THE CULTURAL IMPERATIVE

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Culture constitutes the topmost phenomenal level yet recognized - or for that matter now imaginable - in the realm of nature.

Alfred Kroeber (1)

I believe culture should play a central role in the world. This is not wishful thinking on my part, but rather the result of an objective assessment of the present situation and prospects for the future.

There are many reasons why culture should play a central role in the world. It is needed to transform the relationship between human beings and the natural environment, reduce the amount of tension, violence, terrorism, and conflict in the world, improve relations between the diverse peoples, countries, cultures, religions, and civilizations of the world, decrease income and social inequalities throughout the world, and enhance human welfare and well-being everywhere in the world. It is also needed to reduce the demands human beings are making on the world’s scarce resources, create ways of life and lifestyles that are more in keeping with the new global reality, and achieve much more peace, harmony, stability, and unity in the world. Without this, the world is bound to become a more dangerous, demanding, and volatile place - rather than a safer and more secure place - as resources are used up and the carrying capacity of the earth is approached.

If this adverse situation is to be avoided in the future, valuable contributions will have to come from many different disciplines and activities. Economics is important because it is concerned with the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services and creation of material and monetary wealth, and therefore with people’s jobs, income, and sources of livelihood. Ecology is important because it focuses attention on the complex connection between human beings, nature, and other species, and consequently on the many different ways people interact with the natural environment and the world. Religion and philosophy are important because they are concerned with what is most sacred and profound in life, and hence with what is needed to live life on a higher plane of ethical and moral existence. And science, technology, and education are important because they produce the discoveries, innovations, and
inventions that are needed to live happier, healthier, and longer lives, as well as to open up new learning opportunities, educational possibilities, and social developments for the future.

As important as these and other disciplines and activities are - and there is no intention of downplaying or diminishing their importance here - the most important discipline or activity by far is culture. This is because culture possesses numerous qualities and capabilities that are of utmost importance to the world of the future.

Most of these qualities and capabilities derive from the fact that culture can be perceived and defined in many different ways. While some people may see this as a real disadvantage because there is no single definition or understanding of culture on which people can agree - as is the case for many other disciplines and activities - it is actually a great asset because culture can be stretched in many different directions and used to address all sorts of problems, possibilities, and situations.

The best way to expose the many diverse qualities and capabilities that are inherent in culture - and therefore to demonstrate why culture is of utmost importance to the world - is to examine the way culture has evolved ‘as an idea’ over a history spanning some two thousand years. For although culture was initially perceived and defined in very restrictive terms, it has been progressively broadened and deepened over the centuries to the point where it is now perceived and defined in very expansive terms, thereby imbuing it with all sorts of qualities and capabilities that are of quintessential importance to the world of the future. The process whereby this came about is a long and fascinating one - one that sheds a great deal of light on the nature and meaning of culture in general and the role culture is capable of playing in the world in particular.

Although culture ‘as an idea’ has existed for an incredible long period of time, it has existed for a much longer period of time ‘as a reality.’ Indeed, it can be traced back to the very beginning of human life on earth. Whenever and wherever people came together for the express purpose of living together in the world and working out their complex association with the world, there culture as a reality is to be found. It is to be found, for example, in the cave drawings of the Upper Palaeolithic period some 30,000 years ago, when some of the earliest humans huddled together in caves to keep themselves warm, protect themselves against wild animals and the elements, and attend to their survival.

This is confirmed by the numerous cave drawings that have been discovered in Spain, south-east Asia, and especially the Haute Barone region of France, primarily in such locations as Lascaux, Pech Merle, La Marche, and
Altamira. It is also confirmed by all the oldest settlements in the world, most notably in the Tigris-Euphrates region of Mesopotamia, along the Nile Delta and the Indus valley in present-day Pakistan, in the Huang He area of China around the Yellow River, at Crete in the Mediterranean, and at Mezo in Central America. It is also confirmed by archaeological explorations of the ancient Sumerian, Hittite, Babylonian, and Assyrian civilizations in present-day Iraq, the Olmec civilization in Mexico, the Minoan civilization at Knossos in Crete, and the excavations undertaken at Ur, Catal Huyuk, Alaca Huyuk, Stonehenge, Carnac, and other historic sites throughout the world.

The Egyptians and the Chinese were probably the first people to recognize the incredible power of culture when it is developed in a systematic, sustained, and conscientious manner. There is ample evidence of this in the cultural achievements of the ancient Egyptians and Chinese, as depicted in the numerous exhibitions, publications, and television programs devoted to Egyptian and Chinese culture throughout the world. One need only marvel at the countless treasures unearthed in Egypt and China over the last century and especially over the last fifty years - including the terra cotta figures discovered at Xian in China, the throne of Sitamon, the funeral mask of Tutankhamen, the pyramids of Giza, the Sphinx, Thebes, Luxor, Abu Simbel, and the tombs of the pharaohs in Egypt - to realize the lofty heights to which culture can be raised when it is pursued with vigour and cultivated with imagination. It is not surprising in this regard that authorities in the People’s Republic of China selected several of China’s greatest cultural achievements in an historical sense - the invention of silk, printing, the compass, and drums - when they were confronted with the complex problem of deciding how to depict China to the world at the Olympic Games in 2008.

The tradition that was commenced in Egypt and China was carried on in brilliant style by the Greeks, Persians, and Romans. This is most evident in the case of the Greeks, since Greece is generally regarded as the cradle of western civilization. A great culture flourished there in ancient times, especially in city states like Athens, Delphi, Corinth, Mycenae, Sparta, and others. This is especially true for Athens, the birthplace of democracy, which is well-known for architectural achievements like the Acropolis, the Parthenon, and the Erechtheum, philosophers like Plato, Aristotle and Socrates, authors like Homer, Aeschylus and Euripides, literary masterpieces like the Iliad and the Odyssey, and dramatic venues like Epidaurus, which is still revered throughout the world for its incredible acoustics and remarkable architectural features.

The Persians also realized many splendid cultural achievements countless centuries ago. A great culture flourished there in ancient times. This culture is equally renowned for its literary masterpieces - the Shahnameh for example - as well as for its imperial cities at Susa, Persepolis, and Passargarde. It is a tradition
that was carried on in brilliant fashion by the Romans, who also had their superb poets, playwrights, scholars, and literary figures like Horace and Virgil, as well as phenomenal achievements in architecture, philosophy, music, drama, jurisprudence, and so forth.

It was at this time that culture made its appearance in the world as an idea for the first time. For although culture had existed as a reality for thousands of years prior to this, culture as an idea did not come into existence until the Romans used the term ‘cultura’ in public and private discourse in the classical period, thereby making culture one of the oldest ideas known to humankind with a history dating back some two thousand years as indicated earlier. It was an idea that was to evolve progressively and relentlessly in the centuries to follow.

**CULTURE AS CULTIVATION**

Initially, the term ‘cultura’ was used in the very limited sense to mean ‘to till,’ ‘to nurture,’ or ‘to cultivate,’ largely because it was derived from the Latin verb ‘colo’ or ‘colere.’ Culture’s intimate connection with nature should not be allowed to escape our attention here. Not only does this explain why we have many words in our vocabulary with culture in them that are intimately connected to nature - words like agriculture, silviculture, horticulture, viticulture, permaculture, and so forth - but also it means that culture possesses the potential to establish a strong bond between human beings and the natural environment. It is a bond that is possessed by very few disciplines, and is very much lacking in the world today. For what other discipline possesses the potential to move laterally across the human species, nature, the natural environment, and other species, as well as to focus on the complex interconnections and interrelationships between them?

Interestingly, the term ‘cultura’ - from which the modern term culture is derived - was used by the Romans in another sense as well that was closely associated with the idea of ‘cultivation.’ When the great Roman scholar and statesman, Cicero, said ‘cultura animi philosophia est’ - thereby linking culture with cultivation of the mind or soul and philosophy - he equated culture with the intellectual and spiritual development of the individual. His intention was not to downplay or disregard the connection between culture and nature, but rather to recognize that culture has an essential role to play in the development of people, largely because it is related to the acquisition of knowledge, wisdom, insight, understanding, growth, and development. It was a captivating idea, but one that had to wait another two thousand years before it was picked up in earnest and developed in depth by two well-known British scholars - Thomas Carlyle and Matthew Arnold - in the middle of the nineteenth century.
Both these scholars had very strong views about what constitutes a ‘cultured person.’ This was especially true for Carlyle, who saw culture as the key to becoming ‘authentic,’ ‘true to oneself,’ and ‘one of a kind.’ This is revealed in his Great Law of Culture, which states that every individual should “become all that he was created capable of being; expand, if possible, to his full growth; resisting all impediments, casting off all foreign, especially all noxious adhesions; and show himself at length in his own shape and stature, be these what they may.”(2) But it was also true for Arnold, who saw the cultured person as a person who is refined, sophisticated, well educated, and knowledgeable about the arts, humanities, and finer things in life.

While most people see culture today as something substantially broader than this, many people continue to think of culture in personal terms and associate culture with knowledge, wisdom, education, learning, and appreciation of the finer things in life. This has important implications for the future because it means that culture has a great deal to do with the development of people regardless of where they live in the world or what they work at, as well as their quest to live creative, constructive, and fulfilling lives.

CULTURE AS THE ARTS AND HUMANITIES

If the idea of culture was limited to cultivation in classical times, it was deemed to be the arts and humanities in medieval and early modern times. It was largely associated with the Muses of epic and lyric poetry, music, tragedy, sacred song, dance, and comedy in those days. Today, it is more likely to include the performing arts (music, drama, opera, dance, and mime), the literary arts (poetry, literature, and creative writing), the visual arts (painting and sculpting), the environmental arts (architecture, town planning, urban design, and landscaping), the humanities (philosophy, ethics, and history), and often the culinary and heritage arts (food, drink, preservation, conservation, and so forth). Some people even include ‘the material arts’ or ‘crafts’ in their understanding of culture - weaving, enamelling, engraving, and the like - although there is far less agreement on this because it includes things that are mass produced and not ‘one of a kind.’

A certain amount of caution should be exercised with respect to what is included in this expanded idea of culture, especially as it relates to the arts. What is considered art in one country may not be considered art in another country. In Japan, for example, tree dwarfing and flower arranging are deemed to be art forms, just as calligraphy is in China and Japan and tattooing is in Tanzania. Then there is Bali, which is rich in the arts and elevates many activities to art forms because everything is done ‘to the best of people’s ability.’ This explains why we use terms like ‘the art of science,’ ‘the art of mathematics,’ ‘the art of politics,’ and so forth in public discourse, since these terms imply that many activities can be raised
to the level of art forms and practised accordingly if they are executed with flair and imagination and produced with creativity and excellence.

It is not difficult to determine why culture was expanded to include the arts and humanities in medieval and early modern times. A renaissance was taking place in Italy at this time - and fanning out to include many other parts of Europe and the world - that was inspired primarily by the arts and humanities. This resulted from the ability artists and humanists possess to change the way we see the world, understand the world, act in the world, and value things in the world. This opened the doors to broader and deeper ways of looking at life, living, reality, the human condition, the world situation, and people’s lives.

Eventually, everything was transformed by the renaissance that commenced in Italy and affected the entire world in the centuries to follow: social and economic arrangements, religious activities, politics, the sciences, education, community development, rural life, government, and virtually everything else. There was a blossoming of creativity and imagination in all these fields - and in the complex interconnections and interrelationships between them - that had a profound effect on people and countries in all parts of the world and the world as a whole for centuries, thereby confirming the incredible power culture possesses when it is viewed in this way.

In the early years, seminal contributions were made to the renaissance by painters like Giotto, Masaccio, Lippi, Botticelli, Fra Angelico, Mantegna, Raphael, Michelangelo and da Vinci, sculptors like Pisano, Ghiberti, Donatello, Verrochio and Cellini, writers like Dante, Petrarch, Machiavelli, Giovanni and Boccaccio, architects like Brunelleschi, Bramante and Alberti, and composers like Palestrina, Monteverdi and Gabrielli. This spawned a cornucopia of contributions from generations of artists and humanists who followed in their footsteps, including Correggio, Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese, Van Eyck, Dürer, Holbein, Grünewald, Riemenschneider, Shakespeare, Marlow, Erasmus, Rabelais, Cervantes, Erasmus, de Vega, de Léon, Vivaldi, Corelli, and others. The whole of Europe and many other parts of the world were caught up in the fervour and excitement of the renaissance that started in Italy and rapidly spread to other parts of the world.

There is much to be learned from this expanded idea of culture as the arts and humanities that is relevant to the world of the present and the future. This is especially true for the capacity the arts and humanities possess to bring a great deal of fulfillment and happiness into people’s lives, bind people, communities, and societies together, develop a much greater sense of awareness and appreciation for nature, the natural environment, and other species, broaden and deepen understanding of countries, cultures, religions, and civilizations as wholes, and enable people to aspire to higher values and ideals and reach for the sublime.
The arts and humanities bring a great deal of fulfillment and happiness into people’s lives because they touch and move people in profound and inspirational ways, as well as express strong feelings and emotions. This is because artists and humanists are able to reach into the very depths of our being through the music they create, the pictures they paint, the poems they write, the stories they tell, the acts of kindness they perform, and the thoughts and sentiments they express. As a result, they do a great deal to bind people, communities, and societies together in space and time, primarily by giving them a stronger sense of identity, purpose, belonging, bonding, and self-worth than they would otherwise have.

They also do a great deal to foster our awareness and appreciation of nature, the natural environment, and other species. One need only think of Beethoven’s Pastoral Symphony, Williams’ Lark Ascending, Saint-Saëns’ Carnival of the Animals, Respeghi’s The Birds, Van Gogh’s Starry Night, and Debussy’s La Mer - to cite only a few examples drawn from many - to confirm this. What a superb job these and other works do in enhancing our awareness and appreciation of the natural world and everything contained in it. We only have to listen to Beethoven’s Pastoral Symphony to know how uplifting it is - and how uplifting it was for Beethoven! - to be out in nature enjoying its pristine lakes, babbling brooks, exquisite mountains, and serene calm after the summer storm.

There is another benefit to be derived here. It is the ability to reduce the huge ecological footprint we are making on the natural environment. The arts and humanities do this far better than most other activities because they are primarily labour-intensive rather than capital-intensive or material-intensive in nature, and therefore help to conserve rather than consume resources at a time when severe shortages of resources are manifesting themselves throughout the world. Apart from paints for the painter, paper and computer equipment for the poet, scholar, composer, and author, and raw materials for the craftsperson, the arts do not make excessive demands on the world’s scarce resources or globe’s fragile eco-systems.

Artists and humanists also do a great deal to expand and enhance our understanding of countries, cultures, religions, and civilizations as wholes. They do this through their ability to create signs, symbols, myths, legends, metaphors, stories, and the like that stand for ‘the whole’ and provide us with a more complete, comprehensive, and compelling comprehension of the whole. As a result, they shed a great deal of light on the historical and contemporary character of countries, cultures, religions, and civilizations, as well as what goes on within and between them. This is particularly true for dramatic works. These works are concerned with virtually everything that goes on within and between these human collectivities, from religious customs, educational endeavours and business practices to political developments, social interactions, and recreational activities.
It is impossible to know or understand any country, culture, religion, or civilization in any depth - be it in Asia, Africa, Latin America, North America, the Caribbean, or the Middle East - without exposure to, and familiarity with, the works of their artists and humanists. Take Russian culture for instance. Think of how much our knowledge and understanding of the historical development and contemporary character of Russian culture is enhanced by exposure to, and familiarity with, such outstanding artistic masterpieces as Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov*, Chekov’s *Uncle Vanya*, *The Seagull*, and *The Cherry Orchard*, Pushkin’s *Boris Godunov* and *Eugene Onegin*, Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago*, and Tchaikovsky’s *Symphony Pathetique*. Both the light side and dark side of Russian culture are exposed through these and other artistic and humanistic works, all of which help to provide us with a more complete and comprehensive understanding of one of the most complex and fascinating cultures imaginable.

The same is true for Spanish culture. Expose to and familiarity with Cervantes’ *Don Quijote de la Mancha*, Rodrigo’s *Concierto de Aranguez* and *Concierto de Andaluz*, Granados’ *Goyescas* and *Danzas españolas*, Albéniz’s *Iberia*, de Falla’s *Noches en los jardinas de España* and *El amor brujo*, and the paintings of El Greco, Velázquez, Goya, and many other Spanish painters are essential if we want to broaden and deepen our knowledge and understanding of the historical development and contemporary character of Spanish culture. This is largely because these works evoke strong images of hot days, cool nights, splendid architecture in places like Seville, Cordoba, Segovia, Toledo, Madrid, and Barcelona, intoxicating gardens in Granada, flamenco music and dances in the caves of Andalusia, and majestic monuments in all parts of the country. While there is much more to Spanish culture than this, there is no doubt that exposure to and familiarity with these and other works does a great deal to enhance our understanding and appreciation of Spanish culture in the all-encompassing sense.

And this is not all. The arts and humanities also uplift and inspire us, thereby causing us to aspire to higher values and ideals and reach for the sublime. A good example of this is Beethoven’s *Ninth Symphony*, and especially its *Ode to Joy*. This symphony is so incredibly beautiful and uplifting and reaches such sublime and lofty heights that the Council of Europe and European Union recently selected it as ‘Europe’s Anthem,’ to be played at all official functions because of its inspirational character and ability to represent the whole of Europe and not just specific parts of it. Mahler’s *Resurrection Symphony* also uplifts and inspires us in this way, despite the fact that it has not been accorded the same status as Beethoven’s *Ninth Symphony* and especially the *Ode to Joy*. Nevertheless, it is a work of monumental proportions and exceptional beauty - a work that likewise uses symphonic music and the human voice to scale herculean heights and inspire us to reach above and beyond ourselves and search for the sublime. And while we
are on this subject, how about John Lennon’s *Imagine*, Louis Armstrong’s *It’s a Beautiful World*, and many other equally-evocative popular works? Do they not also uplift and inspire us in profound and moving ways, exhorting us to visualize a world filled with harmony, beauty, and hope, where people can ‘live as one’ and experience ‘the brotherhood of man.’

While the idea of culture as the arts and humanities flourished in medieval and early modern times - and still flourishes today in all parts of the world - a number of substantially broader ideas of culture began to emerge in the nineteenth century. Indeed, the nineteenth century can generally be regarded as a major watershed as far as the idea of culture is concerned. Prior to the nineteenth century, culture as an idea was limited to several very specific activities, most often the arts, humanities, and cultivation. However, since that time, culture has taken on many more expansive and fundamental meanings. It has also acquired numerous other qualities and capabilities that are of utmost importance to the world of the present and the future.

**CULTURE AS THE LEGACY FROM THE PAST**

Several German authors were in the forefront of the movement to expand the idea of culture beyond the arts, humanities, and cultivation. One of these was Dr. Gustav Klemm, whose first volume of his ten volume *Cultural History of Mankind* appeared in 1843. It is devoted largely to the study of the gradual development of humankind as a species. This was followed, in 1854 and 1855, by his two volume *Science of Culture*, which was focused more specifically on the science and history of culture. In these works, Klemm paid great tribute to Voltaire - the renowned French scholar, playwright, and historian - who, Klemm argued, was the first person to set aside kings’ lists, dynasties, political events, battles, and so forth in order to study culture *per se*, even if he did not use the term as such. Interestingly, Voltaire also implored people to ‘plant,’ ‘build,’ and ‘cultivate,’ thereby revealing that he was well aware of the idea of culture as cultivation popular in Roman times. For although Voltaire used the idea of culture in a much more expansive way, he was also committed to the idea of culture as cultivation. He saw it as the best antidote against vice and boredom, as well as the most effective vehicle for ensuring civility, order, refinement, manners, and taste.

It was thoughts like those provided by Voltaire, Klemm, and others that paved the way for the idea of culture as ‘the legacy from the past,’ or, as it is often called today, ‘the cultural heritage of humankind.’ What stands out most clearly when this legacy or heritage is viewed in its totality is its colossal size and universal character. It exists everywhere, and includes virtually everything that has been created by human beings. Not only has it received countless contributions from people, countries, cultures, and civilizations in all parts of the
world, but also there is hardly a group, community, region, or country that has not made a strong, lasting, and valuable contribution to it. As the most obvious measure of humanity’s collective achievements down through the ages - or ‘what remains long after everything else is forgotten’ as some authors prefer to state it - this incredible treasure-trove of historical and contemporary accomplishments is discernible amidst the rise and fall of different countries, cultures, and civilizations regardless of where they are situated in the world.

In addition to countless other things, this legacy or heritage includes the achievements of the Egyptians, the Mayans, and the Asians; all the cities and historical sites in the world - Venice with its enchanting architecture and enticing canals, Isfahan and Istanbul with their exquisite mosques, Kyoto with its ancient temples, and Buenos Aires, Marrakech and Savannah with their sumptuous squares and evocative streets; all the music, dances, paintings, and craft objects that have been created in the world; all the most significant accomplishments that have been achieved in economics, science, education, social affairs, politics, human thought and technology; all the world’s great religious teachings and philosophical writings; eastern as well as western medicine; oriental as well as occidental art; written as well as oral history; and cyclical as well as linear concepts of time.

It is all this and much more. It is also the less tangible but equally essential creations of humankind, or what some people prefer to call ‘the intangible cultural heritage of humankind.’ This includes the pursuit of knowledge, wisdom, beauty and truth, the quest for stability, order, justice, unity, and equality, the expression of friendship, compassion, and human love, and all the countless theories, ideas, and concepts that have been created in the world. Presumably this is why the great Swiss cultural historian Jacob Burckhardt - who wrote at length about culture during the Italian Renaissance and Greek culture during classical times - called this precious jewel in humanity’s crown ‘the silent promise’ or ‘thread in the labyrinth’ that possesses the potential to transform the entire past and present into a spiritual possession.

Like the less expansive ideas of culture, this substantially broader notion of culture as the legacy from the past or cultural heritage of humankind possesses a number of qualities and capabilities that are of utmost importance to the world of the future. One of these is the ability to create a strong bond between the past, the present, and the future, and therefore people’s identity, belonging, solidarity, and ability to move backwards and forwards in time. Another is the ability to speak directly to people about what is most dear to them, and hence about their values, ideals, and rootedness in the world. Still another is the ability to expose people to the mistakes of the past, and consequently the need to correct these mistakes in the future. And yet still another - and one that is especially important in the modern
world and promises to be even more important in the future - is the ability to focus on the fact that every person, country, culture, and civilization in the world acquires a great deal of cultural baggage over the course of their development that they carry with them in the present, regardless of where they are situated in the world.

While much of this baggage is positive, and is meant to be shared, enjoyed, experienced, and appreciated by all people and all countries, a significant amount of it is negative, and results from hostilities, hatreds, prejudices, and jealousies that are hundreds if not thousands of years old. This produces a great deal of tension, conflict, and confrontation in the world - tension, conflict and confrontation that emanates from fear, misunderstanding, mistrust, and suspicion of cultural differences. This compels us to be ever watchful and mindful of the baggage we inherit from the past and carry around with us in the present and the future, as well as to ensure that this baggage is used for constructive rather than destructive purposes. We will never create a better world until we come to grips with the negative aspects of this baggage, which is why spiritual leaders like Mahatma Ghandi, Nelson Mandela, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the Dalhi Lama, and others have been so committed to engendering respect and appreciation for all the diverse cultures, religions, civilizations, and peoples of the world. It is also why Nelson Mandela, Archbishop Tutu, the aboriginal peoples, and others have instituted truth and reconciliation commissions - or their equivalent - to come to grips with the causes of hostilities, confrontations, and conflict in the world.

There is one final quality culture possesses when it is viewed as the legacy from the past or cultural heritage of humankind that should not be allowed to escape our attention. It derives from the fact that this legacy or heritage is ‘shared.’ It is shared by countless people and countries in the world. It is impossible to be a member of any group - be it a community, race, society, or nation - without sharing many things in common: beliefs, values, ideals, ideas, customs, traditions, and so on. It is this fact that makes it possible to bind people and countries together in space and time when other forces are operating to split them apart, thereby emphasizing the incredible value culture possesses when it is viewed as the legacy from the past or cultural heritage of humankind.

This quality was not lost on the well-known poet, scholar, and Nobel prize winner T. S. Eliot. In his Notes Towards the Definition of Culture, he wrote at length about the need to bind people together and share things in common, as well as how important it is for people to learn from the past and the historical development of their culture and the cultures of others. He also attempted to identify those things that bound people in England and English culture together. These he identified as Derby Day, the Henley Regatta, Cowes, the twelfth of August, a cup final, the dog races, the pin table, the dart board, Wensleydale
cheese, boiled cabbage cut into sections, beetroot in vinegar, nineteenth-century Gothic churches, and the music of Elgar. While many people in England may still view English culture in these terms - and listen to the music of Elgar and especially his *Pomp and Circumstances Marches* at highly successful prom concerts at Royal Albert Hall and other venues - it is apparent that English culture has changed substantially since Eliot’s day, when these things were shared by the majority of people living in England and were instrumental in binding English culture together, much as the ‘royal wedding’ did quite recently.

This sharing quality is exceedingly important. We need a great deal more sharing in the world if we are to be successful in overcoming one of the biggest problems in the world of all, namely the huge disparities that exist in income, wealth, and resources throughout the world. Needless to say, income, wealth, and resources will have to be shared much more equitably and broadly if we want to eradicate one of the greatest sources of inequality, hostility, and injustice in the world.

While some of the impetus for this will have to come from economics, corporations and governments, most of it will have to come from culture and people working in the cultural field if it is to come at all. *For the impetus to share - like the impetus to bond - comes much more from the arts and culture than it does from economics, politics, and commerce.* It is intimately connected with the sharing of feelings and emotions, many different types of artistic, humanistic and social experiences, the links that bind people, communities, cultures, countries, and civilizations together, and the legacy from the past or the cultural heritage of humankind. It is from things like this that we must find the collective will - as well as the means - to share income, wealth, and resources more equitably and liberally. This will be required on a massive scale if we are to be successful in improving the welfare and well-being of all people and countries throughout the world, especially when so many people and countries throughout the world live close to the level of nadir and despair, with insufficient food, clothing, shelter, fresh water, clean air, health services, and educational and employment opportunities to provide a healthy standard of living and reasonable quality of life.

**CULTURE AS A WAY OF LIFE OR COMPLEX WHOLE**

If the idea of culture was expanded significantly in the first half of the nineteenth century, it was expanded much more in the latter part of the nineteenth century. In fact, it was expanded so much that a quantum leap took place in the idea of culture.

Prior to the latter part of the nineteenth century, culture was seen and treated as ‘a part of the whole,’ as was the case when it was seen and treated as
cultivation, the arts and humanities, and the legacy from the past. However, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, a number of scholars started to see culture as ‘the total way of life of people’ or ‘a complex whole.’ This included everything that people were engaged in as they went about the process of meeting their individual and collective needs and working out their complex association with the world.

Several anthropologists were in the vanguard of this development. It evolved naturally and organically when anthropologists started studying culture in general - and cultures in particular - in depth and on the ground. What they discovered was that there were all sorts of words to describe the specific activities in which people were engaged as they went about the process of meeting their individual and collective needs and working our their complex association with the world, but there was no word to describe how all these activities were woven together to form a whole or overall way of life.

Culture was the word they used to designate this phenomenon. It resulted from the fact that there were discernible indications in all parts of the world that all the various activities in which people were engaged - economic, social, political, religious, educational, scientific, artistic, recreational, environmental, and so forth - were woven together in specific combinations and arrangements to form a whole or total way of life that was greater than the parts and the sum of the parts. This is why Sir Edward Burnett Tylor, one of the world’s first anthropologists, defined culture formally as ‘that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.’

Could there be anything more fundamental than this? It includes all activities in society - material and non-material, tangible and intangible, visible and non-visible - and not just some activities. It also includes the ordering process that is used to combine all these activities together to form a whole or total way of life. Surely this is what we mean today when we say we are the ‘products of our culture.’ We mean we are the products of everything that exists in our culture, or ‘our culture as a whole.’

Visualized in this way, culture is no longer ‘the icing on the cake’ - as it is when it is seen as the arts and humanities or the legacy from the past. Rather, it is ‘the cake itself.’ While economics forms a very important part of this because it is concerned with the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services and creation of material and monetary wealth, it is part of a substantially larger and more all-encompassing process because it is part of the total way of life of people or a dynamic and organic whole. This makes culture the most important activity in society because it is concerned with all activities in society and not
merely some activities in society, as well as the way in which these activities are woven together to form a whole or total way of life.

What is true for culture is equally true for cultures. Every culture in the world - be it in Africa, Asia, Latin America, North America, the Caribbean, Europe, and the Middle East - is a whole or total way of life composed of many parts. These parts are woven together in specific combinations and arrangements to form wholes or total ways of life that are greater than the parts and the sum of the parts because new properties are brought into existence when the whole or total way of life is created that are not in the parts taken by themselves or separately. This is true regardless of whether we are talking about cultures in the local, regional, national, or international sense, or in the community or ethnic sense. Every culture in the world is a whole or total way of life composed of many different parts. Cultures encompass the gamut of activities when they are visualized in this way, from how people see and interpret the world, organize themselves, and act in the world to how they conduct their affairs, elevate and embellish life, and position themselves in the world.

*This is the real reality that exists in the world and we would be foolish to deny it. At its most fundamental level, the world is made up of many different cultures in the all-encompassing sense - cultures that are constantly changing, evolving, mutating, impacting on one another, and interacting with one another. While these cultures share certain similarities - such as the need for food, clothing, shelter, communications, recreation, renewal, survival, and so forth - they are also very different. This is because the parts of these cultures may be different, or the way the parts are organized and combined to form wholes or total ways of life may be different. This gives rise to the specific identities and unique characters of all the various cultures in the world. It also gives rise to the fact some cultures are best known for their food, clothing, architecture, music, or dance, whereas others are best known for their economic systems, social arrangements, religious beliefs, political practices, communications capabilities, and so forth.*

Like the other ideas of culture examined thus far, this far more all-embracing idea of culture possesses numerous qualities and capabilities that are of vital importance to the world, perhaps the most vital importance of all. Most of these qualities and capabilities emanate from a quality or capability that the ideas of culture considered thus far do not possess, namely the ability to see things in holistic terms. Sight should never be lost of this. Nor should it be underestimated. It is one of humanity’s greatest strengths and most fundamental assets, as well as the key to coming to grips with some of the most urgent and pressing requirements of modern times.
In the first place, it makes it possible to see the world and most things in the world as they are, not as we are conditioned to see them due to our penchant for dividing things up into parts in order to study the parts in detail. For the world and the vast majority of things that exist in the world are wholes made up of many parts, not parts taken by themselves or separately. This is true for individuals, groups, institutions, communities, cities, countries, cultures, civilizations, the world, the world system, and many other things. While specialization is very helpful in shedding light on all the various parts of things - and studying the parts in detail - it is not very helpful in terms of understanding that the world, the world system, and most things that exist in the world are wholes made up of an intricate interlacing of many parts, not smorgasbords of independent or disconnected elements.

Nowhere is this more important than with respect to people. Despite the fact that our bodies and our lives are comprised of many different parts, the fact remains that our bodies and our lives are wholes in the comprehensive and all-inclusive sense, not assortments of disconnected and unrelated parts. Failure to recognize this and deal with the consequences of it can cause serious problems for people who are endeavouring to live happy, healthy, and productive lives but are unable to do this because they are unable to combine all the various parts of their bodies and their lives together to form a harmonious and integrated whole. It is culture, more than any other activity or discipline in society, that enables people to do this, thereby making it possible for them to become ‘whole people’ in the most complete and compelling sense of the term. We will never become whole people until we recognize that this is a cultural requirement more than it is any other type of requirement.

What is true for people is also true for institutions and groups. Like people, institutions and groups are wholes made up of many different parts. As such, they exude very specific ways of life because the parts are different and the way the parts are combined to form wholes is different. This is what makes it possible to talk about the culture of different groups and institutions, such as ‘Buddhist culture,’ ‘black culture,’ ‘police culture,’ ‘hospital culture,’ ‘corporate culture,’ and so forth. Each of these terms, and countless others like them, is designed to focus on the fact that these institutions and groups are wholes that manifest very specific ways of life. Terms like this are popular today because they confirm the fact that institutions and groups exude very specific ways of life as they go about the process of meeting the individual and collective needs of their members. They are also popular because they indicate that these ways of life must change whenever the shortcomings that exist in them exceed the strengths or become too large for them.
In much the same way that people, groups, and institutions are wholes, so the world and the world system are wholes. They are wholes made up of many different interconnected and interrelated parts. This is becoming increasingly apparent as a result of globalization and numerous developments in transportation, communications, technology, and virtually everything else.

It is impossible to view culture in holistic terms without recognizing that culture provides the ‘context’ or ‘container’ within which virtually everything that exists in the human world is situated. This has great relevance for the world and world system of the future because if we have lost one thing in the modern world, surely it is our ability to see things ‘in context’ rather than ‘in isolation.’ We have become so caught up with the ‘contents’ of things that we have lose sight of the ‘context’ in which they are situated.

There are numerous examples of this. Failure to understand that culture provides the context within which corporate activities take place has yielded a situation where many corporate activities are separated from the culture in which they are situated, thereby giving rise to fraudulent accounting practices, numerous financial irregularities, the payment of exorbitant fees and salaries for corporate executives, and the inability to regulate business activities and corporate practices in the public interest. Likewise, failure to understand that culture provides the context within which economic and technological activities take place has yielded a situation where preoccupation with certain types of economic and technological activities is having a deleterious rather than favourable effect on the world situation, especially when undue demands are made on the resources of nature and the lives of people. There is always a price that has to be paid when we get so wrapped up with the parts of things that we lose sight of the whole, just as there is always a price to be paid when we get so fixated with the trees that we lose sight of the forest.

This ability to see things in context rather than in isolation is not the only benefit to be derived from the holistic character of culture as a whole or total way of life. It is also the key to seeing things that are of vital importance to the world. This ability is imperative if we are to come to grips with the environmental crisis and treat the natural environment and other species with the respect and dignity they deserve. Failure to see things in holistic rather than partial or specialized terms has caused us to exploit the natural environment unmercifully and utilize the globe’s scarce renewable and non-renewable resources at an alarming rate. Here as well, we have become so preoccupied with the trees that we have lost sight of the forest, thereby leading to environmental excesses and imbalances that are impossible to justify in view of the size and growth of the world’s population and the finite carrying capacity of the earth.
Culture also possesses the ability to shed light on the complex interconnections and interrelationships that exist between and among many human activities when it is seen and treated in holistic terms. This is imperative if we are to be successful in ‘connecting the dots’ and coming to grips with some of the most demanding and debilitating problems of modern times, such as the complex connections and intimate relationships that exist but are often ignored between economics and ethics, science and religion, health and education, politics and society, technology and spirituality, and so forth.

Unfortunately, many activities are dealt with independently rather than interdependently due to our penchant for seeing things in specialized and separate rather than holistic and integrated terms. We engage in activities that are high in material inputs, outputs, and resource utilization while simultaneously refusing to admit that these things are intimately connected to the natural environment, climate change, and the frequency of floods, hurricanes, forest fires, tornadoes, and so forth throughout the world. We idolize technological developments while at the same time failing to recognize that many of these developments have an undesirable effect on religious practices and spiritual beliefs. We condone huge expenditures on health care while simultaneously decreasing or eliminating physical education and recreational activity in our schools. While culture may not possess the ability to deal successfully with all of these problems, and many others like them, there is no doubt that it provides the best possible vantage point from which to view these problems, as well as the ability to shed a great deal of light on how to make the necessary changes and embark on the new directions that are required to deal with them.

It is especially imperative for governments and politicians to realize this. Unfortunately, governments and politicians have become so accustomed to taking a partial or specialized approach to problem-solving - largely by creating ‘separate silos’ or ‘independent containers’ within which various activities and disciplines are situated - that the left hand often does not know what the right hand is doing. What is needed now, and needed more than ever, is a holistic approach to political and governmental decision-making and problem-solving. It is culture, more than any other discipline or activity in society, that makes this possible. As such, it provides the best possible framework for governmental planning, policy, and decision-making, largely by supplying the most effective vehicle for realizing balance and harmony between the various parts of society and public policy as a whole.

There is one final quality culture possesses when it is viewed in holistic terms that has a great deal of relevance to the world of the present and the future. It is the ability to bring things together rather than split them apart. This is
desperately needed if the world it is to become a safer and more secure place, rather than a more dangerous, demanding, volatile, and fragmented place.

This ability is needed on many fronts. It is needed to unite people, communities, societies, countries, cultures and civilizations, as well as to establish strong bonds and connections between them. It is needed to create symbiotic links and synergistic relationships between the various disciplines and activities in society, as well as to unify knowledge and understanding of what is fundamental and valuable. It is also needed to eliminate the fragmentation in people’s lives - fragmentation that makes it difficult for people to blend all the various activities in which they are engaged together to form a balanced, harmonious, and unitary whole. This is why people in the cultural field have been fighting to educate ‘the whole person’ for more than a century. It is education of the whole person that makes it possible to create an overall way of life that provides fulfillment, happiness, meaning, and contentment in life.

CULTURE AS VALUES, BELIEFS, AND BEHAVIOUR

About the same time that anthropologists were cultivating the idea of culture as an organic whole or total way of life, sociologists started to evolve the idea of culture as values, beliefs, and behaviour. Over the last century or so, their thoughts and impressions on this subject have congealed to form what is generally regarded as the sociological idea of culture:

Culture, a word of varied meanings, is here used in the more inclusive sociological sense, that is, to designate the artefacts, goods, technical processes, ideas, habits, and values, which are the social heritage of a people. Thus, culture includes all learned behaviour, intellectual knowledge, social organizations and language, systems of value - economic, moral or spiritual. Fundamental to a particular culture are its law, economic structure, magic, religion, art, knowledge and education. (6)

As with all the other ideas of culture, the sociological idea of culture possesses a number of qualities and capabilities that are of utmost importance to the world. Take the idea of values and beliefs for example, which is exceedingly germane to the overall understanding of culture in general and cultures in particular. Viewed from this perspective, it is not only the totality of activities that is important - as is the case with the anthropological idea of culture - but also the way in which these activities are assigned weights and priorities. Cultural experiences are configured differently in different cultures, countries, and parts of the world because they are given different weights and priorities, primarily
because they are predicated on different perceptions, preferences, convictions, and possibilities.

If values and beliefs play an important role in the sociological idea of culture, so do race, class, gender, identity, identities, customs, traditions, ethnicity, and so forth. It is essential to examine the insights and findings of sociologists in this area very carefully, since race, class, gender, identity, identities, customs, traditions, and ethnicity have assumed great importance in the modern world. The same holds true for language and communication. It is through language and communication that the bonds are created (or not created!) that bind people and cultures together.

In the modern world, it is the social media - or the cultural and communications industries as they are often called - that facilitate this act of communication most effectively. It is far from coincidental in this regard that ipods, tablets, BlackBerrries, cell phones, the Internet, electronic highways, the computer, playbooks, and so forth are the lifeblood of modern communication, since they provide the vehicles that are used to transmit images, messages, signals, and symbols that enable people in different parts of a country or culture - or in different countries and cultures - to share information, ideas, perceptions, values, value systems, patterns, and beliefs. Little wonder there is great concern about who owns, operates, and controls these contemporary vehicles of communication, as well as what messages and ideas are transmitted through them. Failure to exercise adequate control and ownership over the modern means of communication can pose serious problems - and have serious consequences - for countries and cultures in terms of their identity, survival, and sovereignty.

What is of even greater importance as far as the sociological idea of culture is concerned is people’s behaviour in general and collective behaviour in particular. Given the state of the world at present and prospects for the future, there is no doubt that people’s behaviour is going to have to undergo some profound and fundamental changes if humanity is to go fruitfully into the future.

It is often said that the biggest problem in the world is the environmental problem. But the problem is not with the environment; it is with us. We are the ones who are polluting the environment badly, depleting natural resources at an alarming rate, and exerting enormous pressure on the globe’s fragile eco-system and other species. Consequently, we are the ones who must change. It is imperative in this regard that we learn to conserve rather than consume resources whenever and wherever possible, thereby decreasing rather than increasing the huge ecological footprint we are making on the natural environment. This is a cultural requirement more than any other type of requirement because it has to do with values, priorities, and behaviour in general - both individual and collective -
as well as changes in values, priorities, and behaviour in particular. We will never deal effectively with the environmental crisis until we alter our individual and collective behaviour and create behavioural patterns, characteristics, and ways of life that do as little damage to nature, the natural environment, and other species as possible.

**CULTURE AS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMAN BEINGS AND THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT**

Given the need for fundamental changes in individual and collective behaviour and behavioural patterns, priorities, and characteristics, it is fortuitous that two far more expansive ideas of culture have begun to emerge over the last few decades.

The first is the ecological idea of culture. It is predicated on the conviction that culture is concerned with the intimate relationship between human beings and the natural environment. Whereas all the ideas of culture examined thus far have been predicated on the conviction that culture is limited to the human species and is the product of human creation - from the idea of culture as ‘cultivation’ to the idea of culture as ‘values, beliefs, and behaviour’ - the ecological idea of culture is predicated on the conviction that culture is concerned with the complex interaction between human beings and nature, the natural environment, and other species. This necessitates another quantum leap in the idea of culture, since it requires opening the doors to nature, the natural environment, and other species as a fundamental dimension of culture.

The ecological idea of culture is an outgrowth of the environmental movement. This movement has made us acutely aware of the fact that human beings do not exist in isolation, but are highly dependent on - and intimately connected to - the natural environment, far more dependent on and connected to than most people think. It has also made us acutely aware of the fact that economics and technology - which are often regarded as the crowning achievement of the human species - have not liberated us from our traditional dependency on the natural environment but rather have increased it. This is manifesting itself in consumption of the world’s scarce resources at an astounding rate, rising prices for basic foodstuffs like corn, rice, grain, fish, and so forth, and growing shortages of natural resources such as wood, water, coal, gas, oil, and arable land. As this happens, there is a much greater awareness of the role that the natural environment plays in providing human beings with the sustenance they need for survival, as well as the incredible dependency that human beings have on all forms of plant, animal, vegetable, and mineral life.
Like the other ideas of culture, the ecological idea of culture has a great deal to recommend it, particularly at the present juncture in history. Not only does it focus attention on the relationship between human beings and the natural environment at a time when this is becoming one of the biggest - if not the biggest - challenges facing people and countries in all parts of the world - but also it alerts us to the fact that basic changes are required in this area if human survival is to be assured in the future. For the evidence is clear and unmistakable: cultures that do not give sufficient consideration to the intimate relationship that exists between human beings and the natural environment run the risk of over-extending themselves, collapsing, and disappearing from the global scene because they are unsustainable. History is full of examples of this, from some of the earliest forms of human settlement on earth to some of the most advanced, particularly in areas around coastlines that are threatened by climate change.

**CULTURE AS THE ORGANIZATIONAL FORMS AND STRUCTURES OF DIFFERENT SPECIES**

The ecological idea of culture opened the doors to a much more expansive idea of culture to make its appearance on the scene - quite possibly the most expansive idea of all. It is the biological idea of culture. It is predicated on the conviction that culture is the organizational forms and structures of different species, both human and non-human. This necessitates yet another quantum leap in the idea of culture. It is leap not unlike the leap that occurred at the end of the nineteenth century to the anthropological idea of culture, as well as at the end the twentieth century to the ecological idea of culture. In this case, it is a leap that emanates from major advances in botany, zoology, and especially biology.

With the introduction of the idea that all species have culture, culture is no longer limited to human beings, but is deemed to exist in the realm of nature as well. This is understandable in view of the fact that other species - like the human species - are living organisms, and as such, obey the laws governing all living things, including birth and death, growth and decay, consumption, digestion, and elimination, gender identification, mixing and borrowing, reproduction, and so forth.

It is this fact that makes it possible to talk about the culture of plants and animals and not just about the culture of human beings. It also explains why we have terms like ant culture, wolf culture, and plant culture in our vocabulary and not merely terms like horticulture, agriculture, silvaculture, and permaculture. Whereas the latter refer to activities involving human beings, the former refer to activities involving other species.
Not everyone will agree with the biological idea of culture or feel comfortable about it. Indeed, there may be many who will contend that culture is - and should be - limited to human beings because it is the very thing that separates human beings from other species.

People of this persuasion contend that human beings possess the ability to reason, rationalize, reflect, and engage in various forms of consciousness and reflection that other species do not, or do not possess to the same degree. As a result, they believe that only human beings have culture, while other species do not. Nevertheless, the conviction that culture is not limited to human beings but is evident throughout the realm of nature is rapidly gaining ground and winning converts. This is because more and more people throughout the world are becoming conscious of the fact that countless similarities exist between human beings and other species, despite their obvious differences. Recent research is revealing, for example, that the differences between human beings and other species - which were once thought to be very great - are not as great as was previously assumed.

All that is required to confirm this is to watch other species as they go about the process of meeting their needs and working out their association with the world. Do they not do it in much the same way that human beings do it, even if it might be less sophisticated and complex? Like human beings, other species see and interpret the world, even if they see it in their way and not in our way. They also organize themselves into communities and groups, conduct their affairs with a great deal of courage, conviction, and determination, elevate and embellish life by engaging in various forms of play and recreational activity, and position themselves in the world. Anyone who has tuned in to the profusion of television programs made recently about other species will instantly recognize this and accept it. But it can also be confirmed by watching a flock of geese as they stare at us, observing a colony of ants as they prepare for battle or the hunt, studying cats to see how much they enjoy basking in the sun and playing with each other, or observing a pack of wolves as they carve out a prominent place for themselves in nature and the wilderness.

Nor is this all. Many other species bond, mate, and create wholes and total ways of life in much the same way that human beings do. Take bees for instance. Like human beings, they create cultures that are composed of many component parts, all of which are woven together in specific combinations and arrangements to form wholes or overall ways of life. These wholes or overall ways of life - which include well-defined systems of queen, drone and worker bees, rigid hierarchies and divisions of labour, finely-tuned communications networks and sensing capabilities, and highly-evolved production, distribution and consumption
mechanisms - act to ensure the survival of bees as a species and attend to their biological and non-biological requirements.

They also guarantee a continuous supply of products. These products, such as honey, wax, the beehive, and the honeycomb, are much in demand in the human realm and have both a functional and aesthetic significance. The beehive and the honeycomb, for example, are intricately-designed cultural creations, comparable in their way, style, design, function, and complexity to many of the cultural creations created by human beings. And what is true for bees, the beehive, and the honeycomb is equally true for many other animal and plant species and their creations. Virtually every animal and plant species has its own forms of culture and cultural creation, including its modes of organization, behaviour, procreation, consumption and production activity, and positioning in the environment. In fact, modern advances in the botanical and horticultural sciences are revealing that plants, like people and animals, have feelings, emotions, and experience pain, and what is more, respond very much the way people and animals do when confronted with such unpleasanntries.

The more scientists learn about the culture of plants and animals, the more is known about the various qualities and capabilities that are inherent in the cultures and ways of life of other species. As with human beings and their creations, this is exceedingly important for the world of the present and the future because it means that there are numerous similarities between human beings and other species despite their apparent differences. Moreover, there is a great deal to be learned from the cultures of other species - and indeed from the entire realm of nature - that is relevant to the development of the human species in general and human beings, human culture, and the world system in particular.

For one thing, there is much to be learned about caring, sharing, bonding, and cooperation. Many animals appear to share much more fully and freely than human beings, and do so far more willingly. Take elephants for example. It is a well-know fact that elephants care for one another very deeply, are each others keepers, and pay close attention to what is going on with their fellow companions. They also have phenomenal memories - apparently much more phenomenal than many people - and show an enormous amount of affection, sympathy, and love for one another, especially when they are in trouble. They gather around each other when they are sick, whenever there is work to be done, and when there is a need to rescue their colleagues from danger or distress. And what is true for elephants is true for many other types and species of animals as well.

It follows from this that one of the best ways to understand and come to grips with the culture, cultures, and the ways of life of human beings may be to study the culture, cultures, and ways of life of other species more intensively.
This may prove helpful in determining how human cultures and ways of life can be developed more effectively and fully, anticipating certain events and situations before they happen, preventing others, changing specific patterns and modes of behaviour, and forecasting prospective problems and possibilities. Careful study of the reasons for the survival, thriving, transformation, and extinction of other species and their cultures, for example, may prove helpful in dealing with such life threatening problems as overpopulation, severe shortages of resources, migration, excessive production and consumption activity, and environmental degradation. Many animal species, such as bees, wasps, ants, and so forth, have evolved modes of organization, conservation, and behaviour that reveal an intimate awareness of how large populations can be regulated, managed, and governed most effectively when resources are scarce and space is limited.

These are not the only advantages to be derived from studying the cultures and ways of life of other species more intensively. Another advantage is to improve the relationship between human beings and other species. While many people get an enormous amount of pleasure out of their association with plants, animals, and pets, there is no doubt that our relations with other species will have to undergo profound change in the future if we want to treat other species with the respect, dignity, and empathy they deserve. Clearly we have only begun to scratch the surface of this situation. There is a great deal to be realized here that will redound to the benefit of all species if human beings are attentive to it and do something concrete and practical about it in the years and decades ahead.

**FUTURE NEEDS AND DIRECTIONS**

This completes our examination of the way culture has evolved as an idea over a history spanning two thousand years. While culture as a reality has existed for a far longer period of time as noted earlier, culture as an idea came into existence when the Romans used the term ‘cultura’ to mean ‘cultivation’ in classical times, thereby making it one of humanity’s oldest ideas.

Since that time, many ideas of culture have been advanced and adopted throughout the world. Included among these ideas are culture as: cultivation; the arts and humanities; the legacy from the past or cultural heritage of humankind; a complex whole or total way of life; values, beliefs, and behaviour; the relationship between human beings and the natural environment; and the organizational forms and structures of different species. While these are not the only ideas of culture that have been advanced and embraced throughout the world over the past two thousand years, they are certainly the main ones and without doubt the most essential ones.(7) These ideas have resulted from contributions from many different individuals, groups, institutions, and disciplines, such as the arts,
humanities, history, anthropology, sociology, ecology, botany, zoology, and biology.

Why have so many ideas of culture been advanced and adopted over the last two thousand years? There are many explanations. But most of them boil down to two things in the end: helping people to understand the world and many different things that exist in the world; and helping people to change the world in order to improve their own situation, the human condition, or the world at large. In order to do this, it has been necessary to enlarge and enhance the idea of culture progressively and substantially over the centuries, from culture as cultivation that was popular in classical times to culture as the organizational forms and structures of different species that is increasingly popular today.

No other idea in the English language possesses the flexibility, adaptability, and versatility of culture when it is understood and dealt with in these terms. Whereas most ideas are static and unchanging, culture is dynamic and evolutionary. It has been expanded many times over the course of history to remain in tune with the rapidly-changing nature of reality and human knowledge and understanding.

In ancient, medieval, and early modern times, culture was seen and treated as ‘a part of the whole.’ This was the case when it was seen and treated as cultivation, the arts and humanities, and the legacy from the past or the cultural heritage of humankind. This was necessary to explain many things related to the growth and development of people, the quality of life, and the character of history.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, culture began to be seen and treated in substantially broader and more all-embracing terms, often as the whole rather than a part of the whole, and consequently the total way of life of people. This was necessary to explain how people create cultures as wholes or total ways of life as they go about the process of meeting their individual and collective needs and working out their complex association with the world. This is especially true for the anthropological idea of culture, which caused a seismic shift in the nature, meaning, and understanding of culture - both as an idea and as a reality - when it was introduced to the world in the late nineteenth century.

In the latter part of the twentieth century and early part of the twenty-first century, culture has been expanded even more, primarily through the biological idea of culture. Here, culture is seen and treated as the organizational forms and structures of different species, both human and non-human. This has been necessary to explain the numerous similarities that exist between human beings and other species, as well as to confirm the fact that what human beings deem to
be culture is not limited to themselves but exists throughout the entire realm of nature.

Recognition of these fundamental developments and basic turning points in the evolution of culture as an idea over the centuries has brought us to the present point. How should culture be seen and treated today, as well as in the future? Should it be seen and treated as a part of the whole, a dynamic whole or total way of life of people, the organizational forms and structures of different species, or all of these things? Surely it should be all of these things, since this is the only way it will be consistent with past experience, present realities, and future needs, as well as the many different ideas of culture that have been advanced and embraced throughout the world over the last two thousand years.

The key to coming to grips with this composite understanding of culture is to recognize that there has been a relentless trend throughout history towards an ‘all-encompassing idea of culture.’ This is because the ideas of culture that were advanced in earlier periods of history - such as the artistic, humanistic, and historical ones - are imbedded in the ideas that appeared in later periods of history - most notably the anthropological, ecological, and biological ones - along with a great deal else. This means that the many different ideas of culture that have been advanced and embraced throughout the world over the centuries are not mutually-exclusive and competitive but mutually-complementary and reinforcing.

Taking our cue from this, we may define culture formally as ‘the way in which species in general - and the human species in particular - create wholes or total ways of life that are composed of many different parts as they go about the process of meeting their individual and collective needs and working out their complex association with the world. Among other things, this includes how species see and understand the world, organize themselves, conduct their affairs, elevate and embellish life, and position themselves in the world. This definition capitalizes on the main ideas of culture that have been advanced throughout history and are in active use throughout the world today. It also capitalizes on the fact that culture is not limited to the human species but exists among other species and in the entire domain of nature.

Armed with this all-encompassing understanding of culture, we are in a perfect position to understand why culture is of such vital importance to the world. On the one hand, it embraces virtually everything that exists in the world, thereby making culture not only flexible, adaptable, and versatile but also all-embracing because it includes the human species, other species, and the realm of nature. On the other hand, it affirms the fact that the world is made up of culture in general and countless cultures in particular at its very core and quintessential essence. While economics and economies constitute an extremely important part of this
because they are concerned with the creation of material and monetary wealth - and therefore with people’s jobs, income, and sources of livelihood - they are part and parcel of a substantially broader, deeper, and more fundamental process. *It is culture and cultures in the holistic sense - not economics and economies in the partial or specialized sense - that constitute the real foundations of existence and the ‘engines the drive the train.’*

Recognition of this fact should cause us to focus much more attention on the development of culture and cultures in the future. This is the key to realizing viability and sustainability in the world because it means placing the priority on all activities in society and not just certain activities, as well as achieving balanced and harmonious relationships between them. It also makes it possible to capitalize on the many different qualities and capabilities that are inherent in the various ideas of culture that have been advanced and adopted throughout the world over the centuries, and are therefore contained in the all-encompassing idea of culture. *This is especially important with respect to the anthropological, sociological, ecological, and biological ideas of culture, since many of the qualities and capabilities contained in them are indispensable to the realization of a better world of the years and decades ahead.*

Having identified most of the benefits that accrue from culture in general and the various ideas of culture that have been advanced and adopted throughout history in particular, it is now evident why culture is of such fundamental importance to the world. In one form or another, it:

- **Focuses attention on the big picture, the component parts of the big picture, and the complex relationships that exist between the component parts of the big picture.** This is particularly true for the broader anthropological, ecological, and biological ideas of culture and the many qualities and capabilities contained in them. Our penchant for specialization and breaking things up into parts has caused us to lose sight of the big picture, and with it, the ability to see the flaws, deficiencies, and shortcomings that are inherent in the big picture. It is culture that makes us aware of this, and therefore helps us to understand where we have come from in the past, where we stand at present, and where we should be headed in the future. It also makes it possible to see what is most worthwhile and valuable in the world and in life, as well as the damage we are doing to the natural environment, other species, and the world at large.

- **Shifts the priority from a part of the whole to the whole and the need to achieve balanced and harmonious relationships between the parts and the whole.** Culture’s capacity for seeing things in holistic
terms is of crucial importance here. This is because a number of fundamental imbalances and disharmonies exist in the world - between human beings and the natural environment, materialism and spiritualism, science and religion, sacredism and secularism, and technology and society - that require rectification in the future if human survival and well-being are to be assured. Not only is culture the key to overcoming these imbalances and disharmonies - especially when it is understood and dealt with in the all-encompassing sense - but also it places the priority on the development of the whole person, cohesive communities, countries, cultures, and societies, holistic rather than specialized modes of public and private policy and decision-making, and synergistic relationships between all factors and forces in society.

- **Makes it possible to build strong bonds and connections between human beings, the natural environment, and other species.** This is possible because culture is concerned with all species and not just the human species when it is visualized and dealt with in the all-encompassing sense. No other term in the English language - and presumably other languages - possesses the ability to do this or realize it to the same degree. Since culture is something that all species have in common, it makes it possible to move laterally or horizontally across the human species, nature, the natural environment, and other species because all species share many similarities, manifest certain differences, and are in the same environmental boat. It is this fact that makes it possible to re-establish intimate links and connections between human beings, nature, and other species that have been lost in the modern world due to the separation of human beings from nature and other species.

- **Places more emphasis on conservation than it does on consumption.** Although culture is concerned with all activities in society, much more emphasis is placed on activities that are labour-intensive and low in material inputs and outputs - such as the arts, humanities, social relations, spirituality, and the like - than on activities that are capital-intensive and high in material inputs and outputs, such as many industrial, transportational, and technological activities. This is due to the fact that a strong emphasis is placed in many of the ideas of culture - and certainly in the all-encompassing idea of culture - on the arts, humanities, and related activities. As a result, it is through culture that it is possible to reduce the huge ecological footprint human beings are making on the natural environment by conserving rather than consuming resources at every opportunity and wherever and whenever possible.
- **Possesses the potential to reduce the gap between rich and poor countries and rich and poor people.** Reductions in this gap are far more likely to come through culture than economics because culture in the all-encompassing sense puts a high priority on caring, sharing, cooperation, and matters of the heart, soul, and spirit whereas economics puts a high priority on acquisition, competition, production, consumption, profits, and the pocketbook. While culture is concerned with both matters when it is seen and dealt with in holistic terms, the fact that it places a high priority on the former as opposed to the latter - largely because of its commitment to activities that have to do with feelings, emotions, and the expression of human sensibilities, sensitivities, and sentiments - opens the doors to the realization of more equitable distributions of income and wealth throughout the world.

- **Values history highly and makes humanity aware of the cultural baggage that people and countries carry with them from generation to generation and century to century.** Unlike many activities that ignore history, culture values history highly because it helps to explain how we arrived at the present point and where we should be headed in the future. It also helps to shed light on the cultural baggage that people and countries carry with them from place to place and time to time, thereby making us conscious of the need to come to grips with the mistakes of the past in order to correct these mistakes and create more effective methods, models, techniques, prototypes, and ideals in the future.

- **Improves intercultural relations and creates more effective communications between the diverse cultures and civilizations of the world.** Culture’s capacity to facilitate contact between the diverse cultures and civilizations of the world on a more profound and intense basis is of fundamental importance here. It helps to overcome the fears and suspicions that result from cultural differences and the inability to understand the signs, symbols, values, beliefs, and customs of others, thereby helping to promote peace, harmony, and unity rather than conflict, confrontation, and war in the world.

- **Facilitates changes in behaviour, lifestyles, and ways of life as the key to the survival and well-being of all species.** This is a cultural requirement more than any other kind of requirement because culture is concerned with beliefs, values, behaviour, attitudes, lifestyles, and ways of life much more than any other discipline. Through its ability to deal with generalities and specifics - as well as its ability to see the big picture as well as countless smaller pictures - culture possesses the
potential to bring about the fundamental changes in values, behaviour, lifestyles, attitudes, and ways of life that are indispensable for the future. The longer we ignore this, the more adverse the consequences will be. We need strong economies, industries, and corporations, needless to say, but we need them properly contextualized in the broader and deeper domain of culture and informed by cultural, environmental, historical, and spiritual values and not just commercial, financial, industrial, and technological values. Clearly the challenge of the future is to find the right balance between the two.

- **Possesses the potential to help people in all parts of the world to live creative, constructive, and fulfilling lives.** While culture is concerned with money, power, wealth, and prestige when it is visualized in all-encompassing terms, it is far more concerned with helping people to find joy, happiness, and fulfillment in their lives in all parts of the world. The renowned cultural scholar Joseph Campbell - who did so much to expand knowledge and understanding of culture, cultures, and the power of myth - said it best when he said people should ‘follow their bliss.’ For Campbell understood that ultimately contentment, fulfillment, and happiness in life come from becoming ‘whole people’ in the most compelling and complete cultural sense of the term.

  What is slowly but surely unfolding here is a vision of the world system of the future based on culture. It is a vision that is predicated on living in harmony with the natural environment, other species, and each other, as well as enjoying reasonable standards of living and a decent quality of life without straining the globe’s natural resources and fragile eco-systems to the breaking point. While economics has provided the vision on which the world system has been based since the end of the seventeenth century - indeed ever since the publication of Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* in 1776 - this vision is far too dangerous to carry forward into the future because it is doing a great deal of damage to the natural environment and is producing material demands and expectations that are impossible to fulfill in view of the size and growth of the world’s population and the finite carrying capacity of the earth(8) We must look to culture to create a viable and sustainable vision of the world system of the future, since this is the only way to reduce the huge demands we are making on the natural environment, conserve resources at every opportunity, and achieve peace, harmony, and happiness in the world.

  This brings us to the end of a long and fascinating journey as far as culture as an idea is concerned. While we must take full advantage of culture’s many strengths and deal effectively with its various shortcomings, what can be said about culture in the final analysis? Surely this. We need culture desperately -
both as an idea and as a reality - if the world is to become a better place and people and countries in all parts of the world are to benefit from culture’s numerous qualities and capabilities. Viewed from this perspective, culture is certainly ‘an idea whose time has come.’ There is something so vital, vast, and visionary about culture that it is undoubtedly a categorical imperative for the future.

ENDNOTES


4. Included in this group were such anthropologists as Sir Edward Burnett Tylor, A. Lane-Fox Pitt Rivers, Franz Boas, W. H. R. Rivers, Robert Lowie, A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, Bronislaw Malinowski, Alfred Kroeber, Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, Ruth Bunzel, Raymond Firth, and many others.


