday I had a letter from Morton Levitt, inviting me to contribute to the book he is editing, Readings in Psychoanalytic Psychology [Levitt, 1959]. He mentions your name among a list of excellent looking contributors; what are you going to give him? He asks me to submit a paper “which would deal with the relationship between psychiatric theory and projective techniques.” I imagine

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¹New York: Knopf, 1957. Hiss was a neighbor whom I knew slightly, living in the same New York apartment building. That disposed me to give him the benefit of doubt.
that “psychiatric” is a slip and he means psychoanalytic; but I am not terribly eager to write on just that topic, even though I would like to be in the book. I have been wanting to try to review the theory of primary and secondary process and try to develop some ideas about it that are kicking around in the back of my head; do you think that would be an appropriate topic for me to suggest?

With warm regards from Crusa and myself—

Bob