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A DECADE OF MEMORIES

Reflections on the ten-year history of the journal.

Thoughts by Former Managing Editors of *The Good Society*: Part I

Jyl Josephson and Matthew Thomas

I was a second-year graduate student when Steve Elkin asked me to be the first editor of what began as the *PEGS Newsletter*. It was a position for which I was patently unqualified: I had never published anything, had edited only my own seminar papers, and had never been involved in the production end of any publication. Nevertheless, the opportunity to work on the *Newsletter* was interesting precisely because of the type of enterprise that PEGS represents: an effort to bring academics and activists together, to make scholarly work more available and accessible to a wider audience, while at the same time enabling scholars and activists to discuss matters of political importance across the usual boundaries of ideological and disciplinary differences.

One of the major challenges early on was working with scholars on writing pieces of the length required. Most of us are accustomed to thinking in terms of article length (or longer) essays. It is difficult for most of us to whittle this down to five or six pages. With numerous authors, we worked on editing a longer piece down into a length more manageable for the *Newsletter*. In some instances this involved cutting a 20 or 25 page essay down to five pages. In at least one instance, we cut a 50-page chapter down to less than 10 pages, still (hopefully) maintaining the essential content of the piece.

Of course, being a novice, I made innumerable errors, the worst of which still make me cringe. More importantly, however, editing the *Newsletter* provided the opportunity to work with first-rate scholars writing about issues and ideas that constitute the central questions of our time. This was an invaluable experience, one that has helped shape my own scholarly endeavors. It has been good to see that our initial efforts to address issues

such as gender and race have been followed by a discussion of class, as well as multiple discussions on the meaning, problems, and purposes of democracy and the challenges of participatory democracy. I especially commend the efforts to actually institute a dialogue between academics and activists in volumes seven and eight; as my own research has turned toward studying activism, it has become more clear how important it is that our work be informed by activists, and how fruitful real collaboration between activists and academics can be. Such efforts,

though sometimes difficult, should certainly continue as *The Good Society* changes venue.

One other note of minor interest: the familiar burgundy-on-cream banner of the *Newsletter* was in fact the result of a fortuitous printing error. Our intent was to utilize blue ink in the banner, which many readers of this publication will recognize as a rather shameless imitation of the publication of the University of Maryland's Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy. When the first issue was printed, however, the printer read the ink number incorrectly and printed the banner in burgundy. We liked the error enough to keep it.

I have been pleased to follow the progress of the publication over the years, and am happy that the *Newsletter* is now *The Good Society*, and that Penn State Press will be taking over publication duties. *The Good Society* will surely continue to engage the central questions of our time, and to develop practical visions of more desirable political and economic institutions.

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One of the goals of the current perestroika movement¹ is to broaden the appeal of the *American Political Science Review*, which, in the opinion of the perestroikians, is seen primarily as a journal of formal modeling, with bare nods toward other approaches to the study of politics. While following the debate I have been struck by the fact that many of the criticisms of *APSR*—not enough breadth, no integrative essays, scant empirical qualitative work—aptly describe the very things that are central to *The Good Society*. The journal has always sought out catholic thinkers and encouraged them to write in an intellectual and accessible manner (no, those are not mutually exclusive adjectives, even though the academy often treats them as such). In large part, I think we succeeded.

There is no single author that stands out from my tenure as managing editor. In fact, the beauty of the journal is that so many authors shared important ideas, in an open forum. During my tenure, some of the ideas considered in the pages of *The Good Society* included the merits of deliberative democracy, the shapes and forms of civil society, the role of the law in the good society, and the intersection of institutions and citizenship. In addition, we added the regular feature, “Teaching Toward the Good Society,” to share syllabi from wide-ranging courses that have in common an inquiry into institutional design. I look forward to following another 10 years of such pursuits.

Much like the adage about laws and sausages—one may appreciate them, but may not want to inquire too closely about

their manufacture—the mechanics of publishing a journal are best left unexamined. Suffice it to say that those who have occupied the managing editor’s chair supplemented their academic education with a good dose of practical knowledge. My reflection would not be complete without a large nod of appreciation to two others: Stephen L. Elkin and Claire L. Morgan. Steve was always the best of bosses, if he could be considered as such. His light managerial hand—especially in the mundane mechanical aspects of journal publication—made for a job that was a pleasure.² And without Claire, I would have floundered hopelessly. She steered me through the rapids, helping me emerge relatively unscathed. Her knowledge saved me from countless mistakes, and the journal is better for her ideas. I thank both of them for constant intellectual stimulation, good humor, and their friendship. Happy Tenth, *Good Society*!

Matthew Thomas is an assistant professor of political science at the California State University, Chico.

Endnotes

1. The Perestroika Movement began in the fall of 2000 with an anonymous letter in *The New York Times*. The movement seeks to reinvigorate the political science community through reform in the American Political Science Association, as well as to reestablish the validity of qualitative research.

2. Most of the time, anyway.