

Its relation to art, politics and society

The Importance of Cultural Freedom

RICHARD M. WEAVER

CULTURE IN ITS FORMAL DEFINITION IS one of the fulfillments of the psychic need of man. The human being is a focal point of consciousness who looks with wondering eyes upon the universe into which he is born a kind of stranger. No other being, as far as we can tell, feels the same amount of tension between himself and the surroundings in which he must pass his existence. His kind of awareness is accom-

panied by degrees of restlessness and pain, and it is absolutely necessary, as we must infer from the historical record, that he do something to humanize his vision and to cognize in special ways his relation to these surroundings. This he does by creating what is called a culture.

A culture nearly always appears contemporaneously with the expression of religious feeling. However, the two expres-

sions must be distinguished as follows: religion is man's response to the totality and to the question of his destiny. Through religion he reveals his profoundest intuition regarding his origin, his mission on earth, and his future state. Culture is sometimes auxiliary to this expression, but characteristically it is man's response to the various manifestations of this world as they impinge upon his mundane life. He alters these to forms that reflect meaning; he fills interstices which appear unbearable when left void; he dresses with significance things which in their brute empirical reality are an affront to the spirit. In doing this he makes extensive use of symbolism, and because symbolism is supra-natural, we can say that cultural expression is a vestibule between man's worldly activities and the concept of a supra-nature which lies at the core of most religions. Anyone who engages in cultural activity, however unconscious he may be of this truth, is testifying to a feeling that man is something more than a part of nature. And only when man has begun to create a culture does he feel that he has found a proper way of life.¹

II

LITTLE MORE NEEDS to be said about the value of culture (a value which has on some occasions been challenged). But something does need to be said about the right of a culture to its self-constitution and self-direction. In surveying the history of cultures, we may be tempted to describe any given culture as a perfectly spontaneous and unregulated expression of the human spirit which can know no law except delight in what it creates. But when we study the phenomenology more criti-

cally, we become aware of a formal entelechy. A fact strikingly evident in the history of cultures is that any given culture is born, rises, and flourishes as an integer; that is to say, an entity striving to achieve and maintain homogeneity. It is this cohesive wholeness which enables us to identify it as different from other cultures, to give coherent descriptions of it, and to make predictions on the basis of these descriptions. Culture by its very nature tends to be centripetal, or to aspire toward some unity in its representational modes.

The reason for this is that every culture polarizes around some animating idea, figment, or value, toward which everything that it produces bears some discoverable relation. Everyone perceives that cultures are marked by characteristic styles; and the style will have its source in some idea, feeling, or projection that exists as a fountain feeding the various streams that flow down even into those areas where cultural expression is but slight. A culture lives under the aegis of an image, almost a tyrannizing image, which imposes something of its form upon all the numerous and varied manifestations of its activity. This but underlines the truth that a culture is a shared thing, which cannot exist without consensus. The members of a culture are in a manner of speaking communicants of that culture, and they look toward the center as to some source of authority for an imperative. Thus culture always appears as a creation integral and self-forming, which maintains a coherency amid things which may be neutral, foreign, or distractive.²

The above feature deserves stressing because today culture is being threatened by some who do not understand — and who would oppose if they did understand — this principle of cultural integrity. A chief danger to cultural freedom in our time comes from certain political fanati-

cisms which are trying to break down this cultural integrity by assuming or attempting to prove that it has no right to exist. Sometimes this proceeding is against cultures which have existed independently under one political sovereignty; sometimes it is against the traditional or naturally evolved culture within one nation because it is argued that the institutions of that culture are obstacles to "progressive" reform. In the first case the movement is against culture pluralism, out of a hostility to independent centers of influence; in the second it may be this also, but it may be more directly interested in subordinating culture to ends of the state which have been conceived out of speculation rather than out of consultation with history.

The fomenters of such movements are trying to make political schemata prevail, and they are prone to regard anything that stands in the way of these — even cultural creations of the highest power to gratify artistically — as "reactionary." Both would deny to culture its rightful measure of autonomy, the one trying to pour it into the mould of the supervening national state, the other attempting to bring it into line with political abstractions which may have no relation to the spirit out of which the culture was born. Both are opposed to culture as expressive of a region, but there is ample ground for asserting that all cultures are necessarily regional.

We are not equipped to oppose their attempts without a fuller understanding of the essential nature of culture. For this reason I return to the point that a culture has to retain a high degree of integrity in order to survive, and that in order to maintain that integrity it has to practice a principle of exclusiveness. A culture is born expressive of a place and a time, and a mood which says implicitly "We hold these values." It is these particularities

which give it character, and as a matter of nature character and integrity go together. A culture is like an organic creation in that its constitution cannot tolerate more than a certain amount of what is foreign or extraneous. Certain outside values may be assimilated through transformation or reworking, but fundamentally unless a culture can maintain its own right to its own choices — its own inclusions and exclusions — it will cease. It may be simply suppressed, or the cessation may take the form of a decline into eclecticism, cosmopolitanism, Alexandrianism, or those politically fostered modes which have been an emergence of our time — all of which conditions are incapable of profound cultural creation.

For the freedom of cultures as wholes, two rights must be respected: the right of cultural pluralism where different cultures have developed, and the right of cultural autonomy in the development of a single culture. In a word, cultural freedom on this plane starts with the acknowledgement of the right of a culture to be itself. This is a principle deduced from the nature of culture, not from the nature of the state. Culture grows from roots more enduring than those of the political state. It also offers satisfactions more intimate than those of the political state; and hence it is wrong to force it to defer to political abstractions; the very fact that it has not chosen to embody those abstractions is evidence that they are extraneous. Culture emerges out of climatic, geographical, ecological, racial, religious, and linguistic soils; a state may have to deal with all these factors, but it does not deal with them at the level where they enter into cultural expression. That is the reason for saying that the policy of a state toward the culture or cultures within it should be *laissez faire*, except at those points where collisions may be so severe that they

imperil the minimum preservation of order with which the state is charged.

Abstraction in the form of the political dictate is the great foe of what must develop physiognomically. Cultural freedom is in special danger today because so much of our life has been politicalized in recent decades. We need not concern ourselves with the repression which was practiced in National Socialist Germany and is being practiced in Soviet Russia today. We know these forms for what they are; they are part and parcel of such regimes, and the case against them is largely one with the case against those regimes. It is otherwise with governments which are popular and free, but which allow political sanction to pressures building up against types of cultural expression. Sometimes we do not find it easy, in these cases, to distinguish between society and government; but we can be clear as to the direction of the pressure. It moves to condemn on grounds which are social and political, and its desire is for uniformity, standardization, consolidation, and all the other features of *Gleichschaltung*, as it moves to protect from criticism and even from realistic depiction something over which people have become politically excited. In our American experience, these pressures have been social largely, but sometimes they have been sufficient to manipulate local official bodies, such as boards and legislatures, to effect their will. Moreover, the occurrences have been occasional rather than systematic, but if they are allowed to happen often enough, the occasions could harden into a precedent.

A current trend which throws into clear relief this danger is the practice of condemning books because they give an unflattering picture or apply supposedly derogatory terms to minority groups. Ethnic groups have been especially militant against this kind of expression, and even that American classic *Huckleberry Finn*

has been challenged and actually withdrawn from circulation in some places because the author applied to the Negro a form of the name widely used in his time. But the principle if accepted could be invoked by any minority which had had its feelings hurt or which merely happened to be politically or socially ambitious. Applied in extreme form it could require us to remove Boswell from the shelves because of Dr. Johnson's derogatory remarks about Scotsmen and Americans.

I hope there is no need to argue that it would be culturally fatal to regard in this way any individual or group as being above artistic intuition or critical evaluation. I call this an example of political fanaticism invading the realm of culture because the primary role of culture is neither to carry into effect the specific laws of the state or to give force to political ideologies which have won a temporary ascendancy. In these instances it is being asked to bow before a dogmatic equalitarianism. The truth to be recognized is that the cultural mission is to symbolize reality as this is reflected in men's attitudes, and there can be no *a priori* dictation to it to flatter or disparage. Creations that do one or the other must come out of honest perceptions and feelings, which are at some point in time expressive of a consensus. An artist may use as his subject matter attitudes of a past time, of a present time, or of a future time.

There exist, and I hope there will always continue to exist a large number of minorities of different kinds. Inevitably these will be the objects of varying attitudes, and the attitudes themselves will undergo changes. Whatever the level of expression, any such restraint of treatment would cut artistic effort off from the possibility of doing what it is supposed to do, and the situation would be far worse if the minority were allowed to prescribe the treatment. In short, it is wholly unpermissible to censor work

of culture for presenting a subject as less attractive than one would like it to be. The right to represent freely is an inherent prerogative of culture; corrections will have to be left to change of attitude, to improvement of taste, to supplementation—or to better art.³ The principle is simple: an artist cannot be bound to present only images of the innocuous. If he is a profound artist, he may be presenting images of what the majority will like a generation hence, for what the artist sees and what the generality of men see are at times two different things.

III

THESE FORCES OF REPRESSION raise the question of whether there exists any significant relation between the various forms of government and the liberty of culture to flourish. Many would like to assume that there is a steady relation between the degree of democracy and the degree of cultural freedom, but this assumption is open to historical challenge. The most brilliant phase of Greek culture occurred indeed under a democracy, but a democracy which, according to Thucydides, was a "rule by the first citizen." The Augustan age of Rome, in the first century of the Empire, was by no means culturally poor. Nor would one call England in the latter half of the sixteenth century a period in which culture was stifled by a strong Tudor government. The high point of French drama was reached under Louis XIV, not to speak of the flourishing of many other arts at

that time. Descending to later periods, we find that Imperial Germany in the later part of the nineteenth century was enormously creative. Even Czarist Russia, despite its many repressions, was very productive of literature.

On the other hand, there have been governments of the monarchial kind which have been discouraging to cultural endeavor. George Savile, Lord Halifax, in that remarkable political testament called "The Character of a Trimmer," while declaring himself biased in favor of monarchy, confessed that "in all overgrown monarchies reason, learning, and inquiry are hang'd in effigy for mutineers."⁴

Two extremes emerge from this examination. There are some despotic governments so filled with a feeling of insecurity that they regard the free life of culture as a threat to their existence (according to an informant of mine, contemporary Spain is an example). Others out of simple barbarousness or selfishness may do the same. A highly centralized government which is fearful of the structure of its power may be unfavorable to cultural activity except in so far as culture can be manipulated in the government's vindication.

On the other extreme is the kind of popular government which is so distrustful of all forms of distinction that it sees even in the cultivated individual a menace to its existence. Such states are likely to maintain a pressure which discourages cultural endeavor, although the pressure may be exerted through social channels. But apostrophes to universal enlightenment and culture do little good if the state renders odious or impossible the forms in which these have to manifest themselves concretely. Everyone recognizes that there has been a strain of this in American life, although we have been spared the harshness of Jacobinism. Democracies tend to be jealous of exemptions from their authority. Yet

there is certainly something to Machiavelli's statement that a popular form of government elicits more of the energies of the people.

It is important to note that Jacobinism has always been hostile to culture.⁵ When the scientist Lavoisier was brought to trial during the French Revolution, his contributions to knowledge, which were of the first order, were pleaded as a reason to spare his life. The plea is said to have been answered by the President of the Revolutionary Tribunal with the statement: "*La République n'a pas besoin de savants*," and Lavoisier was sent to the guillotine. The extreme radical François Babeuf, in his "Manifesto of the Society of Equals," exclaimed, "Let all the arts perish if only we can have equality." The nihilist Pisarev declared that he would rather be a Russian shoemaker than a Russian Raphael. In Hitler's Germany, which was a pathological deviation of the right as this extremism was of the left, there was contempt for cultivation well epitomized for posterity in the saying, "When I hear the word 'culture,' I reach for my revolver."

The reason is simply that these are virulences, and that culture does not survive in the presence of a virus.

Modern communism is full of the spirit of Jacobinism; and its influence upon culture, wherever it has made headway, has been much the same. The story of Pasternak needs no retelling. Mikhail Sholokov is, I believe, under a kind of limited dispensation; he is allowed to portray the local and the traditional, but not to the point of impugning party doctrine. Communism is by its very nature intolerant of independent projections of reality. And there is the further consideration that no one can take culture seriously if he believes that it is only the uppermost of several layers of epiphenomena resting on a primary reality of economic activity.

IV

THESE ARE POLITICAL interferences, but no discussion of cultural freedom would be complete without some notice of the right to moral censorship claimed by the political state. Whatever its form, virtually every state has at one time and another used its apparatus of coercion to forbid certain cultural expressions on the ground of their pernicious moral tendency. This is essentially an intrusion, to be distinguished from that cultural coercion which the spirit of a culture exercises in defense of its integrity. The ever latent temptation to invoke the right of moral censorship makes it desirable to study the question in principle.

The idea that a society can be absolutely open either politically or culturally seems to be untenable. But it can be more open culturally, and the reason for saying this is that cultural or artistic creation exists in the province of the imagination. That is not a completely isolated province, but since cultural works are not immediately translated into moral consequences, they should get the longest hearing before it is determined whether—"nature imitating art"—they are going to prove deleterious.

Usually, it seems to me, we approach the problem from the wrong end. Granted that an ultimate right of censorship is defensible, still a society which is culturally or physically in good health will not often need to invoke it. This does not mean that

in the life of such a society cultural expression will never touch upon matters of obscenity or depravity. On the contrary, in such societies these subjects may receive quite frank treatment, as they did in the comedy of Aristophanes, the poetry of Chaucer, the plays of Shakespeare, some eighteenth century novels, and many other forms. The point is that in such artistic expressions these matters are not the dominant foci of interest; they are there simply as filling out the normal range of human activity and interest. The culture is healthy enough to take them in its stride, to incorporate them, to hold them in their place, and to pass on to more important matters. They are not offered to excite prurieny; they are present rather because their absence would be an evidence of the infidelity of the artist to the complete artistic picture.⁶ The Elizabethans and Jacobeans, for example, did not grow worried over "indecent" allusions; they saw no reason why one should not be frank about all the facts of life. They had a vision which was steady and whole, and they were interested in serious themes, which become less serious in proportion as things are suppressed because they might incite the perverse or the immature to harmful acts. Frankness is of course allied in meaning with freedom, which connotes maturity and poise.

The conclusion is that a society will not feel the need for much censorship unless it is somehow out of joint itself. The exploitation of cultural media for purposes which could be called morbid shows not that there are naughty people around but that the society itself has developed weaknesses. (I cannot deal here with the problem of how the state should protect minors from things they are not yet ready to cope with.) There may be occasions on which a society shows itself to be in such poor health that too many people are going to obvert things—are going to turn the prod-

ucts of culture toward ends that supply a different sort of gratification. Then some public restraint on the principle of *salus rei publicae suprema lex* may be necessary. Yet this is a stopgap procedure; the real reform must come from the other end, with the symmetrical development of the individual, so that he is his own sufficient guardian.

Our situation in the United States is complicated by a special historical inheritance. We are still suffering from the Puritan gnosis, which operates by rejecting totally certain parts of reality and then reacts hysterically when these parts come slipping back in in the forms of artistic representation. Unless it could be established that Puritanism is the consensus of our culture, we can only say that in the various rebellions against Puritanical suppression we are witnessing not a tendency toward evil, but a normal effort of the cultural spirit to express itself without crippling hindrance. The remedy for this situation is educating more people to see life and art in their true relations.

V

THE QUESTION OF THE FREEDOM OF THE CREATOR in relation to his own cultural tradition is of special interest to our time. No other period has seen so many instances of artists in apparently violent revolt, of creative workers of all kinds departing radically from the tradition or seeming to attack its deepest presuppositions.

In modern poetry, in painting, in music, in sculpture, and in other forms, the story has been much the same: the new artists are new in a sense which could imply total dissociation from the past. If modern culture has produced some works which are aesthetically gratifying (and I for one would contend that it has) how can this wholesale revolt be explained meaningfully within a pattern of consensus and freedom?

Here one has to proceed with additional circumspection, because it is not given to us to lay down laws to poets, regarding either their subject matter or their forms. Still, we can insist that they be judged against a requirement that cultural creation must satisfy certain psychic needs which we have earlier connected with the birth of culture.

Within the fairly recent past the matter of artistic goals has become complicated by circumstances which artists in other ages have not had to face, at least in anything like such severe form. In most of the recognizable periods of art in the world's history, we can see clearly enough how the artist was held to performance in a tradition by an overriding *mythos*—a story about man or creation which provided the basic themes for his creations. The classical world had its mythology; the Islamic world had its religion, and our culture until recent times had the Christian story of man's life on earth and the Christian eschatology. This was a constructive symbol which gave the artist a starting point and a resolution of his values, even when the latter was only implicit.

But in the last century or two there has occurred a fragmentation of belief which has largely swept away this resource. In consequence, the artist of modernity has been faced with a true dilemma. He could choose on the one hand to symbolize the traditional values in the traditional forms

for a public which no longer had a live belief in those values and thus suffer the fate of being regarded as merely quaint; or he could attempt to revitalize the tradition, beginning with audiences sophisticated and serious, who are aware of what has happened to man and to art. The most likely way to kill a tradition is to over-formalize it, which is to carry it on in the same way after everyone has ceased to defer to it. The way to revive it is to show that it has grown out of and is still related to our most cherished values. But this requires radical insight and the stripping away of many things which are mere accretions.

It is a mistake to suppose, as some apparently do suppose, that all modern artists who have employed highly novel forms have been in revolt for revolt's sake. The truth is that they have seen in revolt against some of the products of our civilization. The past century has been such an increase in popular education, with accompanying accent on the peripheral, such availability of printing, so much cheap reproduction and growth of the means of communication that there has been introduced into our culture a factor of vulgarity which touches many things and which works powerfully against the discipline of respect. The dominant trend of journalism and popular art has been in the direction of the non-serious. However, true culture and art cannot flourish unless people believe that life presents some issues which are momentous. The tide of the trivial has been overwhelming, and it has seemed impossible to artists to oppose the sweep through its own channels; that is, by fighting back through the very media that have engulfed them. It has seemed equally impossible to oppose it by chanting the old values in the old ways, for this would truly be incantation. No one today can write a successful Shakespearean tragedy because our age in general does not possess a sense

of the tragic ambivalence of man. No one today could produce a *Paradise Lost* because the paradigm on which this epic depends does not exist in the minds of the people. This is the kernel of truth in Walt Whitman's remark that "To have great poets there must be great audiences too." The only remaining strategy is to recover for man that sense which tells him that he needs this kind of play and this kind of poem. In his effort toward revivification of this sense, the modern artist has not infrequently retired into himself; he has accepted isolation or even alienation. We hear much complaint about the self-alienation of the artist from society, yet we must ask ourselves whether this is not sometimes defensible or even necessary. Sometimes the good has to go underground, as it were. C. S. Lewis points out that in the time of Domitian humanity itself had to become an underground movement.

At any rate, the "revolutionary" artist of whom I speak has had the aim of saving himself from the surrounding forces of sentimentality and vulgarity. In the nature of the case it is impossible to make a deal with these forces, and we should not be surprised if in striking back the artist has done so in ways even intended to be offensive. He has sometimes shown defiance and contempt toward those who would deny his level of seriousness.

All of this can be pointed up by remarking that we live in a post-1914 world. Most of the problems which men thought had been buried by two centuries of progress and a century of peace have been resurrected into life, some of them with a more frightening power to produce violence and chaos than ever before. As W. E. Hocking has observed: "The world-turmoil cannot fail to bring with it so wide a loss of order and predictable circumstances that *no art today can bear to speak simply in terms of beauty and affirmation.*"⁷ That is why

much modern art is signalized by an offensive warfare against the complacent and the stereotypical. The artist with his superior insight has perceived that we cannot *afford* such addictions.

And art, with its usual prescience, anticipated 1914 somewhat. The new movements were stirring by the beginning of the nineteenth century (in limited forms somewhat before), but the one which I select as an illustration erupted rather suddenly around 1912, the date conventionally taken for the beginning of modern poetry.

The modern poet, at war with the complacent and the stereotypical, has been spoken of as a revolutionary, but for reasons that will appear it would be just as meaningful, and it would better enable us to understand the object he has in view, to call him a reactionary. He is reacting through revolutionary means toward a vision of the world which earlier epochs, not affected by the kind of degradation ours has been through, possessed more fully. Not all poets of course have done this in equal degree, but it is safe to say that no poet today can get a hearing among serious readers of poetry unless his work somehow reflects the torturing experiences, with the resulting complexity of attitude, which distinguish our age.

Looking over the characteristics of the genre, we see the poet trying to break through superficialities of falsehood and inadequacies of sensibility by avoiding all stock devices and patterns—of imagery, of phrasing, and sometimes of syntax, which might be expected to evoke a complacent response. He has spoken boldly through symbol and metaphor, avoiding the more leisurely simile and full predication; through unexpected combinations, violent antitheses, juxtapositions of the colloquial with the traditionally poetic or literary, and other means of surprise and shock which he hoped would awaken the reader

into an awareness that there is a reality to be intuited aesthetically behind the sentimental, romantic, and often vulgar encrustation of the last century or so.

As a leading example of this, and an example very instructive on points which lack general understanding, I shall use T. S. Eliot. If we follow Eliot through "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," "The Waste Land," and "The Hollow Men," and then on through his later poems, we shall see what might be called the evolution of a conservative, or a conservator of our tradition. He has pursued this evolution while remaining one of the most experimental of our creative writers.

The first of the works named, which appeared in 1915, has been subjected to varying interpretations; but I am satisfied to regard it as an extraordinary intuition of the frustration, lack of direction, and helplessness which can be felt by a modern man at the height of our materially flourishing civilization. Space will not allow me to support this proposition with texts, but those familiar with the poem will recall enough of its method. They will realize that for a reader brought up in the preceding tradition of poetry, which means roughly the Victorian tradition, the poem teems with images which are vivid, but which shock, tease, or puzzle by their incongruity.

The wonder created by "Prufrock," however, was exceeded by that which met "The Waste Land" upon its appearance in 1922. This is admittedly a difficult poem, with its ransacking of legend and literature for images, its sudden breaks in surface continuity, and its odd juxtapositions of the noble and the beautiful with the cheap and the tawdry. Now, after the lapse of half a century, when the poetry of Eliot and some others has to some extent passed into the public mind and has itself become a tradition of a sort, the novelty of the method does not seem as striking as it did

then. But then such affronts to the established idea of what a poem should be were taken as proofs positive that the poet had deserted his office, that he had contemptuously alienated himself from the whole tradition of poetry, that he was a man talking to himself, and so on. The feeling was not lessened by the appearance of "The Hollow Men," where the poet pursued the theme of emptiness through images of the barren and the repulsive.

But with the later appearance of "The Journey of the Magi," "Ash Wednesday," and "The Four Quartets," it began to be seen that Eliot was doing something very nearly the opposite of what had been alleged. He was in fact working to restore the tradition in so far as that depends upon a positive and coherent belief about man and his duty or destiny. "Prufrock" could indeed be called negative in the sense that its emphasis is upon a theme of deprivation. But "The Waste Land," for all its images of chaos and its mood of resignation to the breakdown of modern society, in fact prepares us for a turning toward affirmation, so much so that it has been described by one critic as "the rehabilitation of a system of beliefs."⁸ "The Hollow Men" presents some of the philosophical difficulties, or difficulties of re-integrating the sensibility, which will be encountered in the work of this rehabilitation. With the publication of "Ash Wednesday" (1927-29) it became evident that Eliot was perhaps the foremost Christian poet of our time, who had won his way through a dark night of the soul to an affirmative position very much in line with our tradition. For this poem, in the words of one interpreter, "describes stages of despair, self-abnegation, moral recovery, resurgent faith, need of grace, and renewal of will toward both world and God."⁹ His beautiful "The Four Quartets," coming somewhat

later, has been called a meditation upon what it means to be a Christian.

I am not here supposing that art has to be Christian in order to be good; my point is that Eliot through his "revolutionary" techniques (still revolutionary in "The Four Quartets") is not simply presenting a picture of fragmentation or anarchy or supplying an impulse toward antinomianism; but is arriving at something like the consensus which underlay the mythic structure of Western culture. What needs stressing is that he could not have done this in any other way; at least he could not have done so as a creative poet. Only by bringing the elements of our modern experience together in these arresting combinations could he have given the reading public a feeling that here is something momentous which must be heard seriously.

Much the same lesson can be found in the career of another great modern poet, William Butler Yeats. Yeats was of course writing before the outburst of modern poetry, but then these movements should not be too neatly periodized. While not as outwardly revolutionary as Eliot, he felt increasingly as he grew older an impulse to make an overt rejection of modern nihilism and to give his poems continuing reference to a system of belief. Conscious in a similar way that the old system had fallen into disbelief, he went the length of inventing his own system of mythology. This was published in 1925 as *A Vision*. An elaborate construction, it gives "a picture of history, an account of human psychology, and an account of the life of the soul after death."¹⁰ Now there is hardly anything more radical than to invent a mythology, but the use to which this one was put was orthodox and traditional: it was to supply a unifying framework for the creations of the artist. Images from the system constantly recur in his subsequent poems and give them a depth of

meaning they would not have otherwise.

Both of these poets have produced most affecting pictures of the maladies of modernism; but they are not breaking the world in pieces; rather they are at least striving to put it back together again. Their method is a response to the condition of the modern sensibility. A poet who cannot show that he has felt the disillusionments of his own time as poignantly as other people cannot speak to his time. This is the point from which the poet must begin the road back to more humane traditions.¹¹ F. O. Matthiessen notes that James Joyce, faced with a similar artistic difficulty, used the narrative structure of the *Odyssey* to give his novel *Ulysses* a framework.¹²

The only conclusion possible is that a cultural worker must remain free whether he is giving expression to his cultural tradition or seeking by some strategy to recover it. Experimentation and innovation on the part of the artist are not necessarily signs of ignorance or irresponsibility. "An art that merely reports or re-enacts the human load of footlessness, dismay, or despair—as what we call modern art tends to do—may be a loyal art, refusing romantic honors to the headless powers of the time."¹³ It is true that inadmissible heresies will sometimes arise, but the policing of these will have to be left to the forces of the culture itself.

Finally let us bear carefully in mind that art is a form of cognition of reality; one of its functions is thus epistemic, and the epistemic is almost never bound or limited except to our loss. True, the consensus speaks to the artist, but it does not tell him exactly what he must do. Or, if he allows it to tell him exactly what he must do, he is not an artist of the first rank. It rather says, "Tell the story, but tell it in a new way." The Greek tragedians, bound as they felt themselves to be to the

traditional stories, felt the need of this second injunction. That is all the coercion we can allow in the case of the artist. He is a man deeply affected by the momentousness, uniqueness, and truthfulness of various aspects of the pageant of existence. He must be culturally free to do what he can do with his own special gifts and insights. Where the sanction descends, it descends in the name of art, identifying but not forcibly suppressing, the faulty, which may be meretricious, didactic, or ideologically inspired. What is true for art thus narrowly conceived is true for culture as a whole regarded as an art, up to the limits where physical and moral survival raise problems of a more immediate kind.

In brief, cultural freedom as an integral part of the free society requires that distinctive cultures be allowed to preserve their homogeneity; that creators of cultural works should not be hobbled by political and sociological dogmas; and that in a given culture a tradition should be left free to find its own way of renewing itself. Violation of any of these shows a fundamental ignorance of what culture is and of how it ministers to the life of the spirit.

Notes

¹It may be asked whether in the following discussion I am dealing with cultures empirically, recognizing any formalized and elaborated human activity as a culture, or whether I am supposing a normative, axiological definition. An attempt to define the limits of cultural freedom naturally

implies the second approach. Every marked development of formal activity is a sign that the cultural impulse is present; in this sense the first datum is anthropological. But it is ridiculous to maintain that all cultures are equal and of infinite worth; whether a culture or a cultural activity is better or worse must be judged by the amount of satisfaction it provides for the higher faculties. That judgment can be reached only on the basis of a true philosophy of the human spirit. The point of view in this essay is, therefore, cultural pluralism but not cultural relativism. It is inevitable and right that there should be different cultures, but any culture may be viewed critically if the viewer has a definition of man.

²Even anthropologists concede the impulse of a culture to integrate itself. For a discussion of this subject from the anthropological point of view, see Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (New York: Houghton, Mifflin, 1934), Ch. III.

³A substantial part of American folklore has consisted of jokes about "the Irish." One may doubt that the Irish were ever done much harm by these, and today the situation has changed so that their application to the Irish seems to lack point.

⁴*Complete Works of George Savile, First Marquess of Halifax*, ed. Walter Raleigh (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1912), p. 63.

⁵Matthew Arnold makes this point in his *Culture and Anarchy*, and he adds the further important consideration that Jacobinism has a fierce hatred of the past. This thought could be elaborated: no government and no ideology which try to cut a people off from its past can be friendly to culture.

⁶Sir Herbert Read has stated the principle (*Truth is More Sacred: A Critical Exchange on Modern Literature*, by Edward Dahlberg and Sir Herbert Read [New York: Horizon Press, 1961] pp. 216-217): "No censorship can be imposed on the imagination, and the truth we should hold sacred . . . is truth to the divine promptings of the Muse — promptings which may take a poet into a lady's bedroom or a brothel as easily and as frequently as into the vernal woods or the market place."

⁷"The International Role of Art in Revolutionary Times," *Modern Age*, Vol. IV (Spring, 1960), p. 132.

⁸Cleanth Brooks, *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1939), p. 171.

⁹George Williamson, *A Readers' Guide to T. S. Eliot* (New York: Noonday Press, 1953), p. 184.

¹⁰Brooks, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

¹¹I wish that the same hope could be expressed for architecture, which seems the most disoriented of the modern arts. Bruno Zevi has made an apt statement of its situation (*Architecture in America: A Battle of Styles*, ed. William A.

Coles and Henry Hope Reed, Jr. [New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1961] p. 133): "The moment of ostentatious novelty and avant-garde manifestoes has passed and modern architecture must now take its place in architectural tradition, aiming above all at a critical revision of this tradition. It has become evident that an organic culture cannot, in dealing with the past and specifically with architectural history, use two standards of judgment, one for modern and another for traditional architecture, if it is, as it must be, designed to provide modern disoriented

and rootless man with a base and a history, to integrate individual and social needs which manifest themselves today as an antithesis between freedom and planning, theory and practice. Once we are able to apply the same criteria in evaluating contemporary architecture and that of previous centuries, we shall be taking a decisive step forward in this direction."

¹²F. O. Matthiessen, *The Achievement of T. S. Eliot* (New York Oxford University Press, 1947), p. 45.

¹³Hocking, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

Shadows of Pilgrims

Swaddled in elms, what crisp New England town
Is not now also Lisbon, Limerick, Naples,
Or wherever forefinger touches a whirling globe?

Shadows of pilgrims are everywhere evident:
Pilgrims . . . those who travel abroad, who bring
Past and future clearly to every present,

Who carry within some sounding, verified,
That distance can not change, that mind can hold
Safe from the miles, and plant in any soil

Just as the pilgrims born of pilgrims once
Carried a first and ripened heritage
Wrapped safely in New England, across mountain

Never forgetting rock or the harbors before,
Holding it over rivers , over stars,
To place it finally near another ocean,

Beside the ditches for orange trees or lemon.
The white frame houses never stand empty long,
And as new pilgrims move among the elms,

No one can say that it has been decided
Who has pronounced the vowels most correctly.

NORMA MC LAIN STOOP