

# HUMAN NATURE AND INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY, PART II

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Of all of the activities in which the United States is currently engaged abroad, one of the few of which we can be unreservedly proud is the work of our Peace Corps. Tapping the idealism of the younger generation, disciplining it, directing it, and giving it concrete form, the Peace Corps has come to represent abroad something very near the best of American life and values and society. (I spent five weeks in the winter of 1966-1967 visiting Peace Corps volunteers in Latin America and came back a strong admirer of the Peace Corps, its philosophy and, most of all, of the volunteers.)

Purporting to alter attitudes rather than artifacts, the Peace Corps has undertaken what is at once the most difficult but also the most valuable kind of human activity. As one former volunteer, Kirby Jones, has written, "Community development as practiced by Peace Corps Volunteers is a process aimed not at material ends, but rather at the poverty in men's minds." Conceiving of themselves as catalysts of social change rather than performers of concrete services, Peace Corps Volunteers, in Jones' words, have as their goal "not more schools, greater food production, or cleaner streets, but rather a changing of attitudes in such a way that the people will grasp the skill of collective action to solve their felt needs and wants."

A Peace Corps Volunteer in Colombia, Hubert L. Smith, has spelled out the working philosophy of the Peace Corps. Community development, he writes, "is at least half educative and half concerned with the realization of physical projects. The educative aspect is concerned with changing the attitudes of the very poor Latin American about his own worth as a human individual and about his ability to act on his own behalf for the material well-being of himself and his community." Explaining his efforts to get people to wonder why they live badly, to arouse a little hope, and to organize a little elementary democracy, Smith continues: "Next, you try to help them get the swagger of a successfully completed project under their belts. By the time you finish the

two years, hopefully they are ready and able to go on working on the other needs of their community alone. All the time you have to be careful not to become indispensable to the *junta* so that it doesn't collapse when you go. You waste a lot of time making small decisions because you know that they would take *your* word for it, but you want to hear what so-and-so has to say and then his brother, and so on, so that they get into the habit of getting together and talking out their problems."

Smith described what he regards as a significant achievement in his service as a Volunteer, and it was a significant achievement indeed, having to do with the acquisition of human dignity. He writes: "But we are making progress. We need a road to the same little hamlet. I got a Colombian promoter of *Accion Communal* to get an audience with the governor of Cundinamarca. Then seven of these guys paid the thirty pesos that they don't have to waste, and went to Bogota, and walked into his office and told him what was on their minds. That probably doesn't mean much to you, but it does to me. I was proud as hell of them. . . . I knew them when they would take their hats off and look at the ground when I tried to talk to them. Now, they not only do the talking, but they looked the man right in the eye when they did it."

Human dignity is the objective, and who are better able to serve as catalysts for its achievement than the youth, not just of America but of the world. Their physical and mental energy is at its peak; their sense of decency is often keener than that of their elders; their ideals have not been eroded by the age and experience which turn idealists into "realists" or, perhaps more accurately, turn the true realists into jaded cynics.

Our national Peace Corps, however, for all its impressive achievements, is trapped in a dilemma. On the one hand, its programs are being conducted on a limited scale so disproportionate to the magnitude of the problems it purports to deal with as to have no more than a marginal effect on societies which, because of rapid population growth, are not merely stagnating but actually deteriorating, in some cases at a precipitous rate. On the other hand, the introduction of American volunteers into poor and fragile

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societies on anything approaching a scale proportionate to the needs of those societies would so engulf them in an American tide as to reduce them to semi-colonies of the United States. The dilemma, simply put, is that, although a greatly increased number of young volunteers could perform most valuable services in developing countries, there are already far too many Americans nosing about in many of these countries, assisting, advising and directing things, with consequences often as bad as their intentions are good.

For these reasons, I strongly endorse proposals for an international volunteer service under, or at least associated with, the United Nations, one which would draw volunteers from as many countries as possible, rich and poor, Communist and non-Communist, and, in addition and perhaps more important, encourage and assist the development of domestic volunteer services within developing countries.

There exists an organization, the International Secretariat for Volunteer Services, which is dedicated to these ends and which deserves worldwide support. The only intergovernmental agency in the field of developmental activities, ISVS does not recruit or provide volunteers but serves as a kind of international clearing house of information and technique on volunteer services, encouraging both foreign and domestic volunteer programs. ISVS helps developing countries to locate both private and public sources of volunteers abroad, but its major concern increasingly is with the encouragement of domestic volunteer services, noting that "the youth of the developing countries is the world's largest — and a relatively untapped — source of development manpower."

An experimental program in international volunteer work, known as the "Inter-American Volunteers for Development," is now underway in the Dominican Republic. Sponsored by the Dominican Development Foundation and the Pan American Development Foundation, and supported by ISVS, the Inter-American volunteers were recruited from several Latin American countries and were organized into teams with Dominican volunteers. Their project is the teaching of modern agricultural methods; they work with local peasant leaders who it is hoped will pass along their knowledge of modern technique to an ever increasing number of small farmers.

In Latin America I encountered a number of foreign volunteers from countries other than the United States. I visited one site in Lima where an American was working with German volunteers and another in Puno in the Peruvian highlands where an English

girl, sponsored, I believe, by the United Nations Association of the United Kingdom, was working with Americans. The collaboration is natural and extremely promising.

Far from indicating a lack of confidence in the United States Peace Corps, proposals for internationalization aim to apply the Peace Corps concept on a greatly expanded scale and, at the same time, to overcome the inherent disabilities of a national program while advancing purposes which, though entirely consistent with those of the United States Peace Corps, are beyond its reach.

The latter purposes are political, the gradual building of an international community. Drawing on the common idealism of people young and old, from divergent societies with divergent ideologies, an international volunteer service would be a creative form of functionalism in international organization. In this connection, it would be particularly important that an international volunteer service be associated with the United Nations, not because of any administrative services that the United Nations might perform for the volunteer corps but because of the psychological services that the volunteers could perform by breathing new life into the United Nations as the one institutional symbol of a prospective world community. As Inis Claude has written, "it is conceivable that the development of a public service corps is a more essential contribution to the creation of a community fit for law and order than the establishment of a police force."

In addition, by expanding the pool of volunteer talent from the United States to the world, and by reducing if not eliminating the psychological strains of a bilateral relationship between needy recipients and benevolent gringos, an internationalized volunteer service would be able to do more, with greater prospects of success, to advance the fundamental purpose of the American Peace Corps, which is to instill hopeful and creative new *attitudes* in people who have been retarded by attitudes of submissiveness, resignation, and a failure to appreciate their own individual and collective capacities and who are largely beyond the effective reach of government education programs and even the mass media.

Working in fields extraneous to national feeling and ideology — fields such as education, agriculture, community development, health, small industry, youth organization, housing, public administration, nutrition and family planning — an international volunteer corps, operating on an adequate scale over a long period of time, could have a profound impact on both national feeling and ideology, doing, as it were, an end run around the antagonisms between

the rich nations and the poor nations and the antagonisms of the cold war. It would do so by reverting from politics to man, from the terrifying possibilities of national behavior to the hopeful possibilities of human nature. As Pablo Casals said, "we have come from the tyranny of the enormous, awesome, discordant machine back to realization that the beginning and the end are man, that it is man who is important, not the machine, that it is man who accounts for growth, not just dollars or factories, and above all that it is man who is the object of all our efforts."

But this emphasis on man only partially solves the dilemma, even on a theoretical level. For example, Kenneth Boulding wrote:

The person I cannot get out of my mind these days is the young man who dropped the first atomic bomb. . . . If he had been ordered to go and drop it on Milwaukee, he almost certainly would have refused. . . . Because he was asked to drop it on Hiroshima, he not only consented but he became something of a hero for it. . . . Of course, I don't quite see the distinction between dropping it on Milwaukee and dropping it on Hiroshima. The difference is a "we" difference. The people in Milwaukee, though we don't know any of them, are "we," and the people in Hiroshima are "they," and the great psychological problem is how to make everybody "we," at least in some small degree. The degree need be only extremely small. . . . All that is necessary to create the psychological foundations of a world society is that people in Maine should feel the same degree of responsibility toward the people of Japan or Chile or Indo-China as they feel toward California. That is pretty small, really, but it is apparently enough to create the United States.

That is all that is required but it is patently beyond the reach of the world as it is now organized, or, indeed, of the human mind in its current stage of evolution. The world federalist cites the need of world government, but, as we have repeatedly noted, there is no necessary correlation between human need and human capacity. All that we can do, without deceiving ourselves about its inadequacy, is to plug away at the kinds of practical cooperation which may be feasible, working toward the day when some future bombardier, metaphorically speaking, will be as unwilling to drop his bomb on Hiroshima as on Milwaukee, as unwilling to drop it on Moscow as on New York or on New York as Moscow.

What is needed, fundamentally, is not institutions but attitudes, not machinery for law enforcement but the widespread willingness and desire to comply with the law, and not only with the law but with the ethical norms that most individuals within a society accept as guidelines for their decent behavior toward most other individuals. What is needed is the extension beyond national frontiers of that sense of "we" that

the bombardier felt toward people in Milwaukee whom he did not know but did not feel toward the people of Hiroshima whom he also did not know.

The police power is marginal to a community and, in the absence of the state of mind that constitutes a community, no feasible police force could hold a society together. The vast majority of Americans refrain from robbing and killing each other not for fear of the police but because, being members of a community, they do not *wish* to rob and kill each other. Indeed, when a sizeable part of the community becomes strongly disaffected, as for example the South became disaffected from the Supreme Court's desegregation decisions, or as the negroes of the city slums have become violently disaffected from the social and economic injustices to which they are subjected, the government is well advised to temper enforcement with negotiation, seeking to placate the disaffected and to discover whether, just possibly, there is some justification for their disaffection, resorting to the police power only as a last resort, and then with discretion and selectivity.

An international community can no more be built on coercion than can a national community. Like a national community it must be built on consensus — a consensus of law and morals but most of all a psychological consensus, the powerful and indispensable feeling of "we." "In the final analysis," writes Inis Claude, "the decisive difference between the United States and the United Nations as systems of order is to be discovered in the fact that the United States is, and the United Nations is not, a society in which the significance of constituent groups has been so reduced that they are unlikely to press their claims to the point of disrupting the social fabric. . . . Something has happened to Texas that has not happened to the Soviet Union. It is not so much that Texas, unlike the Soviet Union, has been overshadowed by a coercive institutional superstructure, but that Texas, unlike the Soviet Union, has been incorporated in the consensual foundations of a larger community."

We finish where we began, with the mind of man. We need a police power on the international level but can develop and use it only to the extent that nations are willing to comply; we need institutions but, no matter how advanced or logical or sophisticated their machinery, we can make them function only to the extent that men want them to function. We are left with no choice but to plod along, doing not what we most need to do toward building an international community but what we are able to do, trying by painful inches to bring our primitive instincts under the direction of our higher, rational, distinctly human capacities.