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Villa Serbelloni  
Pa P

June 24, 1959

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Program Officers

FROM: DR

OCT -6 1959

SUBJECT: Villa Serbelloni

We must give early attention to the uses to which we might put the Villa Serbelloni. I have in mind the possibility of inviting a few well selected individuals to meet at the Villa in, say, early September to advise with us on the subject.

It's entirely possible that the most fruitful ideas will come from our own officers since we give a great deal of thought, energy and funds to the promotion of international understanding through science, scholarship and the arts.

Please let your colleagues know that I should welcome any suggestions. For the present, we might tap our own minds; consultation with others could occur at a later stage.

As a sample of interesting thinking on the subject, see JM's informal note attached hereto. Suggestions might be short or long, traditional or weird, simple or complex, cheap or expensive.

Thanks.

D.R.

OCT -6 1959

If the adoption of the Trustee resolution to the effect that the Foundation should give special consideration to the needs of the underdeveloped areas of Asia, Africa, and Latin America carried the implication that the Foundation would be even more selective in what it did in Europe and North America, the practice of the Foundation since its adoption has increasingly emphasized another implication, namely, that it is in Europe and North America that the ideas that will nourish the development of the underdeveloped countries are likeliest to emerge. Thus Agriculture, with all its operations in the area of expanded program, looks to research in Europe and North America to discover how DDT and its cognates lethally affect the physiology of insects, or to develop a spray that will make the use of insecticides more effective. In any realistic estimate of the world intellectual situation, Europe and North America will for some time continue to be the world's reservoir of brains. Even if the Foundation's principal concern were to be the development of the underdeveloped countries, the advancement of knowledge and its wider application in Europe and North America continues to be important, indeed, to have a special importance.

In this sense, any deterioration in the intellectual situation of Europe and North America should be of concern to the Foundation. One such deterioration, actual or potential, is the subject of this memorandum.

In the past, the advancement and wider application of knowledge in Europe and North America has depended on intimate intercommunication. Niels Bohr's first glimpse of a neutron was immediately reported by cable to physicists in North America with whose work Bohr was personally and intimately acquainted. Strange as it might seem with the enormously increased volume of "exchange of persons" that has developed since World War II, intellectual intercommunication in this western world appears to be becoming less personal, less intimate, particularly if one scrutinizes communication between what the French call the Anglo-Saxon world (the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada) and the continent. To cite a most striking example, it is hard to find a philosopher or a psychologist on the continent who is not aware of the recent work of Jean Piaget in genetic epistemology, and of the possible fundamental importance of its outcomes; it is almost as hard to find comparable individuals in the United Kingdom or in North America who are even aware that Piaget's principal interest is no longer the developing mentality of children, though his first publication on his new interest was issued by Les Presses Universitaires de France ten years ago now.

If this deterioration in intercommunication should seem imagined or implausible, there are in fact some plausible reasons for it.

As noted, the particular interruption appears to be between the Anglo-Saxon world and the world of the continent of Europe. One reason for it very probably resides in the establishable fact that as recently as a generation ago, Anglo-Saxon intellectual personnel tended at some time in their higher education to study or carry on research somewhere on the continent. Certainly this was true of the generation of scholars and

scientists that flourished as late as the nineteen twenties. In any case, the key group of scholars and scientists of that time were fluent in the major languages of Europe, were personally acquainted with their European counterparts, both senior and coeval, and thus were somehow personally obligated closely to follow their work and publications. To a degree hardly appreciable at the time, these intimate contacts between the Anglo-Saxon world and the continent began to diminish in the decade before World War II, as a consequence of nazism in Germany, fascism in Italy, revolution in Spain, and disturbance in France. And cut off from Europe during World War II, the Anglo-Saxon world fell into the habit of living within itself. Negatively, it lost the habit of following closely what Europeans were doing and publishing, and to some extent the ready command of the languages in which they work and publish. The librarian of the University of Jerusalem travelling recently across the United States was struck by the absence of important recent European publications on the shelves of major university libraries: their faculties no longer desired them, and their librarians were unaware of their importance or of their existence. A leading French philosopher referring to copies of La Revue de Metaphysique at Oxford found them uncut.

One might well ask at this point, But how is it that this loss of intimate contact has not been remedied by post-war "exchange of persons" in both directions across the Channel? To be sure, it has been remedied in some measure. That it has not been in larger measure is subtly due to the nature of this exchange. With the exception of the relatively small volume of exchange that has been specific in its purposes, most notably as made possible by foundation assistance and by strictly scholarly and scientific agencies, the basic purpose of this exchange has tended to be the enhancement of national prestige. Subtly, but inevitably, it has taken on the character of cultural diplomacy, and the contacts it has afforded have become in general more formal than intimate. Furthermore, its very volume has defeated its serving other purposes: counterparts tend now to meet as a matter of international courtesy rather than on the basis of known common interest. And such contacts tend to be arranged by cultural officers whose primary concerns are not intellectual but diplomatic. It is no longer surprising to RF officers travelling in Europe to discover that the responsible American cultural officers know not at all or only by name the scholars or scientists he is seeking out. (In all fairness, it must be added that the representatives of the British Council and of the French cultural services tend both to have heard of them, and not infrequently to know them well).

Again, one might ask, But is personal acquaintance essential? Cannot the advance and wider application of knowledge proceed on the basis of published work, as it eventually turns up through abstracting services or in bibliographies? I cannot speak for the sciences, but abstracting and bibliographies hardly serve in other fields for what may seem frail and human reasons. In theory, every scholar worth his salt tries to "keep up" in some such ways. But the effort to do so in any general way, given the present volume of publication in almost any subject, is considerable. In the first place, much of what he should be reading is in languages he does not read with real readiness: to work through a book in post-war German, more crabbed if anything than pre-war German, is work; and he must be



highly motivated to carry through with it. In the second place, serious European writing has always differed in style from Anglo-Saxon writing: to the Anglo-Saxon reader it appears more theoretical and expansive than empirical and concise: to get at its meat, he must almost consciously overcome an inherent prejudice against what seems to him verbosity. And these two impediments, in the third place, are compounded if initially he has been drawn to the work in question by its title, unsure as to who or what its author is as a scholar. Supposedly, scholarly reviewing is of help, particularly reviews in the leading European journals: but reviewing in them is in general several years behind publication, and in reading reviews the three foregoing considerations come into play; they are in languages he does not readily command, in a style that tends to be for him prejudicial, by an author whom, frequently, he cannot place.

But do not international congresses and other scholarly gatherings provide points of contact? A few do, and more of them later. But in the main, congresses have become so large and heterogeneous that true meetings of minds there are infrequent. Furthermore, post-war international congresses are by no means untouched by cultural diplomacy: it is a matter of concern to European governments, if not to the Anglo-Saxon governments (and increasingly to them) that they be "represented" in such congresses by their ablest cultural diplomats, and it is the expenses they incur in attending that the governments pay. France can afford to send only three representatives to the coming International Congress of Philosophy at Mysore, and certainly the three will not include some who could most profit from attending and who might contribute most. With the increase in attendance at such congresses, due in part to cultural diplomacy, with the necessity their organizers labor under of supposedly providing something of interest for everyone, they have come to be so dispersed and heterogeneous as no longer to serve their earlier functions, when the international scholarly world was more compact, and its personnel more intimately acquainted. The president of the forthcoming International Congress of Historical Sciences at Stockholm this autumn, Frederico Chabod, proposes to say just this in his presidential address.

He will be freed in some measure to say it by his ability to refer to meetings of other types which better serve present needs in history, for example a meeting of fewer than twenty historians held recently in Italy where this carefully selected and competent group discussed ways in which the history of eighteenth century Europe should now be dealt with, and with consequences that may be of real intellectual importance: e.g., the trends that emerged in nazism, fascism, and communism virtually require a reappraisal of the "Enlightenment." More and more within Europe itself, international scholarly and more generally cultural gatherings are taking on some such pattern. But they are likewise tending to become exclusively European gatherings, as for example in the meeting of writers which Pierre Emmanuel, the leading French poet, is arranging in France this summer under the auspices of the Congress of Cultural Freedom: I did not raise the point, and so cannot be sure, but I suppose that the omission of any Anglo-Saxon writers is due to the relative unlikelihood of their being really concerned with the topic for discussion, the role of the writer in an industrialized society more and more dominated by mass communication; in fact it was only characteristic that Emmanuel himself did not know that the American poet and critic, R.P. Blackmur, is actually writing on this very subject. Undoubtedly

other reasons are also in play: the group made up of writers from Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and other European countries will have a common language in French; furthermore, their literary assumptions will be more homogeneous than would be the case if Anglo-Saxon literature were represented.

It is in just this point that I find the interruption of intimate, personal intercommunication between the Anglo-Saxon world and the continent most disturbing, most potentially deteriorative for the advance and application of knowledge in the western, non-communist world. Its present deterioration, in the European view, was illustrated in an anecdote I heard in Italy. Italians whom I saw had recently been visited by an apparently most intelligent representative of an American university press, looking for work it might publish in translation. What she was understandably looking for was work that would be of interest to American scholars, but in the sense that it would relate to their existing interests. To my Italian friends, this seemed odd: in their view, what she should have been seeking was work that might excite interest by its novelty and difference. For their part, the Italians have been busy, some think almost too busy, since World War II, translating Anglo-Saxon work which they hoped might be novel and exciting for them, as they returned to the intellectual world of the West after their long severance from it under fascism.

Rightly or wrongly, Europeans tend to believe that they are doing their share or more to remedy the interruption in intercommunication between the continent and the Anglo-Saxon world. In my experience, they are far more aware of it, and far freer to confront it than their Anglo-Saxon counterparts. As a leading French psychologist remarked, it is only normal now that what in France is regarded as an important contribution may go unregarded in the Anglo-Saxon world for as long as ten years. By comparison, at least, my impression is that continental scholars are extraordinarily up to date on the Anglo-Saxon world of scholarship. Indeed, on my recent visit to Europe I was startled on three or four occasions to find even younger scholars aware of important work in Britain or America not yet too well known there.

With happy exceptions, hardly the same is true of Anglo-Saxon scholarship. I may by now be biased, but I will nevertheless venture the generalization that the Anglo-Saxon assumption is that the appearance of really significant contributions in Europe is less likely than it used to be. The western, non-communist world, intellectually, is more and more divided by the Channel, and on the Anglo-Saxon side its parochialism is beginning to show, at least in the European view.

This generalization may be hard for Foundation personnel to credit, and for a reason which must be stated here without false modesty: they, personally, constitute an exception to it, in some respects a unique exception. The underlying assumption of their work in Europe is that important contributions there are still not only likely but certain. By the very nature of their work, they come into close, even intimate, personal contact with European personnel who, if they are not to produce it, are almost certain to know where it will emerge. In general, they have had a sufficient experience of Europe to know something of the European mind, and so not to be



put off by its stylistic and linguistic differences. It is their business to focus their and others' attention on specific problems, usually if not invariably at the frontiers of knowledge and its application. The assistance they recommend bears on such points, as does the "exchange of persons" they arrange. They thus become keenly aware of subjects of emergent importance and of individuals who share an interest in them.

Even before the Foundation came into the possession of the Villa Serbelloni, I had increasingly come to feel that the Foundation had the possibility of capitalizing on these characteristics of its personnel to exercise some remedial influence in what is to me the deteriorating intercommunication in the western intellectual world, beyond what it normally exercises in the international movement of individuals. Discussions in Italy on this recent trip confirmed this view in Italian opinion. Specifically, the idea was that the officers working in Europe, including the United Kingdom, well grounded as they are in general in developments in the United States and Canada, could from time to time identify subjects which could benefit from international ventilation, and could from their acquaintance on both sides of the Atlantic identify individual scholars or scientists best qualified to confront them. In such instances, the Foundation could then provide for a representative international meeting of sufficient duration to allow full ventilation. For a number of reasons, it seemed that such meetings should ordinarily take place on the continent, in some environment congenial to all: the expense both for travel and living would be reduced; British and Americans tend to be stimulated by a continental environment, Europeans to feel more at their ease there, etc. With the acquisition of the Villa Serbelloni, it seems to provide just the environment for which I had been groping.

I should suppose such meetings might serve an important variety of purposes, varying mainly as the type of subject varied.

One type of subject would almost certainly relate to desirable advances in knowledge or its application, as in the case of the Italian conference as to how history should now deal with the eighteenth century in Europe.

Another type of subject might serve a more instrumental purpose, as for example in defining and clarifying differences in approach to a given problem. One possibility which I discussed in Italy was a series of meetings of philosophers representative of different philosophical positions dealing with topics that would accentuate their differences: suggested were the more characteristically Anglo-Saxon concept of "the public interest" which in Europe tends to be "the national interest," or the role of ideologies in contemporary life, with the concept of an "ideology" relatively alien to the Anglo-Saxon mind. It was suggested that such meetings might well be made up of a continuing core group and a group varying from meeting to meeting for its particular competence on the topic under discussion.

Certainly, if the question of subjects appropriate for different purposes such as these were in the minds of Foundation personnel acquainted with both sides of the Atlantic, other subjects of different types would emerge.

Evidently, the total number of participants involved would never, or should never, be large. But the consequences of their close personal and intellectual association on such occasions might well be considerable.

My impression is that the confidence of the Foundation's personnel in the probability or virtual certainty that important contributions will materialize in Europe stems in last analysis from the fact that it knows the intellectual life of Europe both in its product and in its personnel. Foundation personnel thus has a grasp of European potential which abstracts, bibliographies, or book reviews hardly provide. Knowing what European personnel is doing, it may know that the book someone has just published is no real measure of the importance of his work, as the next one will be. It thus requires no special effort on the part of Foundation personnel to follow his work, even if it is linguistically and stylistically tough. It knows the man.

If such gatherings as are here suggested gave even a relatively restricted group of participants, continental and Anglo-Saxon, a similar knowledge of each other, and almost necessarily through it a wider knowledge of others, still, and of their work, such gatherings would in some measure, perhaps even strategically, stem the interruption of intercommunication between the continent and the Anglo-Saxon world, and restore it to something like the status it enjoyed in the earlier years of the century. At least the possibility is one which deserves some further thought and elaboration, particularly now that, fortuitously, the Foundation has come into possession of what appears to be the ideal environment for it.

Of course, the present emphasis on such gatherings in a western context should not be taken to exclude the possibilities of a wider, east-west context. Indeed as gatherings were arranged on subjects to which eastern participants could contribute, or on specific subjects of east-west interest, it seems somehow eminently appropriate that eastern participation in them should be in Europe. By the fact, the Foundation would again be demonstrating its internationality in a way which I believe easterners would find particularly congenial. Possibilities along this line certainly deserve elaboration.

J.M.

6/23/59