

December 7, 1964

Dr. Victor Twitty
Division of Biology
Stanford University
Palo Alto, California

Dear Vic:

I read your MS. with great delight. It is a masterpiece of lucid presentation of a field that must seem to be rather esoteric to the outsider. Yet accuracy is not lost in the process. I really can appreciate your accomplishment, because I have tried it myself, though rarely in print, and I know the difficulties. The Spemann story was of course a special treat for me, and it awakened nostalgic reminiscences. I could not find any flaws in fact or emphasis, except for one small point. On p. 93 you use "organizer" and "organizing center" synonymously, but Spemann, I remember, made a distinction. I think he used the latter term only as a topographic designation of the region in the early gastrula when "organizer" properties are present. Perhaps the uninitiated reader should be made aware that you present only the early chapters of the story rather extensively; whereas the pages that bring it up to date (Toivonen, etc.) are rather sketchy. This treatment is perfectly all right, since it reflects your personal involvement. Perhaps my point could be taken care of simply by an appropriate chapter heading, such as "A historical view of the organizer story."

I have tried to envisage the kind of reader to whom you address yourself, and I am not quite clear about that. I think I see what you have in mind: to be informative, entertaining in the best sense, and autobiographical; in other words: "The salamander egg and I" with Amblystoma as the main hero. (By the way, do you know that Bill Ballard is working on a monograph of Amblystoma?) For the ideal reader, that is, the intelligent layman with keen curiosity but no background, there might be a bit too much detail, and he might look for some more exposition of general concepts, though there is implicitly a good deal of embryological "philosophy" included. Concerning details I think particularly of the section on gastrulation. Though it is beautifully written, it is too detailed in my opinion and it interrupts the organizer story without illuminating it to any extent. You can skip from p. 76 to 89, bottom without difficulty.

Another suggestion would be to consider a slight shift of emphasis toward the more autobiographical approach, expanding more on your personal philosophy and giving more penetrating portraits of Harrison, Child, a.o. whom you knew so well.

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