Whittingehame Lodge,  
44 Storey's Way,  
Cambridge.  

26th September, 1955.

Dear Professor Wilson,

It was exceedingly nice of you to write your long letter of August 18th. Since then I have had a short trip in Italy to give some lectures at a so-called Biometric Symposium held on Lake Como.

When I was in Brazil we had some discussions on the constitution of the Institute, which were more than usually unfruitful as Stuart Rice, most unfortunately in my opinion, worked up a gesture of protest, in the name of the citizens of the United States present at the meeting, against the idea of recognizing persons of foreign origin who are both registered in the United States and have been accorded citizenship of that nation, as members of the U.S. quota, for purposes of applying the rule concerning the limitation of numbers of any one nationality. It is to be emphasized that no person who would have otherwise been elected has ever yet been refused election by reason of this quota rule, and that it is certain that the rule will permit at least two new members of United States citizenship every year.
for the foreseeable future, but the belief was quickly disseminated that reaching the current numerical limit of 35, elections of United States citizens would peremptorily cease for an indefinite time. This agitation has had a very unfortunate effect in inciting the Europeans present to corresponding feelings of nationalism, to which, perhaps, they are too much inclined.

I was exceedingly sorry to hear in these discussions of your resignation from the Institute, due, I suppose, to your not wishing to stand in the way of a younger man through the operation of this quota rule. In an attempt to ease the situation I did suggest that the quota rule might be applied with the omission of all members of the Institute aged at least seventy-five, a suggestion which I hoped might obviate just such action as you have been led to take. Still, two distinguished visitors to Brazil were 86 and 94 respectively; whether for this reason, or because a contentious nationalistic had already gone to their heads, no one took much notice of my proposal.

On another question raised by your letter, I do not think the existence of innate or spontaneous emotional reactions to logical situations should prevent there being rational analysis, for we can calculate and communicate the extent of the evidence or data having such effect, and the clear recognition of this extent is at least a rational as well as a communicable effect
of the evidence.

I think the typical example is a simple test of significance in which we normally experience a reluctance or resistance to a belief involving a very long chance. The emotional state accompanying this resistance may be quite sub-rational, but we can invite any other rational being to re-calculate the length of the odds, and verify the nature of the evidence available to create such a rational reluctance. In most cases, indeed, there is no means of going further, e.g. of deriving a probability statement concerning the probability of any hypothesis subject to which such long odds have been calculated. I am inclined, therefore, to speak of the hypothetical improbability as affording a rational basis for disbelief in a degree measured by the smallness of the improbability calculated.

Sincerely yours,