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SOCIALISM IN THE SIXTIES

SOCIALISM AND CULTURE

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FOUR SHILLINGS AND SIXPENCE

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I. Culture and Socialism

THE QUESTION

The great mass of what most non-socialists at least consider at present to be part of socialism, seems to me nothing more than a **machinery** *of socialism, which I think it probable that socialism* **must** *use in its militant condition: and which I think it* **may** *use for some time after it is practically established: but this does not seem to me to be of its essence.*

THE words are William Morris', written some seventy years ago, and though there are things in them with which a supporter of the Labour Party today is likely to disagree, there is also one thing here which he loses sight of only to his great detriment. And that is the distinction between what Morris calls the machinery and the essence of Socialism: or, as I should prefer to put it, between the means of Socialism and its end.

The distinction is of great importance, and to it there correspond two radically different ways in which Socialism can be, and historically has been, conceived. For — to put it rather less portentously than Morris — we can conceive of Socialism in terms of the means that it advocates: or, again, we can conceive of it in terms of the end or ends that these means are intended to realise. On the one view, Socialism is seen as intimately connected with certain fairly specific political measures, like progressive taxation or nationalisation, or workers' control: measures which it is typical of Socialist politicians to advocate out of office and to implement (it is to be hoped) when in office. On the other view, Socialism is closely associated with a certain kind of society, a certain way or manner in which free human beings can organise themselves and live together. We might put this by saying that it is possible to conceive of Socialism either as fundamentally a Programme or as fundamentally an Ideal.

In practice, of course, the distinction between these two ways of conceiving Socialism is not quite as neat as this suggests. For it would be incorrect to think of everything that is political or institutional as relevant to Socialism only when conceived of as a Programme, nor would it be right to imagine that the Socialist Ideal can be stated in exclusively social or non-political terms. No conception of an end can ever be totally independent of what are thought to be the best means towards that end. For if we are really to adopt some state of affairs as an end, we must have some idea, however shadowy, of what it would be like for this state of affairs to be realised: and this in turn means that we must have some conception of how it could be realised. Accordingly, into our picture of the good society we must introduce some indication of the institutions, or the political measures, upon which it depends.

Any attempt, then, to express Socialism as an Ideal must, if it is not to be incoherent or partial, contain some political detail. Nevertheless it is a perfectly legitimate exercise sometimes to try and abstract this political element from our Ideal, and consider what remains. What, we

might ask, is the quality of life incorporated in the society that we wish into existence? How are men to be related to one another? What is to be the character of their work, and how are they to spend their leisure? What do we expect them to know, and what store do we expect them to set by knowledge? What will the arts be like? Will they be the preserve of the few, or the common province of all? Will non-conformity be a private virtue or a public vice? Will life become freer, or will freedom become unnecessary?

Answers to these questions would define, or help to define, what I have called the *quality of life* experienced in a Socialist society. Another way of characterising this very general aspect of social existence, which is separate from, though closely dependent upon, political factors, would be to use the word *culture*: and it is in this sense, vague but not, I hope, ambiguous, that I intend to use it, when I raise the question, *What should be the culture of a Socialist society*?

Why Should We Ask?

So much for the *legitimacy* of the question. Some, however, might accept this but question its *utility*. Granted that one way of conceiving Socialism is as the realisation of a certain kind of society, and granted that the description of any such society must involve a cultural specification, what is the use or value of conceiving Socialism in this way? What can one profitably say about the quality of life to be enjoyed by the future? How can one reasonably legislate for the culture of a society as yet unborn?

Before answering this objection I should like to make two important concessions in its direction. In the first place, I think that we should never discuss the culture of Socialism in any except the most general terms. If it is now objected that this will tend to make our discussion vague and unrealistic, I can only say that I think we are far more likely to lose our sense of reality by making our speculations too specific than we are by keeping them too general. Indeed if we accept — as traditionally all Socialists, indeed nearly all reformers, have done — some theory of the dependence of cultural upon material conditions, it would be clearly irrational to specify for Socialist society its cultural character so far ahead of knowing what its material nature will be.

Secondly, I think that there is also grave danger in talking about the culture of Socialism as though it were something static and timeless. It is no part of a progressive way of thought to believe that the entry into Socialism will coincide with the exit from History: even Karl Marx, who certainly attributed an exaggerated importance to the Socialist revolution, believed that beyond it society would continue to change, even if in rather different respects from before. And if society changes, so will culture. To envisage, as some would, the arts and pleasures of Socialist society fixed in a timeless and eternal mould is to indulge in a form of vanity; it is an arrogant effort to try to secure immortality for the products of our wishes and our tentative speculations.

However, once these two qualifications are inserted and we admit the necessarily general and the necessarily historical character of all speculation

about Socialism and culture, I don't think that it can any longer be maintained that the whole inquiry is useless. Indeed its utility can be directly derived from its urgency. For just as the nineteenth-century case for Socialism acquired much of its appeal from the realisation that the economic system was not, after all, the product of impersonal and abstract forces, and that the suffering and hardship it involved could be attributed to human agency, so the case for extending the Socialist ideal to take in more and more aspects of social life, more and more of the activities and interests of man in society, derives its strength from the awareness that increasingly this whole side of life is becoming organised for us by powerful private forces. *Laisser-faire* is no truer an account of cultural life in the mid-twentieth century than it was of economic life in the mid-nineteeth century. If Socialists do not devote any thought to what they want life to be like in the future, they can be sure that advertisers, newspaper-owners and the purveyors of mass-entertainment will; although I suspect that the efficacy of these agents is sometimes exaggerated. In a certain kind of political literature today the Advertiser plays the role that the Armaments-King did a generation ago. He is the chief conspirator in yet another version of the old conspiracy-theory of history; a theory which we all hoped that Marx had destroyed years ago. Nevertheless, this attempt on the part of private and irresponsible power to influence and mould our ideals of life, should not be ignored or go unchallenged: even if only because the full extent of its efficacy is as yet unknown. And if we intend to challenge it, we must know what we want instead.

New Traditions

It is, therefore, not surprising that in the last two or three years there should have been a determined effort to work out afresh the cultural implications of the Socialist Ideal, and to restate Socialism in terms of the quality of life that it wishes to realise. A few years ago the typical voice of radical protest was raised by movements like the *Keep Left* group and *Victory for Socialism*: movements which were preoccupied with certain political measures which, they felt, were no longer being advocated with fervour and wholeheartedness. They detected a degree of compromise, of pusillanimity, in Labour politics, and they were against it. Today this has changed. If we look now for what is most vigorous and fresh on the radical fringe, we find it among the New Left. And what gives unity to this group is not a particular political programme but rather a very general impatience with what is felt to be the excessively practical and empirical tradition of the British Labour movement and a deep desire to produce a new theoretical basis for our Socialism. Socialism must be seen in terms of the society that it offers: and ultimately its appeal should reside in the promise that it holds out of a new way of life. (Indeed, it may seem to many just another symptom of the political confusion of the day that the New Left should have adopted the particular attitude it did over the Clause Four controversy, and should have lent its support to the dogmatic retention of nationalisation as a political means.) Seminal works in the diffusion of this new approach are Raymond Williams' *Culture and Society*, and *The Long Revolution*, and Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy*.

It is some indication of how far this movement has gone that one of its adherents, Dennis Potter, should announce in *The Glittering Coffin*, a young man's book typical of much around it, that the *"so-called 'oblique' attitudes to Socialism — attitudes which realise that the quality of our whole culture, particularly as expressed and exploited by the mass media, is a potent factor in creating that better and more noble society which is the one constant quality of the Socialist vision"* — have already become the new 'tradition' of the Left.

II. The Present Compromise

THE RISE OF MIDDLE-CLASS CULTURE

ONE of the main difficulties in defining the cultural implications of Socialism is to decide where to start. As good a place as any, it seems to me, is our present situation. For, in the first place, it provides the discussion with a basis in fact. And, secondly, since the cultural condition of Great Britain today is — like much else in our society — clearly in a state of transition, it is a matter of some moment for Socialists to decide what they feel about the direction in which the moving parts are going. Are we, or are we not, progressing towards a Socialist society?

To understand the present situation we must go back somewhat in time. In 1853, Gladstone, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, asked Sir Stafford Northcote and Sir Charles Trevelyan to prepare for his use a report on the general condition of the Civil Service. In November of that year the report appeared, a highly conscientious piece of work, complete with criticisms from eminent administrators and educationalists and with replies to these criticisms from the authors. Amongst other things the report recommended that the old system of patronage — whereby, as Bright said, the Service was the outdoor relief department for the aristocracy — should be abandoned, and recruitment effected by open examination. This dry, practical document has been one of the great factors in the formation of the dominant culture in England today: for it has secured the establishment of the system and the class on which this culture ultimately depends.

Nor was this result so alien or so tangential to the motives of the reformers as one might at first suppose. Undoubtedly part of their inspiration was the desire to have an efficient bureaucracy and to remove the various abuses and anomalies of which Dickens' Circumlocution Office was no great parody. But another aim, of which they showed themselves not totally unconscious, and between which and their original inspiration they saw no real conflict, was in some way to 'provide' for the younger generations of the new middle-class: not, of course, in *any* way, but in a decent and suitable way. For there were around, in increasing numbers, young, intelligent, conscientious men who were not particularly interested in the occupations either of their elders or of their betters, who were averse both to sweating labour and to hunting foxes, and who very much wanted to do something for others, provided, of course, that doing so would also do something for them. They wanted a respectable and literate occupation, which was not mercenary but equally not unlucrative. It was quite evident that a reformed Civil Service, if such a thing could be brought into being, would ideally suit their requirements.

By 1870 the recommendations of the report had been implemented in full. Meanwhile, the older universities, shaking themselves out of their eighteenth century slumbers, had ccme to see that it would be increasingly their role to prepare young men to take up their place in the reformed bureaucracy — or, if not exactly in the bureaucracy, then in some other profession that, in virtue of its resemblance or propinquity to the bureau-

cracy, had acquired a similar status and degree of respectability — and they had raised their standards accordingly. Some years previously the public schools had made good their claim to provide the preparatory education for this new channel of preferment; indeed it was in large part the country's inability to absorb satisfactorily the output of the public schools that gave rise to the problem to which the reformed bureaucracy was the answer.

The result of these various processes was that there was set up, in the very middle of English social life, a funnel, or chute, graduated in degrees marked 'Public School (or Grammar School): Oxford or Cambridge: Profession', and into this funnel, and up it, and out at the top, were drawn, in their generations, the sons of the English middle classes, instructed, as they passed through it, in the classics, in the value of judgment, and in the control of the emotions. English middle-class culture as it exists today, and as it has existed for nearly a hundred years, is to be understood in terms of, even if it is not wholly produced by, the operation of this educational funnel. The virtues and vices, as well as the whole range of neutral characteristics, of the dominant culture of this country, relate to this particular set of institutions.

The Culture Reviewed

To begin with, the culture is predominantly literary. The classical learning, on which it was originally grounded, may no longer be widely diffused, but its influence endures, if only in the low cultural rating still assigned to the sciences. Secondly — and this may also, in part at least, relate to its philological origins — English middle-class culture is strongly anti-theoretical in tendency: 'general ideas', in fields as diverse as politics or the criticism of the arts, or educational theory, are fiercely resisted in a way which would be, and is, found unaccountable in France or in the United States. Thirdly, there is an intense resistance to any new cultural movement. The causes of this are complex, and all but impossible to disentangle. In part, it is due to the proverbially strong traditionalism of English life. In part, again, it requires no special explanation, being a natural feature of any society untouched by that benign materialism, such as one finds in America, which automatically assigns to anything that exists a place in the culture. Fourthly, English middle-class culture has always contained a very high level of criticism. This is true not merely of academic subjects, but also of the higher journalism, which is remarkable by European as well as by American standards. And this seems to be intimately connected with the highly personal (and to many highly 'uneconomic') character of the higher education. The close connection between teacher and student and the absence of the professorial manner help to introduce and sustain an atmosphere of ready criticism. Fifthly, English genteel culture is hostile to professionalism in any form. The syllabus of the public school and Oxford and Cambridge are still thought to provide all that it is necessary for, say, a Treasury official or a high executive in industry to know. And, finally, English middle-class culture has a strong class character, so that the line between education and manners, between culture and convention, would be frightfully hard to draw. And this, of course, is the direct result of the close connection between the

culture and the restricted educational system within which it has been stored.

Of recent years the educational system has become noticeably less restricted. The bottom of the chute has now been splayed out so that it can pick up not merely the children of the professional classes but also cleverer children of the classes below. An important qualification is that the public schools still remain a middle-class preserve, constituting (if nothing else) a ridiculous source of wastage for the teaching talent of the country. But if we set aside this gross anomaly and the extent to which it weights educational opportunity in favour of one particular class, we can say that in Britain today access to middle-class culture is in principle open to all. It is, of course, open on highly competitive terms: but the terms of the competition are set in ability, not class or money. 'Clerisy', to use Coleridge's expression, is now a *carriere ouverte aux talents*.

And there is, of course, a certain appropriateness in using this antiquated expression. For despite the changes in recruitment, the structure and character of middle-class culture remain very much as they were. Under the new dispensation the role of the universities is to absorb the abler and more ambitious sons of the lower classes into the ranks of the upper classes; and they do so by means of the old culture of which they are the proprietary agents.

Mass Culture

But the position of the old culture in England is by no means monopolistic. Alongside it there now exists a new culture, which, in its entry requirements and in its general characteristics, stands in marked contrast to the old culture. For whereas the old culture is exclusive, the new culture aims at the maximum diffusion. Whereas the old culture is primarily literary, the new culture is a leisure culture. Where the old culture is highly critical, the new culture is based on acceptance. Where the old culture is modest and unobtrusive, the new culture is ostentatious and essentially bound up with high consumption. And while the old culture is a class culture, the new culture is classless.

The new culture is generally referred to as Mass Culture, and I shall follow this practice myself, though I am aware that the term, being an import from American descriptive sociology, is only approximate to British conditions. Some have argued that its use is inappropriate, and that the phenomenon to which it is applied is neither a 'mass' phenomenon, nor is it a 'culture'. I admit some force to both these objections, but I think that what they establish is that we should be cautious in our use of the term, not that we should abandon it altogether.

Raymond Williams has argued that the use of the word 'mass' in expressions like 'mass-communication' or 'mass-democracy' is the natural heir of the old expression 'mob', and carries with it the same associations of gullibility, fickleness, herd-prejudice, lowness of taste and habit. To apply the word already assumes a patronising air, and its continued usage can only lead to the adoption of an anti-democratic attitude. 'There are', he reminds us 'no masses: there are only ways of seeing people as masses'[1]

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[1] Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society*, p. 300.

While accepting this salutary reminder, I think that the objecion misfires. The word 'mass' does not, of course, merely describe people: it also describes a certain attitude adopted towards people. But then what is called 'mass-culture' is a characteristic product of those who do adopt just this attitude towards others, and it is this fact that makes the expression useful.

Personally I would characterise the attitude that underlies the production of mass-culture somewhat differently from Williams. In the first place, the question of size, which the word 'mass' emphasises, is very important. The producers of modern commercial art and entertainment have in mind a very large audience indeed. And, secondly, they have in mind an audience distinguished by no common characteristic: their market is essentially unorganised and indefinite in extension. It is sometimes said that they produce for a 'homogenised' audience. This is misleading for it suggests that they depend upon a similarity holding throughout their vast audience, whereas the truth is that the character of their audience is a matter of total indifference to them. All that they ask of the members of their audience by way of a common quality is that they should all like what is given to them: what they don't go on to demand is any common tradition or culture, or even any common habits, out of which this liking springs. The peculiarity, perhaps the uniqueness, of this mode of cultural production justifies us, I think, in characterising its products as 'mass-culture'.

As to the other objection, it has sometimes been claimed that what is provided for the entertainment and consumption of the masses is not properly called a 'culture', or is so — according to an alternative version of the objection — only in the 'anthropological' sense of the word. The argument at this stage runs the risk of falling into verbalism. But if everything except 'high culture' is not to be a contradiction in terms, then I should have thought that the fact that what we are dealing with is so articulate entitles it to the name of a 'culture'. There are, moreover, other characteristics, all perhaps connected with articulateness, which further justify the expression. In the first place, mass culture is essentially subject to change, it has a history; and in this way it is different from folk or savage culture. Secondly, the changes that occur are not coincidental or imposed from the outside: they take place in accordance with tradition. There is a constant effort to embody the 'achievements' of earlier works in later works, and this process we can see in action over a whole range of artifacts like films, clothes, pop-songs, or motor-cars. Finally, mass culture is reflective. Those who consume it can recognise on inspection whether new products live up to the demands and standards of the culture, whether they are sufficiently 'sharp'. The existence of this kind of self-consciousness, which, as I said, is probably a direct consequence of articulateness, definitely raises mass culture above the level of a mere anthropological phenomenon: in coherence, that is, though not, of course, necessarily in quality.

The Present Compromise

Here then are the outlines of the Present Compromise. On the one hand,

we have the old genteel or middle-class culture, preserved within certain traditional institutions, though now offered — on highly competitive terms — to many to whom it was traditionally denied. And below this we have a literate self-conscious mass culture, very assertive and very dynamic, which provides the sustenance for those who are unwilling or unable to partake of the higher culture.

Of course, this is not the whole picture. There are in Great Britain today many other cultural elements. There is, for instance, an extensive 'middle-culture', which is essentially conservative and caters for a refined and educated taste that finds serious art too demanding or too disturbing. Middle culture still commands a large audience, and in certain fields like the West End theatre, remains, despite the fashionable gloss of working-class naturalism, the dominant tradition. Again, there are the surviving fragments of proletarian culture, which is in many cases the survival of an earlier rural culture. And, finally, there is the admirable and still fairly well diffused 'autodidact' culture of the true self-taught working-class intellectual. But though these elements all exist and will doubtless continue to do so for some time, it seems to me that they lack both the scale and the resources of energy to count as protagonists in the cultural drama in its present stage.

III. A Reaction

THE INTEGRATED SOCIETY

TO many Socialists the Present Compromise, as I have called it, seems so immediately repugnant that they have rejected it *in toto* and looked around for an entirely different system of culture which would be more consonant with the demands of Socialism. The exclusiveness of middle-class culture, the cheapness and banality of mass culture, and the highly competitive nature of the structure into which these two elements are fitted seem to them to rule the existing arrangement out of court as even the starting-point for the new society. I want to put aside for the moment the criticisms they raise against the Present Compromise, and concentrate upon their alternative proposals.

What these proposals amount to is the construction, or reconstruction, of an organic or integrated way of life, which would be unified by a common culture, common interests, common activities, common 'meanings'. In such a society, culture would be 'ordinary' — in a sense which is opposed rather vaguely to 'unfamiliar' or 'esoteric' or 'highbrow' — because all arts would be closely related to, would be ultimately merely extensions of, the skills by means of which the ordinary members of the society control their environment and earn their living.

The vision of the integrated society, a recurrent theme in the political speculation of the last hundred and fifty years, has a close connection with some of the traditional ideals and aspirations of Socialism. For in the new society or the old society revived (and there is often a certain ambiguity or indecision between these two conceptions), commercialism will exist no more, work will be humanised and reacquire significance, private property will be eliminated or at least markedly reduced, human beings will no longer be divided from one another by cruel and meaningless barriers, and the exploitation of Nature by Man will supersede the old exploitation of Man by Man. The appeal of the integrated society gains a further intensity and depth when, as so often happens, it is identified with a rural or pastoral society: for, as Freud point out,[1] the nostalgia for a form of life that is closer to the earth, a demand that is so frequently heard in any sophisticated culture, is in large part a romantic or poetic expression of the nervousness and the emotional frustrations generated by 'civilised' sexual morality. And even the current admiration for the old working-class life can be seen as an example of this kind of nostalgia. For English proletarian culture is essentially the survival, inside the hideous nineteenth-century urban shell, of an older but now uprooted form of life.

But for all its manifest attractions, any such ideal immediately lays itself open to a number of objections, once we come actually to formulate it. In its contemporary version one difficulty we are brought up against straightaway is the ambiguity that I have already mentioned. Is the ideal

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[1] Sigmund Freud, *Collected Papers*, Vol. II, p. 80.

for which our sympathies are being canvassed, a construction, or a re-construction? Are we being asked to support a revival of an old form of society, or is the future to witness a new form, based at best analogically upon a historical model? There is an ambiguity, an exclusiveness on this point, running through the whole modern literature from Leavis and Thompson's *Culture and Environment* — a work of major influence — onwards. As a consequence, it is possible in any given book of the movement to make out a number of themes but nothing that could be called its thesis.

The 'Older' Order

The most radical and by now the most persistent theme is the plea for the reconstruction of traditional working-class life — what Hoggart calls "an 'older' order". Here, it is claimed, we have a ground for the culture of the future, which is superior at once to the tired and esoteric culture of 'the classes' and to the cheap tawdry 'homogenised' culture of 'the masses'. The case has been presented with great brilliance and subtlety and illustrated by passages of fine descriptive writing, but even in its most persuasive form it is open to certain powerful, and to my mind unanswerable, objections.

Can it be Revived?

In the first place, it must be, on any view of society, a doubtful matter whether it is possible at this stage to revive working-class culture and to give it a position of ascendancy even in the class of its origin, let alone in society at large. Moreover, I should have thought that to anyone who adopted a Socialist, or any sort of 'reformist' attitude, the whole project must seem clearly impossible. For it is surely integral to reformism to hold that, in some sense or other, to a greater or lesser degree, the cultural condition of a society is dependent upon the prevailing material conditions. Accordingly it is hard to see how a social reformer could consistently advocate the retention of working-class culture, if he also wants (as surely he must) the abolition of the old economic position of the working-classes. Indeed, even to someone who has no *a priori* commitment to a theory about the general dependence of a culture on material conditions, it must seem pretty obvious that there is an intimate connection between traditional English working-class attitudes and traditional English working-class poverty: intimate enough for it to be quite unreasonable to expect that the latter could be eliminated and the former conserved.

Nostalgia about the old working-class life seems to me directly comparable to that strong desire, which many express, and many more, perhaps cherish, for a return to the comradeship and the warm easy intimacy of wartime life. The sudden dropping of social barriers, the sense of a common purpose, the occasions of heroism, of *insouciance*, of that unflinching, unglamorous, unheroic endurance which holds a special appeal for the British imagination, make the long days and nights, spent in the Western Desert or in the London shelters or even in government offices, seem in retrospect a sort of Golden Age of feeling, in which it

was possible to have and to communicate strong and simple emotions. But we have no good reason to think that this spontaneous fraternity and unity of sentiment can be recreated without the circumstances that were its occasion: and no-one in his sane mind would think the price worth it. Very rarely, during moments of exceptional social outrage, at a protest meeting in Trafalgar Square or in a multiracial Tenants Association in Notting Hill, we may be able for a brief period to call up the 'spirit of the Blitz'. But the experience is transient, and it holds no general message for us about how life should be lived. As T. S. Eliot has put it '*We must distinguish at all events between the kind of unity which is necessary and that which is appropriate for the development of a culture in a nation at peace*'.[1]

Should it be Revived?

Secondly, even if we were to allow that working-class culture of the old style could be retained as the culture of a Socialist society, it is far from clear to me that this would be desirable. For if we examine the attitudes that constitute this way of life, we find that they very roughly fall into two groups or constellations: what may be called external and internal attitudes. On the one hand, there are those attitudes which relate to outside forces and pressures and which make for the unity and cohesion of the class. These include various attitudes towards those in authority, in particular the 'them' attitudes so brilliantly described by Hoggart, which range from a sullen resistance to an external and alien way of life to a magnificent and dignified refusal to participate on servile terms in a system that, by its very nature, cannot be entered into on terms of equality. And then there are the attitudes to suffering and disaster and adversity: a kind of noble stoicism. On the other hand, there are those working-class attitudes which are internally directed, and which determine the ideals of life. These include the strong sense of family life: the attachment to a kind of simplified Christian morality or 'primary religion' as Hoggart calls it: a lack of curiosity about the unfamiliar and the unknown: a residual puritanism in sexual matters: a cheerful friendly easy-going sentimentality.

Now, the first group of attitudes is utterly admirable, but also, let us hope, superfluous in a socialist society. For all these attitudes very specifically refer to conditions which will not be allowed to survive inside Socialism: a rigid and hierarchical class-system, or poverty and deprivation. The second group of attitudes, on the other hand, is, by and large, unadmirable and ultimately undesirable. Of course there are individual elements in it that are attractive; the attraction may be greater for some than for others: though there can be few to whom Hoggart's picture of Hunslet, even Orwell's of Wigan, make no appeal whatsoever. But I am convinced that, all in all, this way of life is purchased at too high a price. For its roots lie in, and ultimately its character derives from, an intensive and pervasive family-life which extends across the generations and which is bound to be an agent of conservatism on the one hand and conformism on the other. I cannot see how any form of life with this kind of social basis or

[1] T. S. Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, p. 51.

grounding can be anything but hostile to innovation and deviation. The new and the different are inevitably suspect in any highly cohesive society, or indeed in any society that rests upon natural as opposed to consensual relations holding between its members.

The question of the value or desirability of the working-class family as a cultural unit has, of course, a topical relevance outside the 'utopian' speculations of thinkers like Hoggart. It also arises in connection with certain practical proposals which have recently been advanced by sociologists concerned with problems of social hardship or 'secondary poverty' as it continues to exist inside the 'Welfare State'. Much of this work has been done under the auspices of the Institute of Community Studies, and the problems investigated include the position of old people, of the physically or mentally defective and of young wives. In each case the conclusion was reached that the problem could not be dealt with as a conventional welfare problem, and that the only effective solution was the preservation or reconstruction of the family: moreover, the family had this moral advantage over other forms of 'welfare service', that its operation was reciprocal and therefore less offensive to human dignity.[1] Now, it will be observed that these proposals, though they are argued for on quite different grounds, coincide in effect with those of Hoggart. For the family system that meets with the approval of Michael Young or Peter Townsend or Brian Abel-Smith, is not the two-generation family of middle-class life but the three-generation family which is essential to the old working-class culture. I have no wish to doubt the force of the practical arguments that support these proposals. It may be that the reconstruction of old-fashioned family life is the most efficient method of dealing with a number of very urgent and painful problems. But I would suggest that all those who feel a concern with liberty and innovation, who think that there may be some good cause advanced by the permanent rebellion of youth, should very seriously reflect upon the dangers involved in so firmly ensconcing family life in this extended sense into the structure of the society to be.

Working-class Life and The Arts

The third objection that can be brought against the attempt to regard working-class life as providing a basis for socialist culture is the difficulty of identifying anything in this form of life that can be regarded as cultural in the narrow sense of the word. In the descriptions of Hoggart and Potter we find references to entertainments and social activities which often reveal a deep and intense capacity for enjoyment. We read of street-carnivals and club-outings, music halls and the 'close group-games like darts and dominoes' (Hoggart). We find evidence of an interest in serious and earnest discussion, generally of a moralistic kind. But of the arts themselves, of the free expressive activities of man, we find not a hint: nor, worse still, even a hint that these things are missing.

This silence on the subject of Art on the part of those who urge the claims of working-class culture is strange: and I can only think of two reasons to account for it. The first is a false assimilation of the present

[1] See the excellent essay 'A Society for People' by Peter Townsend in *Conviction*.

cultural problem in this country to other problems involving an oppressed or exploited class or group where the class or group genuinely has an indigenous culture that it seeks to preserve. There is, for instance, the problem of the peasant communities of Eastern Europe, where the doctrine of *proletcult* began, and where we do find (or did) a real tradition of folk-learning and folk-art. Or, again, there is the plight of the Latin or Slav immigrant groups in the New World who struggle to maintain their cultural identity as against a 'race-less' education, which is in effect merely the vehicle of the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture. But it would be quite wrong to think that British working-class culture can in any serious sense be compared to what these other groups have to offer. In the narrow sense of the word 'culture' there is no thriving popular culture in England. If one is seriously concerned about the painting and the music and the poetry of the socialist future, then it seems to me quite unrealistic to think that these can spring from the thin soil of English proletarian life.

And this leads me to the second reason why it might be that those who urge the claims of working-class culture say so little about Art; and that is because, fundamentally, they are not interested in it. Art as a free expressive activity of man is not for them a matter of vital concern. They talk about the arts, certainly, but they value them more as some kind of harmless but enjoyable activity which a man does to keep himself happy — just as those who urge the claims of mass culture think of the arts as something that is done to man, in order to keep him happy. The doctrine of Art as Expression gives way in the theory of mass culture to a doctrine of Art as Catering; in the theory of working-class culture it gives way to a doctrine that may be more attractive but is ultimately no less trivial, that of Art as Hobby.

The Case Reconsidered

Of course I don't want to deny that there are elements in the traditional English working-class way of life that should be preserved and incorporated in any Socialist society. And I also think — though this is a quite separate point — that the more features are incorporated, the smoother and less emotionally disturbing the social revolution will be for those who stand most to gain by it: the sons of the old working-class. There will be more in the new way of life that will be familiar to them, less to which they will have to adapt themselves. What I am opposed to is that the working-class life in its entirety, with its comprehensive demands about how man should live and enjoy himself, should form the pattern, the model for the social existence of the future.

We see the problem realised in a very concrete form in the issue of rehousing. It is surely right to protest against a great deal of what occurs on the new housing estates on grounds of ugliness and banality and sheer indifference to the natural human demands of people living together. But I think that if we lend too ready an ear to the complaint that rehousing involves the disruption of an old way of life without the offer of a new, we shall fall either into complacency or into authoritarianism. We shall either do nothing or else we shall construct a new society on the model

of the old with this disadvantage in addition: that it is imposed. Twenty-five years ago, in Orwell's *Road to Wigan Pier* we were shown all the agonies of an intellectual, highly sensitive to the emotional appeal of old-style proletarian life, not over-concerned with the claims of eccentricity or rebellion, confronted by the prospect of a dull, unfeeling, unimaginative rehousing scheme. Orwell ultimately came down on the side of rehousing but by the time he did it was no longer clear why. I find it a strange distortion of the old Socialist ideal that we should build a new Jerusalem in the image of the slums of Wigan or Hunslet.

Other Ideals

However, as I said earlier, not all attempts to conceive an integrated or organic Socialist society consist of advocating the retention of existent, or the revival of past, forms of social life. In some conceptions the closed society of the future is modelled in only a loose or analogical fashion upon some historical model. Now it might well be thought that when the ideal is modified in this way it is less open to criticism. But unfortunately, in so far as it is less open to criticism, it has also less to recommend it. For it preserves itself from criticism only by becoming indeterminate: and its indeterminacy makes it unacceptable. We are told that the new society will be like the old, only different. The differences, however, are rarely specified: and when they are, they make the resemblances obscure. An ideal that possesses such little content may be difficult to reject, but there is little reason to accept it.

IV. What's Wrong with Middle-Class Culture?

THE CHALLENGE

IT is natural at this stage to turn away from Utopianism, and to go back to what I have called the Present Compromise and consider to what extent it is satisfactory and to what extent unsatisfactory, as a starting-point — for we demand no more than that — for the culture of the future. My intention is first to examine separately each of the two components of which it is constituted, and then to consider the relation in which they stand to one another or what I shall call the Present Structure of Culture.

First, let us examine middle-class culture. It was Trotsky's assertion, as against the contemporary supporters of *proletcult*, that the proper aim of Socialism was not to institute a workers' or proletarian society, but rather to create a truly classless society in which the proletariat would lose its identity and the highest values of *bourgeois* society would be available to all as the ground of a still higher culture. Is there any reason why we should reject this formula, which seems to offer Socialist culture at once a basis of fact in the past and scope for development in the future?

Can Middle-Class Culture Become Popular?

There are two arguments in current circulation which would challenge Trotsky's prognostications by calling in doubt the suitability of middle-class culture to be the culture of the future. According to the first argument, middle-class culture, as it exists today, is essentially an *elite* culture: it belongs to the few: it is something that is naturally transmitted through restricted channels. If we overlook this fact and try to give it a mass-circulation, we shall merely destroy it: we shall in the end find ourselves propagating nothing, for there will be nothing left for us to propagate. This argument does not necessarily deny the possibility of mass education — and in this respect, it is not the prerogative of the Right. What it insists upon is that minority education and mass education (if it exists) are quite different things, and that what was suitable as content for the former is quite unsuitable for the latter.

The great proponent of this argument has been T. S. Eliot. Eliot, of course, advances it in the interest of his own decidedly reactionary conception of society: but then it is an observable fact that many of the arguments about culture in contemporary circulation go indifferently to the extreme 'right' and the far 'left'. Now, despite the authority that Eliot's name and his magisterial presentation afford the present argument, I feel that whatever in it is not false is truistic.

At times it seems to be Eliot's case that middle-class culture could not be widely diffused, and this is so because of the essential nature of cultural transmission. For a culture, being as broad as life itself, can only be transmitted in the course of living, personally, by example rather than by

precept. Accordingly the basic channel of cultural inheritance is, and must be, the family, within which culture is handed down from generation to generation: from this in turn it follows that a culture cannot be transmitted (save marginally) ouside the confines of the class with which it is initially associated. More specifically, contrary to what egalitarians would have us believe, a culture cannot be transmitted through education in the narrow sense of what occurs in schools and universities or, as Eliot prefers to call it, 'instruction'. At other times, however, Eliot allows that a culture can be transmitted in ways which in principle permit it to cross class barriers, but his contention is now that in the course of the move it is invariably destroyed. Put in either of these two forms the argument seems to rest on far too narrow a criterion of what it is for a culture to continue in existence. Any serious change or modification in a culture in the course of its transmission is for Eliot sufficient justification in itself for saying that the culture has not been transmitted or (what comes to the same thing) that in the course of transmission it has been destroyed. But this criterion of cultural identity is obviously far too narrow to yield interesting results. Accordingly if Eliot's argument has any force, it must be in its third form. There are times when Eliot allows that a culture *can* move outside the class of its origin, in fact as well as in principle: but, he claims, whenever it makes such a move, it invariably suffers marked deterioration. '*It is an essential condition of the preservation of the quality of the culture of the minority that it should continue to be a minority culture.*' This is clearly the crucial contention: and it is a matter for serious regret, that at just this point, Eliot chooses to replace argument with mere assertion. We are given no real reason for believing that, in matters of culture, diffusion means deterioration. It would be interesting to know what Eliot would say if his thesis were transferred from the sphere of culture to that of religion.

One bad reason, which may be operative with Eliot and is certainly at work with other thinkers who adopt a similar form of conservatism, is the identification of mass education with mass-produced education. It is assumed that if a culture aims at a large audience in the collective sense, then it will try to achieve this by having each of its individual audiences as large as possible and then by treating each of them in an identical fashion. It is an unfortunate fact, and a reflection upon our social priorities, that for the most part universal education means large classes and indifference to regional traditions. But the tendency is to be deplored, and indeed I shall later insist that a vital element in Socialist education must be the preservation of that personal link between teacher and taught which exists so prominently in the theory, if not always in the practice, of the public schools and the older universities.

Middle-Class Culture and Science

The second argument against middle-class culture relates to its content. Even if middle-class culture could be widely diffused so as to become the culture of a socialist society, it ought not to be. For it is essentially a literary culture, whereas what we need is a scientific culture.

This argument, translated into educational terms, has become one of the clichés of the day, and before we examine it we should try to separate

the purely technological from the cultural considerations advanced in support of it. When government departments or educationalists consider the proper level of scientific education, they are, for the most part, led to their estimate by calculating the scientific manpower needs of their country — or of whatever unit they are concerned with: they work out how many physicists or how many engineers will be required over the following X years, and then they suggest means whereby the output from universities and technical colleges can be made adequate to meet the demands. The question of scientific education and its proper level can, however, also be considered from a different point of view. We can ask whether there are not reasons in the nature of education itself, quite apart from this special social function, for thinking that education in a consciously progressive society should be dominantly scientific.

Unfortunately little effort has been made to discuss the cultural value of science in a way that is at once serious and careful. There underlies much of the discussion a crude 'essentialist' view of culture, according to which the culture of any age is a unified and coherent body of ideas which centres round a core or essence, and it is this essence which gives to the various aspects of the culture both their character and their vitality. This essence is identified with the most progressive and most productive concern of that age. Anything in the way of thought or art which does not derive from this concern is necessarily barren, and permitted to attain at best an esoteric and sterile beauty. In the twentieth century, according to this view, the dominant concern is the physical sciences, and in consequence the true culture of our age is a scientific, not a literary, culture.

From such a view of culture it would indeed follow that traditional culture was obsolete, and that any system of education based upon it was an anachronism. But then I think that it would be quite unreasonable to accept this view of culture. It is not the teaching of history, that in any given age the productive forces in thought and art have always been jealously contained within a single exclusive movement: and if we are legislating for the future, it is highly undesirable that we should seek to confine them in this unimaginative way. Of course there are other arguments, and very good ones, for thinking that science should have a far larger place in our culture and hence in our system of higher education than it does in this country at the moment. But it does not follow from this that we need a predominantly scientific culture and education. Indeed if anything of a general kind follows from the argument it is that we should not make the mistake of giving our system of education and culture any sort of dominant or overall tone. Science and the humanities should coexist, side by side, in friendly competition for the attentions of men and it should be left to the natural variety of tastes to decide which makes the greater appeal. If this is so, then a consideration of the role of science in education in no way strengthens the case for the abolition or suppression of middle-class culture in Socialist society. It suggests that this culture may have to be modified in order to accommodate itself to progressive conditions: but this is in no way incompatible with, indeed it was envisaged by, the prognostications of Trotsky with which this section began.

V. What's Wrong with Mass Culture?

THE QUESTION POSED

WHAT, we might ask, is wrong with mass-culture? Already, in posing the question in this unqualified way, we may appear to have abandoned the caution we insisted upon as a condition of using the term at all. For there is a real danger in hypostatising mass-culture and in treating what is merely the sum of the entertainments, literature and leisure-activities preferred at some given moment by 'the masses' as though it were a timeless phenomenon with enduring and unchanging characteristics. In fact, mass-culture is something highly volatile, not merely in character but also in quality. Its general level is liable to considerable fluctuations in response to changes either in supply or in demand. The entrepreneur, or supplier of mass-entertainments, might decide entirely of his own accord to raise (or to lower) the quality of the objects he supplies, and there seems no reason why he should not be able to do so without in any way losing or damaging his market: for in any affluent and sophisticated society, there will surely be a fairly considerable bracket of quality within which the consumer of mass-culture is indifferent. For evidence of this one has only to look to the widely different levels achieved by commercial TV in the United States and in this country, without it would seem, any very real difference in popularity. And, in the long run at least, no less potent a force in determining the quality of mass-culture is the factor of demand. For, just as the supplier might suddenly raise the standard of what he provides, so it is possible that the consumer might come to insist upon products of a higher quality. Whether this happens or not will, of course, depend primarily upon the diffusion of education. For education is required not merely to elevate the standards of the ordinary citizen but also to make him conscious of the very real power that he has, as a consumer, of enforcing these standards upon the supplier. The pessimistic attitude adopted by certain radical thinkers in the mid-twentieth century towards mass culture is highly reminiscent of the pessimistic attitude adopted by many conservative thinkers in the mid-nineteenth century towards mass-politics. In each calculation the same factor is left out of account: the effect of mass-education.

Not all criticism of mass culture, however, makes the mistake of treating it as a timeless entity. There are powerful arguments that have been raised against it, which make full allowance for the reservations upon which I have insisted, and to them I now wish to turn. In assessing them it is important that we should consider the phenomenon against which they are brought, *as a whole*, and in the case of mass culture there is a peculiar temptation not to do this. For, as Raymond Williams has pointed out in an analogous context, there is a tendency for people to judge the quality of a culture by reference to that element in it which corresponds directly to what is of most importance to them in their own. Highly educated people and intellectuals in particular, confronted by mass culture,

tend to judge it largely by reference to what Williams calls its 'reading artifacts'. But there is no reason to suppose that the printed word occupies as large a part in the lives of most people as it does in that of the highly literate person. If we wish to arrive at a fair assessment of mass culture, we must not confine ourselves to the yellow press and pulp literature but must take into account a far wider range of activities and pleasures. (It is to be observed that the modern critic who denies this courtesy to mass culture would never dream of doing so in the case of his favoured 'folk' culture.) No verdict upon contemporary mass culture would be anything but partial if it failed to consider such phenomena as the ubiquitous jazz-clubs; or the new taste for foreign travel, with all that this involves in the way of the elimination of old-style working-class xenophobia; or the prevailing disinterest in religion; or the absence of sexual puritanism, and the growth of genuine toleration; or even the extravagant interest in sartorial fashion, which despite its commercial inspiration and its obvious absurdities, has been a very real factor in stimulating self-expression and self-esteem. In other words, to be fair, one must pass in review that whole set of glossy and uninhibited forms of life which has been poeticised in the London novels of Colin MacInnes.

Mass Culture and Passivity

The most widespread accusation brought against mass culture — and in some ways the hardest to assess — is that mass culture is essentially a passive or spectator culture. In large part this is just another way, perhaps an oblique way, of saying that it is of poor aesthetic quality. For it is a mark of the higher arts that they call for a certain amount of 'reading' or 'projection' on the part of their audience. A novel or play or painting that requires no interpretation from the reader or spectator, who can therefore totally immerse himself in it without in any way drawing upon the imagination or the intellect, is without that capacity to stimulate and enrich the mind which we have come to expect of the arts. It is for this reason, for instance, because it imposes itself so unambiguously and literally upon its audience, and not because of its portrayal of sexual detail — which can, after all, be an important artistic concern — that pornography is aesthetically condemned.

Now if the objection is that mass culture as we have it today, or at any rate a great deal of it, is of low artistic value, I see little reason to dissent. But merely to say this is not to advance the argument very far, for what we need to know is why mass culture is aesthetically so poor and whether its low quality is a necessary, or merely an accidental, feature of it. And the reference to passivity seems hardly to provide the explanation we seek: for passivity (in this sense) seems to be more a consequence than a cause of badness in art.

There is another, rather more literal, sense in which the accusation of passivity has been brought against mass culture. The charge is now that no special action or no particular physical or emotional response is called for on the part of the consumer of mass culture: all that he is required to do is to lap up what is served out to him. But then in this respect mass culture is not significantly different from high culture. The fine arts

may set the faculties of man in motion, but they certainly require nothing of him in the way of active response; they call for no particular skill or accomplishment on the part of the spectator, nor do they physically move him to any display of appreciation or sympathy. Indeed some of the activities of mass culture are far more exacting in this respect than anything to be found in high culture: jazz-sessions and football matches, for instance, call for audience-participation on a scale that is much dreamed of in the theory, but never realised in the practice, of the higher arts.

Of course what those who urge the charge of passivity in this sense really have in mind is a contrast not between mass culture and high culture but between mass culture and folk culture. For the element of activity, of direct and physical response that is felt to be missing from the mass-entertainments, has its home, not in opera or in novel-reading, but in folk drama and in the songs and dances of traditional peoples, where the line between participant and audience, between agent and spectator, is indefinite or even fluid. But the question now arises whether it is reasonable to set up the arts and pleasures of the folk as the model for the culture of a modern society? I do not want to decry the traditional cultures, or to deny that they possess a far greater charm, in many cases a far higher aesthetic value than that attained by the cultures which have superseded them. But in this matter a sense of history is essential. There can be no doubt that folk cultures belong essentially to an earlier stage of material culture and that the price of keeping them alive in modern industrial society must be artificiality and self-consciousness, the loss indeed of that very freshness and spontaneity which is their real appeal. Furthermore, in the United States and even in many Western European countries the theoretical possibility of doing so does not exist. It may be useful to point out that mass culture has lost the vitality and charm of folk culture without attaining the refinement or the expressiveness of high culture: but it does not follow that a reversion to folk culture is at this stage of history either practical or even desirable.

Generally when mass culture is attacked for its passivity what critics have in mind, either overtly or covertly, is television. But the attack upon television brings out fairly clearly the ambiguity of the charge. In one sense television is, undeniably, a passive medium: but this sense is at once trivial and comparatively innocuous. Often enough, however, something more specific and more damaging is intended. But in this new sense it is less clear that the charge sticks. For what it now amounts to is a criticism of quality directed against television programmes as such. And this in turn presupposes a necessary connection between the medium and the quality of what the medium communicates: a presupposition which seems in no way justified. To quote Raymond Williams again *'Modern techniques are at worst neutral, and to ask whether television is a good or bad thing is like asking whether injections are a good or bad thing'*.[1]

A Rootless Culture?

A second objection that is frequently brought against mass culture is that

[1] Raymond Williams in *Encounter*, June 1959.

it is classless or perhaps, more generally, that it is rootless. Once again, it is not easy to appreciate the precise content of the charge. In so far as it is true that classlessness and rootlessness are characteristics of mass culture this is only because they are, more fundamentally, characteristics of the society in which mass culture flourishes. It is in the nature of modern industrial society to tend towards the absence of class and roots. Now it is not clear to me with what right Socialists can object to this state of affairs. For the only alternative to it is surely the differentiated society, the society marked by hierarchy and status. Indeed, 'classlessness' and 'rootlessness', as currently used, seem to be merely opprobrious ways of referring to the decline of the traditional characteristics. Yet no Socialist could possibly be in favour of their continued existence.

Against this some Socialist would maintain that it is possible to have a society that is classless but rooted and moreover that this is the kind of society towards which we should aspire. Personally I find the position unconvincing. In the pre-industrial economy or in the first generation of a community (like a *kibbutz*) which has been consciously and artificially created, such a state of affairs may be possible. But in an advanced technological society, of which the essence is mobility, social and occupational, I do not see how roots can be maintained unless they are reinforced by undesirable pressures, nor do I see how they can do other than limit the opportunities that should be open to all the members of that society.

Of course what is highly undesirable — and if this is what the critic of modern society and modern culture is insisting upon, he is surely in the right—is that classlessness and rootlessness in a society should result in the absence of all character, in the extinction of all marked traits, from that society. There is a false chain of reasoning which would associate the consensual society with the faceless or anonymous society, as though the possession of any definate characteristic or personality by society were always and necessarily an infringement of popular liberty and hence 'undemocratic'. The reasoning is invalid. For providing that society offers alternative ways of living, it can be no criticism of it that these alternatives are highly articulated.

Mass Culture and Artificial Wants

Another common accusation that is often brought against mass culture is that it ministers to spurious or artificial desires. In *The Affluent Society*, a work of considerable contemporary influence, J. K. Galbraith has argued the more general case that the whole of our present economy is geared to 'synthesised' wants, and that the high level of private consumption, upon which it rather insecurely rests, is due solely to what he calls the Dependence Effect. The Dependence Effect he defines as 'the way wants depend on the process by which they are satisfied'.[1] This effect can operate passively or actively. It operates passively when 'increases in consumption, the counterpart of increases in production, act by suggestion or emulation to create wants'. And it operates actively when producers take definite steps to increase demand by means of salesmanship and, above all, advertising.

[1] J. K. Galbraith, *The Affluent Society*, p. 124.

The argument has great *prima facie* plausibility, but I think that it runs rather rapidly into two considerable difficulties. The first is that there seems to be no adequate method of distinguishing between genuine, and artificial or 'created' wants. Indeed the distinction itself seems to rest on two further assumptions both of which are highly questionable. One is that we have a satisfactory criterion of identity for a want, so that we can decide on any given occasion whether we are dealing with the same want as on a previous occasion or with a new want. Such a criterion is necessary, for in its absence, we could not reasonably distinguish (as the argument demands that we should) between the creation of a fresh want and the making of an existent want conscious or articulate. The other assumption is that we can, in a given psychological situation, abstract to the point of saying what a man would have wanted if he had not been subjected to such-and-such a process of inducement or persuasion. To be able to abstract in this way is necessary for the argument, for otherwise, even if we did possess a criterion whereby we could distinguish between a new want and an old want made conscious, we still could not causally attribute the new want to the process of inducement or persuasion.

The second difficulty into which the Galbraith thesis runs is this: that even if we go all the way and concede the distinction between natural wants and created wants, there seems no reason to assume, as Galbraith does, that the latter are of a lower order of urgency, or require to be taken less seriously than the former. The desire for sanitation or for museums are in their different ways created rather than natural wants, and yet their existence seems fairly essential to culture. Galbraith's strictures don't even seem to be particularly appropriate to that sub-set of created wants with which he is especially concerned: namely, those which are created by the very process by which they are satisfied. Is it not, for instance, a distinguishing mark of a good system of education that it inculcates not merely learning but also the desire to learn?

It would, of course, be casuistry to suggest that there is nothing to the argument about synthesised wants. The difficulty, though, is to see what it is. Part of the argument is probably this: There are in our society certain wants — and I suspect that these wants are peculiarly relevant to mass culture — which are based upon emulation or the desire for social recognition. Now it is an essential feature of these wants that they are satisfied equally by the possession of the object towards which they are supposedly directed or by the appearance of possessing it. A man who desires a second car solely to emulate his neighbours will be as satisfied by his neighbours' thinking that he has one as by actually having one. Now if this is so, the satisfaction of such wants is not going to lead to a higher level of welfare or social contentment than that which would have obtained if these wants had never existed. Accordingly, we may say that these wants have no social value, and that any attempt to encourage them, or any culture that depends upon them, is to that extent undesirable.

Again, if the distinction between natural and created wants is inadequate to support a wholesale criticism of modern production, it is no less inadequate to support a wholesale defence of such production. And this is important in the field of culture. For publishers of trashy literature,

backers of shoddy TV programmes, proprietors of gutter newspapers, makers and distributors of bad films, often try to justify their activities by saying that, though their products may be no good, they do at least provide the public with what it wants. But the foregoing argument should have shown that this claim is not easy to substantiate: if, that is, it means not just that the public likes what it is given but what it is given satisfies a pre-existing want. For such a claim presupposes that we can identify this want independently of, and prior to, the object that satisfies it. But this is, or is close to, an absurdity. With something specific and complex like a book or a film, it is quite unrealistic to say that there existed a want for that particular book or film before that book or film existed. For it is not merely that human desires are plastic: they are also, up to a point, unspecific. No-one has ever claimed on behalf of high art that it gives people what they want: that *Anna Karenina* or *Measure for Measure* or *Cosi fan Tutti* satisfy pre-existing desires. What is often ignored is that *one* of the reasons why such a claim would be false, makes it also false of low entertainment. It may not be true that mass culture satisfies synthesised or created wants It does not follow from this that it satisfies genuine or natural wants. And yet when its quality is poor, this is its usual line of defence.

The Culture of High Consumption

I now want to turn to what I regard as some rather more forceful objections to mass culture. All of these assume as their starting-point that mass culture is essentially a consumer culture. In this it seems to me they are right. Mass culture is bound up in a way that is not, for instance, true of middle-class culture, with the consumption and display of goods — TV sets, clothes, Vespas, magazines, records, cars, films. However, even so, the question remains whether these objections relate to necessary aspects of a consumer culture, or whether the evils they indicate could not be effectively neutralised.

An Agent of Public Squalor?

The first of these new objections once again derives from, or at any rate finds its best formulation in, *The Affluent Society*. Galbraith argues that any culture that places a heavy emphasis upon the consumption of goods is bound to lead to what he calls 'social imbalance'. Social imbalance, as he defines it, arises when there is an unsatisfactory ratio holding between the supply of private services or goods on the one hand and that of the services or goods of the state on the other. Now Galbraith, it is true, depends in part upon strictly economic criteria to determine when this ratio is to be regarded as unsatisfactory: the ratio is unsatisfactory and the economy in a state of imbalance when the stability and security of production are threatened. But Galbraith is also interested in more general social considerations, and these also provide criteria by which social imbalance is measured. Moreover, we may safely assume that when the ratio of private to public consumption is so high as to be economically dangerous, it will also have marked social ill-effects: when

the excess of motor-cars and washing-machines over hospitals and schools is so great as to threaten inflation, it will also prejudice the smooth functioning of society. 'Private spending, public squalor' is likely to be at least as disastrous socially as it is economically.

If, then, mass culture with its emphasis upon private consumption does lead to social imbalance, this would be a powerful objection to it. For it would mean, amongst other things, that mass culture contained within itself the seeds, if not of its own destruction, at least of its own deterioration. For, as we have seen, the level of mass culture depends upon the degree of diffusion of mass education. But if the spread of mass culture entails the decline of public goods and services, this must mean that it entails amongst other things the decline of public education: and this in turn means that the more widely mass culture is diffused, the lower will be its level of attainment. In other words, the course of cultural evolution will describe a descending spiral. The question then arises, does mass culture lead to social imbalance?

The argument that it does proceeds by means of a further — and undisputed — premiss that whereas private goods are divisible, public goods are indivisible. Accordingly, the only way of financing public goods is by means of a general levy or taxation. But in a society where emphasis is placed upon private consumption, though there may be no general resistance to public services as such, everyone will resist the fact that he should be asked to contribute to them. For any contribution that he makes will to that degree impair what he really prizes: namely, his powers of personal consumption. Moreover (so Galbraith argues) in a society where the cult of private consumption is highly developed, even if there is no actual resistance to the public services, certainly no pride will be taken in them and no satisfaction derived from their increase. For the sentiment will have grown up that the only wants that need to be taken seriously are those which can be satisfied privately and that it is only in satisfying them that the individual citizen is advancing his welfare or attending to his interests.

On the face of it the thesis appears to have all the inescapability of a tautology, but further inspection shows that this is not so. It may be tautological that a man who is drawn to spending his money on articles of personal consumption, will resent being asked to divert it into public channels. But this certainly does not mean that the strength of his resentment will be uniquely determined by the strength of his consumer-desires. Critics of Galbraith have suggested that the degree of unwillingness with which a country surrenders its private income for public spending is a function not solely of its affluence but also of essentially non-economic attitudes: for instance, of its cultural traditions.

Against this, however, it might be argued that Mass Culture is such an attitude or tradition. Could not Mass Culture be regarded as *par excellence* the practical philosophy of a society that is committed to the belief that happiness can be found only in the personal consumption of personal objects? If this is so, then it is only to be expected that anyone who falls under its spell will resist having his money spent for him on public objects, or at any rate public objects of a peaceful nature. The

argument sounds convincing. But the fact remains that societies that have all equally fallen for the blandishments of mass culture, evince remarkably different degrees of willingness to bear the burden of taxation: compare, for instance, America and West Germany or Sweden. Accordingly, it does not seem as though we can in all fairness charge mass culture with anything more than a *tendency* to be an agent of public squalor in a world of private affluence.

The Problem of Work Ignored

I now want to turn to another objection that also considers mass culture as essentially a consumer culture. According to this argument, mass culture, by the heavy emphasis that it places upon leisure and leisure activities, totally ignores all the immensely important issues concerned with the quality or character of Work in society. Preoccupied as it is with filling, in the most pleasurable or soothing fashion possible, the ever-increasing hours that a man spends away from his factory or his office, it has nothing to say, indeed it makes light of the attempt to say anything about what goes on, and what should go on, in the places of work. And this is highly deplorable. Not merely because in any industrial society — at least for many years to come — the greater number of men's waking hours will be spent in work, not in leisure: but also because these hours have a significance over and above their quantitative predominance. For it is only during and through them that a man can attain true satisfaction. However sweet or agreeable his leisure hours may be, it is in his work that he fulfils himself, if he does at all. A culture which has nothing to say on this subject, which treats work merely as a means of making money which is then spent on leisure, is degrading and ultimately worthless.

It is one of the oldest complaints against Industrialism that it broke up the idyllic conditions of production prevalent in rural society, and that it destroyed for ever the life of craftsmanship. Without subscribing to the dubious historical thesis latent in this indictment, one can scarcely deny that a great deal of work that is typical of modern industrial society, is heartless and unsatisfying. It makes hideous demands, physically and spiritually, and offers few compensating rewards. It was a brilliant insight on the part of the young Marx to associate the increasing dreariness of work with the great organising principle of industrial society: the division of labour. It is because the worker cannot identify any single artefact as the product of his own labour that he is denied any sense of creativity or self-fulfilment in the process. But Marx devised no solution to the problem and the portentous set of philosophical categories — such as 'dehumanisation' and 'alienation' — which is his other contribution to the discussion, has not proved very illuminating, either as used by him or, again, as revived by his disciples today on the New Left. Moreover there is a real danger in his diagnosis. For to place the blame for the utter inhumanity of modern labour, as it is experienced beside the production-belts of Wolverhampton or Detroit or Kharkov, upon the division of labour, carries with it the suggestion that this principle might be reversed to the greater contentment of society. But this is an evident impossibility. Any project

for humanising work that includes the abolition of the division of labour is essentially Luddite. If it means what it says. For sometimes those who attack the division of labour want not its actual abolition but some approximation or analogue to its abolition; but then the problem has in no way been advanced, for now we need to know what this approximation or analogue amounts to, and this we are not told.

Nor is the ultimate aim, that of humanising work, itself free from obscurity. One orthodox way of interpreting it is as trying to find a form of work that would be at once demanding, dignified and creative. Now it certainly would be no mean achievement to think of a mode of labour that satisfied all those descriptions, and the fact that this task is usually undertaken in a nostalgic spirit, with one eye firmly fixed upon the old rural community and with the imagination dominated by thoughts of the cobbler at his last, of the wheelwright in his workshop, should not be allowed to blind us to its very real importance for modern conditions. But even if we could envisage or devise a form of work that satisfied these requirements, such a conception would have a fairly limited value. It would, for instance, be a mistake to identify this kind of work, which we might call significant work, with satisfying work, where we mean work that actually satisfies those who do it. For such an identification would, amongst other things, totally leave out of account the obsessional aspect of work, or the emotional value which certain forms of work that it would be natural to think of as boring, possess on account of the opportunities they offer for the frequent repetition of simple and quasi-mechanical movements. More generally, such an identification makes the common assumption, which is quite unproved, that there is a problem of work; as though everyone made exactly the same demands of his work or found satisfaction in the same activities and exertions. This assumption is a typical instance of the *a priori* psychology which still lingers on inside the science of society and is peculiarly at home in any utopian scheme.

Of course, this is not to deny that certain forms or kinds of work are too ignoble or degrading to exist in a free society, and that everything should be done to eliminate them from the highly technological world that we inhabit, no matter what emotional satisfaction some may derive from them. Even less is this to deny that a constant effort should be made to improve the conditions, as opposed to the character, of work, and to see that these are increasingly brought under the control of those who have to work under them. Not only is workers' control (in this *limited* sense) a natural extension of democratic rule, but it also seems to be, at the moment at any rate, the most promising way of removing the sense of drudgery from industrial work.

Ultimately there is a common fallacy that underlies the thinking both of those who would concentrate to the exclusion of all else upon filling the leisure-hours of man in as pleasurable a way as possible and of those who urge the superior demands of 'humanising' work: and that is the idea that we can totally abstract work from leisure and that we can assess in isolation the contributions of each to the good life or to human happiness. Both psychological theory and empirical inquiry emphasise the fact that

ultimately whether a man finds a certain form of work satisfying or a certain leisure activity pleasurable depends to some degree on how he spends the other part of his life.

Of course in practice we must make the abstraction, but we should all the time be aware of its limitations. And if we do, then I think there can be no doubt that it would be more reasonable to concentrate our energies — in so far as we must concentrate them — upon improving the leisure rather than the work of the ordinary citizen. And this for the quite simple reason that, in the existing state of knowledge, we can expect better returns for our efforts in the one direction than in the other. For we know so miserably little about the empirical problem of satisfaction in work.

To persist for a moment with the abstraction that I have condemned: it seems to me more consonant with the outlook of Socialism to believe that, for years to come, in the affluent societies at any rate, humanity, save for a very few exceptions, is more likely to realise itself through Leisure than through Labour. If many Socialists resist this suggestion it is, I think, for two reasons. The first is the residual influence of the Puritan ethos within the Socialist tradition. And the second is the influence of intellectuals upon Socialist thought in this connection. For intellectuals are amongst the exceptions that I had in mind. For them work is likely to be amongst the most satisfying aspects of their lives. But then the mistake would be to assimilate ordinary work to intellectual work. In one quite obvious sense an intellectual is not a 'worker': in that his productivity is not a direct function of his working-day. In consequence there is no good reason why work should become a drudgery for him in a way that seems to be an almost inescapable condition of industrial labour.

On the whole, of course, we should try not to concentrate but to diffuse our energies between the demands of Leisure and Labour as objects of improvement. But the theoretical issue is worth raising if only because we should be prepared for the moment, which may well arise very soon, when these demands become exclusive. Perhaps a way will be devised of 'humanising' automation. But if it isn't, we may well find that we can further increase the hours of leisure only by making work even more 'soulless'. Personally I have no doubt which way our choice should go. I think that it would be quite wrong, in the interests of some attractive but elusive ideal, to impose a superfluous burden of work upon the human beings of our society. And those who are appalled by the alternative I propose might do well to reflect that creative work may yet return to our society as a significant element in the life of leisure. Crude categories like Labour and Leisure can often blind us to the more hopeful aspects of the world around us.

It may well be that mass culture, as we have it today, is of too low a quality to fill the leisure hours of an automated society. If so, that would be its condemnation. But I do not think that it stands condemned simply because of the emphasis it places upon leisure.

Mass-Culture and Relativism

A final objection that may be raised to mass culture is that it leads

to a total relativism of values. This is, for instance, what lies behind Hoggart's strictures when he rather misleadingly talks of 'the new tolerance' Genuine tolerance may with some justification be claimed as one of the benefits brought by mass culture, but there is no doubt that mass culture also propagates a state of mind which not merely accepts a vast variety of attitudes, tastes, beliefs, habits, forms of literature or entertainment, but also refuses to discriminate between them. Everything that exists within the culture exists — according to this 'virtuous materialism' as Tocqueville called it — because someone likes it, and there is felt to be no legitimate means of going beyond this expression of liking to a judgment of value. Some people may pronounce Bach to be better than pop-songs or Flaubert to be superior to Leicester Square pornography — but in saying so, what are they doing but dressing up their own private preferences as though they were objective matters of fact? Indeed the impossibility of arriving at universal judgments about what is good and bad in the arts is thought directly to follow from the absence of any consensus of taste.

It would be out of place here to rehearse the errors of relativism, and I shall confine myself to indicating the nature of the connection that I believe to hold between mass culture and relativism.

The most fundamental way in which the connection holds is through the notion of consumer sovereignty. Basically this is a purely factual notion, descriptive of the practice of mass culture: namely, that the character of its products is, as far as possible, determined by the tastes of their consumers. This practice is, of course, grounded in the fact that mass culture, being essentially a leisure culture and totally devoid of any social or ideological function, aims simply at giving the greatest amount of pleasure to those who consume it: and the vast commercial apparatus that supplies it, sees that this is done with the maximum efficiency that modern techniques permit. But the purely factual notion of consumer sovereignty spins around itself a further theory or belief, which is certainly not factual in character but serves as a justification or rationale of consumer sovereignty. And this is the view that the tastes of the consumer determine not just the character but also the value of a given product. The consumer, in deciding what he likes, decides *ipso facto* what is good. And this further theory is relativism.

Another connection between mass culture and relativism is established through the considerable emphasis that mass culture places upon fashion. For implicit in the idea of fashion is the idea that the value of any object is determined solely by its date of production; the closer this is to the present moment, the greater is the value of the object.

The significance of the idea of fashion for the producers of mass culture is not hard to see. The dogma of consumer sovereignty is obviously valuable because it encourages consumption over a wide variety of objects; as wide, that is, as the tastes of the public. But when the idea of fashion is superimposed upon this situation, then we virtually arrive at the suppliers' ideal of continuous consumption. Varied tastes are supplemented as determinants of consumption by changing dates; even if there is no subjective reason for novelty, Time provides it. The price, however, at which it does

so is that of bringing objective values and tastes into disrepute; which is perhaps the highest price we have to pay for the solaces of mass culture.

Postscript

In this section I have — I wish to emphasise — discussed mass culture on the assumption that it is one element in a larger cultural complex. I have therefore not criticised it, nor considered criticisms that have been brought against it, on grounds of what it omits; which would, of course, become a relevant thing to do if one thought that we were approaching a situation in which mass culture enjoyed a monopoly. For the undeniable thing about mass culture — harmless, even benign though it may be in many respects — is that it is quite unable to provide a substantial base on which the arts can grow. I shall in a later section return to the question why this is so, but ultimately the reason is that mass culture is a commercial product deriving solely from consideration of circulation and profit. In consequence a society that totally depended for its cultural sustenance upon mass culture would be badly impoverished. But this does not mean that mass culture is necessarily pernicious, nor even that it has no useful function to perform as a solvent of certain traditional attitudes and prejudices.

VI. What's Wrong with the Structure of Culture?

EDUCATION AND SOCIAL MOBILITY

To many it might seem as if what is essentially wrong with the Present Compromise is not so much the class character of middle-class culture nor even the low quality of mass culture—for, though both these are serious matters, there is no reason to think it beyond the powers of educational reform to put them right — but is rather the structure in which these two elements are contained. The real defect is the highly competitive nature of the structure which means that middle-class culture is offered on excessively stiff terms, and that the role of mass culture is to be some kind of sop or palliative for those who are unable or unwilling to pay these terms. Not only is such a system clearly undesirable in itself, but it also seems calculated to preserve and to aggravate the characteristic vice of each of the two cultures: its continued existence can only make high culture more exclusive and low culture more banal.

The most striking fact about twentieth-century society is the great increase in social mobility. Ordinarily we think of this as meaning that far more people rise in the social scale or change class than used to. But even more impressive than the acceleration in what might be called the collective rate of social mobility is the acceleration in the individual rate. It is not merely that more people change class but they do so at a much earlier age. Whereas previously the social transition was effected by the time a man was fifty or sixty, now it is complete at the age of twenty or twenty-five.

On the face of it, this may seem a change for the better, for it means that everyone has now longer to enjoy the social and material benefits to which his natural endowment entitles him. But further reflection will show that the advantages are not all on one side. For unless the conditions of the competition have been considerably modified, what the change means is that the old struggle for status, which used to be fought out across the span of a man's life, in the hard adult world of business or profession, is now compressed into a few years and assigned the schoolroom as its arena. Now, this must be an undesirable state of affairs: for three quite clear reasons.

The Vices of the Educational Ladder

In the first place, it imposes an intolerable emotional strain upon young children who are now asked not merely to control their unruly instincts and to sublimate them into the acquisition of knowledge, but to do so faster and more conspicuously than their companions. Success would seem to be purchased at too high a price, and failure — the knowledge that one has fallen behind in the professional race, and that little, perhaps nothing, that one is capable of doing will allow one to catch up — is brought home

to the child at an age when it can barely be expected to bear it with equanimity.

Perhaps the system would seem less objectionable if one were quite convinced that the race, however rigorous, was also just. But even this consolation is missing. For it is evident that, in contemporary conditions, the race is run in the nature of a handicap, in which children from more educated backgrounds have a decided advantage over those who come from homes with a lower educational standard; the wastage of clever working-class boys from grammar-schools is still alarmingly high. It is, of course, very unlikely that anything can be done to correct this iniquity, save in the long run: but as long as it continues to exist, it constitutes a standing argument in favour of attenuating the fierceness of the educational struggle.

Secondly, it must ultimately have a harmful effect upon the educational system that it should be used primarily as an elaborate and protracted method of social selection. Schooling is becoming like a long steeplechase from start to finish. Every stage that is traversed is regarded as a prelude to the one that follows, every examination that is passed is merely a means of manoeuvring for position for the next. Conversely, the requirements of University entry, which control the final lap in the whole race, make their influence felt all the way back, down every previous stage in the course. What the Crowther Report referred to as 'the crisis of the Sixth Form' is in effect the crisis of the whole system: and the description that Sir Geoffrey in a later lecture ('Schools and Universities') applied to the top form — 'an assault course for educational commandos' — could without exaggeration be generalised downwards. Premature specialisation, the elimination from the syllabus of all side-issues and divagations, concentration upon the techniques of examination, are the inevitable concomitants of a system of which it is becoming increasingly true that its primary social function is not so much to educate people as to eliminate them. It is possible that the clever boy will not be harmed by this system. But that is poor comfort. For all it means is that, if the system is designed for any one, it is designed for him; and he must always be in a very small minority.

Thirdly, an educational system which is conceived primarily as a method of social selection, is bound to have the effect of instilling into those who pass through it, the morality of competition and a view of life in which streaming and grading are natural elements. Instead of the old public school virtues of Leadership and Character, we are going to have the new virtues of Efficiency and Brightness. Now I do not think for a moment that a Socialist society can survive without these qualities: I think that it will have to encourage them, and even pay a high price for them: but I do not think that it need inscribe them, in golden letters, as the motto over its portals.

Finally, it might be apposite to mention here (though the point is not strictly a cultural one) that quite apart from the general undesirability of converting the educational system into a system of elimination, the actual rate at which elimination takes place within our system is quite grotesque even from the most narrowly utilitarian point of view. In Britain today about 3 - 4 per cent of those who enter the system stay in to the end,

i.e. reach university. Considered simply as social investment, this is hopelessly inadequate. Indeed it is arguable that this rate is not merely inadequate but positively harmful. For any system of education that is quite so aggressively eliminative as ours is bound to employ very narrowly academic criteria of selection. But there is considerable reason to think that people chosen by reference to strict academic ability are not necessarily going to be those who will have most to contribute to economic efficiency. Exactly what is the proper percentage of university graduates for an advanced industrial society that wishes to preserve a high rate of economic growth is not clear, but it seems likely to be closer to 15 or 20 per cent: and there are economists who will maintain that no degree of investment in higher education will ever prove unremunerative.

It is, therefore, clear that the present educational or — what comes to the same thing in this country — cultural market, as it is at present constructed, is far from satisfactory. It is not simply that the competition is imperfect; even if it were perfect, the ensuing scramble for benefits would be undesirable. To put the matter another way: Socialism cannot be identified, in a simple-minded fashion, with equality of opportunity: where equality of opportunity is itself identified, in a way which I think has come to stay, with educational opportunity. Nor do I think that there are many today who would deny this. C. A. R. Crosland, for instance, whose book *The Future of Socialism* has been attacked by critics 'on the left', for equating the institution of Socialism with the replacement of a hierarchy of birth or wealth by a meritocracy, is in fact insistent upon certain further conditions that must be satisfied before equality of opportunity is even acceptable, let alone sufficient. He insists that, in the first place, the opportunities that are made open to all, should command a high average level of remuneration: on the grounds that the higher the level of income, whatever its distribution, the greater the subjective sense of equality. And, his second condition, which can be seen as a kind of qualification to the first, is that the total range of remuneration should fall within a certain fixed bracket: that there should, in other words, be an established ratio between the income of the best-paid members of the meritocracy and that of the lowest-paid.

Is the Ladder Wrong?

However, even if we are all agreed that equality of opportunity is not a sufficient, the question arises whether it is a necessary, condition of Socialist society. There have always been Socialist thinkers to raise their voices against it, and today, once again, they are audible. The image of the Ladder, they claim, has no place in the Socialist vision of society. Is this view correct?

One way of arriving at such a view would be as a deduction from a particular conception of man in society. According to this conception both the rights and duties of man stem solely from his most general characteristic, his humanity, and have nothing to do with any particular endowment or ability that he may possess. A man may not justifiably claim any special benefit or provision from society simply because of some superior talent he happens to have. Equally, of course, society may not, in virtue

of this endowment, lay claim to any special contribution or effort on his part. Ability or talent, on this view, is a private matter, which a man is free either to use or not to use. Society is not entitled to make him use it, and he can make no claim upon society if he does use it.

It would be hard not to respect this ideal, for the very serious conception it holds of human dignity, and also for the emphasis it places, in its austere way, upon community and brotherhood. But I think that its consequences make it ultimately untenable. A system of rights and duties, which is based solely upon the universal aspects of man and which totally disregards all utilitarian considerations like rewards and incentives, is bound, when put into practice, to result in a decrease in social welfare. And if it is now objected that the level of social welfare is not to be reckoned in such materialistic terms as the standard of living, the only retort is that the great majority of people in the world, to whose interests, after all, Socialists cannot be indifferent, calculate in just this way.

A more moderate argument against equality of opportunity has been expressed by Raymond Williams who writes:

'*My own view is that the ladder version of society is objectionable in two related respects: first, that it weakens the principle of common betterment, which ought to be an absolute value; second, that it sweetens the poison of hierarchy, in particular, by offering the hierarchy of merit as a thing different in kind from the hierarchy of money or of birth.*'[1]

But the moderation of this argument is also its undoing. For the premisses no longer sustain the conclusion. What follows from the position to which Williams subscribes is, surely, not that the Ladder should be abandoned, but that its operation should in some way be modified. And I do not see that there is any fundamental reason to think that it could not be modified so as to do justice to the two very important and profound reservations that Williams expresses.

Indeed, I have already concurred with the view that equality of opportunity is acceptable only if the opportunities offered do not exhibit too wide a range of inequality and if even the least favoured is on a reasonably high material level. And I would also very strongly agree with Williams that any attempt to provide educational opportunity for the more gifted must go hand-in-hand with raising the educational standard for all. Indeed I too would give this second task priority over the first: though not for the same reason as he would. For whereas Williams believes that individual opportunity is incompatible with, I hold that it presupposes, common betterment. For there is no way of guaranteeing that the best education is offered to the most gifted as long as educational or cultural squalor survives. This principle indeed applies both inside and outside the educational system. It applies inside the system in that, as long as the bottom stream continues to flow at its present low level (and this in turn means as long as the school-leaving age is kept down), it will always be extremely difficult to retrieve out of it children of ability who have got into it on account of late development. And, secondly, the principle applies outside the system, in that children born and brought up

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[1] Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society*, p. 331.

in areas of society which are culturally impoverished find it proportionately more difficult to make use of, and secure recognition for, such abilities as they have.

In Favour of the Ladder

I do not, then, think that the arguments adduced for eliminating the Ladder from our society establish anything more than that its use should be controlled and supplemented. On the other hand, the arguments in favour of its retention seem to me overwhelming. The first of these arguments I shall not dwell on, since it relates to purely practical considerations which fall rather outside the scope of this pamphlet: it is that the comparatively high level of prosperity and security we enjoy, and the far higher level that is within our reach, depend upon society's continued ability to make use of the individual talent and ability it contains. The only observation I want to make is that, if the argument is sound, it seems to show that competitive education (to some degree or other) is a prior condition of good education: for good education, which is an expensive commodity, is impossible save in a society enjoying considerable prosperity. Secondly, the process of liberalising society and removing injustice has, rightly or wrongly, become so closely identified in the general mind with mobility and educational opportunity that it is difficult to see how the connection could be broken or even loosened without causing a widespread sense of frustration and discontent. If there is any doubt on this score, let us consider for a moment a special instance of the more general problem: entry into Oxford or Cambridge. Now it is clearly undesirable that the best brains of the country should be concentrated in these two universities — bad from their point of view, very bad from the point of view of the other universities. But can anyone devise any method for diverting talent from what has now come to be regarded as its natural objective or destination, without inducing a deep sense of social injustice, a feeling of return to the old days of caste and privilege? If it has proved impossible to devise any acceptable solution even in this particular case, it is hard to see how the consequences of clamping down more generally on the possibilities of educational advancement could be made palatable.

How to Improve It

The question then arises, how is it possible to preserve what is good in the theory of educational opportunity without setting an undesirable premium upon intellectual ability or establishing competitiveness and ambition as the central values of our society? I have only the most general suggestions to make.

In the first place, the character of the Educational Ladder should be radically transformed. It should be broadened: it should be shortened: and its absolute position should be raised. Fortunately, all these three aims seem to be intimately linked, so that any reform which effectively realised any one would go a considerable way towards bringing the others about. For if we want to have a far larger proportion of students graduating to higher education, that means that we shall have to see that far more

are brought up to the educational level from which the ultimate choice is made: in other words, in order to broaden the ladder we must shorten it. And if we do this, then at any rate over the span of a generation the absolute standard of education is bound to rise. We have only to compare the prognostications made at the time of the passing of the Education Act of 1870 with the present standard of general attainment to apprehend the dynamic effect of education. Indeed, once this lesson has been fully grasped, we might hope to see the disappearance of that quite empty criterion which is often invoked in talking about educational opportunity: namely, that education should be offered to people according to the degree to which they can *benefit* from it. For the most important thing that education should teach is how to benefit from it.

Secondly, the education that is provided should in one very important respect learn from the old middle-class system. It should aim, that is, at possessing a personal character, or, to put it in practical terms, at having as high a ratio as possible of teacher to taught. If education is to have dynamic consequences or to be self-perpetuating in life, it must induce in the pupil a sense of inquiry and of criticism. And this in turn can only be achieved by means of a personal relation. (It is for this reason that, as Raymond Williams has pointed out, to talk of TV as 'the great popular educator' is rubbish: because its content is — sometimes — 'educative', it does not follow that therefore the service 'educates'.) Of course, education of this kind will be expensive. But then education, as I have already said, *is* expensive, and the community must simply decide whether it knows of anything better on which to spend its money.

Thirdly, I think that it is time we realised that in a sane society a school is not exclusively, perhaps not even primarily, a place of education. A school is — to use that now much abused word — a 'community'; it is a community in that it is a substitute for the prototype community, the family. There the child must learn to control its emotions and to acquire awareness of itself and to live harmoniously and co-operatively with others: if not for the very general reason that these are prerequisites of living, then at least for the narrower reason that these are prerequisites of learning.

But once we recognise the psychological significance of the school, it directly follows that a great deal of what goes on inside its walls must be non-competitive in character. For if we make all school activities competitive we run the decided risk that the child will come to regard the whole process of learning as too overt or crude an outlet for his aggressive tendencies and so will pull back and refuse to compete. On the other hand, the complete suppression of all emulation from the curriculum is equally likely to arouse feelings of guilt in the child, and inhibit his performance. It seems, therefore, as though psychological considerations join with social demands in requiring a form of education in which a careful balance is struck between the competitive and the non-competitive aspects.

My fourth suggestion is that we should try to weaken the intimate connection that now exists between culture and certain educational institutions. There are many arguments in favour of this. In the first place, it would rid culture of that suggestion of 'superiority' which attaches to it

at the moment, and which in practical terms means that, on the one hand, a number of people who have no natural interest in or sympathy with, say, the arts, affect such a concern in order to show that they are educated, and, on the other hand, many people are led to reject culture simply because it belongs to a world to which they do not belong themselves. Secondly, the 'disestablishment of culture' would have the effect of bringing the arts and the higher pleasures at any rate within the reach of people who would otherwise be deprived of them solely because their educational standard was insufficient: whereas there is no reason to think that cultural sensibility and scholastic attainment are positively correlated. Thirdly — and this I regard as the most important consequence of my proposal — the divorce would mean that cultural education could be continued past university or school-leaving age into life. Numerous institutions that we think of as being purely practical, could become agents of cultural diffusion. Wesker has already suggested that the Trades Union Movement should recognise its cultural responsibilities: and the factory, it seems to me, could gain a new significance as a place where it was natural for people to exchange ideas, or listen to music, or read books — so that culture might become a third term in the week, mediating Labour and Leisure.

Finally, I should like to see a greater admission in our society, particularly amongst educators, that middle-class culture and mass culture do not merely appeal to different people: they also, in many cases, appeal to different sides of the same person. Educators like to pretend that educated people like only high culture — although it is to be observed that they themselves are the great consumers of middle culture. In the classroom they insist upon the exclusive claims of Jane Austen or Proust: while in fact they prefer to read Balchin or Durrell. I object to this not merely because it is hypocrisy, but because it helps to perpetuate the low quality of mass culture. It encourages, indeed it licences, the producers of mass entertainment to preserve the standards of a despised culture, and it discourages serious artists from entering into the market and challenging their monopoly. It would not be unduly fanciful to say that, in our society, mass culture exhibits all the well-known psychological characteristics of privation of love.

VII. Socialism and the Arts

THE ARTS AND THE FUTURE

I COME at last to a topic which many, on reading the title of this pamphlet, may have thought would be its principal theme: Socialism and the Arts. The topic is at once very intriguing and very forbidding: one where the temptation to say a great deal is quite out of proportion to what any of us can actually have to say. Accordingly I shall be brief.

On what we may expect the Arts under Socialism to be like I have no opinion. Partly because I don't know; partly because I have no desire to know. For I should regard it as a serious criticism of Socialism were it suggested that the character and condition of the Arts under it were predictable matters. This would surely mean that the arts would lose some of their inventiveness and some of their expressiveness. Indeed it might mean worse; for, in our present state of knowledge at any rate, there seems no way in which we could predict with any precision and any chance of success, the artistic character of an age, save by inference from some directive given to the artists, along with the assurance that the directive will be obeyed.

The Arts and a Closed Society

The question I shall discuss will therefore be not what society may reasonably expect of the Arts but what the Arts may reasonably expect of society. If we wish to see the institution of Socialism coincide with the flourishing of the arts, what demands may we make of Socialism? In particular, what relevance does this have for a problem we have already discussed: namely, the identification of a Socialist with an integrated society? Eliot has very wisely written:

'You cannot in any scheme for the reformation of society, aim directly at a condition in which the arts will flourish: these activities are probably by-products for which we cannot deliberately arrange the conditions.[1]'

The sociology of art is one of the most primitive reaches of the social sciences. We do not know under what conditions great art will be produced, though we sometimes feel that we know a little, in an intuitive way, about the conditions under which it will almost certainly not be produced. However, it has been claimed by some that a *sine qua non* of artistic creativity is an integrated or organic society, and this claim is then felt to add weight to the already powerful case for identifying Socialism with a society of this character. I want to consider two arguments that have been adduced for thinking that Art demands an integrated society.

The Problem of Communication

The first is concerned with the possibility of communication in Art. To say, as some do, that Art *is* communication, seems unjustified: but there

[1] T. S. Eliot, *The Idea of Christian Society*, p. 29.

is clearly an element of communication in virtually all Art. It is not merely that the artist hopes that someone will understand what he is doing, it seems also to be the case that he modifies, or tampers with, the work on which he is engaged, in certain quite specific ways in order that it should be understood. If this is so, then it must be that at some point in the process of creation, the question arises for the artist, either consciously or unconsciously, of what he should do so as to secure, or increase the chances of, intelligibility. Now it is to this stage that the argument for the integrated society relates. If the artist is to be able to decide what to do so as to make his content manifest, then he must be in *rapport* with his audience: and for this to happen, his audience in turn must be a unified and identifiable body, they must constitute an integrated society. If this condition is unsatisfied, the arts of the society will display an uncertainty or incoherence that is incompatible with greatness.

There is much here that is undeniable. The conditions under which the producer of mass culture produces, are hostile to, if not destructive of, creativity. And this is partly at least because, as we have seen, it is characteristic of mass culture to be produced with no known audience in mind: its producers would indeed be disloyal to their occupation if they inserted into their work anything which would restrict its marketability, even if this would also increase its significance or intelligibility within a restricted circle. Mass culture, we might say, has no audience, only a circulation: whereas art demands an audience.

But this does not entail that the artist must be in some direct relation with everyone who reads his books or listens to his music or watches his plays: nor does it even mean that he must be in touch with a typical reader or audience or spectator who can, in virtue of certain shared traits, stand for the rest who resemble him. All that is required surely is that the artist should enjoy a direct and mutual relation with some sub-section of his whole audience, whose approval he esteems, whose criticism he respects, whose comprehension he solicits. The people to whom he so immediately addresses himself should of course be a significant, not a peripheral, element in the total audience: but once he has their ear, there is no reason why he should not be able to speak with confidence to those beyond his awareness. It is art, not mass culture, that we see symbolised in the magical condition of Prospero's island where the air is full of strange voices.

A Content for Art

The second argument in favour of the integrated society as providing the proper conditions for artistic creativity relates to the content of art. Art derives its content from the context of social life. In an 'atomistic' society where the common context shared by the artist and his audience is very small, art is bound to become impoverished. For its content either will become totally esoteric, derived, that is, from a context that is peculiar to the artist, or else will be very meagre, relating to the few aspects of life that occur both in the context of the artist and in that of his audience. The proper solution (the argument continues) is a large shared situation, for then we would have an art with a content that was at once rich and widely accessible. This condition is provided by the integrated society.

As it stands, this argument contains far too many unexamined assumptions. In the first place, it assumes a narrow and yet highly metaphorical conception of art as essentially a 'mirroring' process. This conception is one which has been traditionally associated with Socialist aesthetics to their great detriment. It lies, for instance, at the heart of the famous doctrine of Socialist Realism. According to this view, art mirrors reality according to the consciousness of its age. All earlier ages were, however, characterised by a 'false consciousness', and so the whole of the art of the past is infected with error or distortion. But with the coming of Socialism we may expect a true form of consciousness, and so we can anticipate a form of art which will mirror reality in an accurate and undistorted fashion. Socialist art will be true realism. The curious feature about this doctrine is that it cannot envisage any art that is not realistic; it allows for bad realism as well as true realism, but it refuses to allow art to have any other function but that of mirroring society.

It is this same conception of art which appears in the present argument. The difference is that the coming of Socialist art is here identified with the institution, not of a more accurate or 'truer', but of a larger or more comprehensive, mirror. But the assumption of art as essentially a 'mirroring' activity is still unproved — and for that matter unexplained. Does it, for instance, allow — and if it excludes, by what right does it exclude — the expressive role of art, the function of art as revealing the deeper movements of the soul?

The second assumption in the argument is that the spectator or audience is unable to comprehend more in a work of art than he previously understood: a work of art must not go beyond his experience, else it will certainly become obscure. I find this assumption quite unjustified, and indeed disproved by the degree of comprehension we can have of forms of art deriving from alien and vastly divergent cultures.

Of course the artist must have something in common with his audience, if he is to communicate. But it is not necessary that this should be identified with certain common conditions which are taken hold of by the artist, pass over into his art, and become its content. Indeed, any attempt to say exactly what is necessary must fail because of our incapacity to anticipate the future course of art. For this reason it seems to me that in so far as this second argument is plausible, it reduces itself to the first. The demand that the artist must share his experience with his audience is either excessive, or else it is merely the old demand that the artist must have a means of making himself intelligible to his audience — with, in addition, the elementary (though sometimes ignored) stipulation that art must have *some* content, that art cannot endlessly be about the process of artistic creation itself. The artist, in other words, must live in the world: and this in turn has the practical implication, again elementary, that society must see that the world is habitable by the artist. For, if it doesn't, it runs the risk of being deprived of art.

The State as Patron

So far I have talked about the conditions under which art will be produced in a Socialist society, and I have identified these entirely with

the standing conditions of the society. It may therefore be thought that I have omitted from my discussion one very important element; namely, the direct encouragement given by the state to artistic production. For by many it has been thought to be the most important single aspect of high culture under Socialism, that in the Socialist society the arts will be directly connected with the initiative of the state. The Socialist state, reaching out across four hundred years of bourgeois history, when Individualism was the principle of cultural as well as of economic life, will reappropriate to itself a role traditionally associated with the organ of power and cohesion in society. The artist of the future will find in the Socialist state the same kind of intuitive and enlightened patron that the medieval artist found in the Guild or the Church and the artist of the Renaissance found in the Prince. The advantages of this new arrangement will be twofold. On the one hand society will automatically and immediately benefit from the most advanced art produced within its confines: on the other hand, the artist will enjoy a direct and unfailing connection with his public.

Personally I regard the association of Socialism with the idea of state patronage as a serious misfortune. In a society which displays a proper concern with the quality of life, the state will give considerable encouragement to public interest in and enjoyment of the arts. Museums, concerts, festivals, exhibitions, theatres, will be the recipients of generous grants and endowments: education both in the practice and in the appreciation of the arts will be given a high priority in public expenditure: the State will set an example to society by treating its artists with the respect it affords, say, to its generals in wartime. But I do not think that any good purpose would be served by the direct public subsidy of particular artists — any more than it is at the moment by that monstrous perversion of values which is a new and characteristic feature of late bourgeois society, the public subsidy of private collecting by means of tax concessions. Of course up to a point, in so far as it is naturally responsible for commissioning buildings, or erecting statues, or issuing stamps and coins and banknotes, the state cannot avoid being a patron of the arts. It is a patron in so far as it purveys services whose operation involves objects of aesthetic interest. What I am opposed to is that patronage should itself be a service of the state.

For it seems to me inevitable that as an appointed patron the state is bound to be crude and undiscriminating, and to support specific artists in virtue not of their merits or of the quality of their work but of some quite extraneous category under which they can be brought. The state will be influenced by considerations of respectability, or modernity, or chic. Above all, it will tend to admire and to subsidise artists who can be regarded as exemplifying to a high degree national characteristics. The Englishness of English art may be unsuitable as an academic concept: as a ground for official patronage it seems to me disastrous. And yet the state, even under Socialism, is always more likely to patronise 'national' art than any other kind of art: if only because such patronage is easier to defend, since it can be presented as the expenditure of public money in the national interest.

However, my fundamental objection to the state as systematic patron of the arts relates to its social consequences. For it seems to me that it is bound to lead to the belief that the artist owes the state a special obligation in return for the patronage it offers him. Without wishing to resuscitate any crude romantic or aesthetic view of the artist, I regard this belief as pernicious. The romantic or the aesthetic view claims for the artist a special exemption from duty: I merely wish to claim for him an exemption from any special duty. For what the doctrine I am protesting against demands of the artist is not merely the conscientious discharge of any particular commission he may have received from the State: nor just the recognition on his part of the general form of service that society feels entitled to claim of all its members: but the acceptance of some special indebtedness, which is neither contractual nor shared by his fellow citizens. This seems to me inequitable. And when one further realises that this special duty is generally construed as a responsibility for the 'health' of society, the pernicious consequences of the doctrine are fully apparent.

It may then be asked, how are the arts to be subsidised in a Socialist society? My answer would be, through three different sources. First of all, by private individuals, now enjoying a higher average level of education, who would patronise art out of their private net income. Secondly, by museums and cultural bodies, heavily subsidised by the state, but exercising a free choice in accordance with their taste, their needs and the demands of their public. And, thirdly, by a vast number of informal and co-operative bodies, linked with the normal processes of work, which I referred to earlier on as constituting the great new agents of cultural diffusion in Socialist society.

Progress and the Arts

But with the abandonment of state patronage as an essential element in Socialism, do we also have to abandon the old conviction that the institution of Socialism will result in a raising of the general level of culture? The question admits of no easy answer. Personally, I think that under Socialism there will be a higher level of culture for a number of reasons: the spread of education, the public control of forces that make directly for the destruction of beauty, like speculative building and advertising, and greater concern with non-commercial values. But note, for a *number* of reasons. For there are still people who think that there is *one* reason why the level of culture will be higher under Socialism than now, and that is, quite simply, that there will be Socialism. The view of Socialism as automatically spelling the extinction of vulgarity and tawdriness and ensuring the general elevation of the quality of life is quite unfounded.

Moreover the belief that Socialism will result in the improvement of cultural life contains, for whatever reason it is held, an assumption which can become dangerous if taken too literally. And that is the idea, which recurs in much radical criticism of modern mass society, that there is something quite identifiable, called *the level of culture*, which runs through all the arts of a particular society, and which can be raised or depressed, as the case may be. But in any given society the standards of achievement can vary very much from one art to another: indeed, it is only

the existence of a unified style that can furnish even a *prima facie* reason for thinking that high attainment in one art will be accompanied by high attainment in another. And, equally, the standard of interest taken in the arts is liable to fluctuation from one art to another. In its public role a nation can, for instance, be very concerned with architecture and indifferent to painting, as in Scandinavia: or *vice versa*, as in the United States. In this respect, much probably depends upon the general view that the Society takes of art: so that where art is regarded as primarily decorative or as pertaining to the embellishment of life, architecture and design will be thought to be of great importance, whereas in a society that sees art as primarily expressive, a greater concern will be taken in the standards of painting and perhaps the novel. This, however, is highly speculative. I introduce it here merely to indicate the complex considerations that are appropriate to any well-founded optimism about the condition of the arts under Socialism.

VIII. Common Culture or Plural Culture

THE ISSUE

THERE is a question which has served as the implicit theme of this pamphlet: much of what has been said on particular topics is relevant to it: it is now time to raise it explicitly. The question is, should a Socialist society be a single, or a multi-cultural, society? Is there an entity called Socialist culture which is the proper culture of a Socialist society, or, on the other hand, is it a mark of a Socialist society that it offers its members a cultural multiplicity from which to choose?

My own answer — as will have become apparent by now from what I have said about mass culture and the arts under socialism, about scientific education and the idea of a proletarian culture — is that a Socialist society should be a culturally plural society. Indeed I think that the historical mission of Socialism is to introduce to the world a form of society where the individual may realise himself by drawing at will upon the whole range of human culture which is offered up for his choice freely and in its full profusion.

Many Socialists will disagree with this. For them the attractions of Socialism are essentially connected with the benefits to be derived from an integrated and cohesive society, and they employ arguments drawn either from the nature of culture or from the great radical ideals of Equality and Fraternity to support this connection. Personally I think that these arguments are inadequate. And I think that there are other, and perfectly adequate, arguments drawn from the third great ideal of progressive politics, Liberty, which make the case for the plural society irresistible.

The Argument from the Nature of Culture

The case for a common culture, based upon the very nature of culture, has recently received a very powerful and articulated formulation in Raymond Williams' *The Long Revolution*, and it would be as well to consider the argument as it is there developed.

The starting-point of Williams' argument is a conception of culture as fundamentally a system of communication, a system by means of which one individual citizen transmits his experience to others. The cultural impasse in which we find ourselves today arises from the fact that our society has become fragmented into different groups between which it is no longer possible to commune freely. The exit from this situation lies through the 'common culture' of Socialism: for with the inauguration of this system the barriers to intercourse will be down and man once again will be able to talk to man.

It is, in other words, Williams' contention that any genuine desire for cultural improvement must be a desire for a common culture: that this is so follows rigorously from the nature of culture as a system of communication. To my mind this contention is invalid, and it gains such plausibility as it possesses only from an ambiguity in its use of the notion of 'culture'.

For if we regard culture as primarily a system of communication — and this, I think, is not so evident, because not so clear, as Williams would have us believe — then cultural progress does perhaps mean the institution of a common culture, but, it must be noted, where this in turn means something like the institution of a common language. But this of course is not what Williams and those who argue with him, mean when they talk of a common culture: they mean something much more like a situation in which everyone is animated by the same purposes and ideals. Williams sometimes tries to explicate his ideal by means of the expression 'common meanings, common values'. But what he fails to see is that he has compressed into this expression two quite different ideals: the modest ideal of a society in which people speak the same language, and the more comprehensive ideal of a society in which people say roughly the same things. The first ideal does perhaps follow from his original conception of what culture is: the second certainly doesn't.

Of course it is just possible that when Williams talks of 'shared values', he has in mind merely what might be called the 'permissive' values: values like toleration and rationality which are the preconditions of any common system of inter-communication, not something to be expressed in it. If it is only these permissive values that Williams thinks should be shared, then his ideal is perfectly compatible with a diversity of positive values, and what I would call cultural pluralism. But I think it is fairly clear that he identifies the common culture of Socialism with the widespread acceptance of more substantive values. For why else should he insist upon the sense of community, of participation, that will inevitably flow from the new culture? — and what otherwise would lead him to think of the Aldermaston marches as an earnest of the new spirit?

The Argument from Equality

Those who would argue for an integrated society on the ground of Equality assume that a plurality of cultures is bound to involve a hierarchy of cultures. Now if a hierarchy here means simply a qualitative ordering, this can scarcely be regarded as something objectionable: for the alternative would be relativism, which is clearly undesirable. I therefore take the assumption to be that once any differentiation of culture exists within a society, the *differentia* are bound to attract and draw to themselves distinctions of a purely social kind. One culture will be regarded as socially superior to another, and membership of it will serve as a badge of class or status.

Now, in advocating a plurality of cultures I certainly am not arguing for a hierarchy in this pejorative sense, and I see no reason for thinking that support of the one commits one to the other. I envisage a plural society as one where various cultures coexist without any special cachet or prestige attaching to one rather than another. And if it is then claimed that this is impossible, and that different cultures will always provide occasion for social discrimination, I can see no reason for this. It may be claimed that any form of diversity *can* become a means of social distinction: but it does not follow from this that any particular form of diversity *must* become a means of social distinction. If, however, it is felt necessary to guard against

the mere possibility of this happening, then we are immediately committed to a doctrine of social pessimism. For the only alternatives for society are a hierarchy or else total uniformity.

The Argument from Fraternity

Those who argue for a common culture on the ground of Fraternity maintain that it is only within a close-knit and integrated society that relief can be obtained from the inhumanity and the fragmentation of modern life. Since the coming of industrialism and the break-up of the old order, Man has suffered from a certain indefinable sense of loss: a sense that life under modern conditions has become deracinate and disinherited, and that whatever might give meaning to existence is beyond his reach. If he is to extricate himself from this tragic situation, if he is to regain the dignity of which industrialism deprived him, his hope lies in the restoration of community.

It is difficult not to admire the serious concern for the quality of life in modern society that this argument reveals, but I am highly sceptical both about the analysis that it offers of our present situation and about what it proposes by way of a solution.

For to begin with, I find it implausible to suggest a unitary overall explanation of all our contemporary disorders, of everything that has been fundamentally wrong with society since, say, 1760, and unilluminating to characterise the whole of our present social predicament in terms of some highly general, highly abstract concept like 'alienation', which is supposed to describe in some essential way the condition of us all. For behind any such interpretation or characterisation lies the assumption that basically all men are impelled by a common aim, that they seek satisfaction in a common objective, and that happiness or a satisfactory solution, if they could attain to it, would be identical for all. It is, of course, admitted that, in fact, modern conditions being what they are satisfaction is unobtainable: but this implies that there is, even today, a common condition of man, deriving from a common sense of frustration. Such an assumption is plausible only on the further assumption of a common human nature, whose essence we can penetrate and thereby arrive at a notion of the optimum conditions for its survival and activity.

Now, in a very fundamental sense, it may not be absurd to postulate an underlying human nature of this generic kind. But such a conception would be of purely theoretical interest. It would have no value or use in a discussion of man in society. For as soon as we occupy ourselves with human beings at the point at which they enter society and make demands upon their fellow human beings and their environment, we are dealing with human nature as substantially modified by experience and upbringing: we are dealing, that is to say, with formed character. And the essence of character lies in the different ways in which different people are disposed to react to, or behave in, similar circumstances: character exists when people have different aims and consequently find satisfaction or frustration in different situations. From this it directly follows that it is impossible to give a general diagnosis of *the* disorders of modern man in society or to indicate in a universal way *the* source of his frustration. And from this

in turn a further consequence follows which is crucial to the present discussion. If the ills of men in society are specific and particular, if they relate at least as much to private and personal, as to shared environmental, factors, then there seems no good reason to look for, or to believe that there exists, a universal or general solution to those ills. We have already seen the error in assuming that there exists *a* satisfactory form of work which would satisfy all alike: it is exactly the same error, though on a larger scale, that is involved in assuming that a common culture would ensure the end of frustration and general social contentment.

Moreover, even if there was reason to believe that a common culture was, in principle, the proper solution to all our contemporary disorders, there is a further reason why it could never in fact be efficacious as a solution: namely, that it would have to be imposed. Those who were born into it would have to accept it. It is, however, a necessary condition of psychological cure that the solution offered to the patient should be accepted freely. Now, either the notion of a common culture is empty, or else it fails to satisfy this stipulation.

It seems to me, in this connection, a curious fact that in the mid-twentieth century, just when the positive science of mind seems to offer us a real insight into and understanding of the vast multiplicity and variety of human disturbance, there should be a regression on the part of supposedly advanced thinkers, to *a priori* psychology and the antiquated metaphysical categories like 'alienation' or 'estrangement' in terms of which it is expressed. For it cannot plausibly be maintained that what was good enough for the young Marx is good enough for us. Moreover, this retrogressive move not merely denies us the chance of properly identifying the true sources of discontent and ill-health in society, but if persisted in, would ultimately prejudice our chances of accepting the assistance that psychiatry and psycho-analysis have to offer us.

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Cooper?

The Argument from Liberty

The pragmatic objections to the idea of a common culture, on the grounds that it could not be adequate to the problems it is supposed to solve, that it could not bring about the regime of Fraternity and Equality, are reinforced by a consideration of the third great ideal of radicalism, Liberty. For it is surely inconsistent with the idea of Liberty that men should have their lives limited in any way that is not practically necessary. The liberalised society is one where men fulfil themselves according to their own view or conception of life — provided, of course, that in doing so they do not interfere with, or impose upon, the self-fulfilment of others. To achieve this end, they must be free both of the dictates of established authority and of the subtler but no less effective power of social pressure. Furthermore, they must have free access to the principal ideas evolved in the course of human history concerning the conduct of life: and in so far as these ideas do not satisfy their reasonable expectations of guidance, they should be free to make good the deficiency by what John Stuart Mill, in just this context, referred to as 'experiments in living'. And, once again, either the notion of a common culture is devoid of content, or else it is incompatible with just this demand.

It would be no service to the ideal of Liberty to disguise the fact that its pursuit is often exacting. The burden of choice, whereby a man has to decide what meaning he will give to his life, can be hard to bear, and sometimes he will want to lay it down and return to a society which, either explicitly or implicitly, either by express rule or by tacit intimation. provides him with an answer to problems which he must otherwise answer himself. By appropriating to itself the old liberal ideal of autonomy, Socialism certainly does not make itself a more comfortable doctrine. The hope, however, that it holds out is that in a society from which material insecurity and inequality have been removed, the chance of a man's attaining the degree of emotional maturity and integration necessary for the free ordering of his own life, will have been appreciably raised.

But it must be pointed out that this hope will not be attained directly through the institutions of Socialist society. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Socialism has often drawn upon itself the scorn of great artists and thinkers, of men marked out by their singular awareness, their prodigious understanding of human nature, just because they thought it to be the claim of Socialism that human unhappiness and misery, that personal suffering and the sense of loss, could be expunged from the earth by means of the proper reconstruction of the forms of social life. The anger and the opposition of these great men is understandable if the Socialism of their day made any such stupid or philistine claim.

Socialism properly understood has no easy remedy for anxiety or unhappiness or for the various disorders of the mind. There are, however, things that in a Socialist society we may reasonably hope for. We may hope that the absence of certain kinds of conflict and certain kinds of privation will aid the study of fundamental conflict and fundamental privation. We may hope that in a society of universal prosperity and literacy these findings will be widely diffused and acted upon. We may hope that those whose infancy received a benign and enlightened supervision, will grow up to be human beings capable of making an adult choice. And we may further hope that, not merely in childhood but throughout their lives, the finest efforts of the society will be expended in presenting everything that culture and civilisation have produced that could relate to or affect or enrich their choice.

It should be the ultimate boast of socialism that it decreases the possibility of bad upbringing, that it increases the possibility of good education, and that, having in this way realised the conditions upon which free choice depends, it further offers a man reasonable security that as he chooses, so in fact he will be able to live.

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