

4 October 1971

Dear Richard,

I appreciated your letter of 29th September but for the very reason that, as say, each of us must find truth for himself, I find it hard to reply. Age, experience, temperament, and insight influence each individual's perspective and the direction in which he seeks a personal solution or reconciliation with the world as it is.

For some people the answer—or at least, a degree of comfort—lies in psychoanalysis, or religion, or yoga, or some other form of turning inward. It would be irresponsible and gratuitous to argue against what anyone else finds to be a valid direction, simply because it is not valid for oneself.

To some extent you have misinterpreted my reaction to the many disappointments and frustrations that I experienced during my work on the WR. I started with little or no illusions about the government and the press but with assumptions about other critics (dissidents, liberals, leftists and others with whom I tended to identify) which proved bitterly unfounded. Yet there were exceptions—critics who maintained personal and intellectual integrity, and critics who struggled to do so at times of confusion and conflict—and the experience was far from a total loss. And I did gain from it a greater degree of self-knowledge and stoicism, so that I continue to be active in some degree on the case and to feel a continuing sense of commitment. (Enclosed is a recent article with related material.)

I do not have superior wisdom to offer on the philosophical questions you discuss in your letter. The effort to understand good-and-evil is as old as the human species. I seem to have been born with a built-in anathema for religion (and take much satisfaction in seeing that younger men and women in the church, in this country and elsewhere, have turned to activism and militancy) and regard the social and political nightmare in which we live as rooted in the economic system rather than in individual, personal "lack of grace" or psychopathology. At the same time, I recognize in myself a limited capacity and a narrow scope for action that I both believe in and can live with, and so I try to do the best I can within those limits. I hope that you will continue to find satisfaction in your own search for the way of life that is right for you and the values that are enduring. For most people life is not fair and not happy; the main thing is to try to achieve for oneself and for others as much justice and decency as can be wrested from the experience.

All good wishes,