

Democracy: A Culture

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“Democracy is dying; Freedom lies murdered – in Central Europe, Russia, Cuba, China, and many other lands. After three hundred years of seeming success the historical evolution of modern peoples towards liberty is facing its Waterloo.” We hear this plaint from all sides; we repeat it; we believe it. We must believe it because only thus can we understand the wholesale infliction of torture and death upon masses of men indiscriminately lumped together by race, class, religion, or politics. Inoffensiveness, age, intellectual eminence – nothing stays the hand of the executioner, for the Reason of State does not listen to reason, and the victims perish less because they are dangerous than because the new gods thirst for sacrifices.

In the wake of this factual demonstration follows the argument from fear. We are urged to give up democracy before it sinks and to adopt some system of force which will provide the two needful things of a new Feudal Age – food and protection. Democracy, so runs the tempter’s voice, is a failure. It is feeble, inefficient, corrupt. It “levels down to mediocrity” and, by turning everyone’s mind to sham politics, it enables the unscrupulous to fill their pockets. What we need is a highly organized group system which will serve the tribe by enforcing a fair distribution of goods to all within it, and by dealing out exile or death to all without. Consequently, it is “Down with elections and parliaments, down with international ideas and religions, down with differences of opinion and their utterance. Life on the planet is a bloody struggle in which survival goes to the fiercest beast of prey. Man is a wolf to man and wolves must hunt in packs. All else is theory, moonshine, and speedy death.” Strangest of all, this argument against democracy has been adopted by the communist opponents of fascism. The Marxists tell us that democracy is a middle-class ideal: middle class, therefore capitalist; capitalist, therefore doomed. Yet these same prophets of doom agitate for the democratic defense of political prisoners and would have us fight war

and fascism at home; would have us go to war abroad to fight fascism there, and at the same time convincingly prove to us that fascism is born of war, or else that it is a phase of capitalism, like democracy; or yet again that it is the work of power-mad megalomaniacs – the Hitlers and the Stalins.

This juxtaposition of ideas is enough to show that the madness, if any, has been contagious, and that at least half the contemporary chaos springs from the inside of our heads, from our inconsistent notions, our panicky generalities, our utter lack of historical sense, our amazing belief that dictatorships, violation of treaties, shameless diplomacy, civil war, and wholesale massacre of innocents are new, unheard-of things invented a short while ago expressly to plague us.

It would be unkind to insist, for the feeling is strong that somehow we have failed, and this sense of failure must be an occasion less of chiding than of inward self-reform. In a mood of productive humility we must all acknowledge that we have failed first of all to control our beliefs. We have believed in absolute democracy, absolute personal freedom, absolute peace and fairness in international affairs. Liberals have imagined a slice of European history characterized by absolute moral improvement; or, on turning Marxist, by absolute middle-class evolution grounded in material causes. And when these beliefs proved untenable they were replaced by the bugbear of absolute one-man rule and absolute chaos.

In the United States, the most obvious sign of these abstract absolutes is the general assumption that the single word “democracy” means popular government and personal freedom, combined with weak, inefficient, and corrupt rule; as if all these were inseparable, whence it is inferred that if you remove personal freedom you gain strength, and if you abolish personal liberties you are left with an incorruptible and efficient one-man despotism. This is a fatal series of confusions. What could be more popular, in the worst sense, than the present governments we call totalitarian? Did not their leaders rise to power by demagoguery, and do they not maintain themselves by ceaseless bidding for popular support? Do they not serve Demos when they make a fetish of eliminating privilege, including the privilege of dissent, and when they exalt the virtues of the people, as if the masses had a

monopoly of virtue and common sense? A great show of social equality and economic sharing, of racial brotherhood and national unity, is the truly popular reward of totalitarianism; while a uniform propaganda working hand in hand with censorship satisfies the mob passion for finding sovereignty and truth within itself. To reject critical intelligence as a weakness and to make blind Will triumph through weight of numbers is the paradise of the mass-minded. It is indeed one way of understanding democracy.

The fathers of the American Constitution knew all this when they spoke with hatred and contempt of the mob. Unfortunately, the demagogue-lover in every one of us has always interpreted these remarks as aristocratic disdain of the lower orders. We have thereby forgotten a valuable lesson, the lesson that any irresponsible gang is a mob, no matter what its class, its slogans, or its aims. Democracy, absolute and thorough, is the barbaric ideal of majority tyranny, the mass choosing a leader whom it follows or dethrones according to the whim of the moment or the luck of events in war and peace: dictators are saying no more than the truth when they boast that theirs is actually a popular government. But obviously this sort of populism gives no guarantee of honest or efficient rule. Like other governments, it may or may not be corrupt, while it is invariably wasteful of the lives and energies of men.

Freedom, or Free Democracy, is something very different and much more difficult to achieve. It is a balance between popular will and individual rights. It is a civilized society that tries to establish diversity in unity through the guarantee of civil liberties. It wants stability and peace, but recognizing the dynamic character of society it finds it must safeguard criticism as sacred and insure the free expression of thought as an intellectual privilege granted equally to all. This Rule of Equality is often misunderstood, as will appear in a moment, but it states what most Americans mean by democracy – namely that Everyman, as such, is entitled to protection against individual or mob tyranny. The whole community may be against him and yet he lives. In following common usage and calling this more complicated scheme of life democracy for short, the notion of an absolute democracy claiming

complete freedom for the majority (or for its leaders) must be uprooted from our minds, cast out as a dangerous play on the word “democracy.”

The fog of ambiguity around this word also obscures the important fact that in the so-called democratic countries, free democracy is constantly breaking down. From the Dreyfus Affair in France to the vindication by the Supreme Court of the most obscure victim of injustice, we must always be fighting for causes that involve our liberties. What we fight is an individual or group tyrant exercising local oppression. “Subversives” blacklisted, books and plays banned in Boston, the Evolution trial in Dayton, and the application of gag rule or gun rule anywhere, are signs of the tyrannical spirit of man and which has nothing to do with particular creeds. To imagine the love of tyranny as the peculiar mental trait of certain peoples, or as the result of “madmen’s” powers of persuasion, is absurd. Tolerance is the fruit of circumstance grafted upon desire: the bishop who would persecute his fellow Christian upon the placing of a comma in the articles of faith will become a mild and broad-minded man when alone among the Ubangis whom he is hoping to clothe and convert. Respect for human freedom depends variously on intelligence, habit, sense of impunity, or fear; it does not depend in any fated way on class, race, or nationality. On the one hand, democracy as commonly understood endlessly breeds and combats internal oppression; while in oppressed countries every shift in home policy, every appeal to popular prejudice and all the efforts of propaganda show that Demos cannot be ruled by force alone.

What, then, is the difference? If democracy is not an institution or a set of institutions, what is it? It is an atmosphere and an attitude; in a word – a culture. It is not infallibly lodged in particular countries, but is wherever we find it. In our democracy we constantly complain of our institutions, and quite rightly. We deplore the people’s seemingly infallible gift for voting Incompetence into office; we despair of the corruption that nullifies equality. But we remain democratic because our freedoms, however circumscribed, enable us to fight for more. We do not want Russian trials,

Paris riots,¹ or racial pogroms. The vote, the jury system, the right to print, symbolize as well as carry out our preference. Even when they fail to work, they concentrate our desire for tolerance and make vivid to ourselves and our opponents the limits within which we want free play for our thoughts and acts.

Democracy is a culture – that is, the deliberate cultivation of an intellectual passion in people with intellects and feelings. Like most passions it is at times vague, heedless, even unpractical, but always as real as the affinity of dog and bone. This passion is older than we think. It is true that it has been rapidly spreading through the Western world for the last three hundred years, but as a desire and a goal, it is as old as Socrates and Jesus. As a political movement it has been reenforced by science, the French Revolution, and Romanticism; and if capitalism has also fostered it, it is because these movements occurred in a capitalist era. The connection is real but is far from being cause and effect. There were democrats under Feudalism, just as there were democrats in Greece, and there will always be such so long as there are men to think and therefore to think diversely. Many men, many minds, is the basis of democracy.

The comforting worth of this historical fact is that democracy has already withstood mighty onslaughts of fascism, and that it will take a lot of killing before it disappears from the face of the earth. It will outlive dictators, conspiracies, and loud-speaker mythologies because it is stronger than material interests, more selfish than common selfishness, and more independent of favoring conditions than the hardiest desert cactus. If anyone doubts that freedom survives in unlikely habitats, let him compare eighteenth-century England under a corrupt Parliament and a stubborn king with our own country in our own times. There are places in this great republic where men like Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, or even moderates like David Hume and Dr. Johnson, could not to this day draw a free breath. What bulwark would they – would anyone – have against the “democratic” tyranny of their neighbors? Sheriff and citizens, in a fit of intellectual vigor, would

¹Not only those of the last twenty-five years, but the long series dating back to the post-1870 fascism of Boulanger, Déroulède, and Maurras.

feel irresistibly impelled to save their local culture by forcibly expelling the dissenters. And even if Dr. Johnson's conservatism served to excuse his free speaking, what would be the fate of his three fellows – radicals and freethinkers as out of place as Jonah in the whale? And as for the harmonizing of their four voices, it is obviously beyond the skill of a community where democracy means no more than a zeal for gregarious uniformity. A larger society, with titled lords and bishops, with royal pomp and country squires, is not on those accounts necessarily less democratic than a villageful of despotic pygmies.

If we know where free democracy resides and what it consists in, and if we want to preserve it, we must naturally defend our Bill of Rights and Constitution and fight war and fascism. But fully as important is our obligation to let a democratic breeze into the chambers of our own house and our own brain, for it is there that democracy begins and also there that it begins to decay. It is not enough to protest against flagrant public violations. Democracy, to maintain itself, must repeatedly conquer every cell and corner of the nation. How many of our public institutions and private businesses, our schools, hospitals, and domestic hearths, are in reality little fascist states where freedom of speech is more rigidly excluded than vermin because felt to be more dangerous? It is a constant fight to besiege these live fortresses. Death and martyrdom abroad become vivid irrelevancies compared to the guerilla fought from day to day under threat of dislike and dismissal by those in whom democracy is a practical and particular passion, and not merely an opportunity for frothy partisanship.

This precariousness of democracy, far from damping our spirits, should console us about the present. That democracy is a culture means that we individually possess the power to uphold it; means that we cannot win or lose it all at once. The madness is in us and not in the dictator, if we think his violation of free democracy is an argument against it. Since when does a wave of burglaries reduce "Thou shalt not steal" to absurdity? Liberty, one and immutable, is impossible to achieve, but particular liberties are the reward of effort in a democratic culture. Only a sentimentalist or a cynic – there is in fact no difference between them – will despair because the dinner

which restores his spent energy does not remove the need of future dinners. So long as we continue our efforts, within the bounds of social peace, we are practical and have a chance of success. So soon as we give up and in despair adopt violence, we deserve what we get. As the hard-headed Hobbes says, "Every man ought to endeavor Peace in so far as he has hope of obtaining it." And he might have added: more often than we think, the endeavor justifies the hope.

2

A certain sort of practical mind may object that in any country, democratic or not, it is economic power that determines privilege, and that so long as we have one law for the rich and one for the poor, all boasts of nation-wide freedom will be idle. This is a fact, but we must not let it hypnotize us. The economic question is as old as man, though its overt recognition is new. Who offers to solve it out of hand? No one; though many propose a wonderful series of intermediate steps. What then is the choice before us? It is this: Can the solution of the economic problem be more readily attained under our limping system of theoretical-practical liberties, or under a system of absolute-paternal dictation? That and nothing else is the issue.

If any person or group held the answer, it might conceivably be practical to give up the right to criticize and let them dictate. But it turns out, the world over, that general disbelief in the dictator's scheme is enough to halt or wreck his plan. Inertia is fatal and coercion achieves nothing but . . . coercion. Consequently, that system is the more practical which leaves as many thinking minds as possible to grapple freely with the realities that hamper us.

This relation of the general intelligence to reality is the key relation in the modern world. The old governing classes could deal with economic facts far more readily than we. They could listen to the great landowners or the weavers of wool and placate them in turn, the rest being temporarily left to starve. But the increasing size of nations and interdependence of industries confront us with a tangle of interests no simple formula can solve. One

thing only is clear and that is the impossibility of a strict class government. Whether in fascist, communist, or democratic countries, the latest step in tacit political theory is the recognition that tolerating poverty is no longer safe. It is so unpleasant a reality that we hasten to clothe it with dignified names like Purchasing Power, Consumers' Strike, and Flow of Goods. But the reality beneath establishes against all reaction or sophistry the doctrine of social equality. All societies today are or seek the means of becoming egalitarian.

A great deal has been written on both sides about the popular slogan of Equality. On the one hand the signers of the Declaration of Independence have been called fools for putting their names to the "palpably false" statement that all men are born and created equal; and on the other, the expounders of Inequality have been attacked as schemers for snobbish privilege. The two parties have been struggling with each other rather than with the difficulty.

The source of the error lies in mistaking equality for similarity. Men, so runs the argument, are not equal, for look! some are clever and strong, others weak and stupid; some are scientists and some are street sweepers. The doctrine of equality has in fact nothing to do with personal character or acquired talent. It only asserts two things: one, that all men are to be treated alike in a few respects enumerated by law; the other, that the relative worth of any two men in the state being incommensurable, it is simplest and wisest to assume their equality. When a number of parts are indispensable to a machine, it is childish to argue which is more or less indispensable – the flywheel or the cotter pin. The analogy breaks down when the cost of replacing the smaller part is measured, but it is retrieved again in society by the fact that small parts form large classes who threaten ruin to the whole machine if left uncared for.

As a moving part, every social class is indispensable, at least until replaced. We still inflict or tolerate neglect of whole classes, trades, or geographical areas, but that neglect marks a limit in our powers, not in our insight. The welfare state means nothing else. It may be a complete or a mitigated failure in practice – that is a matter for debate; but it will go down

in history as the first large-scale popularization of the idea that a substantial and permanent equivalence of comfort, health, and economic security is the only means of saving such civilization as we have. The argument is familiar: it is for my children's sake that children in the slums must be kept in health. This must now be extended to read: it is for my security of life and livelihood that the slums themselves must go.

The steps by which substantial equality of income, of medical service, of educational opportunity, and the resulting freedom from animal cares, are to be achieved involve a multitude of technical matters most of the world as yet knows little about. Thinking about them yields – I speak for myself – a profound consciousness of ignorance. But the political idea of assuming equality from the outset relieves us of the questions which in present society form the greatest single obstacle to a better life. It is this same assumption of equality which in ordinary intercourse makes life not only pleasant but possible. If friends at my table were to be rationed according to their intelligence or moral worth, we should come to blows and never eat.

In the family, provided it is democratically run, everyone receives equivalent treatment: food and clothing appropriate to age and condition; training according to ability and inclination. At that point the means generally give out and social inequality or iniquity – it is the same thing – begins. Inequality limits everyone, including the rich, in freedom of movement, choice of friends, and pursuit of vocations; while it mars and shortens the lives of millions for whom the word “choice” has no meaning.

All this is appallingly true and the way out is by no means as plainly marked or as mysteriously preordained by History as some seem to think. The great danger is that seeing two needful things, a world physically fit to live in and a culture favorable to the free play of mind, we will strive in passionate spurts after intermediate goals that shut out one or the other of our desires. To relieve hunger we will jettison the first fruits of democratic freedom by regimenting everybody and his soul; while as upholders of culture and civilization we will shrink from losing our liberties in the doubtful hope of feeding anonymous millions. Those who face the dilemma as a dilemma are nowadays branded with the odious name of Liberal, whereas those who

impale themselves on one of the horns offer up thanks that God made them men of action.²

Paradoxically enough, action, force, violence, are attractive shortcuts to the weary. History can show page upon page of interregnums when for fifteen or twenty years everybody was active, forceful, “practical.” Those are the periods of civil war, the “times of troubles.” In the end, the real efficiency turns out to be hard brainwork by a king or minister who begins the task of reconstruction by assuming the equality of groups and interests and persons within the state.

In our day the boasts of efficiency, brisk action, elimination and extermination, purging and purifying, are so many admissions of inefficiency and panic fear. To say “off with his head” is not to govern but to shirk governing.

The answer to difficulty never lies in theatricalism. The dilemma cannot be solved by anything but intelligent action, which means not intelligence or action by itself, but both working together at the multitude of particular problems that constitute the total difficulty. In a democracy, of all places, we must not pretend that “intelligent” is a term of praise and despise it in our hearts. If the economic realities I spoke of before are increasingly hard to get at, the political problems with which they are entangled are even more complex, and no machinery other than the human brain can cope with them. It matters little whose brains it is, provided we do not all abdicate responsibility in our neighbor’s favor. Shortly before Austria went fascist, in 1938, Schuschnigg is reported to have said that 25 per cent of the population were for him, 25 per cent for Hitler, and that the rest would go the way the cat jumped. This principle deserves the name of Schuschnigg’s Constant. The only doubt is whether he did not grossly exaggerate the number of those having opinions.

Except in moments of national stress, – war, elections, party rallies, or Olympic Games, – how real is the communion of ideas or feelings among the parts of a nation? In other words, how fluid and free is our culture, upon

²The comparison, which has often been made, of the Liberal to Hamlet is a misreading of the play. Hamlet “acts” almost from the beginning, and, far from hugging indolence, sets off a revolution and ends by strewing the stage with corpses.

which depends not only the particular choice of the moment but the possibility of making future choices? We are compelled to admit that for many the only social question is to keep alive. *Primum vivere, deinde philosophari*; first have a job, then perhaps have opinions. It is a small articulate minority who, having opinions, assume that their preoccupations are high matters; their knowledge and desires common knowledge and common desires. Yet so strongly do they project their feelings that they succeed in indoctrinating large masses of men with at least the catchwords of the contest, and use the masses' perennial wants as motive power for their side.

This mixture of realism and deception in political struggles is what makes government a cultural problem. When we alternately use and deplore superstition, spread or combat propaganda, we are not shadowboxing but coping in earnest with opinion; the whole aim of disinterested leadership and education being to raise the quality of common opinions and make them fit the increasing complexities in our path. At any moment in the life of a democracy, there are real predicaments and verbal formulations. The verbalizing is made up of vague feelings, new ideas, old tags of doctrine and hints of future bliss. Politics is the attempt to hitch them all together and pull out of the morass in some one direction.

It is here that the rival methods of free democracy and fascism most clearly show their difference. Free democracy permits everyone to take part in life as a cultural agent, and not merely as a pawn. It secures him the privilege of forming and criticizing opinions. This is not an idealization of the facts: the democratic tendency is to publish, argue, circulate novelty, defend small sects and vindicate original minds.³ Totalitarianism of every brand, though unable to escape the necessity of palaver,⁴ tends to stay at the lowest level of conceptual effort by telling the masses they are the bearers of light or the intended victims of foreign plotters, imperialists, warmongers.

³A citizen of the United States or the United Kingdom, for example, can buy the works of Veblen or Marx or Burke or Saint Augustine; can talk as he pleases about politics, consort with whom he chooses, and vote without supervision from the soldiery. Instances of coercion exist, but they are still regarded as abnormal, shameful, and injurious.

⁴See Chapter 9

And behind the barrage of words, the complicated tasks of government go on as usual in the hands of the few.⁵

The cultural basis of democracy is, I hope, proved: Government is a medium as well as a device and we breathe in it twenty-four hours a day.

3

It now remains to see what kind of intelligence, what individual faiths and habits of mind, make for democratic culture. A century and a quarter ago, Tocqueville visited the United States and said, “I know of no country in which there is so little independence of mind and freedom of discussion as in America.” His whole report on the young republic, which he had approached with sympathy and enthusiasm, is pervaded by this limitation, so that the motto of his book could have been “Democracy in America is not Free Democracy.”

Things have changed since 1831. The United States is a free democracy, but we who live in it are still afraid of discussion. We prefer kindness to intelligence, boosting to knocking, conformity to criticism. We dread unpopularity and so court one another with lies, as minions used to court princes, to their joint peril in this world and the next. From our habit of combining in groups to extort blackmail from some other temporarily helpless group (which retaliates at the first opportunity), we have come to forget the reason for our combining. Parties extort loyalty within, that they may extort material advantage without: seemingly a “practical” move but one which, systematically carried out, kills freedom – specifically, free talk, free action, free friendship, free fancy.

The trouble is that we undervalue the comforts of conscience and the power of ideas, while grossly overvaluing our brute strength in a world choked with groups, leagues, guilds, and unions. Oddly enough, we concede the power of ideas in our opponents. We call their ideas “myths” and treat them with a kind of awe, not seeing that our own faith in diversity, our own interest in ideas, is a perfectly good and workable myth. By ideas I do not

⁵See Chapter 11

mean pedantry or meditation. I mean simply attending with all our mind to the matter in hand and resisting the seduction of such absolutes as I shall define in a moment. As for the man of ideas, he is anyone who uses his head to cope with the difficulty before him; the illiterate immigrant is as often a man of ideas as the college graduate is a dolt. The power to propel a thought even a half inch beyond the vulgar notion is in fact the only thing that divides the intellectual class from the rest. The rest are no doubt the backbone of the nation, but as in the human body so in the body politic, the backbone stops just short of the head.

Holding radical opinions is by no means a guarantee that one belongs to the thinking part. It is just as easy to be blind on the Left as on the Right. The only difference to human history is that the point of resistance to reality comes sooner or later in chronological time. How to stick to principle or social aim while facing facts as they are is the peculiar problem for human intelligence in a democratic culture, and this reliance on brain power always implies that it is free, that the choice is real. Hence, the need of resisting absolutes – that is, party labels, rigid loyalties, simple rules of thumb, easy or cynical fatalism. Anybody can take sides when things are labeled “revolutionary,” “reactionary,” or “democratic.” But what is it we are asked to believe, to consent to, to support? What value is there in opinions that flow from us like the saliva in Pavlov’s dogs, at the ringing of a bell? And again, if our fate is mechanically ground out by the omnipotence of interests, then why indulge in so much talk and print? If talk and print play their part, then why handle them like a mace, incapable of flexible and pointed use?

The totalitarian may have said in his heart, “There is no justice,” but the facts rebuke him. Has the democratic, popular opposition to the police state crystallized around material interests? Not in the least. It has become significant in defense of men representing Opinion in the arts and sciences: university professors, shy scholars, childlike mathematicians – all manner of mild life which is commonly thought to deserve pity and contempt. Basque children, poverty-stricken Jews, ignorant peasants, even remote tribes from the bush of unfamiliar continents – these have concentrated democratic pas-

sion, expressed in money and lives. Where is the interest? What miracle has united one-time antagonists, divided by politics and religion, if not a vast vested interest of Intellect against a totalitarian mass confessing that it has given up its will, its intelligence, and consequently its fate, into the hands of absolutists?

In the United States, where democratic culture is even now making lively efforts to insure its survival, by criticism, persuasion, and professions of faith, it would be insidious to separate by class, or in any other a priori fashion, the culture-carriers from the culture-destroyers. Each man does that for himself by taking his place. But the ideas that are in the air, the practices we find in use, can and must be tested for their fitness to serve democracy. I have tried to show in this chapter that free democracy is a form of culture, a habit of thought that must be defended in the teeth of all oppressive forces, those within us as well as those around us. Those within us take the form of ideas; those around us we experience as legal or social coercion. To deal with the latter we must not underrate the power of the former. Seemingly indifferent in themselves, ideas can lead to freedom or slavery by controlling the minds of those who control the legal or social force.

I have shown in a previous work⁶ by what steps the most remote and seemingly harmless scientific research has led to superstitious race-baiting in modern Europe. The academic idea has become an epidemic fact. It is first a cultural, then a political catastrophe. And we have only to look about us to find that the crassest and most destructive schemes invariably start by drafting art, science, and education on their side. Then the proscriptions begin. The same ideas can be windows on the world or strait jackets; they can paralyze or heighten our joys, resolve or arouse our fears. And with any idea, as I cannot repeat too often, it is our basic notion of its absolute truth and universal applicability that is our undoing. If we believe in absolute truths, how can we help murdering one another as heretics? And if that is indeed the practical way of using ideas to achieve peace and civilization, how can we help being saddled at a moment's notice with an absolute government

⁶*Race: A Study in Superstition*, New York, 1932 (Revised edition, Torchbooks, Harper, 1965).

which, quite possibly, will have got hold of some other absolute than our own?

We thoughtlessly repeat that the desire for absolutes is only the human desire for certainty and security, and that we cannot be rid of it. It is nothing so humanly interesting or spiritually dignified. Most often it is only our lazy habit of deciding the most pregnant issues by signs and tokens instead of looking at the things themselves. The absolute is commonly nothing more than a penny footrule applied to cases where we need complicated instruments of precision. In the realm of ideas it is a single arbitrary notion used where we need a many-sided concept. True, much of our life is mechanical and we cannot help ourselves. When the light is green, we go. It is convenient, but at a price. There comes a time when by a concurrence of circumstances green means danger, and we all rush headlong to disaster. The reverse also holds, and like the little girl in the tale who would not learn to read, we run away from a sign saying "Free Lemonade" because we associate all signs with dangerous bulls. To put it plainly, nine times out of ten we cannot read the signs, which may be why we judge by color, asking: "Is he a Red?" instead of "What is he saying?" All the more reason why, to avoid the fatal reflex action of the Montagues and the Capulets, we must cherish intellectual democracy: we need one another's eyes.

Whatever the dogmatist may feel about it, this relativist, instrumental philosophy is the philosophy of free democracy par excellence; it is rooted in its culture and it stands confirmed by the two great techniques of the human mind which are synonymous with civilization – science and art. Science, of course, we accept as "modern" and useful, but not understanding its bearing (as I shall show) we erect it also into a sinister cast-iron absolute of which racialism is only one manifestation. Simultaneously we neglect the lesson of art. We take it for a pastime of the ivory tower or else for a convenient tool of political propagandists. We forget that it has a function as the organizer of our manifold human desires. In fact we have to be aroused by the follies of Nazis and revolutionist talk to see that art contributes directly to our well-being. Fortunately our democratic practice is often better than our principles: if art and scholarship were entities remote from life, there would

have been no point in giving asylum to Einstein and Thomas Mann. If art were the plaything of dilettantes or a conspiracy of highbrows, there would be no need to worry about the alleged decadence of democratic society. Since we do worry about it, we must repel the raids of political propagandists upon the arts, square our daily thinking with our pretensions to civilized life, in short, defend our stake in twentieth-century culture for the sake of that wider culture which is democracy.