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THE RACE QUESTION IN MODERN SCIENCE

RACE AND CULTURE

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The nature of men is identical; what divides them is their customs.

CONFUCIUS, 551-478 B.C.

After causing innumerable casualties, the second world war ended with the defeat of Nazi Germany and her allies. The National Socialists had won to power on the strength of their racist ideology, and more particularly of their anti-Semitism, and it was in the name of that ideology that they went to war to «unite all Germans in a greater Germany» and force recognition of German superiority on the whole world. Thus the fall of Adolf Hitler lent colour to the assumption that racism was dead. However, such a view both assumes the non-existence of forms of racism other than the Hitlerite, admittedly the most extreme and virulent of them, and overlooks the strong conviction of most white people—even those who do not on that account consider themselves racists—of their congenital superiority.

Admittedly, the white man has something to be proud of in his great inventions and discoveries, his technical equipment and his political power. It is questionable, however, whether these achievements have yet brought a greater sum of happiness to mankind as a whole. For instance, it can hardly be claimed that the pigmy hunter of the Congo forests lives a life less well adjusted than a European or American factory worker. Nor should we forget that, though science has brought us undeniable progress in such fields as sanitation, for instance, it has also enabled us to perfect the means of destruction to such a point that for some decades past, armed conflicts have been truly cataclysmic in their effects. Be that as it may, and despite his consciousness that the civilization he regards as the only one worthy of the name is increasingly threatened with overthrow from within and without, the Western white man still claims the right of passage at the great cross roads to which his means of communication have reduced the world. A lack of historical perspective prevents his realizing not merely how recent is his privileged position, but how transitory it may prove, and he regards it as a sign that he is predestined to create the values which men of other races and other cultures are at best
merely capable of receiving from him. Though he will readily admit that a number of inventions have come to him from the Chinese (to whom he is willing to concede a modicum of «brains» and wisdom, and that such things as jazz have been given to him by the Negro (whom he nevertheless persists in regarding as an overgrown child), he is persuaded that his culture is of his own exclusive making and that only he can claim to have received—by right of blood and character—a «civilizing mission».

In an article recently published in the Unesco Courier, Dr. Alfred Metraux (an ethnographer whose work has covered perhaps more of the world than that of any other) wrote: «Racism is one of the most disturbing phenomena of the great revolution of the modern world. At the very time when industrial civilization is penetrating to all points of the globe and is uprooting men of every colour from their age-old traditions, a doctrine, speciously scientific in appearance, is invoked in order to rob these men of their full share in the advantage of the civilization forced upon them.

«There exists in the structure of Western civilization a fatal contradiction. On the one hand, it wishes and insists that certain cultural values, to which it attributes the highest virtues, be assimilated by other people. But, conversely, it will not admit that two-thirds of humanity is capable of attaining this standard which it has set up. Ironically, the worst sufferers from racial dogma are usually the people whose intellect most forcibly demonstrates its falseness.»

By an irony as strange, the more capable the so-called inferior races prove themselves of attaining emancipation, the more emphatic grows the assertion of racial dogma, stiffened by the coloured races’ acquisition of a minimum of political rights or by their emergence as competitors. And the crowning paradox is that, to provide a rational justification for their blind prejudice, appeal is made to our age’s Gods—science and scientific objectivity.

It is true, as the writer of the article points out, that there has been no lack of anthropologists to condemn the arbitrary basis adopted for the classification of the human species into different groups and to maintain the proposition that a pure race is an impossibility. Moreover, it may today be taken as proved that «race» is a purely biological concept, from which—at least in the present stage of our knowledge—it is impossible to draw any valid conclusion whatever as to the disposition or mental capacity of a particular individual.
Nevertheless, racism, overt or covert, continues to be a baneful influence, and the majority of people still regard the human species as falling into distinct ethnic groups, each with its own mentality transmissible by heredity. It is accepted by them as basic truth that, despite the faults which must be recognized in the white race and the innate virtues they are prepared to concede to other races, the highest type of humanity is, if not the whole, at least the best, of the white race.

The error vitiating this apparent scientific justification of race prejudice lies in failure to distinguish between natural and cultural traits or, i.e., innate characteristics traceable to a man's ethnic origin, and those deriving from background and upbringing. All too often we fail, ignorantly or wilfully, to distinguish this social heritage from the racial heritage in the shape of physical peculiarities (for instance, pigmentation and other less striking characteristics). While there are undoubtedly very real psychological differences between individuals, which may be due in part to the subjects' individual biological ancestry (though our knowledge of the subject is still very vague), they can in no instance be explained by what is commonly called the individual's "race", i.e., the ethnic group of which he is a member by descent. Similarly, while history has seen the development of distinctive civilizations and there are differences of varying degrees between contemporary human societies, the explanation must not be sought in the racial evolution of mankind (brought about by such factors as changes in the combination or structure of the genes—the elements determining heredity—by hybridization and natural selection) which has produced variations from what was probably an ancestral stock common to all humanity. The differences in question are cultural variations and cannot be explained either in terms of biological background or even of the influence of geographical setting, impossible though it is to overlook the importance of this last factor as at least one element in the situation with which a society must cope.

Although the source of race prejudice must be sought elsewhere than in the pseudo-scientific ideas which are less its cause than its expression and although these ideas are of merely secondary importance as a means of justifying and commending prejudices, they still continue to deceive many often well-meaning people, and it is thus important to combat them.
The object of the present paper then is to set out what we are entitled to regard as generally acknowledged regarding the respective influence of race and culture. We have to show that, apart from his personal experience, a given individual is principally indebted for his psychological conditioning to the culture in which he was brought up, the latter being itself the product of history. We have to convince the world that, far from being the more explicit expression of something instinctive, race prejudice is a prejudice in the truest and worst sense—i.e., a preconceived opinion—cultural in origin and barely three centuries old, which has grown up and taken the form we know today for economic and political reasons.
I. SCOPE AND CONCEPT OF «RACE»

The concept of race might at first sight be thought to be very simple and obvious: for instance an American office worker in Wall Street, a Viet-Namese carpenter building a junk, or a peasant of the Guinea Coast are men of three quite distinct races—white, yellow and black—whose ways of life are widely different, whose languages are not the same and who in all probability follow different religions. We accept without question that each of these three men represents a distinct variant of the human species, in the light of their differences not only in physique but in dress, occupation and (in all probability) in mentality, thinking, behaviour and briefly, all that goes to make up personality. As our most immediate impression of a person is of his bodily appearance, we are quick to assume a necessary connexion between external physical appearance and manner of life and thought: we feel that in the nature of things, the white employee will pass his spare time in reading, the yellow man in gambling and the black in singing and dancing. We tend to see race as the primary factor from which all the rest follows, and the reflection that today there are large numbers of men of the yellow and black races pursuing the same occupations and living under the same conditions as whites only makes us feel that there is something freakish or at best artificial about it, as though the real man had been given a kind of veneer making him less «natural».

We perceive clear-cut differences between the three major groups into which most scientists are agreed in dividing the human species, Caucasians (or whites), Mongols and Negroes. However, the question grows more complex the moment we consider the fact of interbreeding between these groups. An individual with one white and one black parent is what is called a «mulatto». But should the mulatto be classified as white or black? A white man, even if not an avowed racist, will in all probability regard the mulatto as a «coloured man» and will tend to include him among the blacks, but this classification is glaringly arbitrary, since
from the anthropological point of view, the heredity of the mulatto is at least as much white as black. We therefore have to realize that, while there are men who can be classified as white, black or yellow, there are others whose mixed ancestry prevents their due classification.

**RACE DIFFERS FROM CULTURE, LANGUAGE AND RELIGION**

In the case of the major racial groups, classification is relatively simple though there are doubtful cases (for instance, are Polynesians Caucasians or Mongoloids?). There are peoples who indisputably belong to one of the three branches; no one could cavil at the statement that an Englishman belongs to the white race, a Baoulé to the black or a Chinese to the yellow. It is when we attempt to make sub-divisions within the three main divisions that we begin to see how equivocal is the commonly held idea of race.

To say that an Englishman is a member of the white race, obviously admits of no argument and is indeed the merest common sense. It is, however, absurd to talk about a 'race' or even to regard the English as being of the 'Nordic' race. In point of fact, history teaches that, like all the people of Europe, the English people has become what it is through successive contributions by different peoples. England is a Celtic country, partially colonized by successive waves of Saxons, Danes and Normans from France, with some addition of Roman stock from the age of Julius Caesar onwards. Moreover, while an Englishman can be indentified by his way of dressing, or even by his behaviour, it is impossible to tell that he is an Englishman merely from his physical appearance. Among the English, as among other Europeans there are both fair people and dark, tall men and short, and (to follow a very common anthropological criterion) dolichocephalics (or long-headed people) and brachycephalics (or people with broad heads. It may be claimed that an Englishman can readily be identified from certain external characteristics which give him a 'look' of his own: restraint in gesture (unlike the conventional gesticulating southerner), gait and facial expression all expressing what is usually included under the rather vague term of 'phlegm'. However, anyone who made this claim would be likely to be found at fault in many instances, for by no means all the English have these characteristics,
and even if they are the characteristics of the «typical Englishman», the fact would still remain that these outward characteristics are not «physical» in the true sense: bodily attitudes and motions and expressions of the face all come under the heading of behaviour; and being habits determined by the subject's social background, are cultural, not «natural». Moreover though loosely describable as «traits», they typify not a whole nation, but a particular social group within it and thus cannot be included among the distinctive marks of race.

Accordingly any confusion between «race» and «nation» must be avoided and there are sound reasons against the misuse of the terms, even in speech.

At first sight it might seem to make little difference to use the term «Latin Race» instead of the correct «Latin civilization». There never was a Latin Race, i.e. (in Professor H. E. Vallois' definition) a «natural group of men displaying a particular set of common hereditary physical characteristics», but there was a people of Latin speech and its civilization spread over the greater part of Western Europe and even parts of Africa and the East, to include a wide variety of peoples. Thus «Latinity» was not confined to Italy nor even to Mediterranean Europe and today its traces can be found in countries (e.g., England and Western Germany) whose peoples do not regard themselves as being a part of the Latin world of today. Here the kinship with Latin civilization is as undeniable as the proportion of Latin blood is obviously minute.

There has been similar—and notoriously disastrous—muddled thinking about the «Aryan» race. There never was an Aryan race and all we are entitled to infer is the existence in the second millennium before our era of a group of peoples inhabiting the steppes of Turkistan and Central Russia with a common «Indo-European» language and culture, who overran or influenced a very wide area so that their tongue is the ancestor of many others including Sanskrit, Ancient Greek, Latin and the majority of the languages spoken in Europe today. Quite obviously, the use of a common language does not mean that all individuals speaking it are of the same race, since the fact that one person speaks Chinese while another speaks English or Arabic or Russian is determined, not by biological heredity, but by what each has been taught.

A similar confusion, which unhappily appears far from
being resolved today, concerns the Jews, who are also deemed to be a race where as the only valid criteria for determining membership of the group are confessional (adherence to the Jewish faith) or at most, cultural, i.e., the survival of certain modes of behaviour not directly religious in origin, but common to Jews of different countries, as a result of the long segregation imposed by Christianity and still continuing to some extent. Originally the Hebrews were Semitic-language pastoralists like the Arabs of today, but at an early stage in their history, there was intermixture between them and other peoples of the Near East, including the Hittites, whose language was of the Indo-European group, as well as such major episodes as the sojourn in Egypt, terminated by the Exodus (second millenium, B.C.), the Babylonian captivity (sixth century B.C.), the Hellenization of Alexander’s day (fourth century B.C.), and conquest by Rome. Thus even before the Diaspora (dispersion) throughout the Roman Empire following the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus (A.D. 70), there was intensive interbreeding. In antiquity the Jewish people appears to have been made up of nearly the same racial elements as the Greeks of the Islands and Asia Minor. Today Jews are so little recognizable anthropologically—despite the existence of a so-called Jewish «type», which itself differs as between the Ashkenazim or Northern and the Sephardim or Southern, Jews—that the Nazis themselves were forced to use special badges to distinguish them and to adopt a religious criterion to determine who were Jews: those persons were considered as of Jewish race whose ancestry included a prescribed number of practising Jews. Such inconsistencies are typical of doctrines like racism, which have no hesitation in doing violence to the facts of science and even to common sense as their political needs require.

WHAT IS A RACE?

We have seen then that a national community is not a race and that race cannot be defined in terms of common culture, language or religion. Further, emigration by the white and yellow races and the slave trade in the case of the black, have made it impossible to draw clear lines of geographical demarcation between the three major racial groups. This means that we must approach the question of race from the
standpoint of physical anthropology—the only one from which such a concept (essentially biological since it relates to heredity) can have any validity—and then go on to consider whether the fact of an individual's belonging to a particular race has psychological implications which might tend to differentiate him from the cultural point of view.

As we have seen, the concept of «races» is in essence that the species *Homo sapiens* can be sub-divided into groups equivalent to botanical «varieties» in terms of certain transmissible physical characteristics. Even from this angle the question is of some delicacy because no single characteristic can be selected as the criterion for the definition of a race (for instance, there are dark-skinned Hindus, but they are differentiated from Negroes in too many other particulars for it to be possible to place both in the same category). Moreover, each of the characteristics on which we must go admits of a considerable degree of variation from the norm—so much so that, far from accurately reflecting the facts, any division into categories must be arbitrary. In practice, a race—or sub-race—may be defined as a group whose members' physical characteristics conform, on average, to those arbitrarily selected as differentials, and there will be overlapping between peoples: for instance, the lighter-skinned individuals, in peoples classified as of the black race, will on occasion be no more—or even less—pigmented than the darkest skinned individuals in populations classified as white. Thus, instead of arriving at a table of races displaying clear-cut divisions, all that can be isolated are groups of individuals who may be regarded as typical of their races because they present all the characteristics accepted as distinguishing these races, but who have congers lacking some of those characteristics or displaying them in a less marked form. Should we then conclude that these typical individuals are representative of the pure or almost pure stock of the race in question, whereas the remainder are mere mongrels?

Nothing entitles us to make such a statement. The Mendelian law of heredity shows the biological heritage of the individual as consisting of a long series of characteristics contributed by both parents which (to borrow the image used by Ruth Benedict) «have to be conceived not as ink and water mingling but as a pile of beads sorted out anew for every individual». Novel arrangements of these elements occur so constantly in new individuals that a multitude of
different combinations is produced in no more than a few generations. Thus the «typical specimen» in no sense reflects the former and «purer» state of the race, but is merely a statistical concept expressing the frequency of certain distinctive combinations.

Hence, from the genetic point of view, it would appear impossible to regard the world population of today as other than more or less a hodgepodge, since the widest variety of types occurs from the prehistoric epoch downwards and the indications are that folk migrations and considerable intermingling took place very early in the evolution of mankind. For instance, as far as Europe is concerned, in the lower palaeolithic period we already find two distinct species: *Homo Heidelbergensis* and *Eoanthropus Dawsoni*, both rather simian in appearance. Then a number of races succeed each other: in the Middle Palaeolithic epoch we have the Neanderthal Man (who may be either a very primitive variety of the species *Homo sapiens* or a separate species); in the upper Palaeolithic age we first find representatives of *Homo sapiens* of today; the Cro-Magnon stock (of whom the Canary Islanders, descended from the ancient Guanches, may well be a modern remnant) and the quite distinct Chancelade and Grimaldi races (of a type reminiscent of the Negroid races of today). In the mesolithic period we find a mixture of races in existence from which there emerged in the neolithic period the Nordic, the Mediterranean and the Alpine types, who, up to our day, have constituted the essential anthropological elements in the population of Europe.

In the case of small societies, relatively stable and isolated (e.g., an Eskimo community living in an almost closed «hunting» economy) the representatives of the various clans making up the community have approximately the same heredity. Here, it is possible to talk of racial purity, but not in the case of larger groups where crossings between families and the introduction of heterogeneous elements have occurred on an extensive scale. Applied to large groups with an eventful past and distributed over wide areas, the word «race» means merely that it is possible to go beyond the differences between nations or tribes and identify groups characterized by the occurrence of physical features which are, to some extent temporary, since for demographic reasons alone, the groups concerned are in constant evolution and the historic process of contacts and blending continues.
WHAT DOES THE INDIVIDUAL MAN OWE TO HIS RACE?

It may be taken, then, that from the point of view of physical anthropology, the species Homo sapiens consists of a number of races or groups differentiated by the frequency of particular physical traits which—be it remembered—represent only a mere fraction of a biological heritage otherwise common to all human beings. Although it follows that the similarities between men are much greater than the differences, we are inclined to regard as fundamental differences which are really no more than variations on the same theme, for, just as we are likely to notice much more difference between the faces of our immediate neighbours than between those of persons strange to us, so a quite false impression of great physical differences between the various races of men is reinforced by the fact of such differences between our own kind being more striking than those between varieties of other species.

The temptation to postulate psychological differences from such differences in external aspect is the stronger in that the men of different races in practice often have different cultures. There is not merely a physical but a mental difference between a magistrate in one of our great cities and a notable of the Congo. However, the mental difference between them is not a necessary corollary of the physical, but a consequence merely of their belonging to two different cultures and even so is not so great as to preclude the finding of certain resemblances between the two men arising from their roughly analogous positions in their respective societies, just as a Norman and a Mandigo peasant, both living off their own holdings, are likely to present some points of resemblance additional to those common to all men.

The assumption has often been made that what white men imagine to be the primitive features in the physique of coloured peoples are indicative of mental inferiority. Even the premise is vitiated by its naïveté, as the thinner-lipped, and hairier white man more closely resembles the anthropoid in these respects than does the Negro. As to mental inferiority, neither anthropological research on such subjects as the weight and structure of the brain in the different races nor psychologists' attempts at direct evaluation of relative intellectual capacity have produced any proof of it.

It has indeed been found that on average the Negro brain weighs a little less than the European, but the difference
(considerably less than can be found between the brains of individual members of one race) is so minute that no conclusions can be drawn from it, while the fact that the brains of a number of great men have been found, after death, to be below average size shows that a greater weight of brain does not necessarily mean greater intelligence.

As regards psychological tests, in proportion as we have learned better how to make allowance for the influence of the physical and social environment (the influence of the state of health, social setting, upbringing, standard of education, etc.) the results have pointed increasingly to a fundamental equivalence in the intellectual attributes of all human groups. In the present condition of science it is not possible to say of a particular race that it is more (or less) «intelligent» than another. While it can undoubtedly be shown that a member of a poor and isolated group—or of a lower social class—is handicapped vis-à-vis the members of a group living under better economic conditions (e.g., better nourished, living under healthier conditions and with more incentives), this proves nothing as to the aptitudes which the less privileged individual might display in a more favourable setting.

Similarly, in assuming the superiority of so-called «primitives» over the «civilized» as regards sensory perception—a superiority regarded as a kind of counterweight to their assumed inferiority intellectually—we are jumping to conclusions and failing to give proper weight to the former's training in observation: a member, say of a community living mainly by hunting and food-gathering, acquires notable superiority over the civilized man in the interpretation of visual, auditory and olfactory impressions, skill in finding his way, etc. . . . and here again, the operative factor is cultural rather than racial.

Lastly, research into character has not been able to show that it is dependant on race: the widest varieties of character are found in all ethnic groups, and there is no reason whatever for assuming greater uniformity under this head in any particular group. For instance, to assume a tendency to irresponsibility in the Negro and to contemplation in the average oriental is to draw a false conclusion from incomplete data: probably white people would be less inclined to picture the Negro as irresponsible if these ideas of him were not based on individuals deprived by slavery or colonization of their natural background and forced by their
masters to tasks to which they can bring no interest. Quite
apart from its possibly debasing effect on its victims, such
a life leaves them with little choice save between revolt and
a resigned or smiling fatalism, which may indeed mask the
spirit of rebellion. Similarly, even without the example of
Japan's emergence as a full-fledged imperialist power after
centuries of almost uninterrupted peace abroad and concen-
tration mainly on questions of etiquette and aesthetic values,
we should be less inclined to regard the yellow man as
naturally contemplative if, from the beginning, we had
gained our impression of China, not from her philosophers
and the inventions for which we are indebted to her, but
from the realistic literature which, like the licentious novel
Kin P'ing Mei, first published in 1610, shows us a type of
Chinese more inclined to riotous gallantry than to art and
mysticism.

Accordingly, the conclusion to be drawn alike from the
anthropological and the psychological researches of the last
30 to 40 years is that the racial factor is very far from being
the dominant element in the formation of personality. This
should be no cause for astonishment if we remember that
psychological traits cannot be transmitted direct as part of
the heredity (for instance, there is no gene governing mind-
wandering or power of concentration) which in this sphere
comes into play only so far as it affects the organs through
which the psychological mechanisms operate, such as the
nervous system and the endocrine glands. These, though
of real importance in the determination of the affective make-
up of normal individuals, obviously exercise a more limited
influence on the intellectual and moral qualities compared
with that of differences of environment. Under this head the
major factors are the character and intellectual level of the
parents (owing to the growing child's intimate contact with
them), both social and academic training, religious teaching
and training in self-mastery, source of livelihood and place in
society, in other words elements in no respect traceable to
the individual's biological heredity and still less to his race,
but largely determined by the setting in which he grows
up, the society of which he is a part and the culture to which
he belongs.
II. MAN AND HIS CULTURES

It is a long-standing and widespread Western habit of mind to regard the converse of «civilization» as «savagery» (the state of life of the «savage», in Latin silvaticus, the man of the woods), urban life being taken, rightly or wrongly, as a symbol of refinement in contrast to the supposedly cruder life of forest or bush, and to divide the human race into two categories in terms of these two opposing ways of life. It is accepted as true that parts of the world are inhabited by peoples classifiable on the above basis as savages and held to have risen comparatively little above the level of the beasts, while in other regions there are highly evolved or sophisticated «civilized» peoples essentially differentiated from the first category as being par excellence the trustees and apostles of culture.

The colonial expansion which began with the maritime discoveries of the late fifteenth century introduced the Western stock even into the regions furthest from Europe in space and most unlike in climate, and, temporarily at least, Western suzerainty was imposed there and Western culture imported. One consequence was the prevalence in the West until recently, of the view—naively egocentric notwithstanding their grounds for pride in their impressive technological progress—that civilization and culture were synonymous with the Western varieties, if only, in the latter case, the culture of the most privileged classes in the West. The exotic peoples with whom the Western nations made contact either as subject races in their colonies or in their search for products unobtainable in Europe, or new markets for their goods or incidentally to their dispositions for the safeguarding of their earlier conquests, were regarded either as untamed «savages» ruled by their instincts, or, in the case of peoples deemed inferior but anyhow semi-civilized, as «barbarians», the contemptuous name given by Ancient Greece to foreigners. The position today is that the majority of Occidentals, whether they regard the way of life of the so called «uncultured» peoples as approximately that of
the beasts or as «primitive» in the sense of Paradisiac, believe that there are «wild men» in the world—beings without civilization representing a phase in the history of humanity analogous to that of childhood in the life of the individual.

Either their noteworthy architectural remains or their close contacts with the classical world (Greece and Rome) fairly early enabled certain major Oriental cultures—or successive series of cultures—to secure acceptance by the West, and Egypt, Phoenicia and Palestine in the Near East, Assyria, Chaldea and Persia, in the Middle East were all sufficiently well known for swift acknowledgement of their title to be described as civilizations worthy of the name. Similarly, India, China, Japan and the great states of pre-Columbian America were not long in receiving their due and no one today would dispute their right to a place of high honour at the very least in any general history of humanity. However, it took the West much longer to realize that peoples little advanced technologically and with no written language as we understand it—like the majority of the black races of Africa, the Melanesians and Polynesians, the modern Indians of North and South America and the Eskimo—nevertheless have their own «civilization», i.e., a culture which, even among the humblest of them, at some moment showed itself possessed of some power of expansion (even if that power is now lost or the culture is shrinking) and which is broadly common to a number of societies over a reasonably extensive geographical area.

The knowledge of anthropology (now a systematic discipline) possessed by Western science of the middle twentieth century warrants the assertion that there is no extant group of human beings today which can be described as being «in the natural state». For confirmation we need look no further than the elementary fact that nowhere in the world is there a people who leave the human body in an absolutely natural state, without clothing, adornment or some modification (tattooing, scarification or other forms of mutilation), as though—whatever the diversity of the forms taken by what the West calls modesty—the human body in its pristine state could not be tolerated. The truth is that «natural man» is a figment of the mind and the note which distinguishes Man from the animal world is essentially that he has a culture, whereas the beasts have not, for lack of the capacity for abstract thought, needed for the development of systems of conventional symbols such as language, or the retention for
future use of the tools made for a specific task. While it may not be an adequate definition of man to say that he is a social animal (since a very wide variety of other species are gregarious), he is sufficiently differentiated if described as possessing culture, since he is unique among living creatures in employing such artificial aids as speech and tools in his dealing with his fellows and his environment.

WHAT IS CULTURE?

Among human beings as among all other mammals, the general behaviour of the individual is determined partly by instinct (an item of his biological heritage), partly by his personal experience and partly by what he learns from other members of his species. In Man, however, with his unique powers of symbolizing, experience becomes more readily transmissible and in some sort «storable», since all the acquisitions of a generation can be conveyed to the next through language, and can thus develop into a «culture», a social legacy distinct from the biological legacy and from the acquisitions of the individual and definable in the terms adopted by Ralph Linton as «a configuration of learned behaviour and results of behaviour whose component elements are shared and transmitted by the members of a particular society».

Whereas race is strictly a question of heredity, culture is essentially one of tradition in the broadest sense, which includes the formal training of the young in a body of knowledge or a creed, the inheriting of customs or attitudes from previous generations, the borrowing of techniques or fashions from other countries, the spread of opinions through propaganda or conversation, the adoption—or «selling»—of new products or devices, or even the circulation of legends or jests by word of mouth. In other words, tradition in this sense covers provinces clearly unconnected with biological heredity and all alike consisting in the transmission, by word of mouth, image or mere example, of characteristics which, taken together, differentiate a milieu, society or group of societies throughout a period of reasonable length and thus constitute its culture.

As culture, then, comprehends all that is inherited or transmitted through society, it follows that its individual elements are proportionately diverse. They include not
only beliefs, knowledge, sentiments and literature (and illiterate peoples often have an immensely rich oral literature), but the language or other systems of symbols which are their vehicles. Other elements are the rules of kinship, methods of education, forms of government and all the fashions followed in social relations. Gestures, bodily attitudes and even facial expressions are also included, since they are in large measure acquired by the community through education or imitation; and so, among the material elements, are fashions in housing and clothing and ranges of tools, manufactures and artistic production, all of which are to some extent traditional. Far from being restricted to or identical with what is commonly implied in describing a person as «cultured» or otherwise (i.e., having a greater or lesser sum of knowledge of greater or lesser variety of the principle branches of arts, letters and science in their Western forms), that is, the ornamental culture which is mainly an outcrop of the vaster mass which conditions it and of which it is only a partial expression, culture in the true sense should be regarded as comprising the whole more or less coherent structure of concepts, sentiments, mechanisms, institutions and objects which explicitly or implicitly condition the conduct of members of a group.

In this context, a group's future is as truly the product of its culture as its culture is of its past, for its culture both epitomizes its past experience (what has been retained of the responses of its members in earlier generations to the situations and problems which confronted them) and also—and as a consequence—provides each new generation with a starting point (a system of rules and models of behaviour, values, concepts, techniques, instruments, etc.) round which it will plan its way of life and on which the individual will draw to some extent, and which he will apply in his own way and according to his own means in the specific situation confronting him. Thus it is something which can never be regarded as fixed for ever, but is constantly undergoing changes, sometimes small enough or slow enough to be almost imperceptible or to remain long unnoticed, sometimes of such scope or speed as to appear revolutionary.
CULTURE AND PERSONALITY

From the psychological point of view, the culture of a given society is the sum of the ways of thought, reactions and habits of behaviour acquired by its members through teaching or imitation and more or less common to them all.

Quite apart from individual variations (which by definition cannot be regarded as «cultural», as they do not pertain to the community), there is no question of all the facets of a given society's culture being displayed in all the members of that society. While some of its elements can be described as general, there are others which the mere division of labour (found in all contemporary societies, if only in the form of the allocation of trades and social functions between the two sexes and the various age groups) makes the preserve of certain recognized categories of individuals, others again peculiar to a particular family or set and yet others (opinions, tastes, choice of specific commodities or furniture) which are merely common to a number of individuals between whom there is otherwise nothing particular in common. This uneven occurrence of the individual items making up a culture is a consequence, direct or indirect, of the economic structure of a particular society and (in the case of societies where even a slightly more advanced division of labour prevails) of its subdivision into castes or classes.

While culture may vary between groups, sub-groups and to a certain extent families, and while it is more or less rigid and contains elements of varying compulsive force, it is at the same time a paramount factor in the shaping of individual personality.

Since personality consists in the sum of the outward behaviour and psychological attitudes distinguishing the individual—he being unique, whatever the general type under which he is classifiable—it is affected by a number of factors: biological heredity, which affects the physical organs, and also transmit a range of the comportments which are instinctive or more accurately «non-acquired»; the experience of the individual in his private life, at his work, and as a member of society—in other words, his life-story over the period (which may be lengthy) from birth until his character may be regarded as set; and his cultural background, whence he derives a proportion of his acquired behaviour by means of his social heritage.

Though biological heredity influences the personality of
the individual (to the extent to which his bodily characteristics and more particularly his nervous and glandular make-up are inherited), this is true of the family, rather than of the racial ancestry. Even where individual pedigrees are concerned, we lack the requisite knowledge of the biological make-up of all ancestors, so that in any case our knowledge of what an individual may owe to his heredity is scanty. Furthermore, it can be demonstrated that all normal men, whatever their race, have the same general equipment of non-acquired behaviour (research into child behaviour brings out clearly the similarity of initial responses and shows that the explanation of subsequent variations in behaviour can be explained by differences in individual make-up or by early training); thus, it is not in the so-called «instincts» that the differences between individuals reside. It must also be borne in mind that the true category of unlearned behaviour is confined to the basic reflexes, and the common tendency to extend it is an error, much behaviour so classified being in fact the result of habits acquired, though never explicitly taught, at so early an age as to give the impression of something inborn.

While undoubtedly there are idiosyncrasies, in addition to those distinguishing individuals, which may be broadly regarded as differentiating the members of a particular society from the rest of the world, it is under the head of acquired behaviour that they will be found; they are thus, by definition, cultural.

To judge of the importance of his culture as a factor in the formation of the individual's personality, we need only remember that it is not merely in the form of the heritage handed down to him through education that his group's culture affects him: it conditions his whole experience. He is born into the world in a particular physical environment (what one might call the bio-geographical habitat) and in a particular social setting. Even the first is not a «natural» but to some extent a «cultural» environment, for the habitat of a settled population (agriculturalists or city dwellers) is invariably of its own making to a greater or lesser degree, and, even in the case of nomadic groups, the physical environment will include artificial elements in the shape of tents, etc.; in addition, the impact on the individual of both the natural and the artificial elements in his environment is not direct but is modified by the culture (knowledge, beliefs and activities) of the group. The influence of the
social environment is twofold: direct, through the examples available to the newcomer in the behaviour of older members of his society and through the group's speech, in which the whole of its past experience is crystallized and which may therefore be likened to a concise encyclopaedia; and indirect, through the influence of the culture concerned on the personalities and the conduct towards the child of the individuals (e.g., parents) playing a prominent part in the subject's life, from early childhood—a crucial phase which will condition all later development.

In general, the individual is so thoroughly conditioned by his culture that even in the satisfaction of his most elementary needs—those which may be classified as biological because they are shared by man with the other mammals, e.g., feeding, protection and reproduction—he only breaks free of the bonds of custom in the most exceptional circumstances: a normal Western man will only eat dog if threatened with starvation, while many peoples would be utterly nauseated by foods which are a delight to us. Similarly, a man's choice of dress will be appropriate to his station (or to the rank for which he wishes to pass) and often custom, or fashion, will override practical considerations. Lastly, there is no society in which sexual life is absolutely free and, while the details may vary from culture to culture, there are rules everywhere against intercourse within prohibited degrees locally regarded as incestuous and hence criminal. It should also be noted that the individual is at least partially influenced by his culture even where he may seem furthest from the discipline of society: for instance, dreams are not, as was long believed, mere phantasies, but expressions of interests and conflicts which vary according to culture in terms of images drawn directly or indirectly from the cultural environment. Thus culture affects the life of the individual at every level and its influence is as apparent in the way in which a man satisfies his physical needs as in his ethics or his intellectual life.

The influence to be drawn from all this is that, while obviously there are variations in the psychological heritage of individuals, the fact of a man's belonging to a particular ethnic group affords no basis for deducing what are likely to be his aptitudes. On the other hand, the cultural environment is a factor of primary importance not merely because it determines what the individual learns and how he learns it, but because it is, in the strict sense the «environment»
within which and in terms of which he reacts. For instance, it is a safe assumption that, if an African baby were adopted at birth by whites and brought up as their own child, there would be no marked psychological differences imputable to his origin between him and his foster parents' natural children of the same sex; he would express himself in the same idiom with the same accent; he would have the same equipment of ideas, feelings and habits and would differ from his brothers and sisters by adoption only to the extent to which the members of any group fall short of uniformity, however great and numerous the analogies between them. It should, of course, be realized that this example is purely hypothetical as, even in an adoptive family free of race prejudice in any form, such a child would in fact be in a different position from the rest. For the experiment to be valid, one would have to be able to eliminate the probable influence on the subject (of unforeseeable effects and importance) of his being regarded as different from others, if not by his immediate circle, at least by other members of the same society. The point however is, that the special differentiating factor which might become operative would be not race but race prejudice, which, even without positive discrimination, puts its victims in a position differing in kind from that of persons whom no preconceived idea can cause to be regarded as not «like everyone else».

HOW CULTURES LIVE

Being identified with the way of life peculiar to a specified human society in a specified epoch, a culture, however slow its evolution, can never be entirely static. Insofar at least as it exists as an organized system, recognizable despite its variations, it is the apanage of a group which is constantly changing through the mere processes of death and birth. Its radius (i.e., «membership») may increase or decrease, but at every stage in its history, it consists exclusively of elements socially transmissible (by inheritance or borrowing) and hence—though there are bound to be modifications or even major alterations, with the rejection of former elements and the addition of new—the culture itself is able to continue through all the transformations of the fluid group it represents, and share its hazards or disasters, assimilate new elements and export certain of its own, more or less replace the
culture of a different group (through conquest or otherwise) or conversely be absorbed by another culture (leaving few, or no, visible traces behind it). Clearly, then, a culture is essentially a provisional and infinitely flexible system. Almost everywhere in the world we find the old comparing the way of life of the young unfavourably with «the good old days», and that in itself amounts to an explicit or implicit admission that customs have changed and that the culture of their society has evolved further. The change may be brought about in either of two ways, by invention or discovery within the society, or by borrowing (spontaneous or under constraint) from outside.

Even when they result from an invention (a new application of existing knowledge of any kind) or a discovery (the appearance of new knowledge, scientific or otherwise), innovations in a culture are never entirely original in that they never «start from scratch»: for instance, the invention of the loom not merely implied prior knowledge of certain laws and of other simpler mechanisms, but also the response to a need arising at a particular moment in the evolution of modern industry. Similarly, the discovery of America would have been impossible without the compass, while Christopher Columbus would never even have thought of sailing westwards if the march of events had not made a maritime trade route to the Indies a felt need. In the aesthetic sphere, the work of Phidias could never have come about without Polycletes, nor Andalusian folk music of today have developed without Arab music; and, as a last example, in the sphere of government, it was on Athenian life and aspirations already existing that Solon drew to endow his fellow citizens with a new Constitution, which in fact was no more than a codification of the existing social complex. Thus no invention, discovery or innovation can be ascribed exclusively to one individual. Inventors, or pioneers on other lines, are, indeed, found in all civilizations. However, an invention is not the result of a single flash of genius, but the last stage in a gradual advance, as the following sequence exemplifies: in 1663, the Marquess of Worcester devised a «steam fountain» on his estate near London, based on principles suggested about 50 years earlier by a Frenchman, Salomon de Caus. Later came the invention of the pressure boiler by another Frenchman, Denis Papin, leading in turn to that of the reciprocating engine by James Watt and the final step was George Stephenson’s construction of the
"Rocket" locomotive in 1814. Neither inventions nor discoveries are ever more than modifications, variable in their degree and their repercussions, which are the latest of a long series of earlier inventions and discoveries in a culture which is itself the work of a community and the product of indigenous innovations or borrowings from abroad by earlier generations. This is as true of innovations in religion, philosophy, art or ethics as of those in the various branches of science and technology. The work of great founders of religions (e.g., Buddha, Jesus or Mohammed) has never amounted to more than the more or less drastic reform of an existing religion or the combination of elements from a number of sources to construct a new creed. Again, it is traditional problems to which a culture's philosophers or moralists devote their time. The statement of the problems and the solutions propounded vary with the age, and divergent opinions on them may obtain concurrently, but nevertheless, the chain of tradition remains unbroken: each thinker takes up the question at the point where it was left by some predecessor.

It is not otherwise with works of literature or plastic art: however revolutionary it may seem, such work always has its antecedents, as with the cubists claiming aesthetic descent from the impressionist, Paul Cézanne, and finding in African Negro sculpture, not lessons only, but a precedent to justify their own experiments. Lastly, even in social relations in the strict sense, non-conformists of every variety—and there are such in all peoples and all circles—normally claim a precedent for their views and, if they make innovations, confine themselves to developing further or more consciously what has elsewhere remained more or less rudimentary. Thus a culture is clearly the work neither of a "culture hero" (as in so many mythologies) nor of a few great geniuses, inventors or law-givers; it is the fruit of co-operation. From a certain point of view, the earliest representatives of the human species might of all men be most legitimately described as "creators"; but even here we have to bear in mind that they had behind them not a void but the example of other species.

Generally speaking, Western man of our own day is dazzled by the inventions and discoveries which can be credited to his culture and is almost ready to think that he has a monopoly in this field. To make this assumption would be to forget firstly that discoveries such as Einstein's theory of
relativity or nuclear fission are the crown of a long process of evolution leading up to them and secondly that innumerable inventions, today out of date and their makers forgotten, showed in their age and place a degree of genius at least equal to that of the most famous of our own scientists. For instance, the primitive inhabitants of Australia made boomerangs which could return to the point from which they were thrown, with neither laboratories nor scientific research services to help them with the complex ballistic problems involved. Similarly the ancestors of the Polynesians of today, moving onward from island to island without compasses and with outrigger canoes as their only vessels, accomplished feats in no wise inferior to those of Christopher Columbus and the great Portuguese navigators.

FECUNDITY OF CONTACTS

Although no culture is absolutely static, it is indisputable that a high density of population furnishes more favourable conditions for new developments in the culture of the group concerned, as the multiplicity of contacts between individuals brings greater intensity to the intellectual life of each. Furthermore, in such numerous and thickly settled groups, a more extensive division of labour becomes possible—as noted years ago by Emile Durkheim, founder of the French Sociological School—and the increase in specialization results not merely in technological progress, but in the sub-division of the group into separate social classes between which tensions or conflicts of interests or self-esteem are bound to arise, this in its turn involving sooner or later a modification of the established cultural forms. In societies of this degree of complexity, the individual is on average confronted with a wider variety of situations which he must tackle along new lines and thus modify the traditional responses in the light of his numerous experiences.

Similarly the less isolated a people is, the more windows it has on the outer world and the more its opportunities for contact with other peoples, the more likelihood of its culture growing richer alike by direct borrowings and as a result of its members' diversified experience and increased need to meet new situations. Even war is a means of contact between peoples though far from the most desirable type, as all too often, only fragments of a culture, if anything,
survive the trials of military conquest or oppression. A good example of cultural stagnation brought about by isolation is that of the Tasmanians who, being cut off from the rest of humanity by their island’s geographical position, were still technologically at the middle Palaeolithic stage when the English settled there at the beginning of last century. In fact, the ending of their isolation was far from advantageous to the Tasmanians, for today they are totally extinct, having perished piecemeal in their constant warfare against the colonists; hence the conclusion to be drawn is that, while in principle, contact, even through war, aids cultural evolution, it is essential, if such contact is to be fruitful, that it occurs between peoples whose technological levels are not too different (to avoid the mere extermination of one of them or its reduction to a state of near-servitude resulting in its traditional culture’s extinction). It is also essential that armaments should not have achieved—as is unhappily the case with the great nations of the modern world—such a degree of effectiveness that both sides, even if they escape utter destruction, emerge from the conflict ruined.

We have seen, then, that the means, external or internal, whereby a culture is transformed include contact between individuals and between peoples, borrowings, the making of new combinations from existing elements and the discovery of new relationships or facts. So great is the part played by borrowings that we may say the same of cultures as of races, that they are never «pure» and that there is none of them which, in its present state, is not the result of cooperation between different peoples. The civilization of which the Western world is so proud has been built of a myriad contributions, of which many are non-European in origin. The alphabet first reached the Phoenicians from the Semitic communities bordering the Sinai Peninsula, travelled from them to the Greeks and Romans and then spread through the westernmost parts of Europe. Our numerals and algebra come to us from the Arabs whose philosophers and scientists incidentally played an important part in the various renaissances of mediaeval Europe. The earliest astronomers were Chaldeans; steel was invented in India or Turkistan; coffee comes from Ethiopia; tea, porcelain, gunpowder, silk, rice and the compass were given us by the Chinese who also were acquainted with printing centuries before Gutenberg, and early discovered how to make paper. Maize, tobacco, the potato, quinine, coca, vanilla and
cacao we owe to the American Indians. The explanation of the «miracle of Greece» is really that Greece was a crossroads, where vast numbers of different peoples and cultures met. Lastly, we should recollect that the wall paintings and engravings of the Aurignacian and Magdelenian ages (the most ancient works of art known in Europe, of which it may be said with truth that their beauty has never been exceeded) were the work of men of the Grimaldi type, probably not unlike the Negro races of today; that, in another aesthetic sphere, the jazz which plays so important a part in our leisure, was evolved by the descendants of Negroes taken to the United States as slaves, to whom that country also owes the oral literature on which the famous Uncle Remus stories are based.

RACE HISTORY AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

However numerous the exchanges between different cultures in the courses of history, and despite the fact that none of these cultures can be regarded as «pure-bred», the fact is that differences do exist and it is possible to identify specific culture areas and periods: for instance, there was a Germanic culture described by Tacitus and of interest to him precisely because of its differences from Latin culture. In our own day, the task of the anthropologist is to study cultures diverging considerably from what with certain variants is the common culture of the Western nations. This must suggest the question whether there is a causal relationship between race and culture and whether each of the various ethnic groups has on balance a predisposition to develop certain cultural forms. However, such a notion cannot survive a scrutiny of the facts and it can be taken as established today that hereditary physical differences are negligible as causes of the differences in culture observable between the peoples. What should rather be taken into consideration is the history of those peoples.

The first point which stands out is that a given culture is not the creation of a particular race, but normally of several. Let us take as an example what we call «Egyptian civilization», i.e., the cultural continuum found in Egypt between the Neolithic age (when wheat and the same type of barley as today were already being cultivated in the Fayum area) and the third century of our own era, when
Christianity spread over the country; the excavation of tombs has shown that from the polished Stone-Age onwards the population of Egypt was Hamitic, while an entirely different strain is found in addition from the beginning of the dynastic epoch. At various times the country was invaded by the Hyksos (nomads from Asia who arrived in the second millennium B.C. and introduced the horse and the war chariot), by the Libyans, by the Peoples of the Sea (who may have included the Achaeans), the Assyrians, and the Persians (whose sway ended only with Egypt’s annexation by Alexander in 332 B.C. and entry into the Greek orbit, in which she remained until the defeat of Anthony and Cleopatra in 31 B.C.); while after a period of relative isolation there was sustained intercourse with the neighbouring countries of the Near East. The vicissitudes of Egypt’s history appear to have had little effect on the physical type, which was stabilized at an early epoch, and although they altered her culture, she remained throughout the home of a civilization based economically on an oasis (in this case, the Nile Valley fertilized by the annual floods). Alexandria, capital of the Ptolemies, as a cosmopolitan city at the cross-roads of Asia, Africa and Europe, enjoyed a period of great brilliance during the Hellenistic age. In Europe too, there is proof of the successive rise and decline of a number of races in the course of pre-history, while from the Neolithic age onwards, the flow of trade points to true «cultural relations» between different peoples. It is notable that in Equatorial Africa even the pygmies, who are exclusively hunters and food-gatherers, live in a kind of economic symbiosis with the settled Negroes who are their neighbours, and exchange game for agricultural products; this relationship is not without other cultural consequences and today the languages of the various groups of pygmies are those of the groups of Negro agriculturalists with whom they are thus linked.

Not only do all the indications point to there being no culture all of whose elements are due to a single race, but it is also apparent that no given race necessarily practises a single culture. In our own time, social transformations of considerable extent have taken place with no corresponding alteration in racial type of which the revolution engendered in Japan by the Emperor Mutsuhito (1866-1912) is the perfect example. To take another instance, the Manchus, who were a semi-civilized Tungus tribe when they conquered China in the middle of the seventeenth century, provided a dynasty
which reigned gloriously over a country passing through one of the most brilliant periods of its civilization; and later China first overthrew the Manchu dynasty in 1912 in favour of a Republic and is now in the process of socialization. Again, when the expansion of Asia began after the death of Mahomet in A.D. 632, some Arab groups founded great States and built cities where the arts and sciences flourished, whereas other groups which had stayed in Arabia, remained simple pastoralists driving their flocks from grazing to grazing. Even before the total disruption of its ways of life first by the razzias of Moslem slavers, next by the seaborne traffic in human beings run by Europeans, and finally by European conquest, Negro Africa suffered the handicap of relative isolation. Nevertheless, its history tells us of such empires as the Ghana Kingdom in West Africa, roughly coeval with our own Middle Ages, which aroused the admiration of Arab travellers; and today, though many Negro tribes appear never to have achieved a political organization on a broader basis than the village, we find, as in Nigeria, great cities founded long before the European occupation. How then is it possible to claim that each physical type connotes a certain type of culture, especially if we look beyond the Negroes of Africa itself to those others, to the number of some thirty-five millions, who today form part of the population of the Americas and the West Indies? Though the descendants of Africans whose culture was utterly overtset by the scourge of slavery, which robbed them of their freedom and their country, these people have nevertheless succeeded in adapting themselves to a cultural setting very different from that in which their ancestors were bred, and have since contrived (despite the prejudice of which they are the victims) to play a major role in many sectors in building and spreading the civilization of which Occidentals had believed themselves to be the exclusive representatives; in literature alone, a Negro, Aimé Césaire, of Martinique is among the major contemporary French poets, and another Negro, Richard Wright of Mississippi, may be accounted among the most talented of American novelists.

From the history of Europe as well, we can learn how much the customs of peoples can change without major alteration of their racial composition, and hence how fluid is «national character». Who would suspect that the peaceable farmers of modern Scandinavia were the descendants of the dreaded Vikings, whose long ships raided so
much of Europe in the ninth century? Or would a Frenchman of 1950 recognize as his fellow-countrymen the contemporaries of Charles Martel, who conquered the Arabs at Poitiers if he had not learned it in the schools? It is also worth remembering that when Julius Caesar first landed in Great Britain in 52 B.C., the Britons struck the invaders as so barbarous that Cicero, writing to his friend Atticus, advised him against buying any of them as slaves because «they are so utterly stupid and incapable of learning». Nor should we forget that, after the fall of the Roman Empire, the inhabitants of Europe took many centuries to establish solidly organized and militarily formidable states; throughout the whole of the Middle Ages—conventionally taken as ending in 1453 with Mahomet II’s capture of Constantinople—Europe had to defend itself alike against Mongol peoples such as the Huns (who nearly reached the Atlantic), the Avars, the Magyars (who finally settled in Hungary) and the Turks (to whom part of South-east Europe was subject for many centuries) and against the Arabs (who, after conquering North Africa, were settled for some time in Spain and the islands of the Mediterranean). At that epoch it would have been difficult to foresee that Europeans would one day found empires.

Analogous examples of variability in the aptitudes of a given nation are afforded by the history of the Fine Arts: the music, painting and sculpture or architecture of some country will pass through a brilliant period and then for some centuries at least nothing further of any note will be produced. Can it seriously be claimed that such fluctuations in artistic talent are due to changes in the distribution of the genes?

It is thus fruitless to seek in the biology of race an explanation of the difference observable between the cultural achievements of the various peoples. However, seeking to find the explanation, say, in the nature of the habitat is nearly as misleading and, just as North American Indians, despite a high degree of racial uniformity, display wide differences in culture (for instance the warrior Apaches of the South-west and the much more peaceable Pueblos who are racially identical), so a given climate does not imply a particular type of dwelling and costume (in the Sudan we find great variety in the types of house and heavily robed peoples living cheek by jowl with others almost naked). The life of a social group is of course conditioned by its bio-geogra-
phical setting, agriculture is as out of the question in the Arctic zone as is cattle and horse breeding in the extensive areas of Africa infested by the tsetse fly; it is also indisputable that, as a general rule, a temperate climate is more favourable to human settlement and demographic development than one of extremes either way. However, varying techniques can secure very different results from similar biogeographical conditions: thus, as Pierre Gourou has pointed out, the practice of cultivating rice in flooded fields in tropical Asia has for ages past permitted a high density of population precluded in almost all other tropical areas, where land is cleared by fire and cultivated dry, by the poverty and instability of the soil. The explanation of the cultural diversity of the various peoples is accordingly more likely to be found in their past history than in their present geographical situation; the factors likely to be of preponderant importance are the knowledge acquired in the different areas they traversed during the wanderings (often long and complex) preceding their final settlement in the areas where we find them today, the degree of isolation in which they have lived or, conversely, their contacts with other peoples and the opportunities they have had of borrowing from other cultures—all of them explicitly classifiable as historical.

Franz Boas has written:

«The history of mankind proves that advances of culture depend upon the opportunities presented to a social group to learn from the experience of their neighbours. The discoveries of the group spread to others and, the more varied the contacts, the greater are the opportunities to learn. The tribes of simplest culture are on the whole those that have been isolated for very long periods and hence could not profit from the cultural achievements of their neighbours.»

The peoples of Europe—whose overseas expansion, be it remembered, is of very recent date, today restricted by the evolution of the very peoples they formerly surpassed in technique—owed their cultural lead to the opportunities they have long had of frequent contacts among themselves and with contrasting groups. The Romans, who may be regarded as the founders of the first major State to exist in Europe, borrowed from Asia in the construction of their Empire, and their only enduring successor, the Byzantine Empire, owed more of its administrative organization to Persia than to Rome. Conversely, the relative isolation of
Africans for so many ages should be an added reason for admiring their success, despite these adverse conditions, in founding, before the fifteenth century, such a State as Benin (a prosperous kingdom which produced masterpieces in bronze and ivory in an age when Europe would have been in no case to supply Negro artists with models), or making sixteenth century Timbuctoo, the capital of the Songol Empire, one of the principal intellectual centres of the Moslem world. Not merely for Africa's sake, but for that of the rest of the world, it is regrettable that the rapid expansion of the European nations, at a period when the material equipment available to them was out of all proportion to those in the hands of other people, should have nipped in the bud a score of cultures whose full potentialities we shall never know.

Can a Hierarchy of Cultures Be Established?

Fundamentally, the cultures of the peoples reflect their past history and vary with their experiences. In peoples, as in individuals, the acquired qualities count for far more than the innate: their differing experience involves a corresponding difference in their acquired knowledge so that the world of today is populated by human groups of widely differing cultures, each having certain dominant preoccupations which may be regarded as representing (in Professor M. J. Herskovits' words) the «focus of its culture».

Main interests and scales of values may differ entirely between any two societies. The Hindus have gone deeply into the techniques of control of the self and meditation, but until recent days had devoted little attention to the material techniques on which their American and European contemporaries concentrated, and the latter in their turn show little inclination to metaphysical speculation and still less to the practice of philosophy. In Thibet the monastic life has always been preferred to the military interests which unhappily loom so large in our lives today. Among the Hamitic Negroes of East Africa, stock-raising is held in such esteem that their cattle are capital rather than food and we find a people like the Banyoro divided into two castes, of which the higher concerns itself with stock-raising and the lower with agriculture; but conversely many societies of black agriculturalists in West Africa leave the care of their
cattle to Fulani whom they despise. The existence of such degrees of cultural specialization should counsel caution in making value judgements of a culture; there is no culture which will not be found defective in certain respects and highly advanced in others, or which, on examination, will not prove more complex than the apparent simplicity of its structure had suggested. Although they used no draft animals and had not invented the wheel or discovered iron, the pre-Columbian Indian races have nevertheless left us impressive monuments which testify to the existence of a highly developed social organization and are among the finest works of man, while one such nation, the Mayas, arrived at the concept of zero independently of the Arabs. Again, no one will seek to dispute that the Chinese created a great civilization but for long ages they neither consumed their cattle's milk nor used the dung in agriculture. The Polynesians, though technologically only at the polished stone stage, developed a very rich mythology, while Negroes who had been thought to be, at best, suitable only as servile labour for the plantations of the New World, have made extensive contributions to the arts; incidentally, it was in Africa that the two varieties of millet, which have since spread throughout Asia, were first cultivated. Even the Australians, whose technology is rudimentary in the extreme, have marriage rules based on theories of consanguinity of the utmost subtlety. Lastly, our own civilization, despite its high technological development, is defective in many respects, as is proved by such facts as the high numbers of maladjusted persons found in the West, not to mention the social problems which the Western countries have still not solved, nor the wars on which they periodically embark.

The truth is that all cultures have their successes and failures, their faults and virtues. Even language, the instrument and channel of thought, cannot serve as a yardstick to measure their relative worth: extremely rich grammatical forms are found in the speech of peoples without a written language and regarded as uncivilized. It would be equally vain to judge a culture by the criterion of our own ethical standards, for—apart from the fact that our ethics are too often no more than theoretical—many non-European societies are in certain respects more humane than our own. As the great African expert, Maurice Delafosse, points out: «In African Negro society there are neither widows nor orphans, both alike being an automatic responsibility either of their
families or of the husband's heir»; again, there are cultures in Siberia and elsewhere in which individuals whom we should shun as abnormal are regarded as inspired by the Gods and as such have their special place in social life. Men whose culture differs from our own are neither more nor less moral than ourselves; each society has its own moral standards, by which it divides its own members into good and evil, and one can certainly not form a judgment on the morality of a culture (or a race) on the strength of the behaviour, sometimes culpable from our point of view, of a proportion of its members living under the special conditions created by their status as a subject people or abrupt transplantation to another country as soldiers or labourers usually living under conditions of hardship. Lastly the argument of some anthropologists that, certain peoples are inferior on the grounds that they have produced no «great men» is untenable. Apart from the desirability of an initial definition of what is meant by a «great man» (a conqueror with innumerable victims to his credit; a great scientist, artist, philosopher or poet; the founder of a religion or a great saint), it is clear that, as the essential condition for classification as a «great man» is the eventual widespread recognition of such «greatness», it is impossible by definition for an isolated society to have produced what we call a «great man». It must however be emphasized that even in regions which were long isolated—in Africa and Polynesia for instance—we find strong personalities such as the Mandingue Emperor, Gongo Moussa (to whom is ascribed the introduction in the fourteenth century of the type of architecture still characteristic of the mosques and larger houses of the Western Sudan), the Zulu conqueror Chaka, the Liberian prophet Harris (who preached a syncretic Christianity on the Ivory Coast in 1913 and 1914), Finau, King of Tonga, or Kamehameha, King of Hawaii (a contemporary of Cook). These and a score of others may well have been prevented merely by their too isolated and demographically restricted cultural environment from achieving recognition by a sufficient number of people to qualify—on quantitative as opposed to qualitative grounds—as «great men» comparable in stature to our own Alexander, Plutarch, Luther or the Roi Soleil. Moreover, it is undeniable that even a relatively elementary technology implies a considerable background of knowledge and skill and that the development of a culture, however rudimentary, at all adapted to its environment,
would be inconceivable if the community in question had never produced a mind above the average.

Our notions of culture being themselves integral elements in a culture (that of the society to which we belong), it is impossible for us to adopt the impartial point of view from which alone a valid hierarchy of cultures could be established. Judgments in this matter are necessarily relative and dependent on the point of view, and an African, Indian or Polynesian would be as fully justified in passing a severe judgment on the ignorance of most of us in matters of genealogy as we should on his ignorance of the laws of electricity or Archimedes' principle. What we are entitled to assert, however, as a positive fact is that there are cultures which at a particular point in history come into possession of technical resources sufficiently developed for the balance of power to operate in their favour and that such cultures tend to supplant other civilizations with inferior technical equipment with which they enter into contact. Today, Western civilization is in that position and—whatever the political difficulties and antagonisms of the nations representative of it—it is spreading over the world, if only in the form of its industrial products. The power of expansion conferred by technology and science might finally achieve recognition as the decisive criterion according to which each culture could be described as more or less «great»; but it should be understood that «greatness» must not be interpreted solely in what might be described as a volumetric sense and that it is moreover on strictly pragmatic grounds (i.e., in terms of the effectiveness of its recipes) that the value of a science can be assessed and that it can be regarded as living or dead and distinguished from a merely «magical» technique. If the experimental method—in whose use the Western and Westernized nations of today excel—is an undoubted advance on \textit{a priori} and empirical methods, it is essentially so because its results (unlike those of the other methods named) can serve as a starting point for new developments capable in their turn of practical application. Incidentally, it must be obvious that, since science as a whole is the product of a vast amount of experiment and development, to which all races have contributed for many thousands of years, it can in no respect be regarded by white men as their exclusive preserve and as indicating in themselves some congenital aptitude.

Subject to these explicit reservations, it is right emphasize
the capital importance of technology (i.e., the means of acting on the natural environment) not merely in the day to day life of societies but in their evolution. The chief milestones in the history of mankind are advances in technology which in turn have had the widest repercussions in all other sectors of culture. The process begins with tool-making and the use of fire at the very beginning of pre-history and even before the emergence of Homo sapiens; next comes the domestication of plants and animals for food, which raises the potential density of population and is the direct cause of the settlement of human groups in villages (a notable transformation of the natural environment), followed in turn by increasing division of labour and the emergence of crafts. At each stage the direct increase in economic resources leaves a sufficient margin for considerable development in other sectors. The latest such milestone is the development of power resources which marks the beginning of the modern Age.

The earliest civilizations of any size, being based on agriculture, were restricted to areas made fertile by great rivers (the Nile, the Euphrates, the Tigris, the Indus, the Ganges, and the Blue and Yellow Rivers). They were followed by trading civilizations lying on inland seas or seas with frequent land masses (the Phoenicians and Greeks in the Mediterranean, and the Malays in the China Seas), which were later displaced by civilizations based on large-scale industry whose vital centres were the coal deposits in Europe, North America and Asia, and trading on a world-wide basis. Now that we have entered the Atomic Age, no one knows where—wars permitting—the principal centres of production will arise in the world nor whether the setting for the great civilizations of the future may not be regions today regarded as backward, whose inhabitants' only crime is that they belong to cultures less well equipped than our own with means of modifying their natural environment but possibly better balanced from the point of view of social relations.
The differences observable between the physiques of the different races (and we must remember that the only features so far used by anthropologists as practical criteria or differentiation are purely superficial, such as colour of skin, colour and form of eyes and hair, shape of the skull, nose and lips, stature, etc.) afford no clue to the cast of mind and type of behaviour characterizing the members of each of the human varieties; outside the field of pure biology, the word «race» is utterly meaningless. Independently of their political division into nationalities, men can undoubtedly be classified in groups characterized by a certain community of behaviour, but only in terms of their several «cultures», in other words from the standpoint of the history of their respective civilizations; the groups thus delimited are quite distinct from the categories which can be determined in terms of physical similarity, while their relative worth can be determined in the light of pragmatic considerations only, and such judgments lack all absolute validity since they are necessarily conditioned by our own culture. In any case, the scale of values thus arrived at might well be relevant for a specific period only, since cultures, even more than races, are fluid, and peoples are capable of very rapid cultural evolution after centuries of near-stagnation. In the light of this, it may be asked what is the origin of the prejudice behind the attempt to classify certain human groups as inferior on the ground that their racial composition is an irremediable handicap.

The first point which emerges from any examination of the data of ethnography and history is that race prejudice is not universal and is of recent origin. Many of the societies investigated by anthropologists do indeed display group pride, but while the group regards itself as privileged compared with other groups, it makes no «racist» claims and, for instance, is not above entering into temporary alliances with other groups or providing itself with women from them. Much more than «blood», the unifying elements are
common interests and a variety of activities conducted in association. In the majority of cases such groups are not in fact «races»—if very isolated, they may at most be homogeneous offshoots of a race—but are merely societies whose antagonism to other societies, whether traditional or arising from specific questions of interest, is not biological but purely cultural. The peoples whom the Greeks described as «barbarians» were not regarded by them as racially inferior but as not having attained the same level of civilization as themselves; Alexander himself married two Persian princesses and 10,000 of his soldiers married Hindus. The main interest her subject peoples had for Rome was as a source of tribute and, since she did not pursue the same ends of systematic exploitation of the earth and its population as more recent imperialisms, she had no reason to practise racial discrimination against them. The Christian faith preached the brotherhood of man and, while all too often it fell short of its own principle in practice, it never evolved a racist ideology. The Crusades were launched against the «infidels», the Inquisition persecuted heretics and Jews, and Catholics and Protestants exterminated each other, but in every case the motives alleged were religious and not racial. The picture only begins to change with the opening of the period of colonial expansion by the European peoples, when it becomes necessary to excuse violence and oppression by decreeing the inferiority of those enslaved or robbed of their own land and denying the title of men to the cheated peoples. (Differences in customs and the physical stigma of colour made the task an easy one).

That the origins of race prejudice are economic and social becomes perfectly clear if we bear in mind that the first great apostle of racism, Count de Gobineau, said himself that he wrote his two notorious «Essays» to combat liberalism: the better to defend the threatened interest of the aristocratic caste of Europe, against the rising tide of democracy, he postulated their descent from a so-called superior race which he labelled «Aryan», and for which he postulated a civilizing mission. We find the same motive yet again in the attempt by anthropologists such as Broca and Vacher de Lapouge of France and the German Ammon to demonstrate by anthropometry that class distinctions reflect differences in race (and hence are part of the natural order). However, the amazing intermingling of human groups which has taken place in Europe as in the rest of the world since prehistoric
times, and the unceasing movements of population occurring in the countries of modern Europe are enough to demonstrate the fatuity of the attempt. Later, racism took on the virulent quality we know so well and, more particularly in Germany, appeared in nationalist guise, though still remaining in essence an ideology designed to introduce or perpetuate a system of caste economically and politically favourable to a minority, e.g., by cementing a nation's unity by the idea of itself as a master race, by inculcating in colonial populations the feeling that they are irremediably inferior to the colonizers, by preventing part of the population within a country from rising in the social scale, by eliminating competition in employment or by neutralizing popular discontent by supplying the people with a scapegoat which is also a profitable source of loot. There is bitter irony in the fact that racism developed parallel with the growth of democracy, which made an appeal to the newborn prestige of science necessary for the calming of consciences uneasy over flagrant violation of the rights of a section of mankind or refusal to recognize those rights.

Racial prejudice is not innate. As Ashley Montagu has noted: «In America, where white and black populations frequently live side by side, it is an indisputable fact that white children do not learn to consider themselves superior to Negro children until they are told that they are so.» When a tendency to racism (in the form either of voluntary endogamy or the more or less aggressive assertion of one's own «race's» virtue) is found in an «outcast» group, it should be regarded as no more than the normal reaction of the «insulted and injured» against the ostracism or persecution of which they are the victims and not as indicating the universality of racial prejudice. Whatever the role of the aggressive instinct in human psychology, there is no tendency for men to commit hostile acts against others because they are of a different breed and, if such acts are all too often committed, the reason is not hostility of biological origin; just as there has never, to the writer's knowledge, been an instance of a dog fight in which spaniels combined against bulldogs.

There are no races of masters as opposed to races of slaves: slavery is not coeval with mankind and only appeared in societies whose technology was sufficiently developed to make slave-owning profitable.

From the sexual point of view, there appears no evidence
of any repulsion between race and race, and indeed all the facts so far collected demonstrate that there has been continual cross-breeding between races since the most ancient times. Nor is there the slightest evidence of such cross-breeding having given bad results since a civilization as brilliant as that of Greece arose in a human environment in which miscegenation appears to have been rampant.

Race prejudice is no more hereditary than it is spontaneous: it is in the strictest sense a «prejudice», that is, a cultural value judgment with no objective basis. Far from being in the order of things or innate in human nature, it is one of the myths whose origin is much more propaganda by special interests than the tradition of centuries. Since there is an essential connexion between it and the antagonisms arising out of the economic structure of modern societies, its disappearance, like that of other prejudices which are less the causes than the symptoms of social injustice, will go hand in hand with the transformation of their economic structure by the peoples. Thus the cooperation on an equal footing of all human groups, whatever they be, will open undreamed-of prospects for civilization.
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