

WHO HELPS THE WORLD?

IT is generally assumed by thoughtful people that every individual has some kind of public responsibility or obligation to fulfill to society. The decision to do work of this sort may arise from the influence of a cultural or "class" tradition—which causes the wives of the rich to engage in organized charities and other welfare activities—or it may spring from a deeply felt emotion on the part of the individual, such as overtook and pervaded Henry George when he saw the stark contrast between fabulous luxury and grinding want on the streets of an American city in 1870.

Men who feel this responsibility directly, by the impact of compassion, are usually the ones who create new forms of public service. Buddha and Jesus are types of the wandering religious teacher who goes from town to town, offering instruction and rooting ethical and moral ideas in the community traditions. Gandhi and Vinoba are modern examples of men who were drawn to similar missionary enterprise. Andrew Carnegie, to go to another extreme, believed that the special mission of the man of wealth was to administer his resources for the common good, and he called this task "the problem of our age." The modern industrialist will establish a non-profit foundation with a charter which directs how its funds are to be used, and the small businessman will join one of the service clubs—Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions, etc.—and participate in one or more of its service programs.

Another category of work for the general good includes the genesis of revolutionary ideas. Here we recall the labors undertaken by the Founding Fathers of the American Republic—the formulation of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the writings of Thomas Paine, the *Federalist Papers*, and all the activities of men who were moved by the liberating conceptions of

eighteenth-century philosophy. The revolutionary movements of the nineteenth century were, as we say, more "extreme," and since their theoretical content and historical consequences constitute the major issues of the "cold war," there can hardly be a comfortable acceptance of their aims and objectives as in the public good; but what can be said is that they originated in passions which mixed devotion to mankind with a terrible indignation at injustice and oppression. It is almost unquestionably the case that the chief obstacle to world peace at the present time lies in the refusal of the Western, "democratic" peoples to understand the motives and the provocations of the still-continuing revolutionary movement of the nineteenth century. There is as much importance in reading Marx, Bakunin, Proudhon, and Lenin, as there is in comprehending the principles of democratic self-government. We ought to find out, that is, what these men *thought* they were doing, and with what intelligence they constructed their theories, instead of merely declaring angrily that they were *wrong*. We ought to acquaint ourselves with the ideals of every voice that has cried out for justice, whatever we think of the means they adopted. If we find it difficult to believe the claims of some of those who today insist that they want to help the world, it is quite possible that the motives behind the release of the atom bomb over Hiroshima are obscure to them. The need for understanding the motives of others is always an imperative need.

There are four general types of activity through which men try to help the world, or their fellows: the religious, the political, the philanthropic, and the educational. In established societies, these types of activity are represented by easily identifiable institutions. We have churches and religious denominations, political parties and political propaganda groups, charitable

organizations and foundations, and a great variety of schools, colleges and universities. The people who use these conventional channels as means for expressing their sense of obligation to others make their alliances by personal inclination and according to their feeling of what is important. Of course, the character of conventional institutions is largely established by the attitude of acceptance of the past, so that there is less original thinking among these people than you would expect to find among those who are dissatisfied with the opportunities afforded by these institutions. But, on the other hand, a certain "safety" comes from working in established institutions. There is the feeling that what has been tested by the past is good to follow, if one is to avoid making serious mistakes. Further, the desire for social approval is bound to play a larger part in the motives of those who work in conventional channels, than it will in those who strike out in new directions. Obviously, today's institutions for doing good, for serving others, are conventionalized versions of yesterday's "radical" or pioneering efforts, so that the measure of the safety achieved by working through conventional channels may also be indicative of the distance by which those channels miss the areas of immediate human need. This does not always follow, but it is certainly a likely result. History is largely the story of how men invent new institutions to serve their needs, and of the obstacles they encounter in resistance to change.

It should be added, however, that, during comparatively stable periods of history, the prevailing institutions do transmit the flow of constructive energies of many men to good effect, and that often the men who work with such institutions have a sagacious understanding of their practical limitations. Yet it is characteristic of all institutions that with the passage of time they tend to grow rigid and mechanical in the exercise of their functions; that the years often endow them with a sovereignty that was no part of the conception of their founders; and that men whose chief interest is personal security habitually

attach themselves to pretentious institutions as a means of reassuring themselves of their own righteousness, rather than from an honest desire to be of use to other men.

From such analysis we soon see the utter meaninglessness of all big generalizations concerning the value to mankind of established institutions. To speak of institutions in an unqualified way is like speaking of the value of technology without distinguishing between the technology of war and the technology of peace. "The whole history of civilization," Walter Bagehot said, "is strewn with creeds and institutions which were invaluable at first, and deadly afterwards." If, then, we are to profit from history, we should make no assumptions as to the goodness of established institutions, but look at them closely before deciding about their influence and value.

Before deciding to undertake political activity, for example, a man should read, say, Plato, Proudhon, Dwight Macdonald, and Jayaprakash Narayan. Plato, for the foundations of Western political thinking; Proudhon for criticism of the political institution itself; Dwight Macdonald for brilliant exposure of the differences between political profession and practice in the twentieth century; and Narayan for a fearless study of the breakdown and failure of the methods of parliamentary democracy.

One might decide, for example, that there were much sounder reasons for working in politics in 1776 than there are in 1960. What are the issues in such a decision? To discuss this question you have at least to bring up the question of what is the fundamental good of man, and then get some idea of the relation of politics to that good.

But here, obviously, is practically a lifetime project. When you speak of the fundamental good of man, you raise ultimate philosophical questions. Looking, then, at politics, you find that, basically, there are two kinds of political systems: One in which the fundamental good of man is presumed to be known, and another in

which it is admitted to be unknown. In last week's review, Everett Knight was quoted as saying, "Progress in man's treatment of man appears to be very closely associated with the slow break-down of all positive identifications of the nature of the universe." What does this mean? It means that when men believe that they have the last word on what human beings (as portions of "the universe") are, and therefore the last word on what they should want and have for their own good, then these believers feel wholly justified in establishing a political system which gives them absolute authority to do whatever is necessary to bring that good into being.

The other kind of political system, the one which admits the ultimate good of man to be unknown, restricts its own authority to lesser matters—or, in political terms, you could say that this system asserts that the highest political good for man lies in the assurance that his *ultimate* good will be left undefined by any political or otherwise coercive authority.

The practical instrument for this assurance in the American Constitution is the Bill of Rights.

What is the guarantee that this admission of ignorance concerning the ultimate good of man will be honestly and continuously maintained? What the man contemplating politics as an avenue for helping the world has to consider is the fact that there is no *political* guarantee that this admission of ignorance will continue.

The stipulation of this ignorance is not a political proposition. It is a philosophical proposition having to do with the question of knowledge—what we know and what we don't know about ourselves. The stipulation of this ignorance in a constitution—which is identical with the stipulation that thought must be free—is an open acknowledgement that politics has no solution for this ignorance, that it accepts the fact of this ignorance as a philosophical judgment which rules and delimits all forms of political judgment.

All philosophic truth in politics is made of left-handed admissions of this ignorance. That is the reason for the traditional separation of Church and State in a free society. The State admits its ignorance, but, in most cases, the Church does not, so that a union of Church and State would abolish the political stipulation which guarantees freedom of thought and thus put an end to the free society.

Where, then, lies the guarantee of the admission of ignorance as to the ultimate good of man, in a democratic or free society? It lies in the *conviction* of the people that the admission is vital to their freedom, and that their freedom is vital to their ultimate good, whatever it may be. This conviction is a trans-political force which originates in what we may call the religious and philosophical intuitions of human beings. When that conviction is fresh and strong, politics is founded upon respect for it; but when it grows weak and finds expression merely as a conventional sentiment, its emotional space in human nature is invaded by other beliefs about the good of man, until it no longer has any effective voice in public affairs.

Something like this has been happening in the United States for at least a generation. The decline of freedom in this country is not due solely to the "national emergencies" which have precipitated the passage of encroaching legislation; our freedom has diminished because conviction about its importance has diminished, or because we have come to care about other things more. The value which was once attached to freedom of thought has been very largely transferred, in the popular mind, to "freedom of enterprise," as though the two were moral equivalents, if not actually the same thing. Now commercial enterprise of the sort which characterizes the American scene is a method of producing the goods and services which people need in their physical lives, and if the volume of American productivity is any indication, the method is probably a pretty good one; but to load

this system of economic production and distribution with moral responsibility for the highest good in human life is to make it bear a burden far beyond its capacities. A further disaster resulting directly from this identification is that it tends to make the nonpolitical institutions of the society subservient to the dominant politico-economic dogma, a process which cannot help but corrupt them. The issue is not at all a need to ween anyone of his admiration of the free enterprise system—which, after all, is no more than an accommodation of human energies to a certain stage of the technological revolution—but an issue of basic intelligence in the meeting of human problems. No political system, free or otherwise, can survive a long cycle of blindly stubborn identification of economics, politics, philosophy, and religion, in one great dogmatic stream of intellectual and moral confusion.

How does it happen that so many people of the modern world have been willing to submit to this identification? Leaving aside the influence of the propagandists and the spokesmen for the Power Elite (after all, propagandists must find and exploit a weakness before they can misdirect a strength), the chief cause of this submission must lie in the apparent lack of an alternative. The single individual, who is the only one who can think of freedom, exercise freedom, or lose his freedom, stands in our society confronted by the enormously impressive structures erected by collective human energies. We go about trying or hoping to be whole men, but we live in a world dominated by the creations of *partial* men—that is, men as laborers, as tradesmen, merchandisers, engineers, technicians, manufacturers, men as all the separate functions which modern industrialism and the division of labor—have spread around the world. Add all these creations up, regard them in the complicated systems into which they have grown, and you seem to have a superstructure of "reality" as overwhelming in its invading presence as the jungle must be to the primitive tribes who live in its shadows. This superstructure of material arrangements and custom imposed by

industrial and economic patterns is changing all the time, of course, and continually altering our lives, but these changes seem to have no relation to our own actions; they *happen* to us, and they always bring unexpected consequences to which we must adapt. Ten or fifteen years later, the sociologists may give us a few new words to describe what has happened, and being able to talk about it glibly is perhaps some relief, but while the changes are occurring we simply submit. Generally speaking, nobody plans these changes in the sense that they are changes instituted *for us*. Somebody—or some board of directors—decides to build a new plant in the South, and after a generation or so that part of the South has an entire new set of *mores*. Another board of directors decides to build twenty thousand tract houses on some barren acres in a middle-western state, and pretty soon you have a big city teeming with babies in a practically traditionless culture, all growing up in one another's front yards, kitchens and living rooms, improvising a way of life from the directives of Henry Luce and the women's magazines. The developer puts in churches and markets and bowling alleys on a careful statistical basis, allotting the institutions which everybody knows the people "need," and when the time comes there'll be a place for draft boards and that sort of thing, perhaps even subterranean nuclear bomb shelters—all, all is provided for.

And of course, it isn't "all wrong." Everybody seems quite conscientious, trying to do things right. After a while the builders and architects will be calling in the psychiatrists and the cultural anthropologists to get the latest word on the Happy Person and the Well-Adjusted Society, until the only thing missing is the voice of Big Brother; and maybe, if we try, we can get that too.

It is hard to put your finger on any single thing that is really wrong. All you can say, finally, is that the persons are not happy; that the society is seriously and methodically getting ready to fight the last and greatest of all wars, like a drunk

solemnly drawing himself to his full height before he collapses in the gutter; and that nobody seems to think that there is any other way to live or anything better to do.

What are the prospects of a change? The only hope, so far as we can see, is that the instinct for moral survival will produce in individuals a fresh wave of intuitions of the importance of human freedom. There is practically no hope of a change from the institutions which are normally expected to help the world along. These institutions—Church, Government, Philanthropy, and Education—have so blended together in their outlook that they are practically interdependent, becoming a uniform facade, all repeating the same tired verities, all as fearful of deviations as an American Communist party cell, which is worse, we understand, than it is in Moscow. If anything like a fresh wave of intuition should occur, it would undoubtedly produce action of the same sort that it has produced in the past. That is, we should see springing up in various parts of the country and the world new efforts in behalf of the good of man—efforts which ignore and neglect the old institutions. We should see new conceptions of religion finding expression independent of the churches, new forms of the regulation of socio-economic relations, independent of government, new ways in which people help one another, disregarding the familiar "Community Chest" sort of charities, and, most important of all, lots of experiments in education.

No doubt these efforts—should they emerge, and there are some in evidence already—will eventually take the form of new institutions and will, in time, submit to the same rigidities and substitutions of authority for function that rendered the old institutions so useless, today, but there will be this difference: the new institutions which come into being will be shaped by men who are fully aware of the built-in weaknesses of all institutions, and who understand, also, what Emerson meant when he said: "An institution is the lengthened shadow of one man." They will

have reason to guard against taking the shadow for the man. They will know that the shadow, whenever it becomes larger than the man, envelopes and destroys him.

The problem of action in behalf of the world is a problem, first, of the determination of human need, and then of relating action to that need. The importance of freedom of thought lies in the practical impossibility of determining true human need under any condition except that of freedom. And since no man is wise enough to have the right to take away human freedom as the means to satisfy human need, the criticism of action in behalf of the world, to have any value, must always be criticism of *how* a thing is done, rather than of what is done. Practically anything may be the right thing to do, under appropriate circumstances, but there is no right in anything that cannot be done without taking away human freedom.

If this be a principle of helping or doing good in the world, then there are obvious implications to be drawn. The good that will be done in the future will be done without compulsion. This means that it will be begun by individuals. After an idea finds friends and supporters, it may gain the voluntary support of large numbers of people, and then the benefits and large-scale work which organization makes possible will follow. But at the beginning, the action will have to be free—scaled, that is, to the capacities, resources, and potentialities of individual human beings. By action begun in this way, we shall soon be able to separate the good from the bad among existing institutions. What will be the test? Their responsiveness and adaptability to an inspiration for good on the part of individual human beings.

REVIEW

MEN OF SOUTHERN MOMENT

A RECENT speech by Lillian Smith, adapted for a September *Progressive* article under the title, "The South's Moment of Truth," renews emphasis on the psychological importance of nonviolent "sit-in" techniques for opposing segregation. As the editors of the *Progressive* point out, the sit-in "has exerted so great an impact on American life that it was the subject of bitter debate and platform pledges at both the Democratic and Republican national conventions this summer."

Negro students who quietly bring their books to sit in segregated lunch rooms until they are served seem to be consistently aware of the fact that their efforts and sacrifices are not only in behalf of the Negro population of southern states, but also serve the ideal of a more universal brotherhood. It is this dimension in thought among Negro nonviolent resisters which deepens the appeal of the demonstrations for a number of white southern students, often leading them to take part. Lillian Smith herself obviously feels that this sort of psychological break-through may wear away segregation attitudes in the near future. A Southerner herself, as well as a sympathizer with Negro problems, she writes:

I believe the movement *can succeed* if enough of us have the imagination to see its significance and its creative possibilities and to interpret these to others who do not see—and if we give the students the moral support and the money they are going to need. There is a tremendous power in the nonviolent protest that the sensitive Southern conscience and heart will find hard to resist, but even so, the students may have to struggle a long time. They will need friends during their ordeal. Americans in other sections can help them and should, for this not only concerns the South, it concerns the entire nation and the nation's relationships with the rest of the world. It also concerns each person's relationship with himself and his beliefs.

But there are some things that only the South can do. Things that only good, responsible, decent Southerners can accomplish. Only they can create a new climate of opinion in which mob violence and

the hoodlums and the police and the white Citizens Councils can be controlled; and they can do this only by breaking this silence and speaking out. To speak out for law and order is not enough, today; there is a higher law which we Southerners must take a stand on, a law that concerns justice and mercy and compassion and freedom of the spirit and mind. Thousands of us must also speak out against segregation as a way of life; not simply racial segregation but every form of estrangement that splits man and his world into fragments. The time has come when we must face the fact that only by speaking out our real beliefs, and then acting on them, can we avoid a bitter time of hate and violence and suffering.

This view of the role of white Southerners recalls some paragraphs in *The Violators*, a novel by Francis Irby Gwaltney. It is a story of a Southerner who outgrew the traditions in which he was reared, and as a very successful business man, stubbornly endangers his position in defense of Negro rights. A lifelong acquaintance, a Negro, becomes an organizer of protest action, and somewhere along the line comes to distrust for a time the motives of his white friend. But as the story evolves, it becomes clear that a white man acting on principle may accomplish more than a Negro proceeding on the basis of understandably partisan emotion. The passage we have in mind is a talk by the Negro, looking back on what happened, and a tribute to the white man's integrity. This talk fits well with Lillian Smith's actual speech. The scene of the story is in Arkansas, and "Leo" is a Negro pastor:

In early October, 1957, immediately following the riots at Little Rock, Leo was invited to speak before the Society of Midwestern Journalists (Chicago). Those who knew him and of the broken friendship with Tom Williams, were surprised by both the title and the subject of his talk. The talk he called "The Man of the Moment in the New South."

"Ladies and gentlemen, the color of my skin makes me an authority on the subject upon which I am going to speak. The only surprising thing about this talk will be, in turn, the color of the skin of the man about whom I will talk. The man of the moment in the New South is not a Negro. He will probably admire Martin Luther King and Thurgood Marshall, but he is not of their race. He is white.

"He is somewhere between twenty-five and forty years old. He was born in poverty and he grew to young manhood in the time of the Depression.

"Nobody knows why he became the man he is today. I doubt that he even knows himself. Or even cares. Some strange alchemy of history made him a man of courage and stubborn integrity and because history made him that, he could be nothing else. Aristotle defined this hero, and such a definition became, in the late middle ages, a thing of western civilization, but this hero became, on May 17, 1954, something more than that: he became a man of substance. History overtook him that day and presented him with a necessity.

"He met the test of that necessity. Sometimes he was angry when diplomacy would have served him better. Sometimes he was sentimental when intellect would have been the easier way. Once he was violent when violence was entirely wrong. In short, he made a million mistakes. But he was no fumbler.

"His courage, like that of a good watchdog, remains. He has been branded a communist by one of the local veteran groups. He has been called a personification of the anti-Christ by one of the churches. He has been called a whore-monger.

"Nothing has stopped him. He has become a man of success, because there must be some cauldron into which he can pour his massive energy. He is stubborn, glum, often rude and something of a recluse, not the kind of man a white hostess would invite to a party which needs life. But he has not swerved.

"And there is your question: how many of his kind exist in the South? I don't know. In varying degrees, his kind are present. Only such incidents as the ones in Gray's Landing, Hoxie, Fort Smith, Van Buren, Fayetteville and Charleston can decide."

Our basic political, educational and religious views are very much affected by "how many of his kind" we believe exist anywhere. Unless one regards the number as capable of growing, as potentially illimitable, the tendency is to be pessimistic religiously and cynical politically. Of course, when you adopt extreme optimism, there is the task of proving that you are right. But this is where the optimist always comes out ahead of the pessimist. The optimist has work to do that will fill his life with constructive activity, and his

"failures" can be no worse than the failures of the best of men.

COMMENTARY
CONCERNING "SYSTEMATIC"
THINKING

THE familiar forms of systematic thinking include theologies, metaphysics, and ideologies. Not many people give attention, these days, to theology and metaphysics, and there is probably not much *serious* attention to ideologies, but there is a great deal of talk about ideologies. It would be foolish to say ideological issues are not important. A man's serious interest in ideology represents his effort to share in a political life which is ordered by principle.

But even here there seems to be a common mistake—the assumption that all human problems will somehow be resolved by adopting or evolving the correct ideology. Few people, of course, will admit that they share this assumption but when you look up the magazines and books which are supposed to contain the serious thinking of the time, you find mostly sagacious discussion of ideological issues.

There is a sense in which going at contemporary problems in this way is going at them backwards. What is a political order? It is a contractual arrangement made by a lot of people to enable them to do the things they want to do. It is a *practical* instrument. A lot of the political and ideological argument you hear, these days, is like an argument between two men about which is the best piano, when neither of them have any intention of ever learning to play anything more complicated than *Chopsticks*.

They don't really want Freedom. They want to be known as people who know how to *secure* it.

There is only one way to get freedom, and that is to start in doing the things which require it—which demonstrate its importance.

We know of a man who was once an alcoholic. By a kind of fortunate accident, he found he had the ability to put together an

environment which helped heroin addicts to overcome their habit. That is, in the environment he and some other people put together, *some* former heroin addicts have managed without the drug for a year, eighteen months, and in a few cases for two years. (This effort is about two years old.)

In the course of the ups-and-downs of this venture, its founders encountered various sorts of obstacles and opposition. They encountered trouble with local city government, with the police, and with state government.

They didn't just encounter the eternal types of bureaucratic administration. They encountered the law as applied to the social community by people who had never in their lives come across a venture of this sort. How can you blame the bureaucrats for their difficulty in understanding a place where some fifty (former) heroin addicts were gathered, living together, most of them with police records? How often do you find something like this going on?

Here was a use of freedom so extraordinary, so imaginative, that ordinary politicians, policemen, and probation department officials couldn't believe it was really happening. (Some learned to, of course.)

Like the teacher who dared to show some children Camus' *The Stranger* (see "Children . . . and Ourselves"), or like the nursery school teacher (see last week's "Children" article) who dared to help five-year-olds to learn the alphabet and taught them ways of playing besides hugging "cuddly dolls," both of whom were made to stop their work by some local authority, the managers and the participants in the Synanon enterprise (see MANAS for Sept. 14) have been variously threatened by official displeasures and legal action calculated to put an end to their work. At this writing, however, they are still going strong.

There's nothing wrong with the political system under which these incredibly stupid frustrations are imposed upon people who happen

to be *using* their freedom. The trouble is that *not enough people* are using it, so that the system closes in—as any system would—to take up the slack.

The system will always make room for people with imagination who insist upon using their freedom, when there are enough of them. You don't need a political party for this sort of guarantee of freedom. A political party is the last thing you want as a way of helping to free a population smothered by its own mediocrity. A political party *lives* on mediocrity.

What you need is action which stretches out after high human ends in every direction, without seeking or waiting for political sanctions. With a lot of this kind of action, you can almost leave politics to take care of itself.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

NOTES

ONCE in a while the style of *Time* magazine (sometimes to be legitimately confused with *Dragnet*) is welcomely effective. Setting the stage for discussion of the perennial problems encountered by young teachers with initiative who teach in mentally cramped surroundings, *Time* (Sept. 12) comes up with the following paragraphs:

Pointing a finger at Schoolteacher Franklin Olson, 23, the justice of the peace intoned: "Young man, your crime is as serious as if you had given them marijuana cigarettes." Olson's crime: assigning five schoolboys in Thompson, Mich., to read *The Stranger*, by France's late Nobel-prizewinning Novelist Albert Camus. Olson's sentence: a \$100 fine and 90 days in the county jail.

Teacher Olson first read the sharp novel, one of the landmarks (1942) of existentialist fiction, when a woman professor gave it to him at Augustana College in Rock Island, Ill. A slow reader, he was impressed by the book's "contemporary relevance" and also by its short, swift sentences. In one gulp, he downed "this story of man trying to tell the truth," and it stuck with him when he went home from college last year to Michigan's Upper Peninsula. There he applied for a teaching job in the hamlet of Thompson (pop. 296), which has an odd hiring system—teacher candidates are asked to submit salary bids. Olson bid \$3,790, and wound up with Thompson's fifth, sixth and seventh grades.

Last spring Olson submitted a new bid for this year of \$4,100, and his contract was not renewed. But long before this error, Olson had made another. When five average-bright boys in his room shunned all reading, Olson remembered *The Stranger's* powers. To get them interested in reading, he gave the lads paperback editions of the book, assigned the first chapter. In short order, one 13-year-old's mother discovered "obscene" passages. She called another mother, who called the school board, which called the state police, who arrested Olson. In his nearby home town of Escanaba the *Press* headlined the story: TEACHER FURNISHES LEWD BOOKS TO CHILDREN.

Mr. Olson was eventually vindicated by a circuit judge who threw out the conviction—although not before the teacher had spent twelve days in jail without being told that he could be released on bail for \$300. In the meantime, his home had been searched by the state police without a warrant. Several books were removed and destroyed, among them *Crime and Punishment* and what *Time* calls "a lively treatise on numbers by Physicist George Gamow."

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Reference to Camus recalls some of that writer's statements on capital punishment, which first appeared in a 1957 *Evergreen Review*. Let us read some of the words of this "corrupter of youth"—a man who had the audacity to assert that the worst sort of corruption already exists in the form of widely accepted attitudes toward punishment:

The death penalty, as it is imposed, even as rarely as it is imposed, is disgusting butchery, an outrage inflicted on the spirit and body of man. . . . I stand as far as possible from that position of spineless pity in which our humanitarians take such pride, in which values and responsibilities change places, all crimes become equal, and innocence ultimately forfeits all rights. I do not believe, contrary to many of my illustrious contemporaries, that man is by nature a social animal; the opposite, I think, is probably nearer the truth. I believe only that man cannot now live outside a society whose laws are necessary to his physical survival, which is a very different thing. I believe that responsibility must be established according to a reasonable and effective scale of values by society itself. But the law finds its final justification in the benefit it provides, or does not provide, the society of a given place and time. For years I have not been able to regard the death penalty as anything but a punishment intolerable to the imagination: a public sin of sloth which my reason utterly condemns. I was nevertheless prepared to believe that my imagination influenced my judgment. But during these weeks of research, I have found nothing which has modified my reasoning, nothing which has not, in all honesty, reinforced my original conviction. On the contrary. I have found new arguments to add to those I already possessed; today I share Arthur Koestler's conclusion without qualification: capital punishment is a disgrace to our

society which its partisans cannot reasonably justify. . . . The death penalty constitutes a loathsome example of which the consequences are unforeseeable.

One naturally wishes for many more teachers like Mr. Olson who would "corrupt" their students by introducing them to writers like Camus. As to the alleged "lurid remarks" in *The Stranger*, Circuit Court Judge George Baldwin commented that they were "minor" compared to many things found in the Bible.

We hope that by this time some school has started making good use of Mr. Olson, who, as of Sept. 12, was unable to find any kind of a job in Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

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Miss Elizabeth Cross, a teacher in England who often writes for the *Bombay Aryan Path*, contributes some useful ideas to the April issue of that publication. Under the heading, "Teachers Needed...Who Are They?", Miss Cross shows how people in every walk of life actually become instructors of the young.

Children she teaches are encouraged to suggest how they might apply ethical counsels, such as found in these four lines from Coleridge:

He prayeth well who loveth well
Both man and bird and beast.
He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small.

Miss Cross writes:

Sooner or later someone from a "polite" home suggests "Give a grown-up your seat on a bus." This is applauded and all agree to do this. Then what happens? The great public takes on its part of the teaching, and many things may happen. First, the ideal citizen is offered a seat, and accepts gratefully and says, "Thank you" with many variations, so that the child is rewarded and made to feel happy. If the ideal citizen is truly ideal he or she can see at a glance whether the child is the sort who will prefer a quiet, intimate "Thank you," so that no one will stare and embarrass him, or whether he (or more possibly a small "she") will like lots and lots of thanks and the whole bus-load of people to notice how good and kind they are! Secondly we get the too common selfish

adult who merely takes the seat as a right and with no courtesy at all, but does at least sink thankfully into it. The child can see his good offer is accepted, although he is disappointed at the ungraciousness. Worst of all, though, we get the sentimental adult, who although obviously needing a seat, refuses it, with a lot of fulsome talk about the dear kiddies being tired too and a shame to take their seat. The poor child, knowing full well his duty to stand, is now quite confused, sinks back overcome with shyness and dare not get up to offer again at the next stop, and may then be judged selfish by new passengers. This may seem a great fuss to be making over a small matter of everyday courtesy. But surely life is made up of very small matters as a haystack is made up of very small pieces of grass, yet coming to something pretty sizeable in the end. Every single person is noticed by some sharp young eyes, every public remark is too often noted by those proverbially long ears. What you say, how you say it, how you walk, how you get into the door of a shop, either rushing rudely or entering gently—sooner or later some child will see and notice and *copy*.

FRONTIERS Revolution in the Arts

A PORTION of Everett Knight's book, *The Objective Society* (Braziller, 1960), left undiscussed in last week's review is concerned with the meaning of modern art. So far as we can make out, Mr. Knight's existentialist position in philosophic thinking represents two rejections and two affirmations. He rejects all metaphysical theories of a "hidden" reality behind appearances, on the ground that those who believe that they have discovered the true reality which, though unseen, is nonetheless real, feel entitled to impose upon the world an external order conformable to that reality, and are thus led to tyrannical manipulation of human beings. The man without a theory of hidden reality is not likely to misuse his fellows in the name of the secret "good" he has come upon through divine revelation or by some other means.

The second rejection is of the doctrine of scientific "objectivity," which has the same historical consequences as the metaphysical theory of a hidden reality. Men who claim to have discovered objective reality through science have put themselves in a position of absolute authority concerning how the world should be run. They *know*. They are "scientific." The Survival of the Fittest is an eternal verity of Darwinian evolution; therefore, *laissez faire* economics is a law of nature which must never be interfered with. Or, the application of Dialectical Materialism to the raw facts of history reveals the inexorable course of natural law in respect to man's social, economic, and political relationships; therefore, the scientific socialism of Karl Marx is an infallible guide to the administration of the laws of Nature. The cultural extension of this knowledge into all phases of human expression is known as Socialist Realism.

Mr. Knight's first affirmation is that the reality in human beings is their subjective intentions. What men see and intend to do is the sum of their

essential being. No one can say more of a man—claim to know more about him, say what he *really* is, or *ought* to be—without being tempted to manipulate him for his own good. The second affirmation is that the *real* world of man is the world that he sees—it is more, of course, but what he sees is the reality in that moment, and a change in perception means a change in reality.

The discussion of art in *The Objective Society* proceeds in the light of these critical and affirmative principles. It is obvious, for example, that Mr. Knight regards modern art as representing the existentialist conception of reality. He explains his view in this way:

There is no "objective" world which Cézanne and his followers perversely flouted. The world of Cézanne is that of Delacroix, and yet it is altogether different—just as the great philosopher thinks new ideas which he has nevertheless inherited. The world is not a substance which we mould to suit our fancy or which the categories of the mind render intelligible, but rather an object of infinite complexity toward which we may adopt various points of view which will be not more or less "true" but more or less rewarding in terms of human well-being. I cannot agree with Malraux that "non-representational art" is a "second creation" quite independent of the first. The vision of the artist is anchored in the real, but the real is not the same for every culture. The wish to "copy nature" appears to me always to have been fundamental in art; all art is representational. What changes is the opinion as to what constitutes nature, or, at least, the proper vantage point from which to represent it. We now view nature as "absurd," not in the sense of meaningless, but in the sense that it can never be fully expressed in a form which we shall not sooner or later find to be inadequate, and it is this nature that cubism "copies." Little importance is to be attached to technical proficiency in art, and there is perhaps no cause to wonder at the admirable drawings that men living fifty thousand years ago left on the walls of their caves. The sculptors of Moissac were not less competent than those of fifth-century Greece; the difference was that they did not see the human being as did the Greeks; they were copying a nature that was totally different.

Mr. Knight is a theorist of *action*, which makes the values he uses in analysis depend upon their relation to action. He divides the men who

think about the world and its order into two classes—"messiahs" and "monks." The messiah is one who, having learned what he thinks are the principles, or some of the principles, of how the world works, sets out to change it according to those principles. The monk is fascinated simply by knowing. He sits and studies, and reports upon "things as they are." According to this analysis, Tolstoi is identified as a messiah:

The messiah's mistrust or even hatred of art which is not didactic with a painful literalness springs from the outrage which a soul oppressed by a sense of moral urgency feels upon contact with the amoral supra-human timelessness characteristic of the best representational art. Tolstoi's attempt at a complete reevaluation of western art is typical of the messiah's reaction to an art which, with the possible exception of the Greek, was the first to aim quite consciously at the production of beautiful objects, objects divorced from immediate sacred utility and whose chief value resides in the expression of a nameless, and in this sense a *hidden*, eternal Order which we may contemplate but not approach. This is the art of the monk which, despite the advent of cubism (not to mention the transformation of poetry and music which help to confirm the impression that a fundamental change is taking place), many of us persist in regarding as "true" art.

It needs to be added, however, that Tolstoi was himself a great artist who revealed in his art the never-relaxed tension in his own thought between immediate appearance and the possible "inner meaning" of the world. He would never permit either theory or fact to ride rough-shod over the other, but maintained a balance of the two, the one supplying his ardor for understanding, the other the wonderful and mysterious panorama of experience, with all its puzzling diversity, its sharp corners and rough edges.

In Tolstoi, perhaps, we have an example of a man who was both messiah and monk, participating in the virtues of both, and doing his best to avoid their excesses. Actually, it is doubtful if any man can for long preserve the naked agnosticism of the existentialist concerning the absurdity of the world, or sterilize his mind

against all theories of "inner meaning." The issue is not so much to preserve this existentialist purity as it is a matter of what a man's theories about the inner meaning of the world lead him to do.

Meanwhile, the sharp, clean distinctions made by Mr. Knight are extremely valuable for examining and understanding post-Renaissance views of the world. Writing of modern art, with Cézanne and George Braque as examples, he says:

Braque, like Cézanne, strikes us as a man making use of his art to record the results of an infinitely painstaking and lifelong investigation of the things around him. Braque used to carry his paintings with him into the country: ". . . to introduce them to things," he says, "to see whether they [the paintings] would stand up to it." Another remark: "If I put a piece of white paper on this blotter, I see it before the blotter. I see it in relief. I worked on that." If we take refuge in formal values, in talking of Braque, it is to avoid the unclean contact of the "subjective." If Braque is copying nature, we say, then it is far too subjective a one to be worth our attention. But this is a mistake. Vision is a habit. We see only what we look for, what we consider we "should see," what our education has taught us to see. We are taught to see a given aspect of reality just as we are taught to speak a given language; but there are other aspects, as there are other languages. People who work in noisy factories soon grow unconscious of the noise; but the noise is still there, just as the world of Braque, whether or not we are conscious of it. The scientific view of the world has led us to believe in a *single* objective reality, with our perception being not a passive absorption, but an act of discrimination calculated to reveal to us the world as it "really is." We may therefore define "scientific perception" as one in which the judgment intervenes to "correct" what is seen. A painter called upon to reproduce the image of a straight stick thrust into water will show the stick as it *appears* to be—as bent; and yet the same painter will depict a landscape as it "really is." From my window I can see a stretch of lawn in the distance, it appears to be a green wall, I can also see a tower and the cloud appears to be pressing upon it from all sides. Why should I not paint the lawn as a wall and the tower as jutting into some white fluffy solid? If the intellect is not allowed to interfere in the case of the stick, on what grounds is it allowed to do so in the case of the lawn? It will be said that if we go to the lawn we shall be able to walk across it and shall not have to climb over it; and climbing the wall

will not enable us to touch the clouds. But the artist is required to paint what he sees, not what he knows. In *Etruscan Palaces*, Lawrence speaks of this subtle interference of knowledge with vision: "For a man who sees, sees not as a camera does when he takes a snapshot, not even as a cinema camera taking its succession of instantaneous snaps, but in a curious flood of rolling vision, in which the image itself seethes and rolls; and only the mind *picks out* certain factors which *shall* represent the image seen." Modern art is quite simply an attempt to present the image itself unprocessed by the mind. We may therefore assert unhesitatingly that, in copying nature, modern art is more rigorous than the classical. The "otherworldliness" . . . characteristic of traditional art arises from the fact that the artist paints not what he sees but an ideal, objective, and to some extent non-existent world that is the *same* no matter from what angle it is viewed. The artist "corrects" what he sees so that the finished work is less a copy than a construction.

The modern artist pleases Mr. Knight because he is no metaphysician seeking to reveal a "hidden essence" which he does not see, but one who paints the actual appearance of things, which is the "real" object. By this means, the artist puts an end to fixed identities and final definitions of "objective" reality. Knight regards the emergence of modern art as representing "a cultural reorientation no less important than that which brought scholasticism to an end." His philosophic justification for asserting that the appearance is the real is of course arguable; what is of interest is his tracing of the causes which led to this great change, and how he connects it with existential thought. It seems unlikely that even modern man will be able to do without metaphysics for long; the enduring value of the existentialist revolt against old doctrines of "reality" may very well be in the vitality of its opposition to *bad* or dogmatic metaphysics.