

THE PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH SOCIETY

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CONTRIBUTORS' BULLETIN

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HOW PROGRESSIVE IS PROGRESS?



Dear Friends:



As we come to the end of another year, it might be interesting to evaluate the prevailing confusion in terms of essential progress. What have we done that was worth doing, and how much has contributed to our individual and collective misery? It is pleasant to assume that we are outgrowing the accomplishments of the past, and that our industrialized existence is a noble destiny--a better way of life--that leads to a better future than we have ever known before. As human beings have we really outgrown the past? Have we outgrown our ancient vices or solved the conflicts that mutilate the pages of ancient history?

As we look around us, we must come to the conclusion that the new is not always the best. We consider with continuing appreciation music of Beethoven, Bach, and Mozart. We cheerfully pay several million dollars for a painting by Rembrandt, and antiques, both Eastern and Western are bringing higher prices in public auction and private treaty. The first edition of the Gutenberg Bible published in 1445 is now the world's most valuable printed book and there will always be buyers if a copy should ever appear in the open market. We have never surpassed or even equaled the bronze utensils now being excavated from the graves of Chinese noblemen who went to eternal rest in the second millennium, B.C.

Years ago, I purchased some examples of Japanese ceramics. The workmanship was beautiful, but they were made in the Edo Period, or the early years of Meiji. As they were not yet a hundred years old, they were not antiques, therefore, comparatively worthless. One dealer told me, "When they become a hundred years old, the price will improve markedly." About 1970, Satsuma ware became antique and examples which I bought for ten dollars are now valued by experts and collectors, to say nothing of connoisseurs, at twenty times the older figure. In the important art auctions held in Hong Kong and London, value is estimated largely in terms of age. Why then should we be so willing to throw away the wisdom of the past in favor of the brittle intellectualism that burdens the present generation?

Without any substantial reason, we try to justify the confusion through which we are passing as inevitable to progress. It is pleasant to think that we have outgrown the vices of our forebears, but unfortunately they are as popular as ever. There is a group of modernists who affirm that "old" is equivalent to "bad," and "new" is good. We can extend this concept in various directions.

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According to materialism, we have outgrown the Ten Commandments and The Sermon on the Mount because they are no longer essential to modern progress. Because our religions began in antiquity they must also be discarded because they interfere with the advancement of our economic industrialism. Socrates recommended that young people should be taught morality and ethics, but in progressive education these virtues are quietly ignored as detrimental to a successful career.

In the name of progress, nation after nation has discarded its ancestral culture and made one gigantic leap into a political future for which it is completely unprepared. Having forgotten its own history and lured on by the dream of opulence, most of these new countries have fallen into the keeping of dictators by which the miseries of the people have been sadly increased. Confucius warned the world to protect home and family at all cost, but he lived six hundred years before the Christian Era and his suggestions have no validity in this new world of unlimited competition. It might well be that a careful study of old ways of living and thinking would be most rewarding.

The Grecians who were the forebears of Western civilization had a number of good ideas. Styles in clothing did not change for centuries, but progress dictates that we should buy a new wardrobe at exorbitant prices every year or two. The educators of children were entrusted with the important task of both enlightening and inspiring young people. The original Olympic Games were created to honor the gods and inspire constructive sportsmanship. There was great emphasis upon good laws, honestly administered. One Greek philosopher made the valuable remark, "A country is best governed when its laws are few and honestly administered." Another said that laws were like spider webs which captured small insects, but allowed the large ones to break through and escape.

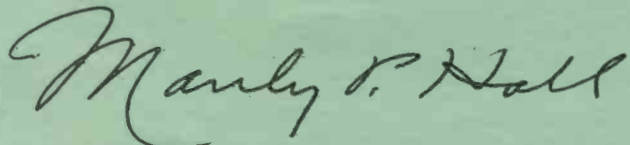
It is peculiar, at least, that when we renounce the past, we neglect its virtues and cling tenaciously to its vices. We have inherited more wisdom than we have created. Sir Isaac Newton once observed that if he saw further than other men it was because he was standing on the shoulders of giants. Our modern approach to life would imply that we regard ourselves as the giants standing on the shoulders of midgets. In the past there have been good governments and bad governments and a long sequence of reforms attempting to correct injustices as they arose. If progress implies improvement, we must then ask, "What is it that makes things better?" The end of socialized existence is that human beings should live together in peace, thoughtful of each other's needs, and mindful of the common good. Most nations of the past began with high hopes and reasonably adequate leadership. By degrees, however, their securities were eroded away by luxury and intemperance. In the end, nations that were no longer fit to live were overthrown by comparatively healthy barbarians. Progress must be measured in finding better solutions for problems that, in one way or another, have afflicted humanity from the dawn of time.

It is not the improvement of armament and the slaughter of millions of human beings that can be considered progress. Actual advancement means that there shall be no more wars because we are intelligent enough to prevent them. Such intelligence is proof of mental progress. We are entitled to consider ourselves as progressive people when there are no longer needs for prisons and our teen-

agers are neither alcoholics nor narcotic addicts. There is nothing admirable about wealth. It may contribute to progress if it is honorably accumulated and wisely distributed. History reveals clearly that essential progress is impossible until individual citizens improve their own characters and overcome the weaknesses in themselves. In the family of nations, the ancients are the grandparents; without their guidance there can be no survival.

There is much to indicate that constructive changes lie ahead. Millions of men and women are weary of their own foibles which are little better than a waste of time. The coming year will have its problems, but there are indications that some actual progress will be achieved. We are losing faith in extravagance and wasteful luxury. We want to read better books, listen to better music, watch better television, and find better outlets for our energies and abilities. It is still possible that we can recover from the illusion that wastefulness is a form of wisdom, and that avoidance of responsibility is a triumph of the mind. A few changes of this kind may enable us to make progress a little more progressive.

Always most sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Manly P. Hall". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a large initial 'M'.

MANLY P. HALL

RECOMMENDED READINGS:

Anderson, Wayne	A Mouse's Tale	(H)	\$12.50
Asimov, Isaac	New GUIDE to SCIENCE	(H)	\$29.95
Balyoz, Harold	SIGNS OF CHRIST	(H)	\$18.00
Brinton, Daniel G.	Myths of the Americas	(P)	\$8.50
Carle, Eric	The Mixed-Up Chameleon	(H)	\$12.50
Geiskopf, Susann	Fast & Natural Cuisine	(P)	\$8.95
Graham, Winifred	Vegetarian Treasure Chest	(P)	\$6.95
Health Research	Cblor Healing	(P)	\$6.50
Highwater, Jamake	Ritual of the Wind	(P)	\$14.95
Kavanaugh, James	There Are Men Too Gentle To Live Among Wolves	(P)	\$5.95
Kierkegaard, Søren	Purity of Heart	(P)	\$5.95
Lamy, Lucie	Egyptian Mysteries	(P)	\$9.95
Lee, O-Young	Smaller Is Better	(H)	\$16.95
Matthews, John	The Grail	(P)	\$9.95
Michell, John	The Earth Spirit	(P)	\$9.95
Payne, Peter	Martial Arts	(P)	\$9.95
Walker, Barbara G.	Secrets of the Tarot	(P)	\$12.95
Weinberg, Julius R.	Short History of Medieval Philosophy	(P)	\$8.95

All of the above books are available at the Arts of the World Gift Shop at PRS or order by mail by adding 6% of the total cost of the order (\$.75 minimum) for shipping and handling for 4th class book rate. Orders may be shipped by UPS, the fastest way, by adding 10% of the total cost of the order (\$1.50 minimum). California residents, please add appropriate sales tax. All prices subject to change without notice. Checks or money orders should be made payable to:

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