

## CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION: IN MAN AND OUT THERE<sup>1</sup>

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Leslie White<sup>2</sup> has issued in recent years a challenge to American anthropologists which though criticized, has gone largely unanswered. He has proposed two very different propositions: (1) that culture be seen primarily as a whole for all mankind through time; and (2) that culture be seen as existing independently of men, or at least particular men. It is proposed here that his arguments have been misapprehended through often polemical opposition, while in fact much of his position pertains to aspects of cultural studies. In terms of semantic fields<sup>3</sup> we will, then, describe the field of "culture" as it is now used in the social sciences as usefully divisible into general culture (civilization) and partitive culture (culture). The latter field, in turn, will be divided into culture independent of men (superorganic culture) and psychologicistic culture (modal culture). Arguments will be adduced for the value and productivity of the distinctions made.

In a recent paper it has been suggested that "the determinants of human behavior" may be profitably analyzed in a semantic field including biological, biosocial, cultural, and situational factors, each class of factors having historical and ahistorical dimensions.<sup>4</sup> The biological factors included specifically those abilities and needs common to all men, and their variation by age, sex, or statistical scatter. Biosocial factors are those hypothetical factors which seem to shape human behavior in groups universally, or in certain type-situations. Cultural factors were those which shaped the behavior of individuals by virtue of their being in one group rather than another or of learning from one tradition rather than another. Situational were those particular geographical, social, or personal factors which influenced behavior in such a way as to modify predictions which might be made without knowledge of these particularities. Of course all of these abstracted factors are the products of the influence of the same or other types of factors over an indefinite past. It should again be emphasized here that this categorization implied no judgment of the relative influence of one or another category. But the distinctive contribution of anthropology has been in its emphasis on cultural factors, and one of its future roles should be continued explorations of the limits of cultural variability.<sup>5</sup>

Culture treated in this way automatically excludes, however, viewing culture as a pan-human accomplishment. In fact there is little room left for the word "culture" but only for "a culture" and "cultures." The explanatory value of the concept of culture lies in the fact that cultures are different. Yet certainly in the attempt to ferret out the ways in which men differ from animals, the course of human biological evolution or the accumulative nature of human progress the concept of culture as a universal biosocial process has also been rewarding. But dealing with this partially biosocial process of culture(2) under the same rubric as the splintering force of cultures(1) leads to confusion of expression and terminology even for the most professional--the "a" and the "s" keep getting lost.<sup>6</sup> As Kroeber and Kluckhohn have pointed out, if we say "the religious system of the Haida is cultural" we do not immediately know whether culture

is in the general sense or particular sense. They add that if one thinks of culture as patterned, the reference is primarily to "culture in the partici- tive sense" rather than general culture.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps it would be clearer if we saw man as civilization creating and culture creating.<sup>8</sup> This seems to be close to the distinction of R. Thurnwald:

[culture] the totality of usages and adjustments which relate to family, political formation, economy, labor, morality, custom, law and ways of thought. These are bound to the life of the social entities in which they are practised and perish with these; whereas civilizational horizons are not lost. . . .<sup>9</sup>

Thus we could speak of the course of civilizational evolution with- out infringing upon the equally valid concept of cultures as ultimately non-additive. The early studies of diffusion would then be seen as dealing with items of pan-human civilization which pass from culture to culture in time and space, ultimately making possible new levels of energy utilization in White's terminology, or new levels of moral consciousness in Redfield's or Kroeber's. Items of usage considered as cultural would remain relative to the total cultural systems (and congeries) of individuals in groups; considered as civilizational they would occupy positions in chains of devel- opment (however conceived) from the stone age to the atomic.

While the distinction of cultures<sub>(1)</sub> and culture<sub>(2)</sub> has been gener- ally admitted, although the attempt was made to get by with one term, White's concept of culture<sub>(3)</sub> in the extrasomatic context has been generally misunderstood or reduced to a pseudo-argument.<sup>10</sup> Thus we find:

There is no genuine problem as to the "inwardness" or "outwardness" of culture. It is "outward" and "impersonal" as an abstraction, a logical construct; it is very much "inward" and affective as intern- alized in a particular individual . . . culture is manifested in and through personalities, culture exists to the extent to which the "private worlds" . . . overlap.<sup>11</sup>

While this may explain the position of the authors, and thus appear to be an "unrewarding controversy," it certainly does not touch upon the position which White suggests.

For a consideration of White's culture<sub>(3)</sub> let us turn to a more extended discussion of the idea of culture<sub>(1)</sub> as it is usually conceived today. In these terms "cultures" have been<sup>(1)</sup> provisionally defined as exist- ing essentially in the shared aspects of the personalities of the members of a group.<sup>12</sup> Individuals learn cultures and extrapolate from this learn- ing and add to this learning those thoughts and actions which may become part of a culture in the future. One always learns his culture in an essentially individualistic manner; it is recreated by him in his own con- scious or unconscious memory, or else it is lost to him and cannot influ- ence his behavior. Thus, group culture exists between the discrepancies of cultures of individuals and the necessities of biosocial existence. At this point we may consider a culture as a statistical abstraction residing in the shared behaviors of its carriers.

With these considerations in mind, let us particularly focus our attention upon an expanded concept of cultural role. In this way we may most usefully organize our knowledge about cultures psychologically.

Thus we may think of most of what an individual has learned of his group's culture as classifiable into clusters of expectations.<sup>13</sup> This expanded concept would include not only technical and interpersonal role-expectations for particular parts of an individual's life, but also generalized roles in terms of which a person identifies himself. Thus a Nuer would presumably think of himself as a member of a particular homestead, hamlet, village, tribal section, tribe, or as a "Nuer." In the non-Nuer world he attempts to act in terms of his expectations of himself playing the role of a "Nuer," and others expect him to act in the ways in which they conceive this cultural role.<sup>14</sup> In more universalistic societies one may play the role of "man" or "human being."

Overriding roles of this sort, then, may be called identity or allegiance roles. With what cultural groups one identifies is of course often brittle, yet knowing whether a person conceives of himself, or feels that he is conceived as, a "Navaho" or an "American," a "Southerner" or a "Negro" (when this word designates a subculture) is particularly relevant in determining what sort of future learning experiences will be sought out or accepted as proper to the self, and which will be rejected. In the process of acculturation certainly this shift in cultural group allegiance or identification is a crucial issue. A lack of positive decision either by the person or those around him leaves the future growth and organization of a personality entirely up to personal resources. This leads to difficulties, since the organization of roles in most personalities comes largely ready-made, being worked out painfully over centuries by the forebearers of the cultural group with which a person identifies.

The items of typical cultures are admitted by most to be linked together in what one may conceive of as "learning chains." If a primitive man becomes a "Christian" he will find that more and more cultural items are linked, at least by others, with the concept "Christian." In the Middle East it has been pointed out that many peasants are poor Muslims. Illiterate and isolated they may know little more than that they identify themselves as Muslims. Yet this identification may allow us to predict that when educational opportunities are open to them they will want first of all to learn more of Islam.<sup>15</sup> The same story is repeated in the case of an isolated community of Indian Jews who after hundreds of years of persisting on the shreds and patches of their lore, learned again much of their lost tradition--a process which was to be repeated several times.<sup>16</sup>

The concept of cultural identification is particularly relevant if we propose, as White does, a non-statistical aspect of culture. What we may call the superorganic culture exists in vehicles<sup>17</sup> and symbols, is "out there." The superorganic tradition exists as potentiality. As a child grows up in a particular group what is potentially his culture, in that it is contained in the tradition to which most of those in his group bear allegiance, becomes to some extent his modal culture, especially those aspects which are related to the roles he is called upon to play or react to. It was by a broadening of allegiances to include ancient traditions that Renaissance Man changed the potentialities of his culture long before he changed its statistical, modal reality. The concept of "superorganic culture," then, gives an added conceptual tool for predicting future behavior. And it also provides a rationale for imputing cultural behavior to past societies. The cultures of the archaeologist exist in

material or symbolic form; we can only imagine what those who lived among these artifacts, bearing allegiance to the traditions that produced them, must have thought and believed, must have learned as their culture. Some traditions which today have little influences on modal cultures<sup>(1)</sup> may become again influential in the future, just as the ideals of Greece and Rome were found and rethought from papyri and stone. In the Middle Ages perhaps no one "lived" Greek culture, yet parts of this tradition in the forms of art and writing and scientific systems were understood and ultimately influential in forming new cultures and cultural traditions. Cultural traditions of great complexity can perhaps only exist outside of us. Perhaps no anthropologist has within his mind a coherent system of anthropology, but rather a mass of ideas and facts out of a scholarly tradition. Yet logically organized traditions in anthropology do exist "out there," and so can be comprehended and explained and rationalized in an objective, organized fashion. In these terms the "culture" which moves and changes in a superorganic realm, which achieves a significant degree of "logico-meaningful integration"<sup>18</sup> generally sets apart from the average man in the group but may be the "tradition" to which the individuals in the group bear allegiance. "Great" or "high" traditions are seldom completely identifiable with the mentation of individuals, but have existence through history and ultimately shape individual lives or cultures<sup>(1)</sup>.

But let us remember another sense in which cultures in the "extra-somatic" context may be conceived to influence human behavior. It is obvious that men do not create their own cultures, yet the culture of a group offers the only available basis in terms of which an individual can think and create. One may be very creative, yet in a long-term perspective his creations don't carry him very far from this base. Thus Leonardo da Vinci was doomed not to fly in his time, or Aristotle to discover the structure of the cell. In this negative sense there was no choice for these men, the force of culture lay beyond their comprehension. Positively, others with the carriage and the gasoline engine thrust upon them by their time had a high probability of creating the automobile, and it made from this predictive perspective little difference who precisely did invent it. We must assume only, as White does, that the human mind can handle symbolic behavior with a certain degree of competence and that man has certain generalized tendencies, and the formula that culture creates culture does not seem an unreasonable way to conceptualize what we find. It is a limited concept of causation that leads Barnett to deny this aspect of reality by saying:

As we have seen, the wherewithal for an invention must preexist the conception of it; but an accumulation of the necessary materials for it does not predetermine it any more than the existence of brick and mortar determines that a building shall be constructed. Culture does not determine or cause anything. Ideas about it may and do.<sup>19</sup>

To use Bidney in reverse, because one is interested in "efficient" causes, the actual individuals or psychological processes involved, does not mean that other types of causality involved in situations are unimportant or trivial.<sup>20</sup>

Long ago Durkheim added another dimension of the superorganic with his concept of the "social fact." Disregarding what seems doubtful in this concept, Durkheim appears right when he suggests that even if we want

to mail a package after the closing times of the post office, it is simply a fact that we cannot. Even if we have not learned when the post office closes we still cannot mail the package. It may be that no one in the community likes this fact or even accepts it. Yet they act in terms of it. Of course with unity and pressure the post office may in the future stay open all night--but what about now? Isn't the closing hour sitting out there by itself, entailed in a maze of other cultural facts about law, work hours, meal times, etc. which are equally too complex for any person or group of persons to alter in a short time?<sup>21</sup> And let us look at the maze of Christmas giving. Increasingly adults may not accept the proposition that exchanging presents is a legitimate expectation, yet they still feel a cultural obligation to match the presents of others when these are given. Theoretically all adults in a group could reject this cultural trait internally and yet because of the barriers of communication among people in a delicate situation, the exchange could go on for years by its own momentum. The ethnographic record seems to suggest that this has happened elsewhere. Of course some would distinguish here between internalized and non-internalized cultural expectations. But if so, why is not the external cultural trait that one should exchange presents to be conceived of as existing outside of individuals in the extrasomatic context?

Shifting our argument, the cultures of "others" have an external reality which would seem to be just as real as the individual and his thoughts, or indeed the physical universe. If the proverbial Martian were to arrive in a religious area of Ireland and kick the cross in plain sight of the parishioners, the result would be just as real as though he had walked off a cliff in the dark. Because we cannot see, touch, or feel cultural facts does not mean that they are somehow less "real." Reality relates to predictability rather than subjective judgment. The ultimate of such reductionism is to assert that nothing exists besides subatomic particles.<sup>22</sup>

Material culture<sup>(3)</sup> poses yet another problem, for it surely exists separately from persons. The psychologists suggest that only the ideas behind the artifact are cultural.<sup>23</sup> And it is presumed that transmission of the ideas must be through persons. But surely this is not necessary. Material objects are themselves models for the next generation, even without explanation. Material objects themselves limit the possibilities of the coming generation--if there are no wheelbarrows, dirt cannot be moved in them. In the limiting case the castoff tin cans of modern peoples have often served primitives in many ways without the medium of the psychologically derived idea of cultural transmission. It may be claimed these cans are not "cultural," but it would be foolish to thereby deny their influence or existence.

Let us then refrain from value judgments of the concept and admit that cultures have their modal reality in the average man's training, but also a superorganic, extra-individual reality. The former is more directly involved in influencing behavior in certain situations, yet the other exists, and potentially will influence the behavior of men through becoming a part of their modal cultures through linkage, prior existence, existence in others, limiting or providing tools for thought or fabrication.

In this essay an attempt has been made to sharpen the limits of the concept of culture so that testing the range of cultural influence in human affairs could be facilitated. At the same time it was felt necessary to not exclude as non-existent those aspects of human experience which we are not presently inclined to label "culture." For this purpose we have distinguished "culture" from "civilization." Although this paper assumes the concept of culture in personality to be central, a fair review of other ways in which cultural traditions exist and allow predictions led to the differentiation of superorganic from modal cultures. The terms chosen may not be the best, but the distinctions, however phrased, would seem important.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>This paper is essentially that delivered at the conference of the American Anthropological Association in Philadelphia, November, 1961. I am indebted to D. Wallace, R. Emrich and H. Goldfried of the University for their suggestions.

<sup>2</sup>Leslie White, *The Science of Culture* (New York, Grove Press, 1949); "The Concept of Culture," *American Anthropologist* 61 (1959), 227-251; and *The Evolution of Culture* (New York, McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1959).

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Leo Weisgerber, *Vom Weltbild der deutschen Sprache* (Düsseldorf, Pädagogischer Verlag, Schwann, 1950 54); and Suzanne Öhman, "Theories of the Linguistic Field," *Word* 9:(2)(1953):123-134.

<sup>4</sup>Raymond D. Gastil, "The Determinants of Human Behavior," *American Anthropologist* 63(6)(Dec., 1961):1281-1291.

<sup>5</sup>The study of cultural systems or structures could either concentrate on strictly cultural analysis (considering the unique configuration of the cultural unit) or be approached biosocially in the spirit of search for universal factors.

<sup>6</sup>E.g. E. A. Hoebel, *Man in the Primitive World* (New York, McGraw-Hill Book Co., 2d ed., 1958), p. 159 (2).

<sup>7</sup>A. L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1952), *Peabody Museum Papers*, 47:1, p. 185.

<sup>8</sup>While other uses of "civilization" are more current, the usual dichotomy of systems in quantitative terms of their size or complexity seems both unwarranted and crippling to the potential use of the comparative method. American or European "civilization" might best be described as a complex or multifaceted culture. If, on the other hand, the focus is on the urban - non-urban dichotomy, then urbanization is the phenomenon under consideration. "Urban civilization" would also be acceptable in this framework.

<sup>9</sup>Quoted in Kroeber and Kluckhohn, *op. cit.*, p. 44 and *passim*.

<sup>10</sup>E.g. David Bidney, *Theoretical Anthropology* (New York, Columbia University, 1953), pp. 108-113 *passim*.

<sup>11</sup>Kroeber and Kluckhohn, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

<sup>12</sup>Cf. Melford E. Spiro, "Culture and Personality: The Natural History of a False Dichotomy," *Psychiatry* 14:19-46. This position is modified somewhat in the thinking of Anthony Wallace, *Culture and Personality* (New

York, Random House, Inc., 1961), especially pp. 34-41. His contribution is a considerable one, yet the implication is that behavioristically people in the cultural group generally act as if they had shared cognitive understandings and personality traits, except for occupational or subcultural specializations.

<sup>13</sup>Normative, verbal or behavioral, as in Kroeber and Kluckhohn, op. cit., p. 162.

<sup>14</sup>E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1940), pp. 114ff.

<sup>15</sup>Cf. Najmeh Najafi, *Reveille for a Persian Village* (New York, Harper Bros., 1958), pp. 40 and 237.

<sup>16</sup>Haem Samuel Kehimkar, *The History of the Bene-Israel of India*. (Tel-Aviv, Dayag Press, 1937), pp. 40-42, 61, 65, 166ff.

<sup>17</sup>Cf. Pitirim A. Sorokin, *Society, Culture and Personality* (New York, Harper Bros., 1947), pp. 555ff. The concept of the superorganic was popularized in anthropology by A. L. Kroeber, "The Superorganic," *American Anthropologist* XIX(1917):163-213 (reissued in his *The Nature of Culture*, Chicago, 1952).

<sup>18</sup>Cf. Sorokin, op. cit., pp. 332-335.

<sup>19</sup>H. G. Barnett, *Innovation: the Basis of Cultural Change* (New York, McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1953), p. 44.

<sup>20</sup>Bidney, op. cit., pp. 33 and passim.

<sup>21</sup>Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, G. Catlin (ed.) (Chicago, Chicago University, 1893 [1938]), pp. 3-13 and passim.

<sup>22</sup>Thus for purposes of argument and in fear of the reification of the culture concept Barnett appears at times to go too far. (Barnett, op. cit., pp. 13-14 and passim, 1000-1002.)

<sup>23</sup>Cf. quotations in Kroeber and Kluckhohn, op. cit., pp. 127-128.