

ONE WORLD—BUT HOW?

[Dr. Alexander F. Skutch is a practical idealist whose contributions are always thought-provoking. In this article he answers the question he raises — "One World — But How?" — by showing that the most powerful unifying force is that of our ideals, and he submits as the most likely to unite our world that of the preservation of the beauty and the fruitfulness of the earth. Let man become "the lord and not the tyrant of the earth." We agree, for such an ideal flows from the recognition of the oneness and sacredness of all life. If practised it would indeed restore harmony between man's spirit and the Universal Spirit, and our earth and everything pertaining to it would then enjoy a fertile period. — Ed.]

TODAY we hear on every hand that this has become "One World," unified in many ways as never before. By some, the growing integration of the world, the increasing dependence of each part on every other part, is welcomed with rejoicing and hope; for others, it raises doubts and misgivings. That the increasing unification of all the peoples on this planet is good and desirable has been too uncritically accepted in many quarters; there are certainly things to be said for the opposite point of view. The question needs more careful analysis and cooler appraisal than it receives.

In what senses has, or can, the world become one? First and most obviously, it has become spatially and temporally unified to a high degree. Modern advances in transportation and communication are the practical equivalent of the shrinkage of the planet's diameter, the levelling of its mountain ranges, the filling of its oceans. This is certainly no unmixed blessing. Although the farthest country is now easily accessible to anyone who can afford an aeroplane ticket, the romance of travel is disappearing along with its difficulties and hardships. Wherever one goes, the airports, the hotels, the streets and the customs are becoming so similar to those at home that the instructive differences of far places are being lost. And, if rapid transportation can bring prompt relief to the sick and the distressed in remote areas, it also carries the diseases of men, animals and plants swiftly over the earth. Nor is life made more pleasant by the assurance that, before we know what is happening, we can be annihilated by a powerful country in another continent. Nearly everywhere men are burdened with heavy taxes to support huge armaments whose effectiveness in shielding them from such destruction is questionable.

From the point of view of communications, the world has become as small as it can be; since a radio message reaches the antipodes almost instantaneously, no further reduction is possible. But to be assailed daily,

and hourly if one will submit to it, with messages, in large measure unpleasant and disquieting, from every part of the earth, is a very doubtful advantage. On the other hand, when the horse and the sailing vessel were man's most rapid means of transport, valuable spiritual and practical insights, which always travel more slowly than disturbing news, none the less made their way over great distances. Even the mighty range of the Himalayas and the vast deserts of central Asia did not prevent a fruitful interchange of ideas between India and China, although until quite recently they precluded a massive invasion of one of these countries by the other. From many points of view, this is the ideal situation: a degree of isolation which prevents neighbouring communities or countries from fighting or becoming economically dependent on each other, but does not stop the interchange of their finest insights.

Secondly, the world is becoming economically ever more unified. Countries which not long ago were almost self-sufficient now depend increasingly on selling and buying abroad. This, too, is no unmitigated advantage. If it enables many people to acquire goods hitherto unavailable, it also makes their situation more precarious. If new centres of production grow up in distant lands, the price of a commodity may suddenly drop to the point where it can no longer be marketed profitably, to the great distress of those whose economy is based upon it. International trade makes of every country the potential rival of every other; when a nation engages heavily in it, its prosperity depends, not mainly on the intelligence and industry of its people and the natural wealth of its territory, but on factors beyond its control. Ideally, every country and indeed every community should be economically independent, able to produce what it needs to support its life. To receive luxuries from afar is pleasant; to be dependent on distant regions for vital necessities is perilous and disquieting.

Moreover, one of the most dangerous fallacies of our time is that there is a single economic system, such as that which has grown up in Western Europe and North America, which the whole world may with advantage adopt. It is probable that economic arrangements which are satisfactory in one country are ill suited to another whose people differ in temperament and habits and live in a different environment. And one who contemplates the manifold evils and unsolved problems which confront the dominant socio-economic systems of the present day will not, if he loves his fellow men, advocate their unlimited extension.

Thirdly, there is the political unification of the world, of which the United Nations Organization is an early step in a movement which may go much farther. A world government strong enough to keep peace among

all nations would be a blessing to mankind. On the other hand, this powerful central authority would be a potential threat to the liberties of all mankind. If, as is certainly not impossible, selfish or fanatical men seize control of the world government, it will require more than a Junius Brutus to overthrow the tyranny.

If an effective world government is established, it should be regarded as a temporary arrangement which, if it can preserve peace for a few generations until nations abolish their armaments and lose the habit of settling differences by force, should thereafter be dissolved. Meanwhile, it must be watched with the utmost vigilance by all men everywhere, lest it usurp powers which it was never intended to have and install itself too firmly ever to be dislodged. A world government is too far from the individual and his immediate community to be responsive to his wishes and needs; to have our government close to us increases our feeling of freedom and responsibility. There is much wisdom in Leopold Kohr's contention, in *The Breakdown of Nations*, that the larger countries could with advantage be divided into smaller, more manageable units, whose smaller problems would be within the grasp of human intelligence. At the same time, many of the problems confronting mankind require action on a more than national scale; but these matters should be controlled by regional or global organizations established for specific purposes and with strictly limited authority.

Fourthly, the world is becoming one in the sense that we increasingly view men of all races and colours as our brothers and equals. This attitude is far from new; it is as old as Stoicism in the West and a good deal older in the East. But modern historical and ethnological studies have placed it on a more solid empirical foundation and done much to dispel the ancient, pertinacious idea that some divisions of mankind are intrinsically superior to the rest, in the sense of being more highly endowed with intelligence, virtue, or strength, or chosen by God for a special mission. The contemplation of the sameness of all men, in origin, nature and destiny, inspires certain people with a sort of mystic exaltation; its growing recognition seems to them the most promising development in the modern world.

In some aspects, the uniformity of mankind has been exaggerated. One might, for example, contest the view that all human races belong to a single biological species. The reason why they are so classified is that all contemporary races of man freely interbreed, producing fertile progeny. But in other divisions of the animal kingdom—birds and insects, for example—individuals which differ from each other far less than Europeans and Amerindians, or Mongolians and Negroes, are placed in different species.

Some of these related species are so similar in appearance that only experts can distinguish them, yet they scarcely ever interbreed even when they mingle in the same area. The difference between birds and men, for example, is that the former have, as a rule, very strict, innately determined mating standards, while human standards are extremely flexible. Although it is probable that all mammals, and indeed all vertebrates, are descended from a single, extremely remote, ancestor, it is by no means certain that different branches of mankind are not derived from distinct, although obviously related, species of Primates; so that *Homo Sapiens* is what biologists know as a polyphyletic group.

Although to the biologist this is a problem of great interest, it lacks moral or political importance. What matters is not the stage in evolution at which another creature's ancestors began to diverge from my own, but the relations that actually exist between us. Our true brothers are those with whom we can dwell in sympathy and harmony, whether they be white or black, walk on two feet or four, or even fly through the air. It is far easier to feel brotherly toward many animals than toward men whose character and conduct are repugnant to us. From this point of view, mankind is still far from being one.

The spatio-temporal, economic and political unifications of the world, so far as they have been achieved, have already brought grave disadvantages no less than benefits; and we cannot view their increase, in the form it now takes, without disquieting thoughts. The brotherhood of all mankind, in the strict biological sense of derivation from a single sub-human ancestor, is probably a myth, and in the spiritual sense it is an aspiration far more than an accomplished fact. Is there, then, no method of bringing mankind together in a unity that will be solid, enduring and beneficent?

The most powerful unifying force that we know is our ideals. Shared ideals draw men together in closest brotherhood, despite differences in age, wealth, race, colour or language. Clashing ideals split men asunder, making enemies of brothers and strangers of neighbours. This is understandable, for our ideals are our highest and most precious possessions, the forerunners of the nobler men that we aspire to become. Without ideals, our vaunted reason hardly raises us above the other animals. They are our compensation for those beautifully integrated patterns of behaviour which they inherit and we have lost.

What ideals are sufficiently high and comprehensive to bind all men together in community of spirit and endeavour? The first that is likely to occur to us is that of universal peace. But this ideal seems to lack force; for men have yearned for peace since ancient times, yet they now make

vaster preparations for war than in any earlier epoch. Apparently the reason why the ideal of peace lacks the power to effect its own realization is that peace, in the political although not in the inner spiritual sense, is essentially a negative concept: the absence of armed strife among nations. Peace is not a positive good so much as relief from a great evil. Perhaps we should regard peace, not as a creative ideal, but as the condition necessary for the realization of our truly constructive ideals, whose nature we must now consider.

An ideal that has been growing of late is that all men everywhere should enjoy a high standard of living, by which is meant enough of the necessities of life, with a liberal margin of its luxuries. To wish others to enjoy the benefits that we have or desire is laudable; but an increase in material comforts does not automatically elevate one's spiritual tone, and in some instances it has just the opposite effect. Until we achieve closer correlation between improvement in the physical conditions of life and growth in spiritual and moral qualities, the ideal of a high standard of living for all men may appear thin and cold to the true idealist. Moreover, under the present economic system, the means for improving standards are obtained largely through competition between individuals and nations. Could we pool the world's resources and then divide them equally among all men, to achieve the high standard of living might become a true unifying endeavour; but this is obviously impracticable. Only in small, homogeneous, archaic communities did the welfare of all the individuals rise and fall together. A money economy seems to make this common sharing of benefits impossible, and the so-called communistic countries have not yet shown us how to overcome the difficulty.

Another ideal that has been gaining ground is that every boy and girl should have all the education that his innate capacity prepares him to receive. If we use the word "education" in its original sense of drawing forth and developing the excellent qualities that are latent within us, this is a worthy goal. If, on the contrary, we understand by "education" merely a technical or literary training which frequently makes the recipient disdainful of manual labour and many necessary occupations, it is a dangerous endeavour. Unfortunately, nearly everywhere education of any kind costs money, and higher education has become appallingly expensive. The means to educate one's children are often acquired in competitive economic pursuits; so that this ideal, like that of the high standard of living, is in present circumstances not truly unitive.

There remains one ideal that holds greater promise for the spiritual unification of mankind than any that we have yet considered: that of pre-

serving the beauty and fruitfulness of the planet on which we dwell and protecting the creatures that share it with us—the ideal that man become "the lord and not the tyrant of the earth." This ideal includes the conservation of natural resources but is more comprehensive. For many, conservation means simply the preservation of the natural foundations of civilization, including the fertility of the soil, the productivity of the forests, the continued flow of the rivers and the like. The importance of this endeavour cannot be exaggerated, yet the more materialistic of the conservationists fail to take cognizance of intangible values which must be recognized by our ideal. It is not merely to assure a continued supply of food, lumber, water-power, and other necessities that we wish to save the natural world from spoliation by man, but also because it is an expression of the creative energy that made us, because it is full of beauty and interest and speaks meaningfully to the contemplative mind. It is not merely because they are links in the chains on which nature's balance depends, or because they provide "sport" for the thoughtless hunter, that we wish to protect animals of many kinds, but because they are sentient beings like ourselves. Thus this ideal includes the ancient and perennially compelling ideal of *ahimsa* or harmlessness; but it is harmlessness widely applied, not only to sentient beings but to the beauty of a landscape, the purity of a river, the integrity of a forest.

This is an ideal that it is hardly possible to pursue selfishly. One may attempt to raise the standard of living of his own family or community, careless of whether his economic manipulations lower that of other families and communities. He may bend all his efforts to provide an education for his son or daughter, no matter how many other children grow up in ignorance. But when one strives, however modestly, to preserve the beauty and fruitfulness of the earth and the lives of the creatures that share it with him, he necessarily aims at benefits that are somewhat widely diffused, not only among his contemporaries but among future generations. To guard the natural world is to display a little of nature's impersonal largess.

Already this is proving a fruitful field for co-operation among nations. An example of this is the recent international effort to prevent the dumping on the high seas of waste petroleum from tankers and other ships. When seafowl heedlessly alight on oily slicks, their feathers stick together; they can no longer fly; they die of starvation and exposure—a tragic fate that each year, in consequence of man's carelessness, overtakes many thousands of beautiful sea birds. Moreover, the oily wastes are washed upon beaches, making them unfit for bathing, with consequent loss to seaside resorts.

Although this and many similar problems require action on the national and international level, it is a mistake to suppose that they can be solved by governments and organizations alone. Unless the demand for their solution comes from the people, official action will never be successful. Those who cherish this ideal must select the articles they use or consume with some regard to their provenance, refraining from things whose production involves wanton exploitation of land or sea or cruelty to living creatures. Since in the complex modern world it is difficult for the consumer to discover the primary source of all the articles he buys, education and publicity in this matter are urgently needed. Probably many of us daily use articles, innocent enough in appearance, that a conscientious person would never touch if he knew all that their production involves.

This ideal of preserving the beauty and fruitfulness of the earth should appeal to every man capable of broad vision, gratitude to the natural world that supports his life, and unselfish concern for its future prosperity. This ideal, if any, should be capable of uniting mankind in a common endeavour. It provides an excellent field for the practice of international co-operation; for one who is dedicated to it can hardly be suspected of manœuvring for selfish advantages. By working together on a global scale for the advancement of this ideal, men would develop attitudes, including mutual respect and confidence, that would help them to co-operate more closely in fields from which it is more difficult to exclude all suspicion of selfish scheming.¹

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¹ See also the present writer's essay "A New Project for Human Happiness," in THE ARYAN PATH for January 1950.