# MR-10 Culture



### The Country of Valmere

When Daniel first arrived in Valmere, the first thing he noticed was how quickly everyone walked. People moved with purpose, their steps brisk and efficient. Conversations happened while walking, not standing still, and even meals were brief. No one lingered. Daniel adapted quickly. He walked faster too. It felt natural, necessary. When he slowed down, he felt strangely uncomfortable, as though he were doing something wrong. No one told him to walk fast. But everyone did.

Years passed. He built a life there. He stopped noticing the pace. It was simply normal.

One day, a visitor arrived. They walked differently — slowly. They paused often, looking around. Daniel found himself growing impatient. "Are you lost?" he asked. The visitor smiled. "No," they said. "I'm just walking." Daniel laughed politely, but the answer stayed with him.

Later that afternoon, he watched the crowds moving through the streets — fast, purposeful, unquestioning. For the first time, he saw it clearly, not as movement, but as pattern.

That evening, he tried something unfamiliar. He walked slowly. At first, it felt wrong, exposed, almost embarrassing. People passed him. No one said anything, but he felt their absence of recognition. He realised, in that moment, that no one had ever taught him to walk fast. He had learned it simply by living there. And because everyone shared it, no one could see it. It was not a rule. It was the water they all swam in.

The next morning, Valmere had not changed. People still walked quickly. So did Daniel. But now he understood something he had not understood before. This was not simply the way the world was. It was the way Valmere was. And knowing that made it possible to imagine another.

**Formal Description**

Culture is a higher-order system of stabilised meanings, norms, values, practices, and expectations that emerges from, and is sustained by, interacting tropes within a society. It provides a shared interpretive environment that shapes belief formation, behaviour, identity, and social coordination over time. Culture both constrains and enables individual agency by defining what is considered normal, acceptable, desirable, or deviant, while remaining subject to gradual evolution and episodic transformation through reflexive action and crisis.

**Plain English Explanation**

Culture is the *background world* that makes everyday life feel normal.

It includes the assumptions people rarely state out loud: what counts as success, how authority should work, what is polite, what is shameful, what questions are worth asking, and which ones feel dangerous. Because culture is everywhere, it is easy to mistake it for reality itself.

Most of the time, culture works quietly and efficiently. But when cultural assumptions no longer fit lived experience or ethical understanding, people begin to feel discomfort, confusion, or tension. Motivational Reflexivity is one of the ways individuals can notice this mismatch rather than simply adapting to it.
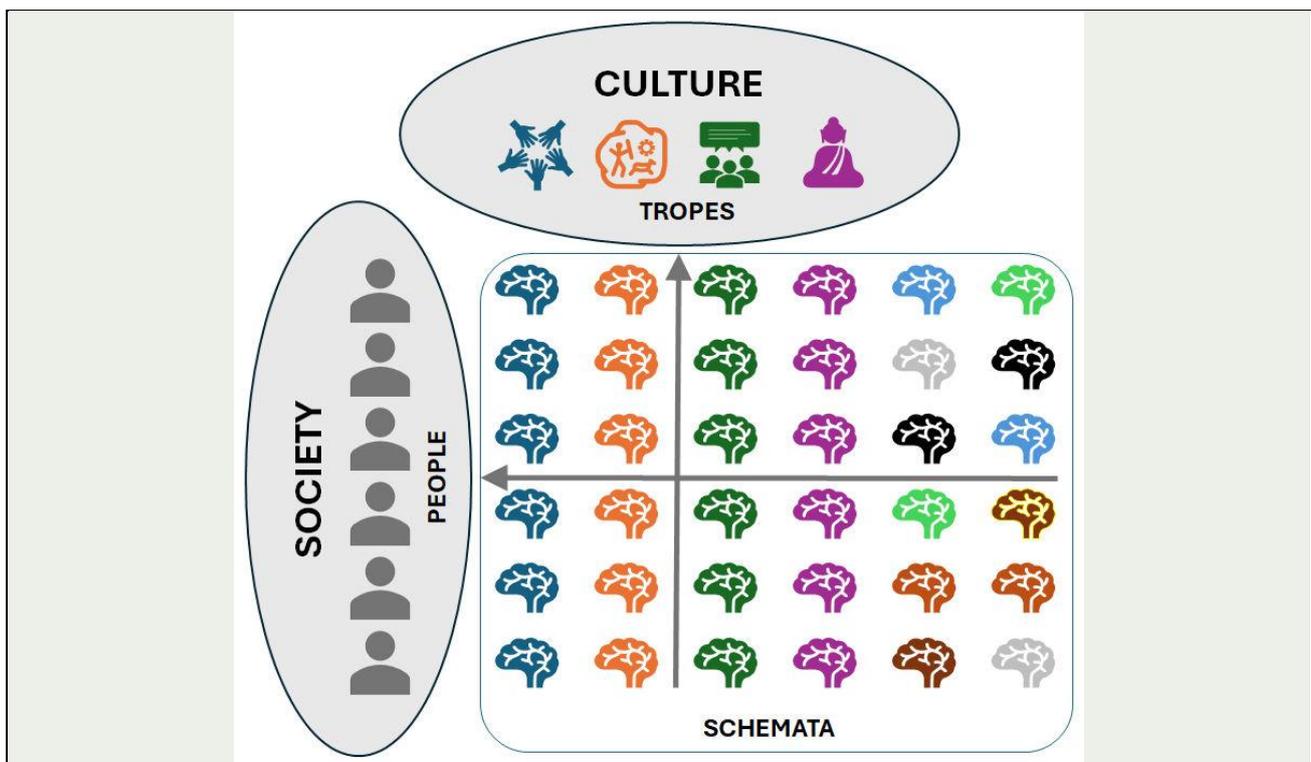


**Example 1 – Societal**

In many societies, there is a cultural assumption that economic growth is inherently good. This shapes policy, education, and personal aspiration, even when environmental or social costs become evident. Individuals may experience unease without initially being able to articulate why.

**Example 2 – Professional**
A professional culture may normalise overwork as commitment. New members absorb this expectation automatically, even if it conflicts with their values or well-being. Questioning it can feel like personal failure rather than cultural critique.

**Provenance and Links**
**Foundational perspectives:**
- **Anthropology and sociology:**
  Classical definitions of culture as shared meaning systems shaping behaviour and social organisation.
- **Berger & Luckmann:**
  The social construction of reality, explaining how meanings become institutionalised and taken for granted.
- **Cultural cognition:**
  Empirical work showing how cultural frameworks influence perception, risk assessment, and belief persistence.

**Systems and critical realism:**
- **Emergence and constraint:**
  Culture as an emergent system that constrains individual action without determining it.
- **Morphogenetic theory (Archer):**
  Culture as a distinct but interacting domain alongside social structure and agency, subject to reproduction (morphostasis) or transformation (morphogenesis).
- **This synthesis:**
  Culture is treated here as the stabilised environment within which motivational reflexivity operates, linking individual belief revision to ethical and social change.

**Links to other Knowledge Objects:**
- Tropes
- Schemata
- Motivational Reflexivity
- Belief Leverage
- The Modified Morphogenetic Cycle

**Practical Exercise – Student Response Area**
**Exercise: Noticing Cultural Assumptions**
1. Identify a behaviour that feels "normal" in your society or profession.
2. Ask:
   o What belief must be true for this behaviour to make sense?
3. Reflect:
   o Who benefits from this assumption?
   o Who might be disadvantaged by it?
4. Consider:
   o How would this behaviour look in a different culture?
5. Write one sentence beginning with:
   o *"I used to assume this was just the way things are, but now I see it as..."*
This exercise builds awareness of culture without requiring rejection of it.