

A Declaration of Interdependence

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"We hold these truths to be self evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights: that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

"Formidable to tyrants only," these words rang defiantly in the ears of a startled world. One hundred seventy-seven years ago an age-old ethical claim in a new political vestment chimed in the rise of a new nation. Three more small letters inserted into the Declaration of Independence, "t-e-r," might have intoned the hymn of world consciousness.

Equality of man has been preached from all the pulpits of all the churches, has been claimed by all the philosophers in all times. And many people, at all times, found it quite pleasant to listen to such sermons and to read well-formed phrases in idle moments not busily devoted to proving that one was better than the next fellow, or more successful, or superior in any sense whatsoever. It even felt good to discuss brotherly love and how all men were children of the same God who wisely distributes punishments and reward to everyone according to his deserts. Which, therefore, makes it quite understandable, even a fact to be expected, a priori, that the reward is due to oneself, the punishment to one's brother. And so it must have shocked the world to learn that there were children of the same father who wanted to correct the balance, rebelling against a yoke which was laid upon them apparently as upon unequals and not endowed with inalienable rights.

The self-evidence of these truths was not, and is not, so very evident after all, it seems. The world whirls around, year in and year out, centuries in and centuries out; men live and die, talk and act, and don't seem to be nearer to these self-evident truths than they were before. Yet every time that "a dreamer" spoke of their reality, a wave of amazed boredom or of violent reaction swept over the world. Wasn't it the same old story that any child could repeat by heart? Why bother people with such banalities, people who had enough worries to make a living in order to keep body and soul together? And the self-evident truths must have hung their heads in shame that evidently self-evidence was not evident, or truth not true. But it was professed always and everywhere, just never practiced anywhere.

What is wrong with the world? Or, if nothing should be wrong with it, some mistake must have occurred, a misunderstanding on the part of all who talked about these truths. There are legions of them, as many as the sands of the sea; of those, however, who hold these truths as self-evident and try to live accordingly, there were, and are, very few. Only a very few in all the centuries of historical time. It may be that the self-evidence is not evident, only self-evident-truth recognizing itself but un-

recognizable to the world. Maybe this intangible truth is a thing that everybody would have to recreate within himself before it could be held by all, believed in, and lived by. Maybe this mistake lies in the assumption that all men are created equal. Aren't there white men and black ones, red and brown and yellow ones, Caucasians, Semites, Negroes, Mongolians, peoples of all colors and races, not to speak of the adopted creeds and classes? This must be the basic reason for the constant, immediate modification in all commentaries which changes "created equality" into "an equality before the law;" an assiduous attempt to correct the intention of the Creator and to bring it before man-made laws before which the one "creations" consider other as equals. There is no limit, it seems, to man's magnanimity. He would not burden his Creator with the responsibility of having created unequal equals, so he charges himself with the heavy task of creating one situation at least in which inequality is supposed to be considered equality.

Whoever is interested in history, or sociology, or psychology might also detect that there is ample evidence to be found that some men are apparently endowed by the Creator with inalienable rights, even with the inalienable right to take rights away from others.

It also may be that man is not entitled to any right in reality, not even to the inalienable one of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Maybe these so-called rights are nothing but visionary dreams of a few idealists who believe that what seems to be the possession of some individuals should become a common good.

What is wrong with the world, and what is wrong with men that such confusion can exist, so much inequality, so little realism of truth?

Two short sentences in a document: and a flood of thoughts springs from the will to understand the discrepancy between the words, those beautiful words ringing like deep church bells, "Liberte, egalite, fraternite," a creed, a hope, a longing—and the facts, those tragic facts condemning creed as fantasy, killing hope, mocking longing.

There must be a terrible mistake somewhere; there must be something to account for the fact that in all the thousands of years man has travelled over the earth so little progress has been made in the Faustian struggle to advance from the word to its meaning, from there to the deed.

Somewhere on the way the self-evidence of these truths has been lost, the inalienability of rights has been distorted. Somewhere on the way, truth has changed into lie, and rights into undue. Theory and practice are far too divergent not to lead to the assumption of a fateful error somewhere on the way from theory to practice.

The world of today with its roaring noise of battles, its loss of lives, the clank of chains of the millions of those who physically or spiritually lost their liberty, the bitter tears of human agony that never flowed as abundantly as now; these horrible facts of death and slavery and distress scorn the most precious concepts: life, liberty, happiness. The unchained

demon of practice defies once again the angel bearing the torch of the self-evidence of truth.

Again anxiously the question forces its way into one's thought: What is wrong with man?

Repeatedly in the course of history, doers of wrong plunged all men into agony. Floods of "blood, sweat and tears," and always larger ones were shed "to right the wrong again." Never, it seems, has the fundamental error been corrected; and all the toiling was in vain. The unfortunate mistake behind the actual and visible events eluded detection and new distress sprang from the hidden sources, originating new mistakes in the attempt to find an explanation for the futility of the toiling—and a remedy for a diseased world. Words conveniently cover up failures in understanding by substituting the self-evident truth of man's equality and rights by the creation of personal beliefs. Intangibles as "the incorrigibility of human nature," "the imperfections of man," "man is nothing but a civilized animal," blamed as motivating forces. Hundreds of slogans allow for shaking off the responsibility for the current event, prepare an excuse for one's own misbehavior at some other time, and lead to some new Declaration of Independence while the world is on fire.

The tragic error of considering the *inhuman* actions of people as human nature serves to increase the gap between theory and practice. It is a discouraged and discouraging expression of a desire not to be bothered with the etiology of the disease, satisfied enough with any kind of treatment that for the time being would grant a regress of the symptoms: "peace in our time." It is the expression of a hopelessness that does not dare to face one's own obligations in bringing about a change of human nature, or a sign of lacking realism that wishes to verbalize as accomplished what is the goal in the remotest future: the brotherhood of man.

Tragic errors, all of them, as they help those "who have eyes and see not, and ears and hear not," to go through life with the proud conviction that *somebody* could find a formula to *make* all people happy, to *give* them all the economic security considered as necessary to hold down their greed for more, or to educate them to still stronger individualism—and greater license—that then all the evils would disappear from the earth and an almost frictionless Paradise—for oneself—would be established in which one could live— independent from all the others — and enjoy life, liberty, and happiness.

Somebody should be clever enough to do something for the people so that one would not be bothered again, would not be painfully reminded that one was not alone in the world—despite one's private declaration of independence.

A formula, a formula, a kingdom for a formula! A formula to rid oneself from such disturbances of one's individual life through the deeds of someone else. No use to bother with the doer! If somebody, anyone, will make him happy and won't enslave him, and will take care of his

physical needs, the human animal won't do evil — in spite of "human nature." Won't he, if he uses his inalienable rights to reduce life to existence, to interpret liberty as license for him until he becomes enslaved to himself, and to find happiness in power, in all its disguises; possessions and always more of them; position, mastery over others, superstitions, prejudices, if he produces the whole scale of a neurotic, individualistic striving for superiority manifesting itself in his deeds?

A destructive notion that the deed alone counts while the doer is of no importance is veiling the truth and brings about the misinterpretation that everybody is endowed with the inalienable rights to independent striving for what he thinks is due to him. Fully to him. *Only* to him.

One word, one conception can change a whole outlook on life. *His* life, *his* liberty, *his* happiness. Nobody's else. All *his*. Of all the millions of people in this world, nobody's else. Oh, yes, from this standpoint man holds the truth as self-evident that *he* is endowed by the Creator with inalienable rights, *his* rights.

It seems as if a colossal misunderstanding were the basis of human tragedy, founded on the declaration of independence of the single individual visualizing himself as disconnected from the whole to which he belongs. The battle is fought between individualism and integration. On one side stands the fiction of the world as one's private domain to the exclusion of all the others, in which one can live independently from the rest of mankind and unconcerned with it. On the other side stands adaptation of oneself as an integrated entirety into the greater entirety of the world in an interdependence that alone makes integration possible. The basic struggle goes on between the limitations of oneself to the primitive, instinctive preservation of a biological finiteness in time and an everlasting evolving of one's person into the cosmic infinity.

This globe is inhabited by millions of Robinson Crusoes voluntarily stranded on their little islands in the midst of an Ocean of Life, and endowed with right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness—Crusoes with no need even for a Man Friday if not as objects of their power—people for whom existence is an end in itself, and who consider it enough to enjoy the life of our ancestors, the great apes—people who live for the sake of being alive. Living has no meaning for them beyond its own continuation.

Were this aim even fully attained, all that would motivate and stimulate human beings, they would never have achieved one step on the way to life, liberty and happiness, those inalienable rights which have been claimed and proclaimed in all the long course from Ape to Man.

Were all the material goods lavished on every single one to which he is, no doubt, entitled; were all his existential needs filled, man's problem would not be solved by it. These values on the plane of bodily survival are *absolute*, momentary solutions without a meaning for some distant future, individualistic satisfactions of physical needs where the sat-

isfaction in itself represents the aim. A life of robots, marvellously constructed, kept in order with meticulous care and completely meaningless.

Whoever first compared men with machines which must have fuel without thinking what those machines are here for, whoever had the idea that the woes of the world could be cured by giving to humans all the economic securities, and nothing else but these, has condemned himself, and mankind as a whole, to the permanent level of animals which live for nothing but the satisfaction of hunger, sex, self-preservation and fight for it. The wild animals that have not been "abnormalized" by domestication, also use force and power over the weaker ones. They too have tyrants of whom they are afraid, because they exercise and enforce their own laws. And Shere Khan of the jungle has many names among man.

Though man and animal don't differ too widely in their physical needs which have to be satisfied to grant them survival, there is another factor that subordinates in men the absoluteness of aim on the existence level to the needs of man for essentiality. The vital necessities turn into tools, they become *relative*. On the human level being alive for "*aliveness*" sake would be the existence of a Mongoloid cretin, liberty in itself would be comparable to the freedom of a stray dog, or a shipwrecked Robinson, and the happiness of such an individual would be the meaningless attempt at making the absolute more absolute still.

If all the physical needs were satisfied, the individualistic independence of the animal transferred into the realm of human beings would deprive life of its inner contents, and make it so void that a truth would become very evident, that such a worthless life entitled man not only to a right but to a duty; to throw it away.

All the self-evident truths, however, and all the inalienable rights that have been postulated over and over again in the course of time did not instigate mankind to progress too far, it seems, not farther than to the present raging individualism. The fault must lie with the people of whom, by whom and for whom this whole planet is governed. Too many cannot conceive of themselves as being more than the highest ranking animals and not different from them. And so the species, homo sapiens, goes on fighting for existence; all for one, nothing for all. And they will not recognize in fact, only in words, that they possess a really inalienable right to use a brain with which they are endowed. Yet, the possession of this brain is the glory and the burden of man alone. It grants him power of creativeness, capacity of discernment, and the potentiality to understand the good, to experience the beautiful and to allow truth to become evident to him.

To be endowed with creative power lifts man from the purely animalistic level of living for living's sake onto the human level of making living worthwhile, purposeful. From the satisfaction of vital needs in the present, man evolves to the conception of a future for the realization of which his present is as necessary a tool as is the chisel in the sculptor's

hand who delivers the stone from the statue which lives in its creator's idea.

No animal carries the burden of an obligation toward the future, no animal enjoys the glory of the duty towards itself to make itself an instrument for a better future for its whole race.

Burden and glory, obligation and duty are man's inalienable rights and man's alone. The duty to himself to develop to his limits contains in itself the obligation to help shape a world in which these duties can be accomplished by everyone. Man's present receives meaning only from the standpoint of the future that will carry the marks of his influence on the present. What the future of the world will be depends upon him; his choice decides good or evil, beauty or monstrosity, value or worthlessness.

The unavoidable coercion to choose exercised by life, and the fear of man to become enslaved to his responsibility for the choice, drive many human beings into slavery to themselves. Hoping to gain freedom by attempting retreat from life, many escape into deeper inner isolation, and they fall victims to the error that freedom lies in a disconnected existence; yet liberty, man's inalienable right, consists in his right to choose, to be responsible for his actions, not to be subjected to any dark fate that would compel him to his shortcomings, or devalue him to a merely responding mechanism. And, therefore, freedom can only be won *in* the world, struggling together with others for a future which would justify our present. Freedom cannot be attained in aloof rebellion against freedom itself. Only in the stream of life can man achieve the development of his personality. The old battle cry of the individualist who proclaims independence from the rest of mankind has done tremendous harm to himself and to the world because the dynamics of life have been distorted into a static possession. His conception of happiness, too, has become static in spite of the alleged inalienable right to pursue it. In this conception happiness suffers the devaluation from man's creation to his possession. Yet a static "happiness" in all the possible guises of it—money, power, prestige—is meaningless too. It manifests itself as an object, the dead prey of the one who holds it. It is no longer the result of a "mystical union" between a person and a value considered by him as essential because it would express his projection into the world of culture, work, and love.

The inalienable right of man to contribute to these three problems of life redeems him from a time-bound present and connects the timeless past of the human race through him with the timeless future which is his *undoing*.

The trinity of word, meaning, and deed condenses itself to a unity representing the ideal goal of mankind's future: oneness in interdependence.

And then, perhaps, the truth would become evident, even self-evident: That all men are created equal.