

UNITY VERSUS DIVERSITY

by Angie M. Guggenberger Nelson

Many futurists speak of a world culture as the only uniting force which can save our planet Earth from a nuclear holocaust. Yet these same and other futurists speak of the necessity of diversity, of a plurality of cultures, for the continuation of sociocultural change; without change humanity would ossify and join the ranks of extinct species eventually. W. Warren Wager maintains that the current world situation allows us two choices: to build a world civilization or to "revert to primeval anarchy."¹ He defines civilization as a world order, "an effort to unify the *ecumene*, to bring the whole known world under one law and one cultural configuration."²

John McHale describes the need for a planetary society "in which the basic forms, institutions, and values of that society are more directly oriented toward the maintenance of the world community."³ Kenneth Boulding calls for a "'mosaic society,' composed of many sub-cultures, each of which gives to its participants a sense of community and identity which is so desperately needed in a mass world, and which can at the same time remain at peace with its neighbors and not threaten to pull society apart."⁴

James Gifford insists that human culture must consist of a minimum of uniformity existing in the form of a set of negative imperatives within which a diversity of sociocultural systems is allowed to develop and interact as they will.⁵ The friction between the universal negative imperatives and the strivings of these individual diverse systems would be eased by an intermediary belief system established to provide holistic meaning to life. To guarantee the survival of diversity and the very freedom to diversify, a world regulatory organization would be created. Gifford suggests that if this world organization is to remain regulatory without developing into an extreme police state each world citizen would have to accept a personal responsibility to the set of negative imperatives.

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Ervin Laszlo, R. Buckminster Fuller, and Oliver Reiser also cite the need for the development of a world system.⁶ Yet the question whether it is possible to have unity with diversity is seldom, if ever, asked. Are unity and diversity compatible? Does unity require uniformity? How does one contain the forces of diversity from social anarchy? The discussion of this problem requires some preliminary definition of terms and statement of assumptions: "Uniformity refers to the commonalities that tie us to others in larger unities."⁷ "Diversity refers to what is distinctive."⁸ "Unity without diversity becomes uniformity."⁹ "Diversity without unity becomes chaos."¹⁰ "Justice is served when unity and diversity are held in creative tension."¹¹

UNITY AND DIVERSITY IN OUR WORLD

Our known universe consists of a diversity of inorganic, organic, and "superorganic" systems and subsystems.¹² Language is evidence of man's ability to perceive differences in his environment. Man has recognized and named the different kinds of animals, plants, minerals, soils, climates, heavenly bodies, and people contained in his world. At the same time language creates unity from diversity by identifying common characteristics of different, individual objects. Objects bearing a set of common characteristics are named as members of a category. Categories of common variables are grouped into still more comprehensive supercategories. For example, the green bean is a member of the bean family, which is in the category of vegetable, which is in the category of edible plant, which is part of the supercategory of plant. The Linnaean classificatory system of plants and animals is the scientific example of man's ability to perceive diversity in his environment and create unity from that diversity.

Diversity characterizes not only man's environment but also his biological and sociocultural systems. There are male, female, transvestites, homosexuals, and perhaps the unisexual. People are short and tall, fat and skinny, and medium sized. Blondes, redheads, and brunettes are common among Caucasians, but black hair is the norm for darker-skinned people. Eye color varies from green to blue to brown. Yet all of these diverse individuals are identified as members of one species, *Homo sapiens*.

Man has lived as hunter and gatherer, herdsman, fisherman, farmer, industrialist, and now as postindustrialist. He is a nomad, a sailor, a country dweller, city dweller, suburbanite, and in the near future a space-station dweller. Anthropologists have identified patriarchal, matriarchal, avuncular, and nuclear families. The uniformity of diversity marks all aspects of the sociocultural system: technology, politics, economics, education, religion, ritual, myth, and

world view. Out of this diversity is the uniform fact that these cultures have enabled man to adapt to and/or control his environment. Just as biological evolution has enabled plants and animals to survive environmental changes, so have culture and cultural change accomplished man's survival.

Uniformity is maintained in nature through natural selection. An animal which does not have the protective coloration needed to hide from his predator will probably not live long enough to produce progeny with his unique coloration. If there should be a drastic environmental change, such as a flood which destroys all of his predators, then, although the protective coloration of his species may be obsolete, he might have an opportunity to pass on his unique coloration to his progeny. At the same time the genetic diversity which allows unique coloration schemes to develop provides the plasticity organic forms of life need to adapt to an ever-changing environment. Creatures, such as the dinosaur, who are not able to adapt to a changing environment become extinct. In the natural world, unity and diversity are held in creative tension by natural selection.

THE INPUT OF CULTURE

Man is a creature of nature and thereby subject to the forces of nature which regulate unity and diversity. But man is also a creator, and this adds another dimension to the problem. Man's ability for creative thinking enhances his genetic capability for change and adaptation, and the invention of culture has enabled him to adapt to environments which otherwise would be alien to his biological system. Through the invention of fire, the construction of shelter, and the creation of clothing, man has been able to live in temperate and arctic environments. The invention of language, family, and other social groupings has allowed him to pass on this culture to the next generation. The invention of culture not only has enabled man to adapt to his environment but has so accelerated change that man has been partially able to control his environment in certain societies.

The ability of human beings and their social institutions to receive data, process the data into knowledge, and communicate that knowledge to following generations is the apex of the evolutionary process. Man perceives the diversity of the plants and animals in his environment, compares and contrasts the similarities and differences, and creates unity by classifying the differences into common categories. Man lives in societies which require the subjugation of individual wishes to group demands; again unity is created. Man also creates unity by developing laws which explain multiple events in his environment. For example, the principle of gravitation explains the

movement of the tides, the rotation of the planets, the changes of the seasons, as well as the phenomenon of falling.

Man is also able to create diversity from unity. Throughout time in societies all over the world there have existed men who have questioned the beliefs, traditions, and customs of their culture. These men have stimulated cultural change. Some societies have developed roles for those that wonder, question, and think about the universe in which they dwell; these have been called philosophers, poets, priests, and shamans.

Culture contact is also a source of cultural change. As men have traveled and become aware of societies of other men who talk different languages, wear unusual clothing, live in strange houses, and worship new gods, they have become aware of alternatives and are led to question the authority and wisdom of their own gods, priests, and chiefs. For those who question and borrow, the greater the number and variety of cultural contacts the faster is the rate of sociocultural change. This is analogous to a similar principle in evolutionary theory: The rate of evolution is proportionate to the heredity variability in the population.¹³

Probably the majority of men, however, have regarded human diversity as something abnormal or outrageous instead of the natural phenomenon which it is. The American Indians, Australian aborigines, and African tribes were regarded as "savages" and "barbarians" by their Western invaders; they were hunted and killed, forced onto reservations, and enslaved in a foreign land. This tendency to ignore and/or abhor diversity as unnatural has created a confusion in America regarding the meaning of equality. The Declaration of Independence declares that all men are created equal. Many Americans, including judges, academics, scientists, and educators, have interpreted equality to mean that all people are essentially the same. The right to equal opportunity is justified on the basis that there are no significant genetic differences among the various human populations. Skin color may vary, but it is a genetic adaptation to climates which require greater skin protection against the sun. Skin color is not a significant difference; intelligence is. Rather than deal with that difference, the popular consensus has it that all human populations must be essentially the same in their intelligence quotient. The question of why intelligence should be exempt from the reality of genetic variation is taboo to many liberals of our society.

The meaning of equal opportunity remains the critical issue. Bernard D. Davis argues that equal opportunity does not mean equal performance.¹⁴ Elving Anderson has explained that what the authors

of our Declaration meant by their statement, "All men are created equal," is that no man has the right of dominion over any other.¹⁵ Other documents of the times express their intent more clearly. The Virginia Declaration of Rights (1776) declares ". . . that all men are by nature equally free and independent, and have certain inherent rights, of which, when they enter into a state of society, they cannot by any compact, deprive or divest their posterity."¹⁶ The French Declaration of Rights states, "Men are born and remain free and equal in rights."¹⁷ If we are ever to have social justice, we must recognize the reality of genetic diversity. To ignore that diversity is to travel the road to mediocrity and uniformity.¹⁸

Davis defines an egalitarian society as one which recognizes the differences among individuals and rewards equally the talents which they possess. Social justice is the opportunity for each individual to develop his full potential as a human being. The handicapped and the gifted, men and women, blacks, Chicanos, and American Indians have the right of equal opportunity to education, to a career, to a life-style of their own choosing by the very fact that they are human beings.

TECHNOLOGY—TOWARD UNIFORMITY OR DIVERSITY

The advanced communication and transportation systems which characterize our industrialized society are responsible for many more people experiencing cross-cultural contact, leading them to question their cultural beliefs and social customs and experience sociocultural change. Alvin Toffler identifies this phenomenon as "future shock" or "too much change in too short a time."¹⁹ As our communication and transportation technologies become more and more sophisticated, change will continue to accelerate; but what will be the direction of that change? Is diversity increasing as cross-cultural contacts multiply? Or are cultural differences being blurred into cultural uniformity as other societies adopt the values and beliefs of Western society in an effort to acquire the technological wonders that make life more comfortable and countries more powerful?

Scenarios of our societal development toward either extreme and the consequences of that development are multiple. The antitechnologists argue that "technology is a 'thing' or a force that has escaped from human control and is spoiling our lives."²⁰ The limits-to-growth camp maintains that our natural resources, such as land, water, energy, and fertilizer, are in short supply and will continue to be so for decades. It also maintains that capital resources will never be adequate to meet the needs of the world's population.

Both the critics of technology and the advocates for a limits-to-growth policy argue that we must slow the development of technological marvels, the demand for more and more material goods, and the consumption of our natural resources. They maintain that the dependence of people on the energy and products of our industrial society is creating a bland uniformity which cuts across class, age, ethnic, and racial differences. Mankind cannot depend on one culture, one world view, and one technological system to ensure its survival. There is no such thing as a superculture; rather a good culture is one that is adapted to its environment. Since environments are diverse, so must cultures be diverse.

The argument continues that technology needs to be adapted to the sociocultural system adopting it. Undeveloped countries should have the autonomy to establish a technology policy which is in accord with needs they have identified and given priority to. Denis Goulet writes, "Cultural diversity in today's world must find its expression not only in language, the fine arts, local garb and practices, but primarily in the practical arts: in diverse work patterns, in differentiated tools and products."²¹ Others like E. F. Schumacher maintain that what is needed is a reduction of social scale—metropolitan sprawl must be stopped, neighborhoods rebuilt, community ties strengthened, small rural towns revitalized.²² It is argued that the third and fourth worlds must be encouraged to pursue alternate routes of development. The high technology of developed countries may be inappropriate to developing countries' needs. At least in some areas intermediate technology may be more appropriate; it is relatively inexpensive, labor intensive, and small scale. Furthermore, intermediate technology does not require highly trained technicians or sophisticated resources. With intermediate technology, countries can utilize their own natural and human resources to create simultaneously a balance of trade and unemployment relief. At the same time high technology can be reserved for those production areas of high priority.²³

China presents a case in point; the Chinese have chosen high technology for their machinery and tool manufacturing industries. In their secondary industries, however, intermediate technology maximizes employment and worker participation in decision making.²⁴ The Chinese present an example of a developing country which has identified and ranked its needs and goals, established a technology policy to alleviate those needs and achieve those goals, and adopted appropriate technologies consistent with that policy. What the Chinese have achieved is technological diversity.

The protechnology camp, on the other hand, counterattacks the antitechnology argument. They maintain that technology is not a thing

or force independent of man. (Such language is reminiscent of the supernatural forces of previous centuries: spirits, gods, fate, Lady Luck, and the devil). Rather technology is the complete inventory of the tools man has invented to facilitate his adaptation and control of his environment; these include hardware (tools, buildings, clothing) as well as software (language, social institutions, beliefs, and values). Broadly speaking, culture is technology. Through culture man has been able to survive environments intolerable to his basic, biological condition. Clothing, shelter, and heating and cooling systems have been the tools to that adaptation. Language, the family, the tribe have provided man the means to pass on what he learned to following generations; through this technology cultural knowledge has accumulated and cultural change has accelerated. Beliefs and values have provided man with the reasons for living, the hope to carry on in the face of strife, and the faith in his own ability to succeed. They also have provided the techniques for establishing, maintaining, and controlling interpersonal relationships, a necessity for a social animal like man who is dependent on the group for his survival. Culture is man's creation and therefore can hardly be considered independent of man.

Currently the development of certain cultural hardware has surpassed the development of related cultural software. William Ogburn refers to this phenomenon as cultural lag: Different parts of our sociocultural system change at varying rates causing social stress.²⁵ The antitechnologists attribute this social stress to technology which has escaped human control and is now spoiling our lives. Toffler identifies this stress as future shock. But why has the invention of software fallen behind? In our industrial and postindustrial society, business and industry have accepted the responsibility for identifying social needs and resolving those needs. They sell their solutions to the public at a profit, thus perpetuating themselves, the economy, and the social system at large. However, through experience industry and business have found that it is easier and cheaper to invent new hardware than software. In the computer industry with the recent invention of microprocessing units we are on the threshold of another industrial revolution. Yet the impact of this technology will not be felt for a few years due to the lack of appropriate software to take advantage of the capabilities of the new hardware. Business and industry generally have avoided the invention of software because it is not profitable to do so. They did not invent and sell new family forms which were better adapted to the mobility the automobile created. They have not invented new "schools" which are better adapted to the communications technology currently available.

Few have accepted the responsibility for inventing radical software

to match radical hardware. Several social institutions (government, schools, universities) attempt to solve social problems, but none are in the business of inventing social systems or subsystems. Government, schools, welfare agencies are domestic organizations, that is, those that have their clientele and funding guaranteed.²⁶ There is no motivation for them to make worthwhile social inventions because they will continue to exist whether they do or do not. One administrator described the resulting organizational climate as "the lack of a production orientation." Hence the result of our cultural lag is not a technology which has gone out of control but a failure of man to take a similar responsibility for the invention of cultural software as he has for cultural hardware.

The antitechnologists maintain that what is needed is greater cultural diversity. On the other hand people like Toffler criticize our society for having too much diversity. There is overchoice in shopping, choosing a career, deciding on a life-style, even selecting a value system; people are being overloaded with options and information and are experiencing future shock.²⁷ Racial and ethnic groups are rediscovering and re-creating their own distinct cultures. Blacks, American Indians, Chicanos, Polish Americans, Ukrainians, Puerto Ricans, Scandinavians are in the process of building and controlling their own communities. Adding to the momentum of ethnic identity is the counterculture movement of American youth. The argument is that the entire ethic of uniformity is giving way before an ethic of diversity; it is as though the general public realized the obsolescence of the traditional American culture simultaneously and turned to different cultures for alternatives.

Yet scientists have discovered a few unifying threads among all this seeming diversity. Magoroh Maruyama maintains that a similar logic pervades all the different subcultures of the counterculture movement. He compares and contrasts the traditional, unidirectional logic with the emerging mutualistic logic as follows:²⁸

TRADITIONAL UNIDIRECTIONAL LOGIC	EMERGING MUTUALISTIC LOGIC
Uniformity	Heterogeneity
Competition	Symbiosis
Hierarchy	Interaction
Emphasis on quantity	Emphasis on quality
Classification and separation	Finding relationships
Atomistic focus	Contextual focus

In a study of the plethora of recent social movements in the United States Luther P. Gerlach and Virginia H. Hine identified five factors

which are crucial to the growth of any movement: (1) Organizational structure is segmentary (composed of semiautonomous cells or segments), decentralized (is polycephalous or "many headed"), and reticulate (consists of cells linked into a network in a variety of ways). (2) Members are recruited through preexisting personal relationships. (3) Ideology consists of a few basic tenets shared by all groups in the network, plus an infinite number of variations on the theme. (4) Personal commitment requires fundamental shifts in beliefs and values as well as new patterns of behavior. (5) Opposition, either real or merely perceived, is necessary to promote a movement, to offer a basis for its commitment process, to unite its disparate segments.²⁹

Hence once again man is at work creating unity from diversity. Just as physicists are able to explain multiple phenomena through the law of gravitation, so social scientists explain the multiplying subcultures of ethnic groups, racial identities, religious affiliations, the youth counterculture, and women's liberation movement through the identification of a common logic and growth factors.

Thus the reports from the social scientists studying the current social scene are varied. Some see too much diversity, a society on the verge of anarchy as more and more people experience too much change in too short a time. Others see a burgeoning growth of uniformity; a greater and greater dependence on a materialistic, consumption-oriented society as developing nations strive to acquire the same level of technology and affluence of the leading powers. Still others maintain that our problem is cultural lag. We may need to invent more technology of the software variety to control and take advantage of the new hardware which has become and is becoming available to mankind. Yet, despite the contradictory reports on the state of our system, the projections of the future of that system are the same: death, destruction, and an evolutionary halt to the development of mankind.

WHAT IS THE ANSWER?

With little agreement on what the problem is, how can the problem be resolved? If there is too much diversity, the aim must be to create more unity. If there is too much uniformity, the aim must be the development of more diversity. The direction in which the pendulum of change is swinging is not clear. It is obvious that more attention must be given to the definition of the problem.

Perhaps the solution is the development of indicators of uniformity and diversity. A means might be devised to measure the amount of diversity and uniformity which exist within and between societies.

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With these measurements it would be possible to develop policy to correct the wild swinging of the pendulum between the extremes of uniformity and diversity in an effort to maintain the creative tension necessary to a smoothly functioning world system.

Developing a policy which succeeds in effecting that creative tension presents another difficult problem. We all probably have experienced the coordination problem of carrying a full cup of coffee or tea across a room. The eye-hand coordination involved in balancing the cup so that it does not spill often ends up with the hand overcorrecting a perceived tilt of the cup, thus effecting the spill we had taken action to avoid. A similar coordination problem may be involved in developing the creative tension between uniformity and diversity. Any man-made policy may overcorrect a swing in one direction and end up with a swing in the other direction.

If a policy should be developed, the next problem lies with enforcement. Are we to expect the diverse groups which the policy intends to control to submit voluntarily to the policy and terminate themselves if they are declared excess diversity? Such an assumption would be highly unrealistic. Mutual self-interest is not sufficient to create unity. Or will it be necessary to create some sort of police force which will have the power to regulate the amount of diversity allowed? Politics being what it is, such a procedure surely would result in more uniformity than the original policy intended.

The solution of our problem appears to be as complex as the problem itself. Perhaps it is an unsolvable problem. Or perhaps it is not a problem at all. Stafford Beer in *Platform for Change* points out that our language frequently traps us into problems that are irresolvable. For example, he presents the following problem: "The barber in this town shaves everyone who does not shave himself. Who shaves the barber?" The language does not allow a person to talk about the barber without contradicting oneself. Therefore Beer states that it is necessary to use a metalanguage "to provide the logical vantage point from which to perceive the nature of undecidability in the first language."³⁰ To solve our dilemma of unity versus diversity it is necessary to introduce such a metalanguage.

THE PROBLEM FROM THE METALEVEL

The problem is how to develop a world system (a unity) which preserves cultural plurality (diversity). Unity without diversity has been defined as uniformity. Diversity without unity has been defined as chaos. It has been explained that the two forces of unity and diversity must be maintained in creative tension if either of the extremes of uniformity and chaos is to be avoided. If man should give up the

struggle to achieve unity, the pendulum might swing too far effecting too much diversity; the result would be chaos and anarchy. If man should create a worldwide police force to maintain unity, the pendulum might swing to the other extreme resulting in too much uniformity.

From the metalevel the swinging pendulum takes on a different perspective. Due to the varying definitions of the problem and the multiple diverse activities initiated to resolve the problem, the very struggle to effect a balance between the forces of unity and diversity seems to effect the creative tension man seeks to achieve. The scientists and policy makers who declare there is too much diversity and seek to effect greater unity counteract those scientists and policy makers who believe the contrary. The antitechnologists are succeeding in slowing the growth of technological hardware. They are attempting to develop the appropriate software to control the use of available hardware. Yet the push of the protechnologists is effecting new hardware continuously; the development of technological hardware may have slowed, but it certainly has not stopped.

If man should ever succeed in finding equilibrium between unity and diversity, the result would be stagnation and eventual uniformity, for it is the struggle to resolve the seeming contradiction between unity and diversity which restrains the forces from effecting either extreme of uniformity or chaos. Our unity lies in our diverse efforts to find unity, and it is our diverse efforts which prevent uniformity and create the tension we are seeking to attain.

In conclusion I offer yet another solution to the universal problem of unity versus diversity. If it is the problem-solving process which maintains the pendulum swing, let us continue to have diverse perceptions and conceptions of our world which will prevent us from ever unanimously agreeing to any solution. But diversity is not maintained by simply nurturing local tradition and preserving the past: "Diversity itself must be saved, not the outward and visible form in which each period has clothed that diversity."³¹ Maintaining diversity means fostering latent potentialities, encouraging every natural inclination for collaboration. Tolerance must become every man's virtue, and "tolerance is not a contemplative attitude, dispensing indulgence to what has been or what is still in being. It is a dynamic attitude, consisting in the anticipation, understanding and promotion of what is struggling into being."³²

NOTES

1. W. Warren Wagar, *The City of Man: Outlines of a World Civilization* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1971), p. 28.

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2. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
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4. Kenneth Boulding, "Expecting the Unexpected: The Uncertain Future of Knowledge and Technology," in *Prospective Changes in Society by 1980*, ed. Edgar L. Morphet and Charles O. Ryan (New York: Citation Press, 1965), p. 212.
5. James Gifford, "Perspective from the Past as Trajectories to the Future," in *1970 American Anthropological Association Cultural Futurology Symposium: Pre-Conference Volume* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1970).
6. Ervin Laszlo, ed., *The World System: Models, Norms, Applications* (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1973); R. Buckminster Fuller, *Utopia or Oblivion: The Prospects for Humanity* (New York: Bantam Books, 1969); Oliver L. Reiser, *Cosmic Humanism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman Publishing Co., 1966).
7. Philip Hefner, "Altruism, Sacrifice, and Human Existence" (paper presented at the Twenty-third Summer Conference ["Diversity or Uniformity—Strategies for Human Survival?"] of the Institute on Religion in an Age of Science, Star Island, New Hampshire, July 31–August 7, 1976).
8. *Ibid.*
9. John Fish and John Kretzmann, "Unity and Diversity in the Modern City" (paper presented at the 1976 IRAS summer conference [see n. 7 above]).
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*
12. The superorganic is a term used by some anthropologists to describe the independence and power of culture upon the members of a society.
13. Bernard D. Davis, "Evolution, Human Diversity, and Society," *Zygon* 11 (1976): 80–95.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Elving Anderson, "Genetic Diversity and Human Equality" (paper presented at the 1976 IRAS summer conference [see n. 7 above]).
16. As quoted in *ibid.*
17. As quoted in *ibid.*
18. Davis.
19. Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York: Bantam Books, 1970), p. 2.
20. Samuel Florman, "In Praise of Technology," *Harper's Magazine* (November 1975), p. 56.
21. Denis Goulet, "The Paradox of Technology Transfer," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 31 (June 1975): 43.
22. E. F. Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).
23. Goulet, p. 43.
24. *Ibid.*
25. William Ogburn, *On Culture and Social Change: Selected Papers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).
26. Richard O. Carlson, "Environmental Constraints and Organizational Consequences: The Public School and Its Clients," in *Behavioral Science and Educational Administration*, ed. Daniel E. Griffiths, 63d yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, pt. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).
27. Toffler, pp. 285–343.
28. Magoroh Maruyama, "Toward a Cultural Futurology," in *1970 American Anthropological Association Cultural Futurology Symposium* (n. 5 above), p. 1.
29. Luther P. Gerlach and Virginia H. Hine, *Lifeway Leap: The Dynamics of Change in America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1973), pp. 163–87.
30. Stafford Beer, *Platform for Change* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1975), p. 9.
31. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Race and History* (Paris: UNESCO, 1952), p. 49.
32. *Ibid.*