

Seven deadly sins

Dinner speech ICLHE Maastricht

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Geert Hofstede

Seven deadly sins in Catholic tradition

*greed, lust, envy,
gluttony, anger,
pride, laziness*

Seven deadly sins in a multicultural world (for politicians, businesspeople, scientists, consultants and anybody else)

- Unawareness
- Ethnocentrism
- Amnesia
- Professional myopia
- Conceptual mix-up
- Academic polemics
- Level confusion

Unawareness

“The English, of any people in the universe, have the least of a national character, unless this very singularity may pass for such”

Scottish philosopher David Hume, 1742

Today: In a discussion at an international conference, try using the nationality of the speaker as an argument – see what happens

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Ethnocentrism

Zhongguó (the Empire in the centre):
Chinese for China

People in most countries implicitly
consider theirs as the centre of the
world

“Cross-cultural studies” are often
published by monolingual Americans

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Amnesia (ignorance of history)

“Western civilization is superior”

Dutch politician

Venturing a military campaign in Russia

Adolf Hitler, forgetting Napoleon

Claiming to pacify Afghanistan

George W. Bush, after Russia and Britain

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Professional myopia

“This dates from the days we believed we could learn anything from sociology. My research among the Karen of Burma has proven that there are no national cultures”

Anonymous reviewer for Current Anthropology

“The methods Hofstede used violate every premise of opinion analysis I learned at the feet of Lazarsfeld and Hyman”

Immanuel Wallerstein, US sociologist

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Conceptual mix-up

“Culture”, “identity”, “values”, “practices” can mean many things. They do not *exist*, they are *constructs*, useless without clear definitions

“A construct is not directly accessible to observation but inferable from verbal statements and other behaviors and useful in predicting still other observable and measurable verbal and nonverbal behaviors”

T. Levitin, 1973

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Academic polemics

- Scientists have egos. In the natural sciences, their impact is limited by falsifiable empirical results
- The social sciences leave a lot of room for ego boosting. Colleague scientists are often treated as competitors who are wrong if not evil
- All academic research on culture is constrained by the culture of the researcher. This is an excellent reason for seeking synergy with others
- The ultimate criterion is predicting observable and measurable verbal and nonverbal behaviors

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Level confusion

- A culture presupposes a collective or social system
- Culture research always focuses at a specific level of collective: nations, regions, organizations, occupations, generations, families, genders
- Individuals don't have cultures but personalities
- Research results only apply at their own level: dimensions of national culture belong to anthropology; of organizational culture to sociology; of personality to psychology
- For comparing individuals the culture question is not “how I score” but “where I feel at home”

“La culture, c’est ce qui reste
quand on a tout oublié”

culture is what is left if you forgot all else

*Édouard Herriot 1872-1957, French
politician and pioneer of European unity*