Nostalgic Teleology

And the Question of Arnoldian Culture

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Introduction

"The snake that cannot shed its skin," wrote Nietzsche, "perishes. [And] likewise spirits which are prevented from changing their opinions; they cease to be spirits."[1] Although he was writing some years after the publication of Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*, Nietzsche's comment captures something central to Arnold's concept of culture:[2] namely, the search for a kind of human perfection through an unceasing striving. It is an idea that forms perhaps the very essence of Arnoldian culture—a process of unfolding transmogrification "where the individual may be perfected, that his activity may be worthy, [where] he must learn to quit old habits, to adopt new, to go out for himself, [and] to transform himself."[3] For Arnold, culture is a process where "in making endless additions to itself, in the endless expansion of its powers, in endless growth and wisdom and beauty, the spirit of the human race finds its ideal."[4] In Arnold's view, this goal of perfection can only be reached through the transforming power of culture. As he puts it, "to reach this ideal, culture is an indispensable aid, and that is the true value of culture. Not a having and a resting, but a growing and a becoming, is the character of perfection as culture conceives it."[5]

Though the word culture is rich with meaning, for Arnold its manifold resonances are actually not his principal concern; rather it is through culture's actions and effects—in short, its content as he defines it—which most interests him. As he writes, "what we are concerned for is the thing, not the name; and the thing, call it by what name we will, is simply the enabling [of] ourselves, whether by reading, observing or thinking, to come as near as we can to the firm intelligible law of things and thus to get a basis for a less confused action and a more complete perfection than we have at present."[6] In Arnold's view, culture is therefore something which, though acquired in different ways, has as a destination, our inner selves; and it is from our inner self that our outward actions originate. As such culture's province is both the public and the private sphere of human experience—spheres which hold great consequences for the individual and the society which he inhabits. Outwardly, as Arnold relays, "culture may with advantage continue to uphold steadily its ideal of human perfection; [but] that this is [nonetheless] an inward

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[1] F. Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, Cambridge (1982), 228

[2] Nietzsche published *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality* in 1881; Arnold published *Culture and Anarchy* in 1869

[3] Matthew Arnold, *The Complete Works*, Ann Arbor (1960-68), Vol. 1

[4] Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, Oxford (2006), 36

[5] Ibid., 36

[6] Ibid., 120

spiritual activity, having for its characters increased sweetness, increased light, increased life, increased sympathy."[7]

Foreshadowing Arnold's idea of self-transformation also lays the German concept of *Bildung*; for, indeed, there is a close conceptual connection between it and key aspects of Arnold's thinking in *Culture and Anarchy*. In point of fact, *Culture and Anarchy* contains I think, what Constantin Behler elsewhere terms a kind of "nostalgic teleology;" that is, where an idealised image of ancient Greece supports a critique of a problematic present—a present which might nonetheless be overcome through some final, future chimerical stage of history—and Behler's term thus illustrates something of the Janus-like character of such enterprises, Arnold's included.[8] The implications of this for Arnold's consideration of both past and future combined with the concept of *Bildung* and aforementioned characters such as sweetness, light, life and sympathy, indicates something of the multifarious aspects and complexities of Arnold's ambitious enterprise; And so in this paper, in order to unravel some of these complexities, I will therefore attempt to explore his idea of culture from differing standpoints—standpoints which will allow for a proper consideration of all these matters; but in particular, however, I will throughout reflect on the nature of this perfecting force called culture and the role its 'inward spiritual activity' is intended to have in public values and conduct.

1. Culture and Education / Culture and *Bildung*

For Arnold, "[education's] prime direct aim is to enable a man to know himself and the world."[9] As a consequence, education stands right at the centre of Arnoldian culture, as it forms one of the principal mechanisms for its dissemination and inculcation. As the son of the founder of Rugby School and later, as an inspector of schools himself, Arnold was highly aware of both the transformative power of education and the many issues surrounding its access. Without a state-sponsored, properly coordinated educational system, or indeed without any kind of national curriculum, many schools barely provided even the most basic tuition. In addition to this, the issue of formal education was further

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[7] Ibid., 48
[8] C. Behler, *Nostalgic Teleology: Friedrich Schiller and the Schemata of Aesthetic Humanism*, Bern & New York, Peter Lang, (1995), 2
[9] Arnold, *The Complete Works*, Vol. 4, 290

complicated by the British Class System: for whilst the aristocratic classes always had access to schools like Eton, the middle and lower classes had far more limited choices.[10] And with their growing numbers and developing interests, Arnold clearly felt the issue demanded proper address. To his mind, the state needed to be a far more pro-active agent in educating its people, and thus ensure the proper delivery and promotion of "the best that has been thought and said."[11]

But Arnold's urgency on this issue was not born of mere altruistic feeling. As John F. Kuhn points out, "Arnold feared an uneducated middle-class liberalism, which denies right reason as a norm for human action and claims that individual opinion has the right to rule."[12] In this way, Arnold's concerns for education were directly related to both democracy and political freedom. Indeed, still feeling the after-shocks of the French Revolution, Arnold's anxieties were not by any means atypical for the time; for though he largely welcomed greater democracy, he remained throughout his life cautious and sceptical as to its intrinsic virtues. And yet, that said, he could still see the reality of democracy's advance and for this reason, he rightly identified the need for a properly effective educational system that could produce a people capable of handling the weighty responsibilities that attend political freedom. It should also be pointed out that in Arnold's eyes, the freedom to simply do as one pleases is not freedom at all, but rather some kind of dangerous ersatz liberty that ultimately leads to anarchy. As Lionel Trilling notes, the authentic end of democracy for Arnold was, after all, "true liberty and true humanity."[13]

As Arnoldian culture is really a process, once of its principal methods of advance is through intellectual criticism—and this is primarily developed through formal education. As good criticism is the very thing that leads to the shaping of good ideas, so do ideas, in turn, shape society, which in turn again, shapes conduct. And as the goal for Arnoldian culture is the perfection not just of the individual, but crucially, of society as a whole, then it is clear that the whole process really begins with education. As Arnold writes, "human progress consists in the gradual increase of those who, ceasing to live by the animal life alone come to participate in the intellectual life also, and to find enjoyment in

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[10] J. F. Kuhn, "Some Notes on Matthew Arnold's Thought on Education and Culture," *Notre Dame English Journal*, (1971), Vol. 7, 52-53

[11] Arnold, *The Complete Works*, Vol. 1, 23-24

[12] J. F. Kuhn, "Some Notes on Matthew Arnold's Thought on Education and Culture," *Notre Dame English Journal*, (1971), Vol. 7, 57

[13] L. Trilling, *Matthew Arnold*, New York, (1949), 186

the things of the mind."[14] Arnold thus linked criticism to education—and education to culture, which he then ties directly into the realities of a newly unfolding democratic suffrage. In this way, education is perhaps the main weapon in Arnold's multifaceted agenda, as it seeks to equip the individual with the necessary tools to undertake the journey towards perfection.

Clearly implicit in Arnoldian education though is also the idea of expansion—of horizons, of perspectives and of experiences—and this is, in fact, the very essence of the German concept of *Bildung*, which might be defined as the cultivation of complete human beings through education and art. Such cultivation of the self through the discovery of new cultures and new ideas is bound up with Arnold's cultural goal of self-perfection and in this way Arnold's ideas tie in to a whole tradition of German thought going back to at least the eighteenth century. As E.K. Brown notes, Arnold in this way opened up continental literature for many Britons[15]—though, this was, unfortunately, for critics at that time (and even slightly later critics like Sir Walter Raleigh for instance) a negative trait. As Raleigh himself once penned (as a new introduction to the 1912 edition of Arnold's *Essays in Criticism*), Arnold was nothing but "a well-bred, highly cultivated stranger … [with] little affection for England."[16] That said it is nonetheless true that Arnold drew upon continental ideas. And as with thinkers like Friedrich von Schiller and Heinrich Heine, Arnold's idea of *Bildung* has far-reaching consequences; for the idea of linking criticism, education, culture and politics together places cultural concerns right at the very heart of debates on freedom, governance and the nature of society—and this is also a very continental idea. In Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* for instance, there is a preoccupation with establishing a preeminent aesthetic education in order to create what he calls a rational political state. Surrounded by the turmoil of late eighteenth century Europe, Schiller concerned himself with "that most perfect of all the works to be achieved by the art of man: the construction of true political freedom."[17] But in attempting to achieve this, he argued that "if man is ever to solve that problem of politics in practice, he will have to approach it through the problem of the aesthetic, because it is only through beauty that man makes his way to freedom."[18] The rational

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[14] Arnold, "Essays in Criticism," *The Complete Works*, Ann Arbor (1960-68), Vol. 1.

[15] E. K. Brown, "The Critic as Xenophobe: Matthew Arnold and the International Mind," *The Sewanee Review*, (1930), Vol. 38, No. 3, 301

[16] Arnold, (With New Introduction by Sir Walter Raleigh), *Essays in Criticism*, London (1912)

[17] F. Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters*, Edited and Translated by E.M. Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby, Oxford (1967), 7

[18] Ibid., 9

state is thus, for Schiller, an expression of an inner unified whole—and this inner whole is in turn only properly achieved through *Bildung*. Though undoubtedly different in form, tenor and context, the *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* and *Culture and Anarchy* bear distinct resemblances: where Schiller speaks of beauty, Arnold speaks of Sweetness; where Schiller speaks of fragmentation, Arnold speaks of self-interest; what Schiller calls the aesthetic ideal, Arnold calls perfection.

And still these linkages to German thought do not stop there; for as Donald D. Stone writes, "in Heine [too], Arnold found an intellectual and literary model … connecting past and present with the future."[19] Indeed, Arnold's distinction between the Hellenistic and the Hebraic was undoubtedly inspired by Heine; for instance, in *Ludwig Borne*, written some three decades before *Culture and Anarchy*, Heine wrote, "all people are either Jews or Hellenes; people with drives that are ascetic, image-hating and ravenous for spiritualisation, or a people of a nature that rejoices in life, is proud of display and is realistic."[20] For Heine, most of the history of western civilisation was characterised by an oscillation between these two tendencies—and it is these very ideas which Arnold seizes upon to build into one of the cornerstones of his thesis: namely that England needs to see a return to the Hellenic spirit. Even the concept of the philistine, Arnold gets directly from Heine, and as with Schiller, Heine too connects what is an outlook on life—a *Weltanschauung*—with firm political consequences.[21] But central to the thinking of all three—Heine, Schiller and Arnold—is this idea of *Bildung*: that it is only through a transformation of the self by means of art and education, a continual expansion of one's outlook, that such forces can be overcome within the self; and only then can politics and society be changed for the better.

2. Culture and Politics / Culture and Pragmatism - A Brief Case Study

Though Arnold's cultural and educational agenda is inextricably tied in with the political and societal health of the nation as a whole, what can one ascertain of his political views—and, moreover, how do those particular views sit with his ideas on culture and

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[19] Donald D. Stone, "Matthew Arnold and the Pragmatics of Hellenism," *Poetics Today*, (1998), Vol. 19 No. 2, 188

[20] H. Heine, *Ludwig Borne*, (cited in Joseph Carroll: 1982: 242)

[21] Donald D. Stone, "Matthew Arnold and the Pragmatics of Hellenism," 181

perfection? To answer this, one might best view a brief case study of Arnold's engagement with the problem of Irish Independence within the British Empire, as this problem was both cultural *and* political. During the 1860s, a new kind of unprecedented nationalism emerged from Ireland; the Fenians began campaigns of terrorism which they brought to mainland Britain, striking fear into the hearts of many. Some people even worried about a possible alliance between the Fenians and the Socialists, leading to a kind of revolution—or anarchy—within Britain.[22] In addition to this, Michael Davitt's land league was rapidly achieving success in bringing about reform for the rights of tenants and small farmers—rights which some felt might weaken the Ascendency's power within Ireland, which could in turn weaken the Union. At the same time, there was considerable support for Home Rule within Ireland as many saw the fundamental contradiction of giving support for national government in Greece and Italy for instance, but not for Ireland. This contradiction or tension persisted though, as many others thought an independent Ireland too great a risk to security and peace (with it serving as a possible staging ground for a foreign invasion, for instance); but also many feared that an independent Ireland might set a dangerous precedent within the Empire. And so, as a consequence a middle ground of some reform was taken. For Irish Nationalists however, this was unacceptable; as William Harcourt puts it, "the via media of conciliation [was] impossible [as] there was no alternative between separation and coercion."[23]

Arnold, who was an opponent of Irish Home Rule, sought, however, precisely such a via media; and this is especially apparent in his book, *On the Study of Celtic Literature*. There, Arnold's solution for the governance of Ireland is, as David Lloyd stipulates, "an eschewal of specifically political solutions and an appeal instead to the harmonisation and mediating power of culture."[24] In short, Arnold attempts to transcend politics by using culture to produce political effects. His argument is a curious concoction of on the one hand—admirable idealism and—on the other—lamentable prejudicial stereotyping on all sides; yet it nonetheless illustrates much in terms of his vision for the Empire and indeed the world generally in how culture might be used to deal with conflicting values and solve complicated political problems.

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[22] John Newsinger, " Old Chartists, Fenians and New Socialists, *Eire-Ireland*, (1982), 117, no. 2, 19-45

[23] Letter of William Harcourt, Quoted in William Robbins, "Matthew Arnold and Ireland, *University of Toronto Quarterly*, (1947), Vol. 17, No. 1, 61

[24] David Lloyd, "Arnold, Ferguson, Schiller: Aesthetic Culture and the Politics of Aesthetics," *Cultural Critique*, (1985-86), 141

For Arnold, the idea of difference is a great problem as it is tied in directly to the Schiller-like fragmentation of society as a whole. Depending heavily on ethic oppositions, Arnold's first step is to identify certain essential characteristics inherent in the Celt and the English: whereas the latter he sees as practical, if somewhat dull and lacking in imagination, the former is "half barbarous" and "ineffectual in politics" though impressively "sentimental".[25] Arnold's agenda is ultimately for one of growth and expansion; and he therefore argues that despite their fundamental differences in character, the Celts and the English "have notwithstanding, beyond perhaps any other nation, a thousand latent springs of possible sympathy with them."[26] Essentially he proposes that the Celts assimilate more into the Empire becoming more English-like in character, whilst similarly, the English becoming more Celt-like; in short, he advocates a kind of melting pot, where each essence benefits from its opposing 'other'. And yet Arnold's key assumption throughout is that the Empire nonetheless continues on, with Westminster remaining the seat of centralised political power. The resulting 'Indo-European' people would only then be capable of producing a culture of 'imaginative reason', a term which he uses in *Culture and Anarchy* to describe the essence of the cultivated disposition.[27] As Lloyd puts it, "an aesthetic notion of the telos of historical evolution thus governs Arnold's ethnography insofar as it is directed from the start towards the production of such a state of culture."[28]

Yet, how pragmatic was such a proposal? And more pertinently, how effective? Although many aspects of Arnold's study of Celtic Literature were discredited even at the time, and study of the book fell away especially following Irish Independence, it nonetheless illustrates something important in Arnold's thinking of the relationship between culture, values and politics. For despite its obvious shortcomings, it is nonetheless also clear, that Arnold's key enemy here is not one race or another, but rather provincialism and fragmentation. In his view, these are simply emblematic of a narrowness of mind, an anti-cosmopolitanism which stifles growth and prevents the proper flourishing of culture and perfection. The Irish problem is thus, for Arnold, a primarily cultural and educational one; it is about a narrow-minded nationalism which prevents a proper world embrace of knowledge and experience. What Arnold does not address however, is the issue of power

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[25] Arnold, "On the Study of Celtic Literature," *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, Ann Arbor, (1962), 392
[26] Ibid., 395
[27] Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, Oxford, (2006), Chapters II-III
[28] David Lloyd, "Arnold, Ferguson, Schiller: Aesthetic Culture and the Politics of Aesthetics," *Cultural Critique*, (1985-86), 148

and control. Instead, he assumes that when a people are long on the path to perfection, when they carry culture in their hearts, the issue of political power will naturally and peacefully take care of itself. It is a huge assumption to make and yet logical in that it assumes a high degree of rationality on behalf of the populace. That they would, on the other hand, rationally choose Westminster for the centre of political control seems to Arnold almost obvious, perhaps reflecting his own narrowness of mind on this matter. If anything, though, Arnold's ideas on the problem of Irish Independence only highlights the idealism of Arnold's cultural agenda and how therein both its strength and its weakness lie.

3. Culture and Liberalism / Positive and Negative Liberty

The term Liberalism has of course multiple meanings; but the sense in which I use it here relates to the mid-Victorian sense of the perceived importance for limiting central government. As Geoffrey Best puts it, direct government "was something [the Victorians] hardly knew and did not like the idea of."[29] And as Lauren Goodlad points out, many Victorian civil servants were liberals in the sense that that they favoured a laissez faire agenda in social policies. For instance, the Newcastle Commission of 1858-61 actually sought to "delimit working class education in the interests of self-help and economy." And even larger centralising measures such as the 1834 New Poor Law and the 1848 Public Health Act were widely disliked.[30] As Jose Harris puts it, "self-government … [was] a quintessential feature of British national character."[31] And yet within Liberalism also lay a subtle tension; the tension between what Goodlad terms "negative liberty" and "positive liberty;" the former involving a restricting of government, whilst the latter involving an empowerment of some kind.[32] Goodlad argues that some of the literature of the period dramatizes this tension, whilst simultaneously promoting a vision where Victorians could have "a modern governing agency that would be rational, all-embracing and effective but also anti-bureaucratic, personalised and liberatory."[33]

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[29] Geoffrey Best, *Mid-Victorian Britain 1851-75*, London, (1985)
[30] Lauren M. E. Goodlad, "Beyond the Panopticon: Victorian Britain and the Critical Imagination," *PMLA*, (2003), 118, No. 3, 541
[31] Jose Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: Britain 1870-1914*, London (1993), 18
[32] Lauren M. E. Goodlad, "Beyond the Panopticon: Victorian Britain and the Critical Imagination," 541-543
[33] Ibid., 540

Placed in this context, Arnold's ideas on culture contain various implications for liberalism. To begin with, Arnold's proposal that the state take on some kind of responsibility for the education of its people would have run directly against the liberal instincts of many Victorians. And yet, it is undoubtedly also his goal to empower the individual so as to equip them with the necessary tools for self-transformation; and this, in turn, is necessary in order to ensure the right and proper governance and general societal health of the nation. In this regard Arnold's proposal thus contains something of Goodlad's notion of "positive liberty": "positive" in the sense that he aims to empower the individuals who ultimately make up society; but he is also anti-liberal in his desire to see government controlling and taking responsibility for the education of its people.

And yet Arnold shows a keen awareness, however, of "negative liberty." In this latter respect it is first of all interesting to contrast Arnold's ideas with those of a near contemporary, Samuel Laing. Relating his observations on the continental education system—the very one Arnold was to speak so admiringly of—Laing writes, "[continental man] is an educated slave … [with] his personal bodily and mental actions … fitted on him by his master, the state, like clothing on a convict."[34] Though Laing was writing with Arnold in mind, his comment captures something of Victorian views on continental attitudes to its citizens; attitudes that Arnold seemed dangerously amenable to. In terms of perception, Arnoldian culture was thus bound up with a program that would undoubtedly have seemed to some Victorians as anti-liberal in its underpinnings. And this combined with, as I say, his predilection for continental ideas would have raised many alarm bells in the English Victorian mind. However, be that as it may, these are all criticisms which Arnold admirably anticipates and deals with in *Culture and Anarchy*. In his discussion of Wilhelm Von Humboldt's *The Sphere and Duties of Government*, for instance, he writes, "[Humboldt saw] that the individual must act for himself, and must be perfect in himself … he saw very well that for his purpose itself, of enabling the individual to stand perfect on his own foundations and to do without the State, the action of the State would for long, long years be necessary."[35] Arnold thus deflects criticisms of illiberalism and a deeply held suspicion towards any kind of centralised, direct government, by arguing that it would only form a step on the way to perfection—like a kind of scaffolding, which, on completion of the building, falls away having achieved its primary purpose. But, nor does Arnold in any way retreat from the kinds of proposals he would clearly welcome;

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[34] Samuel Laing, *Notes of a Traveller on the Social and Political State of France, Prussia, Switzerland and Italy and Other Parts of Europe during the Present Century*, London, (1842).
[35] M. Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, Oxford, (2006), 94

as he writes, "and from [Humboldt's] ministry, all the great reforms which gave control of Prussian education to the State—the transference of the management of public schools from their old boards of trustees to the State, the obligatory State-examination for schools, the obligatory State-examination for schoolmasters, and the foundation of the great State University of Berlin—take their origin."[36] Arnold thus shows an acute awareness of the charge of anti-liberalism and perhaps for this reason, through his quoting of Ernest Renan, he reemphasizes his liberal creed—whilst nonetheless still subtly reasserting his conviction in a government controlled educational program: "A liberal believes in liberty and liberty signifies the non-intervention of the State. But such an ideal is a long way off from us, and the very means to remove it to an indefinite distance would be precisely the State's withdrawing its action too soon."[37]

4. Culture and Fetishism / Culture and Religion

In *Culture and Anarchy*, Arnold uses the term fetish to describe when someone places excess value on a cultural object and as this is a tendency he believes to be widespread, he regularly cites it as a pervasive phenomenon. England, as far as Arnold was concerned, was a place stifled by convention and provincialism; this combined with the lack of any specific cultural authority made it prone to seek value in things or objects that lacked substance. Closely connected to this idea is also Arnold's critique of "machinery"—as machinery represents for Arnold convention; a machine, after all, cannot grow or change or transform itself. It is in short the opposite of Arnoldian culture which seeks to evolve at all times and in all directions. And so the relationship between object and machine stands for the predictable, valueless quality which many of the citizenry hold for objects and other conventions in their lives; it is emblematic of the pervasive fetishism of which he speaks. As he writes, "faith in machinery is, I said, our besetting danger; often in machinery most absurdly disproportioned to the end which this machinery, if it is to do any good at all, is to serve; but always in machinery, as if it had a value in and for itself. What is freedom, but machinery? What is population but machinery? What is coal but machinery? What are railroads but machinery? What is wealth but machinery? What are religious organisations but machinery?"[38] Arnold's central point here is that the English have started to worship these things—like wealth; like freedom; like railroads; like

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[36] M. Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, Oxford, (2006), 94
[37] Ibid., 95
[38] M. Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, Oxford, (2006), 37-38

religious organisations—as if they had some kind of limitless intrinsic value. And this, according to Arnold, is the essence of fetishism.

The term fetishism also holds an important etymological implication for Arnold's conception of it; and indeed, it is important to point out, as Peter Melville Logan puts it, that "Arnold uses fetish in a figurative sense."[39] Indeed, it was first used by De Brosses who used the term to explain the use of objects in Egypt—objects which gradually came to be seen by the ancient Egyptians as Gods in and of themselves and De Brosses thus postulated that this was representative of primitive societies.[40] Though various others began using the term to explore different areas of scholarship, it was Auguste Compte who then used the idea in his book *Cours de Philosophie Positive* to help support an elaborate theory of human development; Compte's idea was that all human societies evolved in three stages, with the earliest stage one where humans attributed motive and characters to inanimate objects and impersonal phenomena. Compte thought this stage was emblematic of fetishism. In his second stage, when such hidden forces become more abstract, a need for priestly casts arises, in order to properly "interpret" the world.[41] As Logan argues, Arnold has a similar idea in the historical models he uses in *Culture and Anarchy*; where, in the first stage, men are disunited, lack any kind of cultural authority and are slightly primitive in their education—and above all, are hence prone to fetishism. In the second stage, when things get more complex, he uses the ideas of "aliens"—similar to Compte's priestly casts—as special figures who can interpret culture and lead it forward.[42]

For Arnold, free trade and freedom are concepts he sees as key Victorian fetishes. In the case of the former, he is not so much against it, as he is against the idea that this is an intrinsically great transforming power for society. Rather, for Arnold, it is but another machine—that is, limited and incapable of spiritual growth. As he writes, "[in] the policy of our liberal friends free trade means more than this, and is specially valued as a stimulant to the production of wealth, as they call it, and to the increase of the trade,

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[39] Peter Melville Logan, "Fetishism and Freedom in Matthew Arnold's Cultural Theory," *Victorian Literature and Culture*, (2003), Vol. 31, No. 2, 559

[40] Ibid., 559

[41] Ibid., 559-560

[42] Ibid., 560-61

business and population of the country."[43] For the liberals, in Arnold's view, see free trade "as an instrument of national happiness and salvation."[44] And he concludes, that the liberals "mechanically worshipping their fetish of the production of wealth and of the increase of manufactures and population," fail to see the world clearly as they confuse means with ends.[45] He is quick too to point out similar issues concerning our infatuation with freedom as an end. As he puts it, "freedom, I said, was one of those things we worshipped in itself without enough regarding the ends for which freedom is to be desired. In our common notions and talk about freedom, we eminently show our idolatry of machinery."[46]

But as Peter Melville Logan astutely observes, Arnold, despite his criticisms of freedom, places freedom at the very centre of his own theory of culture. As he writes, "intellectual free play is thus the one necessary exception to Arnold's critique of freedom as machinery. And because of this exception, Arnold's theory rests on an apparent paradox: the fetishization of freedom in one arena is to be remedied by freedom in another."[47] Indeed, in this way, Arnold's theory hides a rather knotty inconsistency: that, as Logan also points out, Arnold essentially just transposes the realm of Adam Smith's free market place of the everyday world to the free market place of the mind. And moreover, the very fact that Arnold does not make clear the precise content of this free play of thought—but instead worships it as a value in itself—leads him to fetishize the very tendency which he criticizes elsewhere.

And yet this inconsistency comes about partly because Arnold aims to describe a process of expansion within the self—what he calls culture—and he is fully aware that this can only happen when that self is properly free within the intellectual sphere. For Arnold, culture is something which therefore subsumes all other practices and customs—even religion. As he puts it, "perfection is a harmonious expansion of all the powers which make the beauty and worth of human nature, and is not consistent with the over-development with any one power at the expense of the rest. Here culture goes beyond religion as is generally

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[43] Peter Melville Logan, "Fetishism and Freedom in Matthew Arnold's Cultural Theory," *Victorian Literature and Culture*, (2003), Vol. 31, No. 2, 561
[44] Ibid., 561
[45] Ibid., 562
[46] Ibid., 562
[47] Ibid., 562-563

conceived by us."[48] It is indeed important to point out that Arnold, though undoubtedly influenced by religious ideas—and in particular by those of John Henry Newman—was nonetheless primarily committed to culture as a force—albeit a moral one—for shaping and directing the world. As William Robbins notes in a study of Arnold's religious thought, "Arnold's religious writings were a deepening and modification of his crusade for culture, not a retreat from Greece to Israel."[49] In essence, religion really takes a back seat to a larger force which Arnold spent a lifetime attempting to articulate and such a position was not always well regarded, especially by those in the religious community who thought there was something hypocritical and contradictory about the moral dimension to Arnold's declamations. As John Henry Newman writes, "he respects piety and devotion; he even supports institutions as venerable, beautiful, or useful, to which he does not assent… not that he may not hold a religion too, in his own way, even when he is not a Christian. In that case his religion is one of imagination and sentiment; it is the embodiment of those ideas of the sublime, majestic and beautiful, without which there can be no large philosophy. Sometimes he acknowledges the being of God, sometimes he invests an unknown principle or quality with the attributes of perfection."[50]

One could charge that Arnold turns culture itself into some kind of quasi religion—or even fetish—depending on how one defines the terms.[51] Although it is undoubtedly true that he places culture at the very centre of his *Weltanschauung*, it is also the case that it not so much a set of ideas or objects which he values, but rather a process which drives towards an idealist destination and which can never be reached; for at the heart of Arnold's concept of culture lays the idea of change and evolution—of that shedding of skin which Nietzsche referred to—and this is the antithesis of the "mechanical" practices of religious organisations, or free trade, or even freedom itself.

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[48] Arnold, *The Complete Works*, Ann Arbor (1960-68), Vol. 5, 94
[49] William Robbins, *The Ethical Idealism of Matthew Arnold*, London (1959), 41
[50] John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University*, Notre Dame, (1982), 160
[51] See for example, 'Religion of Culture' in Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 54

Conclusion: A democracy of aristocrats / an aristocracy of democrats

"Culture without character," wrote Arnold "is no doubt something frivolous, vain and weak. But character without culture is something raw, blind and dangerous."[52] For Arnold, the principal goal of culture was the perfection of the human being—and therefore, of human society; and though he is often charged with elitism and intellectual snobbery, it is important to bear in mind that the whole project of Arnoldian Culture was meant as a project ultimately for everyone. In this way, Arnold radically differs from a thinker like Nietzsche, who saw high culture as something only open to the few. As Arnold writes, "A good thing meant for the many cannot well be so exquisite as the good things of the few; but it can easily, if it comes from a donor of great resources and wide power, be incomparably better than what the many could, unaided, provide for themselves."[53]

And yet, it is possible to see from this just how easily misunderstood Arnold can be; for though he opens by criticising the common taste ("a good thing meant for the many"), he advocates the sharing of those very elite treasures held by the few; and it is these two combined qualities that mark out Arnoldian culture: democratic in terms of opportunity—but aristocratic in terms of taste. And perhaps it is the very juxtapositioning of these two qualities which gives Arnoldian culture its unusual flavour. As he writes, "one's business in life was, first, to perfect oneself by all the means in one's power, and, secondly, to try and create in the world around one an aristocracy, the most numerous that one possibly could, of talents and characters."[54] Throughout, Arnold's goal is towards the achievement of an ideal state, where a synthesis between his many often seemingly incongruous elements can take place; and where, in short, the destination of his "nostalgic teleology" is headed. As David Delaura writes, "the central intention of *Culture and Anarchy* is surely the definition of an ideal which will cancel the historical oscillation of Hebraism and Hellenism ... somehow combining them in a higher synthesis."[55] And it is this very end goal of a higher synthesis which, for Arnold, is his answer to the question of culture and its ultimate role in the world.

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[52] Arnold, "The Popular Education of France ('Democracy')," *The Complete Works*, Vol. 2, 24-25

[53] Arnold, *The Complete Works*, Vol. 1

[54] Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 94

[55] D. Delaura, "Matthew Arnold and John Henry Newman: The Oxford Sentiment and The Religion of the Future," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language,* Vol. 6, 598-599