

The Game of the Future

Author(s): Emanuel Lasker

Source: *The North American Review*, Vol. 186, No. 622 (Sep., 1907), pp. 121-126

Published by: University of Northern Iowa

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25105988>

Accessed: 03-09-2019 11:41 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

University of Northern Iowa is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The North American Review*

THE GAME OF THE FUTURE.

BY EMANUEL LASKER.

CHESS, the game of dreamers, comes from Asia, the home of all exquisite dreams of mankind. There originated philosophy and religion. Asia, indeed, is the mother of all our civilization; she discovered the reality and the power of justice and wisdom. Her misfortune is that her people have grown indolent and of dimmed perception. The modern nations believe in labor and accuracy of observation, hence their progress. Asia believes and has always believed in mind and spirit; she has created astronomy, mathematics, physics, a philosophy of art and life, and she has brought forth such men as Hammurabi, Buddha, Zoroaster and Confucius; but finally her strength became her weakness, by exaggeration. Had Bacon lived in Asia and taught his great lesson of the value of observation and experiment to the peoples beyond the Ural and the Behring Straits, the map of the world would probably be very different now. Yet, notwithstanding her failure to comprehend the power of discovering and correcting the errors of imagination and theory exerted by events as they actually occur, Asia is a vital factor in the world. The ideas of her ancient great men grow stronger as the years roll by. And of her fine dreams, Asia has had none subtler than the infinitely misunderstood, lightly esteemed, but ever-progressing and developing game of chess.

Some strategist, now long forgotten, invented the game to demonstrate concretely the power of the intellect in directing the movements of antagonizing forces. Whether he divined all that his thought implied, or not, he set himself a monument forever, though he forgot to carve his name on it. In the pleasing form of a game, he has given to the world the clay in which to mould strategic ideas.

The rules of chess are known to many, though only superficially. The game is played by two opponents, on a square board divided into eight-by-eight compartments, with pieces of various shapes that are moved on the sixty-four squares according to certain rules. The players alternate in moving the pieces. As the game proceeds, they capture opposing pieces and remove them from the board. The object of the game is to capture the piece called the "king." Whoever achieves it wins. The rules are meant to imitate the mobility and the capacity for fighting possessed by soldiers of the antique type; but the particularities of the construction of the rules do not really matter, since they have no bearing on the intellectual content of the game and the intention of its unknown inventor to make it a game of combat and strategy.

Chess is the most ancient game known; it has survived until our time and its popularity is rapidly progressing among all civilized nations; its vitality bespeaks its competency to be the game of the future. Other facts add to the probability of its attaining this goal. The combative spirit finds in it innocent expression. It teaches strategy by experiments, as it were. And that its lessons are based on reason and true to nature may be shown by a rigid analysis which will here be attempted.

The events of a contest, though they impress first by the changes in power, wealth and happiness produced by them, have their most permanent influence in the moral they convey. Thus the incidents of the struggle for tolerance waged by the Christian Church against the Roman Empire have been forgotten, but the lesson of its outcome, that the welfare of society is based rather on love and charity than on power, has been an active force in the life of the world ever since. Again, though Galileo died in enforced retirement and was held as the vanquished in the opinion of his contemporaries, his last words, "*E pur si muove,*" forever acclaim the liberty of the search for truth from the interference of dogma. And again, though the political changes of the French Revolution have been effaced, that event has left a lasting inheritance in the principle that opportunity must be equal for all.

However struggles might vary in their outward circumstances, there is a near relationship, amounting to almost an identity, in the moral lessons which they teach. From that aspect, war,

competition, the search for beauty or truth, are akin to the game of chess. This is because the world is constructed on a principle of simplicity, economy and harmony. Though convictions as to the nature of the cosmic makeup cannot be deduced by logic, since they are basic and therefore unable to rest on other and simpler convictions, what here is assumed is in accord with often-repeated experience and with the profoundest thought of our best men who seek for unity and law, and for simplicity in that law, in physics, chemistry, biology and art. Hence we are at liberty to suppose the essential identity of the interpretation to be put on the successive and related events of struggles.

This liberty does not, of course, imply the license to extend any possible reading of the moral of the happenings of a contest to other contests. The principle asserts only that there is a way of interpreting a struggle so that the interpretation refers to all possible struggles—that, in other words, the story of every combat is an allegory, if the idea it conveys be rightly comprehended.

This view of the world is made compelling for him who passes through the evolution of a chess-player, and it is elaborated in detail by the modern theory and art of chess-play.

A beginner in chess moves without a purpose; he is guided by chance only. After many trials, he learns that it is profitable to capture opposing men and detrimental to lose his own, since the men represent so many resources for effecting the check-mate. Thus an appreciation of the first strategic law, that superiority of force is an advantage, is slowly evolved in him, but, at the outset, in a very imperfect state. Yet, such as he knows it, it serves the very useful purpose of surprising him by its failures to apply. He is thus led to think; and he finally comprehends that it is not the number of men that decides the issue, but the activity which they display in the fighting. He sees that greater activity usually goes with the greater number, but that it depends on other factors also. He tries to detect these other factors. The mystery incites his imagination; each game for him is a search for the truth that he dimly perceives, but which ever seems to evade capture.

When the mind is in this state of wonder, chess exerts a great charm on it; the impression of truth or natural law at its first half-unconscious inception is ecstasy—in fact, all ecstasy comes from incipient mental movements. The sentiment gains in

strength when blind chance is eliminated. Since all factors that determine the outcome of a game of chess are subject to analysis and reason, the practise of chess is rich with the delight that comes from the hunting for evasive truths.

If the chess-player, arrived at this stage, has talent, experienced players say of him that he can see "combinations" and that he is full of surprises, but that he lacks "strength." His moves are individually fine, but they have no coherence; he is imaginative, but gives no evidence of being logical. As a chess-player, he is in the state of a savage whose senses are perfectly developed and whose mind is waking up to the perception of philosophic truth. When, by earnest and honest effort, he advances further, he is struck by the logic of events on the chess-board; he shapes himself a philosophy of chess, and thus, unconsciously, lays the foundation for a "style" of his own. From a tactician he becomes a strategist; instead of merely knowing how to profit skilfully from opportunities, he learns how to prepare them.

This evolution requires will-power and honesty, for there is constant temptation to slide into the easy path of opportunism. The acquired imaginative tactical skill is sufficient to win many games by setting "traps" or concocting surprising devices; and many players are therefore arrested from further development at this stage. Only he who is not content to win, but desires to win "by force"—that is, against any possible defence—ever overcomes the obstacles that vanity of applauded achievement, a desire to shirk irksome labor and other opposing factors pile in his way.

If the growing chessmaster, in this struggle against himself, is victorious, his brain gathers, from his experiences over the board and in analysis, a store of well-defined and true chess impressions; if vanity and uncritical subjectiveness overcome him, the impressions that he stores bear the stamp of these faults. Thus his "position judgment" is formed, and, if correct, it enables him, at a glance, to decide which side in a given position has an advantage; and his memory is stocked with a series of manœuvres and procedures adapted to certain types of positions and calculated to drive certain advantages home. Thus he learns how to methodically win an isolated pawn, or to exchange pieces when the end game is favorable, or to mass his pieces for an at-

tack against the King, or to advance a chain of pawns on one of the wings, with his officers placed securely but effectively behind them, etc. For the execution of these operations he needs the imaginative faculty developed in the early stage of his evolution, and, in addition, the ability to form a plan and to follow it systematically to its logical end. In his final stage, he studies the merits and shortcomings of such plans, and he discovers that, to be successful, they must be founded on a quality akin to justice. He observes that no attack, however brilliantly executed or ingeniously conceived, can succeed by force unless it is based on a superiority of the aggressor, or on a weakness of the opponent's position.

Thus the master learns to abstain from attacks that lure the weaker players, but he acquires that economy of effort which makes the attacks that he undertakes direct and vehement and hard to repulse.

If "chess" were replaced in the foregoing discussion by struggle of another name and the technical details of the one substituted for the other, the description would still remain true. Acquisition of skill or knowledge or moral ideas follows essentially the same pathways independent of the subject or environment. The phases of evolution comprise always a technical or tactical part; a process of deepening imagination so that it becomes fit to discover a logical plan, or programme, of operations; a comparative study of such plans; and, lastly, the acquisition of the greatest economy in their execution.

And the forces which oppose progress are essentially the same as in chess; the subjective view, prejudice, temptation to obtain cheap successes, striving for applause rather than for sterling achievement, a desire to shirk labor that is unrewarded except in furthering self-evolution.

The theory of chess teaches the principle of measuring the values of the pieces by their capacity for achievement, and that a player of infinite skill would obtain from his pieces a degree of useful activity in exact proportion to these capacities. It asserts the extreme importance of economy of effort in defence, of justice in offense and of economy of time, or rather of "*tempo*," in development. It thus reads like a philosophy or a code of morality.

Hence, chess is a mirror of life; it shows how existence would

be if chance were entirely eliminated, and opportunity even. To this extent it pictures the various phases of life true in every detail. The whole drama of temptation, sin and punishment, of conflict, effort and victory of justice, is there depicted in miniature.

Such a game can never die; and, as the world advances, and mind and intellect attain progressively higher values, the practice of chess, with its facility for easy entertainment, and with the variety of its deeply human and yet logical parts, is bound to become the universal pastime.

EMANUEL LASKER.