

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE VALUES OF CULTURE

Cultural Studies like other disciplines in the humanities is a synthesis of a number of other pre-existing disciplines, such as anthropology, gender studies, geography, history, literary studies, philosophy, political studies, psychology and sociology. These in turn emerged as the result of an identification of a potentially wide field of study as the result of the extension of scientific enquiry into the humanities where the judgment and interpretation of phenomena were combined with suitable methods of collecting data and measurement derived from advances in physical sciences. In the course of the development of different disciplines in the nineteenth and early twentieth century a number of competing theories and methodologies, for example in history and geography, yielded powerful insights and stabilized as central instruments within the discipline. Cultural Studies is still in the process of drawing on these pre-existing disciplines although the last forty years has seen the production of a number of seminal works which could only be specifically assigned to the field of Cultural Studies. The task of this textbook is to identify the most influential theories and illustrate their contribution to Cultural Studies.

### DEFINITIONS

According to Webster's Dictionary the word culture is derived ultimately from the Latin verb **colo** meaning (l) till, cultivate or worship. From colo the Romans derived a participle cultus/a/um meaning tilled, cultivated, worshipped or honoured, dressed or clothed and a noun cultus meaning the following:

1. The act of tilling or cultivating;
2. The act of honouring or worshipping, reverence, adoration, veneration; loyalty
3. A religious group, cult, sect.
4. Care directed to the refinement of life, cultural pursuit, civilization, culture, style; elegance, polish, refinement.
5. Style of dress, external appearance, clothing, attire; ornament, decoration, splendor.
6. (rare) The act of labouring at, labour, care, cultivation, culture.
7. (rare) Training, education, culture.

For students of British Cultural studies Raymond Williams provides a succinct and illuminating essay on the definitions of culture in his Keywords. He observes „In general it is the range and overlap of meanings that is significant.... in cultural anthropology the reference to culture or a culture is primarily to material production while in history or cultural studies the reference is primarily to signifying or symbolic systems.“ At the end of his essay Williams highlights the emergence of modern popular uses of the word culture as in the American phrase „culture-vulture.“

### HUMANISM

The great Roman orator and philosopher, Marcus Tullius Cicero, wrote of the *cultura animi* (the cultivation of the soul) and this forms the basis of Matthew Arnold's essay **Culture and Anarchy**, a seminal essay from the nineteenth century on what culture might be.

Cicero was influential on the development of prose style in Europe from the Renaissance to the eighteenth century and *cultura animi* became a founding concept for emerging theories on what constituted a civilized personality. German thinkers, such as Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), argued that human creativity which can be both unpredictable and diverse was as important as human reason. Herder elaborated the concept of *bildung*, which envisages personal intellectual and emotional growth coming into harmony with a wider society, into a collective idea where a totality of experiences create a coherent identity and a sense of common destiny for a people. Later in the nineteenth century German scholars,

influenced by the movement towards German unity developed a theory of weltanschauung (world-view) which argued that each ethnic group had its own world view, which differed from that of other groups. Not only did this contribute to the various doctrines of nationalism, it also underpinned the continuing practice of examining the cultures of different modern nation states as though they are self-contained and distinct from one another even though they might have a language in common, for example English-speaking countries and Spanish-speaking countries.

In contrast, Adolf Bastian (1826-1905) proposed the psychic unity of all mankind where a scientific examination of diverse human societies would reveal a number of basic components common to all world views. Bastian's view had a profound influence on the anthropologist Franz Boas (1858-1942) who emigrated to the United States and who was one of the founding fathers of the American anthropological tradition.

In Britain a definition of culture was influenced well into the twentieth century by Matthew Arnold's essay, *Culture and Anarchy*.

Culture, which is the study of perfection, leads us, as we in the following pages have shown, to conceive of true human perfection as a harmonious perfection, developing all sides of our humanity; and as a general perfection, developing all parts of our society.

Arnold wrote his essay in 1869 in the aftermath of the 1867 Reform Act which extended voting rights to a significant proportion of the male working class. It had been preceded by widespread demonstrations which created fears of anarchy. Moreover, the established church, the Church of England, had undergone an intellectual crisis occasioned by the Oxford Movement. This had resulted in a number of intellectuals moving away from the orthodox Protestantism of the Church of England to a more Roman Catholic practice, a distinction between "high church" and "low church" which persists until today. A few, such as John Henry Newman (1801 -1890) (later Cardinal Newman) and the poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844 - 1888), went all the way and converted to Catholicism. An anxiety evident in *Culture and Anarchy* is that the established church had lost its intellectual authority to Catholicism and its evangelical and moral authority to non-conformist denominations, such as Methodism.

Arnold was one of the sons of Thomas Arnold, an early and influential educational reformer, and he himself had a career as a school inspector significantly improving the quality of instruction in a range of schools before the Education Act of 1870 came into force. Consequently, *Culture and Anarchy* has a significant didactic motivation in addition to its political and religious anxieties.

But there is of culture another view, in which not solely the scientific passion, the sheer desire to see things as they are, natural and proper in an intelligent being, appears as the ground of it. There is a view in which all the love of our neighbour, the impulses towards action, help, and beneficence, the desire for stopping human error, clearing human confusion, and diminishing the sum of human misery, the noble aspiration to leave the world better and happier than we found it,—motives eminently such as are called social,— come in as part of the grounds of culture, and the main and pre-eminent part. Culture is then properly described not as having its origin in curiosity, but as having its origin in the love of perfection; it is a study of perfection. It moves by the force, not merely or primarily of the scientific passion for pure knowledge, but also of the moral and social passion for doing good.

Arnold wrote when ideas about unconscious motivation had not been developed. Consequently, social action and relationships with a wider society were regarded as

emerging from individual, rational choice based on Christian doctrine, in Arnold's case, preferably those of the Church of England. Culture for Arnold was an individual moral quality.

And religion, the greatest and most important of the efforts by which the human race has manifested its impulse to perfect itself,— religion, that voice of the deepest human experience,—does not only enjoin and sanction the aim which is the great aim of culture, the aim of setting ourselves to ascertain what perfection is and to make it prevail; but also, in determining generally in what human perfection consists, religion comes to a conclusion identical with that which culture,—seeking the determination of this question through all the voices of human experience which have been heard upon it, art, science, poetry, philosophy, history, as well as religion, in order to give a greater fulness and certainty to its solution,— likewise reaches. Religion says: The kingdom of God is within you; and culture, in like manner, places human perfection in an internal condition, in the growth and predominance of our humanity proper, as distinguished from our animality, in the ever-increasing efficaciousness and in the general harmonious expansion of those gifts of thought and feeling which make the peculiar dignity, wealth, and happiness of human nature.

Culture is what distinguishes human beings from animals.

The idea of perfection as an inward condition of the mind and spirit is at variance with the mechanical and material civilisation in esteem with us, and nowhere, as I have said, so much in esteem as with us. The idea of perfection as a general expansion of the human family is at variance with our strong individualism, our hatred of all limits to the unrestrained swing of the individual's personality, our maxim of "every man for himself." The idea of perfection as an harmonious expansion of human nature is at variance with our want of flexibility, with our inaptitude for seeing more than one side of a thing, with our intense energetic absorption in the particular pursuit we happen to be following.

Culture is also anti-materialistic and contributes to a broader and less fanatical character. The idea of a "mechanical" civilisation being antithetical to culture was one which dominated British belles-lettres for the next century culminating in the Leavis-Snow debate of the 1950s where the arts and sciences were regarded as enemies.

Never did people believe anything more firmly, than nine Englishmen out of ten at the present day believe that our greatness and welfare are proved by our being so very rich. Now, the use of culture is that it helps us, by means of its spiritual standard of perfection, to regard wealth as but machinery, and not only to say as a matter of words that we regard wealth as but machinery, but really to perceive and feel that it is so. If it were not for this purging effect wrought upon our minds by culture, the whole world, the future as well as the present, would inevitably belong to the Philistines. The people who believe most that our greatness and welfare are proved by our being very rich, and who most give their lives and thoughts to becoming rich, are just the very people whom we call the Philistines.

A number of metaphors that Arnold used in his essay, such as "philistines" have passed into the language with philistine still meaning a person with little time for or only a crude understanding of culture.

It is by thus making sweetness and light to be characters of perfection, that culture is of like spirit with poetry, follows one law with poetry. I have called religion a more important manifestation of human nature than poetry, because it has worked on a broader scale for perfection, and with greater masses of men. But the idea of beauty

and of a human nature perfect on all its sides, which is the dominant idea of poetry, is a true and invaluable idea.

This is the social idea; and the men of culture are the true apostles of equality. The great men of culture are those who have had a passion for diffusing, for making prevail, for carrying from one end of society to the other, the best knowledge, the best ideas of their time; who have laboured to divest knowledge of all that was harsh, uncouth, difficult, abstract, professional, exclusive; to humanise it, to make it efficient outside the clique of the cultivated and learned, yet still remaining the best knowledge and thought of the time, and a true source, therefore, of sweetness and light.

Arnold took a phrase coined by Jonathan Swift, "sweetness and light" and used to describe beauty and intelligence both of which are essential to culture. As with "philistines" it has become part of ordinary English language usually used in contexts to contrast a person's good and bad moods, which is a long way in meaning from Arnold's original sense.

But by our best self we are united, impersonal, at harmony. We are in no peril from giving authority to this, because it is the truest friend we all of us can have; and when anarchy is a danger to us, to this authority we may turn with sure trust. Well, and this is the very self which culture, or the study of perfection, seeks to develop in us; at the expense of our old untransformed self, taking pleasure only in doing what it likes or is used to do, and exposing us to the risk of clashing with every one else who is doing the same! So that our poor culture, which is flouted as so unpractical, leads us to the very ideas capable of meeting the great want of our present embarrassed times! We want an authority, and we find nothing but jealous classes, checks, and a dead-lock; culture suggests the idea of the State. We find no basis for a firm State-power in our ordinary selves; culture suggests one to us in our best self.

Culture for Arnold as this quotation suggests is what is necessary to avoid anarchy. Arnold regards the well-ordered state as one which exemplifies culture. The cultured individual is equated with "firm state power." Unwittingly Arnold was suggesting the connection between the hegemony of a ruling class through the media which forms an important strand in contemporary cultural studies.

Thus we have got three distinct terms, Barbarians, Philistines, Populace, to denote roughly the three great classes into which our society is divided; and though this humble attempt at a scientific nomenclature falls, no doubt, very far short in precision of what might be required from a writer equipped with a complete and coherent philosophy, yet, from a notoriously unsystematic and unpretending writer, it will, I trust, be accepted as sufficient.

Arnold classified the class divisions of aristocracy, middle-class and working class into Barbarians, Philistines and Populace. The Barbarians have little use in producing culture except their own military pursuits such as hunting although they act as patrons for culture productions such as fine art paintings and music. The Philistines see no intrinsic value in cultural productions although they might have a practical use in business activities. The populace has only an unstructured idea of freedom, which manifests itself in avoiding public duties for the common good and avoiding the intellectual effort required to acquire culture.

Thus, in our eyes, the very framework and exterior order of the State, whoever may administer the State, is sacred; and culture is the most resolute enemy of anarchy, because of the great hopes and designs for the State which culture teaches us to nourish. But as, believing in right reason, and having faith in the progress of humanity towards perfection, and ever labouring for this end, we grow to have clearer sight of the ideas of right reason, and of the elements and helps of perfection, and come

gradually to fill the framework of the State with them, to fashion its internal composition and all its laws and institutions conformably to them, and to make the State more and more the expression, as we say, of our best self, which is not manifold, and vulgar, and unstable, and contentious, and ever-varying, but one, and noble, and secure, and peaceful, and the same for all mankind,— with what aversion shall we not then regard anarchy, with what firmness shall we not check it, when there is so much that is so precious which it will endanger! So that, for the sake of the present, but far more for the sake of the future, the lovers of culture are unswervingly and with a good conscience the opposers of anarchy.

Arnold concludes that culture is essentially what stands between an orderly state and anarchy. When he published the essay in 1869 it was a year before the Forster Education Act which made primary education compulsory. It was essentially a critique of mid-century Victorian society when the industrial revolution was at full blast and much remained to be done in terms of regulating working and social conditions and when the aristocracy was still a potent force outside the new industrial cities. The long-term effect of the essay was to create an informal definition of culture as a combination of academic learning and aesthetic understanding of cultural productions which before had been only available to the aristocracy and wealthy bourgeoisie such as rich merchants. In time culture came to be divided into “high” and “low” culture with high culture having a strong aesthetic value and low culture referring to popular culture such as the music hall of late Victorian and Edwardian times and slightly later popular songs, cinema, popular sports and so on. Arnold’s ideals became with a notion of culture coming to be seen as elitist and snobbish and it was this notion that prompted seminal figures in modern cultural studies, such as Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams to redefine culture.

Arnold wished for an education system that would disseminate culture to the whole of society and his aspirations chime with that of another cultural critic, John Ruskin, whose *Fors Clavigera: Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain* (1871-1884) combined social and aesthetic criticism in a critique of Victorian capitalism. The importance of Culture and Anarchy is that it based culture on notions of value, however rudimentary. The perception and analysis of cultural values is an integral part of cultural studies.

## **MAIN POINTS**

- Culture is a complex concept and has many definitions.
- Arnold’s Essay, *Culture and Anarchy*, stressed humanistic values in culture as opposed to a scientific basis for culture implied by the „psychic unity of mankind“ put forward by Adolf Bastian and the materialism of mid-nineteenth century Victorian Britain.
- For Arnold culture was the study of perfection and consisted of the best thought and knowledge of the time, „the best that has been thought and said in the world.“
- Culture was necessary to avoid anarchy.
- The population consisted of barbarians, philistines and the populace all of which were enemies of culture.
- Culture is essential to improve the State.
- The effect of Arnold’s essay was to give the concept of culture an emotional and moral value.

- One of the effects was to create a notion of „high culture“, largely prestigious artistic products, refined manners versus „low culture“ largely popular cultural pursuits such as working class entertainment and sport.

### **SEMINAR EXERCISES**

- What does the word culture mean to you in everyday speech?
- How would you define a cultured man or woman? Or an uncultured man or woman? Is there any difference between “cultured” and “cultivated” when applied to people?
- What associations do you make when you hear the word culture?
- Does Slovak have the same meanings and associations for “kultúra?” What are the differences in meaning between “vzdelaný”, “kultivovaný” and kultúrny.”

### **READING**

Arnold, Matthew. Culture and Anarchy. Project Gutenberg,  
[https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/4212\\_1869](https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/4212_1869)

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Willams, Raymond, Keywords, London: Fontana Press, 1976