

## Letter from Alan Ross Anderson to A.N. Prior dated June 28, 1955<sup>1</sup>

DARTMOUTH COLLEGE

:- Department of Philosophy :-

HANOVER – NEW HAMPSHIRE

June 28, 1955

Dear Dr. Prior,

Thank you very much for your interesting letter of June 21, which arrived this morning. I am writing a reply now, after only a hasty look at the system you discuss, because the press of affairs will probably prevent my thinking much about it for a month or so.

My situation is this. I am interested in the problem you mention, and would like to work on it; but I can't see my way clear to promising to do so in the near future. I have now in train an introductory textbook of readings (edited by members of the department here), and a paper to be Ann Arbor at the end of August. In addition, we are moving to New Haven in two weeks, and I will have some new courses of lectures to prepare for Yale next fall. (Incidentally, I recommend that you not write me until after July 10, when my address will be 144 Roger White Drive, New Haven, Connecticut. This arrangement will probably help prevent any letters from going astray – we will be on the move for the next week or so.)

On the other hand, it is not at all unlikely that I should have some time to work on the problem toward the end of the summer; and if you would find your self content with this rather vague commitments on my part, I would be very happy if you would "count me in." In any event, I can promise to try to do something with the problem as soon as possible – but it may not be until next winter.

I have had one or two ideas about the system this afternoon, but I won't mention them because I haven't really examined them. There is one point in your letter, however, which I find obscure. In discussing the infinite characteristic matrix for  $Q$ , you say:

“Each of the elements may be associated with an infinite sequence of numbers, which must be 1, 2, or 3, and of which the first must be 1 or 2. Intuitively, the number 1 amounts to ‘is true in’, 2 to ‘is unstable in’ & 3 to ‘is false in’, and the possible state of affairs concerned is

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<sup>1</sup> This is a transcription of a letter kept in the Prior Collection at Bodleian Library, Oxford. It has been edited by Adriane Rini and Peter Øhrstrøm. – The collection not only contains the original, typed on Dartmouth College letterhead, but also an unsigned carbon copy.

indicated by the place of the number in the sequence, the first place representing the actual state of affairs.”

What I don't understand is why the first number must be 1 or 2. Wouldn't this mean that the N function, applied to a sequence beginning with 1, would yield a sequence which is {p. 2} not an element of the matrix? If that stipulation is omitted, then I find everything in the letter quite clear. (This may well be a blunder on my part, occasioned by hasty reading – in which case I apologise.)

Please excuse my rush; things should be calmer later in the summer. I look forward to hearing from you in New Haven.

Yours sincerely,

Alan Ross Anderson