

The Image of Culture

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NO ONE CAN DENY that there is widespread discussion of the decline of Western culture, however much opinions of the realities involved may differ. This has been present in philosophical works for more than half a century; the shock of the First World War brought it into more popular organs of discussion, and today one may encounter it, though usually in frivolous forms, in the columns of daily newspapers. That the idea has not merely persisted but has seeped increasingly into the modern consciousness is itself a cultural and social fact of great importance which cannot be overlooked among the signs of the times.

Attempts to dismiss the idea often take the easy route of attributing it to temperamental pessimism or some other condition of the critic. It is alleged that those who say our culture is decaying are those who regularly take an apprehensive view of the future, or they are those who have lost their nerve amid the complexities of an age of transition, or they are those who suffer from nostalgia. The presence of such persons, it is

argued, is not peculiar to this age, and hence their warnings are not to be taken as a serious sign that our way of life is deteriorating. The properly constituted man adopts the red-blooded attitude toward things; he goes along with changes because he realizes that change and progress are the law of life and that, although some valued institutions may be disappearing, they will more than be made up for by new ones that are in the process of creation. The upholders of this view retort, in brief, that the world instead of growing worse is growing better and that it is really one's civic duty to believe this and to proclaim it.

Thus two largely antithetical views are regularly placed before the public. It is well to see that both of these views are capable of support. One can argue that our culture is in serious decline, and one can argue that it is flourishing and improving. But both arguments cannot be equally valid. Whenever large-scale tendencies are being examined, facts taken from a superficial level and facts taken from a profound one may

conflict or point in opposite directions. Like two air masses, one moving at ground level and one moving at a high altitude, they can for awhile pursue opposite courses. If one reads from the top level of phenomena, one may get many signs of assurance which will be contradicted by a look lower down. The real issue in this controversy, then, is one of depth of implication. Yet there can be no implication at all unless one is willing to contemplate an order of human values. The nature and proper end of man are central to any discussion, not only of whether a certain culture is weakening, but also of whether such a culture is worth preserving. It is when we look at the depth of implication that we see the real difference between the parties to this argument.

Those who contend that things are going well enough or are improving are found to be nonserious, in the sense of refusing to look at serious things. They glean their data from the novel, or flashy, or transitory sort of development, which often does indicate a sort of vitality, but shows at the same time a lack of direction and a purposelessness. Their data are likely to be the kind that can be quantified in the style of the social scientists or at least of the publicist — so many more people owning record players, so many more books circulating from public libraries, and the like. They ignore the deep sources of tendency which can very easily render nugatory any gains of the above kind. In short, their fact-finding is superficial and simplistic, and their claims are made sometimes in a strident tone which is itself a demerit to their case.

Moreover, it is certain that some if not many of the defenders of this optimistic position have a vested interest in "progress," or the present trend of things. A

continuation of this trend means for them reputation and money, and they fall in with it as supporters who expect to be rewarded. There are many disintegrative processes which are immediately profitable to those engaged in promoting them, and it is human weakness to covet even such ill-gotten rewards. Therefore it is not hypercritical to look closely at the situation of those who argue for the excellence of modernism to see whether they stand to profit in practical ways from these developments. Not only advertising and journalism but considerable areas of education now invite this kind of scrutiny.

When we turn to the other view, we find that it is made up predominantly of persons who are concerned with the nature of man and the problem of value. They are people with definite ideas of right and wrong, possessing the faculty of taste and consciences which can be offended. Furthermore, they usually will be historically informed with the result that to them novelty is not always originality nor a fresh departure toward a new horizon. If they are conservative, it is because they have learned the truth of the maxim, "The good is hard," and they know how tempting it is to try to circumvent this. It is my observation that these people suffer a great deal, and their suffering is sometimes used to condemn them, as if failure to achieve complacency were an indictable thing. But it is only those who are capable of discrimination and of feelings *against* things who can be the custodians of culture. Accordingly, I am satisfied that T.S. Eliot made a true appraisal of our times in asserting that "our own period is one of decline; that the standards of culture are lower than they were fifty years ago; and that the evidences of this decline are visible in every department of human activity."¹

Another way of understanding this conflict of opinion is to recognize that the "optimists" have the current rhetoric on their side even while the "pessimists" have the proof. The modern world has a terrific momentum in the direction in which it is going, and many of the words of our everyday vocabulary are terms implicit with approval of modern tendencies. To describe these tendencies in the language that is used most widely is to endorse them, whereas to oppose them is to bring in words that connote half-forgotten beliefs and carry disturbing resonances. Thus the signs and probabilities are with the optimists, and their task of expression is an easy one, since they have so many ready-made terms at hand. They have the rhetorician's advantage of a language in circulation and a set of "prejudices" in the mind of the majority. It is the object of this writing to bring a rhetoric along with a proof to show that the present course of our culture is not occasion for complacency but for criticism and for possible reconstruction. This requires meeting a rhetoric derived from circumstances with one based more on definition and causal analysis.

I anticipate the further objection that all ages are ages of anxiety just because all ages are in some respect ages of transition. Since transition is a passage to the unknown, a degree of apprehensiveness over what is tentative, unformed, and uncertain is natural. There is some truth in this generalization, yet it would be as absurd to say that every period in the history of a culture is equally healthy and fruitful as to say that every period in the life of an individual is equally happy. It would in fact be intellectual and moral skepticism to deny that some periods are distinct as crises, and the troubled consciousness of

modern man gives ample ground for believing that ours is such a period.

The need then is great for a revisionist view of what is known as modernism. The mindless approval of everything modern—indeed, of each dissolution of an old pattern—as something better than what preceded it, or acceptance of the Spenglerian thesis of inevitable decay, massive and intellectually serious as this is, does not constitute a true dilemma for the man who wishes to orient himself with reference to the culture of our time. There is the answer of some third alternative, involving basic principles and leading through free will and effort to some creative results. The imagination of the time cannot, at least, leave this possibility unexamined.

One more thing needs to be said about the relation of a critic to his culture. There is an opinion, by no means easy to refute, that culture is like a brotherhood: either you are of it or you are not. If you are of it, you can do something about it to the extent of carrying it on by living according to its prescriptions. If you are not of it, there is nothing you can do about it, except perhaps describe it from a distance while missing the real *Innigkeit*. On this assumption there is no such thing as aiding a culture from the outside or of aiding it consciously in any way. If you belong to it, you live in and by it; if you are outside it, you find the gulf impassable, except to certain superficial contacts. "Culture is culturing," and when a culture has lost its will to live, outside ministrations are of no use.

But in a further view, there is more than one way of being outside a culture. One can be outside it simply in the sense of having been born outside its pale and of having received no nurture through it. People in this position constitute the kind of "foreigners" the Greeks called *bar-*

baroi—"those speaking a different language." Certainly not to speak the language of a culture, in the figurative sense, is to suffer effective disbarment. These persons are alien, even when they belong to another culture of high development. The man of a different culture has different intellectual and moral bearings, and except in the case of gifted individuals having long periods to assimilate, there is no crossing over, nor any real desire for it. The men of another culture are outsiders, and one expects no more from them than from a friendly stranger, although there is sometimes critical value in an outside view.

There is another type of outsider, however, who may entertain hope of doing something about a culture that is weakening. He is a member of the culture who has to some degree estranged himself from it through study and reflection. He is like the *savant* in society; though in it, he is not wholly of it; he has acquired knowledge and developed habits of thought which enable him to see it in perspective and to gauge it. He has not lost the intuitive understanding which belongs to him as a member, but he has added something to that. A temporary alienation from his culture may be followed by an intense preoccupation with it, but on a more reflective level than that of the typical member. He has become sufficiently aware of what is outside it to see it as a system or an entity. This person may be a kind of doctor of culture; in one way he is crippled by his objectivity, but in another way he is helped to what he must have, a point of view and a consciousness of freedom of movement.

It has been observed, to cite a kind of parallel, that nearly all of the leaders of strong nationalistic movements in the present age were men who had some type of "outside" experience in their rearing or their education. They were men

who knew their nations from the inside, but who had also seen them from a vantage point elsewhere. Thus it was with Parnell and Ireland, with Sun Yat-sen and China, with Hitler and Germany, with Gandhi and India. Even Franco is a "Gallego"—not a Spaniard in the true sense. These men had all at one time been far enough removed from their future nations to see what these were, and what they saw engendered in them an urge to define the reality and the consciousness of that nationhood. Although they were "doctors" of nationalism rather than "doctors" of culture, their case shows enough analogy to provide guiding points here. The man who is simply a carrier of his culture may not be armed in the same way to do something about it when it flags. His role may be too much that of simply acting; he can keep in stride, but he cannot coach. For diagnostic and remedial work we may have to turn to those who have in a way mutilated themselves by withdrawal, by a special kind of mental discipline, and by the kind of fixation upon a task which even impedes free cultural participation.² We may therefore regard it as no anomaly, but rather as an understandable event, if a person not conspicuously cultured himself should discern what is impairing the health of a culture. Thus it is not the person who has contributed most to a culture who will necessarily have the most useful things to say when the culture shows signs of dissolution.

But what can this person, who is not a paragon of the culture, but who finds himself profoundly stirred by its uneasy situation, actually contribute? From his mixed position he probably can recognize the hostile or disruptive forces. Like the doctor again, he cannot make the object of his attention live, but he can combat those things which would keep it

from living. He can point out: this is a disease, this is a poison, this is a bad diet. If the inimical conditions are removed and if there is a true vitality, the sufferer should recover. There are, of course, limits of the analogy of a human culture to an organism, yet culture is a creation in the world, and it must obey certain fundamental conditions of existence.

A radical perspective on the subject may even start with the question of whether culture as such is something we ought to cherish and defend. It would be uncritical to assume that the answer has always been affirmative. Now and in the past culture in the sense meant here has had to meet open and covert hostility. Certain religions have been largely hostile to it; moralists have condemned it as a frivolity or an indulgence; men of business have been impatient with its demands and its "extravagance"; statesmen of a certain type have opposed it as producing "effeminacy." At present there is a fairly widespread feeling that culture "costs too much" in the sense of gratifying certain educated appetites at considerable expense while the masses are deprived. If the friends of culture were to allow the matter to be put to a popular vote, they might still win, but I do not think that the size of the majority would be reassuring. The public of today does not understand clearly either the nature or the role of culture, and general literacy has not helped the situation.

The claim of culture as such to exist is best explained through its genesis. Man is a special creature in the respect that he has to live with two selves. One of these is his existential part, his simple animal being, which breathes and moves and nourishes itself. This is man without qualification or adornment, an organism living in an environment. In this existence

he is a very predictable animal—or would be except that the second self can have effects upon his somatic appearance and behavior.

The second self is an image which he somehow evolves from his spirit. It is made up of wishes and hopes, of things transfigured, of imaginations and value ascriptions. It is a picture to which the subjective part of our being necessarily gives a great deal, and hence the danger of trying to read it literally from external facts. A culture expresses itself very extensively through artistic creation, and, as Suzanne Langer has pointed out in her *Problems of Art*, we cannot infer artistic vision from a symptom. That is to say, a mere noting of details without insight and some constructive use of the imagination will not produce an understanding of a culture.

It appears that even the most primitive people have this urge to depict themselves in some fashion. Without the picturization, man feels an unendurable nakedness in the face of his environment and before the questions of life. From such poverty he rescues himself through projections that include the natural environment and whatever is suggested by his spirit regarding the mystery that broods over creation. Look beneath the surface of the most brilliant cultures of history, and you find a hunger and a wonderment, reaching even to a kind of melancholia. Nietzsche has shown how this impelled the Greeks to create their splendid world of illusion in myth and art. Impulses of like kind can be found beneath the efflorescence of Elizabethan England. The more man is impressed with the tragic nature of his lot, the more he dramatizes his relation with the world. A strain of artist in the race causes it to reach out in proportion as its awareness

deepens and to throw up great protective creations.

This great yearning of man to be *something* in the imaginative sense, that is, to be something more than he is in the simple existential way or in the reductionist formula of materialism, is both universal and proper to him. The latter may be asserted because he is the only creature who asks the question why he is here and who feels thwarted in his self-realization until some kind of answer is produced. This urge to be representative of something higher is an active ingredient of his specific humanity; it has created everything from the necklace of animal teeth with which the primitive adorns his body to the elaborate constructions which the men of high cultures have made to interpret the meaning of life and their mission in it. This is the point at which he departs from the purely utilitarian course and makes of himself a being with significance. It is a refutation of all simplistic histories and psychologies, but it is one of the most verifiable facts about man.

No one has been able to define exactly how a culture integrates and homologizes the ideas and actions of many men over a long period of time any more than how the consciousness gives a thematic continuity to the life of an individual. As far as one can tell, the collective consciousness of the group creates a mode of looking at the world or arrives at some imaginative visual bearing. It "sees" the world metaphorically according to some felt need of the group, and this entails an ordering which denotes dissatisfaction with "things as they are." Of course cultures do respond to differences in what nature has provided, such as the sea, or a kind of terrain, or a hot or cold climate, these having the power to initiate imaginative reactions. But man

meets the given part way, and then proceeds with something of his own. So cultures reflect different regions and varying kinds of historical endowment. But the decisive thing is the work of the spirit, which always operates positively by transfiguring and excluding. It is of the essence of culture to feel its own imperative and to believe in the uniqueness of its worth. In doing so, it has to reject others which are "objectively" just as good, yet for it irrelevant. Syncretistic cultures like syncretistic religions have always proved relatively powerless to create and to influence; there is no weight of authentic history behind them. The very concept of eclectic religion and eclectic culture derives from an inappropriate analogy which suggests that a plurality can be greater than one. Culture derives its very desire to continue from its unitariness. Perhaps some deep force which explains our liking for figures of repetition is here involved; we feel confirmed through seeing things repeated in the same way, and departures from the form are viewed as laxity or ignorance.

Evidently this is the reason that every culture in the course of its formation sets up directions from which the members are constrained not to depart. Penalties for violation may be no more than cultural, although sometimes they have been moral and legal. The truth is that if the culture is to assume form and to bring the satisfactions for which cultures are created, it is not culturally feasible for everyone to do everything "any way he wants to." There is at the heart of every culture a center of authority from which there proceed subtle and pervasive pressures upon us to conform and to repel the unlike as disruptive. So culture too is faced with the metaphysical problem of freedom and organization, which rules out the possibility of uncircumscribed lib-

erty. Like all forces which shape and direct, it must insist on a pattern of inclusion and exclusion. This is a necessity of integral being and a fundamental fact to deal with in any plan for its protection.

At this center there lies a "tyrannizing image," which draws everything toward itself. This image is the ideal of its excellence. The forms that it can take and the particular manifestations that it can find are various. In some instances it has been a religious ritual; in others a sacred scripture; in others a literature which everyone is expected to know; codes of conduct (and even of warfare) may be the highest embodied form. But examine them as we will, we find this inward facing toward some high representation. This is the sacred well of the culture from which inspiring waters like magnetic lines of force flow out and hold the various activities in a subservience of acknowledgment. Not to feel this magnetic pull toward identification and assimilation is to be outside the culture.

Such centripetalism is the essence of culture's power to cohere and to endure. There is a center which commands all things, and this center is open to imaginative but not logical discovery. It is a focus of value, a law of relationships, an inspiring vision. By its very nature it sets up rankings and orders; to be near it is to be higher; to be far from it in the sense of not feeling its attraction is to be lower. Culture is thus by nature aristocratic, for it is a means of discriminating between what counts for much and what counts for little; this no doubt explains the necessity man feels to create it. It is his protest against the uniformity and dead level of simple succession. He *will* establish a center of value and see to it that the group is oriented toward it. This is his rejection of any merely nat-

uralistic ordering of his life, his declaration of independence from mere environment. Discrimination, selection, and preference with regard to the tyrannizing image are its constitutives.

For this reason it is the very nature of culture to be exclusive. Without the power to reject that which does not understand or acknowledge its center of force, it would disintegrate. We might say that a culture continues by attracting and attracts by continuing. In this way it maintains its identity. There can be no such thing as a "democratic" culture in the sense of one open to everybody at all times on equal terms. To *know* the right thing, without mediating thoughts as to what and when, is to be native born to the culture. An individual absorbs his native culture as he acquires his native tongue, with the most subtle shades of intonation; again, like the idioms of a language, the ways of a culture are rooted too deep in immemorial bias and feeling to be analyzed. If a culture appears arbitrary in the preferences it makes and the lines it draws, this is because it is a willed creation.

The truth most important for us to recognize in our present crisis is this principle of integration and exclusiveness. There is for all things, as Aristotle pointed out, an entelechy, a binding, type-determining factor, which gives to a thing its specific form and property of coherence. The fact that a culture is a spiritual and imaginative creation does not mean that it is any less bound by this pervading law. Just as the skin of a sound fruit protects it from dispersion or evaporation, so the form of a culture keeps it from ceasing to exist through a miscellaneous commingling. Form is intellectual and negative; it sets boundaries which affirm in the very process of denying. The form of a culture is its style,

which it asserts against the world of meaningless "democratic" existence. In a highly developed culture this sense of style permeates everything; it is in dress and manners, in art and institutions, in architecture and cookery. It imparts tone to the whole of society by keeping before its members a standard of the right and not right. But this form depends upon the centripetal image of an ideal of perfection and goodness and upon confidence in ruling out what is unlike or fortuitous.

The task of the conservative in our time is to defend this concentration and to expose as erroneous attempts to break down the discriminations of a culture. For once the inward-looking vision and the impulse to resist the alien are lost, disruption must ensue. What was a whole ceases to feel its reason for being a whole, and the different parts may suffer a random distortion—random just because there is no longer a unifying idea to prescribe fitness and size. Parts then get out of line and begin to usurp the places and roles belonging to other parts. This is the chaos that the true friend of culture beholds with deepest apprehension, not only because it deprives him of so much but because in the masses it can induce monstrous outbursts of irrationality. All men, and not merely the sensitive and the gifted, need the integrating service of this vision, although not all realize that they need it. Lancelot Law Whyte in his *Next Development in Man* has vividly expressed the power of this urge:

Man abhors the absence of integration. He demands integration, and will create religions, achieve heroic self-sacrifice, pursue mad ambitions, or follow the ecstasy of danger rather than live without. If society refuses him this satisfaction in constructive form, he will seize a destructive principle to which he can devote himself

and will take revenge on the society which thought his only demand was pleasure. Vice, in this sense, shows the integrating power of virtue, of which it is merely the negative form. The mass-man readily rejected the utilitarian philosophy which had created him and accepted in its place the new mass religion of national suicide.³

The final sentence, written with reference to the fascist movements of Europe, reminds us that if no reasonable cultural unification is offered, an unreasonable one may be invented and carried to frightful lengths.

The greatest perversion of culture in our time is a misconception of the role of democracy. As the preceding definition makes clear, a culture integrates a people qualitatively. Under the widely current misconception, it is supposed that democracy can integrate them as quantitative units—that is, as units without relation to the value structure of the ideal. The most pressing duty of the believer in culture today is to define democracy and keep it within its place, in doing which he not only will preserve it as a viable form but also will protect those other areas of activity which are essential to supply a different kind of need.

Democracy is not a pattern for all existence any more than a form of economic activity is a substitute for the whole of living. Truly considered, democracy is nothing more than an ideal of equity among men in their political relationships. Its roots are in the truth that every individual has an inviolable personality, a private experience, and an authentic voice. Every individual is a reporter of what affects him, and he offers motions, as it were, concerning the general political welfare. To make this possible, a democratic state decrees a certain limited equality among its citizens.

Even so, this equality is more theoretical than actual. But theories of this kind may have their practical usefulness as well as their noble objects. Thus in a parliamentary assembly we might give each speaker ten minutes to express his views, although we know that one man can say more in ten minutes than another can in an hour. Still, the equality serves the larger purpose. And so with democracy in its consulting of opinions and its counting of votes.

But democracy has to do with citizenship, and as Ortega has pointed out in one of his trenchant essays, our citizenship is the most insipid of our qualities. It concerns the things we have to get done in order to be in position to do things higher in the scale. It is account-keeping or household management, an essentially low order of practical activity. It is better to do this well than poorly, and it should be done with equity to the individuals involved. But it is senseless to say that dutiful household management is the highest commission of man and that whatever proves instrumental in this must be our principle of ordering all social and cultural life. In our present confusion over the role of culture, this is what is being done with the limited concept "democracy."

When democracy is taken from its proper place and is allowed to fill the entire horizon, it produces an envious hatred not only of all distinction but even of all difference. The ensuing distortion conceals its very purpose, which is to keep natural inequalities from obtruding in the one area where equality has intelligible function. The reason we consent to treat men as equals in this area of activity is that we know they are not equals in other areas. The fanatical democrat insists upon making them equal in all departments, regardless of the type

of activity and vocation. It is of course the essence of fanaticism to seize upon some fragment of truth or value and to regard it as the exclusive object of man's striving. So democracy, a valuable but limited political concept, has been elevated by some into a creed as comprehensive as a religion or a philosophy, already at the cost of widespread subversion.

Ortega has wisely pointed out that this is not the spirit of true democracy, but of plebeianism. It exalts the very things that democracy was hopefully inaugurated to combat in the ranks of the people.

The initial result is the wounding of the very sentiment which gave rise to democracy: for the concept of democracy springs from the desire to save the plebs from their low condition. But the doctrinaire democrat, who has converted a technique, democracy, into an end, soon finds himself sympathizing with the plebs precisely because of their plebeianism—their customs, manners, and intellectual tone. An example of this is the socialist creed (for we are dealing here with a creed, a secular religion) which has for one article of faith the dogma that only a proletarian head is fit for true science and reformed morality.⁴

Today we are being asked to accept "democratic living." The eulogistic tone with which this phrase is pronounced invites the question of whether this could be the "tyrannizing image" of some new culture. The answer is "no," if by democracy one means simple communism. Now there are in fact some places where a large measure of equality is in effect among the members without prejudice to the cultural life which they support. Such is true of the communities of some reli-

gious orders, where, for example, no outward discrimination is made between those who carry on the work of teaching and those who look after maintenance. It is true also of some educational institutions where the students do a large part of the work; no real distinction is made between those who hold "white collar" jobs and those who labor in the cow barns. Anyone who has visited such a community knows that the social atmosphere there is most agreeable and relaxing. But when one studies the impulse that sustains them, one realizes that the democracy is made possible by a consecration to and a hierarchy of purpose. In the religious communities it is of course the service of the religion; in the schools it is the furtherance of education. Nobody pretends that in these areas all are equal. There is selection according to ability, vocation, and dedication. This structure of purpose and calling is really the insurer of the democracy that exists; equality is maintained where it is useful because there is an overriding aim to be served. If this overriding aim were conceivably withdrawn, it is easy to picture even such communities breaking up into competitive pressure groups among "unequals." It is the authority of the mission which they carry on that keeps inequalities of service in a manageable and pleasing order. Thus the cohesiveness of such communities lies in the idea that informs and possesses them.

What I have here spoken of as true of small associations bears analogy with peoples and nations; a culture is a means of uniting society by making provision for differences. Differences do not create resentment unless the seed of resentment has been otherwise planted. A just man finds satisfaction in the knowledge that society has various roles for various kinds of people and that they in

the performance of these roles create a kind of symphony of labor, play, and social life. There arises in fact a distinct pleasure from knowing that society is structured, diversified, balanced, and complex. Blind levelers do not realize that people can enjoy seeing things above them as well as on a plane with them. Societies with differentiation afford pleasure to the moral imagination as an aesthetic design affords rest to the eye. The propaganda of egalitarianism encourages belief that any society embodying distinctions must necessarily be torn with envy and hatred. But theory does not show and empirical observation does not discover that societies having a proper internal differentiation are unhappy. On the contrary, they may be reposeful and content. Of a number of examples which could be used to support this, I choose one described by Goethe in *Poetry and Truth*. Commenting on the Germany in which he had grown up, this great poet and philosopher of life—"Europe's wisest head"—had this to say:

the tranquilized condition of Germany, of which my native town had formed a part for more than a century, had remained intact in spite of many wars and convulsions. The existence of the most varied social grades, including as they did the highest as well as the lowest, the Emperor as well as the Jew, instead of separating the various members, seemed rather to unite them; and this condition of things was conducive to a feeling of contentment.⁵

Goethe, whose insight told him the true nature of the French Revolution while many of the romantics and rationalists were still befooled, was not deceived by the effect of classes.

In Germany it had hardly occurred

to anyone yet to look with envy on this vast privileged class, or to grudge its obviously worldly advantages. The middle classes had quietly devoted themselves to commerce and the sciences, and by these pursuits, as well as by the practice of the mechanical arts, had raised themselves to a position of importance which fully compensated their political inferiority; the free or partially free cities encouraged their activities, so that members of these classes were able to lead lives of peace and comfort. The man who increased his wealth or enhanced his intellectual influence, especially in matters of law or state, could always be sure of both respect and authority. In the Supreme Court of the Empire and elsewhere, the bench of nobles was faced by one of learned lawyers; the freer, less restricted outlook of the one worked in friendly harmony with the other, and not a trace of rivalry could be detected between them in everyday life. The noble felt secure in his exclusive and time-hallowed privileges, and the burgher felt it beneath his dignity to pretend to their possession by adding a prefix to his name.⁶

This was the Germany of poets, musicians, and philosophers. The classes thrived on a mutual dependence, and the principle of distinction, far from being felt as invidious, was the cement that held the whole together. One senses the kind of satisfaction that was felt in seeing different kinds of people to the right and left of one and, since it is in the nature of things, above and below. Not to be overlooked is the fact that a "lowest" class often finds satisfaction in knowing itself "superior" to other classes in certain respects—in hardihood, in industry, or in religiousness.

A society which is cohesive in this way, through classes which have developed

naturally out of civic and cultural vocation, is in point of fact stronger than one which is undifferentiated. The latter tends to be inflexible and brittle; it does not have the internal give and take of the former. The inner organizations of a structural society act as struts and braces and enable it to withstand a blow which would shatter the other. The whole is sustained by its parts, which afford, as it were, a protection in depth. Nations composed of such societies have proved themselves very tough in international encounters. English society, despite a high degree of classness, has displayed intense patriotism and great power of endurance in crises. The society of the American South, which is formed somewhat upon the English model, has stood up under strong attacks and pressures from the outside through its sense of being organized. All the evidence shows that differentiation which is not fragmentation is a source of strength. But such differentiation is possible only if there is a center toward which the parts look for their meaning and validation. One of the functions of cultural activity is to objectify this center so that it will exist as an ever-present reminder of one's place and one's vocation. A high degree of cultural orientation is, accordingly, a symptom of a healthy society.

In brief, culture is an exclusive, which is to say, self-defining creation, which satisfies needs arising from man's feeling and imagination. Every culture has a kind of ontological basis in social life, and this social life does not express itself in equality, but in a common participation from different levels and through different vocations.

Because of these facts and because of the political contentiousness of our time the question has actually been raised as to whether culture is "reactionary." The

question itself reveals a confusion of categories which should never have been permitted. But we know from the words and deeds of Communists and their sympathizers that they make much of this subject and that they are prone to condemn artistic or cultural expression which deviates from their harsh political line. Now it is true, if one takes a very narrow and false view of progress, that much which the world has valued as culture could be condemned as "reactionary." For one thing, the very concept of culture runs counter to blind progressivism, by which I mean that state of mind which cannot measure anything except by number and linear extension. Since culture operates in the realm of quality and offers not greater magnitudes but more refined and intense sentiments, it is an engagement of the spirit lying beyond the thinking of those who have allowed their minds to be dominated by material categories. Speed and mass, virtually the slogans of contemporary Western civilization, are the antitheses of culture. The pointless series of "new developments" and expansions which the modern barbarian delights in look poor and hollow when placed beside authentic creations of the spirit. Since the two impulses move in opposite directions, the one does recede from the other. The barbarian, were he capable of a critical vocabulary, might brand what frustrates his kind of pleasure as "reaction." The possession of culture by historical elites gives some edge to this as a political weapon, but the charge of course mistakes the true gift brought by this creation of the spirit.

Under another aspect culture can be viewed as "reactionary" because it involves much ceremonial waste, which cannot be explained to those whose vision of life is merely economic and sensate.

This brings up the supremely important

matter of style. All culture incorporates the idea of style, which is an homage to an intangible but felt need of the spirit. We hear references to "the modern style" in buildings and other creations where man customarily expresses his desire to impose order and design, yet this seems really to be a negation of style, relieved a little perhaps by imaginative attempts to suggest mass.

True style displays itself in elaboration, rhythm, and distance, which demand activity of the imagination and play of the spirit. Elaboration means going beyond what is useful to produce what is engaging to contemplation. Rhythm is a marking of beginnings and endings. In place of a meaningless continuum, rhythm provides intelligibility and the sense that the material has been handled in a subjective interest. It is human to dislike mere lapse. When one sees things in rhythmical configuration, he feels that they have been brought into the realm of the spirit. Rhythm is thus a way of breaking up nihilistic monotony and of proclaiming that there is a world of value. Distance is what preserves us from the vulgarity of immediacy. Extension and proportion in space, as in architecture, and extension in time, as in manners and deportment, help to give gratifying form to these creations. All style has in it an element of ritual, which signifies steps which cannot be passed over.

Today these factors of style, which are of the essence of culture, are regarded as if they were mere persiflage. Elaboration is suspected of spending too much on nonutilitarian needs, and the limited ends of engineering efficiency take precedence. Rhythm suffers because one cannot wait for the period to come around. In regard to distance, it is felt that there *should* be nothing between man and what he wants; distance is a kind of pro-

hibition; and the new man sees no sanction in arrangements that stand in the way of immediate gratification. He has not been taught the subtlety to perceive that what one gains by immediate seizure one pays for by more serious losses. Impatience with space and time seems to be driving the modern to an increasing surrender of all ideas of order. Everywhere there is reversion to the plain and the casual, and style itself takes on an obsolescent look, as if it belonged to some era destined never again to appear.

It may be thought negligent that in this exposition I have made no reference to the now extensive studies of various cultures by anthropologists. The reason is that anthropological relativism is the chief quandary to be avoided in the kind of search that is undertaken here. The method of the anthropologists is descriptive, as everyone who has looked at their type of study knows. Essentially geographers and cataloguers of cultures, they are interested in a wide collection of particulars, so that their object could be summed up as *polymathein* rather than *polynoiein*: to know much rather than to understand much. I may do some of them less than justice by this charge, yet it is by and large true. What I am certain of is that their practice constitutes a distraction for the one whose interest is in the value of culture and especially of his own culture.

For him the main object is to seize the formal *Innigkeit* of cultural expression and then to decide in what way his own is being menaced or vitiated. Thereafter he is in position to be both doctor and preacher, and indeed it is hard to conceive of a man's being thus interested in culture without feeling moved to proceed against its enemies.

I have pointed to the fact that a culture comes into being under the influence

of a "tyrannizing" image or vision. I use the word "tyrannizing" hoping that it will be excused its sinister connotations and understood as meaning unifying and compelling. A culture then is a complex of values polarized by an image or idea. It cannot be perfectly tolerant or even tolerant to any large extent, because it lives by homogeneity. It therefore has to exclude on grounds which are cultural and not "rational" what does not comport with its driving impulse.

A grave danger arises when this principle is challenged by rationalistic thinkers, as is happening today. In speaking of a culture's power to influence and to bind I have more than once used the word "integrate," since a culture is something unitary gathered about the dominating idea. But "integration" and "segregation" are two sides of the same operation. A culture integrates by segregating its forms of activity and its members from those not belonging. The right to self-segregate then is an indispensable ground of its being. Enough has been said to show that our culture today is faced with very serious threats in the form of rationalistic drives to prohibit in the name of equality cultural segregation. The effect of this would be to break up the natural cultural cohesion and to try to replace it with artificial, politically dictated integration. Such "integration" would of course be a failure, because where deep inner impulse is lacking, cohesiveness for any length of time is impossible. This crisis has been brought to our attention most spectacularly in the attempt to "integrate" culturally distinct elements by court action. It is, however, only the most publicized of the moves; others are taking place in areas not in the spotlight, but all originate in ignorance, if not in a suicidal determination to write an end to the heritage of Western culture.

¹T. S. Eliot, *Notes Toward the Definition of Culture* (New York, 1949), 17.

²An example of this is often seen in the relation of the academic person to the culture in which he lives. He may be and often is learned in it, but he is not exactly of it. I have felt more than once that this fact is proved by the peculiar explicitness of the speech of college professors. They are usually at great pains to draw out the meaning of their phrases and to verbalize all the connections of thought. Some of this may result from the habit of simplifying things for youthful learners, but this is not the whole account of it. In the speech of a culture maintained by a traditional society, there will occur many elisions and ellipses of meaning. It is not necessary to state them, because anyone can supply the omissions; it is rather the awkwardness of pedantry to put them into words. But the man who is outside the tradition, or who is self-consciously halfway between the tradition and something else, goes about it in a

different way: its beliefs, values, and institutions are "objects" to him, and he refers to them with something of the objective completeness of the technical description. This is why professors "sound so funny" when they talk of something that is an everyday subject to the ordinary man. The ordinary man wonders why the professor, instead of using lumbering phrases to designate the obvious, cannot assume more. It may also explain why professors as a class are suspected of dissidence. Their speech does not sound like the speech of a person who is perfectly solid with his tradition, which is oftentimes the case.

³Lancelot Law Whyte, *The Next Development in Man* (New York, 1948), 188.

⁴José Ortega y Gasset, "Morbid Democracy," *Modern Age* (Summer, 1957), 54.

⁵Goethe, *Poetry and Truth From My Life* (2 vols.; London, 1913), II, 240.

⁶*Ibid.*, II, 241.