Essay 1, Chapter 4: "An Alternative View in 11 Propositions"

Chapter 4: "An Alternative View of Culture and Cultural Change in Eleven Propositions"

#Hunter ch. 4: An Alternative View of Culture and Cultural Change in Eleven Propositions.

Since this is #Hunter 's positive statement of his model, I'll sometimes put in my own reflections.
Prop. 1: "Culture is a System of Truth Claims and Moral Obligations." Culture is *like* worldview, but it runs much deeper.

What this means is that culture shapes our undstg of the world and self and moral norms per-cognitively. V. much like #JamieSmith's understanding of the "social imaginary" in "Desiring the Kingdom."

Language specially important, since lang. "provides the primary medium thru which people apprehend their conscious exp of the wld."

That last quote from p. 33.

Prop. 2: "Culture is a Product of History." In other words, culture don't change fast, kids.
: Money quote: "Culture takes form as the slow accretions of meaning in society over long periods of time." (33)

Here, he makes use of French soc. theorist Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "habitus"-dispositions shared in a community. Or better... "'history turned into nature,'" *second* nature, if you will." (34) That makes cultures resistant to change, or at least consc. chg.

"The inertia built into cultr by virtue of its relatshp to its long hist tends to make it lumbering and erratic at the same time." Also from p. 34.

Prop. 3: "Culture is Intrinsically Dialectical." I.e. culture is the meeting place *between* ideas and institutions.

Ideas don't shape culture alone, but only as they are in conversation and shaped by institutions. And institutions (e.g. educational) carry these ideas according to their own logic and rules. So not all ideas are created equal.

And obviously, indv.s and institutions are in dialogue too. But the center of gravity lies with the institutions.

Prop. 4: "Culture is a Resource and, as such, a Form of Power." Here he draws on Bourdieu's concept of "symbolic capital."

Forms of knwl (e.g. credentials) act like money (capital), and it is unequally distributed within a culture. Ph.D.s have more, etc.

Or elite universities have more than community colleges, certain publishers have more. It's about cache, prestige w/in a culture.

Prop. 5: "Cultural Production and Symbolic Capital are Stratified in a Fairly Rigid Structure of

'Center' and 'Periphery'"

This is an elaboration of prop. 4 using the visual model of spheres of power. Some groups have a status of being central to power, others, not. So far, his case sounds commonsensical to me. But it has disturbing implications for "grassroots cultural change."

Prop. 6: "Culture is Generated within Networks." Here, he takes down the "Great Men" view of history.

History doesn't change because of great indvs (Einstein, Luther, etc.), but bc of the netwks w/in which these indvs were embedded.

Prop. 7: "Culture is Neither Autonomous nor Fully Coherent." Maybe the hardest to swallow for those who blv in a democracy of cultr.

Culture spreads and changes only in tandem with the market and the state (e.g. through a state monopoly on pub. education).

Culture also made up of "fields" (Bourdieu again): publ., religion, ent., edu., etc. They overlap, but have diff. agendas.

Add to this differences of ethnicity and geography within a society, and you've got one messy mixture. Can't predict how it changes.

#Hunter's first 7 props had to do with the definition of culture. His last 4 have to do with how culture changes.

Main theme for this section: "Ideas Sometimes Have Consequences." To riff on Orwell, some ideas are created more equal than others.

Prop. 8: "Cultures Change from the Top Down, Rarely If Ever from the Bottom Up." He doesn't deny that popular mvts exist, but they aren't the ones that produce lasting cultural change. Those who do that are those at the center who re-shape cultural concepts.

And those concepts are translated into concrete forms as research programs, passed on by educators, then popularizers who apply them

Money quote (at least for me): "Cultural change is most enduring when it penetrates the struc. of our imagination, frameworks of knowledge and discussion, the perception of everyday reality." (42) For someone into pop culture, this resonates more than he knows.

Because popular culture traffics in the realm of the imagination. I think entertainment has a bigger role to play than he thinks.

Prop. 9: "Change is Typically Initiated by Elites Who Are Outside of the Centermost Positions of Prestige."

Here, he employs Ital. soc. theorist Vilfredo Pareto's metaphor of the "lions" and "foxes." Lions are at the ctr. of power and crave social stability. Foxes seek to subvert and introduce new ideas. Cultural change happens in that tension btw lions and foxes.

Or even as the foxes *become* the lions. Note however that foxes lurk in elite institutions, just not the tip-top elite institutions

Prop. 10: "World-Changing is Most Concentrated When the Networks of Elites and the Institutions They Lead Overlap."

Not much explanation needed here: when elite networks from diff. fields come together in common cause, change results. But not fast.

Prop. 11: "Cultures Change, but Rarely If Ever Without a Fight." Every cultural change is a struggle for cultural power. Cf.Foucault

The struggle is never a fair fight, but it is a fight. "Conflict is one of the permanent fixtures of cultural change. It is typically through different manifestations of conflict and contest that change in culture is forged." (44)

The challenges to status quo must be able to "articulate" changes w/the existing social setting. Plausibility is key here.

This section made me ponder: "What are Christians truly called to with respect to culture?" Are we called to continuing culture war?

I don't think so. While we want to see cultures change, I don't know how much we want to be in a stance of "permanent conflict" with others in our societies. Seems to cut against the obligation to love and serve those we differ with. I also don't like #JamieSmith's suggestion that we simply abandon the culture (lest it taint our social imaginations) and burrow ourselves in church-led monasteries.

That seems like abandoning those who need us most. Is there some way of serving and loving from a position of cultural weakness that looks for cultural change without the acrimony? I liked #AndyCrouch's cultural servant model. I'll have to wait and see what I think of #Hunter's "faithful witness" posture. I can understand Xns who are frustrated w/their culture (like Chuck Crismier), but the culture-war model seems so counter-productive (church's image is one of grumpy, censorious, judgmental types), and so counter-gospel as well.

The role of subversive servants, working from the peripheries (and sometimes the centers) of cultural power to overturn structures of unbelief and injustice - that seems a better model to me. And I think an authentic and incisive Christian popular culture has an important role to play, as "oases for the imagination" of both the Christian and the non-Christian. Anyway, that's what my 2d book is about (d.v.).

Back to #Hunter: He summarizes his diff. model of cultural change vs. idealism (it's not about true or good ideas, but about the ways ideas are embedded in powerful institutions and networks; not just ideas, but soc. conditions and circumstances.

Against individualism, not the aut. and rational individual, but "networks and the new institutions that they create."

Contra pietism (cultural change will come w/indv. spiritual renewal): "It is not so much individual hearts and minds that move cultures but cultures that ultimately shape the hearts and minds and, thus, direct the lives of individuals." (45).

That last quote will be hard for Evangelicals to hear.

Ch. 4 ends w/some lessons. Lesson 1: culture cannot change "in a generation" (pace Dobson). Cultural change happens slow and subterranean. "The most profound changes in culture can be seen first as they penetrate into the linguistic and mythic fabric of a social order." (45) The quote goes on about how it changes the "rewards and punishments that organize soc. life" and structures of consciousness and character." It's great stuff. Just read all of p. 45.

If his characterization is correct, Evangelicalism's got a rude awakening.

#Hunter gives a thought experiment about a "3rd Great Awakening." Lots of hearts changed, lots of good people voted into office, lots of Christian judges and good rulings, but nothing of lasting cultural change if the elite institutions remain untouched.

That's why prohibition didn't stick, nor the changes in Am. after the 1980s vis-a-vis pornography,

abortion, homosexuality, etc.

"Invitations by Christian leaders to fast and pray are most worthy, but their main effect will be to renew the church rather than keep American from 'losing its soul." So evangelism, pol. change, social reform, won't do what Evangelicals think it will.

Last note: cultural change never goes in the way you expect it. There is (as Crouch stated) always unintended consequences.

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