Sincerity and Authenticity and "Mind in the Modern World," Lionel Trilling's last two works, form a sad but lucid coda to his literary and intellectual career which extended over four decades. In both he took melancholy note that the two values he had cherished most were at war with each other; he perceived to his dismay that an apotheosis of authenticity was being accomplished at the cost of the devaluation, even utter rejection, of mind. Reviewing The Idea of a Christian Society in 1940, Trilling had rejected T.S. Eliot's "Either/Or" of Catholicism and materialism, and confidently proposed "our pledge to the critical intellect" as the "only one connection with the future of which we can be sure."¹ Even after the Second World War he would not have shared the utter despair that led H.G. Wells to write Mind at the End of Its Tether.² While he had upheld fulness of individuality, he


had also revelled in the pleasures of mind, the "thoughts that wander through Eternity." As a reader "who takes pleasure in endangering his own fixed ideas," he had been "grateful for the exhilaration that Newman can give." He had joined Wyndham Lewis in condemning Sherwood Anderson to whom "mind seemed . . . always a sort of malice" and whose work is "an assault on responsibility and thoughtful maturity, on the pleasures and uses of the mind, . . . on Socratic clarity and precision." While he had never said that art must submit to the intellect, he had certainly insisted that art must engage the intellect. In fact he had found a tragedy like King Lear invigorating in spite of its "dire report of life," because "it does us the honor of supposing that we will make every possible effort of mind to withstand the force of its despair . . . it draws us into more activity than we had thought ourselves capable

\(^3\)Paradise Lost, II.148.


\(^6\)Lewis Leary is right in saying that "perhaps the mind's final and fatal presumption is its insistence that art must submit to intellect." But it is difficult to agree with him when he holds Trilling guilty of having "beguilingly tempted us" toward such a presumption (Lewis Leary, "Lionel Trilling 1905-1975," Sewanee Review, 84 (Spring 1976), 301.)
of." He would have seen himself as being historically in the same line as Thomas Jefferson (under whose "bright aegis" he delivered the "Mind in the Modern World" lecture) and H.G. Wells. This line goes back in some respects to the philosophers of ancient Greece both in its "aesthetic appreciation of mind" and in its assumption that "mind can play a decisive part in the moral life of the individual person." In other respects, the line is of recent origin, going back to the Renaissance through the French Revolution in its belief that "what mind can encompass of knowledge of the physical universe has a direct bearing upon the quality of human existence, and also in its certitude that mind can, and should, be decisive in political life."^8

But now in 1972 (the year he published his Sincerity and Authenticity lectures and delivered the "Mind in the Modern World" lecture) he had to admit that there were "dark portents," that mind might indeed be at the end of its tether. For one thing, the past has been proclaimed to be dead, the study of history has fallen into disrepute, and the sense of the past which had been held to be an impetus to mind is no longer sought or valued. There is


9Ibid., pp. 104-105.
another humiliation offered to mind in that the majority of human beings are being excluded from science, "the mode of thought which is . . . the characteristic achievement of the modern age." The practical consequences of scientific thought are well known but "its operative conceptions are alien to the mass of educated persons." Nor have the productions of other disciplines "entered into our lives." No book of economics, for example, can now hope to engage attention or provoke debate in the fashion or degree that Mill's Principles of Political Economy did when it appeared. Philosophy too has become a technical subject for specialists and "no longer consents to accommodate the interest and effort of any reasonably strong general intelligence."
The situation with literary studies is similar if not worse. Sometime ago, literary criticism was chided for standing as "a barrier between the ordinary reader and the literary work." Now, the work of literature itself is regarded as standing between human beings and life. Literature has come to be "realized" as a "diversion and a spectacle," a "dereliction . . . from seriousness." The spokesman of this view is no less a person than Professor

10 The moment of "realization" was 1968--the year of the campus riots in America which forced "social and political reality upon our consciousness"--after which, according to Professor Kampf, there has been utter disillusionment with literary studies on the part of the students and a thorough demoralization on the part of the teachers.
Louis Kampf, a President of the Modern Language Association. Professor Kampf perceives the influence of Matthew Arnold on the "literature-teaching profession in America," but he does not locate Arnold's influence where it truly resides, in Arnold's conception of literature as a "criticism of life." But Professor Kampf, says Trilling not in complete irony,

speaks as the elected chief officer of the professional association of teachers of literature; in his estimate of the morale of his constituency there must be some quantum of truth. We can therefore say that in our time the mind of a significant part of a once proud profession has come to the end of its tether. 11

One reason for the crisis of authority that mind now suffers from is the view that the authority accorded to mind negates social equality. A practical consequence of this view in America—and, we may add, in countries like India—has been the governmental edicts which are intended to ensure social justice but which actually result in the undermining of academic performance and so of the pursuit

of intellectual excellence itself. That the academic community has not even debated this interference is a measure of the low state into which mind has fallen.\(^\text{13}\)

Now the view that intellectual pursuits—or the implicit authority such pursuits accord to mind—promote social inequality would have bewildered Jefferson, Matthew Arnold and many others like them. Jefferson thought "it was virtually of the essence of mind that it pointed toward equality." He sought, by means of education, to countervail the power of property by the power of ideas.\(^\text{14}\) Matthew Arnold believed that

\(^{12}\)Trilling, "Mind," in *LD*, pp. 112-18. Diana Trilling notes that among the changes proposed by the students in the name of social progressivism there are some which are actually "perilous to democratic education." They proposed, for instance, that there be substituted for the traditional Ph.D. in political science something called "an action Ph.D." in which "the candidate, instead of writing a dissertation, chooses a street in a disadvantaged New York area and organizes the residents for social-political activity." This, Mrs Trilling points out, is "asking for academic dictatorship, for how else, except by dictate, would one determine the correct social and political activity into which the poor of the city should be induced?" (Diana Trilling, *Op. cit.*, pp. 106-107).

\(^{13}\)Trilling, "Mind," in *LD*, p. 119. It is clear from a recent *Encounter* article that the Affirmative Action Programme which Trilling mentions in this connexion still continues to be implemented in the U.S.A., much to the detriment of academic standards. The real but unstated aim of the Programme, the writer says, seems to be to achieve "an equality of forced results" (John H. Bunzel, "Affirmative Action, Negative Results," *Encounter*, 53, No. 5 (Nov. 1979), pp. 43-51).

\(^{14}\)Trilling, "Mind," in *LD*, p. 113.
"democracy is based on the intellect; it can progress only by the intellect, by the circulation of sound ideas so clear and distinct as to win general agreement."¹⁵ To Arnold France was a better democracy than England because France has "remodelled her institutions with an eye to reason rather than custom."¹⁶ The French Revolution itself, that great movement for equality, had been a movement of the mind.

But there is perhaps some ground for the charge that the authority of mind makes for inequality. Implicit in the concept of mind there is the idea of order, control, hierarchy and subordination. And a similar hierarchy must be allowed to prevail even among those who carry out the mind's enterprises,—they

must rise from the ranks, usually by slow stages, although some are inequitably privileged to rise faster and higher than others. In the institutionalized training of mind, some persons are given, or arrogate, the right to prescribe to others a certain degree of proficiency, to specify the means by which they are to attain it, and to test the extent to which they have done so.¹⁷

¹⁵Trilling, MA, p. 162.

¹⁶Matthew Arnold, Complete Prose Works, ed. R.H. Super, II (Ann Arbor: The Univ. of Michigan Press, 1962), 11. This volume is hereafter cited as Super, II.

And, after all, when we speak of these privileged few we tend to refer to them by some such phrase as an "intellectual aristocracy." E.M. Forster too hails such an aristocracy and says, what must further enrage radical democrats, that the members of such an aristocracy, living in different parts of the world, have an unspoken awareness of and regard for one another.¹⁸

A more important ground on which mind has been impeached is its commitment to the ideal of objectivity. The very term "objectivity" sounds cold and inhuman to modern ears. It is charged that objectivity reduces the process of perception to mere abstract cognition, that it fails to view the object in its wholeness, in its integral being. The dangers of such mechanistic knowledge are obvious. By viewing objects in this limiting fashion, that is, by using only our faculty of abstraction and by not using our powers of imaginative perception, we lose the joy of the instinctual life and so our humanity.¹⁹

¹⁸E.M. Forster, "What I Believe," in Two Cheers for Democracy, pp. 82-83. Arnold mentioned "the aristocracy of the intellect" in France as eminently fitted "to meet the best demands of the modern spirit" ("Popular Education in France," in Super, II, 162). The acts of violence that characterized the campus agitations--Diana Trilling (Op.cit., p. 112) mentions the burning by the students of documents of research done over a period of twelve years by a professor--could be ultimately construed as an expression of protest against such an "aristocracy."

Trilling admits that if the ideal of objectivity did really result in all this, it would be deplorable. But objectivity in its best traditional sense does not mean this. True objectivity is not reductive; it is not mechanical; it is not abstract cognition. In fact the best definition of objectivity is contained in the phrase that Matthew Arnold so often used: objectivity is the effort "to see the object as in itself it really is":

The object, whether it be a phenomenon of nature, or a work of art, or an idea or system of ideas, or a social problem, or, indeed, a person, is not to be seen as it, or he or she, appears to our habitual thought, to our predilections and prejudices, to our casual or hasty inspection, but as it really is in itself, in its own terms, in these alone. Objectivity, we might say, is the respect we give to the object as object, as it exists apart from us.20

Now we may say that the entire canon of Trilling's criticism shows a striving towards this Arnoldian objectivity—or disinterestedness if we may use Arnold's own favourite term—and bears extensive testimony to its achievement too. When we call Trilling an Arnoldian it is this which we have chiefly in mind—the effort to see the object as in itself it really is. In fact we may take a bold step further and assert that in many respects Trilling achieved a greater degree of objectivity than

his master himself did.

Let us leave the Jefferson lecture for a while and study the implications of this ideal of objectivity as Trilling and Arnold have understood and practised it.

Disinterestedness, first of all, is the recognition that our habitual modes of perception may be faulty or inadequate. This recognition is both the cause and the effect of our listening to the opposition or where there is none present, to imagine all the possible grounds on which our own position could be impugned. Arnold had set the following quotation from Burke as the motto for the 1865 edition of *Essays in Criticism: First Series*:

> Our antagonist is our helper. This amicable conflict with difficulty obliges us to an intimate acquaintance with our object, and compels us to consider it in all its relations. It will not suffer us to be superficial.²¹

The achievement of objectivity, the very effort towards it, is all the more commendable in both Arnold and Trilling because each, unlike most other critics of literature and society, was a member of a group. Arnold was in fact a member of the Liberal Party and Trilling, though not belonging to a party, still subscribed, along with other

American liberal intellectuals, to certain clearly defined assumptions and doctrines. In other words, both Arnold and Trilling had much, and many, to lose by their unwavering adherence to the ideal of objectivity. That they saw this ideal as not inconsistent with the liberal doctrine shows of course the inclusive way in which they defined liberalism itself. In fact we may say that they levelled the charges they did against liberalism because they were liberals. As Robert Langbaum says, "Trilling moves in a conservative direction because, in the manner of Arnold, he is correcting the dominant liberal stance. In a predominantly conservative milieu, he would no doubt have moved in the opposite direction."\(^{22}\) Arnold had all along ridiculed the anarchic excesses of English individualism and hailed the power of the State in France. But he admitted that if he were a Frenchman, "I should never be weary of admiring the independent, individual, local habits of action in England, of directing attention to the evils occasioned in France by the excessive action of the State."\(^{23}\)

Objectivity is needed especially in moments of complacency and self-congratulation. Speaking at a discussion in 1948 on "The Soviet Attack on Culture—What Happened and


\(^{23}\)Arnold, "Democracy," in Super, II, 16.
What Does It Mean?" Trilling said that we must view the question of intellectual tyranny not only in the Russian context but in two other contexts as well: (1) the whole tendency of modern European culture when everything has become polemical on the basis of ideology, when even a traditionally peaceable group like the Jews in America have become committed to the Zionist terrorism in Palestine, when even the preference of children for certain kinds of music is dictated by ideology; (2) the repressive instincts in our own hearts, our first violent responses to works of art which we don't approve of.\textsuperscript{24}

The next observation to make, which follows from the last, is that disinterestedness consists in not bothering about the size of your audience, not bothering whether you are speaking to or for the many or the few or yourself. "The populist critics seem to deny the possibility of humanity to those who do not have a large audience in mind," but the great writers noted for their breadth of humanity never felt that

\textsuperscript{24}Trilling, "The Repressive Impulse," \textit{Partisan Review}, 15 (June 1948), 718–20. We are reminded of E.M. Forster's refusal to regard England as entirely innocent of a tendency to repression similar to that in Germany. "Not the beam in Dr Goebbels' eye, but the mote in our own eye. Can we take it out? Is there as much freedom of expression and publication in this country as there might be?" ("The Tercentenary of the 'Areopagitica,'" in \textit{Two Cheers for Democracy}, pp. 65–66).
the effect of their imagination depended on the size of their audience. . . . The Romanticists wrote for a handful while the nation sneered. . . . And our Whitman, now the often unread symbol of the democratic life, was through most of his career the poet of what was even less than a coterie.

For the writer serves only "his daemon and his subject." If we may use Arnold's words about Burke, the writer, like Balaam, is unable to speak anything but what the Lord has put into his mouth. Disinterestedness is conscience in the intellectual sphere.

"Where I disagree, as where I agree, my chief effort has been to draw out and make clear the full implications of Arnold's positions," says Trilling in the Introductory Note to his *Matthew Arnold*, and this gives us another function of disinterestedness. We shall see in the next chapter how one of the major occupations of Trilling as a critic of culture was to examine the implications of people's responses to ideas, events, books and writers. "Do you know what you are saying?" he seems to ask all the time, "do you know this is what your position really means, do you know what you are laying yourself open to, what you are shutting


In subscribing to the Parrington view of reality, for instance, American liberals do not realize that they are undermining the primal impulse of liberalism itself. While neglecting Wordsworth probably on the ground of his assertion of the "sentiment of being," twentieth-century readers do not seem to recall that many of our own great writers like Joyce and Faulkner have conceived characters like Wordsworth's old men, children and idiots whose only pride is that they are. Indians have, for understandable reasons of course, no patience with Kipling. But, in their general sense of outrage at Kipling's imperialism, they don't always see that "the dominant emotions of Kim are love and respect for the aspects of Indian life that the ethos of the West does not usually regard even with leniency."  

And then disinterestedness, while it means seeing the object as in itself it is, while it takes account of all nuances and modulations and complexity, certainly does not mean making no intellectual distinctions. This was the major fault of The Kinsey Report which showed itself guilty of "intentional intellectual weakness," "a nearly conscious

aversion from making intellectual distinctions, almost as if out of the belief that an intellectual distinction must inevitably lead to a social discrimination or exclusion."

For the Report implies that

there can be only one standard for the judgment of sexual behaviour—that is, sexual behaviour as it actually exists; which is to say that sexual behaviour is not to be judged at all, except, presumably, in so far as it causes pain to others.30

Objectivity also consists in subjecting our ideas and ideals themselves to the severest scrutiny and trying to see what damage they can sometimes do. Thanks to the French Revolution, politics has become available to everyone and in that politics ideas play a great part. On the whole this is a welcome development to the extent that it promises liberation and fulfilment to the majority of human beings. But we have not learnt that just because ideas and ideals have great power nowadays, "there is a direct connection between their power and another kind of power, the old, unabashed, cynical power of force."

Leftist liberals are surprised when this fact is forced on their attention. They were surprised at the unregenerate force that Communism unleashed, they even refused to acknowledge it because they had irresponsibly thought of politics as a kind of intellectual idyll. It was the

achievement of George Orwell that he saw that a politics of ideas and ideals could be as vicious as, for instance, feudal politics.  

And then there is the misconception that objectivity is an abstracting, merely rational process and that the more we employ it, the farther away we get from experience. It is supposed that by being objective, we lose the immediacy of experience, we never get close to the object. Trilling would of course deny that the rational intellect is necessarily against experience. In situations like the present when sex, violence and madness have acquired an ideational and ideological status, if the rational intellect is brought into play, "it may be found that it works in the interests of experience." But objectivity is no barren intellection. Writing of George Orwell, Trilling says that Orwell was using "the imagination of a man whose hands and eyes and whole body were part of his thinking apparatus." As John Henry Raleigh explains, to be disinterested is not to be disengaged from experience but rather to connect ideas and experience.

31 Trilling, "George Orwell," in OS, p. 152.
33 Trilling, "George Orwell," in OS, p. 164.
Seeing the object as in itself it really is of course the primary function of criticism. But Trilling would go a step further and say that objectivity is the hallmark of literary creation as well-only he would then call it "moral realism." If objectivity means taking the fullest account of complexity, variety and modulation, then the literary imagination is eminently fitted for the task. If objectivity consists in going beyond ideology, then it is the creative writer with his unique gift of negative capability who is the most likely to achieve it. If objectivity means viewing the object in its wholeness, then it is the creative writer, who thinks through images, who is the most likely to succeed in such a perception.

The writer's moral realism, as Trilling generally defines it, results in a kind of double view. Thus Scott Fitzgerald exemplifies his own description of a first-rate intelligence in that he has "the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind, at the same time, and still retain the ability to function." For example, he maintained a delicate tension between "his idea of personal free will and his idea of circumstance." Henry James's mind is nothing if not dialectical. For not only does he present in all his work the conflict between the radical and the conservative

principles. What is more remarkable, "the values assigned to each of the two opposing principles are not permitted to be fixed and constant." Unlikely as it may sound, even Whitman had and sustained such a duality of vision. He displayed at the same time a sense of "personalism" as well as a faith in democracy. Unfortunately, Trilling complains, modern champions of democracy forget this dualism of Whitman's belief.37

Quite often as a mind in quest of truth, Trilling feels the fascination of what may be called loosely "the other side," even when it happens to question his "deepest pieties." This becomes understandable if we remember that the truth he seeks is not just something in the abstract that could be defended in dialectical terms, but something which would be experientially valid and feasible. John Stuart Mill had said that there were occasions when the political tradition of a people made democracy impracticable. Even to say this would seem to be "virtually to abrogate the whole ethic of liberalism"; it would seem immoral to accept that "democracy was not available to all peoples at any stage in their history." So it had once seemed to Trilling himself. But,


taking part in a Commentary Symposium in 1967, Trilling admitted that "experience enforces the truth of Mill's observation," and that "the assumptions and habits that make democratic government possible are not present in the tradition of every people." Trilling said this at the same time as he insisted that he was still an anti-Communist.38 (One of the experiences that enforced the truth of Mill's observation must surely have been America's futile involvement in Viet Nam.)

Again and again, in Trilling's work, we have this insistence that the complexity of life is such that we cannot afford to take a simple single attitude. We may perhaps expect him to make an unmodulated response at least towards anti-Semitism. But no, he remains true to his ideal of disinterestedness even here. In the course of another Commentary Symposium, he said he of course met hostile statements about Jews with hostility. "But this doesn't necessarily destroy my relation with the writer who makes them." For after all, there is no need to be in a passive relation to a writer "expecting him to be a guiding saint."

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38 Trilling, Contribution to "Liberal Anti-Communism Revisited: A Symposium," Commentary, 44 (Sept. 1967), 76. Incidentally, the social organization that we have inherited in India, for instance, and the unhappy results of our experiments in democracy in the last thirty years would appear to confirm, at any rate make real, Trilling's view about nations for whom democracy is not "available."
Moreover, adverse statements about Jews are not necessarily anti-Semitic in the usual meaning of the word. Thus he would distinguish between, on the one hand, Eliot's symbolic use of the Jew in his poetry and, on the other hand, his remarks about Jews in his prose. Above all, as a humanist and as a believer in cultural pluralism he would expect each of the components of a society to have "enough reality to tempt discourse" and even tension. Much is made of Thomas Wolfe's anti-Semitism. But "this man of the artisan class of North Carolina represented a certain past and they [the Jews of New York] represented a certain past, and something more than a bow was appropriate to the meeting of these two embodied ideas." However, acceptance of the implications of cultural pluralism does not mean the abrogation of decency and the ideals of common humanity and civil peace.  

Such a centrality of outlook can be maddening to the "committed" reader in its refusal to take firm sides, in its willingness to remain in doubt and uncertainty. "Those who are not with us are against us," roared Sir Winston Churchill during the World War and even less militant spirits would like, "if not systematic certainties, at least directions for the journey." A critic of Arnold defined


disinterestedness as Arnold's "principle of abstaining from specific proposals."\textsuperscript{41} Arnold of course would have discomfited that critic by acknowledging the truth of the definition. What he said in "A French Eton" about his own criticism of secondary education in England he would have said about his criticism of other things as well:

I have no pet scheme to press, no crotchet to gratify, no fanatical zeal for giving this or that particular shape to the public establishment of our secondary instruction.\textsuperscript{42}

Trilling would have said the same thing about his own criticism. He would have said about himself, what he had said about Robert Warshow, that he was dealing with experience by trying to understand it, not by prescribing the attitude to be adopted to it.\textsuperscript{43}

Not that he is afraid to commit himself. The commitment is there but it is a commitment not to any static ideal but to a progressive growth of vision as it were and it is a commitment that emerges slowly. Thus, if we are driven to it, we may say that the commitment in The Liberal


Imagination is to the primal impulse of liberalism in all its variety and complexity, in all its balance of idealism and realism; that the commitment in *The Opposing Self* is to a delicate compromise between a liberated selfhood and the given of biology and social and cultural circumstances. We can go on, but we will only be fixing and formulating the truth of Trilling's position which can only be perceived in its infinite variations.

Let us approach this matter in another way. R.P. Blackmur said that Trilling "cultivates a mind never entirely his own." Commenting on this, Eugene Goodheart says that Blackmur would seem to imply that Trilling "therefore is vulnerable to a reality that might be resisted if he simply acted from his own conviction." Disagreeing with Blackmur's conclusion, Professor Goodheart says that "Trilling's conviction includes the effort to understand a reality larger or other than his own personal moral commitment and this effort can create strength as well as weakness." The "mind not his own" referred to by Blackmur is, of course, the mind of the European past. Even in a collection like *A Gathering of Fugitives*

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where Trilling speaks about books in a rather informal way, he tries not only to look freshly and personally at the object as in itself it really is, but also to evaluate it by the best standards of the Western moral and imaginative tradition. We see then that Trilling's disinterestedness is actually a search for "the best that is known and thought in the world" upon the subject under consideration; the disinterestedness is really interested in establishing an order of ideas, in making the best ideas prevail.

* * *

One last criticism made against the ideal of objectivity --and now we may return to "Mind in the Modern World"--is that it is incapable of full realization, that it is not, at all times and in all situations, possible. That this view is true, that the object as it is in itself can never finally be known, "is guaranteed by the nature of individual persons, by the nature of society, even, the philosophers tell us, by the nature of mind itself." That Matthew Arnold, the relentless advocate of objectivity, fell short of it in many instances is also well known.\(^4^6\)


\(^4^7\) Sister Thomas Marion Hoctor, however, shows that Arnold strove all the time towards greater objectivity. Even the revisions that he made in the text bear this out. (Sister Thomas Marion Hoctor, "Introduction to the Textual Notes," Essays in Criticism: First Series, pp. 233-41).
The truth is that great minds have always known that complete objectivity is impossible of achievement. Yet they have always made the effort "out of something like a sense of intellectual honor and out of the faith that in the practical life, which includes the moral life, some good must follow from even the relative success of the endeavor." This becomes clear when we remember that objectivity is not only an attempt at a greater clarity of vision which may lead to some practical good, but is really a search for the best ideas. In his review—significantly titled "Elements That Are Wanted"—of The Idea of a Christian Society, Trilling recommends to the attention of his readers Eliot's religious politics in spite of its vulnerability. And as a justification for his recommendation Trilling cites Arnold's advice that criticism "must be apt to study and praise elements that for the fulness of spiritual perfection are wanted, even though they belong to a power which in the practical sphere may be maleficent." He recommends it because it suggests elements "which a rational and naturalistic philosophy, to be adequate, must encompass."


50 Trilling, "Elements That Are Wanted," p. 379. Arnold observed that "the man of imagination—nay, and the philosopher
Trilling, like Arnold, wishes to conserve the best and like Arnold seeks to conciliate epochs. No single man can succeed in this but as Trilling says of Arnold, this method has its vitality "exactly because it is the method of history."  

It is not quite material whether Arnold—or Trilling—attained the ideal that he had set for himself. But it does matter when on the grounds of their failure, we seek to devalue the ideal itself. It is not, as Trilling says, the limitation itself but the worship of limitation that is degrading. Arnold's fellow-liberals were content with the limited view of truth that their ideology or rather their practical lives allowed them. A contemporary of Trilling, a German Minister, declared:

The old idea of science—based on the sovereign right of abstract intellectual activity has gone forever. The new science is entirely different from the idea of knowledge that found its value in an unchecked effort to reach the truth.  

The depressing thing is not so much that people are terrae filli as that they are content to be such.

too, in spite of her propensity to burn him—will always have a weakness for the Catholic Church; because of the rich treasures of human life which have been stored within her pale" ("Pagan and Mediaeval Religious Sentiment," in Essays in Criticism, p. 137).

51 Trilling, MA, p. xiii. 52 Ibid., p. xii.
An extreme form of the reaction against objectivity is the gross subjectivism which views madness as a desirable state in itself. According to this view, society itself is really mad, so individual madness is really liberation from the madness of society, is ultimately the means by which society itself may recover its lost sanity. Now Trilling makes a characteristic first response to this view by observing that many great writers like Shakespeare and Cervantes have themselves shown that madness is not something to be despised or condescended to, that it is a condition productive of truths "which are not accessible to our habitual and socially countenanced mode of perception." It is of course true that for these writers madness was something more than a metaphorical construct. But they never presented madness, as some of our psychiatrists now do, as a state of existence to be desired and sought, as a paradigm of authentic existence and cognition. That some of our contemporaries look upon a state of aberration as a state of normalcy, even as a state of perfection, only shows the desperateness of our "impulse to impugn and transcend the limitations of rational mind." 53

But Trilling refuses to end his lecture on a note of lament. He notes, once again exercising his critical

function of disinterestedness, this time about mind itself, that mind has not always played a significant part in the affairs of men. Mere habit, or inertia, or traditional pieties have often ruled over life. But, starting from the sixteenth century, we have tried to model our societies on mind in the sense of incorporating its energy of spirit, its intentionality, into our conduct of affairs. The decline in our faith in mind must cause us greater concern because it will now have social consequences. But there is still hope for mind and therefore for society because the essence of mind is "its wish to be conscious of itself, with what this implies of its ability to examine a course it has taken and to correct it." 54

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We have been speaking as if the disinterestedness advocated and to a large extent practised by Arnold and that which characterizes Trilling's work are identical in kind. And so they are, in many important respects. But there appears to be one significant difference. What the difference is will become clear when we take account of the various sources through which Arnold derived his concept of disinterestedness. Sister Thomas Marion Hoctor, S.S.J., drawing in part from R.H. Super, lists them:

Spinoza, Goethe, Sainte-Beuve, Wordsworth and Cardinal Newman. But Sister Hoctor adds that Arnold's notion of disinterestedness owes something to his reading of the Bhagavad Gita. That Arnold did mean by "disinterestedness" something very close to the "detachment" enjoined on us by Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita is evident from his reference to it in "The Function of Criticism," and elsewhere in his letters to Clough. The first step in the cultivation of this detachment which is the mark of the Sthitapragna (the whole man or the ideal man), is to withdraw from action and try to achieve a condition of Grace, "the condition of the instrument in purity, transparency, carrying out (without attachment even to the work) the will of God." This condition is not something intellectual. It is a harmonious surrender of all the faculties to the Divine Will, it is a rising above the dualities of life and above all it is a transcending of personality—for the tendency of personality is to appropriate to itself the fruits of the action. Neither the Gita nor Matthew Arnold preaches abandonment


of action. They only insist that the action be without passion, without egoistic attachment, that the action be done in a state of resignation (in the highest sense of the word). 58

The self-perfection which Western ethics insisted on is after all only a means to an end. The Eastern text with which Arnold was familiar preached self-transcendence for self-transcendence leads to a higher perfection when action takes its volition from the Divine Will and not from the human will. For so long as there is the self, absolute disinterestedness is impossible. At any rate, the ordinary self should be transcended, and the true self discovered. That Arnold had a vague perception of this fact and that Lionel Trilling would never have granted this necessity is another difference between the two critics. It was perhaps inevitable that Trilling should have been distrustful of such a view for the whole tendency of his work is to exalt mind with what it implies of will. Trilling was in fact afraid of such a dissociation between "ideals" and "passions and interests" since he was not sure that it might not result in a complete paralysis of action. 59

58 V.S. Seturaman, "Introduction" to Selections from Matthew Arnold, p. xxii.

Trilling's fears would appear to be legitimate purely from the point of view of political action.

To say that all this implication is lacking in Trilling's conception of disinterestedness—he was of course aware of its presence in Arnold's thinking—is not necessarily to devalue Trilling's own view of disinterestedness. But we must record the difference in the interests of completeness, and perhaps of disinterestedness itself.