What is Culture?
Culture is then properly described not as having its origin in curiosity, but as having its origin in the love of perfection: it is a study of perfection. It moves by the force not merely or primarily of the scientific passion for pure knowledge but also of the moral and social passion for doing good.

If culture is a study of perfection, and of harmonious perfection, general perfection, and perfection which consists in becoming something rather than in having something, in an inward condition of the mind and spirit, not in an outward set of circumstances, it is clear that culture ... has a very important function to fulfil for mankind.

Culture as “best that has been thought and known”
Raymond Williams, the definition of culture in his *Keywords* (1976)

- A general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development: *Bildung* in German, a romantic idea of growing one’s “self”
- A particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, a group of humanity in general: an anthropological perspective.
- The works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity: the work of art
Williams’s elaboration of the meaning of culture

- a ‘social’ definition of culture, in which culture is a description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour. The analysis of culture, from such a definition, is the clarification of the meanings and values implicit and explicit in a particular way of life, a particular culture.
Williams’s elaboration of the meaning of culture 2

Such analysis will include ... Historical criticism ... in which intellectual and imaginative works are analysed in relation to particular traditions and societies, but will also include analysis of elements in the way of life that to followers of the other definitions are not ‘culture ’ at all: the organization of production, the structure of the family, the structure of institutions which express or govern social relationships, the characteristic forms through which members of the society communicate.

(Williams, The Long Revolution, 1961 , p. 57)
Edward Said’s “Culture and Imperialism”

- The main battle in imperialism is over land, of course; but when it came to who owned the land, who had the right to settle and work on it, who kept it going, who won it back, and who now plans its future - these issues were reflected, contested, and even for a time decided in narrative. As one critic has suggested, nations themselves are narrations. The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them. Most important, the grand narratives of emancipation and enlightenment mobilized people in the colonial world to rise up and throw off imperial subjection;
in the process, many Europeans and Americans were also stirred by these stories and their protagonists, and they too fought for new narratives of equality and human community...Arnold believed that culture palliates, it does not altogether neutralize, the ravages of a modern, aggressive, mercantile, and brutalizing urban existence. You read Dante or Shakespeare in order to keep up with the best that was thought and known, and also to see yourself, your people, society, and tradition in their best lights. In time, culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or state; this differentiates ‘us’ from ‘them’, almost with some degree of xenophobia.

(1993, 157-158)