

# DEMOCRACY AND CULTURE

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to create appetites (working cunningly on human frailty), and then to satisfy them—at a profit. Their origin is anything but democratic. This state of things is of course made possible by the venality of artists themselves, and their capacity for rationalising their treacheries. There are thousands of artists who are nothing more than collaborators in an occupied country. It is the artists who produce nearly all the bad commercialised art—doing it deliberately, in the full knowledge that they are debasing standards, and excusing themselves on the ground that they "must live." (Je ne vois pas la nécessité).

I think that when the State, or any other public authority, sets out to organise or to patronise the arts, it has a clear duty to encourage only that which is genuine. It should have no truck with anything that is meretricious, or moronic. The State certainly has no business helping to commercialise the standards of art, any more than it has to enter the cocaine trade or to run State brothels. Otherwise, we might as well set up a Ministry of Bread and a Ministry of Circuses at once. Perhaps we have them already.

Both the artist and the State have a higher responsibility than that of providing the public of the moment with what it thinks it wants. Their first duty is to the traditions of art, and of civilised society. There are objective standards in art just as there are in doctoring and plumbing. These can't be codified in exact terms, any more than you can give a scientific definition of happiness. But there is an organic and living tradition; and there is such a thing as intellectual authority—and if a community doesn't accept and cultivate these things as one cultivates a garden, it will end by throttling itself, or die by a sort of ptomaine poisoning.

At the same time, may Heaven defend us against the establishment of any sort of "official" art. If the State is to encourage the arts, the politician's job is not to impose his own tastes (which may be anything at all), but to create the conditions under which art can happen. This means, among other things, encouraging diversity, and preventing any particular artist to whom power is entrusted from imposing his ideas on all the other artists. This is very likely to happen. For artists as a rule are about as tolerant and broad-minded as cats.

What we need is a class of men whose minds are cultivated; who are not bound in academic chains; and who are intimate with the broad traditions of the arts. Their function should be to act as intermediaries between the State, the artists and the people; and as guardians of standards, anti-toxic agents. The authority for administering public art should be delegated chiefly to groups drawn from this class. I think we have such men. But I see little inclination in any quarter to let them do the important work for which they, and probably they alone, are fitted.

—A. R. D. Fairburn

MR. PRIESTLEY must surely be the sentimentalist of the Left. He has been greatly publicised and when his article first appeared I merely glanced at it. One tires of reading in order to refute rather than to gain instruction

or delight. Counting heads is proper for selecting those to engage in the art of government but not for fixing standards in what he differentiates as cultural arts. The farm-hand ignorant of culture is sufficiently expert in essential principles of government and in policies such as broadcasting, or monetary controls, or gaming, which may become vital issues at an election.

Government is probably a pre-requisite of the emergence of culture. Under enlightened government, whether or not democratic in form, the common people are often better judges of cultural things than of policies. Folk music has inspired some of our greatest musicians; folk-lore and proverbial philosophy exhibit both beauty and wisdom. The shoemaker may be a good art critic if he does not look above the shoe. The commonsense of the people has often been a prime factor in the rejection of extravagance or decadent trends in art.

The crux of the problem of government as of culture lies in authority. I have not found life easy. I am not so submissive as not to have kicked against the pricks or so passionless as to have felt no tension of choice between light and dark. I have held by training and instinct to the necessity of authority and I have passed to successive stages of loyalty in service, of ethical conduct, of cultural appreciation, with the same certitude of higher values as when I deserted marbles for cricket. Two things worry one—a seeming dualism in life and the abuse of authority. Space restricts me to brief consideration of the second.

As to the seat of authority—I reject unconditional legitimacy claims of persons or classes. Our history gives no support to the theory that vox populi is vox Dei. I reject determinist claims that social organisation, classless for instance, or planned economies will prevent abuse. Authority emerges, wins allegiance, endures as it accepts the principles of laws inherent in the nature of things. They have been called the Law of Nature and the Law of God. I prefer the latter. They are not entirely self-evident, are always unfolding. The almost Hegelian shuffle of society left or right calls for constant prophecy. Conformity is the vital principle. The great rebel is a great conformist. Acceptance of the law is a unifying principle. The United Nations have nothing comparable. It gave authority to the internationalism of Grocius. In a State, authority will strive to maintain the tradition, those national traits, that sense of mission and faith in it which conditioned its rise and loss of which will bring its fall. At our truly heroic periods the common people, my people, under great leaders have fought for right not privilege. With such a faith they may be trusted to respond to things of the spirit.

—T. D. H. Hall

MR. PRIESTLEY has, in the best journalistic tradition, written a provocative and amusing article in which he implies the need for a cultural dictatorship. He wants good art. We all

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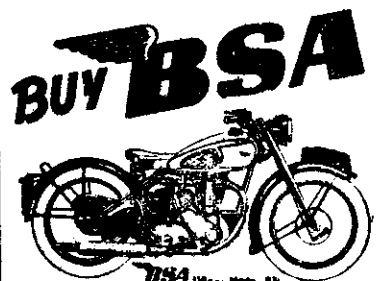
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