

CULTURE  
AND SOCIETY

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control was bound to be slow. It is now becoming clear, from all kinds of evidence, that a society can, if it chooses, train its members in almost any direction, with only an occasional failure. The failures will be interpreted in terms of virtue or of recidivism, according to circumstances. But what is important is not that we are all malleable—any culture and any civilization depend on this—but the nature and origin of the shaping process. The contributions of old democrat and new sceptic are alike irrelevant to this decisive question; and the cheapjack has jumped in on the irrelevance and the general confusion.

The local newspaper, of all things, stands as a most important piece of controlling evidence. For it is read by people at least as simple, at least as poorly educated, as the readers of the worst strip paper. Yet in method and content it is still remarkably like the older journalism of minority reading, even to its faults. The devices which are said to be necessary to reach the ordinary mind are not employed, yet the paper is commonly read and understood. This is a case which, because of special circumstances, illumines the general problem. Produced for a known community on a basis of common interest and common knowledge, the local newspaper is not governed by a 'mass' interpretation. Its communication, in fact, rests on a community, in sharp contrast with most national newspapers, which are produced for a market, interpreted by 'mass' criteria. The methods of the popular newspaper do not rest on the fact that simple people read it, for then the local paper would hardly be read or understood at all. They rest on the fact that it and its readers are organized in certain kinds of economic and social relation. If we realize this we will concentrate our attention, not on man's natural goodness or badness, but on the nature of the controlling social relations. The idea of the masses, and the technique of observing certain aspects of mass-behaviour—selected aspects of a 'public' rather than the balance of an actual community—formed the natural ideology of those who sought to control the new system and to profit by it. To the degree that we reject this kind of exploitation, we shall reject its ideology, and seek a new definition of communication.

### Communication and Community

Any governing body will seek to implant the 'right' ideas in the minds of those whom it governs, but there is no government in exile. The minds of men are shaped by their whole experience, and the most skilful transmission of material which this experience does not confirm will fail to communicate. Communication is not only transmission; it is also reception and response. In a transitional culture it will be possible for skilful transmission to affect aspects of activity and belief, sometimes decisively. But, confusedly, the whole sum of experience will reassert itself, and inhabit its own world. Mass-communication has had its evident successes, in a social and economic system to which its methods correspond. But it has failed, and will continue to fail, when its transmissions encounter, not a confused uncertainty, but a considered and formulated experience.

Observing this, the practitioners of mass-communication turn to the improvement of what they call their science: that is to say, to scraps of applied psychology and linguistic. It is of the greatest importance to attend to what they are doing, but at the same time any real theory of communication is a theory of community. The techniques of mass-communication will be irrelevant to a genuine theory of communication, to the degree that we judge them to be conditioned, not by a community, but by the lack or incompleteness of a community. It is very difficult to think clearly about communication, because the pattern of our thinking about community is, normally, dominative. We tend, in consequence, if not to be attracted, at least to be preoccupied by dominative techniques. Communication becomes a science of penetrating the mass mind and of registering an impact there. It is not easy to think along different lines.

It is easy to recognize a dominative theory if, for other reasons, we think it to be bad. A theory that a minority should profit by employing a majority in wars of gain is easily rejected. A theory that a minority should profit by employing a mass of wage-slaves is commonly rejected. A

theory that a minority should reserve the inheritance of human knowledge to itself, and deny it to the majority, is occasionally rejected. But (we say) nobody, or only a few bad people, can be found to support such theories. We are all democrats now, and such things are unthinkable. As a matter of fact, mass-communication has served and is in some places still serving all the theories I have mentioned. The whole theory of mass-communication depends, essentially, on a minority in some way exploiting a majority. We are not all democrats now.

Yet 'exploiting', of course, is a tendentious word. What of the case where a minority is seeking to educate a majority, for that majority's ultimate good? Such minorities abound, seeking to educate majorities in the virtues of capitalism, communism, culture, contraception. Surely here mass-communication is necessary and urgent, to bring news of the good life, and of the ways to get it, and the dangers to avoid in getting it, to the prejudiced, servile, ignorant and multiplying masses? If workmen are impoverishing themselves and others by restrictive practices; if peasants are starving themselves and others by adhering to outdated ways; if men and women are growing up in ignorance, when so much is known; if families are breeding more children than can be fed: surely, urgently, they must be told this, for their own good?

The objection, as a matter of fact, is not to telling anyone anything. It is a question of how one tells them, and how one would expect to be told oneself. Nor is this merely a matter of politeness, of politeness being the best policy. It is really a matter of how one would be told oneself: telling as an aspect of living; learning as an element of experience. The very failure of so many of the items of transmission which I have listed is not an accident, but the result of a failure to understand communication. The failure is due to an arrogant preoccupation with transmission, which rests on the assumption that the common answers have been found and need only to be applied. But people will (damn them, do you say?) learn only by experience, and this, normally, is uneven and slow. A governing body, in its impatience, will often be able to enforce, by any of a number of kinds of pressure, an

apparent conformity. This can on occasion be made substantial by subsequent experience; such a fact is the sharpest temptation to any dominative policy—that events will substantiate what at first people would not accept. As a matter of politics, this is perhaps the most difficult contemporary issue. As a matter of communication, however, such a point only substantiates what has already been said; it will be the experience that teaches. In a society which lacks the experience of democratic practice, a zealous reforming minority will often be forced to take this kind of chance. Yet, even here, it has great dangers; the process of learning depends so much on the conscious need to learn, and such a need is not easily imposed on anyone.

It is clear, on the other hand, that even in contemporary democratic communities the dominative attitude to communication is still paramount. Almost every kind of leader seems to be genuinely afraid of trusting the processes of majority discussion and decision. As a matter of practice this is usually whittled away to the merest formula. For this, the rooted distrust of the majority, who are seen as masses or more politely as the public, is evidently responsible. Democratic theory remains theory, and this practical scepticism breeds the theoretical scepticism which is again becoming, even in our own society, dangerously marked. The consequences are unsatisfactory from most points of view. If people cannot have official democracy, they will have unofficial democracy, in any of its possible forms, from the armed revolt or riot, through the 'unofficial' strike or restriction of labour, to the quietest but most alarming form—a general sullenness and withdrawal of interest. Faced with this set of facts, it is always possible to fall back on the other part of the 'mass' interpretation; to see these symptoms as 'proving' the unfitness of the masses—they *will* riot, they *will* strike, they *will not* take an interest—such is the nature of that brute, the mob. I am arguing, on the contrary, that these characteristic marks of our civilization are not interpretable in this mode; that they are, rather, symptoms of a basic failure in communication. It is possible to say this, and to conclude that the answer lies in educational projects, the feeding of information, or a new publicity drive. But this

is to go on thinking of communication as transmission alone, a renewal, perhaps by new means, of the long dominative effort. The point is very difficult to see, in practice, when a group is certain that its case is right and urgent, and that for their own good, and urgently, people must be brought to recognize this.

Yet the uneasy symptoms are, precisely, a response to a dominative organization. In a revolt, in most riots, in many strikes, it is a positive response: the assertion of a different kind of answer. The answer that is then finally adopted will depend on the balance of power. But often it is less formulated than this: a confused, vague reaction against the dominative habit. What I have called sullenness is the obvious example of this. I think it is now a very prevalent reaction to the dominative kinds of mass-communication. People don't, of course, believe all they read in the newspapers, and this, often, is just as well. But for one small area of discriminating reading, almost always the product of training, there is a huge area of general suspicious disbelief, which, while on particular occasions it may be prophylactic, is as a general habit enfeebling. Inertia and apathy have always been employed by the governed as a comparatively safe weapon against their governors. Some governing bodies will accept this, as at least being quiet. But in our own society, because of the way we produce, there is so large a degree of necessary common interest and mutual effort that any widespread withdrawal of interest, any general mood of disbelief, can quite certainly be disastrous. The answer to it, however, does not lie in exhortation. It lies, rather, in conceding the practice of democracy, which alone can substantiate the theory. It lies, in terms of communication, in adopting a different attitude to transmission, one which will ensure that its origins are genuinely multiple, that all the sources have access to the common channels. This is not possible until it is realized that a transmission is always an offering, and that this fact must determine its mood: it is not an attempt to dominate, but to communicate, to achieve reception and response. Active reception, and living response, depend in their turn on an effective community of experience, and their quality, as certainly, depends on a

recognition of practical equality. The inequalities of many kinds which still divide our community make effective communication difficult or impossible. We lack a genuinely common experience, save in certain rare and dangerous moments of crisis. What we are paying for this lack, in every kind of currency, is now sufficiently evident. We need a common culture, not for the sake of an abstraction, but because we shall not survive without it.

I have referred to equality, but with some hesitation, for the word is now commonly confusing. The theoretical emphasis on equality, in modern society, is in general an opponent response; it is less a positive goal than an attack on inequality, which has been practically emphasized in exact proportion to equalitarian ideas. The only equality that is important, or indeed conceivable, is equality of being. Inequality in the various aspects of man is inevitable and even welcome; it is the basis of any rich and complex life. The inequality that is evil is inequality which denies the essential equality of being. Such inequality, in any of its forms, in practice rejects, depersonalizes, degrades in grading, other human beings. On such practice a structure of cruelty, exploitation and the crippling of human energy is easily raised. The masses, the dominative mood, the rejection of culture, are its local testaments in human theory.

A common culture is not, at any level, an equal culture. Yet equality of being is always necessary to it, or common experience will not be valued. A common culture can place no absolute restrictions on entry to any of its activities: this is the reality of the claim to equality of opportunity. The claim to such opportunity is of course based on the desire to become unequal, but this can mean any of a number of things. A desired inequality which will in practice deny the essential equality of being, is not compatible with a culture in common. Such inequalities, which cannot be afforded, have continually to be defined, out of the common experience. But there are many inequalities which do not harm this essential equality, and certain of these are necessary, and need to be encouraged. The point becomes practical in examples, and I would suggest these. An inequality in other than personal property—that is to say an inequality in

ownership of the means of life and production—may be found intolerable because in practice it may deny the basic processes of equality of being. Inequality in a particular faculty, however, or unequal developments of knowledge, skill and effort, may not deny essential equality: a physicist will be glad to learn from a better physicist, and will not, because he is a good physicist, think himself a better man than a good composer, a good chess-player, a good carpenter, a good runner. Nor, in a common culture, will he think himself a better human being than a child, an old woman, or a cripple, who may lack the criterion (in itself inadequate) of useful service. The kind of respect for oneself and one's work, which is necessary to continue at all, is a different matter from a claim to inequality of being, such as would entitle one to deny or dominate the being of another. The inequalities which are intolerable are those which lead to such denial or domination.

But some activities *are* better than others, the objection is returned. An insistence on equality may be, in practice, a denial of value. I have followed the course of this objection with some care, for it is important indeed. Is not a teacher to dominate a child, so that he may learn? Some facts will be right, and others wrong: the teacher must insist on their distinction, whether or not it is right to dominate. I agree, but most good teaching, in fact, is a transmission of the skills of discrimination alongside statements of the conclusions and judgements which have been received, and which have, provisionally, to be used. This offering, alike of a statement to be confirmed, and of the means of decision, is the proper working of general communication. A child will only learn the skills if he practises them; a teacher will only be skilled if he is aware of the process while offering the product. The utmost emphasis on distinctions of value, in all the things that man makes and does, is not an emphasis on inequality of being. It is, rather, a common process of learning, which, indeed, will only ever be undertaken if the primary concession of equality of being, which alone can remove such a process from the dominative sphere, is made. Nobody can raise anybody else's cultural standard. The most that can be done is to transmit the skills, which are not personal but general human property, and at the same time to give open

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access to all that has been made and done. You cannot stop a child reading a horror comic, or a man reading a strip newspaper, by order (unless you attempt the indignity of physical power over him), or even by argument, by telling him that it is bad. You can only give him the opportunity of learning what has been generally and commonly learned about reading, and see that he has access to all that is available to be read. In the end, and rightly, his choice will in any case be his own. A man's concern for value—for standards, as we say—properly expresses itself in the effort towards a community of experience on which these standards can rest. Further, if his concern for value is something more than dogma, he will hold himself open to learn other values, in the shaping of a new common experience. The refusal of either course is a petulant timidity. If one cannot believe in men, and in their common efforts, it is perhaps only in caricature that one can believe in oneself.

## Culture and Which Way of Life?

We live in a transitional society, and the idea of culture, too often, has been identified with one or other of the forces which the transition contains. Culture is the product of the old leisured classes who seek now to defend it against new and destructive forces. Culture is the inheritance of the new rising class, which contains the humanity of the future; this class seeks, now, to free it from its restrictions. We say things like this to each other, and glower. The one good thing, it seems, is that all the contending parties are keen enough on culture to want to be identified with it. But then, we are none of us referees in this; we are all in the game, and playing in one or other direction.

I want to say something about the idea of 'working-class culture', because this seems to me to be a key issue in our own time, and one in which there is a considerable element of misunderstanding. I have indicated already that we cannot fairly or usefully describe the bulk of the material produced by the new means of communication as 'working-class culture'. For neither is it by any means produced exclusively for this class, nor, in any important degree, is it produced

by them. To this negative definition we must add another: that 'working-class culture', in our society, is not to be understood as the small amount of 'proletarian' writing and art which exists. The appearance of such work has been useful, not only in its more self-conscious forms, but also in such material as the post-Industrial ballads, which were worth collecting. We need to be aware of this work, but it is to be seen as a valuable dissident element rather than as a culture. The traditional popular culture of England was, if not annihilated, at least fragmented and weakened by the dislocations of the Industrial Revolution. What is left, with what in the new conditions has been newly made, is small in quantity and narrow in range. It exacts respect, but it is in no sense an alternative culture.

This very point of an alternative is extremely difficult, in terms of theory. If the major part of our culture, in the sense of intellectual and imaginative work, is to be called, as the Marxists call it, bourgeois, it is natural to look for an alternative culture, and to call it proletarian. Yet it is very doubtful whether 'bourgeois culture' is a useful term. The body of intellectual and imaginative work which each generation receives as its traditional culture is always, and necessarily, something more than the product of a single class. It is not only that a considerable part of it will have survived from much earlier periods than the immediately pre-existing form of society; so that, for instance, literature, philosophy and other work surviving from before, say, 1600, cannot be taken as 'bourgeois'. It is also that, even within a society in which a particular class is dominant, it is evidently possible both for members of other classes to contribute to the common stock, and for such contributions to be unaffected by or in opposition to the ideas and values of the dominant class. The area of a culture, it would seem, is usually proportionate to the area of a language rather than to the area of a class. It is true that a dominant class can to a large extent control the transmission and distribution of the whole common inheritance; such control, where it exists, needs to be noted as a fact about that class. It is true also that a tradition is always selective, and that there will always be a tendency for this process of selection to be related to and

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even governed by the interests of the class that is dominant. These factors make it likely that there will be qualitative changes in the traditional culture when there is a shift of class power, even before a newly ascendant class makes its own contributions. Points of this kind need to be stressed, but the particular stress given by describing our existent culture as bourgeois culture is in several ways misleading. It can, for example, seriously mislead those who would now consider themselves as belonging to the dominant class. If they are encouraged, even by their opponents, to think of the existing culture (in the narrow sense) as their particular product and legacy, they will deceive themselves and others. For they will be encouraged to argue that, if their class position goes, the culture goes too; that standards depend on the restriction of a culture to the class which, since it has produced it, alone understands it. On the other hand, those who believe themselves to be representatives of a new rising class will, if they accept the proposition of 'bourgeois culture', either be tempted to neglect a common human inheritance, or, more intelligently, be perplexed as to how, and how much of, this bourgeois culture is to be taken over. The categories are crude and mechanical in either position. Men who share a common language share the inheritance of an intellectual and literary tradition which is necessarily and constantly revalued with every shift in experience. The manufacture of an artificial 'working-class culture', in opposition to this common tradition, is merely foolish. A society in which the working class had become dominant would, of course, produce new valuations and new contributions. But the process would be extremely complex, because of the complexity of the inheritance, and nothing is now to be gained by diminishing this complexity to a crude diagram.

The contrast between a minority and a popular culture cannot be absolute. It is not even a matter of levels, for such a term implies distinct and discontinuous stages, and this is by no means always the case. In Russian society in the nineteenth century one finds perhaps the clearest example of a discontinuous culture within recent history; this is marked, it should be noted, by a substantial degree of rejection of

even the common language by the ruling minority. But in English society there has never been this degree of separation, since English emerged as the common language. There has been marked unevenness of distribution, amounting at times to virtual exclusion of the majority, and there has been some unevenness of contribution, although in no period has this approached the restriction of contribution to members of any one class. Further, since the beginning of the nineteenth century it has been difficult for any observer to feel that the care of intellectual and imaginative work could be safely entrusted to, or identified with, any existing social or economic class. It was in relation to this situation that the very idea of culture was, as we have seen, developed.

The most difficult task confronting us, in any period where there is a marked shift of social power, is the complicated process of revaluation of the inherited tradition. The common language, because in itself it is so crucial to this matter, provides an excellent instance. It is clearly of vital importance to a culture that its common language should not decline in strength, richness and flexibility; that it should, further, be adequate to express new experience, and to clarify change. But a language like English is still evolving, and great harm can be done to it by the imposition of crude categories of class. It is obvious that since the development, in the nineteenth century, of the new definition of 'standard English', particular uses of the common language have been taken and abused for the purposes of class distinction. Yet the dialect which is normally equated with standard English has no necessary superiority over other dialects. Certain of the grammatical clarifications have a common importance, but not all even of these. On the other hand, certain selected sounds have been given a cardinal authority which derives from no known law of language, but simply from the fact that they are habitually made by persons who, for other reasons, possess social and economic influence. The conversion of this kind of arbitrary selection into a criterion of 'good' or 'correct' or 'pure' English is merely a subterfuge. Modern communications make for the growth of uniformity, but the necessary selection and clarification have been conducted, on the whole, on grounds quite irrelevant to

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language. It is still thought, for instance, that a double negative ('I don't want none') is *incorrect* English, although millions of English-speaking persons use it regularly: not, indeed, as a misunderstanding of the rule, which they might be thought too ignorant to apprehend; but as the continuation of a habit which has been in the language continuously since Chaucer. The broad 'a', in such words as 'class', is now taken as the mark of an 'educated person', although till the eighteenth century it was mainly a rustic habit, and as such despised. Or 'ain't', which in the eighteenth century was often a mark of breeding, is now supposed to be a mark of vulgarity: in both cases, the valuation is the merest chance. The extraordinary smugness about aspirates, vowel-sounds, the choice of this or that synonym ('couch' 'sofa'), which has for so long been a normal element of middle-class humour, is, after all, not a concern for good English, but parochialism. (The current controversy about what are called 'U' and 'non-U' speech habits clearly illustrates this; it is an aspect, not of major social differences, but of the long difficulty of drawing the lines between the upper and lower sections of the *middle* class.) Yet, while this is true, the matter is complicated by the fact that in a society where a particular class and hence a particular use of the common language is dominant a large part of the literature, carrying as it does a body of vital common experience, will be attracted to the dominant language mode. At the same time, a national literature, as English has never ceased to be, will, while containing this relation, contain also elements of the whole culture and language. If we are to understand the process of a selective tradition, we shall not think of exclusive areas of culture but of degrees of shifting attachment and interaction, which a crude theory either of class or of standards is incompetent to interpret.

A culture can never be reduced to its artifacts while it is being lived. Yet the temptation to attend only to external evidence is always strong. It is argued, for instance, that the working class is becoming 'bourgeois', because it is dressing like the middle class, living in semi-detached houses, acquiring cars and washing-machines and television sets. But it is not 'bourgeois' to possess objects of utility, nor to

enjoy a high material standard of living. The working class does not become bourgeois by owning the new products, any more than the bourgeois ceases to be bourgeois as the objects he owns change in kind. Those who regret such a development among members of the working class are the victims of a prejudice. An admiration of the 'simple poor' is no new thing, but it has rarely been found, except as a desperate rationalization, among the poor themselves. It is the product either of satiety or of a judgement that the material advantages are purchased at too high a human cost. The first ground must be left to those who are sated; the second, which is more important, is capable of a false transference. If the advantages were 'bourgeois' because they rested on economic exploitation, they do not continue to be 'bourgeois' if they can be assured without such exploitation or by its diminution. The worker's envy of the middle-class man is not a desire to be that man, but to have the same kind of possessions. We all like to think of ourselves as a standard, and I can see that it is genuinely difficult for the English middle class to suppose that the working class is not desperately anxious to become just like itself. I am afraid this must be unlearned. The great majority of English working people want only the middle-class material standard and for the rest want to go on being themselves. One should not be too quick to call this vulgar materialism. It is wholly reasonable to want the means of life in such abundance as is possible. This is the materialism of material provision, to which we are all, quite rightly, attentive. The working people, who have felt themselves long deprived of such means in any adequacy, intend to get them and to keep them if they can. It would need more evidence than this to show that they are becoming vulgar materialists, or that they are becoming 'bourgeois'.

The question then, perhaps, is whether there is any meaning left in 'bourgeois'? Is there any point, indeed, in continuing to think in class terms at all? Is not industrialism, by its own momentum, producing a culture that is best described as classless? Such questions, today, command a significant measure of assent, but again, while drawing support from the crudities of certain kinds of class inter-

pretation, they rest, essentially, on an external attitude alike to culture and to class. If we think of culture, as it is important to do, in terms of a body of intellectual and imaginative work, we can see that with the extension of education the distribution of this culture is becoming more even, and, at the same time, new work is being addressed to a public wider than a single class. Yet a culture is not only a body of intellectual and imaginative work; it is also and essentially a whole way of life. The basis of a distinction between bourgeois and working-class culture is only secondarily in the field of intellectual and imaginative work, and even here it is complicated, as we have seen, by the common elements resting on a common language. The primary distinction is to be sought in the whole way of life, and here, again, we must not confine ourselves to such evidence as housing, dress and modes of leisure. Industrial production tends to produce uniformity in such matters, but the vital distinction lies at a different level. The crucial distinguishing element in English life since the Industrial Revolution is not language, not dress, not leisure—for these indeed will tend to uniformity. The crucial distinction is between alternative ideas of the nature of social relationship.

'Bourgeois' is a significant term because it marks that version of social relationship which we usually call individualism: that is to say, an idea of society as a neutral area within which each individual is free to pursue his own development and his own advantage as a natural right. The course of recent history is marked by a long fighting retreat from this idea in its purest form, and the latest defenders would seem to the earliest to have lost almost the entire field. Yet the interpretation is still dominant: the exertion of social power is thought necessary only in so far as it will protect individuals in this basic right to set their own course. The classical formula of the retreat is that, in certain defined ways, no individual has a right to harm others. But, characteristically, this harm has been primarily interpreted in relation to the individual pursuit—no individual has a right to prevent others from doing *this kind of thing*.

The reforming bourgeois modification of this version of society is the idea of service, to which I shall return. But



both this idea and the individualist idea can be sharply contrasted with the idea that we properly associate with the working class: an idea which, whether it is called communism, socialism or cooperation, regards society neither as neutral nor as protective, but as the positive means for all kinds of development, including individual development. Development and advantage are not individually but commonly interpreted. The provision of the means of life will, alike in production and distribution, be collective and mutual. Improvement is sought, not in the opportunity to escape from one's class, or to make a career, but in the general and controlled advance of all. The human fund is regarded as in all respects common, and freedom of access to it as a right constituted by one's humanity; yet such access, in whatever kind, is common or it is nothing. Not the individual, but the whole society, will move.

The distinction between these versions of society has been blurred by two factors: the idea of service, which is the great achievement of the Victorian middle class, and is deeply inherited by its successors; and the complication of the working-class idea by the fact that England's position as an imperial power has tended to limit the sense of community to national (and, in the context, imperialist) lines. Further, the versions are blurred by a misunderstanding of the nature of class. The contending ideas, and the actions which follow from them, are the property of that part of a group of people, similarly circumstanced, which has become conscious of its position and of its own attitude to this position. Class feeling is a mode, rather than a uniform possession of all the individuals who might, objectively, be assigned to that class. When we speak, for instance, of a working-class idea, we do not mean that all working people possess it, or even approve of it. We mean, rather, that this is the essential idea embodied in the organizations and institutions which that class creates: the working-class movement as a tendency, rather than all working-class people as individuals. It is foolish to interpret individuals in rigid class terms, because class is a collective mode and not a person. At the same time, in the interpretation of ideas and institutions, we can speak properly in class terms. It depends, at any time, on which

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kind of fact we are considering. To dismiss an individual because of his class, or to judge a relationship with him solely in class terms, is to reduce humanity to an abstraction. But, also, to pretend that there are no collective modes is to deny the plain facts.

We may now see what is properly meant by 'working-class culture'. It is not proletarian art, or council houses, or a particular use of languages; it is, rather, the basic collective idea, and the institutions, manners, habits of thought and intentions which proceed from this. Bourgeois culture, similarly, is the basic individualist idea and the institutions, manners, habits of thought and intentions which proceed from that. In our culture as a whole, there is both a constant interaction between these ways of life and an area which can properly be described as common to or underlying both. The working class, because of its position, has not, since the Industrial Revolution, produced a culture in the narrower sense. The culture which it has produced, and which it is important to recognize, is the collective democratic institution, whether in the trade unions, the cooperative movement or a political party. Working-class culture, in the stage through which it has been passing, is primarily social (in that it has created institutions) rather than individual (in particular intellectual or imaginative work). When it is considered in context, it can be seen as a very remarkable creative achievement.

To those whose meaning of culture is intellectual or imaginative work, such an achievement may be meaningless. The values which are properly attached to such work can, at times, seem overriding. On this, I would only point out that while it may have seemed reasonable to Burke to anticipate the trampling down of learning by the irruption of the 'swinish multitude', this has not in fact happened, and the swinish multitude itself has done much to prevent it happening. The record of the working-class movement in its attitudes to education, to learning and to art is on the whole a good record. It has sometimes wrongly interpreted, often neglected where it did not know. But it has never sought to destroy the institutions of this kind of culture; it has, on the contrary, pressed for their extension, for their

wider social recognition, and, in our own time, for the application of a larger part of our material resources to their maintenance and development. Such a record will do more than stand comparison with that of the class by which the working class has been most actively and explicitly opposed. This, indeed, is the curious incident of the swine in the night. As the light came, and we could look around, it appeared that the trampling, which we had all heard, did not after all come from them.

### The Idea of Community

The development of the idea of culture has, throughout, been a criticism of what has been called the bourgeois idea of society. The contributors to its meaning have started from widely different positions, and have reached widely various attachments and loyalties. But they have been alike in this, that they have been unable to think of society as a merely neutral area, or as an abstract regulating mechanism. The stress has fallen on the positive function of society, on the fact that the values of individual men are rooted in society, and on the need to think and feel in these common terms. This was, indeed, a profound and necessary response to the disintegrating pressures which were faced.

Yet, according to their different positions, the idea of community, on which all in general agree, has been differently felt and defined. In our own day we have two major interpretations, alike opposed to bourgeois liberalism, but equally, in practice, opposed to each other. These are the idea of service, and the idea of solidarity. These have in the main been developed by the middle class and the working class respectively. From Coleridge to Tawney the idea of function, and thence of service to the community, has been most valuably stressed, in opposition to the individualist claim. The stress has been confirmed by the generations of training which substantiate the ethical practice of our professions, and of our public and civil service. As against the practice of *laissez-faire*, and of self-service, this has been a major achievement which has done much for the peace and welfare of our society. Yet the working-class ethic, of solidarity, has also been a major achievement, and it is the

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difference of this from the idea of service which must now be stressed.

A very large part of English middle-class education is devoted to the training of servants. This is much more its characteristic than a training for leadership, as the stress on conformity and on respect for authority shows. In so far as it is, by definition, the training of upper servants, it includes, of course, the instilling of that kind of confidence which will enable the upper servants to supervise and direct the lower servants. Order must be maintained there, by good management, and in this respect the function is not service but government. Yet the upper servant is not to think of his own interests. He must subordinate these to a larger good, which is called the Queen's peace, or national security, or law and order, or the public weal. This has been the charter of many thousands of devoted lives, and it is necessary to respect it even where we cannot agree with it.

I was not trained to this ethic, and when I encountered it, in late adolescence, I had to spend a lot of time trying to understand it, through men whom I respected and who had been formed by it. The criticism I now make of it is in this kind of good faith. It seems to me inadequate because in practice it serves, at every level, to maintain and confirm the *status quo*. This was wrong, for me, because the *status quo*, in practice, was a denial of equity to the men and women among whom I had grown up, the lower servants, whose lives were governed by the existing distributions of property, remuneration, education and respect. The real personal unselfishness, which ratified the description as service, seemed to me to exist within a larger selfishness, which was only not seen because it was idealized as the necessary form of a civilization, or rationalized as a natural distribution corresponding to worth, effort and intelligence. I could not share in these versions, because I thought, and still think, that the sense of injustice which the 'lower servants' felt was real and justified. One cannot in conscience then become, when invited, an upper servant in an establishment that one thus radically disapproves.

Now it is true that much of this service has gone to improving the conditions of the 'lower servants', but, because

of its nature, this has been improvement within a framework which is thought, in its main lines, inviolate. I have seen this psychology of service extend to the working-class movement itself, until the phraseology of 'making a man a useful citizen', 'equipping him to serve the community', has become common form. A particular climax of this, for me, was a book called *How we are Governed*, written by a left-wing democrat. It is at this point, on the basis of a different social ethic, that one becomes awkward.

*How we are Governed*, as an explanation of democracy, is an expression of the idea of service at its psychological limit. The break through to 'How we govern ourselves' is impossible, on the basis of such a training: the command to conformity, and to respect for authority as such, is too strong. Of course, having worked for improvement in the conditions of working people, in the spirit of service, those who are ruled by the idea of service are genuinely dismayed when the workers do not fully respond: when, as it is put, they don't play the game, are lacking in team-spirit, neglect the national interest. This has been a crisis of conscience for many middle-class democrats and socialists. Yet the fact is that working-class people cannot feel that this *is* their community in anything like the sense in which it is felt above them. Nor will education in their responsibilities to a community thus conceived convince them. The idea of service breaks down because while the upper servants have been able to identify themselves with the establishment, the lower servants have not. What 'they' decide is still the practical experience of life and work.

The idea of service, ultimately, is no substitute for the idea of active mutual responsibility, which is the other version of community. Few men can give the best of themselves as servants; it is the reduction of man to a function. Further, the servant, if he is to be a good servant, can never really question the order of things; his sense of authority is too strong. Yet the existing order is in fact subject to almost overwhelming pressures. The break through, into what together we want to make of our lives, will need qualities which the idea of service not only fails to provide, but, in its limitation of our minds, actively harms.

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The idea of service to the community has been offered to the working class as an interpretation of solidarity, but it has not, in the circumstances, been fully accepted, for it is, to them, inferior in feeling. Another alternative to solidarity which has had some effect is the idea of individual opportunity—of the ladder. It has been one of the forms of service to provide such a ladder, in industry, in education and elsewhere. And many working-class leaders, men in fact who have used the ladder, have been dazzled by this alternative to solidarity. Yet the ladder is a perfect symbol of the bourgeois idea of society, because, while undoubtedly it offers the opportunity to climb, it is a device which can only be used individually: you go up the ladder alone. This kind of individual climbing is of course the bourgeois model: a man should be allowed to better himself. The social conscience, which produced the idea of service, argued that no greater benefit could be conferred on the working people than that this ladder should be extended to them. The actual process of reform, in so far as it has not been governed by working-class pressure, has been, in large part, the giving of increasing opportunity to climb. Many indeed have scrambled up, and gone off to play on the other side; many have tried to climb and failed. Judged in each particular case, it seems obviously right that a working man, or the child of a working-class family, should be enabled to fit himself for a different kind of work, corresponding to his ability. Because of this, the ladder idea has produced a real conflict of values within the working class itself. 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. On the educational ladder, the boy who has gone from a council school to Oxford or Cambridge is of course glad that he has gone, and he sees no need to apologize for it, in either direction. But he cannot then be expected to agree that such an opportunity constitutes a sufficient educational reform. A few voices, softened by the climb, may be found to say this, which they are

clearly expected to say. Yet, if he has come from any conscious part of the working class, such a boy will take leave to doubt the proffered version. The education was worth the effort, but he sees no reason why it should be interpreted as a ladder. For the ladder, with all its extra-educational implications, is merely an image of a particular version of society; if he rejects the version, he will reject the image. Take the ladder image away, and interest is returned to what is, for him, its proper object: to the making of a common educational provision; to the work for equity in material distribution; to the process of shaping a tradition, a community of experience, which is always a selective organization of past and present, and which he has been given particular opportunities to understand. The ladder, which is a substitute for all these things, must be understood in all its implications; and it is important that the growing number who have had the ladder stamped on their brows should interpret it to themselves and to their own people, whom, as a class, it could greatly harm. For in the end, on any reckoning, the ladder will never do; it is the product of a divided society, and will fall with it.

#### The Development of a Common Culture

In its definition of the common interest as true self-interest, in its finding of individual verification primarily in the community, the idea of solidarity is potentially the real basis of a society. Yet it is subject, in our time, to two important difficulties. For it has been, basically, a defensive attitude, the natural mentality of the long siege. It has in part depended, that is to say, on an enemy; the negative elements thus produced will have to be converted into positives in a fully democratic society. This will at best be profoundly difficult, for the feelings involved are fundamental.

The issue can be defined as one in which diversity has to be substantiated within an effective community which disposes of majority power. The feeling of solidarity is, although necessary, a primitive feeling. It has depended, hitherto, on substantial identity of conditions and experience. Yet any

predictable civilization will depend on a wide variety of highly specialized skills, which will involve, over definite parts of the culture, a fragmentation of experience. The attachment of privilege to certain kinds of skill has been traditionally clear, and this will be very difficult to unlearn, to the degree that is necessary if substantial community of condition is to be assured. A culture in common, in our own day, will not be the simple all-in-all society of old dream. It will be a very complex organization, requiring continual adjustment and redrawing. At root, the feeling of solidarity is the only conceivable element of stabilization in so difficult an organization. But in its issue it will have to be continually redefined, and there will be many attempts to enlist old feelings in the service of an emerging sectional interest. The emphasis that I wish to place here is that this first difficulty—the compatibility of increasing specialization with a genuinely common culture—is only soluble in a context of material community and by the full democratic process. A skill is only an aspect of a man, and yet, at times, it can seem to comprehend his whole being. This is one kind of crisis, and it can only be overcome as a man becomes conscious that the value he places on his skill, the differentiation he finds in it, can only ultimately be confirmed by his constant effort not only to confirm and respect the skills of others, but also to confirm and deepen the community which is even larger than the skills. The mediation of this lies deep in personal feeling, but enough is known to indicate that it is possible. Further, there can be no effective participation in the whole culture merely on the basis of the skill which any particular man may acquire. The participation depends on common resources, and leads a man towards others. To any individual, however gifted, full participation will be impossible, for the culture will be too complex. Yet effective participation is certainly possible. It will, at any time, be selective from the whole culture, and there will be difference and unevenness in selection, as there will be in contribution. Such selection, such unevenness, can be made compatible with an effective community of culture, but only by genuine mutual responsibility and adjustment. This is the conversion of the defensive element of solidarity into the wider and more

positive practice of neighbourhood. It is, in practice, for any man, a long conversion of the habitual elements of denial; a slow and deep personal acceptance of extending community. The institutions of cynicism, of denial and of division will perhaps only be thrown down when they are recognized for what they are: the deposits of practical failures to live. Failure—the jaunty hardness of the 'outsider'—will lose its present glamour, as the common experience moves in a different direction. Nobody will be proud any longer to be separate, to deny, or to ratify a personal failure in unconcern.

The second difficulty, in the development of the idea of solidarity, is related to the first: in that it is again a question of achieving diversity without creating separation. Solidarity, as a feeling, is obviously subject to rigidities, which can be dangerous in a period of change. The command to common action is right, but there is always the danger that the common understanding will be inadequate, and that its enforcement will prevent or delay right action. No community, no culture, can ever be fully conscious of itself, ever fully know itself. The growth of consciousness is usually uneven, individual and tentative in nature. An emphasis of solidarity which, by intention or by accident, stifles or weakens such growth may, evidently, bring a deep common harm. It is necessary to make room for, not only variation, but even dissidence, within the common loyalty. Yet it is difficult to feel that, even in the English working-class movement, with its long democratic tradition, this need has been clearly and practically recognized.

A culture, while it is being lived, is always in part unknown, in part unrealized. The making of a community is always an exploration, for consciousness cannot precede creation, and there is no formula for unknown experience. A good community, a living culture, will, because of this, not only make room for but actively encourage all and any who can contribute to the advance in consciousness which is the common need. Wherever we have started from, we need to listen to others who started from a different position. We need to consider every attachment, every value, with our whole attention; for we do not know the future, we can never be certain of what may enrich it; we can only, now, listen to

and consider whatever may be offered and take up what we can.

The practical liberty of thought and expression is less a natural right than a common necessity. The growth of understanding is so difficult that none of us can arrogate to himself, or to an institution or a class, the right to determine its channels of advance. Any educational system will reflect the content of a society; any emphasis in exploration will follow from an emphasis of common need. Yet no system, and no emphasis, can be adequate, if they fail to allow for real flexibility, real alternative courses. To deny these practical liberties is to burn the common seed. To tolerate only this or only that, according to some given formula, is to submit to the phantasy of having occupied the future and fenced it into fruitful or unfruitful ground. Thus, in the working-class movement, while the clenched fist is a necessary symbol, the clenching ought never to be such that the hand cannot open, and the fingers extend, to discover and give a shape to the newly forming reality.

We have to plan what can be planned, according to our common decision. But the emphasis of the idea of culture is right when it reminds us that a culture, essentially, is un-plannable. We have to ensure the means of life, and the means of community. But what will then, by these means, be lived, we cannot know or say. The idea of culture rests on a metaphor: the tending of natural growth. And indeed it is on growth, as metaphor and as fact, that the ultimate emphasis must be placed. Here, finally, is the area where we have most need to reinterpret.

To rid oneself of the illusion of the objective existence of 'the masses', and to move towards a more actual and more active conception of human beings and relationships, is in fact to realize a new freedom. Where this can be experienced, the whole substance of one's thinking is transformed. There is a further shift in experience, cognate with this, when we think again about human growth, and its human tending, in a spirit other than that of the long dominative mode. The forces which have changed and are still changing our world are indeed industry and democracy. Understanding of this change, this long revolution, lies at a level of meaning which

it is not easy to reach. We can in retrospect see the dominative mood as one of the mainsprings of industry: the theory and practice of man's mastering and controlling his natural environment. We are still rephrasing this, from experience, as we learn the folly of exploiting any part of this environment in isolation. We are learning, slowly, to attend to our environment as a whole, and to draw our values from that whole, and not from its fragmented parts, where a quick success can bring long waste. In relation to this kind of learning, we come to realize, again slowly, that where the dominative mood extends to man himself, where human beings also are isolated and exploited, with whatever temporary success, the issue in the long run is a cancelling in spirit of the full opportunities offered by the material gains. A knot is tied, that has come near to strangling our whole common life, in this century. We live in almost overwhelming danger, at a peak of our apparent control. We react to the danger by attempting to take control, yet still we have to unlearn, as the price of survival, the inherent dominative mode. The struggle for democracy is the pattern of this revaluation, yet much that passes as democratic is allied, in spirit, with the practice of its open enemies. It is as if, in fear or vision, we are now all determined to lay our hands on life and force it into our own image, and it is then no good to dispute on the merits of rival images. This is a real barrier in the mind, which at times it seems almost impossible to break down: a refusal to accept the creative capacities of life; a determination to limit and restrict the channels of growth; a habit of thinking, indeed, that the future has now to be determined by some ordinance in our own minds. We project our old images into the future, and take hold of ourselves and others to force energy towards that substantiation. We do this as conservatives, trying to prolong old forms; we do this as socialists, trying to prescribe the new man. A large part of contemporary resistance to certain kinds of change, which are obviously useful in themselves, amounts to an inarticulate distrust of this effort at domination. There is the hostility to change of those who wish to cling to privilege. There is also the hostility to one's life being determined, in a dominative

mood masked by whatever idealism or benevolence. This latter hostility is valuable, and needs to be distinguished from the former with which it is often crudely compounded. It is the chafing of any felt life against the hands which seek to determine its course, and this, which was always the democratic impulse, remains essential within the new definitions of society. There are still major material barriers to democracy, but there is also this barrier in our minds, behind which, with an assumption of virtue, we seek to lay hands on others, and, from our own constructions, determine their course. Against this the idea of culture is necessary, as an idea of the tending of *natural* growth. To know, even in part, any group of living processes, is to see and wonder at their extraordinary variety and complexity. To know, even in part, the life of man, is to see and wonder at its extraordinary multiplicity, its great fertility of value. We have to live by our own attachments, but we can only live fully, in common, if we grant the attachments of others, and make it our common business to keep the channels of growth clear. Never yet, in the great pattern of inheritance and response, have two wholly identical individuals been formed. This, rather than any particular image of virtue, is our actual human scale. The idea of a common culture brings together, in a particular form of social relationship, at once the idea of natural growth and that of its tending. The former alone is a type of romantic individualism; the latter alone a type of authoritarian training. Yet each, within a whole view, marks a necessary emphasis. The struggle for democracy is a struggle for the recognition of equality of being, or it is nothing. Yet only in the acknowledgement of human individuality and variation can the reality of common government be comprised. We stress natural growth to indicate the whole potential energy, rather than the selected energies which the dominative mode finds it convenient to enlist. At the same time, however, we stress the social reality, the tending. Any culture, in its whole process, is a selection, an emphasis, a particular tending. The distinction of a culture in common is that the selection is freely and commonly made and remade. The tending is a common process, based on common decision, which then, within itself, comprehends the actual

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variations of life and growth. The natural growth and the tending are parts of a mutual process, guaranteed by the fundamental principle of equality of being.

The evident problems of our civilization are too close and too serious for anyone to suppose that an emphasis is a solution. In every problem we need hard, detailed inquiry and negotiation. Yet we are coming increasingly to realize that our vocabulary, the language we use to inquire into and negotiate our actions, is no secondary factor, but a practical and radical element in itself. To take a meaning from experience, and to try to make it active, is in fact our process of growth. Some of these meanings we receive and re-create. Others we must make for ourselves, and try to communicate. The human crisis is always a crisis of understanding: what we genuinely understand we can do. I have written this book because I believe the tradition it records is a major contribution to our common understanding, and a major incentive to its necessary extensions. There are ideas, and ways of thinking, with the seeds of life in them, and there are others, perhaps deep in our minds, with the seeds of a general death. Our measure of success in recognizing these kinds, and in naming them making possible their common recognition, may be literally the measure of our future.

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### INTRODUCTION

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### PART I

#### CHAPTER I

(i)

- | Page | Note No. |   |
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| 4    | 2.       | <i>Essays in Criticism</i> ; M. Arnold (1918 edn.); p. 18.  |
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