



Sources of Cultural Conflict

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Abstract

This paper explores the primary causes or factors underlying cultural conflict in all its forms and seeks to answer the questions that follow. Why do people hate and wage wars against each other in the name of culture? Are cultural wars necessary or inherent in the very nature of culture as a phenomenon of human life? Can cultural differences be a justifiable cause of war? In my attempt to explicate and answer these questions, I shall first advance a concept of culture. What do we mean when we speak of culture? What is the essential structure or building blocks of culture as a human phenomenon? The proposition I shall defend is that the tendency of animosity, tension, and conflict among people is not and cannot be inherent in their cultures. Accordingly, any claim that cultural difference is directly or indirectly a cause of cultural violence is not tenable, even though such violence may take place in the name of culture or cultural allegiance. But, if the tendency towards animosity, tension, or conflict is not inherent in the essential structure of culture, what might be the roots of the so-called cultural wars? The thesis I advance and elucidate in detail is that an answer to this question should proceed from an analysis of Socrates's dictum that ignorance is the source of human evil. A discussion of this dictum and its implications, in the process of examining the roots of cultural wars, will reveal that the real culprits behind cultural conflicts are a cluster of political, intellectual, economic, psychological, and educational factors.

Keywords: Culture; Collective Subject; Human Values; Human Essence; Source

Introduction

Regardless of its magnitude, intensity, or the extent of its destructive impact and the degree of its justifiability, any meaningful inquiry into the primary causes of cultural conflict should, I think, proceed from an adequate conception or understanding of culture as a "human phenomenon". This entails answering certain questions. In what sense can a culture quarrel with, hate, antagonize, or wage war on another culture? Is it possible, in principle, for cultures to clash with each other? We readily understand what people mean when they talk about hate or conflict between two

human beings because we can identify the subjects or agents of the hate or conflict. The ability to identify the subject enables us to examine the conditions under which the hate or conflict takes place. But can a culture think, feel, will, or act the way two human beings can? Can it hate or initiate war on another culture? Is the analogy between a human being as a subject or reality and culture as a subject or reality warrantable? Again, two human beings may bicker or fight with each other, and they may suffer unnecessary reciprocal harm. Such bickering or fighting might be avoided; but how? Can we mediate a conflict if we do not know its causes? But how can we know the causes if we do not know, at least to

some extent, the identity of the conflicting subjects? Similarly, two institutions—for example, governments—may quarrel or declare war on each other, thereby suffering unnecessary reciprocal harm. This quarrel or war might be prevented; but how? Does a culture constitute a reality that can think, feel, plan, deliberate, or act as a subject? The point I am trying to emphasize is that knowledge of the subject of a conflict as well as its causes is a necessary condition for preventing or mediating it; otherwise, the mediation would be arbitrary, temporary, or dictated by an external power [1-4].

Two assumptions underlie any discourse about “cultural wars”: first, culture is, or should be, a distinct reality; if it is not, it cannot wage a war on another culture. Second, culture should act as a subject—that is, as a thinking, feeling, willing, and acting being—for war is a peculiarly human phenomenon that cannot happen without a power designing and steering its realization. These two assumptions prompt the following questions. In what sense is culture a distinct reality? How can it act as a subject, if it can act at all?

First, culture is not a physical or sensible reality, for we do not encounter it in the streets, marketplaces, or gardens of social life, nor do we encounter it anywhere in the realm of nature. Yet, it is as real as the reality of any natural or artifactual object. Indeed, as I will soon explain, it is the foundation of human life. Saying that it is the ontic source of the human as such is not an exaggeration. But although it is this kind of reality and it is such a source, the question remains: what type of reality is culture? An answer to this question is urgently needed because we cannot explain the sense in which a culture can wage a war or engage in a conflict with another culture without a clear understanding of what a culture is. For example, we can understand what it means for a lion to fight another lion or for a human being to fight another human being because we know the kind of reality a lion or a human being is. Even if cultural wars are real, we cannot understand how and why cultural wars happen or why a culture wages war on another culture if we do not know what kind of reality culture is.

Culture is an institutional reality. It is not merely a principle but also a fundamental institution of the state or society as a kind of human organization. I say “fundamental” because various, especially major institutions of state or society, derive their being and legitimacy from this institution. Though culture is a fundamental institution of the state, it shares one basic feature with the rest of the institutions, namely, that it is an embodied reality just as an artwork is an embodiment of a dimension of human values. For example, a book or a discourse, which is a conceptual medium, may be an embodiment of a belief, a religious doctrine, a scientific concept, or an ideological point of view. The mode of

existence of the doctrine is abstract or general; it acquires a concrete mode of existence when it is embodied in the book or the discourse. However, the medium of an embodiment may be natural, artifactual, or conceptual. We may view a tree, a natural object, as an instantiation or embodiment of the general idea of the tree, which exists for the mind as a general idea or schema. This tree is “a tree” by virtue of the imminence of the general idea of “tree qua conceptual form”. This immanence is the basis of the structure of that particular tree. Similarly, a sad piece of music, an artifactual object, is an embodiment of the general idea of sadness. In these and other similar cases, we intuit the general idea in the particular and the particular in the general, that is, we apprehend the meaning of the general by intuiting its manifestations in the essential structure of the particulars exemplifying it. Indeed, the presence of the general in the particular is what gives the particular its identity.

Accordingly, inasmuch as it is an embodied reality, an inquiry into the nature of culture should be based on a comprehensive examination. Such an examination would be a reflective, analytical, constructive, and systematic investigation of its multiple embodiments or instantiations, across various states and communities punctuating the landscape of human civilization. For example, a government is an embodiment of the fundamental beliefs and values articulated in the constitution and laws of society and translated into a multitude of departments, activities, buildings, and a system of communication. Similarly, religion is an embodiment of beliefs and values articulated in the doctrine or revealed divine message of a community and translated into rituals, practices, symbols, and modes of conduct—in short, a religious way of life. Again, an economy is an embodiment of basic beliefs and values articulated in a country’s conception of the means of producing and distributing its resources or wealth. Finally, an educational institution is an embodiment of the basic beliefs and values that should shape the character of the upcoming younger generation in a given society. These and the other conceptual documents that underlie the institutions of the state are, in turn, translated into material embodiments. For example, the constitution of a country, which is the basis of its laws, is concretely and existentially translated into an unusually complex and multidimensional system of departments, policies, rules, norms, and modes of behavior and a hierarchical system of departments and functionaries. This type of translation is characteristic of all state institutions; in effect, it is an embodiment of basic beliefs and values constituting the spiritual fabric of society. As a way of life, “culture” is, as I shall presently discuss, “an embodiment of ideals underlying the highest degree of human growth and development in a society.” The unity of these ideals makes up the essential structure of culture [5].

However, unlike any other institution or organization and, certainly, unlike any natural, artifactual, or conceptual objects, all of which are offered to perception or reflection as ready-made realities, culture is not given as a ready-made reality; it is in a constant process of rational evaluation and realization. For example, the structures and parameters of technological, political, economic, or religious institutions are clearly defined, articulated, and systematized by leaders presiding over their administration. If you have a clear understanding of the constitution, laws, and organization of a government or the doctrine of a religion and the way they are translated into a way of behavior or life, you will understand what it means for a government to be monarchic, democratic, despotic, or welfarist or for a religion to be Muslim, Buddhist, Christian, or Hindu. The central beliefs and values underlying the beings and identities of various institutions are “established or instituted centers or bases”. But, on the other hand, culture lacks a definable or articulated center. However, metaphorically speaking, it is the center of all institutional centers; it is, as I have just indicated, the source of their being and legitimacy. But if culture lacks a recognizable center, how can we discourse about it? In what sense is it an institution? How can it initiate an action, the way an individual can, or wage war on another culture? How can it be the foundation of the life of people? In what sense can it function as a foundation?

An answer to these and other related questions cannot be forthcoming without an adequate or at least reasonable conception of culture. In what follows, I shall first advance a concept of culture. Second, I shall discuss the sense in which we can speak of cultural wars, if we can. The proposition I shall elucidate and defend is that human cultures do not and cannot wage wars on other cultures or institutions for three reasons. First, a culture cannot act as a collective subject that makes decisions or initiate actions. Second, culture does not have the material means for initiating any kind of action or war. “Culture is a purely spiritual or human phenomenon.” Third, the so-called cultural wars are most of the time waged in the name of culture for political, hegemonic, economic, religious, technological, or personal reasons. The basis of these types of wars is national, social, or community allegiance—namely, the feeling of obligation to be loyal to one’s community, nation, group, or institution. This type of allegiance is a sophisticated feeling of tribalism. Its basic premise is identification with one’s community.

A Concept of Culture

Regardless of any practical or theoretical interest, an inquiry into the nature of culture as a human phenomenon or the role it plays in human life in general or in a kind of experience in particular (for example, religious, ideological, social, educational, or aesthetic experience) is confronted

with varying definitions, concepts, analyses, and sometimes bewildering interpretations of its essential structure or identity. One reason for this variation is that “culture” is a paradoxical reality, for it is at once “ubiquitous and elusive”. It is ubiquitous, because it is a primary demand of human nature, as I shall explain, and pervades, indeed underlies, the way humans think, feel, and act as individuals and groups. Culture is elusive because it is not offered to experience as a ready-made object the way rocks, lions, or trees are given, or the way scientific or mathematical concepts are given to the mind. Yet, from the perspective of human progress, it is more real than any of these types of objects. It is the foundation of the human being, as such. Accordingly, we should ask: what kind of reality is culture? An adequate answer to this question should, I think, throw light on not only the meaning of human existence in general but also the extent to which a culture may wage a war on another culture. As I emphasized in the introduction to this study, we cannot say whether a culture can or cannot wage any type of war if we do not know how it can wage the same. Again, we cannot know how it can wage a war if we do not know what it is. I shall begin my discussion of this question with some general questions about the identity and mode of existence of culture: What type of reality is culture? What is its essential structure? In my analysis of these questions, I shall highlight three aspects that distinguish culture as a specific human phenomenon.

Culture as a Spiritual Reality

Although culture is not a natural, psychological, or ordinary object, it is a type of human reality. It is a “way of being human in the world”, that is, of human living and flourishing. This proposition is composed of two concepts: “being human” and “way”. First, what does it mean to be a human being? Second, what do we mean when say that a culture is a way of being human in the world? What is the basis of this way? As a human body, I exist in nature the way trees, lions, and rocks do. However, unlike any other type of object, I exist in a special way as a human being. Furthermore, unlike the way other human beings exist, “the way I exist is the essence of my being as a human individual”; I become the human being I am in this way. The apple tree is what it is; its whatness is given, that is, its structure is expressed in the form of its givenness—in the way it grows, matures, gives fruits, and dies. Again, unlike the tree, I am what I shall become, and what I shall become depends on the material and human conditions under which I shall grow in the near and distant future or on “how” I shall live. This way is not given as a natural object or aspect, and yet, it is neither fortuitous, accidental, fleeting, or phantasmic. It is a fundamental type of reality, just as natural objects are fundamental types of reality. More concretely, it is a “source”—the source of a special type of reality. “Source” comes from the Latin word “sugere”, which means “to rise or spring up”. Metaphorically,

we can call it a fountain or a spring. However, unlike a natural fountain or spring that brings forth water from the belly of the earth as a way of being, this type of source “creates what it gives forth”. Hence, it is appropriate to characterize it as a “creative power”. Let me explicate this claim in greater detail.

As a source, the human way of being inheres as a potentiality in the formal organization of the human body, just as aesthetic qualities in here as potentialities in the formal organization of an artwork. More concretely, it inheres in the “dynamic interrelatedness” of elements comprising the structure of the human body, in contrast to the formal organization or structure of various bodies or organisms constituting the animal kingdom. It is realized, or it comes into being and develops, when a person is born and begins to grow under certain social, pedagogic, and material conditions. That which comes into being is a complex of human capacities—the capacity to think, feel, will, and act based on what one wills. These capacities inhere in the formal structure of the body as powers, that is, “abilities” to act in certain ways. They are the ontic locus of the human essence or the fundamentals that constitute the foundation of the human as such. We are not born as human beings, but with the potentiality to become human realities. Consequently, we are not born as Japanese, Senegalese, lawyers, engineers, farmers, lovers of beauty, or criminals, but with the potentiality to become any one of these or several other types of human realities.

The way the human essence is realized, which is the same across the human species, varies in different parts of the world. This assertion is supported by a belief widely recognized by scientists and philosophers: the way the human essence is realized varies from one geographical, religious, economic, political, technological, and artistic environment to another—in short, one cultural environment to another. This environment provides the human and material environment wherein the potential or general and abstract acquires a concrete existence. This concrete existence involves language, norms, practices, laws, symbols, institutions, modes of behavior, social rites, values, beliefs, and certain survival skills—in short, a way of life. As Hegel insightfully pointed out some time ago, regardless of whether she is an artist, a scientist, a politician, a businessperson, an inventor, or an ordinary member of society, a human being is a child of her culture. Apart from a few exceptions such as Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, or Beethoven, whose genius can soar into the depths of the universe and human nature and emerge from this quest with a vision of the essence of all essences, no human being can transcend the boundaries of her culture. Why? Because, as I have just pointed out, first, the human essence carries a potentiality for infinite possibilities of realization, and, second, the natural and social environment is the existential framework wherein this realization occurs. A human’s character is nourished

by the beliefs and values constituting the structure of her culture. Transcending her culture is tantamount to self-negation, which is impossible. Ontologically speaking, this type of realization is an intersection between the ideals that underlie the culture and the existential conditions of the social environment. This kind of intersection reflects the magical power of reason.

The powers or capacities that constitute the foundations of human nature are “impulses”; as such, they are “drives” that aim at self-fulfillment or self-assertion. By its very nature, a drive is “telic” in character; it aims at a goal or a purpose. Therefore, we may characterize these impulses as “peremptory desires”. But inasmuch as they inhere as potentialities within the formal organization of the human body, the goals they aim at are “values”. We may distinguish five essential capacities as constitutive of human nature—thinking, feeling, willing, and wondering. The capacity of thinking aims at truth; the capacity of feeling aims at goodness and beauty; the capacity of volition aims at freedom; and the capacity of wondering aims at knowledge of the foundations of the universe, which is the essence of the religious impulse. These basic values give rise to derivative values, each of which entails a possibility for engendering further derivative values. For example, truth includes values such as wisdom, prudence, erudition, deliberation, and insight; goodness includes values such as justice, courage, love, and honesty; beauty includes values such as grace, elegance, sublimity, and loveliness; freedom includes values such as individuality, community, success, and cooperation; and religiosity includes values such as piety, compassion, humility, and faith. This characterization of the essential structure of human nature calls for the following comments.

First, these five basic values form the substance of the activities and goals human beings pursue across various domains of experience. They are the moving force behind the objectives they seek daily, right from the moment they open their eyes to the world to the moment they surrender their consciousness to Morpheus. The realization of these values in concrete experience is the source of human satisfaction or happiness. Indeed, the more people succeed in realizing them, the more they feel fulfilled as human beings. If we cast an inquiring look at the sea of humanity in its historical context, we can discover that the realization of these values has been the preeminent concern of people across various spheres of life. If you delete interest in or pursuit of love, beauty, justice, truth, freedom, and religiosity and the extant values inflaming the minds and hearts of people while conducting the business of human living across the world, you also delete humanity as a reality in the world. The unity of the realized values in individual and communal life is the dwelling wherein people exist and thrive as human beings. Physically, they live in the realm of nature; as human beings,

they live and thrive in the human world they build. This world is anchored in the realm of nature because human nature inheres as a potentiality in the formal organization of the body [5].

Second, the realm of human values is the reason for the existence of philosophy, science, technology, art, religion, and government. These values form the bases of the institutions forming the structure of the state. A scientist seeks to know the truth of the facts comprising the scheme of nature; a philosopher seeks to know the meaning of these facts; an artist seeks to reveal the essential nature of the meaning of existence in general and human existence in particular; a theologian seeks to interpret and translate the revealed truth into a way of life; a technologist seeks to discover the best way to transform the knowledge of the scientist into useful instruments; and a political theorist seeks to discover the foundations of a just or good society. The various achievements in these areas of inquiry form the content of human civilization. What is this history but the narrative of the realization and systematization of these achievements? Is it an accident that the study of human civilization in the process of its development is the most appropriate and resourceful storehouse for any meaningful inquiry into the essence of human nature? This rhetorical question does not belittle or denigrate the analysis of the mind or the psyche by the psychologist or the philosopher, which is microcosmic; on the contrary, it only casts a different light upon the phenomenon of humanity in its larger presence in the world, macroscopically. If we take Plato's analogy—that society is the human soul writ large—seriously, as a principle of explanation, we can say by the same logic that the history of civilization is human nature writ large. This is because history provides the largest and richest landscape of human achievements, of what human nature is and can do. We may view the studies of the psychologist, philosopher, and philosopher of history as microscopic and macroscopic “mirrors” reflecting the reality of human nature. This analogy is based on the assumption that we can, to a large extent, examine the nature or identity of the human individual by what she does. Do we not glean the soul of the artist, the philosopher, the social reformer, the mystic, or the scientist in her work? Taken as a whole, can we not glean the nature of the human essence within the achievements of humanity in its historical context?

Third, the five basic values and their derivatives constitute the foundations of the institutions within which the human individual grows and flourishes: family, government, religion, art, science, philosophy, technology, economics, agriculture, defense, school, and business. These institutions and related organizations exist for one reason: to create the existential conditions for human growth. Consider for a moment the institution of education.

Notwithstanding the general emphasis on and proliferation of practical, technical, or career education, we can defensibly say that the general aim of education is the cultivation of human character. What is the subject matter or stuff of this kind of education? If we cast an investigative look at the curricula of university and pre-university education, we discover that the foundation of this education is the unity of the basic values and their derivatives. Its two pillars are sciences and humanities, namely, knowledge of nature and human nature; both aim at the cultivation of intellectual capacity and essential values nourishing moral, religious, social, aesthetic political, and intercultural sensibilities. The building blocks of a cultivated mind are these types of human sensibilities. However, these sensibilities do not exist inside the human mind as ready-made realities but as abilities and, more concretely, potentialities. Their unity within the mind constitutes the “human dimension of the human being”; that is, a person is human inasmuch as she possesses this dimension. However, in so far as it exists within the mind as a potentiality and comes into being in experience, it is not a material reality. The experience wherein it emerges is an embodiment or a realization of a dimension of human values. This dimension comes to life as a drop or a flame of human experience—as a human flame! This flame is not reducible to nor can it be interpreted in terms of material categories. “It is spiritual par excellence.” Accordingly, a human being is spiritual inasmuch as she exemplifies within the various spheres of her life the highest instantiation of human values. Do we not admire and respect a saint because she is a radiant flame of moral goodness, human understanding, and a mystical comprehension of the meaning of human existence and destiny? Do we not admire and respect a teacher, citizen, thinker, genius, or social reformer who exemplifies the highest realization of intellectual and moral values in her life? Do we not build artistic, conceptual, and social monuments for such people, mainly because they are embodiments of human values or ideals? I am aware that the world of human civilization is punctuated by false human monuments—of corrupt political, social, religious, and artistic leaders; but such monuments, sooner or later, either tumble or recede into the belly of oblivion. Genuine embodiments of human values endure [6].

Culture as a Worldview

Human values are existential responses to peremptory urges inherent in human nature; as such, they are propulsive drivers. But they are not blind or capricious drivers. They are, as I argued in the preceding section, telic. Moreover, they are ways of satisfying human desires; the aims they seek are inherent within them. Accordingly, when I say that they aim at truth, goodness, beauty, freedom, and religiosity, I mean that their thrust constitutes an integral part of their structure as drivers. As a potentiality, the unity of these drivers constitutes

the essential structure of human nature. But human nature does not float in a metaphysical space; it is tethered to the formal organization of the human body, which is the same across the human species. Thus, it is universal inasmuch as the human species is universal. This proposition implies that an organism instantiating the formal organization of the human body is a “human organism”.

However, as a potentiality, human nature is not real, in the sense that it does not exist. It exists in the mode of potentiality, but potentiality is not an actual element of the real world. Potentiality may step into the realm of reality under certain social and material conditions. However, these conditions differ from one part of the world to another and from one epoch to another. This means that the intuition, understanding, or conception of the values and the ways they can be lived on the ground of reality will necessarily differ from one place to another and from one epoch to another. Although these conceptions differ, the difference will not be essential, structural, primary, or generic, mainly because, irrespective of its mode of realization, it will essentially be a response to a peremptory human desire or urge. This difference is not exclusive to regions, communities, or nations, but extends to individuals within the same community, region, or nation, even to the same family. As a universal, a value exists as a “schema”, that is, a possibility that can be realized as a particular reality. The realization is, in principle, a creative activity; but how? Translating a value “qua” universal into an action is not an activity of imitation, replication, or interpretation; it consists of bringing into being a reality that did not exist earlier. Moreover, although it is an instantiation of a universal, it is not a copy of the universal; rather, it is a creation of a new reality. The universal functions as a “guidepost”, as a source of inspiration that aims to capture the essence of a universal that is not yet real. By definition, the universal is generically different from the particular.

Now, I can state that culture steps into the realm of reality as a concrete embodiment of a particular understanding or a conception of the reality of human values, in two ways. First, this conception reflects people’s understanding of the meaning of existence in general and the meaning of human life in particular. This understanding is summed up in the unity of the values underlying the way humans think, feel, and will—that is, their way of life. Although we discourse about these values as if they are discrete, unitary conceptual realities, in fact, form a multidimensional and multivalent unity. They imply each other. Hence, we can refer to them as a “realm”. For example, can the truth of the scientist or the philosopher be aesthetically or morally undesirable or irrelevant to the administration of justice? Can a bad human being be happy, or can a truly happy human being be morally bad? Is the quest for freedom inconsistent with or even

possible without a commitment to truth, justice, or beauty? Is the pursuit of the religious as such possible without an adequate knowledge of the order of nature or human nature? This essential feature of the realm of values is, to my mind, the basis of the assertion that it is not “merely” a conceptual unity of human values, nor is it some kind of inert reality; it is a living reality—a living, spiritual reality. Ontologically speaking, people’s conception of human values and the way this conception functions as the basis of their way of life is a reflection of its worldview, “weltanschauung”—namely, its spirit, “geist”. Here, I assume that spirit is not a metaphysical reality or entity but a substantial human reality, and the texture of this reality consists of values expressing the essential desires of human nature.

Second, inasmuch as they are constitutive elements of cultural reality, human values exist as ideals worthy of pursuit. They pass from the state of ideality into concrete embodiment through two interconnected ways. The first is written or documented, and the second is unwritten or undocumented. The first is conceived, whereas the second evolves and gradually emerges as modes of conduct. The first is composed by general consent, and the second is written in the minds and hearts of people in the form of life’s material and spiritual demands. As mentioned earlier, values function as the foundations of the institutions comprising the fabric of the state—family, school, religion, technology, art, philosophy, government, or agriculture. These institutions are pedagogic and formative not only because they create an existential environment wherein people plan and realize their life projects but also because, directly or indirectly, they provide structures and possibilities for thinking, feeling, and acting. Undermine these structures and possibilities, and you undermine the reality of the state as a social order. The point that merits special emphasis at this point of my discussion is that, first, as human beings, people live in a human environment and human values are the structural elements of this environment. Second, these values are derived from the ideals forming the texture of a people’s culture. Indeed, culture reveals itself through conventions, norms, customs, traditions, symbols, myths, and social practices—in short, through the actual way people design and conduct their lives publicly and privately. This second mode of embodiment of culture is generally emphasized by sociologists and anthropologists. Although these two modes of embodiment are distinguishable modes of being, they are interactive and complementary. This is not only because the second mode is derived from the first level of embodiment but also because both emanate from the spiritual structure of the given culture. For example, many of the laws and social organization categories of various states of the world originate from their customs, traditions, norms, and general practices.

Culture as Normative Reality

Normativity is the quintessential condition of the capacity of a culture to be a way of life. This proposition is based on two fundamental assumptions: first, culture is a value based reality grounded in the realm of values; second, this realm is the source of ideals that define not only the structural constitution of human nature but also the normative power of culture. Let me elucidate this two-fold assumption in some detail.

As a phenomenon, culture is a value reality, in the sense that its structure or being consists of values. But values are not natural or psychological objects; they are human creations. They exist as ideals, that is, schemas or possibilities for concrete realization in human experience. However, as schemas, their ontic mode of existence is that of particular types of potentialities. Their realization of specific actions transforms the actions into value actions such as moral, aesthetic, social, or religious types of actions. By itself, as given, the action not only retains its natural or psychological character but also exists as a valuable action. It exists as an action embodying a particular value, only to the person who performs it and the people who can comprehend the conditions under which it is performed. Nevertheless, the performance of this kind of action forms the source of a particular type of meaning—aesthetic, religious, moral, or social.

Broadly speaking, a value action or an action expressing a value derives its identity from the rule, principle, or standard—that is, “norm”—according to which the action is performed. For example, fasting on a certain day or month, worshipping God in a certain way, or showing compassion to the poor and the oppressed may be deemed religious actions. In these and other similar cases, the religious person fasts, worships God, or shows compassion to the poor and the oppressed not only because such actions constitute an instantiation of certain religious values but also because these values are essentially normative; they are a source of obligation. I may take a vacation from social, professional, or personal modes of behavior, but I cannot take a vacation with impunity from acting according to the rules of moral goodness. Can I say one morning, “Today I shall give myself the liberty to lie, hate, speak falsely, or delight myself in harming people or insulting their dignity?” When I say “normative”, I mean that by its very nature, values function as a standard, measure, or criterion of action. Being a standard implies, at least implicitly, that one should act or is obliged to act according to the standards prescribed by society, an institution, or an established or recognized authority. Do we not feel obliged, pressurized, or inclined to act according to the standards of truth, morality, or religion, although we frequently violate them? When we discover that our friend

is a thief, do we not feel inclined, if not obliged, to distance ourselves from them? A standard or norm is always the basis of the value of a type of action.

However, the inescapable question necessarily emerging from these reflections is, what makes a value function as a norm or standard, one that gives it the power to incline, oblige, compel, or at least recommend? If I am to answer this question succinctly, its very signification is as follows: that which is valuable is important. But what is importance? “Importance is a generic, primitive category concept.” Its meaning is apprehended intuitively. It is indefinable but used to define certain types of phenomena, such as people, artworks, natural objects, or social events. We deem such phenomena as important, generally because they are significant, vital, and necessary; because they matter to us; and because we, as human beings, endear them. In short, they are meaningful: an important or valuable object is a meaningful object. It is the kind of object wherein we place a certain worth. Value norms or standards need not be accompanied by a coercive power or authority such as God, the state, or moral conscience. They influence and to a large extent direct people by virtue of the human satisfaction they produce in our lives. Attainment of meaning is a fundamental good. The good is attractive and desirable. Do we not crave meaningful experiences in pursuing our life projects or planning various types of activities in our daily lives? This understanding of the concept of value underlies my classification of our most prized qualities into a realm—truth, beauty, goodness, freedom, and religiosity.

Although not all standards or norms implied by human values are as coercive as religious or moral values, all types of values imply certain standards or norms of excellence as the basis for their evaluation. For example, although I am not compelled to appreciate the aesthetic qualities of an artwork or a type of art, the general standards of excellence in the arts retain their normative character because they define excellence in the pursuit of meaningful experiences. Regardless of whether it is in the sphere of aesthetics, ethics, knowledge, religion, or practical life, the attainment of meaning is good. Accordingly, even the norms defining excellence across the various domains of human values are not coercive; they act as “directive powers” since they promise the attainment of meaning.

Concluding Remark

Based on the preceding discussion in its entirety, I can now sum up the concept of culture within six main propositions. First, culture is an embodiment of the worldview of a nation, state, or community; it acquires a concrete being in values that are responses to peremptory desires inherent in human nature. Second, culture does not appear as a ready-made

reality but as a potentiality for realization; accordingly, it is a human creation and the highest expression of the human essence. Therefore, it is reasonable to characterize it as a spiritual reality. Third, as an embodiment of a people's worldview, culture reveals the popular understanding of the meaning of existence in general and human existence in particular. Fourth, culture constitutes the foundations of institutions comprising state structure. A member of the state or any community acquires her cultural identity in the process of growing and flourishing within these institutions. Fifth, culture is a normative reality because it offers norms defining human excellence across varied areas of human experience. It derives its ability to chart and steer a people's way of life, based on these norms. Sixth, although culture is always a concrete embodiment of a people's values that differ from one region to another, the peremptory desires or urges underlying human values are universal.

As I argued in the Introduction, any meaningful discourse about the possibility of cultural wars or the role cultural identity may play in initiating or waging such wars or performing any human action should, I think, proceed from an adequate conception of (a) culture as a human phenomenon and (b) the extent to which a culture can actually wage war on another culture. It is extremely difficult to say that a culture can be an agent, subject, or basis for engaging in a certain type of action if we are not clear about the sense in which a culture can initiate, engage, or contribute to any type of political or social action. Two animals, human beings, families, religions, or states can engage in some kind of conflict, even war, with each other. An understanding of any one of these types of wars is, in principle, possible because we can examine the nature of the participants in the war and the conditions under which the war takes place. The fundamental fact underlying the possibility of such wars is that the parties of the war are concrete realities, which may be identified and examined. Thus, if we say that a culture or cultural identity can be used as a means of designing and performing a kind of social or political action, we should be ready to "explain" how they can be a means for accomplishing this kind of action. Such an explanation implies, as I have just indicated, a clear conception or understanding of the conditions under which the action is performed.

Given the concept of culture I advanced in the second part of this study, I shall now argue that a culture cannot wage or initiate any kind of constructive or destructive action against another culture. This claim shall be supported by two main arguments. First, unlike a given and concrete reality such as a human individual, a lion, or a state, a culture cannot act as a "subject" or "collective subject", that is, as an agent that thinks; feels; plans; wills; or implements an idea, plan, or any kind of action. Being a subject is a necessary condition for conceiving and carrying out any kind of action.

This assertion is based on the generally recognized principle that the performance of any action implies the existence of three elements: a subject that conceives and administers the performance of the action, a purpose or aim for the conception and performance of the action, and a means for its performance. Second, as a human reality, culture cannot, inherently or in principle, initiate any kind of action. This assertion is warranted by the premise, which I have already discussed, that the realm of human values is constitutive of the essential structure of culture as a human reality anywhere in the world. The pursuit of this aim is the primary aim of these values. Accordingly, the claim that culture can wage war is "inconsistent" with the fact that the pursuit of human values is an existential response to the peremptory desires constituting the fabric of human nature.

Can a Culture be a Collective Subject?

I shall begin my answer to this question with a clarification of the meaning of "subject" and "collective subject". A subject is an agent that presides over the design and realization of an action. She envisions the design, method, means, and activity of its realization; moreover, she assumes responsibility for the consequences of the action she performs. In contrast, a collective subject is an assembly of subjects. While the subject is "given" as a singular reality, the collective subject is "created" to perform a certain function, namely, to represent a community, a state, an organization, or an institution at a meeting, a rite, or a celebration. As an assembly, the collective subject acts as a unity of minds and wills; they think, feel, and will in unison. They are individuals, but they communicate the same beliefs, values, or messages. Moreover, the individual subject acts on her behalf; the collective subject "represents", that is, acts on behalf of the community, state, organization, or institution it stands for. The collective subject "personifies" the community she represents, primarily because she embodies its interests, aims, desires, and viewpoint—in short, its spirit. She acts "as if" she is the community she represents. Thus, although a member of the collective subject or any representative of a community is a particular individual, she brackets out her subjectivity and assumes the "persona" or spirit of the community. Therefore, when a delegation or its envoys are insulted or honored by another delegation or representatives, all the members of the institution feel insulted or honored. Also, when Sheikh Al Azhar speaks, Sunni Islam in the Middle East speaks; when the Pope speaks, the Catholic Church speaks; when the President or Emir speaks, the whole country speaks; when the chief executive of the Ford Motor Company speaks, the company speaks; and when the delegation at a national or international meeting speaks, the state speaks.

Now I shall begin the analysis of the first argument with some brief comments on one institution: the

government. Regardless of their identity or the complexity of their functions, all institutions of the state are “embodied realities”; hence, they are human creations. They derive their concrete being from a definable set of beliefs, values, and purposes usually articulated in an official and approved document. The institution exists for the sake of translating these beliefs, values, and purposes into a functioning reality. Generally speaking, an institution is a concrete reflection or embodiment of the conceptual structure of a document expressing the beliefs, values, and purposes of its creation. The process of its embodiment becomes complete when the conceptual plan or design of the institution is “centered” in a physical location and operated by legally employed functionaries or officials. The institution acquires a life of its own when an executive presides over its various activities. I highlight this point only to emphasize that a political institution is a “concrete and centered” reality. As such, it can administer a type of activity—for example, an economic, educational, technological, or healthcare activity. It can make decisions, design projects, create policies, and initiate various types of actions. For instance, it can declare war on another state, and it can execute its declaration. It may or may not be justified in waging the war, and it may lose or win it. What matters is that it has at its disposal, the necessary and sufficient conditions for waging the war. The ability to perform this type of action is facilitated by the fact that the state is a “centered institution”, that is, a center of decision-making and acting. Similarly, a religion is a centered institution. Its mode of centeredness and the type of war it can wage against another religion are certainly different from the institutional centeredness of a state or the kind of war a state can wage. Religious wars can be as violent and destructive as political wars, mainly because they are centered institutions.

Moreover, the fact that centeredness is a necessary condition for waging a war against another state applies, in principle, to all the institutions of the state, mainly because they are constitutive elements of the government. They derive their being and life from it. For example, the executive authority of the Department of Economic Affairs can send a delegation to an international conference or another state to negotiate an agreement on a matter of mutual concern or discuss the possibility of cooperating on a certain project. As a collective subject, the members of the delegation represent, in the sense of “embodying” or “personifying”, directly the beliefs, values, policies, or interests of their institution and indirectly of the whole state. This type of representation is possible only because the Department of Economic Affairs is a centered institution. For example, the executive authority that presides over all the institutions of the state and consequently acts as an embodiment of the will or interests of the people can decide to wage war on another state. It can

execute this decision because it has the legal power to wage it and the means to execute it.

I am quite aware of the general fact that some philosophers, historians, political thinkers, and sociologists, not to mention politicians and social critics, have frequently talked about cultural wars and alternatively about wars or clashes between civilizations [7]. It is almost taken for granted that cultural wars happen the way political or religious wars do. My aim in the present discourse is not to discuss or evaluate these claims about wars between cultures and civilizations but simply to explore as critically and analytically as possible whether one culture or civilization can wage war on another. A war between two states is a public event. Two states declare war on each other. These states exist in a certain region of the world; they are centered and identifiable. They have armies and the means of waging the war. Similarly, one religion can wage war on another. They exist and they are centered. Broadly, I understand people when they talk about these and other similar types of wars. But what puzzles me is the extent to which this talk is justifiable. If it is justifiable, how so? By what empirical or rational method can we undertake this type of justification? Again, what if it is not justifiable, as I have been arguing? Again, suppose it is not justifiable, what reasons might be given for talking about cultural or civilizational wars, clashes, or conflicts in general?

Given the preceding discussion in its entirety, I can now more directly ask; can a culture, at least in principle, wage war on another culture? Let me at once propose that, regardless of whether it is national, religious, academic, professional, or ideological, a culture cannot engage in peaceful, violent, or any type of human action against another culture: first, because it is not a centered institution; and second, because it is inherently incapable of performing any type of activity. It cannot act, and it is not the kind of reality that acts. I shall discuss the first reason in this section and the second reason in the following section.

Although some philosophers and social scientists characterize culture as an institution on par with those comprising state structure as a political reality, it is not an institution in the ordinary sense of the term. This is because, unlike state institutions, it is not a purposefully and legally organized and instituted social structure. Hence, it is not a human creation resembling purposefully and legally created state institutions. It is, as I argued earlier, founded in the community’s worldview. The government and every type of institution and organization directly or indirectly arise from beliefs and values—and the ways these beliefs and values are translated into a particular way of life—that constitute the fabric of the community’s worldview. Hence, I

stated in the first part of this study that culture is the center of all institutional centers or, expressed differently, it is the soil from which every social sphere of human experience emerges. Accordingly, it is reasonable to say that the state, in the diversity of its institutions, is an embodiment of a people's culture. Do anthropologists not seek an understanding of a dead or even a living culture through an examination of its conceptual and artifactual remains—buildings, clothes, coins, books, and instruments, including the trash dumped in certain holes or valleys? But as an embodiment, culture is not a centered reality; it is a spiritual reality. As such, it is centerless; otherwise, how can it thrive in the minds and hearts of people through a long stretch of time and across diverse geographical regions? How can it be the foundation of every state institution?

Culture evolves. The spring from which it comes into being and evolves is the human essence that exists, as I argued earlier, as a potentiality for infinite realization and consequently for the possibility of continual evolution. Neither the origin nor the process of its evolution is conceived and steered by an executive authority underlying the existence of various state institutions and organizations. On the contrary, it is energized and propelled by an intricate web of social, historical, economic, political, religious, intellectual, scientific, artistic, and technological factors. The ontic domain of a culture is the realm of its spiritual life, of the ideals and aspirations moving people in their endeavors to fulfill themselves as human individuals.

But, if culture is not a centered reality, how can anyone claim, much less theorize, that it can perform an action or wage a war? I tend to think that, although a culture cannot initiate or wage a war, it is possible to wage a war "in its name". The basis of this possibility is cultural allegiance, the "feeling" of loyalty to one's country and the "feeling" of duty to support it in times of need or crisis. Culture is the basis of one's identity as a particular human individual. Any threat to one's country is an implicit threat to one's identity and consequently one's being. But is waging a war in the name of culture justifiable? Can it be truly a cultural war? How do we know that the crisis or need justifies the war? Is it possible that a country waging a war in the name of culture is prompted by economic, hegemonic, personal, or selfish reasons? Defending one's country is a duty, and it can be a noble one. But, even if it is morally justifiable, can we call the war "cultural, in the sense that a culture wages it"? Political, religious, ideological, and economic leaders frequently tend to take advantage of the feeling of cultural allegiance.

A leader may, justifiably or unjustifiably, feel or believe that she needs the support of the people to launch and win a war against an adversary. One way of enlisting such support

is to create an intimate causal relation or an argument that a primary, if not the sole purpose of the war, is the integrity of culture. How many a war is waged in the name of God or the sanctity of the word of God? How many a war is waged in the name of freedom, justice, and human rights? How many a war is waged in the name of national security or "our democracy"? There is no need to lengthen this list of rhetorical questions; but, I can say that culture has frequently been used as a cover or subterfuge for waging a war on another state for the sake of economic or hegemonic reasons. Accordingly, it is critically necessary to ascertain whether, in the case of so-called cultural wars, the war is indeed caused by a cultural factor, as well as the actual causes and conditions under which the war is being waged.

It is quite possible that waging a war for economic, ideological, or hegemonic reasons may influence a culture negatively or positively, for any kind of destructive event such as war will, directly or indirectly, affect the integrity, development, or progress of the cultural life of people. But it would be a grave mistake to say that culture can either initiate an action or wage a war because it is not a centered reality. How can it act if it lacks a center, a mind, regardless of whether it is singular or collective, which designs and performs the action or the war? Moreover, a war between two peoples could be caused by cultural rivalry, jealousy, an attitude of arrogance, or an implicit conviction—a kind of prejudice that they are culturally superior, which is a common phenomenon in the history of human civilization? Is this kind of feeling, conviction, or attitude a sufficient reason for waging a war? Suppose the war does take place, can we justifiably characterize it as a cultural war or a cultural encounter wherein two cultures confront each other? Can a culture undergo a feeling of jealousy, arrogance, rivalry, or superiority? People may experience these and other similar feelings, but is the conflict or war they engage in a cultural war—or is it a type of psychological or idiosyncratic war? I feel we should make a distinction between people as a type of reality and culture as a type of reality. For example, cultural arrogance or rivalry may provoke a feeling of hatred, hostility, and anger in the minds and hearts of people, and this feeling may prompt a war between them. But can we say that it is a cultural war? It may be caused by a feeling of cultural inferiority or superiority, but is the conflict or war between them cultural?

Second, a culture cannot, in principle, wage war on another culture. This is not only because the other culture is a spiritual reality and thus cannot be an object of conflict or any type of material confrontation, but especially because it is the kind of reality that cannot perform a violent action such as war. Let me elucidate this claim.

Even if a culture is a centered institution and it may assume

the persona of a subject, that is, even if the conditions enabling it to wage a war are at its disposal, it cannot wage such a war. This is primarily because its essence and the essence of the other culture are the same: “a human essence”. It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for culture as a human reality to engage in a violent action. This is because, it is inherently contrary to its fundamental impulse which aims at the good, the beautiful, the true, the free, and the religious. This kind of impulse is essentially constructive; it inherently aims at the promotion of human wellbeing, not at its obstruction. No two cultures are identical. Some are larger and more developed, influential, and vibrant than others. This type of difference has always been a fact of life throughout the world. As I argued in the second part of this study, since cultures thrive in varied geographical, religious, social, historical, economic, educational, and technological conditions, they will necessarily respond differently to this fundamental human impulse. This means that they will interpret the meanings of human values as well as the methods of realizing them differently. Although the ways of life of the Chinese, Indian, Italian, Congolese, or Nicaraguan people are different, that is, although they meet their aesthetic, moral, intellectual, social, or religious peremptory desires differently, no one is more or less human than the other, although some may be richer or poorer because of economic, political, educational, or technical reasons. We encounter this difference within the same culture and frequently within the same facility. But, in general, do we not weep or feel grief when we lose a loved person, and do we not feel glad when our children succeed in their lives? Regardless of where they live or what they do, do people not prize freedom? I have a feeling that the more our world becomes interconnected and interactive, socially, educationally, scientifically, religiously, philosophically, technologically, scientifically, and economically, that is, the more people experience and understand each other, the more they will discover the universality of the human essence. It is crucially important to recognize that difference does not necessarily entail contradiction or the possibility of opposition. On the contrary, difference is desirable and inspiring, and it can be an impetus to cooperation. In fact, the prevalence of difference across all the spheres of experience is an existential testimony to the versatility and exuberance of human nature, of its capacity for the possibility of infinite realization [8].

Ironically, instead of being a source of cooperation, mutual aid, and human enrichment, cultural difference seems to have become a source of fear, alienation, prejudice, rivalry, and conflict between many peoples of the world, now and in the past—but why? I tend to think that Socrates’s insight, namely, “ignorance is the source of all human evil”, which has functioned as a principle of explanation across several areas of human life, underlies much of the cultural alienation, misunderstanding, and conflict among various

communities of the world. An encounter with another human being who is culturally different from me, one who stands before me as a closed human world, generates a moment of self-consciousness. It, implicitly or explicitly, creates an awareness of comparison. This kind of moment can be expressed as: “She is not like me!? Who is she? Is she peaceful or hostile? Is she superior or inferior to me? Is she a threat?” This state of mind is occasionally accompanied by a feeling of skepticism, hesitation, fear, caution, and sometimes repulsion if not rejection. Do we not wonder about and sometimes fear a student who always sits silently in the back row of the classroom and refrains from associating with the rest of her classmates? Do we not feel curious and assume an attitude of skepticism toward a neighbor who refuses to speak and associate with any member of the neighborhood? The student might be a genius and the neighbor might be an Edison. Does our attitude of skepticism, caution, fear, or mystery not recede when we communicate with or know the student or the neighbor? Again, consider the case of a neighbor whose color, facial configuration, or general appearance are quite different from ours—do people in general not shy away, fear, denigrate, or assume an attitude of skepticism toward such a neighbor? What if one day this neighbor jumps into the river and saves the life of a young girl who is about to drown; carries her in her arms; still dripping with water, knocks at the door of her house; and, with a smile on her face, delivers her to her parents—how would the parents react to or feel about this neighbor? Would they not see in her a genuine human being who feels, thinks, and acts the way they do, if they happen to be genuine human beings? Would their eyes not learn to penetrate the appearance of a human being and see the humanity that lies underneath the appearance? Do people not undergo this type of transformation across varied domains of human experience everywhere in the world? Knowledge is the brightest light of reason; it enables people to see others as human beings despite their biological, social, professional, or economic differences [9-11].

Just like the student who was hidden behind her silence and reluctance to associate with her classmates and the neighbor who was hidden behind her different biological and behavioral appearance, the culturally different other is hidden behind a different way of life [12-17]. She may look, speak, feel, enjoy life, or act differently, “but her way of life emanates from the same human core” that underlies the lives of humans across various cultures of the world. This core can never be a direct or indirect cause of cultural war or conflict. Especially at present, when means of communication, facile transmission of human knowledge, and transportation are slowly transforming the human world into a kind of human community, the veil of cultural difference and identity is becoming increasingly open, opaque, and transparent [18-22].

Conclusion

I tend to think that the so-called cultural wars and wars of civilization are waged in the name of culture or civilization. The real dynamics underlying wars between the states or communities of the world are ignorance, greed, selfishness, political arrogance, and economic and hegemonic aspirations [23-25]. As I have argued in the preceding discourse, culture cannot wage wars because, being a human phenomenon, it cannot act as a collective subject taking decisions and performing actions. Also, the possibility of waging wars is inconsistent with the fundamental urges that constitute the fabric of human nature.

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