

The Right of Aesthetic Realism to Be Known

A PERIODICAL OF HOPE AND INFORMATION

Aesthetic Realism was founded by Eli Siegel.

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Racism Can End

Dear Unknown Friends:

We are serializing the enormously important, amazing 1951 lecture *Aesthetic Realism As Thought*, by Eli Siegel. In it he shows something never seen before: mathematics, thought as such, emotions, and art have a basis in common. That basis is in the great Aesthetic Realism principle stated by him: “The world, art, and self explain each other: each is the aesthetic oneness of opposites.”

For example, every instance of thought—from arithmetic (as he describes here), to Beethoven’s thought as he composed his Fifth Symphony, to a woman’s thought about love—is a dealing with the sameness and difference of reality. For the sameness and difference of things is present in quantities, notes, and our being affected by someone who has the temerity to be *not us*. How accurately and deeply and richly we see sameness and difference is how good our thought is.

The fact that this matter is the same as pulsing, hoping, and often agonized life, and that Aesthetic Realism is necessary and sweepingly beautiful, can be seen through something reported in the *New York Times* on June 11. Under the headline “New Survey Shows Americans Pessimistic on Race Relations,” Steven A. Holmes writes that according to a Gallup poll “a majority of Americans are pessimistic that blacks and whites will ever learn to get along.”

I am completely sure that racism can end, through the study of Aesthetic Realism. Furthermore, if the press had not boycotted Aesthetic Realism for decades, there would not be racism in America now. But persons of the press have been furious at needing to learn about everything—the news, art, the human mind, their own lives—from Aesthetic Realism. They have been furious at Eli Siegel’s beautiful utter honesty: that he wouldn’t sell out, flatter people; he wouldn’t put “getting ahead” before justice as they expect everyone to do, and do themselves. So these press persons have kept from America the knowledge that can have white people and black

people—as they see one another on the street, in a classroom, in the office—have feeling about each other that is alive with kindness and respect.

Where Prejudice Begins

The big thing people have not known about racial prejudice is that it does not begin with race. It begins with the world itself, and how one sees the world. Race will never be understood and racial prejudice will not end until people can learn the following from Aesthetic Realism: 1) Race is an aspect of the aesthetic structure, the sameness-and-difference structure, of the world. This structure is what we see as we see two different things, ocean and sky, inextricably part of one horizon; as different words join together to make one sentence; as a tree’s trunk and leaves are different yet *for* each other, sweetly and powerfully coherent with each other. Whenever, Mr. Siegel showed, we see difference and sameness as one, we see beauty. 2) No person would be against people of a different race if that person were not against the biggest thing different from him: *the world*.

Let us take a girl we can call Heather Norris, born in Vermont 15 years ago. Aesthetic Realism explains that while Heather was born to particular parents, she was born, like every child, into the whole world other than herself—of objects and history and sun and money and words and human beings. Mr. Siegel explained that there is a fight within every person concerning that reality different from oneself. It is the fight between *respect* and *contempt*.

The purpose of Heather’s life—what she, as a tiny baby lying in a Vermont crib, was born for—was to respect the world, like it. That means, to feel things and people in all their difference from her were related to her too: they could add to her, make her more herself through her wanting to know and value them. But within Heather and all of us there was and is another possibility: the false, hurtful dealing with sameness and difference, which is *contempt*. Mr. Siegel described

contempt as the “disposition in every person to think he will be for himself by making less of the outside world.”

She Did Not Like the World

Heather was bewildered by the world she met. Her parents, being human, confused her. They could buy her presents and tell her she was gorgeous, brilliant, “the most special girl in the world,” and then sometimes they could seem not interested in her at all. Further, she came to feel her parents were stupid for praising her so lavishly and that other people were cold and mean for *not* doing so. She disliked the world because she saw some bad things in it: she saw selfishness in people, and her keen ears discerned hypocrisy. But she also disliked the world for being complicated, for confusing her, for having so many different things and happenings and people that she couldn’t understand fast and that didn’t give her her way.

By the time she was eight, this representative person was in a contest with the world different from her—that contest which is contempt. She went after feeling sure and important through feeling other things were deeply separate from her, that the reality within herself was warmer, profounder, more precious than the reality outside her. She did not see the other children in her third grade class as having the insides she had—the full range of feelings, the thoughts in bed at night—even though she could play energetically with those children and giggle with them. There was a big desire in Heather—a representative, ordinary, terrible desire, simmering along hour by hour—to punish the world, beat it out, to feel she mattered by showing other things *didn’t* matter, weren’t good enough for her. She liked making fun of her teacher with her friends. She felt like she was important then—that someone who had made her feel she needed to learn things wasn’t as good as she was.

She Became a Racist

When Heather saw a girl whose skin was a color different from hers, she, without

knowing it, was seeing someone who vividly embodied the *world* as different from her, a world she wanted to defeat. Heather seized the opportunity to despise this girl and others with that different skin color. The feeling of revulsion and superiority she had as to them was the fake, horrible, yet ferociously desired victory of contempt: of feeling she was somebody just because she could look down on what was different.

Heather heard someone use a crude, demeaning word about a person of another race. That word appealed to her. And the first time she used it—toward a girl in her class—she had a thrill. It was the thrill of feeling that in one swift utterance she had put in its place not only a person but the world different from her. She could get to quick sureness by defeating what was other than herself: by making difference—in the form of an eight-year-old black girl—look low and ridiculous through two sneering syllables. The sureness, being fake, didn't last; and the contempt, the untruth, it was based on made Heather feel often deeply nervous and dreary. But she relished those moments of swift, sneering, conquering sureness and kept going after them.

The horrible way Heather saw black people continued because her desire to have contempt for a world not herself continued. Now she is 15. With some friends, she has spray-painted ugly words on a church attended by African-Americans in her town.

Meanwhile, Heather's contempt for people of another race had as a prerequisite for its existence a dislike of people *as such*. Most persons are like her: they see people not as deeply adding to them but as means to be important, praised, superior. And (as I have said in previous TROs) profit economics, with its horrible way of seeing people, has led to an increase of racism in America. Men and women worry about jobs and money, and rightly hate being seen by a boss in terms of how much profit they can produce for him. But they wrongly use their anger to dislike the world itself; and they try to even the score through looking down on persons standing for that world different from them.

What Must Replace Racism

Aesthetic Realism shows—greatly, efficiently, kindly shows—that for racism to end we have to be against the thing it begins with: contempt for the world itself. Further, racism won't be effectively done away with unless it is replaced with something that has terrific power. What needs to replace it is not the feeling that the difference of another person is somehow tolerable. What is necessary is the seeing and feeling that the relation of sameness and difference between ourselves and that other person is *beautiful*. People need to feel, with feeling both intimately personal and large, that difference of race is like

the difference to be found in music: two notes are different, but they are in behalf of the same melody; they complete each other; each needs the other to be expressed richly, to be fully itself.

It is possible for millions of men, women, and children to have an emotion about race that is like an art emotion. And it is necessary. It will happen when America is studying Aesthetic Realism.

Despite the continued virulent boycott by many press persons, increasingly articles and letters by Aesthetic Realism consultants and students are being published in America. Over 550 have appeared in the last 14 months. And some are about racism and Aesthetic Realism's great understanding of it. The Emmy award-winning anti-prejudice public service film by Aesthetic Realism consultant Ken Kimmelman, *The Heart Knows Better*, is being seen by Americans on television and in professional sports stadiums, including Yankee Stadium and Shea. The statement by Eli Siegel this film is based on and quotes has his beautiful way of seeing all humanity, his humor, his great unending kindness: "It will be found that black and white man have the same goodnesses, the same temptations, and can be criticized in the same way. The skin may be different, but the aorta is quite the same."

The pleasure and increased kindness people feel seeing this sentence, in so many parts of America, needs to grow, become complete, become effective in everyday American life through the study of Aesthetic Realism.

To show in one more way the art feeling—the only practical and just feeling—Americans can have about race, I quote a 1970 poem by Eli Siegel. It has, with its rich music, his beautiful logic and tenderness:

Only Later; or, The First Line

I heard a Negro child crying
And it sounded so much like a white
child

It was only later
I found out what I said
In my first line.

—Ellen Reiss, *Class Chairman
of Aesthetic Realism*

Quantity and Emotion By Eli Siegel

Note. In showing the elements thought contains, Mr. Siegel is looking at words in a poem popular after the Civil War: F. M. Finch's "The Blue and the Gray," about buried soldiers of both the North and South.

"Where the blades of the grave-grass quiver / Asleep are the ranks of the dead." There is one word here that accents the regularity of things: *ranks*. The word *ranks* reminds one of one of the earliest forms of thought, arithmetic. The

first thing in arithmetic is to see that things have numbers. A child used to be asked by the teacher, "Look at this basket—how many oranges are there?" The child would have to see a similarity in the oranges. That problem could be made more difficult if there were apples and pears, but there would still be ten objects in the basket. Then, if the child counting ten things felt that because there were ten they were all the same, it would be very bad. He has to have a sense of difference and sameness.

Thought is a good deal like numbering. One word around thought which has to do with its mathematical quality is *calculate*; another is *reckon*. In the child's being able to say there are ten oranges, he is able to find a continuity among these oranges. He sees them each as different and he sees some relation among them; it is a very simple thing. There can also be a more complex relation of diverse forces. For instance, it is a big day when a child gets to fractions. And there are such things as cube root and square root—which are also counting.

All arithmetic is really counting; it has to do with quantity. But I want to point out that thought of any kind has to do with quantity. And quantity has to do with value: we say, "You give this *too much* of a value."

These things I have been describing are also present in a poem, in art. How they are put together—the sense of sameness and difference, weight, motion, form—has to do with how the poem affects one. There are things in this poem that weight the emotion. It is a topical poem. A person reading it in Portugal, where the Civil War meant much less, wouldn't be affected as much. But a person who was reading it in New England or in Georgia, if he were well-disposed, would be very much affected. The question is, Do emotions have quantities? The purpose of art is to arouse a large emotion that is really large, has all dimension; because if it is only personal, it isn't enough.

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PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS

THURSDAYS, 6:30 PM: Seminars with speakers from Aesthetic Realism faculty;

SATURDAYS, 8 PM: "People Are Trying to Put Opposites Together," Aesthetic Realism Dramatic Presentations

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