

CULTURE, BEHAVIOR, AND THE INDIVIDUAL

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ABSTRACT.—Culture is a reality reflected, somewhat imperfectly, by human behavior.

When we talk of culture, we are referring to a reality as familiar and as casually accepted by each of us as our own personalities. In a real sense culture is a part of us. When I act culturally, I behave according to our culture. If I commit a crime, I do not act culturally even though I perform the act with implements and skills known and utilized in the society. My action is the result of certain "emotions," because of the cast of my personality. Both cultural and anti-social acts are behavior but only the first reflects faithfully the culture.

This close interrelationship of culture and human behavior is a major obstacle to the establishment of a science of anthropology. That culture cannot be observed directly but must be deduced from human activities only serves to make an unclear situation, still more perplexing. The common habit of the anthropologist of passing from culture to behavior and back again in explaining his conclusions serves to confuse the speaker and his audience. For example, the acts of a strong leader and that of a weak one in the same position, at different times, may neither reflect the culture accurately. The stronger leader may exercise more power than the culture sanctions; the weaker may allow others to encroach on powers that are his social responsibility. The cultural norm may be known

to the informed native but cannot be derived from overt behavior alone.

Thus culture and behavior belong to two distinct but interlocking natural systems. The failure to recognize behavior as such and to exclude it from generalizations of a cultural nature is largely, in my opinion, responsible for the failure of a general hypothesis, a coordinated "body of scientific theory," to emerge from the numerous studies in social anthropology made down to the present.

Later I shall show that though a man behaves according to the culture he does it as a "free" agent or personality, that is, he acts according to personally held convictions.

Before proceeding further, the realities we are discussing should be formally defined. Terms, to be most helpful to the understanding of the thesis advanced, should be familiar to anthropologists and limited to a single, unequivocal meaning. Thus culture, currently used in several senses, is restricted herein to signify the *system of rules that regulates the behavior of individuals in a society*, as proposed by Radcliffe-Brown (1957, p. 99), Malinowski (1944, p. 40) and Leslie White (1949, p. 144). *Human behavior comprehends the activities of the individual, physical and mental* (perception, interpretation, ideation, synthesis, etc.), in satisfying his needs. [Behavior (to be an entity) includes not only the activity but

the urge as well, which arises in the psychobiological structure as the results of a need, and impels the action.]

The operation of a society is behavior, not culture. Cultural behavior is *activity* in conformity to the culture, *not* culture. Proceeding on the assumption that culture is a natural system, it follows that it has laws and principles peculiar to itself (Radcliffe-Brown, 1957 p. 43; L. A. White 1949 p. 123). Culture, therefore, is built around a dynamic agent evidence of which will be found in all its states (F. S. C. Northrop 1959, pp. 343-4). This agent is the human biological structure with its basic needs. Since this is a controversial issue with anthropologists, some further explanation is in order.

Some scientists, like Leslie White, hold that culture is the dynamic factor and man its passive puppet.

"... Culture traits have an existence prior to the birth of any person living. They exist outside the human organism, they act upon him from outside. . . . Man, as an animal organism, as a species, lies within the man-culture system, and there he is the dependent, not the independent variable; his behavior is merely the function of his culture, not its determinant. . . . He exerts no control whatever over his culture. . . . Of course culture traits could do nothing were it not for human beings; they could not even exist" (White 1949 pp. 78-79, 350, 99).

Thus White holds that the human brain is a mechanical brain manipulated by culture.

An analysis of a few concrete examples of everyday behavior and the chain of events that lead to the specific action may afford a clearer understanding of the problem. In the United States, a person custom-

arily drives in the right-lane of the highway. A man raises his hat when greeted by a woman acquaintance. A hundred similar examples could be cited. Does culture *make* one drive on the right half of the road, salute a lady by tipping one's hat? Only metaphorically speaking does culture "make" us do anything.

The individual performs these actions. Why? Because he is used to acting thus. He does it without thinking of his culture. Indeed he may not even know he is "controlled" by a culture. He wants to act as he does and would feel uncomfortable if he did otherwise. It is part and parcel of his personality. On the other hand he was not born to act in this manner. He learned it while growing up.

Cultural training of the individual began very early. As a child, he had certain basic urges incident to living—the need for food, for evacuation of waste and so on. To fit into society, he had to learn to perform these natural functions in a manner acceptable to others, that is, in cultural ways. His parents taught him these ways because of the knowledge they had acquired as children from their parents. So the child learned as he matured by precept, example, satisfaction and disappointment, to "know and live his culture." His native urges due to his structure and its needs were modified or conditioned, not by his *culture* but by *cultural training*. These facts are not a mere matter of words, a sophistic splitting of hairs, but show the distinction between culture and behavior. The parts played by culture and human psychology can be summarized thus:

CONCRETE EVENT OR CONDITION	RULE OR ACTIVITY
a. Rules of behavior as recorded in parents brains.	a'. Culture
b. Parents' obligation to act culturally (and train children in cultural behavior)	b'. Parents' Personality (Psychological potentiality)
c. Parents instruct child to behave culturally Learning how to behave Observing behavior of others "Living" the culture—behaving culturally	c'. Parents' behavior Child's behavior Child's behavior Child's behavior
d. Rules of behavior & sanction recorded in child's brain.	d'. Culture
e. The obligation to behave culturally— Conscience plus natural urges to satisfy needs	e'. Child's personality

Let us analyze another psychocultural concept: cultural change. In this process White believes culture is again the dynamic factor, that cultural development depends primarily on culture, not on the human psychobiological structure.

"... We do not need to take the brains of men into account in an explanation of mathematical [or other cultural] growth and invention . . . There is action and reaction among the various [cultural] elements. Concept reacts on concept; ideas mix, fuse and form new syntheses. This process goes on through the whole extent of culture . . . When this . . . interaction and development reaches a certain point, new syntheses are *formed of themselves*." (White, 1949, p. 292-293. Deuel's italics).

Hallowell opposes White's view of culture determinism and asserts that individuals are the motivating force in cultural change.

"Although American anthropologists often speak of the 'movements' of culture or the 'meeting' of cultural traits or complexes, this manner of speaking must be understood as an economical mode of abstract speech. In a literal sense, cultures never have met nor will ever meet. What is meant is that peoples meet and that, as a result of the processes of social interaction, acculturation—modifications in the mode of life of one or both peoples—may take place. Individuals are the dynamic centers of this process of interaction. If perceptible differences in the mode of life of either people result, it means that new ways of acting, thinking, and feeling have been

learned by individuals . . . It is hard to see how culture—an abstract summation of the mode of life of a people—can exert an influence except as it is a definable constituent of the activities of human individuals in interaction with each other. In the last analysis it is individuals who respond to and influence one another." (Hallowell, 1945 pp. 175, 174).

This is a case where "both are right and both are wrong." The true situation will be apprehended by tracing the development of a cultural change from the inception of the invention. This is initiated in the brain of an individual for ideas can form there only. The potential invention is put into existence by making the device or engaging in the habit by one individual, then a few until finally it is a generally accepted habit of the people. Up to now it is purely psychological. At the point where it is recognized as a right and proper rule of behavior by the people generally, it is *sanctioned*. Sanction transforms a psychological habit of the group into cultural behavior.

It is sometimes said that a custom diffuses from one culture to another. Does this mean that a culture trait is transmitted bodily to a second culture?

Customs do not move about; they are not transmitted from one society

to another, nor are they induced in a culture by their presence in a second culture. In the process of diffusion, a new habit is introduced into the first society, through learning by an individual of the principles of an invention made or used in another culture. (Example: Japanese engineers and scientists

learning Western technology and the later incorporation of the exploited techniques into their culture.) Again, the borrowed habit develops among a number of persons in the society and, when finally sanctioned, becomes a custom. Culture change can be analyzed in the following manner:

CONCRETE EVENT OR CONDITION	RULE OR ACTIVITY
a. Invention or learning new habit by individual	a'. Behavior
b. Formation of new habit by a number of people	b'. Behavior
c. Sanction of habit—new custom	c'. Culture

From the foregoing analyses, it is seen that custom formation is foreshadowed in the psychological processes of the brain and in individual behavior. This White freely admits, though as has been seen, he appears to deny any significant psychological contribution of the human biological structure to the syntheses. "These syntheses are, to be sure, real events and have location in time and place. The places are of course the brains of men." (White, 1949, p. 293). But these syntheses are behavior—a mental activity, psychological by its nature—even though the data it works with is culture.

If the foregoing explanation is correct, it has been shown that the individual behaves according to his culture, because his personality has been so molded in the family during his formative years. He behaves as he does in conformity to his culture as a "free" agent on account of his convictions and desire that he should so act. Culture has a very real ex-

istence, though intangible, in the brains of human individuals, in the brains of most of the people of a society. It consists not only of the system of rules but of the sanction of these rules. Even the criminal conforms to custom most of the time. In fact, in a well integrated society, most of the people obey most of the customs most of the time or it could not operate smoothly. (Radcliffe-Brown, 1957, p. 99).

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Manuscript received April 29, 1964.