

Culture, Commerce and Well-being : Metaphysical Loss of the Human

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Every human being is shaped by twofold transmissions, genetic and social. By virtue of the former, man is a natural being; and by virtue of the latter, he is a cultural being. As a cultural being, man enables culture to emerge, to be kept alive and grow and lead to the creative capacity of a group of people characterized by the notions of unity, truth, goodness and beauty whose meaning and value suggest that culture at its base is a renewal or reliving of origins in an attitude of profound appreciation. Thus it is suggested that the world of nature as the object of human activities based on cognition becomes a world of culture in its metaphysical sense. If this is the case then, in order to appreciate the nature and significance of culture, commerce and the meaning of well-being as the topic of the present paper indicates, ours is an attempt to take recourse to a number of steps. First, it intends to throw some light on the notion of culture itself. Then, it examines in this light the nature of consumption and well-being as conceived in the present day as the cumulative work of modernity by persons as members of cultural communities. Next, we examine the loss of the human subject in this process with a view to understanding his role in a complicated society as of today.

Within the new global context, the model of specific cultures receives specific meanings. Accordingly, the role of culture in constituting and reproducing society has been highlighted; culture is regarded as a framework of self-understanding of individuals and collectivities. The shaping of the present rationality - instrumental rationality- found its wide application in all spheres of human activity and rationality has been universally identified with perfection, splendor, profit and material abundance. Accordingly, instrumental rationality conceives well-being as centered on the physical aspects, which provide pleasure and comfort. Consequently, our consumption norm is based on widely held normative outlook about the acquisition and possession of commodities. Science and technology, which has unified the world by invading every spiritual or material cubic inch, has also necessitated that the world is run on the principle of instrumental rationality. In order to retrieve the human subject from such a peril, there should be a shift of attitude not only in economic or commercial terms but also cultural and moral. This will facilitate and build upon the richness of humanizing cultures, which science, commerce and technology had omitted and often suppressed. Such an urge will search out new ways of living our freedom with other persons and groups in societies of different cultures.

In our consideration of the general theme of this issue, reflections upon culture, commerce and metaphysical loss of the human subject are especially important, at least, for two reasons. The first is the radical craze for modernity, which is taking place in the third world in general and India in particular with the result that the human subject is increasingly getting dehumanized. Secondly, the term commerce with culture carries a notably pejorative connotation as one tempts to believe that culture too is a commodity, which can be used for commercial purposes in the 21st century. But thinking reflectively, it is certain to assume that people and their society can be studied in terms of their culture and commerce and thereby one is able to review the scope, catholicity and vision that such a topic envisages. Nevertheless, one might ask whether this approach in terms of meaning is not itself subject to the accented intellectualism and commercialism characteristic of modern times? In our modern times, we have somehow lost the deeper metaphysical dimension of culture as basically a unity of man's expressions of varied existence and his manifold diversity. Thus it is suggested in this paper that the world of nature as the object of human activities based on cognition becomes a world of culture in its metaphysical sense. Accordingly, this paper is intended to reassess the human subject with regard to his physical and intellectual powers which are subject to objective observation and meaning and the will that searches for the good and yet more deeply the human dimension at which we integrate all of these in terms of his well-being. If this is the case then, in order to appreciate the nature and significance of culture, commerce and the meaning of well-being, ours is an attempt to take recourse to a number of steps. First, it intends to throw some light on the notion of culture itself. Then, it will examine in this light the nature of consumption and well-being as conceived in the present day as the cumulative work of modernity by persons as members of cultural communities. Next, we will examine the loss of the human subject in this process with a view to understanding his role in a complicated society as of today.

Culture : Defining the Thematic Scope

It is generally accepted that man is a cultural being. But when it comes to the question of delineating the notion of culture in greater clarity, we are at a loss. Every human being is shaped by twofold transmissions : genetic and social. By virtue of the former, man is a natural being; and by virtue of the latter, he is a cultural being. As a cultural being, man enables culture to emerge, to be kept alive and grow and lead to the creative capacity of a group of people characterized by the notions of unity, truth, goodness and beauty whose meaning and value suggest that culture at its base is a renewal or re-living of origins in an attitude of profound appreciation.

There exists a great divergence of views in the definition of culture. One of the earliest definitions of culture, which is often quoted and considered valid even today, is given by E.B. Taylor.¹ According to him, culture is the sum total of the beliefs, ideas, customs, laws, morals, arts and other capabilities and skills acquired by man as a member of society. B. Malinowski defines culture as the total way of life and the instruments-mental, social and material- of which this way is constituted;² whereas for Bidney, culture is the product of the agro facts, artifacts, socifacts and mentifacts.³ Culture in this latter sense, is a thing that exists. Accordingly, culture has a threefold function :

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1. It serves first to adapt man to his natural environment. Culture, in this way, comprises the means and methods by which man reacts to his environment, his means of acquiring food, the implements that he uses for it such as tools, weapons, cooking utensils, husbandry, and the means of transportation etc.
2. Culture further connotes man's reactions to his social groups, his social institutions as the family, the kinship group, sibs and clans, political institutions and laws, the position of man, woman and child in these institutions, the customs of birth, mating, death and funeral, property rights and inheritance and, in general, all laws and customs regulating private and social life. It also comprises man's creative and artistic activities and their products, his ornaments, carvings and sculptures, his paintings and drawings, his music and dancing, his story telling, myths and legends, poems and riddles.
3. Culture finally comprises man's beliefs about a transcendent world, his beliefs in the existence of superhuman powers and beings, the lower and higher deities, ghosts and spirits, demons and goblins, the existence of a soul, life after death and so on.

It is universally admitted that only man has an ethical evaluation and religion and it is the human subject who is capable of enjoying art. It is only man who is capable of ceremonies and rites resulting from his beliefs and magical practices. In short, man alone has culture. The development of culture, at least to some extent, is dependent on man's free will and creativity, which includes his desires, caprices, vices, knowledge and ignorance. This implies that man is as much the creator of culture as its product and carrier. When he created a cultural form, man reacted in a certain manner, articulating both his need for free will and creativity. Man is the child of a particular age, society, and convention, which we call tradition. This possibility refutes cultural determinism and consequently, the development of culture cannot be worked out and foreseen in the manner of the natural sciences by generally valid laws and principles, which determine the course of cultural development. Laws and principles of cultural development are valid only in a general and approximate degree.

From Cultural Thematic to Civilization

On the other hand, 'culture' can be traced to the term *civis*.⁴ This reflects the need for a person to belong to a social group or community so that the human spirit may be able to produce proper results. By bringing to the person the resources of the tradition, the *tradita* or past wisdom produced by the human spirit, the community facilitates comprehension. By enriching the mind with examples of values, which have been identified in the past, it teaches and inspires one to produce something analogous. For G.F. Klemm, such an objective sense of culture is composite in character.⁵ E.B. Taylor thus defined culture classically for the social sciences as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits required by man as a member of society"⁶ In contrast, Clifford Geertz came to focus on the meaning of all this for a people and on how a people's intentional action went about shaping its world. Thus he contrasts the analysis of culture to an experimental science in search of laws, seeing it rather as an interpretative science in search of meaning.⁷ What is sought is the import of artifacts and actions; whether "it is ridicule or

challenge, irony or anger, snobbery or pride, that, in their occurrence and through their agency, is getting said.”⁸ In this light, Geertz defines culture rather as ‘an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of intended conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life’.⁹

Civilization and Communities

Each particular complex whole or culture is specific to a particular people; a person who shares in this is a civis or citizen and belongs to a civilization. Arnold Toynbee recognized that civilizations arise when creative governing minorities consistently make effective adjustments and adaptive decisions for the community, thus confirming their ‘legitimacy’ and evoking popular assent to their leadership. Civilizations and communities at every level begin to fail when their rulers or ruling class increasingly make inappropriate and maladaptive uses of social resources including human talent, productive capacities, wealth and influence or maladaptive program human interactions through ill-considered laws.

Twentieth century has been a laboratory proving Toynbee’s insight at both the national and international levels. World War I marked the breakdown of the Enlightenment’s secular liberal world order; the moral anarchy of Germany’s Weimar Republic failed and called forth a monster, Nazism. In the U.S.S.R. following World War II and decades of moral, economic and political malaise, seventy years of the omni competent State and socialist planning had proved maladaptive and utterly dysfunctional by 1989. In America, the fun and money-frenzied 1920s, gangsterism and a maladaptive economy produced, by reaction, an ever-increasing concentration of power in a bureaucratic welfare state. This phenomenon was characteristic of both representative democracies and the revolutionary populist regimes of right and left in the 1930s and 40s.

Within the new global context, which we experience and from our specific vantage points, the model of specific cultures receives specific meanings. Accordingly, the role of culture in constituting and reproducing society has been highlighted; culture is regarded as a framework of self-understanding of individuals and collectivities. The notion that culture is a constitutive factor in identity formation and in the production of meaning has focalized culture itself. Critical debates regard it as a domain where meaning systems that construct the individual are constantly being formulated. Touraine (1981), for instance, conceptualizes struggles in the field of culture as struggles over historicity, that is, the way society’s production of meaning is subverted, renegotiated and redefined.¹⁰

Cultural Contestation and the Post-modern Thought

The cultural scenario of the world, from the traditional point of view, has been regarded as a hierarchical structure with different cultures placed one over the other or one around the other according to the order of importance. Post-modern thought has destroyed this myth of the higher and the lower, or the center and the periphery. Lyotard’s definition of post-modernism as “incredulity towards meta-narratives”,¹¹ is indicative of this shift of thought. Jacques Derrida¹² has given greater clarity to it by his

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notion of the deconstruction of the binary opposites. According to him, Western thinking has been based on a hierarchical system of binary opposites of the center and the periphery. The center has been taken as that, which guarantees meaning and truth, and what is at the periphery has meaning only in reference to the center.¹³ Western thought and life has been exclusively built on the center and the periphery is totally excluded.¹⁴

This post-modern philosophical conception is very much exhibited and applied to culture too; thus today no culture can claim to be universal and perennial,¹⁵ posing itself as the model and superior to all the rest.¹⁶ In Lyotard's terminology, there are no cultural 'grand narratives'. It is a sad but true fact that until recently most of the ancient cultures in the world, including Indian culture has been marginalized as primitive, barbaric and antiquated; and they have been given only a 'footnote-importance'. Many others have been branded as 'cultureless'. Everyone accepted a center, an apex, a model and a grand narrative in culture, and this center or the grand narrative was something based on Western culture, the model and reference point for all others.

These reflections indicate that cultural values and preferences are a function of the priorities governing the survival behavior of each culture. However, when cultural values play a role in their reaction, there exists a certain freedom of choice on part of the human subject and arises the condition for overcoming a deterministic animal behavior which is called the intermediation of a culture. Those intermediations and their prescriptions are what we call the values of the specific cultural and historical entity to which we belong.

Cultural Contestations and Quantitative Growth

Ours is an era which tries to give more importance to quantitative growth, an era governed by the principles and ideas of the eco-social-market-economy (ESME). This model originates in an ever-growing awareness on part of people of the deficiencies detected in the traditional model, which was dominated by considerations related to the operation of the law of supply and demand. ESME is a historical reality of our times representing a model of economic growth with in-built qualitative parameters, which has been able to combine the efficiency of the market economy. Economic activity as an evolved organism maintains a constant interaction of consuming within the environment. Thus, an analysis in "economic" terms (quantity), abstracting from the existing social organization (quality) may be detrimental to many existing cultures. In dealing with the survival pressure, it develops a science and technology, which can threaten mankind's very survival as a species. Since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century, as a consequence of improved techniques of navigation coupled with European imperialistic policies and rivalries, the human subject started to partake the life-style of a commercial society. Given the economic and commercial forces unleashed by the Industrial Revolution prowling over continents and oceans, it is only natural to expect that after two hundred years, no human community would have any chance of exempting itself from humanity's "manifest industrial destiny" i.e. modern mass-consumption. In other words, technology not only has commercialized the world by invading every spiritual or material cubic inch; it also has acquired the responsibility to run it. In principle, technology and the groups that direct it are accountable for

producing dangerous alterations in the equilibriums sustaining biological diversity and cultural pluralism. A conspicuous example of such alterations is an international trade and pricing system causing the destruction of extensive areas of the tropical rain forests. Present day social existence, wherever it is geographically located, living in misery or in abundance, sooner or later becomes impregnated with the spirit and material expressions of industrial civilization, as seen in its three grand-children, the true black-sheep of the human family: the ecological crisis, overpopulation and technological unemployment.¹⁷ It is to this process that Paul Feurabend¹⁸ in his *Against Method* refers when he says: "I wanted to support people, not to advance knowledge. People all over the world have developed ways of surviving partly dangerous, partly agreeable surroundings. The stories they told and the activities they engaged in enriched their lives, protected them and gave them meaning. The process of knowledge and civilization- just another name for pushing Western ways and values into all corners of the globe - destroyed these wonderful products of human ingenuity and compassion without a single glance in their direction. Progress of knowledge in many places meant the killing of minds." He concludes thus: "I am against ideologies that use the name of science for cultural murder. It seems that to clarify the meaning of growth in quality constitutes, indeed, a necessary step in protecting man against such murderous activity".

Quantitative Growth and Changing Life-Styles

The new economic models and the overgrowing commerce of consumerism have changed our perception of individual values and the behavior patterns in the society. The modern man acquired new attitudes towards providing for a family through mental or physical work patterns, society, law and government. Whatever remnants of traditional attitudes may remain, it is clear that modernity and its accompanying attitudes have become the major context within which most of us live. In his analysis of modern technological society Ellul states the following: "There is no doubt that all the traditional cultures and sociological structures will be destroyed by technique before we can discover or invent social, economic and psychological forms of adaptation which might possibly have preserved the equilibrium of these peoples and societies".¹⁹ Consequently, the late modernity has its flip side and has produced many kinds of 'stray dogs'. Most visible are the downcast and the forsaken that fill the streets and Railway stations of New Delhi, Mumbai, Calcutta and their brethren in other cities across India and other nations. But there are other kinds of "stray dogs", less visible but no less deserving our pity. They are morally and spiritually homeless, confined as they are to their joyless workplaces and homes. They lead a life that makes them forget what society is so that among the younger generation, many no longer have any idea about society and culture. In our democracy, these people vote and have the power to decide the future shape of society. But their conceptions of a 'cultural' society and value are confined only in not throwing litter into the streets or tell a neighbor to buy a food at a better price from a shop in their vicinity or to watch a TV serial whose actors are blessed with better cheeks. Few seem to notice that this barely skims the surface of one's social being, that it completely ignores the cultural bonds that really compose a society. Thus, Berger's definition of modernization asserts the phenomenon in the following way: "we will discuss modernization as the

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institutional concomitant of technologically induced economic growth...Modernization, then, consists of the growth and diffusion of a set of institutions rooted in the transformation of the economy by means of technology...As modernization proceeds and is diffused beyond its original territory, we see the institutions of technological production and bureaucracy, together and separately, as primary agents of social change.”²⁰

Our social consciousness operates in what Martin Buber²¹ has called the ‘the world of it’. The world of it is the world of objects and things. In such a world, there is a single center of consciousness. The single subject, the ‘I’ experiences, arranges and appropriates. It does not enter into a dialogical relationship with other beings. It experiences the other human being from the angle of workability and practicality perspectives. The ‘I’ self ‘knows’ itself as pure being while it ‘knows’ the other as a deprived being. The ‘I’ self does not enter into communion with the other for the other is not known as ‘Thou’. The other is always an ‘it’. In other words, the other is an object to be used, manipulated or eliminated, as I do not consider him as a center of consciousness.

In the I-It mode of relationship, the individual tries to control situations by remaining detached and calculating: the attitude of detachment is preserved under all circumstances. The individual refuses to let go to the extent that the experience simply becomes unattainable. It is obvious that the I-it attitude of detached control can be directed to minerals, tables, computers and credit cards. It can equally be directed to cows, snakes and dogs. Less obviously, it is also directed to people of lower castes, rickshaw pullers, scavengers and elevator operators. They are generally treated impersonally like rickshaws and buttons in the elevators. Hence, such a culture could produce a police head constable who kickbeats a 14 year old boy by hanging him upside down against a tree in the name of disciplining a society. Such an attitude and cruelty when compounded with a strong sense of staggering moral perversity in our society can degenerate our value systems too. In an article entitled ‘Nation of Moral Monsters’ in *The Hindustan Times*, Praful Bidwai says that students of a very reputed college in Delhi- St. Stephen’s College- preferred to have their role model as Hitler rather than a Gandhi or Mother Teresa or a Jawaharlal Nehru. He writes” We are producing nothing short of moral monsters in many of our elite institutions. Our school-toppers have mastered the techniques of writing objective tests. But they remain untouched by elementary considerations of good and evil, the public weal or the universal values of citizenship. They are incapable of exercising unambiguous or discriminating moral judgment or of acting in the public interest.”²² Thus the post-modern culture and its democratic institutions and social life has been able to convert humans into humanoids and our leaders have reached an absurd conclusion that peace and values can be guaranteed only among unemotional individuals, failing to notice that this would be a peace of the living dead. Therefore, if we have to make sense of the discussion about on culture, commerce and well-being, we must make sure that it ultimately is about human beings free to express every major dimension of themselves, mental, physical, emotional, spiritual, cultural and social.

Changing Life-Styles : The Self-Conscious Narcissists

For many of those who survive the humanoidal imperative, such is the intensity of life within them that

they succumb instead to narcissism. Narcissism is not merely 'self-absorption', narcissism in this century has outgrown more than its dictionary meaning. In Christopher Lasch's well-known book, *The Culture of Narcissism*, the term refers to a related group of personality disorders brought on by the outward conditions of modern 'consciousness'. These disorders combine to distance individuals from surroundings (both persons and things) as well as from themselves. According to Lasch, the contemporary narcissists have many traits that make for success in bureaucratic institutions which put a premium on the manipulation of interpersonal relations, discourage the formation of deep personal attachments and at the same time provide the narcissist with the approval he needs in order to validate his self-esteem.²³ In a recent post script, he describes these traits as a certain protective shallowness, a fear of binding commitments, a willingness to pull up roots whenever the 'need arose, a desire to keep one's options open, a dislike of depending on anyone, an incapacity for loyalty or gratitude.'²⁴ Such a manipulative and technical position is one of mastery over things and people. This attitude is problematic in as much as it means being in control and reducing everything to a matter of technique. The main question is not "what is it", but "how can I get it"? Thus, for the modern person, Yoga, for example is not for self-disciplining the human mind but has become a technique for lowering one's blood pressure or for becoming more slim and beautiful and maintaining a sense of physical well-being. In fact, the main aim of Yoga or for that matter, the martial art of '*Kalaripayattu*' in Kerala was meant to train the mind and bring it into contact with the ultimate reality. As Herrigel says: "If one really wishes to be master of an art, technical knowledge of it is not enough. One has to transcend technique so that the art becomes an 'artless art' growing out of the unconscious".²⁵ In sum, most of our activities have become 'technical' in character and have been reduced to mastery, efficiency and neutrality, thereby losing the authentic selfhood. This character of technical thinking is the outcome of the loss of meditative thinking. It is pertinent here to recall the words of Heidegger: "The approaching tide of technological revolution in the atomic age could so captivate, bewitch, dazzle, and beguile man that calculative thinking may some day come to be accepted and practiced as the only way of thinking. What great danger then might move upon us? Then this might go hand in hand with the greatest ingenuity in calculative planning and inventing indifference toward meditative thinking, total thoughtlessness. And then? Then man would have denied and thrown away his own special nature-that he is a meditative being. Therefore, the issue is the saving of man's essential nature. Therefore the issue is keeping meditative thinking alive".²⁶

Metaphysical Rationality and Instrumental Rationality

There exist different kinds of rationality, which find their expression on the perception of values, which exert a decisive impact on our activities. There are two types of rationality, which stamp our civilization and culture, the analyses of which can be a good starting point to reveal a very decisive influence upon the occurring processes of globalization and conditionings of the idea of a new civic culture. The two classical types of rationality, which have existed till now in the Western civilization are metaphysical rationality and instrumental rationality. In the tradition of great European philosophical systems, the sources of metaphysical rationality can be traced back to Greek philosophers, mainly

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Parmenides, Plato and Aristotle. Later, in the middle ages, metaphysical rationality was echoed in the views of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, and, further, it found its classical expression in philosophical systems of the 17th and 18th centuries, including the system of Hegel. Before Hegel, metaphysical rationality found its strong grounding in the philosophical systems of Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz.

Metaphysical rationality possessed a number of distinctive features. The most important of them was the conviction of the necessary connection between reason and being and assumed that the world was organized wisely and purposively, because it owed its existence and ordering to the existence and efficient power of the divine Absolute. This absolute is variously called the *Being* identical with reason by Parmenides, the *Nous* by Anaxagoras, the *Divine builder - Demiurge* by Plato, the *First substance* by Aristotle, the *God* by Christian philosophers, the *Substance* by Spinoza, or the *Absolute idea* by Hegel. In every case, it was dependant upon the existence of an objective cause that warranted law and order in the temporal world. Despite certain imperfections, the world as a whole appeared as a reflection of the divine Absolute in this philosophy. The metaphysical rationality excluded any accidentality. Everything that exists has a meaning and is purposeful, which can be analyzed in exact logico-mathematical or natural laws originating from the objective reasonableness.

In the metaphysical rationality reasonableness is an attribute of both being and man. The human intellect, *ratio*, is a particle and man is equipped with reason with an end in view of comprehending and disclosing the reasonableness of the whole being. "The reason", wrote Hegel, "is the certitude of the consciousness that it is an all-embracing-reality."²⁷ Rationality belongs to the being itself, where objective rationality warrants law and order to all that exists; the thinking which takes place in human mind displays the truth of being and in the final account it is a road on which being itself is reached at the true knowledge about himself. From the standpoint of the metaphysical rationality the world is full of meaning; all that exists is endowed with meaning, be it the world of nature or human history. In this image of rationality, knowledge is an activity, which mirrors the objective meaning of things and therefore it acquires a positive moral value. The rational behavior, being compatible with an objective order, is always moral and it directs towards more and more new values. Perhaps one of the most important features of metaphysical rationality is that ideas of truth and goodness are related with themselves.²⁸

As is seen in the above, metaphysical rationality rests on the view that reason exists as the definite and potential power not only in human mind but also in the objective world, i. e., in nature and its manifestations, in social institutions, in inter-human relations and in the life of individuals. Such a notion of objective reason has never excluded subjective reason, but the latter has been acknowledged as a partial and special expression of the former. The former was functioning as universal reasonableness from which one deduced all criteria for all things and living creatures. The most important aim of subjective reasoning was to bring the concordance between objective orders or to use Hegel's words - "everything that is rational", and the human existence, inclusive of private affairs of the individuals.

The second type of rationality as the result of the simple denial of metaphysical rationality is what we may name "instrumental rationality" or as some critics called it: the "means-end-rationality". From

the historical viewpoint, this rationality is the result of the destruction of classical rationalism on the one hand and as the effect of positivistic phenomenism on the other; it got eventually combined with the scientific attitude with its cult of techniques together with the widespread technocrat ideologies. In turn, instrumental rationality became the boss in 20th century materialistic-technocrat-ideologies as it steered people's awareness and activity exclusively towards achieving practical, material and consumer aims. It lost the transcendent and objective references, e.g., to *God, Logos, objective reason, objective order* etc. and, instead, it became exclusively connected with a human subjective reasoning subordinated in the form of instrumental tools to realization of aims whose reasonableness nobody inquires. In modern times, at least beginning from the period of Enlightenment, reason developed a trend to destroy its own objective content. The progress of Enlightenment gradually knocked down the idea of objective reason. It successively deepened the course of subjective reason till this process led to a situation, where reason completely destroyed itself as a medium of metaphysical, ethical and religious insight and, as a result, annihilated itself as a power of every moral judgment.

Transformation of Instrumentalization of Reason

The transition from objective to subjective reason caused reason to become exclusively an instrument; its only value became the utilitarian one (instead of substantial), i.e., the value of operating tools which serve to calculate, count and compare costs and profits, or compute probability of desired or expected effects at given costs. The subjective reason has, in fact, to do with analyzing optional proceedings, and this solely with reference to supposed effects; its activeness is exhausted by the examination of adequateness of means to an established aim. In the present epoch where instrumental rationality dominates all spheres of life, one does not perceive the necessity of any reasonable substantiation of aims. In his Encyclical *Fides Et Ratio*, Pope John Paul II wrote: "It should also be borne in mind that the role of philosophy itself has changed in modern culture. From universal wisdom and learning, it has gradually been reduced to one of the many fields of human knowing; indeed in some ways it has been consigned to a wholly marginal role. Other forms of rationality have acquired an ever-higher profile, making philosophical learning appear all the more peripheral. These forms of rationality are directed not towards the contemplation of truth and the search for the ultimate goal and meaning of life; but instead, as "instrumental reason", they are directed—actually or potentially—towards the promotion of utilitarian ends, towards enjoyment or power."²⁹

The results and consequences of the transformation of the instrumentalization of reason have absorbed many critics of today. The attention has been turned towards human freedom, justice, equality, happiness, tolerance etc, which have lost their spiritual roots. Even if they are being acknowledged as aims for which one strives, there is already no rational instance that would be entitled to giving them value and reconciling them as the objective reality. The shaping of the present rationality within a span of 150 years was able to give birth to a number of negative phenomena in science, techniques, art, philosophy, and literature and practically in all spheres of social and cultural life. The criterion of instrumental rationality found its wide application in all spheres of human activity in science, techniques, economy, organization of collective life etc., and rationality has been universally

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identified with perfection, splendor, profit and material abundance. As a consequence, one feels obliged to rationalize one's own existence, thinking and acting. In the stereotype of instrumental rationality, the qualification "rational has also meant consistency with scientific methods, resting on the knowledge about causality and other laws of nature" and thereby in conformity with established aims such as bringing profitable results and to foresee future events optimizing human actions in all forms of life. Hence, instrumental rationality affirms on the model of most efficient instrument for the creation of conditions of a 'prosperous' life of people. An even stranger erosion has taken place in this instrumental conditioning of rationality: while the single-minded pursuit of wealth was first tied to a strong work ethic, this has now been cast aside in favor of creating the impression that one gets things done, the impression that one is a "winner". Lasch reports that he was "struck by the evidence, presented in several studies of business corporations, to the effect that professional advancement had come to depend less on craftsmanship or loyalty to the firm than "visibility", "momentum", personal charm, and impression management."³⁰ However, we must also acknowledge that if our modern consciousness is steered to proceed farther in the same direction, then the final consequence of the instrumentalization of reason leads to a situation where we will make ourselves similar to technical mechanisms like our products. All this could mean an erasing of the essence of humanity, and thus in the final account, it would be inhuman and irrational.

Consumption and Well-Being

Another related form of instrumental rationality in the modern life is man's understanding of consumption and well-being. If we try to dissect our modern society, we shall miss the meaning of what well-being is. Well-being for many of us is centered on the physical aspects, which provide pleasure and comfort. Our consumption norm is based on widely held normative outlook about the acquisition and possession of commodities. Materialism and anti-materialism are two such perspectives.³¹ Materialism assures that having more is being more. It identifies well-being with buying, accumulating and displaying consumer goods, especially those that bring comfort and convenience. Although the 'buying and use' of commodities may be essential to the economic growth, commodities usually fail to provide us reliable and ultimate meaning to existence. As political economist Robert E. Lane suggests, it is not what we buy or own that brings us happiness but rather our work, our relations with other spouses and colleagues and the well-being of our children. Anti-materialism, on the other hand, conceives a good life and well-being on the outskirts of all attachments to material goods. The physical aspects of well-being such as adequate food, clothing, shelter, healthcare etc. need to be moderately allowed is the dictum proclaimed by the anti-materialists.

Capability Approach : Amartya Sen and Nussbaum

Following Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum have developed a theory, which is called 'capability approach' wherein they suggest that well-being refers not to some one component of life, such as pleasure or satisfaction of the basic needs, but to a heterogeneous list of human conditions, activities, inner capacities and external opportunities. To have well-being, or to

be and to do well, is to function and to be capable of functioning in certain humanly good ways. According to them, although physical well-being is a necessary condition for the concept of well-being, it is not to be regarded as a sufficient condition. We must also include in our definition the mental aspects of well-being. Among these are the cognitive capacities and our activities of perceiving, imagining, reasoning, judging and deciding. The latter embraces our ability to choose a conception of good life. Mental well-being also includes opportunities and capacities for enjoying or finding pleasure whether in other aspects of well-being, such as physical health, or in such things as art and nature. Happiness although contributory to well-being, is not sufficient, for it may occur with and even camouflage significant deprivation.³² Accordingly, Amartya Sen and Nussbaum assert that human well-being has four components: bodily components, mental components, social components and fourthly, what Nussbaum calls, separateness, which rests on our being distinct from others, expressing our singular identity, which is uniquely our own.

Irrationality as Cogito

It is an acknowledged fact that one of the widespread negative reactions on the overgrowth of instrumental rationality in our understanding of consumption and well-being is the phenomenon of degenerating rationality into its opposite, i.e., into irrationality. Some analysts of the present society perceive that Aristotelian definition of man as a *rational animal* awakes more and more reservations in the consumerist culture of the present century. It seems that people are more interested in producing irrational ideologies and symbols in selling off their products. For example, contemporary researches confirm the growth of irrational behaviors of customers in their scope of the theory of human behaviors. The notion “homo economicus” that rested on the recognition of an inclination of man to rational economical behavior has become an anachronism in the present times. R. Selten (the laureate of the Nobelium award in economics in 1994) argues that in the processes of undertaking our decisions, reason is only one of many “advisers”, and not at all the most important.³³ For example, some rules of the present-day marketing, as well as the ways and means of influencing potential consumers by using the mediation of advertising are not in accordance with the accepted norm of rational mode but with an aim of luring the customers with irrational modes. The rationality of the contemporary market, therefore, consists in the view that rational modes are such activities that cause irrational behavior patterns in the mass-society.

Conclusion

Though culture is essentially a way of humanizing nature, especially of man and his interpersonal relations, the acceptance of an impersonal model of culture has inevitably changed humanism into utilitarianism and anti-humanism. The technological changes that we experience affect institutional stability, individual values and the behavior patterns of present day human beings. Our external nature has been obliterated; it no longer determines the conditions of survival. It amounts to saying that we require to develop a new ‘science’ characterized by humanistic principles which will provide a new direction not only for man in his actions but also in his interpersonal relations wherein man shall

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not be used merely as an instrument but must become the center of activities. In principle, technology and science are accountable for producing dangerous alterations in the equilibriums sustaining biological diversity and cultural pluralism. But, science and technology, which has unified the world by invading every spiritual or material cubic inch, has also necessitated a paradigm shift on account of the replacement of metaphysical rationality by instrumental rationality. Rather, science and technology must be looked upon as instruments for human development and as aids in man's interpersonal relations. It is, therefore, necessary to take into account the impact of science and technology to cope with the complexities of human nature. This demands a shift of attitude not only in economic or commercial terms but also cultural and moral. This will facilitate and build upon the richness of humanizing cultures, which science and technology had omitted and often suppressed. Such an urge will search out new ways of living our freedom with other persons and groups in societies of different cultures. Accordingly, it is possible to retrieve the loss of the human subject in this complicated society of ours.

Notes

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10. As quoted by Chandhoke, Neera. 1995. *State and Civil Society. Explorations in Political Theory*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 77.
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12. Derrida is considered as the central figure in post-modern thought. Some of his important works are; *Of Grammatology* (1975), *Writing and Difference* (1978), *Dissemination* (1981), *Margins of Philosophy* (1982) etc.
13. There are a number of binary opposites in which the first term stands for the privileged center and the second is excluded as the periphery: man-woman, Christian-pagan, reason-emotion, nature-culture, truth-falsity, sacred-profane etc. The second term inevitably gets a negative meaning: thus, woman is what is not man; pagan is the one who is not a Christian.
14. Philosophy is based on what is true; ethics on what is right, aesthetics on what is beautiful, religion is what is sacred etc. The periphery exists only as totally excluded.
15. For more on post-modernism, refer Johnson Puthenpurackal, ed.2002. *The Post-Modern : A Siege of the Citadel of Reason*. Delhi: Media House.
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