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CULTURE

THE ANTHROPOLOGISTS' ACCOUNT

Chapter 1

CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION: FRENCH, GERMAN, AND ENGLISH INTELLECTUALS, 1930–1958

Civilisation naît à son heure.
([The word] "civilization" was born at the right time)

Lucien Febvre

"*To reconstruct the history of the French word 'civilisation,'* " remarked the historian Lucien Febvre, "it would be necessary to reconstitute the stages in the most profound of all the revolutions through which the French spirit has passed from the second half of the eighteenth century to the present day." This was the topic he chose for his address to a weekend seminar he convened in 1929 on the theme "Civilisation: Le mot et l'idée" (the word and the idea, not, it should be noted, the thing itself). It was very much the issue of the day. As the storm clouds gathered over Europe for the second time in a generation, intellectuals were moved to think again about the meaning of culture and civilization, and their relationship to the destiny of their nations. The German sociologist Norbert Elias was drawn to these questions at the same time, and he remarked that while theories of culture and civilization had been current (with the words themselves) since the second half of the eighteenth century,

they became matters of general concern only at certain historical moments when "something in the present state of society finds expression in the crystallization of the past embodied in the words."

Febvre (1878–1956) was educated at the École Normale Supérieure, where he specialized in history and geography. During World War I he saw active service with a machine-gun unit, and when peace came he took up an appointment at the University of Strasbourg, reestablished as a French university in 1919 when Alsace was returned to France. The brilliant young faculty members recruited to the university included some of the leading social scientists and historians of the next generation, among them Maurice Halbwachs, Charles Blondel, Georges Lefebvre, and, along with Febvre himself, the historian Marc Bloch, with whom he began a long collaboration that was to transform French historiography. In 1929 they founded the journal *Annales,* which became the forum of a school of historians closely allied to the social sciences. Cultural, psychological, and social themes were to be brought back into a historiography that had been dominated by the study of politics, diplomacy, and war, and intellectual history was revived.

Opening the seminar on "Civilisation," Febvre began by noting that a dissertation had recently been presented at the Sorbonne on the "civilization" of the Tupi-Guarani of South America, whom, he remarked, an earlier generation would have called savages. "But for a long time now the concept of a civilization of non-civilized people has been current." (He added the barbed comment that one might imagine an archaeologist "coolly dealing with the civilization of the Huns, who we were once told were 'the flail of civilization.'") Yet while now ready to grant that the Tupi-Guarani, and even the Huns, had a civilization, the French nevertheless still tended to believe that there was progress in civilization. Apparently the word had come to designate two quite different notions. One of these Febvre characterized as the ethnographic usage; it referred to the set of characteristics that an observer might record in studying the collective life of a human group, an ensemble that embraced material, intellectual, moral, and political

aspects of social life. This usage implied no judgment of value. In the second sense, the word connoted our own civilization, which was highly valued, and to which some individuals enjoyed privileged access. How could a language known for being clear and logical have arrived at two contradictory usages for one word?

Febvre had been unable to find a source that used the term *civilisation* in either of its modern senses before 1766. *Civilisation* had previously occurred only as a technical legal term, referring to the conversion of a criminal prosecution into a civil matter. However, the terms *civilité, politesse,* and *police* (meaning law-abiding) go back to the sixteenth century. Throughout the seventeenth century, the terms "savage" and, for more advanced peoples, "barbarian" were current in French for people who lacked the qualities "of civility, courtesy, and, finally, administrative wisdom." In time, *civilisé* displaced the term *policé,* but by the eighteenth century, Febvre suggested, there was a need for a new substantive term, to describe a new notion. Born at its hour, in the 1770s the neologism *civilisation* "won its papers of naturalization," and in 1798 it forced the doors of the Dictionary of the French Academy.

This was a time of great scientific activity in all fields, and daring theoretical syntheses. The enormous range of materials on exotic cultures and the ancient past brought together in the *Encyclopédie* provoked reflections on the great pattern of history. The growing literature on exploration at first tended to reinforce belief in the superiority of civilization. French intellectuals began to conceive the outlines of a universal history in which savagery led to barbarism, and barbarism to civilization. This model of cultural development imitated Lamarck's representation of the relations between the species in his version of the great chain of being. Soon, however, this triumphalist history of progress began to be questioned. Not only levels of civilization but even states of civilization were gradually distinguished. The immense empire of "la Civilisation" was divided into autonomous provinces. It was admitted that distinctive ways of being civilized had been developed in different parts of the world. In 1819,

according to Febvre, the plural form, *Civilisations*, was first introduced.

Febvre dated this relativization of the notion of civilization to the half-century from 1780 to 1830, noting that it represented the climax of a long and patient effort of documentation and reasoned inquiry. There was a simultaneous transition in biology, history, ethnography, and linguistics from the universalism of the eighteenth century to a more relativist perspective. Lamarck's theory now also came under fire. Cuvier insisted that there was not one great chain of being but many separate ones. These changes in scientific thinking reflected a more general shift in the intellectual mood. The optimism of the revolutionary period had waned. The survivors of the revolution had learned something new: that a civilization may die. ("And they did not learn this simply from books," he remarked.) Faith in a philosophy of progress and the perfectibility of humanity was eroded. There was renewed sympathy for the pessimism of Rousseau and for his concern with the ills of civilization.

With the restoration of the monarchy, the optimistic belief in a progressive civilization returned, with fresh force. It was presaged most powerfully in Guizot's *De la civilisation en Europe* (1828) and *De la civilisation en France* (1829). Febvre quotes Guizot's bald statement of faith: "The idea of progess, of development, seems to me to be the fundamental idea contained in the word civilization." Progress could be measured both on the level of society and that of the intellect, though these did not necessarily go together. In England, according to Guizot, there had been social progress, but not intellectual; in Germany, spiritual progress had not been matched by social progress; only in France had both advanced hand in hand.

Febvre noted that a different line of thinking had developed in Germany. Initially, the German notion of culture was very similar to the French idea of civilization, but in time a distinction came to be drawn between the external trappings of civilization and the inward, spiritual reality of culture. Alexander von Humbolt, for instance, had suggested that a savage tribe could have a civilization, in the sense of

political order, without a high level of "culture de l'esprit"—and, indeed, vice versa. Nevertheless, both traditions of thought posed a similar philosophical problem. Is a relativist appreciation of the differences between cultures compatible with "the old concept of a general human civilization"? The question was left hanging in the air.

In a companion paper, delivered at the same seminar under the title "Les Civilisations: Éléments et formes," the sociologist Marcel Mauss outlined the conception of civilization that he and Emile Durkheim had expounded for many years in the *Année Sociologique*. He passed quickly over what he termed vulgar usages, in phrases such as French civilization, or Buddhist or Islamic civilization. What was at issue in these cases was particular modes of thought, specific casts of mind, for which he preferred to use the word *mentalité*. Nor should civilization be restricted to mean only the arts, or be equated with *Kultur*, in the sense of cultivation. These were folk representations, of no scientific value.

From the point of view of a sociologist, civilization is, first of all, collective and distinctive. But it is not equivalent to what the Durkheimians called the "collective consciousness" of a society, because it is not confined to any particular population. Moreover, in contrast to purely local cultural traditions, civilization is rational and universal, and above all progressive. For that reason, it was spreading irresistibly across the whole world. With the international diffusion of science and of new technologies like the cinema, the phonograph, and the radiotelephone, a new world civilization was coming into being, which "penetrates all forms of music, all accents, all words, all the news, despite all the barriers. We are just at the beginning [of this process]." As civilization advances, it will impose sacrifices. There is no guarantee that it will promote individual happiness or advance the common good. "But the capital of humanity increases in any case . . . all nations and civilisations are in fact tending to become *more—more powerful, more general,* and *more rational.*"

Febvre had begun his essay with the famous comment that time spent in discovering the origin of a word is never wasted. His exam-

ple inspired later French scholars to extend his inquiry. In 1954 the linguist Emile Benveniste noted that patient research had traced the first use of the term *civilisation* to the physiocrat Mirabeau, in 1757. This use was in the sense of *policé*, of political order, but in the 1760s the term was generally used to mean "the original, collective process that made humanity emerge from barbarity, and this use was even then leading to the definition of *civilisation* as the state of civilized society." He also observed that before the revolution few French words ended in *-isation*.

In an essay published in 1989, Jean Starobinski points out that *civilisation* was just one of many nouns formed in those revolutionary years with the suffix *-ation* from verbs that ended in *-iser*. In 1775 Diderot had defined the new term in relation to another *-ation* coinage: "Emancipation, or what is the same thing by another name, civilization, is a long and difficult work." Regarding Diderot's usage, Starobinski comments that "already there are abundant signs that civilization might well become a secularized substitute for religion, an apotheosis of reason."

The new noun assimilated related notions of polish and refinement, and of intellectual and political progress. But whereas Febvre argued that the word *civilisation* had come into being in order to designate a new idea, albeit one only vaguely perceived at first, Starobinski makes the word the precursor of the idea. "Not surprisingly, as the term gained currency due to its synthetic powers, it, too, became a subject of theoretical reflection." This reflection was stimulated by the fact that the word became current at the same time as the word "progress" in its modern sense: "The two words were destined to maintain a most intimate relationship." Reflecting on these twin neologisms, the *philosophes* concluded that they "describe both the fundamental process of history and the end result of that process . . . The action suffix *-ation* forces us to think of an agent. If that agent is confounded with the action itself, it becomes autonomous."

But the word did not suggest just one idea. "No sooner was the word *civilisation* written down . . . than it was found to contain a possible source of misunderstanding." Mirabeau himself had written of "false civilization" and "the barbarity of our civilizations." The term could refer both to extant modern societies and to the ideal of a civilized condition of social life. "The critique thus took two forms: a critique of civilization and a critique formulated in the name of civilization." In either sense, the term implies a contrary; but the contrary—natural, savage, or barbarous—might appear to be preferable. Civilization may be decadent, and the remedy may be re-Christianization, as Benjamin Constant would argue, or re-barbarization, so that Rimbaud demanded "new blood . . . pagan blood." But normally civilization was valued, and identified with progress. In general usage, the term took on a sacred aura. To represent something as contrary to civilization was to demonize it.

A few years after Febvre's seminar, Norbert Elias, a German Jewish exile writing in London on the eve of the Second World War, compared the evolution of the German notion of *Kultur* and the French idea of *Civilisation*. Elias (1897–1990) was born in Breslau and studied sociology in Heidelberg under Karl Mannheim and Alfred Weber. Alfred's brother, Max Weber, had recently died, but his legacy was very much alive in his old university. In 1929 Mannheim was called to the chair in sociology at Frankfurt, and he invited Elias to accompany him as his academic assistant. Here Elias became associated with the inner circle of the "Frankfurt School," a creative group of Marxist scholars that included Theodor Adorno, with whom Elias established a close bond, though he was always skeptical about Marxist theory.

Elias once noted that the Jews, although outsiders politically, were "at the same time carriers of German cultural life." "I was steeped in German *Kultur*," he remarked, at the end of his long life, but emphasized that "one can identify oneself strongly with the German cultural tradition—as I still do—without thereby being, let's not say a patriot, but a nationalist." However, as a Jew (associated, more-

over, with the radical Mannheim), he was obliged to leave Germany after the rise of Hitler. After a spell in France he moved to England and spent the immediate prewar years in the Reading Room of the British Museum, working in isolation on his masterpiece on the civilizing process, which was published in German in 1939. Recognition came very late, and it was only during his prolonged retirement, first in Bielefeld, in Germany, and then in Amsterdam, that he became an iconic figure for a new generation of European sociologists.

Alfred Weber and Karl Mannheim stood for two opposing approaches to the study of culture. For Alfred Weber, culture represented the self-contained world of art and religion, which had no external, rational ends to serve, and which was opposed to the material world of civilization. This was the orthodox view of culture in Heidelberg, and the philosopher Karl Jaspers encouraged the young Elias to write a seminar paper on the debate between Thomas Mann and the despised *Zivilisationsliterat*. For Mannheim, in contrast, cultural productions were rooted in social situations, and they were to be understood as expressions of particular political and economic interests.

In the first volume of *The Civilizing Process,* Elias explored the relationships between the German notion of culture and the French idea of civilization. In the French tradition, civilization was conceived of as a complex, multifaceted whole, encompassing political, economic, religious, technical, moral, or social facts. This broad concept of civilization "expresses the self-consciousness of the West . . . It sums up everything in which Western society of the last two or three centuries believes itself superior to earlier societies or 'more primitive' contemporary ones." To the Germans, however, civilization was conceived of as something external and utilitarian, and in many ways alien to their national values. Civilization moves forward over time and transcends national boundaries, in contrast to *Kultur,* which is bounded in time and space and is coterminous with a national identity.

When Germans expressed pride in their achievements, they spoke not of their civilization but of their *Kultur.* This term "refers

essentially to intellectual, artistic, and religious facts," and the Germans typically "draw a sharp dividing line between facts of this sort, on the one side, and political, economic, and social facts, on the other." *Kultur* was not only national but personal. The term had been introduced into modern discourse by Herder, and he had taken the term from Cicero, who wrote metaphorically of *cultura animi,* extending the idea of agricultural cultivation to apply to the mind. *Kultur* therefore implied cultivation, *Bildung,* a personal progression toward spiritual perfection. A French or English person might claim to be "civilized" without having accomplished anything on his own account, but in the German view every individual had to achieve a cultured state by way of a process of education and spiritual development.

The notion of *Kultur* developed in tension with the concept of a universal civilization that was associated with France. What the French understood to be a transnational civilization was regarded in Germany as a source of danger to distinctive local cultures. In Germany itself, the threat was very immediate. *Civilisation* had established itself in the centers of political power, in the French-speaking and Francophile German courts. In marked contrast to French and British intellectuals, who identified with the aspirations of the ruling class, German intellectuals defined themselves in opposition to the princes and aristocrats. In their eyes, the upper class lacked authentic culture. The civilization of the French-speaking elite was borrowed; it was not internalized but was a matter of forms, and of outward show. The moral principles of the aristocracy derived from an artificial code of honor. Excluded from the circles of power, German intellectuals chose to emphasize the claims of personal integrity and of scientific and artistic accomplishment. The individual achievement of spiritual growth was esteemed above inherited status and the artificial trappings of courtly style. The base of the intellectuals was the university, "the middle-class counterweight to the court," and here they fostered a literary and philosophical culture that was German, achieved, inward.

Following Mannheim, Elias identified social reasons behind these ideological differences. The concept of a universal civilization appealed for obvious reasons to the dominant classes in imperial states, like France and Britain, while "the concept of *Kultur* mirrors the self-consciousness of a nation [like Germany] which had constantly to seek out and constitute its boundaries anew, in a political as well as spiritual sense." Bound up as they were with political circumstances, these ideas ebbed and flowed with historical changes. In the aftermath of the French revolution, the antithesis between a false, aristocratic civilization and a genuine national culture was projected into an opposition between France and Germany. This antithesis was renewed with fresh vigor after the defeat of Germany in the Great War, a war that had been waged against them in the name of a universal civilization. The idea of *Kultur* was brought into play in the subsequent struggle to redefine the identity and destiny of Germany. *Kultur* and *Zivilisation* summed up the competing values that (in the view of some Germans) divided Germany and France: spiritual virtue and materialism, honesty and artifice, a genuine morality and mere outward politeness.

But in contrast to Mannheim, Elias did not believe that ideas were merely ideological productions, instruments of domination that were degraded by their uses. Whatever their origins, and however they had been manipulated, concepts such as culture and civilization might have an analytical value. Like Marcel Mauss, Elias therefore put the idea of civilization to work, and the second volume of his study illustrated what he called the civilizing process in European history. The European courts gradually refined their manners, subjecting the body and its functions to a series of cumulative checks. The "social constraint towards self-constraint" grew in force, and the "threshold of embarrassment" was raised. This argument was further developed in *The Court Society*, first published in German in 1969 but also largely written in the thirties. In both these studies, Elias chose to illustrate the classic German view of the civilization process as external, merely customary, imposing formal rules on what had been expressive or instinctual acts, a process he linked to the extension of control by the state.

Elias remarked that at the time he was working on his book he was more influenced by Freud than by any sociologist, even Mannheim. Freud had recently published two books on culture or civilization: *The Future of an Illusion* (first published in German in 1927) and *Civilisation and Its Discontents* (1930). Here Freud spoke of "human civilisation, by which I mean all those respects in which human life has raised itself above its animal status and differs from the life of beasts—and I scorn to distinguish between culture and civilisation." This disavowal perhaps excused his English translator, who systematically used the term *civilisation* where Freud used *Kultur*, but in any case the central opposition that Freud proposed was that between the cultivated human being and the instinctual animal. Culture makes a mere human into a god (if, he joked, a god with a prosthesis). But this power is dearly won. The process of human cultivation is conceived of as purely external, impressed by force. Just as the individual makes the anguished sacrifice of Oedipal fantasies, so "every civilisation must be built on coercion and the renunciation of instinct." Sublimation fosters cultural creativity, but it imposes great sacrifices of sexual freedom and requires the control of aggression.

Perhaps the rise of Fascism impelled central European Jewish intellectuals like Freud and Elias to question the saving power of personal culture. When the crunch came, the frail, external, human controls that civilization had fabricated were powerless to restrain the uncivilized masses, who, Freud wrote, are "lazy and unintelligent; they have no love for instinctual renunciation." The masses will accept the sacrifice of an animal freedom only if they are compensated by improvements in their material circumstances. "If the loss is not compensated for economically, one can be certain that serious dangers will ensue."

In contrast to Elias and Freud, the right-wing, nationalist writers preferred to identify instinct and culture. They reserved their suspicion for civilization. The growth of culture is organic, that of

civilization artificial. Culture and civilization will tend to conflict as their forms of growth diverge. Civilization eventually becomes an empty material shell, devoid of animating spirit, and collapses. This theme—an old one—was revived by German conservatives as the optimism of the Hegelians was checked by the catastrophe of the First World War. An extreme exponent was Spengler, who drew a moral diametrically opposed to that of Freud and Elias, excoriating "the bloodless intellect whose criticism gnaws away everything that is left standing of the genuine—that is, the naturally grown—Culture." Like a number of German intellectuals, Spengler welcomed the Nazis as the harbingers of a cultural renewal of the race, and as the enemies of an artificial civilization.

Although Elias emphasized the role of the universities in the development of this discourse on culture and civilization, he did not discuss in any detail the academic disciplines that developed in Germany to study the products of culture and the human spirit, the *Geist* (the *Kulturwissenschaften* and the *Geisteswissenschaften*). Fritz Ringer, in *The Decline of the German Mandarins* (1969), extended Elias's analysis to embrace the development of these fields of study in the critical years that followed the Franco-Prussian war. Germany enjoyed a period of rapid but turbulent economic growth, which accelerated from about 1890. The intellectuals, fearful of materialism and what Weber was to call the rationalization of public life, faced what they saw as a renewed but more powerful challenge to culture from a soulless civilization, and they reacted by drawing upon the resources of philosophical idealism and of romanticism, and by encouraging national pride. Rational, universal civilization threatened the spiritual culture of a *Volk*, and infringed on the inner freedom of the individual. Nations should not allow their unique values to be swallowed up in a common civilization. The world is made up of "contending national spirits . . . qualitatively different cultures."

Scientific materialism was the most insidious agent of civilization, corroding moral values, devaluing spiritual insights, contemptuous of traditional wisdom. The mandarins rejected the notion that

ideas are imprinted on the mind by sensations, that values have a material origin. *Geist* was not to be treated as if it were part of nature. The science of the spirit was completely different from a natural science. In the 1880s, Dilthey adapted the Hegelian notion of the "objective Geist." The work of the collective spirit was made manifest and public in documents and forms of language, and so it was available for study, but only by way of a subjective, intuitive approach, leading to an empathetic understanding. The methods of the natural sciences were not appropriate. A furious debate developed between the positivists and Dilthey and his sympathizers, coming to a head in a great methodological controversy, the *Methodenstreit*, which began in 1883 and which eventually led to the development of a new cultural history. It also provoked Max Weber to set out the principles of his cultural sociology in a series of methodological statements that appeared between 1903 and 1919.

Weber defined culture as "the endowment of a finite segment of the meaningless infinity of events in the world with meaning and significance from the standpoint of human beings." Its most characteristic expression was in religious life. Although culture was a matter of ideas, often implicit, that could be grasped only by a sympathetic exercise of the imagination, Weber insisted that "beliefs and values are just as 'real' as material forces" and that they may "transform the nature of social reality." Culture was vulnerable, however. Its foundations were being undermined by civilization, by the irresistible and corrosive forces of science, rationalization, bureaucratization, and materialism. In its defense, culture can muster only the chaotic chances of charismatic renewal and the defensive work of the intellectual.

More recently, Woodruff D. Smith has refined Ringer's genealogy in *Politics and the Sciences of Culture in Germany, 1840–1920* (1991). He extracts a specific line of liberal academic reflection on culture, a *Kulturwissenschaft* that was distinct from the *Geisteswissenschaften* of the hermeneutic tradition. This was a way of thinking with closer affinities to French and British liberal ideas; and Smith

suggests that Herder and Humboldt were more sympathetic to the Enlightenment than they appear to be from some other accounts. The academics in the liberal tradition approached culture in a scientific spirit, seeking laws of development. They defined culture, Smith remarks, in an anthropological sense: "That is to say, they were interested primarily in the patterns of thought and behavior characteristic of a whole people rather than the intellectual and artistic activities of the elite." The fortunes of this liberal tradition—and of the more conservative hermeneutic tradition—fluctuated with the fortunes of the liberal and nationalist movements in German politics. The years 1848 and 1870 were watersheds for both traditions of thought, and Smith traces the revival of a somewhat chastened liberal, scientific concern with culture in the ethnological school that was built up by Rudolf Virchow in Berlin in the 1870s and 1880s.

In Britain, as in France and Germany, the European political crisis of the 1930s provoked renewed, anxious debates on the questions of culture and civilization. However, intellectuals drew more directly on a very English tradition of reflections on the place of high culture in the life of a nation; its point of reference was Matthew Arnold's thesis, presented most famously in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869). Culture, they believed, was under threat from two sides: from material civilization, on the one hand, and mass culture on the other.

After the humiliation of Munich, T. S. Eliot found himself stirred not so much by a revulsion against the particular policies of the Chamberlain government as by something more profound, "a doubt of the validity of a civilization." (When Eliot wrote of materialism, or of finance and industry, he used the term "civilization" in preference to "culture.")

> Was our society, which had always been so assured of its superiority and rectitude, so confident of its unexamined premisses, assembled round anything more permanent than a congeries of banks, insurance companies and industries, and had it any beliefs more essential than a belief in compound interest and the maintenance of dividends?

Reflecting on these issues in the immediate aftermath of the war, Eliot was moved to rethink the whole question of culture. By culture, he told a German audience,

> I mean first of all what the anthropologists mean: the way of life of a particular people living together in one place. That culture is made visible in their arts, in their social system, in their habits and customs; in their religion. But these things added together do not constitute the culture . . . a culture is more than the assemblage of its arts, customs, and religious beliefs. These things all act upon each other, and fully to understand one you have to understand all.

In his *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1948), Eliot contrasted this anthropological idea of culture ("as used for instance by E. B. Tylor in the title of his book *Primitive Culture*") with the conventional humanist view, which has to do with the intellectual or spiritual development of an individual, or of a group or class, rather than with the way of life of a whole society. The traditional literary notion of culture was inadequate, for "the culture of the individual is dependent upon the culture of a group or class," and "the culture of the group or class is dependent upon the culture of the whole society." Each class "possesses a function, that of maintaining that part of the total culture of the society which pertains to that class." Eliot's image of society was hierarchical but organic. "What is important is a structure of society in which there will be, from 'top' to 'bottom,' a continuous graduation of cultural levels."

In short, culture "includes all the characteristic activities and interests of a people." It was not confined to a privileged minority, as Matthew Arnold believed, but embraced both grand and humble, elite and popular, sacred and profane. By way of illustration, Eliot offered an indicative list of English cultural traits: "Derby Day, Henley

Regatta, Cowes, the twelfth of August, a cup final, the dog races, the pin table, the dart board, Wensleydale cheese, boiled cabbage cut into sections, beetroot in vinegar, nineteenth century Gothic churches, and the music of Elgar." Again in contrast to Arnold, Eliot was not out to denigrate the soulless pleasures of the philistines. Rather, he was illustrating the diverse constituents (for Eliot, a necessary diversity) that make up a national culture.

This national culture was an integrated whole. Arnold, Coleridge, and Newman had—from different points of view—all insisted that a culture is bound up with a religion. "We may go further," Eliot wrote, "and ask whether what we call the culture, and what we call the religion, of a people are not different aspects of the same thing: the culture being, essentially, the incarnation (so to speak) of the religion of a people." (Consequently, he suggested, "bishops are a part of English culture, and horses and dogs are a part of English religion.") Culture and religion may serve the same great purpose: "any religion, while it lasts, and on its own level, gives an apparent meaning to life, provides the framework for a culture, and protects the mass of humanity from boredom and despair." But it is also the function of culture to imbue life with purpose and meaning. "Culture may even be described as that which makes life worth living."

In the aftermath of the world war, Eliot adopted a qualified relativism. It was true that civilization had become more complex, social groups more specialized, the arts more sophisticated, but there had not been any obvious moral progression. Moreover, he insisted that other cultures must be treated on their own terms. "We can also learn to respect every other culture as a whole, however inferior to our own it may appear, or however justly we may disapprove of some features of it: the deliberate destruction of another culture as a whole is an irreparable wrong, almost as evil as to treat human beings like animals." The very diversity of cultures is to be valued. The ideal of a common world culture is therefore a monstrous notion: "a world culture which was simply a *uniform* culture would be no culture at all. We should have a humanity de-humanised." Rather, "we must aspire to a common world culture which will yet not diminish the particularity of the constituent parts." He also warned that cultural variety would provoke conflict. "Ultimately, antagonistic religions mean antagonistic cultures; and ultimately, religions cannot be reconciled."

A decade later, in 1958, Raymond Williams produced a genealogy of English theorists on culture (parallel to the essays of Febvre on the French tradition, and of Elias on the German). Dismissing Eliot's appeal to a specialized, anthropological approach, he placed him squarely within the English tradition of thinking on culture, a tradition that he insisted was quite distinct from the German and French traditions.

Raymond Williams (1921–1988) came from a working-class, socialist milieu on the Welsh border. He went up to Cambridge University to read English, but his studies were interrupted by the outbreak of World War II, in which he saw active service. Briefly a member of the Communist Party before the war, he was nevertheless greatly influenced by the theory of literature and culture that had been developed by a charismatic but profoundly (if quirkily) conservative dissident in the Cambridge English faculty, F. R. Leavis.

Despite very different political sympathies, their approaches had much in common, and E. P. Thompson's description of Williams as "a moralist wearing a literary habit" could be applied just as well to Leavis. In 1948 Leavis had published *The Great Tradition,* in which he defined a canon of texts in modern English literature that offered a "life-enhancing" cultural alternative to the values of modern, mass, industrial society. In *Culture and Society, 1780–1950,* published in 1958, Raymond Williams constructed a parallel tradition of literary intellectuals (including both Leavis and Eliot) who had authored *theories* about the saving role of culture in industrial society—or, more precisely, in modern England.

In an introduction to a new edition of the book in 1983, Williams said that his argument had been based on "the discovery that the idea of culture, and the word itself in its general modern uses, came into English thinking in the period which we commonly describe as that of the Industrial Revolution." The term had entered into English discourse together with other new words: "industry," "democracy," "class," and "art." The notion of culture was shaped by its relationship to these other ideas. In particular, the idea of culture had developed in tension with what Carlyle called "industrialism."

According to Williams, the English discourse on culture was initiated by Romantic poets, particularly Blake, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Keats. While he recognized that many of their themes could be found in Rousseau, Goethe, Schiller, and Chateaubriand, Williams insisted that there was a specific English cast to their thinking, forged by the reaction of the poets to the Industrial Revolution. Their slogan was Shelley's: "Poetry, and the Principle of Self, of which money is the visible incarnation, are the God and Mammon of the world." But Williams argued that this Manichean opposition between art and commerce could not be sustained. "The positive consequence of the idea of art as a superior reality was that it offered an immediate basis for an important criticism of industrialism. The negative consequence was that it tended . . . to isolate art . . . and thus to weaken the dynamic function which Shelley proposed for it."

Coleridge and Carlyle developed a more sophisticated critique of industrial civilization. Civilization meant modernity, materialism, industry, and science: the world of progress celebrated by the utilitarians. It touted positive science as the only reliable basis of knowledge. Carlyle denounced the view that "except the external, there are no true sciences; that to the inward world (if there be any) our only conceivable road is through the outward; that, in short, what cannot be investigated and understood mechanically, cannot be investigated and understood at all." Coleridge proclaimed in thunderous italics

"the permanent distinction and occasional contrast between cultivation and civilisation."

> But civilisation is itself but a mixed good [Coleridge wrote], if not far more a corrupting influence, the hectic of disease, not the bloom of health, and a nation so distinguished more fitly to be called a varnished than a polished people, where this civilisation is not grounded in cultivation, in the harmonious development of those qualities and faculties that characterise our humanity.

Matthew Arnold provided the most influential statement of the opposition between the values of culture and the values of modern civilization. Industrial civilization was "to a much greater degree than the civilisation of Greece or Rome, mechanical and external, and tends constantly to become more so." The philistines are content with the material progress that civilization delivers. But:

> Culture says: "Consider these people then, their way of life, their habits, their manners, the very tones of their voice; look at them attentively; observe the literature they read, the things which give them pleasure, the words which come out of their mouths, the thoughts which make the furniture of their minds; would any amount of wealth be worth having with the condition that one was to become just like these people by having it?"

Williams noted sorrowfully that Arnold imbued the tradition with a new priggishness and spiritual pride, reacting to vulgarity in a way that was itself vulgar. In his view, Arnold was infected with "largely self-regarding feelings of class." And if he despised the philistine bourgeoisie, Arnold trembled in the face of the common people. Despite his progressive concern with popular education, he stood ready to call on the state for protection against the threatening masses, toward whom "the lovers of culture may prize and employ fire and strength."

Arnold might be dismissed as a reactionary, but Williams believed that in general the great English theorists had failed to grasp

the permanent importance of industrialism, and the nature of the civilization it had created. He devoted a long chapter to the two essays by John Stuart Mill on the ideas of culture and civilization in the philosophies of Bentham and Coleridge (essays that had been edited by Leavis). Mill had attempted to find a way of synthesizing the science of practical life, represented by Bentham, with what he called "the philosophy of human culture," whose spokesman was Coleridge. But Mill's synthesis inevitably fell short, because he wrote generally of "Civilisation" when he should have addressed specifically the question of "Industrialism" (by which Williams really intended, capitalism). Because Mill did not grasp the nature of the changes in England, he did not recognize that Coleridge's reaction to industrialism transcended the bounds of Mill's own "humanized Utilitarianism."

Coleridge, according to Williams, had foreshadowed a more radical critique of capitalist society, and Coleridge's insights were developed by Ruskin, Carlyle, and William Morris. Williams identified Morris in particular as "the pivotal figure of the tradition" because he began to articulate a proto-socialist critique of industrialism, suggesting the possibility of a popular cultural revival. Later, D. H. Lawrence was to be a more explicit spokesman for a popular sensibility, a witness to the liberating possibilities in the working-class experience. Eliot, in contrast, represented a conservative position on culture, but he was original and important because he analyzed the place of culture in a class society. ("We can say of Eliot what Mill said of Coleridge, that an 'enlightened Radical or Liberal' ought 'to rejoice over such a Conservative.' ") Williams also praised Eliot for his anti-individualist perspective, even if his ideal of an integrated society could not be reconciled with the reality of the atomized, individualist society that capitalism inevitably produced.

Nevertheless, Williams insisted that Eliot's approach to culture was firmly situated within the English literary tradition. For Eliot, the main components of culture were religion and the arts, as they had been for Coleridge and Arnold, and its enemy, as ever, was mod-

ern civilization. Williams played down the significance of Eliot's introduction of the idea of "culture" as "a whole way of life." He admitted that the use of the term in this sense "has been most marked in twentieth-century anthropology and sociology," but insisted that even the anthropological usage was not new.

> The sense depends, in fact, on the literary tradition. The development of social anthropology has tended to inherit and substantiate the ways of looking at a society and a common life which had earlier been wrought out from general experience of industrialism. The emphasis on "a whole way of life" is continuous from Coleridge and Carlyle, but what was a personal assertion of value has become a general intellectual method.

Williams was not familiar with the social sciences, but his wife, who had studied anthropology at the London School of Economics, "got him to read the sociologists on the LSE syllabus of the 1930s" while he was writing *Culture and Society*. However, he was prepared to concede that two lessons may be learned from the anthropologists. The first was that change may be positive, but it cannot be piecemeal: "one element of a complex system can hardly be changed without seriously affecting the whole." The second lesson was that there are other alternatives to industrial civilization besides the medieval world evoked by so many English writers on culture. But this was "perhaps of more doubtful value," since neither primitivism nor medievalism represented a realistic option in our own case.

The true importance of what Eliot had to say lay, for Williams, in his argument that culture varies from class to class in complex societies. An elite culture cannot flourish in isolation, but neither can it be stretched across the classes without adulteration. This suggests a very different issue. Must popular culture contaminate a higher, or more authentic, culture—or could it be a source of renewal? Leavis had addressed the same issue in his book *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture* (1930). However, Leavis accepted Arnold's view that "it is

upon a very small minority that the discerning appreciation of art and literature depends." This small elite

> constitute the consciousness of the race (or a branch of it) at a given time . . . Upon this minority depends our power of profiting by the finest human experiences of the past . . . In their keeping . . . is the language, the changing idiom, upon which fine living depends, and without which distinction of spirit is thwarted and incoherent. By "culture" I mean the use of such a language.

Williams suggested that where Arnold confronted Industrialism, Leavis recognized and challenged another monster, which had emerged from the smoke and grime of the satanic mills: Mass Culture. It was represented for Leavis by the popular press and even the intellectual weeklies, and was epitomized by Middletown, a community in Illinois that had been described by two American ethnographers, Robert and Helen Lynd, in a book boldly subtitled *A Study in Contemporary Culture*. Leavis was frankly appalled at the picture the authors presented of small-town life in the Midwest. Judging by the culture of Middletown, the contemporary world was in a very bad state indeed. "*Middletown* is a frightening book," Williams agreed, but he insisted that the manufactured culture of suburbia must be distinguished from the genuine culture that emanates from the experience of working-class people, an experience that fosters opposition to established standards and prefigures the values on which a better society might be established. Williams was accordingly impatient with Leavis's nostalgic references to a golden age when, he imagined, English culture had rested firmly on the base of an organic communal life. A socialist, he could not join Leavis in mourning the "momentous change—this vast and terrifying disintegration . . . which is commonly described as Progress."

The authors in Williams's canon had developed a distinctive national discourse on culture. In contrast to the German intellectuals, they did not appeal to a specifically national culture (and perhaps this would have been problematic, for what would they have made of Welsh, or Scottish, or Irish culture?). Unlike the French, they were not inclined to celebrate the universal values of a scientific, rational civilization. They wrote instead of a high culture that was at once European and English. Their central problem—the relationship between high culture, popular culture, and material progress in industrial society—was recast by Williams in Marxist terms, as a dimension of a more fundamental class conflict.

In the introduction to a new edition of his book, published in 1983, Williams remarked somewhat defensively that critics had asked why he ignored non-English writers on culture. A biographer notes that he "couldn't read German, and didn't read French for fun," but Williams was in any case convinced that the English discourse on culture had emerged from a very particular historical experience. The industrial revolution had begun in England, and its effects were first appreciated there.

> At the beginning, and indeed for two or three generations, it was literally a problem of finding a language to express them. Thus though it is true that comparable changes happened in other societies, and new forms of thought and art were created to respond to them, often in equally or more penetrating and interesting ways than in these English writers, it is nevertheless of some permanent general importance to see what happened where it happened first.

This is not a persuasive argument, if only because priority does not guarantee superior insight, and by the late nineteenth century the English experience of industrialism was widely shared. In any case, the writers with whom Williams was engaged were often profoundly influenced by Continental debates. Wordsworth was possessed by the language and ideas of the French revolution; Coleridge was steeped in German philosophy (indeed, Mill wrote of the "Germano-Coleridgian school"); Mill was perhaps the most sophisticated commentator on Comte's positivism; Carlyle wrote extensively on Goethe and the German Romantics; Arnold was insistently Euro-

pean, a scourge of English cultural insularity; and Eliot drew on the ideas of the right-wing French Catholic writer Charles Maurras.

Williams's own project must surely be seen as a contribution to the wider European debate in the middle decades of the twentieth century about the origins and meaning of *culture* and *civilization*. His account parallels those of Febvre and Elias; and, as Williams himself later came to recognize, the arguments he made were similar to those that had been developed by the Frankfurt School in Germany, and by Gramsci in Italy. As Europe endured its greatest crisis, a long-standing European discourse on culture had suddenly burst into life again. Throughout Europe, the same themes recurred in the most diverse debates, drawing in radicals and reactionaries—and also both humanists and social scientists.