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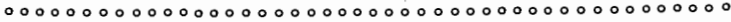
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Beyond the two Cultures

In this paper, based on that given to the VICTORIA INSTITUTE on 18 May 1974 in London at the Symposium on "The Christian and Modern Culture", the author who is a lecturer in the Department of English Language and Literature in the University of Keele, explores the avenues by which we may break open "the hermetically sealed containers of specialisation and privilege in our diverse culture". He closes with some reflections on the discussion which ensued.

It seems a long time now since C. P. Snow and F. R. Leavis crossed swords. It was in 1959 that Snow gave his Rede Lecture, lamenting the dangerous gap between the two 'cultures' of the scientists and the literary intellectuals. In 1962 Leavis gave his Richmond Lecture, a mixture of personal vituperation and cogent criticism which aimed at nothing short of demolition of all that Snow stood for. At the time the debate was long and often acrimonious; now it raises no hackles to speak of. Is the issue still alive?

At this distance we can see that the debate has a much longer history than ten years. If we consider Matthew Arnold's Rede Lecture of 1882, *Literature and Science*, the issue is immediately crystallised in educational terms. It is part of Arnold's continued argument with T. H. Huxley, the apologist of science. Arnold parts company with Huxley as soon as he

proposes that training in science should be the main part of education for the majority of students. Similarly, we must see the conflict of Snow and Leavis as the conflict of academic specialists, one group of which wanted the main thrust of education to be in training more scientists and technologists, the other who saw the English School as the natural hub of the university. In his "The Two Cultures: A Second Look", Snow described his Rede Lecture as "Some straightforward proposals about education";¹ rather more unkindly, John Tasker asserts;

The real purpose of [Snow's] lecture was to advocate the expansion of technological specialisation and to provide a rationale for the empire-building of scientific research in the universities. To this end it was necessary actually to discredit literary studies . . .²

To be fair to Snow, the phrase 'empire-building' gives scant credit to his stated intentions of alleviating world poverty and defrosting the Cold War by shared scientific advance. But there is an uncomfortable grain of truth behind Tasker's rhetoric; Snow's solution to the problem of the literary intellectuals' opposition to the march of scientific progress was simply to have less literary education. Time is short; the pace of change, social, economic and scientific, is too fast for any but scientists — in that notorious phrase, with "the future in their bones" — to deal with. I find it difficult to escape from the sense that the only academic culture that Snow finds acceptable is that of the scientist; that the only literary culture acceptable is that acquired by the scientist in his non-professional moments. Certainly that is true of his proposals seen as applied to education, even though he praises writers like Bernard Malamud and Robert Graves, whose scientific interests I have not noticed. And of course the original attraction of Snow's thesis was partly due to his own status as a novelist.

It is that gap between his lament and his actual proposals that worries me most about Snow, but there are other points to be considered before we adopt a Leavisite approach to the educational problem.

It is Snow's contention that the only hope of the poor is technological advance. Quite mistakenly, he accuses the literary writers of the nineteenth century of blind opposition to the Industrial Revolution. It is true that the Revolution did raise standards of living of the working class but, for the first seventy years of so, you would never have guessed. And so the reactions of literary intellectuals as diverse as Blake, Wordsworth, Dickens and Mrs. Gaskell seem quite appropriate. Snow's point about the social ideas of top-rank writers in the present century is far more telling; "the romantic conception of the artist carried to its extreme", and the *engagé* work of an Orwell seems scant alongside the reactionary modernists like Pound and Yeats. Snow goes on to ask the question "How far is it possible to share the hopes of the scientific revolution, the modern difficult hopes for other human lives, and at the same time participate without qualification in the kind of literature which has just been defined?"^{1b} — i.e., modernist literature.

Leavis, however, contends that simple technological advance (and Snow is very fond of 'plain man' expressions of this) is "disastrously not enough". Here he is not anticipating the perspective on technology engendered by environmental and ecological considerations, but making a point about the nature of man, and with this we must agree. As Leavis points out, Snow uses the crass word "jam" instead of 'salvation' or 'felicity'.³ But aren't those religious words? What does Leavis mean when he wants salvation and felicity? Alas, disastrously not enough. It is a kind of æsthetic and ethical universalism, worthy and important aims in their way, but not what a Christian would recognise as true spirituality. It is interesting that Leavis' heroes in his criticism after the 'Two Cultures' debate are far more 'spiritual' in this limited sense — Blake, Yeats and Tolstoy, for example. But Leavis' tragic failure to go far enough is shown nowhere more clearly than in his essay on *The Pilgrim's Progress*, where he takes spirituality to be most happily shown in the home life, the music and books, of Christiana and her children, rather than in Christian's journey to the Heavenly City and the conflicts that that involves.⁴

The same inadequacies appear in Arnold's lecture mentioned above. We must applaud the way he goes much further than Huxley in his appreciation of what a man needs to be an educated human being — "the power of conduct, the power of intellect and knowledge, the power of beauty, and the power of social life and manners".⁵ But unless one adds something like 'the potential of knowing and serving God' it is doubtful whether these qualities will hold together. It seems that Arnold yearned after religion as a cultural fact, but was unwilling to have the concomitant of the religious fact. Leavis has regarded Arnold as his mentor, and the connection holds here as elsewhere.

A more famous inheritor of the Arnold tradition, T. S. Eliot, took the claims of religion in a more serious and appropriate manner. Nor did he, in the manner of many Christian contemporaries of Arnold's time and his own, substitute a Manichean distrust of intellect, beauty and society for a biblical enjoyment of them.

But Eliot's own work on culture and education, in *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* and *The Idea of a Christian Society* gives an analysis and a prescription which is still lacking in something. The most serious criticism one can make of it is not its scant treatment of science, but the implicitly aristocratic concept of culture which it contains. Raymond Williams, in *Culture and Society*, has pointed to the contradiction. Eliot insists, admirably, that culture is not simply a product, a few books, a work of art, a piece of music, but a whole way of life. He condemns injustice and an 'atomized' way of life; and yet he advocates the kind of economy as the background to his culture which, historically, has thrived on injustice and encouraged 'atomization', the increasingly private nature of man. It seems important to add that most Christians are still in Eliot's position, still failing to realise that an appeal for justice is a criticism of the structure of society.

One can imagine Snow, albeit a different brand of socialist from Williams, making the same criticism of Eliot but, even at the economic and political level, Snow's educational proposals

perpetuate injustice and inequality. Again the issues are clarified by the historical context. If we look back to the Taunton Report of 1868, three grades of secondary education are proposed: the first for the sons of the very rich, the professional people, and the gentry, who should pursue the classics, maths., modern languages and natural science; the second, for those intending to join the army, all but the highest branches of the professions, civil engineering, etc. and the mercantile classes; the third grade, with a syllabus of the three Rs, for farmers, tradesmen and artisans. Blatantly class-based, blatantly unjust, but nevertheless an improvement on the situation as it then was. The trouble is that we have still to free ourselves totally from that self-perpetuating tripartite system; and while the 1944 Education Act has none of the recognisably 'Victorian' attitudes of the Taunton report, the inequalities have not been eradicated. The Dainton Report of 1968, on technology in higher education, is an example of the new rhetoric, and an example of the success of Snow's ideas. What we require now is education which will meet the national need. Dainton tussles briefly with the need for individual freedom, then concludes, "National requirements do, after all, determine the opportunities for individuals".⁶ It is a constant weakness of educational reports that these requirements are, eventually, recognisable in terms of economic progress along current lines — which begs a lot of questions.

Of course, things have improved enormously since 1868, but let us not ignore the built-in classification of people that still exists, to the detriment of those people. Culture is not just the property of the 'first grade'; arguments about culture, the 'two cultures' debate included, often assume it is. That, then, is one way of going beyond the two cultures dichotomy: to recognise the economic factors which determine to quite a large extent the nature and quality of culture.

Another way, as Snow indicates, would be to notice the rise of the 'third culture', the social sciences. Most universities tend to split themselves three ways — arts, sciences, social sciences. And it is the third group which is the expanding one.

Durkheim is as good a place as any to start with for the distinctively sociological approach to man — man as a socially created being.

Every society sets up a certain ideal of man, of what he should be, as much from the intellectual point of view as the physical and moral. This ideal is, in some degree, the same for all members of society ; but it also becomes differential beyond a certain point, according to the specific groupings contained in its structure. It is this ideal, which is both integral and diverse, that is the focus of education . . . Education is thus simply the means by which society prepares, in its children, the essential conditions of its own existence.⁷

The growth of this way of seeing education, indeed of seeing ourselves, is yet another way of breaking open the hermetically sealed containers of specialisation and privilege in our diverse culture. Equally, the principle that creates a sociology — treating all fact as social fact — can lead to the same kind of exclusiveness, one-sidedness and incompleteness that we have lamented elsewhere.

Another way of reducing the fragmentation might be an examination of the nature of creativity in the various branches of knowledge and the arts. This would not affect much of the educational argument ; but a model, like Liam Hudson's, of the convergent and divergent minds, indicates that the processes of creation are similar in the various 'cultures'. But, that said, this line of thinking does not take us far. A living culture demands creativity but is not created by it. Culture is integrated at the level of discourse, not at the level of creation. And important though it is for us to have a clear notion of Christian creativity — and in that sense we all read Genesis properly these days ! — it will not help us much with the problem of a disintegrating culture.

But what is the point of working for a common culture anyway ? Do not those who work for it make it into a false God ?

My point about that with regard to Arnold and his successors was that his idea was incomplete if one argues from a Christian standpoint, taking Eliot's notion of culture as a whole way of life. Our aim should be one of completeness, the cultured man in the cultured society.

These are pitfalls. There is the remnant mentality, which takes the Christian so far out of the world that such an ideal is an impossibility. It would seem that here an entirely laudable desire for holiness has produced a sense that salvation is possible for individuals but never, in some way, for societies. The Old Testament remnant never lost the vision that both were necessary. Nor should we.

But equally we can take on a misleading, misty-eyed conception of what an organic society might be. It is not unusual for those who plead for a unified culture to have an Arcadian conception of past glories, when you could take a girl to a tournament, buy her lampreys and chips and twenty Woodbines and still have change from a groat. And we should be equally suspicious of those who see history as a sort of ethical escalator, with the neon lights of the kingdom of heaven on earth winking at the top. There are to be all sorts of wars and rumours of wars before the end comes. It is up to us to be blessed peace-makers, making real peace in the cultural sphere as in others.

In the original lecture I suggested one small way in which we might begin, in the realm of religious language. It may be that the language of the Authorised version has become obscure, for the language has changed since 1611 so much that it has become misleading to take it literally in some places. But all the current versions of the Bible that I have come across are often ludicrously infelicitous in their use of language. Ian Robinson, in his book *The Survival of English*, argues that the decline of religious language has gone so far as to make it genuinely difficult to be religious. I feel that Ian Robinson, in the great tradition of Arnold and Leavis, laments this as a cultural rather than a religious fact, but the argument is a strong one. A questioner made the important point that I seemed to be falling into the

class trap I had so gingerly avoided earlier, and ought to make the sacrifice for the extension of the kingdom to those whose natural language is that of the tabloid newspaper. In a way the questioner answered his own problem by reference to the case of Bunyan, a man deeply biblical in his writing, and yet popular in the best sense, whose style is very different from the Authorised Version. He was good at it, though; he uses real proverbs with the authentic zip and daring of living colloquialism. Where is the modern version of *Proverbs* that has real proverbs in it? As Bunyan himself noted, second-hand religious experience makes a useless religious book; but so does flat, boring language; far better to “make truth to spangle, and its rays to shine”.⁸

As Ian Robinson hints, it is not only our cultural life that is the poorer for drab journalese religious language; it may be our sense of the authority and validity of religious experience that suffers too. This may seem a narrow part of God’s vineyard, but it does seem to be one area where there is work to be done.

NOTES

1. C. P. Snow, *The Two Cultures: and a Second Look*, Cambridge, 1964, (a) p. 86; (b) p. 96-7.
2. John Tasker, *The Richmond Lecture*, Swansea, 1972, p. 13.
3. F. R. Leavis, *Two Cultures? The Significance of C. P. Snow*, London, 1962, p. 25.
4. The essay is in *Anna Karenina and Other Essays*, London, 1967.
5. Matthew Arnold, *Discourses in America*, London, 1885, p. 101.
6. *Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Flow of Candidates in Science and Technology into Higher Education*, 1968, chapter 8.
7. E. Durkheim, *Selected Writings*, ed. Antony Giddens, Cambridge, 1972, p. 203-4.
8. John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, London, 1678, ‘The Author’s Apology for his Book.’