

Savage Minds Occasional Papers No. 5

**Culture, Genuine and Spurious**

By Edward Sapir

Edited and with an introduction by Alex Golub

First edition, 5 November, 2013



## **Savage Minds Occasional Papers**

1. The Superorganic by Alfred Kroeber, edited and with an introduction by Alex Golub
2. Responses to “The Superorganic”: Texts by Alexander Goldenweiser and Edward Sapir, edited and with an introduction by Alex Golub
3. The History of the Personality of Anthropology by Alfred Kroeber, edited and with an introduction by Alex Golub
4. Culture and Ethnology by Robert Lowie, edited and with an introduction by Alex Golub
5. Culture, Genuine and Spurious by Edward Sapir, edited and with an introduction by Alex Golub

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*Sapir, Edward. 1924. Culture, genuine and spurious. American Journal of Sociology 29 (4): 401-429.*

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## Introduction

This number of the Savage Minds Occasional Paper Series presents an edited version of Edward Sapir's essay "Culture, Genuine and Spurious." "Culture, Genuine and Spurious" is worth reading for several reasons: it demonstrates the way anthropological theory can be applied to ethical issues; it exemplifies the way Boasians founded public anthropology by weighing in on the great issues of their day alongside cultural critics like Randolph Bourne or George Seldes; it gives us insights into the opinions of Boasians on cultural imperialism and the exploitation of labor; and above all, it presents us with a set of questions -- and answers -- that are as relevant today as they were eighty years ago.

What kind of a good thing is culture? In asking this question, Sapir describes the role that culture can play in the flourishing lives of individuals, as well as the communities that they are part of. His answer to this question, although inspired by anthropology, also draws on his wider education. As a result, Sapir's essay presents us with an example of how anthropology can become a form of cultural criticism.

Sapir wrote this essay with modern American culture in mind. On the one hand, he was appalled by the demands industrialization made on workers and depressed by the cheapness and vulgarity of the mass consumerism that was meant to satisfy them. On the other hand, he found American elite's uptake of European high culture snobbish, artificial, and inauthentic. For Sapir, both ossified 'high culture' and the new consumerism were 'spurious' forms of culture.

In contrast, Sapir considered culture 'genuine' when it drew on the past in order to enrich the lives of people in the present. It was honest, deeply involved people in its production, and created a deep sense of community. Authenticity in culture, from Sapir's point of view, is more about the mode of cultural production than the contents.

There is much more to say about Sapir as a cultural critic, and I hope to explore his work in future SMOPs. Ultimately, however, I believe that Sapir's argument is so interesting that it needs no introduction.



The version of "Culture, Genuine and Spurious" in this SMOPS has been lightly edited, from about 12,000 words to 8,500. My main goal in presenting this paper has not been to slash it down to a readable size, but to trim some of the more excessive prose and, above all, to help bring attention to this remarkable essay. I hope that this paper, like the others in this series, will help present early anthropological theory in a form that is accessible to everyone. There is today a tremendous amount of material which is open access, but it is difficult to find, inconvenient to read, and many people do not know where to start looking for it. By curating a selection of important open access work, I hope to make open access resources better known and to raise awareness of the actual history of anthropological theory.

-R  
5 Nov 2013  
Honolulu

## **Culture, Genuine and Spurious**

Edward Sapir

### I. THE VARYING CONCEPTIONS OF CULTURE

There are certain terms that have a peculiar property. Ostensibly, they mark off specific concepts that lay claim to a rigorously objective validity. In practice, they label vague terrains of thought that shift or narrow or widen with the point of view of whoso makes use of them. An analysis of such terms discloses the fact that underneath the clash of varying contents there is a unifying feeling-tone. What makes it possible for so discordant an array of conceptions to answer to the same call is precisely this constant halo that surrounds them. Thus, what is "crime" to one man is "nobility" to another, yet both are agreed that crime, whatever it is, is an undesirable category. We disagree on the value of things and the relations of things, but we agree on the value of a label. It is only when the question arises of just where to put the label, that trouble begins. These labels -- perhaps we had better call them empty thrones -- are enemies of mankind, yet we have no recourse but to make peace with them. We do this by seating our favorite pretenders. The rival pretenders war to the death; the thrones to which they aspire remain serenely splendid in gold. I desire to advance the claims of a pretender to the throne called "culture," Whatever culture is, we know that it is a good thing. I propose to give my idea of what kind of a good thing culture is.

The word "culture" [is] used in three main senses. First of all, culture is technically used by the ethnologist and culture-historian to embody any socially inherited element in the life of man, material and spiritual. Culture so defined is coterminous with man himself, for even the lowliest savages live in a social world characterized by a complex network of traditionally conserved habits, usages, and attitudes. From this standpoint all human groups are cultured, though in vastly different manners and grades of complexity. For the ethnologist there are many types of culture and an infinite variety of elements of culture, but no values attach to these. His "higher" and "lower," refer not to a moral scale of values but to stages, real or supposed, in a historic progression or in an evolutionary scheme. I do not intend to use the term "culture" in this technical sense. "Civilization" would be a convenient substitute for it, were it not by common usage limited rather to the more complex and sophisticated forms of the stream of culture. To avoid confusion with other uses of the word "culture," I shall, where necessary, use "civilization" in lieu of the ethnologist's "culture."

The second application of the term is more widely current. It refers to a rather conventional ideal of individual refinement. Sophistication in the realm of intellectual goods is demanded of the applicant to the title of "cultured person," but only up to a certain point. Far more emphasis is placed upon a certain preciousness of conduct. At its worst, the preciousness degenerates into snobbishness. At its most subtle, it develops into an amused skepticism of even more radical aloofness than snobbishness. Aloofness of some kind is generally a sine qua non of the second type of culture. Another of its requisites is intimate contact with the past. Present action and opinion are, first and foremost, seen in the illumination of a past of infinite richness and glory.

The ghosts of the past haunt the cultured man at every step. He shrinks from the employment of his individuality as a creative agency. But perhaps the most extraordinary thing about the cultured ideal is its selection of the particular treasures of the past which it deems worthiest of worship. This selection, which might seem bizarre to a mere outsider, is justified by a number of reasons, but unsympathetic persons incline to the view that these reasons are only rationalizations ad hoc, that the selection of treasures has proceeded chiefly according to the accidents of history.

In brief, this cultured ideal is a vesture and an air. The vesture may drape gracefully about one's person and the air has often much charm, but the vesture is a ready-made garment for all that and the air remains an air. In America the cultured ideal is a more exotic plant than in the halls of Oxford and Cambridge, whence it was imported to these rugged shores, but fragments and derivatives of it meet us frequently enough. Wherever we find it, it discloses itself to our eyes in the guise of a spiritual heirloom that must, at all cost, be preserved intact.

The third use made of the term is the least easy to define. Culture in this third sense shares with our first, technical, conception an emphasis on the spiritual possessions of the group rather than of the individual. With our second conception it shares a stressing of selected factors out of the vast whole of the ethnologist's stream of culture as intrinsically more valuable, more characteristic, more significant in a spiritual sense than the rest. We may perhaps come nearest the mark by saying that the cultural conception we are now trying to grasp embrace[s] in a single term those general attitudes, views of life, and specific manifestations of civilization that give a particular people its distinctive place in the world. Emphasis is put not so much on what is done and believed by a people as on how what is done and believed functions in the whole life of that people, on what significance it has for them. The present conception of culture is apt to crop up in problems of nationality, with attempts to find embodied in the character and civilization of a given people some peculiar excellence that is strikingly its own. Culture thus becomes nearly synonymous with the "spirit" or "genius" of a people, yet not altogether, for culture includes a series of concrete manifestations which are believed to be peculiarly symptomatic of it. Culture, then, may be briefly defined as civilization in so far as it embodies the national genius.

We are on dangerous ground here. The current assumption that the so-called "genius" of a people is reducible to inherent hereditary traits of a biological and psychological nature does not bear very serious examination. Frequently what is assumed to be an innate racial characteristic turns out to be the resultant of purely historical causes. There need be no quarrel with this conception of a national genius so long as it is not worshiped as an irreducible psychological fetich. Ethnologists might shy of broad generalizations and hazily defined concepts. They are therefore rather timid about operating with national spirits and geniuses. The chauvinism of national apologists, which sees in the spirits of their own peoples peculiar excellences utterly denied to less blessed denizens of the globe, justifies this timidity. Yet here, as so often, the precise knowledge of the scientist lags somewhat behind the more naive but more powerful insights of non-professional experience and impression. To deny to the genius of a people an ultimate psychological significance and to refer it to the specific historical development of that people is not, after all is said and done, to analyze it out of existence. It remains true that large groups of people everywhere tend to think and to act in accordance with established and all but

instinctive forms, which are in large measure peculiar to it. The question as to whether these forms, that in their interrelations constitute the genius of a people, are primarily explainable in terms of native temperament, of historical development need not cause us much concern. It is enough to know that in actual fact nationalities have come to bear the impress of a certain mold and that this mold is more clearly discernible in certain elements of civilization than in others. The specific culture of a nationality is that group of elements in its civilization which most emphatically exhibits the mold. In practice it is sometimes convenient to identify the national culture with its genius.

An example or two and we shall have done with these preliminary definitions. No one who has even superficially concerned himself with French culture can have failed to be impressed by the qualities of clarity, lucid systematization, balance, care in choice of means, and good taste, that permeate so many aspects of the national civilization. These qualities have their weaker side. We are familiar with the overmechanization, the emotional timidity or shallowness, the exaggeration of manner at the expense of content, that are revealed in some of the manifestations of the French spirit. Those elements of French civilization that give characteristic evidence of the qualities of its genius may be said to constitute the culture of France. From this standpoint we can evaluate culturally such traits in French civilization as the formalism of the French classical drama, the prevalence of epigram in French life and letters, the intellectualist cast so often given to aesthetic movements in France, the lack of turgidity in modern French music, the relative absence of the ecstatic note in religion, the strong tendency to bureaucracy in French administration. Their study would yield something like a rapid bird's-eye view of the spirit of French culture.

Let us turn to Russia, the culture of which has as definite a cast as that of France. I shall mention only one, but that perhaps the most significant, aspect of Russian culture, as I see it - the tendency of the Russian to see and think of human beings not as representatives of types, not as creatures that appear eternally clothed in the garments of civilization, but as stark human beings existing primarily in and for themselves, only secondarily for the sake of civilization. The one thing that the Russian can take seriously is elemental humanity, and elemental humanity, in his view of the world, obtrudes itself at every step. He is therefore sublimely at home with himself and his neighbor and with God. Indeed, I have no doubt that the extremest of Russian atheists is on better speaking terms with God than are the devout of other lands. For all the machinery of civilization, the Russian has generally not a little contempt. The subordination of the deeps of personality to an institution is not readily swallowed by him as a necessary price for the blessings of civilization. We can follow out this sweeping humanity, this almost impertinent prodding of the real self that lies swathed in civilization, in numberless forms. In personal relations we may note the readiness of the Russian to ignore all the institutional barriers which separate man from man; on its weaker side, this involves at times a personal irresponsibility that harbors no insincerity. The renunciation of Tolstoi was no isolated phenomenon, it was a symbol of the deep-seated Russian indifference to institutionalism, to the accreted values of civilization. In a spiritual sense, it is easy for the Russian to overthrow any embodiment of the spirit of institutionalism; his real loyalties are elsewhere. The Russian preoccupation with elemental humanity is naturally most in evidence in the realm of art, where self-expression has freest rein.

In the pages of Tolstoi, Dostoyevski, Turgenev, Gorki, and Chekhov personality runs riot in its morbid moments of play with crime, in its depressions and apathies, in its generous enthusiasms and idealisms. So many of the figures in Russian literature look out upon life with a puzzled and incredulous gaze. "This thing that you call civilization - is that all there is to life?" we hear them ask a hundred times. In music too the Russian spirit delights to unmask itself, to revel in the cries and gestures of man as man. It speaks to us out of the rugged accents of a Moussorgski as out of the well-nigh unendurable despair of a Tchaikovski. It is hard to think of the main current of Russian art as anywhere infected by the dry rot of formalism; we expect some human flash or cry to escape from behind the bars.

I have avoided all attempt to construct a parallel between the spirit of French civilization and that of Russian civilization. I have been content merely to suggest that underlying the elements of civilization, the study of which is the province of the ethnologist and culture-historian, is a culture, the adequate interpretation of which is beset with difficulties and which is often left to men of letters.

## II. THE GENUINE CULTURE

The second and third conceptions of the term "culture" are what I wish to make the basis of our genuine culture - the pretender to the throne whose claims to recognition we are to consider. We may accept culture as signifying the characteristic mold of a national civilization, while from the second conception of culture, that of a traditional type of individual refinement, we will borrow the notion of ideal form. A genuine culture is perfectly conceivable in any type or stage of civilization, in the mold of any national genius. It can be conceived as easy in terms of a Mohammedan polygamous society, or of an American Indian "primitive" non-agricultural society, as in those of our familiar occidental societies. On the other hand, what may by contrast be called "spurious" cultures are just as easily conceivable in conditions of general enlightenment as in those of relative ignorance and squalor.

The genuine culture is not of necessity either high or low; it is inherently harmonious, balanced, self-satisfactory. It is the expression of a richly varied and yet unified and consistent attitude toward life, an attitude which sees the significance of any one element of civilization in its relation to all others. It is a culture in which nothing is spiritually meaningless, in which no important part of the general functioning brings with it a sense of frustration, of misdirected or unsympathetic effort. It is not a spiritual hybrid of contradictory patches, of water-tight compartments of consciousness that avoid participation in a harmonious synthesis. If the culture necessitates slavery, it frankly admits it; if it abhors slavery, it obviates the necessity of its employment. It does not make a great show of an uncompromising opposition to slavery, only to introduce what amounts to a slave system into certain portions of its industrial mechanism. If it builds itself magnificent houses of worship, it is because of the necessity it feels to symbolize in stone a religious impulse that is deep and vital. It does not look sheepish when appeal is made to its religious consciousness, then make amends by furtively donating a few dollars toward an African mission. Nor does it carefully instruct its children in what it knows to be of no use either to them or in its own mature life. Nor does it tolerate a thousand other spiritual maladjustments such as are patent enough in our American life of today. The great cultures that we instinctively



feel to have been healthy spiritual organisms, such as the Athenian culture of the Age of Pericles, have tended to such harmony.

A genuine culture has no necessary connection with efficiency. A society may be admirably efficient, yet it may well be an inferior organism as a culture-bearer. It is not enough that each member of the community feel in some dim way that he is doing his bit toward the attainment of a social benefit. A genuine culture refuses to consider the individual as a mere cog. The major activities of the individual must directly satisfy his own creative and emotional impulses. The great cultural fallacy of industrialism, as developed up to the present time, is that in harnessing machines to our uses it has not known how to avoid the harnessing of the majority of mankind to its machines. The telephone girl who lends her capacities to the manipulation of a technical routine that has a high efficiency value but that answers to no spiritual needs of her own is an appalling sacrifice to civilization. As with the telephone girl, so, it is to be feared, with the great majority of us, slave-stokers to fires that burn for demons we would destroy, were it not that they appear in the guise of our benefactors. The American Indian who solves the economic problem with salmon-spear and rabbit-snare operates on a relatively low level of civilization, but he represents an incomparably higher solution than our telephone girl of the questions that culture has to ask of economics because there is no sense of spiritual frustration during its prosecution, because it works in naturally with all the rest of the Indian's activities instead of standing out as a desert patch of merely economic effort in the whole of life. A genuine culture must be looked upon as a sturdy plant growth, each remotest leaf and twig of which is organically fed by the sap at the core. And this growth is not here meant as a metaphor for the group only; it is meant to apply as well to the individual. A culture that does not build itself out of the central interests and desires of its bearers is an external culture. The genuine culture is internal, it works from the individual to ends.

We have already seen that there is no necessary correlation between the development of civilization and the relative genuineness of the culture which forms its spiritual essence. By the development of civilization is meant the ever increasing degree of sophistication of our society and of our individual lives. This progressive sophistication is the inevitable cumulative result of our steadily growing knowledge of our natural environment and, as a consequence, our practical mastery of the resources that nature grants us. It is chiefly the cumulative force of this sophistication that gives us the sense of what we call "progress." Perched on the heights of an office building twenty or more stories taller than our fathers ever dreamed of, we feel that we are getting up in the world. It would be sheer obscurantism to wish to stay their progress. But there can be no stranger illusion than this, that because the tools of life are today more specialized and more refined than ever before, it necessarily follows that we are attaining a deeper and more satisfying culture. We are right to have faith in the progress of civilization. We are wrong to assume that the advance of culture is a function of such progress. The facts of ethnology and culture history proves that maxima of culture have frequently been reached in low levels of sophistication; that minima of culture have been plumbed in some of the highest. Civilization, as a whole, moves on; culture comes and goes.

Every profound change in the flow of civilization, particularly every change in its economic bases, tends to bring about an unsettling and readjustment of culture values. Old culture forms

tend to persist through the force of inertia. The maladjustment of these habitual reactions to their new civilizational environment brings a measure of spiritual disharmony. Sometimes the maladjustment corrects itself with great rapidity, at other times it may persist for generations, as in the case of America, where a chronic state of cultural maladjustment has reduced much of our higher life to sterile externality. It is easier for a genuine culture to subsist on a lower level of civilization; the differentiation of individuals as regards their social and economic functions is so much less than in the higher levels that there is less danger of the reduction of the individual to an unintelligible fragment of the social organism. How to reap the benefits of a great differentiation of functions, without at the same time losing sight of the individual, is the great problem of any rapidly complicating civilization. The present world-wide labor unrest has as one of its deepest roots some sort of perception of the cultural fallacy of the present form of industrialism.

It is the ethnologist who has studied an aboriginal civilization at first hand who is most impressed by the frequent vitality of culture in less sophisticated levels. He cannot but admire the well-rounded life of the average participant in the civilization of a typical American Indian tribe; the firmness with which every part of that life is bound together into a significant whole in which he is far from a passive pawn; above all, the molding role that he plays in the mechanism of his culture. When the political integrity of his tribe is destroyed by contact with the whites and the old cultural values cease to have the atmosphere needed for their continued vitality, the Indian finds himself in a state of bewildered vacuity. Even if he succeeds in making a compromise with his new environment, in making what his well-wishers consider great progress toward enlightenment, he is apt to retain an uneasy sense of loss. What has happened is that he has slipped out of the warm embrace of a culture into the cold air of fragmentary existence. What is sad about the passing of the Indian is not the depletion of his numbers by disease nor even the contempt that is too often meted out to him, it is the fading away of genuine cultures, built though they were out of the materials of a low order of sophistication.

We have no right to demand [that] the higher levels of sophistication preserve the individual his manifold functioning, but we ask whether, as a compensation, the individual may demand an intensification in cultural value, a spiritual heightening, of such functions as are left him. The limitation in functioning works chiefly in the economic sphere. It is therefore imperative, if the individual is to preserve his value as a cultured being, that he compensate himself out of the non-economic, the non-utilitarian spheres-social, religious, scientific, aesthetic. This idea of compensation brings to view an important issue, that of the immediate and the remoter ends of human effort.

As a mere organism, man's only function is to keep himself alive and to propagate his kind. There are civilizations, like that of the Eskimo, in which by far the greater part of man's energy is consumed in the satisfaction of these immediate ends. There are practically no civilizations, however, in which at least some of the available energy is not set free for the remoter ends, though, as a rule, these remoter ends are by a process of rationalization made to seem to contribute to the immediate ones. (A magical ritual, for instance, which seems to liberate and give form to powerful emotional aesthetic elements of our nature, is nearly always put in harness to some humdrum utilitarian end.) As a matter of fact, there are very few "primitive" civilizations

that do not consume an exceedingly large share of their energies in the pursuit of the remoter ends. Art for art's sake may be a psychological fact on these less sophisticated levels; it is certainly not a cultural fact.

On our own level of civilization the remoter ends tend to split off from the immediate ones and to assume the form of a spiritual escape from the pursuit of the latter. It is easy to demonstrate this drift by examples taken out of our daily experience. While in most primitive civilizations the dance is apt to be a ritual activity at least ostensibly associated with purposes of an economic nature, it is with us a merely and self-consciously pleasurable activity that not only splits off from the pursuit of immediate ends but even tends to assume a position of hostility to that sphere. In a primitive civilization a great chief dances as a matter of course, with us the captain of industry either refuses to dance at all or does so as a half-contemptuous concession to the tyranny of social custom. On the other hand, the artist of a Ballet Russe has sublimated the dance to an exquisite instrument of self-expression, providing himself with an adequate cultural recompense for his loss of mastery in the realm of direct ends. The captain of industry is one of the comparatively small class of individuals that has inherited something of the feeling of control over the attainment of direct ends that belongs by cultural right to primitive man; the ballet dancer has saved and intensified for himself the feeling of spontaneous participation and creativeness in the world of indirect ends that also belongs by cultural right to primitive man. Each has saved part of the wreckage of a submerged culture for himself.

The psychology of direct and indirect ends undergoes a gradual modification in the higher levels of civilization. The immediate ends continue to exercise the same tyrannical sway in the ordering of our lives, but as our spiritual selves become enriched and develop a more and more inordinate craving for subtler forms of experience, the immediate ends cease to be felt as chief ends and gradually become necessary means, but only means, toward the attainment of the more remote ends. These remoter ends become the chief ends of life. This change of attitude is implied in the statement that the art, science, and religion of a higher civilization best express its spirit or culture.

The transformation of ends is of the greatest cultural importance because it acts as a powerful force for the preservation of culture in levels in which a fragmentary economic functioning of the individual is inevitable. So long as the individual retains a sense of control over the major goods of life, he is able to take his place in the cultural patrimony of his people. Now that the major goods of life have shifted so largely from the realm of immediate to that of remote ends, it becomes a cultural necessity for all who would not be looked upon as disinherited to share in the pursuit of these remoter ends. No harmony and depth of life, no culture, is possible when activity is well-nigh circumscribed by the sphere of immediate ends and when functioning within that sphere is so fragmentary as to have no inherent intelligibility or interest. Here lies the grimmest joke of our present American civilization. The vast majority of us, deprived of any but an insignificant and culturally abortive share in the satisfaction of the immediate wants of mankind, are further deprived of both opportunity and stimulation to share in the production of non-utilitarian values. Part of the time we are dray horses; the rest of the time we are listless consumers of goods. Our spiritual selves go hungry pretty much all of the time.

### III. THE CULTURED INDIVIDUAL AND THE CULTURAL GROUP

There is no real opposition between the culture of the group and an individual culture. The two are interdependent. A healthy national culture is never a passively accepted heritage from the past, but implies the creative participation of the members of the community; implies, in other words, the presence of cultured individuals. An automatic perpetuation of standardized values leads to the dominance of impersonal formulas. The individual is left out in the cold; the culture becomes a manner rather than a way of life, it ceases to be genuine. It is just as true, however, that the individual is helpless without a cultural heritage to work on. He cannot, out of his unaided spiritual powers, weave a strong cultural fabric instinct with the flush of his own personality. Creation is a bending of form to one's will, not a manufacture of form ex nihilo. If the passive perpetuator of a cultural tradition gives us merely a manner, the creator from out of a cultural waste gives us hardly more than a gesture or a yawp.

There is a curious notion afloat that "new" countries are especially favorable soil for the formation of a virile culture. By new is meant something old that has been transplanted to a background devoid of historical associations. There is nothing more tenuous, more shamelessly imitative and external, less virile and self-joyous, than the cultures of so-called "new countries." The environments of these transplanted cultures are new, the cultures themselves are old with the sickly age of arrested development. If signs of a genuine blossoming of culture are belatedly beginning to appear in America, it is not because America is still new; rather is America coming of age, beginning to feel a little old. In a genuinely new country, the preoccupation with the immediate ends of existence reduces creativeness in the sphere of the more remote ends to a minimum. The net result is a perceptible dwarfing of culture. The old stock of non-material cultural becomes progressively impoverished, and ends by being ill-adjusted to the economic and social environment. The more sensitive spirits tend to break with it altogether and to begin anew with a frank recognition of the new environmental conditions. Such new starts are invariably crude; they are long in bearing the fruits of a genuine culture.

The most decisive cultural influences of personality, the most fruitful revolts, are discernible in those environments that have long and richly streaming culture. So far from being suffocated in an atmosphere of endless precedent, the creative spirit gains sustenance and vigor for its own unfolding and may swing free of that very atmosphere with a poise hardly dreamed of by the timid iconoclasts of unformed cultures. Not otherwise could we understand the cultural history of modern Europe. Only in a mature and richly differentiated soil could arise the iconoclasms and visions of an Anatole France, a Nietzsche, an Ibsen, a Tolstoi. In America, at least in the America of yesterday, these iconoclasms would either have been strangled in the cradle would have half-developed into a crude and pathetic isolation. There is no individual incorporation of a cultured ideal without the soil of a genuine communal culture; and no genuine communal culture without the transforming energies of personalities saturated with the cultural values of their time and place. The highest type of culture is thus locked in the embrace of an endless chain. Such a culture avoids the two extremes of "externality" - the externality of surfeit, which weighs down the individual, and the externality of barrenness. The former is the decay of Alexandrianism, in which the individual is no more; the latter, the combined immaturity and decay of an uprooted culture, in which the individual is not yet. Both types of externality may be combined in the

same culture, frequently in the same person. Thus, it is not uncommon to find in America individuals who have had engrafted on a barren and purely utilitarian culture a cultural tradition that apes a grace already embalmed. This juxtaposition of incongruous atmospheres is even typical in certain circles.

Let us look more closely at the place of the individual in a modern sophisticated culture. I have insisted that a genuine culture is one that gives its bearers a sense of inner satisfaction, a feeling of spiritual mastery. In the higher levels of civilization this sense of mastery is all but withdrawn from the economic sphere. It must feed on the non-economic spheres of human activity. The individual is thus driven to the identification of himself with some non-economic interests. For instance, a mediocre person moderately gifted with the ability to express his aesthetic instincts in plastic form and exercising that gift in his own sincere and humble way is a more cultured individual than a person of brilliant endowments who has acquainted himself in a general way with all the "best" that has been thought and felt and done, but who has never succeeded in bringing any portion of his interests into direct relation with the innermost shrine of his personality. An individual of the latter type, for all his brilliance, we call "flat." A flat person cannot be truly cultured. Direct creativeness is [not] essential for the development of individual culture. It is possible to gain a sense of the required mastery by linking one's own personality with that of the great minds and hearts that society has recognized as its significant creators, so long as such linking is attended by some portion of the effort, the fluttering toward realization that is inseparable from all creative effort. It is to be feared, however, that the self-discipline that is here implied is none too often practiced. The linking, as I have called it, of self with master soul too often degenerates into a pleasurable servitude. The pleasurable servitude may degenerate still further into a vice. Those of us who are not altogether blind can see in certain of our acquaintances, if not in ourselves, an indulgence in aesthetic or scientific goods that is strictly comparable to the abuse of alcohol. Both types of self-ignoring or self-submerging habit are signs of a debilitated personality; both are antithetical to the formation of culture.

The individual self, then, in aspiring to culture, fastens upon the accumulated cultural goods of its society for stimulus and [for] the orientation derived in a world of cultural values. The orientation is necessary to give the self a *modus vivendi* with society. The individual needs to assimilate much of the cultural background of his society to prevent his self-expression from degenerating into social sterility. A spiritual hermit may be genuinely cultured, but he is hardly socially so. To say that individual culture must needs grow organically out of the rich soil of a communal culture is far from saying that it must be forever tied to that culture by the leading strings of its own childhood. Once the individual self has grown strong enough to travel in the path most dearly illuminated by its own light, it not only can but should discard much of the scaffolding by which it has made its ascent. Nothing is more pathetic than the persistence with which well-meaning applicants to culture attempt to keep up or revive cultural stimuli which have long outlived their significance for the growth of personality. To keep up or brush up one's Greek, for example, in those numerous cases in which a knowledge of Greek has ceased to bear a genuine relation to the needs of the spirit, is almost a spiritual crime. If the traveling in the path of the self's illumination leads to a position that is destructive of the very values the self was fed on, as happened with Nietzsche and with Tolstoi, it has not in the slightest lost touch with

genuine culture. It may well, on the contrary, have arrived at its own highest possible point of cultural development.

Nietzsche and Tolstoi, however, are extreme types of personality. There is no danger that the vast army of cultured humanity will ever come to occupy spiritual positions of such rigor and originality. The real danger is in submitting to the remorselessly leveling forces of a common cultural heritage and of the action of average mind on average mind. The caution to conformity with tradition, which the champions of culture so often feel themselves called upon to announce, is one that we can generally dispense with. It is rather the opposite caution, the caution to conformity with the essential nature of one's own personality, that needs urging as a counter-irritant to the flat and tedious sameness of spiritual outlook, the anemic make-believe, the smug intolerance of the challenging, that so imprison our American souls.

No greater test of the genuineness of both individual and communal culture can be applied than the attitude adopted toward the past. The genuinely cultured individual or society does not contemptuously reject the past. They honor the works of the past, but not because they are gems of historical chance, not because, being out of our reach, they must needs be looked at through the enshrining glass of museum cases. These works of the past still excite our heartfelt interest because they may be recognized as the expression of a human spirit warmly akin, despite all differences of outward garb, to our own. This is equivalent to saying that the past is of cultural interest only when it is still the present or may yet become the future. Paradoxical as it may seem, the historical spirit has always acted in some measure as an unwitting deterrent of the cultural utilization of the past. The historical spirit says, "Beware, those thoughts and those feelings that you so rashly think to embody in the warp and woof of your own spirit - they are of other time and of other place and they issue from alien motives. In bending over them you do but obscure them with the shadow of your own spirit." This cool reserve is an excellent mood for the making of historical science; its usefulness to the building of culture in the present is doubtful. We know more about Hellenic antiquity than did the scholars and artists of the Renaissance; it would be folly to pretend that our utilization of the Hellenic spirit is comparable to the the creative stimulus, that those men of the Renaissance obtained from its fragmentary and garbled tradition.

It is difficult to think of a renaissance of that type today. We walk so gingerly in the paths of the past for fear of stepping on anachronisms, that, wearied with fatigue, we sink into a heavy doze, to be awakened only by the insistent clatter of the present. It may be that in our present state of detachment, is not only unavoidable but essential for the preservation of our own individualities. The past is now more of a past than ever before. Perhaps we should expect less of it than ever before. Or rather expect no more of it than it hold its portals wide open, that we may enter in and despoil it of what bits we choose for our pretty mosaics. Can it be that the critical sense of history, which galvanizes the past into scientific life, is destined to slay it for the life of culture? More probably, what is happening is that the spiritual currents of today are running so fast, so turbulently, that we find it difficult to get a culturally vital perspective of the past, which is, for the time being, left as a glorified mummy in the hands of the pundits. And those of us who take their culture neither as knowledge nor as manner, but as life, will ask the past not so much "what?" and "when?" and "where?" as "how?" and the accent of their "how" will be modulated in

accordance with the needs of the spirit of each, a spirit that is free to glorify, to transform, and to reject.

To summarize the place of the individual in our theory of culture, we may say that the pursuit of genuine culture implies two types of reconciliation. The self seeks instinctively for mastery. In the process of acquiring a sense of mastery that is not crude but proportioned to the degree of sophistication proper to our time, the self is compelled to suffer an abridgment and to undergo a molding. The extreme differentiation of function which the progress of man has forced upon the individual menaces the spirit; we have no recourse but to submit with good grace to this abridgment of our activity, but it must not be allowed to clip the wings of the spirit unduly. This is the first and most important reconciliation — the finding of a full world of spiritual satisfactions within the limits of a confined economic activity.

The self must set itself at a point where it can, if not embrace the whole spiritual life of its group, at least catch enough of its rays to burst into light and flame. Moreover, the self must learn to reconcile its own strivings with the general spiritual life of the community. It must be content to borrow sustenance from the spiritual consciousness of that community and of its past, that it may grow where its power, great or little, will be brought to bear on a spiritual life that is of intimate concern to other wills. Yet, despite all reconciliations, the self has a right to grow as an integral, self-poised, spiritual growth, whose ultimate justifications rest in itself. The conception of the self as a mere instrument toward the attainment of communal ends lead[s] in the long run to psychological absurdities and to spiritual slavery. It is the self that concedes, if there is to be any concession. Spiritual freedom, what there is of it, is not alms dispensed by the social body.

Wherever there is discussion of culture, emphasis is instinctively placed upon art. If we would catch something of the spirit of a bygone period or of an exotic civilization, we turn first to its art. For it the highest manifestations of culture necessarily rest[s] in art, for the reason that art is the authentic expression, in satisfying form, of experience; experience not as logically ordered by science, but as directly and intuitively presented to us in life. As culture rests on the harmonious development of the sense of mastery instinctively sought by each individual soul, art, the form of consciousness in which the impress of the self is most direct, is bound to reflect culture. To relate our lives to forms of expression that carry conviction to others and make us live again in these others is the highest spiritual satisfaction we know of, the highest welding of one's individuality with the spirit of his civilization. Were art ever really perfect in expression, it would indeed be immortal. Even the greatest art, however, is full of the dross of conventionality, of the particular sophistications of its age. As these change, the directness of expression in any work of art tends [is] increasingly hampered by something fixed and alien, until it gradually falls into oblivion. While art lives, it belongs to culture; in the degree that it takes on the frigidity of death, it becomes of interest only to the study of civilization. Thus all art appreciation (and production, for that matter) has two faces. It is unfortunate that the face directed to civilization is so often confounded with that which is fixed on culture.

#### IV. THE GEOGRAPHY OF CULTURE

An oft-noted peculiarity of the development of culture is the fact that it reaches its greatest heights in comparatively small, autonomous groups. In fact, it is doubtful if a genuine culture ever properly belongs to more than such a restricted group, a group between the members of which there can be said to be something like direct intensive spiritual contact. This direct contact is enriched by the common cultural heritage; it is rendered swift and pregnant by the thousands of feelings and ideas that constantly glimmer in the background. Such small, culturally autonomous groups were the Athens of the Periclean Age [and] the London of Elizabethan days. It is customary to speak of these groups as though they were identical with widely extended groups and cultures. Such usages are really figures of speech, substitutions of a part for the whole. It is astonishing, for instance, how much the so-called "history of French literature" is really the history of literary activity in the city of Paris. True enough, a narrowly localized culture may spread its influence far beyond its properly restricted sphere. Sometimes it sets the pace for a whole nationality, for a far-flung empire. It can do so, however, only at the expense of diluting in spirit as it moves away from its home, of degenerating into an imitative attitudinizing. If we realized what the rapid spread of a culture entails, to what an extent it conquers by crushing the germs of healthier autonomous growths, we would be less eager to welcome uniformizing tendencies. A culture may well be quickened from without, but its supersession by another is no cultural gain. Whether or not it is attended by a political gain does not concern us here. That is why the deliberate attempt to impose a culture directly and speedily, no matter how backed by good will, is an affront to the human spirit. When such an attempt is backed, not by good will, but by military ruthlessness, it is the greatest conceivable crime against the human spirit, it is the very denial of culture.

Does this mean that we must turn our back on all internationalistic tendencies and vegetate forever in our nationalisms? Here we are confronted by the prevalent fallacy that internationalism is opposed to the development of autonomous cultures. The fallacy fail[s] to realize that internationalism, nationalism, and localism are forms that can be given various contents. We cannot intelligently discuss internationalism before we know what it is that we are to be internationalistic about. Unfortunately we are so obsessed by the idea of subordinating all forms of human association to the state and of regarding the range of all types of activity as conterminous with political boundaries, that it is difficult for us to reconcile the idea of a local or restrictedly national autonomy of culture with a purely political state-sovereignty and with an economic-political internationalism.

No one can see clearly the larger outcome of the present world conflicts. They may exacerbate rather than allay national-political animosities. But this deplorable result cannot well be other than a passing phase. Even now it is evident that the war has, in more ways than one, paved the way for an economic and semi-political internationalism. All those spheres of activity that relate to the satisfaction of immediate ends will tend to become international functions. However the internationalizing processes will shape themselves, they will at bottom be but the reflection of that growing impatience of the human spirit with the preoccupation with direct ends. Such transnational problems as the distribution of economic goods, the transportation of commodities, the control of highways, the coinage, and numerous others, must eventually pass into the hands of international organizations for the simple reason that men will not eternally



give their loyalty to the uselessly national administration of functions that are of inherently international scope. As this international scope gets to be thoroughly realized, our present infatuations with national prestige in the economic sphere will show themselves for the spiritual imbecilities that they are.

All this has much to do with the eventual development of culture. As long as culture is looked upon as a decorative appanage of large political units, its preservation is bound up with these units. But genuine culture is inconceivable except on the basis of a highly individual spiritual consciousness, it rarely remains healthy when spread thin over an interminable area, and in its higher reaches it is in no mood to submit to economic and political bonds. Now a generalized international culture is hardly thinkable. The national-political unit tends to arrogate culture to itself and up to a certain point it succeeds in doing so, but only at the price of serious cultural impoverishment of vast portions of its terrain. If the economic and political integrity of these large state-controlled units becomes undermined by the growth of international functions, their cultural *raison d'etre* must also weaken. Culture must then tend with ever increasing intensity to cling to relatively small social and political units, units that are not too large to incorporate the individuality that is to culture as the very breath of life. Between these two processes, the integration of economic and political forces into a world sovereignty and the disintegration of our present unwieldy culture units into small units whose life is truly virile and individual, the fetich of the present state may in the dim future be trusted to melt away. The political state of today has long been on trial and has been found wanting. Our national-political units are too small for peace, too large for safety. They are too small for the intelligent solution of the large problems in the sphere of direct ends; they are too large for the fruitful enrichment of the remoter ends, for culture.

It is in the New World that the unsatisfactory nature of a geographically widespread culture is manifest. To find substantially the same cultural manifestations in New York and Chicago and San Francisco is saddening. It argues a shallowness in the culture itself and a readiness to imitation in its bearers that is not reassuring. Even if no definite way out of the cultural morass is discernible for the present, there is no good in basking forever in self-sufficiency. It can only be of benefit to search out the depths of our hearts and to find wherein they are wanting. If we exaggerate our weakness, it does not matter; better chastening than self-glorification. We have been in the habit of giving ourselves credit for essentially quantitative results that are due rather to an unusually favoring nature and to a favoring set of economic conditions than to anything in ourselves. Our victories have been brilliant, but they have also too often been barren for culture. The habit of playing with loaded dice has given us a dangerous attitude of passivity — dangerous, that is, for culture. Stretching back opulently in our easy chairs, we expect great cultural things to happen to us. We have wound up the machinery, it is "up to" culture to come forth, in heavy panoply. The minute increment of individuality which alone makes culture in the self and eventually builds up a culture in the community seems somehow overlooked. Canned culture is so much easier to administer.

Just now we are expecting a great deal from the European war. No doubt the war and its aftermath will shake us out of some part of our smugness and let in a few invigorating air currents of cultural influence, but, if we are not careful, these influences may harden into new

standardizations or become diluted into another stock of imitative attitudes. The war and its aftermath cannot be a sufficient cultural cause, they are at best but another set of favoring conditions. Sooner or later we shall have to get down to the humble task of exploring the depths of our consciousness and dragging to the light what sincere bits of reflected experience we can find. These bits will not always be beautiful, they will not always be pleasing, but they will be genuine. And then we can build. In time, in plenty of time — for we must have patience — a genuine culture — better yet, a series of linked autonomous cultures — will grace our lives. And New York and Chicago and San Francisco will live each in its own cultural strength, not squinting from one to another to see which gets ahead in a race for external values, but each serenely oblivious of its rivals because growing in a soil of genuine cultural values.