

Psychosynthesis Research Foundation, Inc.

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TEL: PLAZA 9-1480

October 30, 1971

Dear Colleague:

The second meeting of the 1971/2 series of Psychosynthesis Seminars (held on the third Friday of each month) will be held on Friday, November 19, 1971 at 7:30 P.M. at the Park Sheraton Hotel, 7th Avenue and 56th Street, New York City.

Our speaker will be Dr. Gerald Feinberg of the Physics Department, Columbia University; his subject: "The Prometheus Project." As usual, the talk will be followed by open discussion.

Hoping it will be possible for you to attend.

Cordially yours,

JACK COOPER, M.D.
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FRANK HARONIAN, Ph.D.
(212)759-1480

DATE & TIME OF MEETING: Friday, November 19, 1971 at 7:30 P.M.

PLACE: Liberty Room, Mezzanine floor, Park Sheraton Hotel, 7th Ave. & 56th St. New York, N.Y. (Please consult the notice-board in hotel lobby in case of room change.)

SPEAKER: Dr. Gerald Feinberg

TOPIC: The Prometheus Project: Mankind's Search for Long Range Goals

PSYCHOSYNTHESIS SEMINARS

1971-72 SERIES

Second Meeting: November 19, 1971

**Speaker: Prof. Gerald Feinberg
535 East 86th Street
New York, N.Y. 10028**

**Subject: The Prometheus Project: Mankind's Search for
Long Range Goals**

Participants:

**Erena Adelson
Alfred Brauch
A.J. Brodbeck, Ph.D.
Jon Castle
Jack Cooper, M.D.
Gerald Feinberg, Ph.D.
Jose Gonzalez
Joyce Goodrich
June Gordon
Frank Haronian, Ph.D.**

**Frank Hilton
Hilda Hilton
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Herbert McMichael
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James Verna
Murray Winokur**

(and others)

**Psychosynthesis Research Foundation
Room 1902
40 East 49th Street
New York, N.Y. 10017**

THE PROMETHEUS PROJECT

Gerald Feinberg, Ph.D.

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Haronian: Our speaker tonight is Dr. Gerald Feinberg of the Physics Department at Columbia University. He's noted for his theory of a particle that moves faster than light, and I think it takes some nerve to posit something of that sort! He's called it the tachyon.

Professor Feinberg was a Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Princeton, back in 1956, and he has since worked at Brookhaven Laboratories and Rockefeller University; he is presently on the faculty at Columbia.

I think that his interest in human issues balances beautifully his vocation in the natural sciences and is very much in keeping with the spirit of psychosynthesis. Professor Feinberg believes that the increased interdependence of mankind and the irreversibility of many decisions that we make creates the necessity for mankind to agree on long-range goals. In order to disseminate his ideas about the urgency of this problem he wrote a book entitled, "The Prometheus Project: Mankind's Search for Long-Range Goals," a paperback version of which has recently come out.

Professor Feinberg starts with the thesis of the essential unity of mankind. He believes that because the effects of many of man's actions can strongly influence mankind as a whole, the decision to take a particular action should not be left in the hands of a small group. He goes on to point out that the ethical principles on which these momentous decisions must be based are connected with the question of man's ultimate values and goals. Therefore, these values and goals should be made explicit before decisions are made regarding actions, many of whose effects are unforeseeable, and sometimes irreversible.

I think you will agree that this is an important and exciting point of view. Tonight Professor Feinberg will give us a picture of the Prometheus Project, and after that he plans to tell us about a specific, long-range goal for mankind, namely the extension of consciousness beyond presently existing forms.

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DR. GERALD FEINBERG:

I appreciate the opportunity to address the Psychosynthesis Research Group about the Prometheus Project, and to tell you some of the things that we're trying to do. I might just like to begin by expressing my deep regret that Dr. William Wolf is not here tonight in body, although I'd like to think that he's here in spirit.

Dr. Wolf was one of the people deeply involved in the Prometheus Project, and I understand also in the Psychosynthesis Movement, and I think he will be missed by both of our groups as well as many others.

What I would like to do tonight are two things. First, I would like to describe what led me to think of the Prometheus Project, and some of the things we've been trying to do with it. Secondly, I would like to discuss a particular long-range goal, although not with the idea of saying you must buy this as part of the package together with the Prometheus Project. As you'll see, we're more concerned with the

notion that the human race should explore long-range goals than that they should adopt a particular one.

Nevertheless, if only as an illustration of a possible goal, I will, in the latter part of my talk, discuss the extension of consciousness as a possible long-range goal; I think that that will be of particular interest to the members of the Psycho-synthesis Research Group since it's closely related to some of your own interests.

The Prometheus Project is basically an effort by people—by the human race—to take control of our common future, rather than, as has been in most cases in the past, leaving it up to blind chance to determine what happens to us as a species.

The word "Prometheus" in the sense I used it in the title doesn't have anything to do with the mythological character who stole fire from the heavens and brought it to man. It rather refers to the Greek word meaning foresight, since what we're trying to get people to do is to think ahead about what kind of future we would like, rather than passively waiting for it to happen to us.

Why should we be concerned with this right now, as opposed to in the past or in the future? The main reason, I think, is the following: There has been, with the passing of time, an increase in the ability of human beings to alter and to control both the environment around us and also ourselves. By ourselves I mean the workings of our bodies and the workings of our minds.

As this ability does increase, it becomes more and more important to decide what kind of alterations or what forms of control we want to implement. That is, at a time in the distant past when we couldn't do very much about how the world was or the way we operated, it didn't really matter very much how we wanted things to be, one way or another way. We were living in a world we didn't make, so to speak, and therefore our wishes were not very important.

But evidently, as our abilities increase, the question of what we want does become more important. Up until now, I think it's fair to say that these abilities have mainly been in the direction of the control of the environment outside ourselves. That is to say they have come mainly through advances in physical sciences. It's obvious that the lives people in the industrially advanced countries now live are quite different from those people lived hundreds of years ago, or thousands of years ago, and this change has to a large extent come about from advances in the physical sciences.

I think, though, that a much more important change is on the way, which has already been discussed by a number of scientists. That is the possibility for control over the workings of our body and mind through the developments in biological sciences and psychology.

The news media in recent years have been filled with speculations about such things as the possibility of genetic engineering, that is of changing the content of human genes so as to cure disease, or perhaps to produce forms of human beings that have never existed previously.

Another example, which was mentioned several months ago by Kenneth Clark at an American Psychological Association meeting was about the use of drugs or something of that sort to control the political leaders in such a way that they would act in a way that was socially beneficial.

A third possibility which again has been in the news recently, was the proposal by B.F. Skinner of various methods of psychological conditioning to "control people's behavior." He doesn't put it quite that way but I think it's a fair summary of what he's saying.

One last possibility along these lines that I wanted to mention is the possibility of an artificial intelligence—or computer intelligence—which is either comparable to or perhaps exceeds human intelligence. It has not been achieved yet, but some of the people working with computers believe that it's not very far off; and that it will be possible to make computers which will be at least comparable to human beings and their intelligence.

Now any or all of these developments, if they take place, or if they become possible, let's say, would certainly have in them the potentiality for major changes in human life, and also in the social institutions that we use to guide various phases of human life.

This being the case, it would seem evident that we should try to think ahead about what the changes entailed in these developments would be and see whether we are in favor of them or not.

In other words, given the possibility for large scale changes in human life in the future, we should certainly make some effort to decide whether we want them or not, in order to do some kind of long-range planning about them.

Now, long-range planning has two aspects to it. One of them, the cognitive aspect, is that we must develop the ability to foresee the consequences of our actions, or the consequences of particular developments. That might be analogous to having a very accurate roadmap, so that if you want to take a trip you know what set of roads you must follow to get from here to there.

However, there is another aspect in long-range planning which is at least as important as knowing what the consequences of our actions are, and that is to have suitable ethical principles to evaluate the desirability of particular consequences. That is, even after you know that if you do one thing now or another thing tomorrow, then in twenty years you'll end up there; you'll need some principles that enable you to decide whether it's better to be there or better to be somewhere else, where you might have ended up if you took a different set of actions. These principles are basically ethical principles. They're not something that you can get from purely scientific or factual consideration, in that they have an important or basically ethical aspect to them.

The Prometheus Project is devoted to the second aspect I just mentioned; the development of a general consensus of mankind on such ethical principles, expressed in the form of long-range goals for the human species.

Let me elaborate a little bit on why it takes that form and what we have in mind by the development of such long-range goals. First of all, the long-range aspects are relevant because it's important to plan far ahead of the actual development. That's important for several reasons; one is that these consequences are likely to persist for a very long time. Another is that if we plan far ahead of the actual occurrence, there's a possibility of being much more flexible than if we wait until we are in the middle of a situation.

Let me give you an analogy to that, which is something that's been discussed a lot recently. We now know that the use of automobiles on a large scale, the way it's done now in the United States, produces a number of unpleasant by-products, in the form of pollution of the atmosphere. In the present situation, where there are a hundred million or so automobiles riding around in the streets, it's fairly difficult to do anything about that, because many people use automobiles in a very fundamental way in their daily lives; many people earn their living from the making of automobiles, or from servicing them in one way or another, and if we just said: Well, you cannot use automobiles in the present form any more, it would obviously produce major social dislocations in the United States.

On the other hand, if it had been recognized fifty years ago or seventy-five years ago, before the automobile was introduced into our lives in a major way, that the use of a hundred million of them would lead to these environmental problems, then I think it would have been much easier to do something about it. We might then have developed different kinds of automobiles that didn't have these by-products, or maybe we would have developed a completely different method of transportation. Perhaps the railroads would have been improved much more than they have been.

I don't want to enter into precisely what would have been done, but I think it's reasonable to suppose that had we recognized this long before the situation was actually upon us, we could have been much more flexible in our response to it than we can be now.

In the same way, I believe that if we recognize ^{now} what some of these possible future developments may be, and develop the ethical principles to deal with them now rather than wait until we're in them, we have a much better chance of dealing rationally with them when they come about than we would have if we wait until we read in the morning paper that somebody has developed a computer as smart as human beings are

So that is why I feel that the long-range aspects of the considerations are very important.

The reason for concentrating on goals rather than on abstract ethical principles, is because that way we make the principles much more concrete. If you just state an ethical principle it has a tendency to be rather abstract and not catch people's imaginations very much.

If, rather, you state a goal for something that you would like the human species to accomplish, that, I believe, is much more likely to be something that people could set their minds to and say, "Yes, that would be good," or "No, that would not be good."

So that is one of the reasons why the Prometheus Project wants to concentrate on goals rather than on abstract principles.

One may next ask, "How are these goals to be arrived at?" and that is truly a very important question. If one agrees one should have goals at all, we ask ourselves how we get them. I believe that it's fundamental that these goals, upon which we eventually hope to base decisions about technological advances when they come about, should be things which command the allegiance of everybody who is going to be affected by these decisions. That is to say, by all of humanity, because it's pretty clear that the things I've been talking about will be things which will affect everybody; they're not going to just be confined to affecting a small group. If we develop techniques for biological engineering, or Skinnerian conditioning of people's responses, then eventually they're going to be part of everybody's life.

At least it will have the potentiality for affecting everybody's life; I don't mean that it will necessarily affect each individual, but there's no easy way by which a given individual would avoid it. This in itself is a relatively recent development. In the recent past, the world was not sufficiently united technologically so that something that happened at one place would necessarily affect what happened everywhere else, at least in the short run.

People living, say, in Indian villages, or in the Amazon jungle, were not likely to be affected by technological developments in New York—at least in a short period of time. I think that's changing. I think that very soon, if not already, it will be the case that anything that happens in one place in the world will, rather rapidly over a period of ten to twenty years, affect everybody living on the planet. So there isn't going to be any escape from these things by going to some technological backwater. At least technologically the world is becoming united, if not politically.

If one accepts that there is a need for the allegiance of everybody—of all humanity—to these goals upon which we are going to base decisions, then we must ask ourselves how is it likely that this allegiance can be gained? I believe that it can be gained only if everybody who wishes to has an opportunity to participate in the determination of these goals. That is to say I believe that the determination of long-range goals for humanity must basically be a democratic process, rather than being a process which is determined by some "elite" group.

There are two reasons why I think this. One is that it seems to me that recent history has very clearly indicated that people are not content, now, to accept principles or laws which are handed down to them from on high by any group with the injunction, "Just do this; it's good for you," or something along those lines. It seems to me that recent history has indicated very clearly that people everywhere want to play a direct role in determining the principles that guide their lives, and I think they have every right to want this.

I think, therefore, that if goals are set by any small group, no matter how constituted, that this in itself would prejudice their acceptance by humanity as a whole, and therefore lead to substantial resistance to decisions made on the basis of such principles.

The other reason for general participation is a philosophical one. It's based on an idea which I think has been recognized by many philosophers for a long time now, which is that ethical principles of any kind—such as long-range goals—are essentially expressions of individual feeling, rather than matters of knowledge. You cannot learn about what proper long-range goals are in the way that one learns about scientific matters by doing experiments. They rather must come from inside of people.

This implies, I think, that there's really no such person as an expert on ethics to whom we should turn for guidance on what are the proper ethical principles to follow. If we do that—if we simply set up some group as being the experts on such matters—I think what we'll be doing is substituting the feelings of this small group for those of humanity as a whole, and I see no reason to believe that the results obtained in that way would be acceptable to the rest of humanity.

For example, it has been proposed by some of the scientists involved in some of these technological developments, that the decisions about how to use them or whether to use them at all, should be left to the scientists that make the discovery. This I believe would be a very grave mistake for us as a species to make.

I think it would be a mistake for two reasons. One is that we'd be abrogating a responsibility that really belongs to all of us for deciding how these things are to be used; the other reason is that scientists or any other small group of people have certain interests in common which are not necessarily shared by the rest of humanity,

Scientists, for example, have as a common interest the extension of scientific knowledge. Of course, the interests of these small groups certainly should play a role in determining what the goals of humanity should be. But if we leave these decisions to small groups, then their interests (whether consciously or unconsciously) are likely to play major roles in their determination of what the proper action to take is. In that way I believe they will have introduced a significant bias into what we end up doing.

So for those reasons, I think that it is essential that the determination of long-range goals for mankind involve mankind. Ideally, it would involve all of mankind. Whether that's possible or not is something that is a matter of hot dispute within the Prometheus Project, so let me say then that it should involve all those people who are prepared to take part in the discussion, and that we would like to have as wide a spread as possible.

Now let me give one or two brief examples of places where long-range goals would be needed to make decisions about the implementation of some technological developments. One illustration, as I mentioned earlier is a proposal by B.F. Skinner to psychologically condition desirable behavior on the part of everybody. Let me, for the moment, assume that it's possible to do that. I don't want to get into an argument—since I know very little about the subject—as to whether the techniques that Skinner has in mind, or any other techniques, could do what he says they would do.

Even if it is possible, though, one must ask the obvious question: What behavior do we want to condition in people? Or more generally we must ask the question: What aims are to be served by the society that is to be constructed according to the suggestions that Skinner has laid down, either in Walden II or in his recent book, Beyond Freedom and Dignity.

Psychological conditioning, it seems to me, is a technique which may be more effective than previous techniques for producing some particular form of behavior, but the technique itself does not indicate what behavior is desirable. Furthermore, it's conceivable that there may be the disadvantage that if the technique is very effective, it might make deviating from that behavior, on the part of the people who had been so conditioned, very difficult, even if it turned out eventually that such a deviation would be necessary, for example if we found that the kind of society that had been constructed this way isn't really the one we want.

You might find the society was missing something, and want to change the way people are so that the thing that is missing would come back. If you've been very successful in conditioning people you may find that you can no longer change the way they are and you're stuck with it.

To repeat, the technique for altering behavior, be it psychological conditioning, or some kind of chemical method with drugs, or electrical stimulation along the lines that Delgado has described, seem to be less important than the ends that are being served by the technique.

Now Skinner, in Walden II, is rather silent about what the ends are that are being served. Perhaps he feels that they're implicit in the picture of the society

that he describes. It would seem to me, however, that before embarking on the course that he outlines, we consider where we wish it to take us, that is to say, to consider what kind of future society, what kind of future man, we'd like to end up with, by going along this path.

If we do not have that goal in view, then it seems to me to be very difficult to decide whether these techniques should be used or not, and even if we decide whether they should be used, to decide exactly what kind of principles you should try to install in people by using them. So if Skinner is right about the effectiveness of his method, it seems to me to be very important to discuss what we want to end up with by using them.

Let me give you one other brief illustration of what would be a use of some agreement on long-range goals. This has to do with the discussion recently about the environmental crisis you have all read about in the mass media and elsewhere.

It's pretty clear now, that we—that is the human race—have altered the natural environment in many ways, both accidentally and purposely, both for the good and for the bad. Much of the recent discussion has been of alterations of the environment for the bad—there certainly have been many of those—on the other hand it seems also clear that we have altered it in many ways for the good.

For example, we now live in houses that are heated by one method or another; we don't have to brave the rigors of the New York winter just in the open air. That is clearly a change in our environment which I think most of us would say is for the good.

In cases where we make such alterations in the environment, particularly in the case of purposeful alteration, we're involved in the decision of whether the changes we make in the environment are things we desire, or in other cases when they aren't desirable, whether we're willing to accept them in return for other aims we have in mind which are desirable.

For example, if one result of the generation of electrical energy is that we must heat up the rivers that flow by electrical power plants, and as a result of that some of the fish that live in the rivers are killed, then we have to make a choice about whether we think it's more important to have the electrical energy for the uses that we're going to make of it, or whether we feel that allowing the fish to continue living in the river is more important.

This, I suggest, is basically an ethical question, not a scientific one. Science is not able to help you decide whether one of these is better than the other; you have to eventually come down to what you think is important. In circumstances like that, again, one should keep in mind long-range questions, at least to a certain extent, as well as immediate ones. We have to think whether we want to continue the trend of living in a more or less man-made world, which is the way things have been going in recent times, or whether on the contrary, we would like to preserve the world as it was before human intervention.

The latter might be a consequence, for example, of the ethical belief that we should consider the welfare of other non-human creatures more than we generally do. We generally don't pay much attention to the welfare of non-human creatures in deciding what we do, but it's been suggested throughout history, and now, that perhaps we should; that we should not make changes in the world that lead to a significant disturbance in the life of animals or even trees or other things that we share the world with. This, again, is a basic ethical question which we should consider in discussing what we want to do with environmental change.

I raise this question mainly because I think that this point has been lost sight of in a good deal of the current discussion of environmental problems. This discussion has turned very often on purely scientific questions, whether X or Y will result from some action. There hasn't been very much attention paid to the question of whether you want X or you want Y to happen; whether it's a good or bad thing in comparison with something else that might happen.

So those are some illustrations of questions that are either facing us now or will face us in the coming days and years—where I think that some kind of agreement on long-range goals would be of great help when we come to face them; if we could have some kind of agreement on long-range goals I think we would be able to do much better in answering this kind of question than we can if we just have to rely on sort of ad hoc principles that are invented for the particular problem that faces us.

Let me then turn briefly to an example of what could be a long-range goal for the universe. I repeat what I said at the beginning, that I don't want you to think that you have to accept this long-range goal as part of the Prometheus Project. This is one of the goals which some of the discussion groups that the Prometheus Project has evolved have taken up. But it isn't the only goal that we've discussed, and it may or may not be one which the human race eventually settles on.

The goal that I have in mind is the extension of consciousness to forms which go beyond any which exist at present—on earth, at least, and I don't want to go into the question whether in other parts of the universe there are higher forms of life. This is something we don't really have much information about, yet.

Let me start off by saying a few things about consciousness, and I do this with a certain amount of diffidence, since most of you know a good deal more about the subject than I do. However, I will say a few things about what I think I know. The views on consciousness among people vary a good deal, from denials of its existence by some behavioristic psychologists, to the claim that it's the only real thing by many philosophers. If, for the purpose of discussion, we accept the existence of consciousness, at least as an introspective phenomenon, then there are still many matters of debate among people who have thought about the question.

There is on the one hand a materialist view that consciousness is something which is eventually to be understood in terms of the same natural laws as other aspects of the universe, such as chemical phenomena. In other words, consciousness is sort of another manifestation of the same laws of nature that we meet with in inanimate objects. On the other hand, it's been suggested that there is a duality in the universe. On the one hand there are inanimate objects—matter and the laws that it satisfies, and on the other hand something else that is not reducible to material phenomena, and that is consciousness.

Furthermore, the scope of consciousness is something which is uncertain, in the sense that people have different views about it. There are people who maintain that consciousness is essentially the thing that we are more or less familiar with; what's immediately accessible to our minds introspectively. On the other hand, many people have maintained that ordinary consciousness is just a very small part of a much wider set of phenomena, including, for example, mystical experiences, parapsychological experiences, and so on.

Now, I evidently do not plan to discuss these questions in my talk tonight, and I certainly don't know the answers to them. I will, however, say that while this last question of the scope of consciousness, is very important for deciding upon methods for extending consciousness, it is not as important for deciding whether extending

consciousness is a good idea. That is to say, I think one should discuss the question of whether you want to extend consciousness, whether you believe on the one hand in consciousness in a narrow sense, as the stream of consciousness in our minds, or in the very broad sense of Cosmical consciousness or one of the other ideas that I alluded to earlier.

So let me for the moment not take a stand on that question and rather go over to the question of why I think that extending consciousness is a good thing. One reason is that in extending consciousness I believe that we would be taking perhaps the most important step we could in removing a basic source of human discontent, the distinction between the self and the world outside the self.

Of course, that distinction between the self and the world outside is a very primitive one, perhaps the first distinction made by a human that develops from infancy to adulthood. The distinction has as one of its features, that whereas the elements of our consciousness have a sort of unity to them which is presented to us as a whole thing not split up into little parts, this is not the case for the external world. Furthermore I believe this distortion is responsible for many of the things that cause us to be unhappy.

In particular, I think, it's the basic thing responsible for the fact that we are what has been called finite creatures. That is to say there are things we can want which we cannot get, simply because there are things in the world beyond our control. The things within our consciousness, it seems to me in an important sense, are under our control. The things outside of our consciousness are things that are not within our control. Insofar as the inability to do or to get things that we want is a source of discontent—and it obviously is—then I would say that something which lessened that distinction, which brought more of what is now part of the external world into the internal world, would be a step in the direction of reducing that kind of discontent. So that is one reason which I think one might have for wanting to extend consciousness.

The other reason is something which I cannot really justify in any detail; let me just say it and not dwell on it. I believe—and I think this is a belief that many people would share—that consciousness is the most precious thing that we as human beings have, and that indeed it is the thing that makes us human beings rather than inanimate objects. Therefore, in seeking to extend it, we would be enriching both ourselves and the universe in the thing which is most worth having, and I cannot imagine any goal being any more desirable than that one.

Let me, then, leave for the moment the reasons for wanting to extend consciousness, and go into the question of what it means to extend consciousness, a question that I'm sure has occurred to you as I was speaking.

Broadly, I can imagine two aspects of extending consciousness, a qualitative aspect and a quantitative aspect. Qualitatively, by extending consciousness I would mean introducing new aspects to what we now call consciousness by making things conscious which are at present not conscious. For example, it's been pointed out by psychologists that the creative processes in human beings are generally not conscious processes. They usually take place in a part of our minds which are not accessible to our consciousness; for example in scientific creation, many scientists have reported that the way they solve a problem is not by keeping on thinking about it until the solution comes out in logical order. Rather, they think about it for a while and then they put the problem aside and do something else, and then the solution comes to them while they're in the process of doing something else.

Well, presumably it doesn't come to them through magic. It must be happening in a part of the mind which is not accessible to the consciousness through some continuation of a process that was started consciously, that eventually gets the answer and then filters up to the conscious mind. One might imagine that that kind of process could be made part of the conscious mind, and that by some method or other—and again I do not want to enter into the methods by which we could do this because I regard that as rather a secondary question—it might be possible to make conscious the creative processes that at present are not conscious.

Another example which comes to my mind as a scientist, is that it might become possible to us to perceive some things directly which now we can only reach through a series of indirect steps. For example, we can on the one hand perceive colors directly; it's something which is immediately apparent to us, at least to most of us, what the colors of objects are.

On the other hand, it's not immediately apparent to anybody what the causal connections are between one set of phenomena and another set. This is something that we have to reason out by logic, so to speak. For example, when Kepler figured out that the planets went around the sun in elliptical curves, he did it by a very complicated set of logical inferences. Again, one might imagine that it might be possible to change human thinking, or the human mind, in such a way that this kind of causal connection would become as apparent to the people who are changed in this way as the color of an object is to us now. That would be another example of a qualitative change in consciousness, and obviously, one could get a long, long list of them.

On the other hand, quantitative changes in consciousness would mean—at least to me—something of the following. It would mean a kind of either temporary or permanent merging of minds between, say, two human beings, or perhaps, among many human beings.

In such a merging of minds, the consciousness of the individual human beings would presumably be replaced by a kind of unified consciousness. That may seem like a rather strange notion, but interestingly, it seems that something of the kind happens within our own minds. It's been found by neurophysiologists that in ordinary human beings, although the brain has two halves, they function in such a way that we are not ordinarily aware that we have two halves of the brain. Even though each half may perform different functions, nevertheless introspectively we seem to have a unified consciousness.

In some people, whose brains are damaged in one way or the other, the two halves of the brain function separately; the connections are destroyed in one way or another, and in those people I think it's more accurate to say that there are two separate consciousnesses inhabiting the same head. Therefore the fact that in ordinary people the consciousness is unified indicates that there is no paradox involved in thinking that it's at least hypothetically possible to go a step further, and take two people, each of whom has an ordinary consciousness, and somehow temporarily merge them in such a way that there is one consciousness for the two.

I don't know how to do this, of course. It's been reported by some people having various drug experiences that something like this could happen during that experience. I have no direct knowledge of that, and I don't know that it's been explored far enough to pin it down, but that's perhaps one example of a method one might use.

If such a merger could be produced by whatever method, either by some kind of direct physical connection between the brains which one might imagine, or perhaps by

some effective form of mental telepathy, if that could be managed, then I would guess that the entity that was produced in this way, the merged consciousness, would probably have very different feelings and perceptions than the individual components would have, in the same way that the human consciousness is a very different thing from the perhaps very primitive kind of consciousness that an individual neuron in the human brain would have. Of course, there one is just speculating. Until something like this is produced, one hardly will know what kind of consciousness it would have, but one would guess it would be very different from what we now have.

One could speculate even further along the lines of Olaf Stapleton or Teilhard de Chardin, and say that the ultimate form of extended consciousness would be to produce a universe with a unified consciousness. I had some speculations about this in my book. A sort of ultimate goal, not only for the human race but also for any other kind of conscious beings that may exist in our universe, if there are any, would be to sort of merge all the consciousnesses into one, which then becomes identical with the whole physical universe.

Both Stapleton and de Chardin have speculated along those lines. In the case of de Chardin I think he has in mind that such a thing already exists, whereas I would say that is something which we have to work to create. That is, it would be something which doesn't exist yet and for which we're going to have to go through a series of stages. But that may not be a major difference in our thinking.

To come back slightly down to earth, what would be the case if humanity chooses extending consciousness as a goal? What sort of things would that entail? I think the first thing it would entail would be a substantial effort to understand consciousness much better than we do now, since it seems to me that at present we really don't understand it very well at all, and that we should certainly try much harder to understand consciousness both as it occurs naturally and perhaps as it could occur artificially, either in machines or some other kind of artificial way.

This would involve a study of the scope of consciousness in the sense I mentioned earlier of mystical phenomena and parapsychology, and so on. It would also, I think, involve a study in the development of consciousness. One thing that to me seems really remarkable is that you can take ordinary matter and have it, over a period of years, develop this remarkable thing that we call consciousness; we can see how an infant, which doesn't seem to have a consciousness, over a few years develops to the point where it's conscious like the rest of us.

This is to me a remarkable phenomenon, and one which hasn't, I think, been studied sufficiently.

Now these studies—and others like it—could be carried out both by the methods of natural science, and by the rather less formal methods of introspection and individual study. I think it doesn't matter which of these methods you use; I think you can use both of them. I think what is important is that we should remain committed to sharing our findings with one another, because I think it's very important that the scientists who are studying consciousness should talk to people who are studying it by their own efforts within their own minds. It seems to me that otherwise one is not likely to progress very far.

I think also that as we uncover new truths about consciousness, individuals can try to apply them to their own lives. Although I think that such a study would be very important to the development of this goal that I'm trying to convince people of,

I think that the study would have ramifications other than that, in that individuals would be able to apply them to their own lives, whether or not the human race chooses this as a goal.

And I think obviously the work of the Psychosynthesis group is already one effort to do that, with the things about consciousness that we already know about.

So much for particular long-range goals. Let me end very briefly by telling you one or two things that the Prometheus Project has done so far, just to give you some idea of what our activities have been, and then mention one or two of the things that we're trying to do in the future. Thus far we have done several things. We've had small discussion groups of, say, ten people at a time who have taken one or another possible long-range goal to explore some of its aspects. For example, we had one going for a year or two, now, on this goal of extension of consciousness, and explored various ramifications of that.

We've had another one which has met a number of times on the possibility of extending human life substantially as a long-range goal. Last year we sponsored a series of public lectures on the question of control of aging, which is one of the possible scientific developments that's coming about, i.e., that we'll learn how to control the aging process and extend life that way. If we can do that, the question is, is it desirable, and what kind of social implications does it have and so on.

We've recently started publishing a newsletter which is devoted to some of these issues, and I would be happy to send this newsletter to any of you who are interested and who will give me your names.

We want in the future to do a number of different things; we hope to publish other books on particular aspects of long-range goals; we're also planning a conference in the next year or two which will deal with some of these possible developments which are going to take place, and discuss in detail again what kind of changes they would produce in our society and whether these are desirable or not.

So far we've only begun our efforts and we want to involve as much of the world as possible in it; we've only got, so far, several hundred people involved, so you can see there's a long way to go before we succeed in what we're after. Nevertheless, we intend to succeed in this process of trying to get more and more people involved, and I might close by saying that we'd be very happy, if any of you are interested in participating with us, to have you join in with our activities.

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DISCUSSION

Mrs. Hollender: Where is the Prometheus Project center? Where do you meet?

FEINBERG: So far it's been rather informal; it doesn't really have a center. The different people in various places who have been doing these activities have only had loose contacts with each other. However, we've recently set up a kind of central organization to try to coordinate the different activities, and that is in New York--at least most of the people involved are in New York or in the surrounding region. I would say that at least for the coming few years we're going to be centered in New York, although eventually we hope to have centers in many other places, also.

Winokur: It seems that society thinks of progress in terms of getting rid of the horse and wagon and getting automobiles; also by working very hard and having three

jobs and making a lot of money and ruining one's health. Do you think there will come a day when society will really realize what progress is and get rid of the automobile and get back their health so they can breathe fresh air, and also stop making money and stop ruining their health by working too hard?

FEINBERG: I would certainly hope that society would realize sooner or later—and preferably sooner—what progress is. In fact, I would like to see society decide what progress is and then act in accordance with that decision.

I don't think that the answer is obvious in the sense that it's just a matter of people realizing something that's already there. I think it requires a long process of discussion and mutual contact to come to that decision, if only because people have different views on this. Some people really believe that progress consists of substituting the automobile for the horse and buggy, and I don't think you can rule that out, out of hand. You have to express the question of why it is progress and what are the important parts of it, and so on. That's one of the things we would like to do; have people decide what progress is.

Haronian: May I add to your answer? I think that Prof. Feinberg has offered a point that will, perhaps, fit in with your desires, Mr. Winokur, when he said that consciousness is the most precious thing that we have as human beings. Perhaps if we move more towards this point of view, we'll evaluate automobiles and work and whatever in terms of their ability to help us expand consciousness. That itself suggests that there would be some very dramatic changes in values.

I was very much struck with the fact that he, and people like himself, who come from such a different background, with professional training in the physical sciences, are thinking so much like some psychologists are today. I say some—not all. It seems to be a very select thing among a few people in different professions, but there seems to be no boundaries, professionally speaking, for those who think this way.

Hilton: Dr. Feinberg, since this whole question rests on values, have members of your group explored or tried to find out how values come into consciousness?

FEINBERG: No, I would say we haven't. In fact one of the things our groups have been missing is more participation by psychologists. We had Dr. Wolf's aid for a time, but the scientists we've had have been more physical scientists and natural scientists than behavioral scientists, and so we haven't gone into that particular question that you've raised. But I think it's a very important one.

Hilton: I think it's fundamental to the whole question, because we can examine men who have seemingly the same degree of consciousness, but they may have totally different sets of values. Does this involve different dimensions? We have got to learn how to inculcate values if we're going to get wide acceptance of the Prometheus Project; but how do we do that?

FEINBERG: I would be inclined to say that we first have to see which values are already there. You might think of it as an experiment to see whether human beings as they are have some body of values they can agree on. I'm sort of implicitly assuming that there is such a body; that the different people in the world, because of a common heredity and certain aspects of a common upbringing, do in fact have certain values in common, and these long-range goals can be taken as an expression of these common values. That might be wrong, of course, I don't really know, since the Prometheus Project hasn't ascertained yet whether indeed these common values exist; I believe they do, but it remains to be seen.

Imich: I believe that what is most common is the idea of value which has only two sides, good and bad. Now whether what is good and what is bad comes from a conclusion, and the differences in accepting what is good and what is bad in different nations and in different parts of the world, are, of course, connected with the specific differences of life—the environment and upbringing.

But it is universal for human beings to accept that "values" exist, and that everyone tries to justify his behavior by referring to values.

Coming to an agreement about what is good and what is bad, what is desirable and what is undesirable, I would compare with progress in science, progress in technology. In other words, it is a matter of detailed working of the problem before complete agreement will be achieved.

It is a very pleasant surprise to hear from a scientist that he does not consider scientists proper people to determine long-range goals for humanity. That's a very democratic approach.

FEINBERG: I want to clarify that I'm not advocating majority rule of any kind, which I wrote clearly in my book, I think. What I'm advocating is a consensus—not a majority vote. I also don't think a majority vote on these matters is a good way to decide things. I'm looking rather to find those goals that essentially everybody can agree on, although some people disagree just because they don't like to agree with other people.

I would like us to look for things which in fact scientists and other people can agree on. I believe that such things exist, but what I was saying we shouldn't do is to simply follow goals that science has thought were good. Those goals, in my opinion, are not likely to be things which many other people will agree on.

There's a difference between saying you look for things which are acceptable both to scientists and to others, and saying you pick things scientists want and let others follow. The difference is that scientists are going to do many things. If you leave the decision to them, they're likely to fix on those things common to scientists as a group, whereas if you ask for things which are more widely acceptable, then you will not just find things which are acceptable to scientists as a group; you will find things which are much more widely acceptable, and that's what I think we should be after.

Imich: Probably the specialist will play the greatest role in determining long-range goals, because the long-range goals have to be not only acceptable to the rest of humanity, but they have to be viable. We may accept something which in two years we will decide doesn't work, and therefore we have to have specialists on human nature which will determine whether a suggested goal is one which can be possible.

FEINBERG: I certainly agree with you that experts are necessary for discussing the viability of goals. I was trying to separate the question of what is possible from the question of what is desirable. I don't maintain that the question of what is possible is one which can be decided democratically; that is a scientific question.

Brodbeck: I have some questions: First, aren't you making your needs themselves part of your long-range goals, and don't needs always take on the characteristics of long-range goals?

As I listen to you, it seems to me that one of the things which is part of your needs, which could very easily become part of your long-range goals, was that of people taking responsibility for themselves.

FEINBERG: I think what you say is right in an important sense. At present people do not have that responsibility, at least in practice; many may have it in theory. One could say that it's a goal to have people take on this responsibility in fact. The Prometheus Project itself is a goal of sorts, but it's a goal, however, which at least I am prepared to try to carry out immediately, rather than wait. I don't think that this is something that we should wait for people to come to spontaneously; I think it's something that one should urge them on to accept. Otherwise I agree with what you say.

Brodbeck: I think you are aware of how Erich Fromm tried recently to get people, through a book called Revolution of Hope, to come to terms with their lives. I think several million copies were sold, and the response to the plea in the book was something less than one per cent, and I think that's a generous estimate. The question is, do people want to take the responsibility for their own future and their own lives and the roles they play in the evolution of mankind; if not, what does the Prometheus Project want to do about that?

FEINBERG: I do know about Erich Fromm's efforts; I received his final statement about how many people responded to him, and it is discouraging. However, there are several aspects to it which one may consider hopeful. One of them is, as you said, that the book sold a very large number of copies. Another is that I think one has to keep at it. That is to say, Erich Fromm was evidently discouraged enough to stop at that point.

Although I've gotten less response, numerically, than he has, I'm not discouraged; at least I'm willing to keep on. Maybe I'm younger and more energetic. Also, I think at least the techniques now exist for reaching very large numbers of people other than by writing books. Writing books, although it's one way of reaching people, has its limitations in whom you can reach, and we've been trying to use other methods than books--television, and so on. I think that that has in it at least the possibility of doing better.

However, there are certainly no guarantees in this. I don't think any of us has any illusions that we're guaranteed success even in the long run. It's something that we feel has to be tried, and if it doesn't work within a reasonable period, then perhaps something else can be tried. It remains to be seen. But I'm not at the moment ready to think about alternatives to explore this somewhat further.

Hilton: I'd like to comment on Fromm. I think he was unduly discouraged, because in any new idea or new movement, out of a hundred people who are in support of it, you're lucky if you have five percent who support it actively. So I think you might have a much much greater support for the Prometheus Project than you realize. They will not come forward, but they will not oppose it. You will only get a small number of activists with any new movement.

FEINBERG: I hope that's true.

June Gordon: What response have you had on the governmental level?

FEINBERG: We purposely stayed away from governmental involvement for several reasons. One is, as I said, we want this to be a worldwide thing, not a national one, and for better or worse, there are lots of people in other parts of the world for whom something involved with the United States Government is automatically something to be avoided.

Therefore, we have gone out of our way not to get involved with the Government. I sent a copy of the book to a few Senators who are interested in these matters, but I haven't tried to get Government involvement in any other way, and I don't think we intend to until a much later stage of development of the Prometheus Project.

June Gordon: Have you received affirmative support in a non-popularized way, for example?

FEINBERG: Well, yes. I got an affirmative statement from Senator Ribicoff whose Senate committee is interested in genetic engineering and the prospects it raises for humanity. He said he read the book and thought it was quite interesting. I would say that the main response of the Government has been lack of interest, and I'm just as happy it is so.

Brodbeck: Another question I have is really one that relates to psychosynthesis and what you are doing, and I am not certain how to formulate it, but I'll try.

For every goal one could set up, there could be resistance to it, and counter goals could be set up. It seems to me that if you look at any historical movement, there is always a resistance to any goal. So if you're setting out to do this on a large scale, you're going to have to study the phenomenon of idea-setting and resistance to the idea, both within and without.

Very recently, I read a paper on duality. It had a lot to do with how to work with this kind of resistance and with the whole process of causation by opposites. What the paper suggested is that there might be a way of doing this sociologically, too. One could study the whole Prometheus Project as a way in which one could, on a collective scale, try to overcome or in some way reduce the phenomena of duality. I wondered if anybody in Psychosynthesis would like to comment?

Mrs. Hollender: The goal has to have a certain flexibility; it has to evolve as you're working with it. In order to reduce the amount of resistance, it has to be a kind of emerging goal. You can set great goals of great value, but you really can't develop in advance a detailed blueprint that will take in all the influences that get in the way. It seems to me that goals are always expanding, just as consciousness is always expanding.

Cooper: But if we use this expansion of consciousness as a means, then you have to define what it does. Does it bring about healing? Does expansion of consciousness increase communication between people? These are questions that we must ask. I think that in Psychosynthesis we have found some answers to these kinds of questions, using the expansion of consciousness as a means. But again, back to your particular question of the goal, I think this immediately sets up other problems such as we're seeing in the drug scene today. Some people consider drugs to lead to the expansion of consciousness, but it doesn't seem to lead to a real kind of communication and real get-togetherness—so that we can preserve and protect the planet.

The most dangerous thing that we have against us at the moment is the ever-prevailing arms race, and my feeling is that either the Prometheus Project had better get going very fast or we'd better expand consciousness very fast!

FEINBERG: We haven't really thought very much about the question of resistance to goals, and in my case at least, the reason is along the following lines: I recognize the historical thing you mentioned, that very often when a group sets up a goal it

automatically produces a reaction. However, I think in most of the historical cases, at least, the group tended to isolate itself by the very setting up of a goal. That is, the goal tended to be a goal for that group, and only they wanted it. They either said, "We have the truth and we're going to make you believe it whether you want to or not," or they said, "we don't care about you; we have this and that's it."

In the Prometheus Project, at least hypothetically, what we're trying to do is somewhat different. We're trying to take, as a group, everyone and see whether there are any goals which from the beginning don't meet with any resistance.

Assuming it's successful, then at least the historical reasons for this kind of reaction wouldn't necessarily be present. There would, of course, be future generations and the question of whether they would continue to accept the goal. That might become a very serious problem if this went through. But at least the immediate problem of resistance, one would hope, might have been gotten around by this procedure.

Brodbeck: How many long-range values have been suggested to you. Could you give us some idea of how prolific the thinking has been?

FEINBERG: I don't have a number for you off-hand. If you take significantly different ones, leaving out those that are similar, there were ten or so suggested. That surprised me a little; I would have thought that people would have been a lot more prolific in their imagination, but one has to make do with what there is. The number of people involved has been several hundred. That might suggest that if the number increased to several million people, the number of goals would increase also, but I don't know.

End of Discussion
