

Culture and [read, vs.] Anarchy | Matthew Arnold

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Here,

**Culture** is the study of perfection and beauty. And,

**Anarchy** is the practice of violation and violence

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**A. Key Issues:**

- The definition of culture
- The role of culture
- The function of culture
- The types of cultural texts, practices, and industries
- The definition of anarchy
- The significance of Cultural Literacy and Cultural Studies

**B. Executive Summary:**

Culture is an opposing factor to anarchy. Culture refers to **order** [=light] and **beauty** [=sweetness], whereas anarchy stands for disorder and chaos. That is to say, whatever is in discipline is due to real cultural values. This essay is no less than a doctor's prescription for a utopian reality to a great extent because Arnold is expecting a real world through following the inward operation of true cultural texts and practices.

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**C. Key Sentences:**

**What is Culture?**

1. Culture is a “great **help** [=a problem solver] out of our present **difficulties** [=problems and crisis]”. >> **because it shapes and controls humans' mind, spirit, beliefs, habits, values, perspective and behaviour.**

2. Culture is the “**pursuit** of [=desire/attempt for] our **total perfection** [=complete: e.g., accomplished person] by means of getting to **know** [well-informed; up-to-date; to be aware of the best things: beliefs, values,

**practices, knowledge etc.],** on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world”.

3. Although **culture may perfectly remain beyond letters and books**, “[I]t is a pity [that] we cannot use [culture] more perfectly [keeping it] free from all shadow of **reproach** [=criticism].”

4. “If a [person] without books or reading, or reading nothing but his letters and the newspapers, get nevertheless a fresh and free **paly** [=divided into two equal vertical stripes] of the best thoughts upon his stock [= of the paly =] **notions** [= thoughts] **and habits** [=practices] **he has got culture** [they must practice what they preach].”

5. “Culture has one great **passion** [=target / purpose / aim], the passion for **sweetness** [pleasure] and **light** [knowledge/wisdom/intellectuality].”

**What is the role of Culture? >>> Culture does everything for all: a collective contribution**

6. “Again and again I have insisted how those are **the happy moments of humanity**, how those are the marking **epochs** [=the particular period of time in history or in one person’s life] of a people’s life, how those are the flowering times for literature and art and all the creative power of genius, when there is **a national glow of lights and thought**, when the whole society is in the fullest measure permeated by thought, sensible to beauty, intelligent, and alive. **Only it** [=culture] **must be real thought and real beauty; real sweetness and real light.**” >>> Arnoldian notion of culture = Julien Benda’s idea of intellectuals, e.g., real intellectuals and unreal intellectuals...

7. Not all of us have equal power, will and ability to **fight against** [=stop the production, distribution and consumption of] such bad things as the **ordinary popular literature** [=the cultural enemy/opposition; the real bad thing; slow poison; slow violence; slow/creative destruction]. “Plenty of people will try to **indoctrinate** [=poison] **the masses** [i.e., the general populations with little education and knowledge about the real world >>> the unlucky victims] with **the set of ideas and judgements** [i.e., the so-called poetic license and poetic justice in ‘popular’ texts] constituting the **creed** [= (system of) fath] of their own profession or party.

## The function of culture

- a. **Social function**: we can use culture for our betterment.
- b. **Intellectual function**: wise people get ‘light’ from it.
- c. **Political function**: culture tries to “do away with classes”; it advocates equality.
- d. **Affective function**: culture gives people sweetness.
- e. **Educative function**: culture works differently; it is unlike ordinary popular culture

## Arnold’s criticism against popular culture

8. The contributors of the ordinary popular literature are no less than the members of religious and political organizations. “[B]ut **culture works differently** [=the function of culture =]. **It does not try to teach down to the level of inferior classes** [>>> Arnold’s elitis culture is not for the ordinary people: e.g., how can less literate/educated people know about the value of classical music?]; it does not try to win them for this or that sect of its own, with ready-made judgements and watchwords. [**Self-contradictory?=?**] It seeks to do away with **classes** [i.e., it is for all, of all, and by all]; to make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere; to make all men live in an atmosphere of sweetness and light, where they may use ideas, as it uses them itself, freely – nourished and not bound by them.”

9. “**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** [=preachers], for making prevail, for carrying from one end of society to the other, the best knowledge, the best ideas of their time”.

10. <<< **Cultural texts, practices, and industries: two types: serious and ordinary** >>> **Culture results from serious cultural texts and practices, whereas ordinary popular culture** does not provide any **intellectual food** [=the line of difference]. People follow culture **staunchly** [=consciously], but they follow ordinary popular culture **mechanically** [=sub-/unconsciously].

## What is Anarchy?

For Arnold, **anarchy** refers to, for example, “an Englishman’s right to do what he likes [i.e., **autocracy**]; his right to march where he likes [i.e., **colonization**], meet where he likes [i.e., **manipulation**], enter where he likes [i.e., **exploitation**], hoot as he likes [i.e., **vulgarity**], threaten as he likes [i.e., **hegemony**], smash as he likes [i.e., **violence**]. [And, culture is the opposite one.]

**Arnold’s Concern: Why Cultural Literacy and Cultural Studies matter?**

11. “But meanwhile our **social machine** is a little out of order; there are a good many people in our **paradisiacal** [=heavenly] centres of **industrialism** [i.e., **capitalism**] and **individualism** [i.e., **postmodernism**] taking the bread out of one another’s mouth.”

**How was Arnold’s England in 1869?**

England lagged behind France and Germany technologically, socially, philosophically, and culturally at that time. The world saw dehumanization of work, child labour and pollution. England was all about a overcrowded place driven by poverty. Great Britain was expanding in that Victorian period of time.

**Whether Arnold was against imperialism and colonialism is a question. His example of anarchy and notion of social machine are implicit indications.**

Of course, it was a confusing era since many things were changing. Its literature says all: e.g., *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *Great Expectations*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, *Jane Eyre*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Oliver Twist* etc.

12. **Center** [>>> **culture takes care the center, whereas ordinary popular culture rejects/questions the center and promotes chaos and disorder**] is essential because “too many cooks spoil the broth”.

13. People are divided into **Barbarians** [=the landed aristocrats], **Philistines** [=the middle class], and **Populace** [=all else including the inferior classes].

14. **Culture teaches** that the framework of society is sacred.

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**D. Conclusive Remarks:**

Culture is: an opportunity; a platform; a driving force; a problem-solver; a weapon for good people; a threat for bad people; the source of light; the center; and a teacher.