



A noted poet and public representative of Europe
turns his talent to the greatest challenge of all —

Freedom of Mind

PAUL VALERY (1871-1945)

WHAT IS the composition of this capital we call *Culture* or *Civilization*? It is primarily constituted of *things*, material objects, books, pictures, instruments, and so on, which have their probable duration, their fragility, their precariousness as things. But this material stock is not enough, any more than a gold ingot, an acre of good land, a machine are capital if there are not *men who need them and know how to use them*.

Note these two conditions. In order for the material of culture to be capital, it also demands the existence of men who require and

can use it, that is to say men who have a thirst for knowledge and for the power of internal transformations, a thirst for the development of their sensibility, and who, on the other hand, know how to acquire or exercise the necessary habits of intellectual discipline, those conventions and practices which are needed in order to utilize the treasure of documents and instruments that have accumulated over the centuries.

The capital of our culture is in peril. It is in peril in various aspects and ways. It is brutally and insidiously threatened. It is attacked by more than one enemy. It is dissipated, neglected, disgraced by us all. The progress of this disintegration is plain.

The whole of modern life con-

stitutes, often under the most brilliant and attractive appearances, a veritable sickness of culture, since it subordinates this wealth, which must accumulate like natural wealth — this capital which must shape itself by successive layers in the minds of men. It submits this to the general agitation of the world, which is propagated and developed by the exaggeration of every means of communication. At such a rate of activity, overrapid exchanges become a fever and life devours itself.

Perpetual shocks, novelties, news, and essential instability become a genuine need, a nervousness which is generalized by all the means that mind itself has created. One can say that suicide is implicit in the ardent and superficial form of existence of the civilized world.

The Independent Thinker

How can one conceive of the future of culture if one's age allows one to compare what it used to be with what it is becoming? Here is a simple fact which I offer to your reflections in the same way as it imposed itself upon my own.

I have watched the progressive disappearance of beings who were extremely valuable to the steady formation of our ideal capital

and as precious as creators themselves. I have seen disappear one after the other those connoisseurs, those inestimable amateurs who, though they created no works of their own, created their true value; they were passionate but incorruptible judges for whom or against whom it was exhilarating to work. They knew how to read, a virtue which has become extinct. They knew how to hear and even listen. They knew how to see. That is to say that what they insisted on rereading, rehearing, reseeing, was by this repetition made into a *solid value*. They thus increased our universal capital.

I am not saying they are all dead or that no more will ever be born. But I observe their extreme scarcity with regret. Their profession was *to be themselves* and in complete independence to enjoy their own judgment which no publicity or article could affect.

The most disinterested and ardent intellectual and artistic life was the very motive of their existence.

There was not a show, not an exhibition, or a book to which they did not give scrupulous attention. They were sometimes described, and with some irony, as men of taste, but their kind has become so rare that the word itself is no longer taken as a gibe. That is in itself a considerable

loss, for nothing is more precious to the creator than those who can appreciate his work and above all give to the painstakingness of his work, the *work-value* of his work, that valuation of which I was speaking a moment ago, that standard which, regardless of fashion and passing whims, could establish the authority of a work or a name.

Lack of Stability

Nowadays things move so fast that reputations are made and vanish overnight. Nothing stable is made, for nothing is made for stability.

How can you expect an artist, in spite of the apparent diffusion of art or its widespread teaching, not to feel all the futility of this age, the confusion of values that is taking place, the facility which it encourages?

If he gives all the time and care that he can to his work, he gives it with the feeling that something in that work will impose itself on the mind of his reader; he hopes people will reward him by a certain quality and duration of attention for some of the pains he gave himself to write a page.

Let us admit that we reward him very badly. It is not our fault, for we are deluged with books. Above all, we are besieged with reading matter of an immediate

and vital interest. In the public news-sheets there is such a variety, incoherence, and intensity of news, and particularly on certain days, that whatever time we can give to reading out of every twenty-four hours is entirely taken up by it and our minds are disturbed, agitated, or overstimulated.

The man who has a job, who earns his living and can give an hour a day to reading, whether at home or in the bus or the subway, has that hour devoured by crime, incoherent rubbish, monotonous gossip, and scraps of scandal, whose chaos and abundance seem calculated to bewilder and grossly simplify people's minds.

Such men are lost to books. This is fatal and there is nothing we can do about it.

The result of all this is a real decline of culture; and secondarily, a real diminution of veritable freedom of mind, for that freedom, on the contrary, requires detachment and the rejection of all the incoherent or violent sensations we receive from modern life at every moment of the day.

On Liberty

I just mentioned liberty. There is liberty in itself, and liberty of mind or minds.

All this takes me a little from my subject, but we must, nevertheless, give it some attention.

Freedom is an enormous word, a word that has been liberally used in politics though it has been forbidden here and there in recent years; liberty has been an ideal and a myth; it has been a word rich in promises for some and full of threats for others; a word which has made men rise and tear up paving-stones; a word which was the rallying cry of those who seemed the weakest and who felt themselves to be the strongest, against those who seemed the strongest and did not feel themselves to be weakest.

This political freedom is hard to distinguish from notions of equality, of sovereignty, but is also hard to reconcile with the idea of order, and sometimes with the idea of justice.

Freedom of Thought

But that is not my subject.

I return to mind. When one examines all those political liberties a little closer, one is rapidly obliged to consider *freedom of thought*.

Freedom of thought is confused in people's minds with freedom to publish, which is not the same thing.

Nobody has ever been prevented from thinking whatever he liked. It would be difficult unless we had machines for detecting the thoughts in other people's brains.

It will certainly be managed some day, but we have not quite reached that stage and we are not eager for such a discovery. Meanwhile, freedom to think exists to the extent that it is not restricted by thought itself.

It is very nice to have freedom to think, but one must also have something to think about.

But in most common usage, when people say *freedom of thought*, they mean *freedom to publish* or *freedom to teach*.

Such freedom gives rise to serious problems; it is always causing some difficulty, and the nation, the State, the Church, the school, or the family will at different times be found objecting to freedom of thought in publishing, in thinking publicly, or in teaching.

The above are so many powers which are all more or less jealous of the external manifestations of the thinking individual.

I do not intend to concern myself now with the root of the question. It is a matter of particular instances. It is certain that in some cases it is good for freedom of publication to be supervised or restricted.

But the problem becomes very difficult when it is a question of general measures. For instance, there is no doubt that during a war it is impossible to allow everything to be published. It is

not only imprudent to permit news of the conduct of operations — everyone can understand that — but there are certain things which in the interests of public order could not be made known.

That is not all. Freedom to publish, which forms an essential part of the freedom of trade in things of the mind, finds itself today, in certain cases and in certain countries, severely restricted and even in fact suppressed.

The Political Sphere

You feel to what extent this is a burning question and that it is being asked almost *everywhere*. I mean wherever asking questions is still allowed. Personally, I am not very inclined to publishing my thoughts. One can easily refrain from publishing. Who obliges us to publish? . . . What demon? And what good does it do, after all? One can keep one's ideas. Why externalize them? They are just as beautiful in a drawer or in one's head. . . .

But all the same, there are some people who like to publish, who like to inculcate their ideas into other people, who think only in order to write, and who write in order to publish. Therefore, they venture into the political sphere. It is then that the conflict begins.

Politics, which is obliged to falsify all the values that mind has

the mission of controlling, admits all falsifications or all the reticences which suit its purpose and are in agreement with it, and it violently rejects or suppresses those which are not.

Well, what is politics? Politics consists in the will to conquer and retain power; consequently, it demands an active constraint upon or maintenance of illusion in men's minds, which are the material of all power.

All power is necessarily concerned with preventing the publication of things which do not suit its own functioning. It does its best to that end. The political mind ends by being forced to falsify. It circulates intellectual counterfeits and falsified notions of history; it develops specious arguments, and in a word it allows itself whatever is necessary in order to preserve its authority, which, for some reason unknown to me, people call "moral."

Mutual Enemies

We must confess that at every step *politics and freedom of mind exclude each other*. The latter is *the essential enemy of parties*, as it is of any doctrine that possesses power.

That is why I wanted to insist on the shades of meaning which such expressions can assume in French.

Freedom is a notion which appears in contradictory expressions, since we use it sometimes in the sense of doing what we want, and at others in the sense that we can do what we don't want, which according to some people is the very height of liberty.

This means that there are several beings in each of us, but that these several beings dispose of only one language, and it so happens that the same word (such as liberty) is used for very different requirements of expression. It is a word "of-all-work."

At one moment we are free because nothing opposes what arises within us and attracts us, and at another we find ourselves *free* in a superior way because we feel we are escaping from some seduction or temptation and are able to act against our inclinations: that is a maximum of liberty.

Liberty Is a Response

Let us examine this fluid notion, just a little, in its spontaneous usage. I immediately find that the idea of liberty is not *primary* within us; it is never evoked without being provoked; that is to say, it is always *a response*.

We never think we are free when nothing shows us we are not free or that we could not be so. The idea of liberty is a response to some sensation or hy-

pothesis of impediment, hindrance, or resistance, which opposes itself either to some impulse in our being, or to some desire of the senses, or to a need, or else to the exercise of our considered will.

I am only free when I feel free, but I only feel free when I think I am being constrained, when I start imagining some state which contrasts with my present state.

Liberty is therefore not felt, nor conceived, nor desired, *save* by the effect of a *contrast*.

If my body finds obstacles to its natural movements or reflexes, if my thought is hindered in its operations either by some physical pain or by some obsession, or by the action of the external world, by noise, by excessive heat or cold, by the din or music from next door, I aspire to a change of condition, a deliverance or a liberty. I tend to regain the use of my faculties in their full range. I tend to reject the condition which prevents such use.

You will see, then, that there is an element of negation in the term "liberty" as soon as one looks for its original function, in the nascent state.

This is the conclusion I must draw. Since the need for liberty and the idea of liberty are not produced in those who are not subject to hindrances and *constraints*, the less we are aware of restric-

tions, the less the term and reflex *liberty* will exist.

A person who is scarcely aware of the hindrances to freedom of mind, or of the constraints which are imposed on him by public powers, for instance, or by external circumstances of any kind, will react hardly at all against these constraints. He will have no impulse of rebellion, no reflex, no revolt against the authority which imposes such restrictions upon him. On the contrary, as often as not he will find himself relieved of a vague responsibility. His own deliverance, his freedom, will consist of feeling himself discharged of the responsibility of thinking, deciding, and willing.

The Values of the Mind

You will see the enormous consequences of this: among men whose sensitiveness to the things of the mind is so weak that the pressures which are exercised upon the production of works of the mind are imperceptible to them, there are no reactions, or at least no external reactions.

You know that this consequence is being demonstrated very close to us; you can see on the horizon the most obvious effects of such pressure on the mind, and you can observe at the same time the feeble reaction it produces. This is a fact.

And it is only too evident. I do not want to judge, however, because it is not my place to judge. Who can judge men? . . . Does it not mean setting oneself up as more than a man?

If I speak of this, it is because there is no more interesting subject for us, for we cannot tell what the future has in store for us men, whom I will call *men of the mind* if you wish. . . .

I think, then, that it is both necessary and disturbing to be obliged today to invoke—not what one calls the *rights of the mind*, for that is an empty phrase since there are no rights without power—but to invoke the interest, which is everyone's interest, of preserving and supporting the values of the mind.

Why?

Because the creation and the organized existence of the intellectual life find themselves in a most complex relationship, yet a most definite and intimate relationship, to life, indeed to human life. No one has ever explained what we men are, and that peculiarity of ours which is the mind. Mind is an internal power which has involved us in an extraordinary adventure; our species has become very remote from all the prime and normal conditions of life. We have invented a world for our mind, and we want to live in

that world of our mind. It wants to live in its work.

It has been a question of remaking what nature had already made, or correcting it, and thus ending by remaking, to some extent, man himself.

To refashion, according to our already considerable resources, to remake our habitation, to equip the portion of the planet we inhabit, to overrun it in every direction, to plumb its heights and depths, to exploit it, to extract from it whatever it contains that can be turned to our purpose, all this is very good; and we cannot see what man would do if he failed to do that, save to relapse into an animal condition.

Knowledge Is Also Perishable

Let us not omit to say that all our truly spiritual activity, apart from the material remaking of the globe, is closely linked with such replanning, and this amounts to a veritable reshaping of the mind which has consisted of creating speculative knowledge and aesthetic values, and of producing a large number of works, a capital of immaterial wealth. But whether material or spiritual, our treasures are not imperishable.

I wrote a long time ago, in 1919, that civilizations are as mortal as living creatures, and that there is nothing extraordinary in the

thought that our civilization might vanish with all its processes, its works of art, philosophy, and monuments, in the same way as so many other civilizations since the beginning of time — like some great ship that is submerged. In vain is such a ship provided with all the most modern devices for finding its way, or to defend itself against the sea; in vain does it take pride in the all-powerful machines that drive it forward, for they move it towards its destruction just as easily as towards port, and it vanishes with all hands and cargo.

All this struck me then, and I feel no more reassured today. That is why I do not feel it is useless to recall the precariousness of all our possessions, whether such possessions be culture itself, or freedom of expression.

For where there is no longer freedom of mind, culture falls in ruins. . . . One can see important publications and reviews which were very much alive across the frontier, and which are now full of articles of unsound erudition; one feels that life has ebbed from these periodicals, and yet that they must still pretend to maintain intellectual life.

There is an hypocrisy in this which reminds us of what used to happen in the period when Stendhal scoffed at certain learned

gentlemen whom he met: despotism condemned them to take refuge in arguments over the proper punctuation of a passage in Ovid.

Such abject misery had come to seem incredible. Such absurdity appeared condemned for all time. But here it is again, revived and all-powerful in certain places. . . .

On every side we can see obstacles and threats to the mind, whose liberties are attacked at the same time as culture by our

inventions and ways of living, by politics in general and by several different varieties of politics, so that it is perhaps neither futile nor disproportionate to sound the alarm and show the dangers that surround what the men of my time have considered the supreme good. ● ● ●

From Paul Valéry, *Reflections on the World Today*. Translated by Francis Scarfe. Copyright 1948 by Pantheon Books, Inc., New York.

The Spirit of the Universe

I DOUBT if a collective will is ever very potent, but the individual will is powerful indeed and it is vital that it comes from minds whose understanding is based on truth. And inasmuch as each individual view of the truth is inevitably a little different from all others, we need to integrate them for greater wisdom. The collective pool of understanding grows from what is poured into it, but the contributions are those of individuals and the will to act must come from them — as the diversified individuals of a group acting together like those of an orchestra, not as members of a herd following the loudest voice.

We need faith, a faith in ourselves as human beings and not as members of this or that race or religion or stage or class of society. We need no faith in supernatural forces. We need only to recognize that our knowledge of the universe through our senses and our knowledge of the universe through our own inward nature show that it is orderly, moral, and beautiful; that it is akin to intelligence; that love and hope belong in it as fully as light itself; and that the power and will of the human mind is but a symptom of reality; that we, when we are most human, most rational, most aware of love and beauty, reflect and represent the spirit of the universe. That should be enough. But insofar as we recognize this and fail to live accordingly, we know and do evil in some degree, for the deeper the insight the greater the sin.

N. J. BERRILL, *Man's Emerging Mind*.

Behind Civilization

...A VISION

EDMUND A. OPITZ

HERE has been a dramatic revolution in scientific thought in this century. The physics and chemistry of today's world bear little resemblance to the schoolboy sciences of a generation ago. The revolution in historical study has been hardly less dramatic. Historical writing used to be largely composed of folk legends, narratives of kings and their wars, tales designed to inflate nationalistic pride, and the like.

But now history is conceived as the shadow cast by the evolving spirit of man (Gerald Heard), as the life history of cultures and civilizations (Spengler and Toynbee), or as the effort to understand the development of the present out of the past as an organic process, as with Christopher Dawson.

Heard's major contributions have been in other fields than history, but Dawson as an historian invites comparison with Spengler and Toynbee. These two men have gained spectacular popular success, whereas Dawson has not. But Dawson is the most prolific of the three, and there are those who would argue that he is a more profound thinker than either Spen-

gler or Toynbee. In any event, penetrating essays on each of these men, as well as other essays on the histories of Augustine, Gibbon, Marx, and H. G. Wells, are included in a new anthology of Dawson's writings from 1921 to 1954, entitled *The Dynamics of World History* (Edited by John J. Mulloy. New York: Sheed & Ward, 489 pp. \$6.00). Many of the selections appear in book form for the first time, and the topical arrangement of the whole affords an impressive panorama of Dawson's thought, valuable even to those who have read his books. The editor has arranged his thirty-one chapters under the following headings: The Sociological Foundations of History, The Movement

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