

RESTITUTIO

CULTURE AND THE FULFILMENT OF THE HUMAN PERSONALITY*

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There is one fact at the origin of human consciousness: the feeling for novelty. Consciousness turns man into a being sensitive to novelty.

The more extraordinary the novelty, the stronger it imprints itself upon human consciousness. The entire development of human consciousness depends on this basic fact. The new, extraordinary fact sets going the attention of the primitive man and causes him to think. It causes him to think, all the more so as for primitive man, this new fact isps often as not a threat to his existence. For primitive man, to understand the novelty, to assimilate it within his own consciousness means not only compliance with curiosity but also carrying out a useful vital action.

Because culture is a personality. It is however a prototype-personality and not a concrete one, such as that of the individual. The variety of structure offered by the concrete personality is not to be found in culture. Culture has an ideal structure: it is rather a potential reality. It is more than the statistical average of the concrete personalities inside a people: it is the ideal personality to which each concrete personality contributes as a component. The worse torn in their souls by the pains of doubt and the absurdity of experience are concrete personalities, the more lively become their aspirations after unity. The deeper a people's feeling of the world's disharmony in their consciousness, the more propitious becomes that consciousness to welcoming some culture. For culture, like personality, spells spiritual balance.

One often speaks of European culture, in the singular, and of national European cultures in the plural. How should we understand the relationship between these words in the singular and in the plural? We ought to construe it as a relationship of organic growth. European culture is but one; on the other hand it has undergone various stages. Each major stage has found its crystallization in an easily recognizable form of national culture. Each form used to be definitive for the time and milieu in which it appeared; but after the exhaustion of the time

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suiting it, each form lost its definitive nature and saw a process of transformation, out of which a new form emerged. Thus, European culture is divided into several national cultures, very much as the human personality generally is divided into several personalities, in keeping with the correlation of spiritual abilities.

The various national cultures are but components of European culture which confers unity and continuity upon them. As a matter of fact no European people is the exclusive creator of one type of culture. Even when we find a people largely contributing to moulding a type of culture, we immediately realize that borrowings were not absent from it either. The genuine types of culture go beyond geographical divisions. Not even divisions according to races are observed. European races and peoples belong to the same type of culture. Cultural differences between them are not so profound as to give birth to different types. Differences in nationality do not entail differences in culture. European culture comprises several nationalities and several races. If one nevertheless speaks of English, French, German, Italian and other cultures, this is done with certain qualifications, because all these individual cultures are components of the same type of culture [...]

European culture is the ideal result of the various national cultures, very much as a people's personality is the ideal result of the different individual personalities included in that people. Individual personalities are more concrete than the people's personality, while the latter is more concrete than the European one, because the former are fixed in their established forms and aptitudes, while the cultures of the various peoples' are, even more so, European culture as a whole, have no established form and aptitudes, but are subject to permanent change. Individual personalities are more concrete, though not necessarily more real. They are all equally real.

Originally, European culture sprang from the bold attempt made by some elite spirits to provide answers for the contrarities of experience. Dissatisfied with the vague armour of mysticism, those spirits sought a lasting and fertile structure for their armour. Very much as with the mystics, their endeavour was to place man above the experience full of contrasts. Actually, new culture too is in the nature of heroism. It tends to embody the ideal of a strong personality, raised above the environment and including all of the latter's contrarities in its comprehension. Like the mystic, the educated European anthropomorphizes – not with the subjectiveness of emotion but with that of intelligence. Originally, like the mystic, the European starts out with trust in his triumph.

The European is inclined to see everywhere conflicts between contrary forces. For him life is a struggle. Until a short while ago, the most elementary facts of the physical world were surrounded for him in metaphysical dualism. Until a short while ago, the European needed some kind of energy to oppose

matter, very much as he needed a spirit, in order to oppose the body. All his ideas are imbued with the opposition between contraries.

He, the first homo *faber*, was left as if fascinated under the impression of the first tools which, beginning with man's hands, are all of them a combination of opposite forces submitted to the achievement of some purpose. As stated by the great naturalist Cuvier, the hand has the capacity to oppose the thumb to the other fingers, thus enabling man to catch objects. The hand is therefore the most useful tool, the one that preceded all other instruments. The hand served as a model for the earliest instruments: its organization contains in an embryo the entire technique of the machine age. Today's thinking European follows the example of the first European who created instruments. He views all Nature as a great "organon", in which aims are achieved through the opposition of the contraries. Good must come off victorious out of its struggle with evil; the spirit out of its struggle with matter; happiness out of its struggle with pain... The European does not give up this dualism even ^understanding facts closely connected with experience. For the European, even when it is reduced to a mere discussion, struggle must produce something. Ideas emerge from discussions very much as sparks emerge from the flint steel string the flint. In his intimate, spiritual forum, the European is a worshipper of fire in the meaning ascribed by Heraclitus as a generator of permanent contrasts. Nature acquires life out of the struggle of the contraries; the soul is purified throughputs struggle with sin; mind is sharpened through dialectics ! The European sees everywhere some struggle between forces and principles; "homo *faber*" follows "homo *divinans*."

Should we now analyse the development of European culiire, we can distinguish three major phases in it. Each of these phases throws out into bold relief some essential moment out of what we now call the European type of culture. The first phase was dominated by the genius of the Greeks. During that phase, European consciousness was deeply concerned with the contradiction between pleasure and pain, between form and matter, between the eternal and the transient, between reason and sensitiveness. During that phase arose the systems of classical philosophy – Platonicism and Aristotelianism. In both those systems, form and the eternal ideal emerged triumphant over matter and sensitiveness. The spiritual balance acquired for personality during that phase is found by us crystallized in the morality of stoicism. Through reason the sage rises above the senses, mastering passions. *Si fractus illabatur orbis, impavidum ferient ruinae.**

The stoic sage was the first structure of spiritual balance, offered as a model to European personalities. Its ideal prevailed for many centuries. It still lives in our own days, merging into crystallizations acquired of late.

* If the round sky should crack and fall upon him, the wreck will strike him fearless still (Horace, Odes, III, 7 – *Ed*).

The second phase was that of mediaeval Christianity. The ideal of Christian man was moulded in it. Victory now goes to the soul against the body: it goes to happiness acquired through pain. Spiritual balance is conferred by salvation from evil. It is an ideal that again prevailed for centuries and is still dominant, although blended into a new crystallization.

Finally, the third phase is that in which we now live. Typical of it is what has been saved for it by history: the accomplishment of the ideal personality in terms of freedom. The stoic sage masters the senses, though not Nature; the Christian saint secures for him the happiness of heaven; for the ideal to become complete, one still needed man's rising, in dignity, above all Nature, as a free agent. This is what the thinkers of modern Europe have achieved. Our own era is that of the free, autonomous and sovereign personality. The European who belongs to a great and powerful nation, takes pride in his national sovereignty. The European who belongs to a smaller nation nevertheless takes pride in his national autonomy. As a matter of fact, any European – with or without nationality – takes pride in his freedom. The European world has no more widespread belief than that of freedom of his will. Individuals are entitled to self-determination.

While the first two phases of culture are a thing of the past, the results obtained during those phases have not yet disappeared from the consciousness of European peoples. The stoic ideal and the Christian one are still alive and will go on living. Yet they no longer enjoy the supremacy they used to have. On Europe's map we find them relegated increasingly towards a peripheral place. In the centre held by the cultivated peoples, the ideal dominates under its most recent form. The human personality has eventually found the balance after which it has striven: in freedom and mechanism, i.e. freedom for the moral world, mechanism for the physical world. Whoever can preserve the autonomy of his will and at the same time wrest from Nature as many services as possible, that is a complete human being. For such a man, the contrarities of experience are at least explained if not removed. Nature reduced to a mere mechanism can no longer be a threat. Its contrarities are just accidents and can be mastered. Man's link to Nature, that is man's real tragedy, is no longer a mystery. Through his transient side, man is linked to the earth; he is a mechanism. But that does not matter. Man's most mobile side is free, it is autonomous, it is sovereign. What does the clay figure* care about death, pain and ill-luck, when he is the world's sovereign? That nature lies at his feet is proved by the riches gathered through mechanism. Never before was man stronger. The European is proud. Culture invests him with an almost magical armour. The instruments which prolong his hand drill the earth and

* Perhaps an allusion to Mihai Eminescu's famous philosophical poem "*Luceafărul*" (*The Evening Star*) in which mortals are seen as clay figures (*Ed*).

cleave the oceans; his great machines and mechanisms transform the elements of Nature according to his needs (...) Nevertheless his thirst for the ideal is not yet quenched. With all the dignity he has conquered, still he cannot find his rest. The structure of his personality lacks something. While his spiritual abilities are challenged to make their contribution, this does not apply to all of them; even those which are elicited are used rather anarchically. Metaphysical dualism has left some latent antagonism in man's soul. The European is obsessed with the struggle between the good side of things and their evil side. He believes that victory must by all means rest with good. Consequently he looks down scornfully upon the side which he himself has called "evil". Nature must behave like a mechanism, because he himself has brought it down to this low level, in order to confer loftiness upon his autonomous will. He is a unilateral dialectician. Stoicism filled him with over-confidence in reason; Christianity imbued him with over-confidence in the happiness which comes naturally when pain has ceased; and the modern ideal has raised him so high above mechanical nature that the motivation of his deeds has come to hang on the mere capacity for self-determination.

That is why the European's spiritual structure yields so easily to revolutionary and war-like tendencies. The concatenation of his dispositions does not lead to a continuous production but to leaps which are heroic, at most. Seen from a distance, European culture appears like a mediaeval knight's armour: awesome in appearance, yet unpractical in reality. The man of the future ought to make another armour for himself.

What will this new armour be like?

More productive and more practical. In European culture up to date, the crystallization of spiritual inclinations does not go to the very depths of the human being. The European is no longer mystical, yet he is not fully realistic either. His ego is still anarchic. European culture displays a kind of organization which is wonderful for aesthetic and intellectual creations, but is very deficient for the creations of labour.

The European man reflects himself in his culture as disciplined in his thinking and anarchic in his deeds. This discrepancy lies at the root of his propensities to a hyperbolization of struggle.

Man attains the fulfilment of his personality when he places at the service of society the maximum of energy with which Nature endowed him. At the basis of man's personality lies his psycho-physical human background, made up of a vast number of factors: some of these are linked to biological functions, others to spiritual ones. The harmony between all these factors generates maximum of energy. Between man's body and man's mind there must be a close correlation. The hand is all the more industrial as the brain is more thoughtful. A perfect human being blends both of them. A contemplative man – in spite of his fine inclinations to art and science – is no full personality if he is unproductive or

proves productive only in a desultory manner. The life of a tramp, “la vie de bohème” is most adverse to human personality.

Things are perfectly similar in the field of culture. Culture starts being rounded off with a people the very moment when the treasure of its dispositions generated by its members are turned to full account. There is no exclusively poetical or exclusively intellectual culture. There are only the cultures springing from complete souls: out of work and thinking taken together.

European culture heads for perfection, yet it has a long way to go. Proof of this is offered by the characterizations attached to its national cultures. Not one of these labels offer an image of full man. All of them float in the sphere of imagination or of abstraction. As a rule we have no characterizations made according to the technique of work, and when we have them, they are extremely vague. Allegedly the English are commercial, the Germans industrial, the Jews inclined to money speculations... and that is about all. With abundant details one describes the representative types of philosophers, artists, diplomats, military commanders, revolutionists... who have emerged out of various peoples and – as is but natural – from the knowledge of such types one attempts to draw conclusions on the culture of the nations themselves, while the types of work-builders are left aside, as unimportant. Nevertheless, it is such types that ought to be studied before all the others. The technique of work links man to the cosmic and biologicp environment.

It is through the differentiation of manual labour that begins the first well-grounded differentiation of spiritual energy into aptitudes, after which follow the first buds of culture. Culture is only achieved through ennobling labour, while ennobling labour is the result of the development and utilization of professional aptitudes. A people may inhabit the richest country in the world, yet if they do not boast aptitudes for professional work, all of the country's wealth is useless. They are not going to have an original type of culture because they lack the bridge spiritually linking them to the earth, from which come the springs apt to feed their energy. A people without inclinations to work may boast a specifically national morality, mentality, poetry or physical type of their own, though not genuine culture; such a people is a type of social environment linked to geography but not to history; that is to say such a people is characterized by what Nature imprints on their soul, though not by what they themselves create, changing and promoting Nature.

From *Personalismul energetic (Energy Personalism)*, 1927
Translated by Anda Teodorescu



Constantin Radulescu-Motru (centre, sitting) together with the linguist Theodor Capidan (left) and the literary historian Dimitrie Caracostea, dressed as members of the Romanian Academy



Constantin Radulescu-Motru's *For Developing the Kantian Theory of Natural Causality* (Leipzig, 1893) was one of the starting points in working out the theory of energy personalism.
