Prof Feinberg

11-14-84

p 102 ✓

I answered your questions about "optimism" too brusquely. May I redress that now?

1) I was taken aback that there was one who had read CIBA 1962*

2) I did not think that was so optimistic, which left me off balance.

From* its 3d sentence it was full of resonances with Aldous Huxley (who had died recently). It was certainly full of irony: that at least was the intention of the "mights" on page 265.

But, as I reread it, that irony is a way of distancing myself from many of the real world problems that I now address. My own education was proceeding.

Am I such a pessimist now? At one level, I feel the need for that posture — to avert hybris, and to run scared in hopes of a self-revising or-correcting prophecy. I don't speak pessimistically to my 10 year old daughter. I think there is a reasonable chance that nuclear deterrence will work to forfend general war: hardly a level of assurance one can be complacent about.

I guess it is the LDCs' morass and what we see today in South Asia and Fundamentalist Islam and most of Africa that underlay my expostulations — and what many quoted at the meeting about the widespread denial of these trans oceanic realities: (but south of the Rio Grande is not much more exalting!) Those are the "hand-baskets" to which I was mainly alluding.

The Ciba 1962 in fact just succeeded the Cuban missile crisis. We could hardly have been feeling very complacent at that moment either; but I don't recall any specific allusion to it at the conference. Our agenda was "Biology" — perhaps one reason

Perhaps the main difference in my mood between 1962 and now is a shift from resignation to activism. In 1962 I was just looking outside the lab, had little practical sense of what (little or much) might be done to influence the course of events at policy levels.

By 1971 I was feeling more optimistic ... US reopening relations with the PRC in some detente with the USSR ... and the personal opportunity to play some part in the negotiation of the BW disarmament treaty.

Today I am again dismayed at the regression in US-USSR relations. The fault is by no means equally shared; but our policies are hardly blameless. So my mood may not be too far from that of Nov '62. But I am a little better able to vent that anxiety now — at the cost of some 20% of my time in Washington — at least knocking on a few doors.

Today's seminar itself was a lift. It may have been "talking to the converted"; but I don't have enough of that milieu (less than I did at Stanford) now, either at my own specialized institution nor in my forays on the Potomac. We were, as happens rarely, at least addressing the right questions!

Sincerely,

Jean Fidelity

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ot→ ✓ 11/15/80