

N E R V A L ' s D I A R Y

Le voyageur enthousiaste observe ...

*At the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C.,
in the week of Hanukkah, December 1996*

A Homage to America

Fifty years ago to the day, on the 9th of December 1946, Telford Taylor opened the Nuremberg Doctors' Trial with his statements. Half a century later, a panel of distinguished scientists and some 200 attendees from all over the world convened to mark this occasion and to assess what the impact of the Nuremberg Code is today. The magnificent and at the same time incredibly sobering atmosphere of the Holocaust Memorial Museum served as an appropriate venue to remind the world and to remind us, the Austrian and German physicians, how much we have failed; failed twice, against humanity and against our Hippocratic pledge. Coercion, torture, murder, reinforced by eye witness accounts, objects, films.

But not only the period of World War II was discussed. It is one of the wonders of this country to experience the omnipresent enthusiasm to tackle all sorts of

problems which have arisen since, to speak up against misuse, to criticize also American failures, to discuss the present, to extrapolate into the future. Anglo-Saxon individuality at its best.

Ever so many questions remain unresolved: universality of human rights versus practical possibilities to implement them; governmental orders versus motions of civil rights groups; sanctity of life versus abortion; euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide. The few survivors present discussed together with the progeny of the Holocaust generation, the progeny of the perpetrators and of those who are still unwilling to admit their share of guilt. All were united in a vivid debate of these burning questions unlikely to be resolved in the near future.

As one of the lady speakers said: 'Hope is the oxygen of human life.' Therefore let us hope.