

behaviour peculiar to *Homo sapiens*, together with material objects used as an integral part of this behaviour. Thus, culture includes language, ideas, beliefs, customs, codes, institutions, tools, techniques, works of art, rituals, and ceremonies, among other elements.

The existence and use of culture depends upon an ability possessed by humans alone. This ability has been called variously the capacity for rational or abstract thought, but a good case has been made for rational behaviour among subhuman animals, and the meaning of abstract is not sufficiently explicit or precise. The term symboling has been proposed as a more suitable name for the unique mental ability of humans, consisting of assigning to things and events certain meanings that cannot be grasped with the senses alone. Articulate speech—language—is a good example. The meaning of the word dog is not inherent in the sounds themselves; it is assigned, freely and arbitrarily, to the sounds by human beings. Holy water, “biting one's thumb” at someone (*Romeo and Juliet*, Act I, scene 1), or fetishes are other examples. Symboling is a kind of behaviour objectively definable and should not be confused with symbolizing, which has an entirely different meaning.

The concept of culture

Various definitions of culture

What has been termed the classic definition of culture was provided by the 19th-century English anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor in the first paragraph of his *Primitive Culture* (1871):

Culture . . . is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.

In *Anthropology* (1881) Tylor made it clear that culture, so defined, is possessed by man alone. This conception of culture served anthropologists well for some 50 years. With the increasing maturity of anthropological science, further reflections upon the nature of their subject matter and concepts led to a multiplication and diversification of definitions of culture. In *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (1952), U.S. anthropologists A.L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn cited 164 definitions of culture, ranging from “learned behaviour” to “ideas in the mind,” “a logical construct,” “a statistical fiction,” “a psychic defense mechanism,” and so on. The definition—or the conception—of culture that is preferred by Kroeber and Kluckhohn and also by a great many other anthropologists is that culture is an abstraction or, more specifically, “an abstraction from behaviour.”

These conceptions have defects or shortcomings. The existence of behavioral traditions—that is, patterns of behaviour transmitted by social rather than by biologic hereditary means—has definitely been established for nonhuman animals. “Ideas in the mind” become significant in society only as expressed in language, acts, and objects. “A logical construct” or “a statistical fiction” is not specific enough to be useful. The conception of culture as an abstraction led, first, to a questioning of the reality of culture (inasmuch as abstractions were regarded as imperceptible) and, second, to a denial of its existence; thus, the subject matter of nonbiological anthropology, “culture,” was defined out of existence, and without real, objective things and events in the external world there can be no science.

Kroeber and Kluckhohn were led to their conclusion that culture is an abstraction by reasoning that if culture is behaviour it, ipso facto, becomes the subject matter of psychology; therefore, they concluded that culture “is an abstraction from concrete behavior but is not itself behavior.” But what, one might ask, is an abstraction of a marriage ceremony or a pottery bowl, to use Kroeber and Kluckhohn's examples? This question poses difficulties that were not adequately met by these authors. A solution was perhaps provided by Leslie A. White in the essay “The Concept of Culture” (1959). The issue is not really whether culture is real or an abstraction, he reasoned; the issue is the context of the scientific interpretation.

When things and events are considered in the context of their relation to the human organism, they constitute behaviour; when they are considered not in terms of their relation to the human organism but in their relationship to one another, they become culture by definition. The mother-in-law taboo is a complex of concepts, attitudes, and acts. When one considers them in their relationship to the human organism—that is, as things that the organism does—they become behaviour by definition. When, however, one considers the mother-in-law taboo in its relationship to the place of residence of a newly married couple, to the customary division of labour between the sexes, to their respective roles in the society's mode of subsistence and offense and defense, and these in turn to the technology of the society, the mother-in-law taboo becomes, again by definition, culture. This distinction is precisely the one that students of words have made for many years. When words are considered in their relationship to the human organism—that is, as acts—they become behaviour. But when they are considered in terms of their relationship to one another—producing lexicon, grammar, syntax, and so forth—they become language, the subject matter not of psychology but of the science of linguistics. Culture, therefore, is the name given to a class of things and events dependent upon symboling (i.e., articulate speech) that are considered in a kind of extra-human context.

Universalist approaches to culture and the human mind

Culture, as noted above, is due to an ability possessed by man alone. The question of whether the difference between the mind of man and that of the lower animals is one of kind or of degree has been debated for many years, and even today reputable scientists can be found on both sides of this issue. But no one who holds the view that the difference is one of degree has adduced any evidence to show that nonhuman animals are capable, to any degree whatever, of a kind of behaviour that all human beings exhibit. This kind of behaviour may be illustrated by the following examples: remembering the sabbath to keep it holy, classifying one's relatives and distinguishing one class from another (such as uncles from cousins), defining and prohibiting incest, and so on. There is no reason or evidence that leads one to believe that any animal other than man can have or be brought to any appreciation or comprehension whatever of such meanings and acts. There is, as Tylor argued long ago, a "mental gulf that divides the lowest savage from the highest ape" (Anthropology).

In line with the foregoing distinction, human behaviour is to be defined as behaviour consisting of, or dependent upon, symboling rather than upon anything else that *Homo sapiens* does; coughing, yawning, stretching, and the like are not human.

Next to nothing is yet known about the neuroanatomy of symboling. Man is characterized by a very large brain, considered both absolutely and relatively, and it is reasonable—and even obligatory—to believe that the central nervous system, especially the forebrain, is the locus of the ability to symbol. But how it does this and with what specific mechanisms remain to be discovered. One is thus led to the conclusion that at some point in the evolution of primates a threshold was reached in some line, or lines, when the ability to symbol was realized and made explicit in overt behaviour. There is no intermediate stage, logical or neurological, between symboling and nonsymboling; an individual or a species is capable of symboling, or he or it is not. The life of Helen Keller makes this clear: when, through the aid of her teacher, Anne Sullivan, Keller was enabled to escape from the isolation to which her blindness and deafness had consigned her and to effect contact with the world of human meanings and values, the transformation was instantaneous.

Evolution of "minding"

But even if almost nothing is known about the neuroanatomy of symboling, a great deal is known about the evolution of mind (or "minding," if mind is considered as a process rather than a thing), in which one finds symboling as the characteristic of a particular stage of development. The evolution of mind can be traced in the following sequence of stages. First is the simple reflexive stage, in which behaviour is determined by the intrinsic properties of both the organism and the thing reacted to—for example, the contraction of the pupil of the eye under increased stimulation by light. Second is the conditioned reflex stage, in which the response is elicited not by properties intrinsic in the stimulus but by meanings that the stimulus has acquired for the responding organism through experience—for example, Pavlov's dog's salivary glands responding to the sound of a bell. Third is the instrumental stage, as exemplified by a chimpanzee knocking down a banana with a stick. Here the response is determined by the intrinsic properties of the things involved (banana, stick, chimpanzee's neurosensory-muscular system); but a new element has been introduced into behaviour, namely, the exercise of control by the reacting organism over things in the external world. And, finally, there is the symbol stage, in which the configuration of behaviour involves nonintrinsic meanings, as has already been suggested.

These four stages exhibit a characteristic of the evolution of all living things: a movement in the direction of making life more secure and enduring. In the first stage the organism distinguishes between the beneficial, the injurious, and the neutral, but it must come into direct contact with the object or event in question to do so. In the second stage the organism may react at a distance, as it were—that is, through an intermediate stimulus. The conditioned reflex brings signs into the life process; one thing or event may serve as an indication of something else—food, danger, and so forth. And, since anything can serve as a sign of anything else (a green triangle can mean food, sex, or an electric shock to the laboratory rat), the reactions of the organism are emancipated from the limitations that stage one imposes upon living things, namely, the intrinsic properties of things. The possibility of obtaining life-sustaining things and of avoiding life-destroying things is thus much enhanced, and the security and continuity of life are correspondingly increased. But in stage two the organism still plays a subordinate role to the external world; it does not and cannot determine the significance of the intermediary stimulus: the bark of a distant dog to the rabbit or the sound of the bell to Pavlov's dog. This meaning is determined by things and events in the external world (or in the laboratory by the experimenter). In stages one and two, therefore, the organism is at the mercy of the external world in this respect.

In the third stage the element of control over environment is introduced. The ape who obtains food by means of a stick (tool) is not subordinate to his situation. He does not merely undergo a situation; he dominates it. His behaviour is not determined by the juxtaposition of things and events; on the contrary, the juxtaposition is determined by the ape. He is confronted with alternatives, and he makes choices. The configuration of behaviour in stage three is constructed within the dynamic organism of the ape and then imposed upon the external world.

The evolution of mind is a cumulative process; the achievements of each stage are carried on into the succeeding one or ones. The fourth stage reintroduces the factor of nonintrinsic meanings to the advances made in stages two and three. Stage four is the stage of symboling, of articulate speech. Thus, one observes two aspects of the evolution of mind, both of which contribute to the security and survivability of life: the emancipation of behaviour from limitations imposed upon it by the external world and increased control over the environment. To be sure, neither emancipation nor control becomes complete, but quantitative increase is significant.

Evolution of culture

The direction of biologic evolution toward greater expansion and security of life can be seen from another point of view: the advance from instinctive behaviour (i.e., responses determined by intrinsic properties of the organism) to learned and freely variable behaviour, patterns of which may be acquired and transmitted from one individual and generation to another, and finally to a system of things and events, the essence of which is meanings that cannot be comprehended by the senses alone. This system is, of course, culture, and the species is the human species. Culture is a man-made environment, brought into existence by the ability to symbol.

Once established, culture has a life of its own, so to speak; that is, it is a continuum of things and events in a cause and effect relationship; it flows down through time from one generation to another. Since its inception 1,000,000 or more years ago, this culture—with its language, beliefs, tools, codes, and so on—has had an existence external to each individual born into it. The function of this external, man-made environment is to make life secure and enduring for the society of human beings living within the cultural system. Thus, culture may be seen as the most recent, the most highly developed means of promoting the security and continuity of life, in a series that began with the simple reflex.

Society preceded culture; society, conceived as the interaction of living beings, is coextensive with life itself. Man's immediate prehuman ancestors had societies, but they did not have culture. Studies of monkeys and apes have greatly enlarged scientific knowledge of their social life—and, by inference, the scientific conception of the earliest human societies. Data derived from paleontological sources and from accumulating studies of living, nonhuman primates are now fairly abundant, and hypotheses derived from these are numerous and varied in detail. A fair summary of them may be made as follows: The growth of the primate brain was stimulated by life in the trees, specifically, by eye-hand coordinations involved in swinging from limb to limb and by manipulating food with the hands (as among the insectivorous lemurs). Descent to the ground, as a consequence of deforestation or increase in body size (which would tend to restrict arboreal locomotion and increase the difficulty of obtaining enough food to supply increased need), and the assumption of erect posture were other significant steps in biologic evolution and the eventual emergence of culture. Some theories reject the arboreal stage in man's evolutionary past, but this does not seriously affect the overall conception of his development.

The Australopithecines of Africa, extinct manlike higher primates about which reliable knowledge is very considerable today, exemplify the stage of erect posture in primate evolution. Erect posture freed the arms and hands from their earlier function of locomotion and made possible an extensive and versatile use of tools. Again, the eye-hand-object coordinations involved in tool using stimulated the growth of the brain, especially the forebrain. It is not possible to determine on the basis of paleontological evidence the precise point at which the ability to symbol (specifically, articulate speech) was realized, as expressed in overt behaviour. It is believed by some that man's prehuman ancestors used tools habitually and that habit became custom through the transmission of tool using from one generation to another long before articulate speech came into being. In fact, some theorists hold, the customary use of tools became a powerful stimulus in the development of a brain that was capable of symboling or articulate speech.

The introjection of symboling into primate social life was revolutionary. Everything was transformed, everything acquired new meaning; the symbol added a new dimension to primate—now human—existence. An axe was no longer merely a tool with which to chop; it could become a symbol of authority. Mating became marriage, and all social relationships between parents and children and brothers and sisters became moral obligations, duties, rights, and privileges. The world of nature, from the stones beside the path to the stars in their courses, became alive and conscious spirits. “And all that I beheld respired with inward meaning” (Wordsworth). The anthropoid had at last become a man.

Relativist approaches to sociocultural systems

Thus far in this article, culture has been considered in general, as the possession of all mankind. Now it is appropriate to turn to particular cultures, or sociocultural systems. Human beings, like other animal species, live in societies, and each society possesses culture. It has long been customary for ethnologists to speak of Seneca culture, Eskimo culture, North American Plains culture, and so on—that is, the culture of a particular society (Seneca) or an indefinite number of societies (Eskimo) or the cultures found in or characteristic of a topographic area (the North American Plains). There is no objection to this usage as a convenient means of reference: “Seneca culture” is the culture that the Seneca tribe possesses at a particular time. Similarly, Eskimo culture refers to a class of cultures, and Plains culture refers to a type of culture. What is needed is a term that defines culture precisely in its particular manifestations for the purpose of scientific study, and for this the term sociocultural system has been proposed. It is defined as the culture possessed by a distinguishable and autonomous group (society) of human beings, such as a tribe or a modern nation. Cultural elements may pass freely from one system to another (cultural diffusion), but the boundary provided by the distinction between one system and another (Seneca, Cayuga; United States, Japan) makes it possible to study the system at any given time or over a period of time.

Every human society, therefore, has its own sociocultural system: a particular and unique expression of human culture as a whole. Every sociocultural system possesses the components of human culture as a whole—namely, technological, sociological, and ideological elements. But sociocultural systems vary widely in their structure and organization. These variations are attributable to differences among physical habitats and the resources that they offer or withhold for human use; to the range of possibilities inherent in various areas of activity, such as language or the manufacture and use of tools; and to the degree of development. The biologic factor of man may, for purposes of analysis and comparison of sociocultural systems, be considered as a constant. Although the equality or inequality of races, or physical types, of mankind has not been established by science, all evidence and reason lead to the conclusion that, whatever differences of native endowment may exist, they are insignificant as compared with the overriding influence of the external tradition that is culture.

Culture and personality

Since the infant of the human species enters the world cultureless, his behaviour—his attitudes, values, ideals, and beliefs, as well as his overt motor activity—is powerfully influenced by the culture that surrounds him on all sides. It is almost impossible to exaggerate the power and influence of culture upon the human animal. It is powerful enough to hold the sex urge in check and achieve premarital chastity and even voluntary vows of celibacy for life. It can cause a person to die of hunger, though nourishment is available, because some foods are branded unclean by the culture. And it can cause a person to disembowel or shoot himself to wipe out a stain of dishonour. Culture is stronger than life and stronger than death. Among subhuman animals, death is merely the cessation of the vital processes of metabolism, respiration, and so on. In the human species, however, death is also a concept; only man knows death. But culture triumphs over death and offers man eternal life. Thus, culture may deny satisfactions on the one hand while it fulfills desires on the other.

The predominant emphasis, perhaps, in studies of culture and personality has been the inquiry into the process by which the individual personality is formed as it develops under the influence of its cultural milieu. But the individual biologic organism is itself a significant determinant in the development of personality. The mature personality is, therefore, a function of both biologic and cultural factors, and it is virtually impossible to distinguish these factors from each other and to evaluate the magnitude of each in particular cases. If the cultural factor were a constant, personality would vary with the variations of the neurosensory-glandular-muscular structure of the individual. But there are no tests that can indicate, for example, precisely how much of the taxicab driver's ability to make change is due to innate endowment and how much to cultural experience. Therefore, the student of culture and personality is driven to work with "modal personalities," that is, the personality of the typical Crow Indian or the typical Frenchman insofar as this can be determined. But it is of interest, theoretically at least, to note that even if both factors, the biologic and the cultural, were constant—which they never are in actuality—variations of personality would still be possible. Within the confines of these two constants, individuals might undergo a number of profound experiences in different chronological permutations. For example, two young women might have the same experiences of (1) having a baby, (2) graduating from college, and (3) getting married. But the effect of sequence (1), (2), (3) upon personality development would be quite different than that of sequence (2), (3), (1).

Cultural comparisons

Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism is the name given to a tendency to interpret or evaluate other cultures in terms of one's own. This tendency has been, perhaps, more prevalent in modern nations than among preliterate tribes. The citizens of a large nation, especially in the past, have been less likely to observe people in another nation or culture than have been members of small tribes who are well acquainted with the ways of their culturally diverse neighbours. Thus, the American tourist could report that Londoners drive "on the wrong side of the street" or an Englishman might find some customs on the Continent "queer" or "boorish," merely because they are different. Members of a Pueblo tribe in the American Southwest, on the other hand, might be well acquainted with cultural differences not only among other Pueblos but also in non-Pueblo tribes such as the Navajo and Apache.

Ethnocentrism became prominent among many Europeans after the discovery of the Americas, the islands of the Pacific, and the Far East. Even anthropologists might characterize all preliterate peoples as being without religion (as did Sir John Lubbock) or as having a "prelogical mentality" (as did Lucien Lévy-Bruhl) merely because their ways of thinking did not correspond with those of the culture of western Europe. Thus, inhabitants of non-Western cultures, particularly those lacking the art of writing, were widely described as being immoral, illogical, queer, or just perverse ("Ye Beastly Devices of ye Heathen").

Cultural relativism

Increased knowledge led to or facilitated a deeper understanding and, with it, a finer appreciation of cultures quite different from one's own. When it was understood that universal needs could be served with culturally diverse means, that worship might assume a variety of forms, that morality consists in conforming to ethical rules of conduct but does not inhere in the rules themselves, a new view emerged that each culture should be understood and appreciated in terms of itself. What is moral in one culture might be immoral or ethically neutral in another. For example, it was not immoral to kill a baby girl at birth or an aged grandparent who was nonproductive when it was impossible to obtain enough food for all; or wife lending among the Eskimo might be practiced as a gesture of hospitality, a way of cementing a friendship and promoting mutual aid in a harsh and dangerous environment, and thus may acquire the status of a high moral value.

The view that elements of a culture are to be understood and judged in terms of their relationship to the culture as a whole—a doctrine known as cultural relativism—led to the conclusion that the cultures themselves could not be evaluated or graded as higher and lower, superior or inferior. If it was unwarranted to say that patriliney (descent through the male line) was superior or inferior to matriliney (descent through the female line), if it was unjustified or meaningless to say that monogamy was better or worse than polygamy, then it was equally unsound or meaningless to say that one culture was higher or superior to another. A large number of anthropologists subscribed to this view; they argued that such judgments were subjective and therefore unscientific.

It is, of course, true that some values are imponderable and some criteria are subjective. Are people in modern Western culture happier than the Aborigines of Australia? Is it better to be a child than an adult, alive than dead? These certainly are not questions for science. But to say that the culture of the ancient Mayas was not superior to or more highly developed than the crude and simple culture of the Tasmanians or to say that the culture of England in 1966 was not higher than England's culture in 1066 is to fly in the face of science as well as of common sense.

Evaluative grading

Cultures have ponderable values as well as imponderable, and the imponderable ones can be measured with objective, meaningful yardsticks. A culture is a means to an end: the security and continuity of life. Some kinds of culture are better means of making life secure than others. Agriculture is a better means of providing food than hunting and gathering. The productivity of human labour has been increased by machinery and by the utilization of the energy of nonhuman animals, water and wind power, and fossil fuels. Some cultures have more effective means of coping with disease than others, and this superiority is expressed mathematically in death rates. And there are many other ways in which meaningful differences can be measured and evaluations made. Thus, the proposition that cultures have ponderable values that can be measured meaningfully by objective yardsticks and arranged in a series of stages, higher and lower, is substantiated. But, it should be noted, this is not equivalent to saying that man is happier or that the dignity of the individual (an imponderable) is greater in an industrialized or agricultural sociocultural system than in one supported by human labour alone and sustained wholly by wild foods.

Actually, however, there is no necessary conflict between the doctrine of cultural relativism and the thesis that cultures can be objectively graded in a scientific manner. It is one thing to reject the statement that monogamy is better than polygamy and quite another to deny that one kind of sociocultural system contains a better means of providing food or combating disease than another.

Cultural adaptation and change

Ecological or environmental change

Every sociocultural system exists in a natural habitat, and, of course, this environment exerts an influence upon the cultural system. The cultures of some Eskimo groups present remarkable instances of adaptation to environmental conditions: tailored fur clothing, snow goggles, boats and harpoons for hunting sea mammals, and, in some instances, hemispherical snow houses, or igloos. Some sedentary, horticultural tribes of the upper Missouri River went out into the Great Plains and became nomadic hunters after the introduction of the horse. The culture of the Navajos underwent profound change after they acquired herds of sheep and a market for their rugs was developed. The older theories of simple environmentalism, some of which maintained that even styles of myths and tales were determined by topography, climate, flora, and other factors, are no longer in vogue. The present view is that the environment permits, at times encourages, and also prohibits the acquisition or use of certain cultural traits but otherwise does not determine culture change. The Fuegians living at the southern tip of South America, as viewed by Charles Darwin on his voyage on the *Beagle*, lived in a very cold, harsh environment but were virtually without both clothing and dwellings.

Diffusion

“Culture is contagious,” as a prominent anthropologist once remarked, meaning that customs, beliefs, tools, techniques, folktales, ornaments, and so on may diffuse from one people or region to another. To be sure, a culture trait must offer some advantage, some utility or pleasure, to be sought and accepted by a people. (Some anthropologists have assumed that basic features of social structure, such as clan organization, may diffuse, but a sounder view holds that these features involving the organic structure of the society must be developed within societies themselves.) The degree of isolation of a sociocultural system—brought about by physical barriers such as deserts, mountain ranges, and bodies of water—has, of course, an important bearing upon the ease or difficulty of diffusion. Within the limits of desirability on the one hand and the possibility of communication on the other, diffusion of culture has taken place everywhere and in all times. Archaeological evidence shows that amber from the Baltic region diffused to the Mediterranean coast; and, conversely, early coins from the Middle East found their way to northern Europe. In aboriginal North America, copper objects from northern Michigan have been found in mounds in Georgia; macaw feathers from Central America turn up in archaeological sites in northern Arizona. Some Indian tribes in northwestern regions of the United States had possessed horses, originally brought into the Southwest by Spanish explorers, years before they had ever even seen white men. The wide dispersion of tobacco, corn (maize), coffee, the sweet potato, and many other traits are conspicuous examples of cultural diffusion.

Acculturation

Diffusion may take place between tribes or nations that are approximately equal in political and military power and of equivalent stages of cultural development, such as the spread of the sun dance among the Plains tribes of North America. But in other instances, it takes place between sociocultural systems differing widely in this respect. Conspicuous examples of this have been instances of conquest and colonization of various regions by the nations of modern Europe. In these cases it is often said that the culture of the more highly developed nation is “imposed” upon the less developed peoples and cultures, and there is, of course, much truth in this; the acquisition of foreign culture by the subject people is called acculturation and is manifested by the indigenous populations of Latin America as well as of other regions. But even in cases of conquest, traits from the conquered peoples may diffuse to those of the more

advanced cultures; examples might include, in addition to the cultivated plants cited above, individual words (coyote), musical themes, games, and art motifs.

One of the major problems of ethnology during the latter half of the 19th and the early decades of the 20th centuries was the question “How are cultural similarities in noncontiguous regions to be explained?” Did the concepts of pyramid building, mummification, and sun worship originate independently in ancient Egypt and in the Andean highlands and in Yucatán or did these traits originate in Egypt and diffuse from there to the Americas, as some anthropologists have believed? Some schools of ethnological theory have held to one view, some, to another. The 19th-century classical evolutionists (which included Edward Burnett Tylor and Lewis H. Morgan, among others) held that the mind of man is so constituted or endowed that he will develop cultures everywhere along the same lines. “Diffusionists”—those, such as Fritz Graebner and Elliot Smith, who offered grand theories about the diffusion of traits all over the world—maintained that man was inherently uninventive and that culture, once created, tended to spread everywhere. Each school tended to insist that its view was the correct one, and it would continue to hold that view unless definite proof of the contrary could be adduced.

The tendency nowadays is not to side categorically with one school as against another but to decide each case on its own merits. The consensus with regard to pyramids is that they were developed independently in Egypt and the Americas because they differ markedly in structure and function: the Egyptian pyramids were built of stone blocks and contained tombs within their interiors. The American pyramids were constructed of earth, then faced with stone, and they served as the bases of temples. The verdict with regard to the bow and arrow is that it was invented only once and subsequently diffused to all regions where it has been found. The probable antiquity of the origin of fire making, however, and the various ways of generating it—by percussion, friction, compression (fire pistons)—indicate multiple origins.

Evolution

Evolution of culture—that is, the development of forms through time—has taken place. No amount of diffusion of picture writing could of itself, for instance, produce the alphabetic system of writing; as Tylor demonstrated so well, the art of writing has developed through a series of stages, which began with picture writing, progressed to hieroglyphic writing, and culminated in alphabetic writing. In the realm of social organization there was a development from territorial groups composed of families to segmented societies (clans and larger groupings). Sociocultural evolution, like biologic evolution, exhibits a progressive differentiation of structure and specialization of function.

A misunderstanding has arisen with regard to the relationship between evolution and diffusion. It has been argued, for example, that the theory of cultural evolution was unsound because some peoples skipped a stage in a supposedly determined sequence; for example, some African tribes, as a consequence of diffusion, went from the Stone Age to the Iron Age without an intermediate age of copper and bronze. But the classical evolutionists did not maintain that peoples, or societies, had to pass through a fixed series of stages in the course of development, but that tools, techniques, institutions—in short, culture—had to pass through the stages. The sequence of stages of writing did not mean that a society could not acquire the alphabet without working its way through hieroglyphic writing; it was obvious that many peoples did skip directly to the alphabet.

Approaches to the study of culture

Viewing culture in terms of patterns and configurations

Cultural traits

The concept of culture embraces the culture of mankind as a whole. An understanding of human culture is facilitated, however, by analyzing “the complex whole” into component parts or categories. In somewhat the same sense that the atom has been regarded as the unit of matter, the cell as the unit of life, so the culture trait is generally regarded as the unit of culture. A trait may be an object (knife), a way of doing something (weaving), a belief (in spirits), or an attitude (the so-called horror of incest). But, within the category of culture, each trait is related to other traits. A distinguishable and relatively self-contained cluster of traits is conventionally called a culture complex. The association of traits in a complex may be of a functional and mechanical nature, such as horse, saddle, bridle, quirt, and the like, or it may lie in conceptual or emotional associations, such as the acts and attitudes involved in seclusion in a menstrual hut or retrieving a heart that has been stolen by witches.

Cultural areas

The relationship between an actual culture and its habitat is always an intimate one, and therefore one finds a more or less close correlation between kind of habitat and type of culture. This results in the concept of culture area. This conception goes back at least as far as the early 19th century, but it was first brought into prominence by the U.S. anthropologist Clark Wissler in *The American Indian* (1917) and *Man and Culture* (1923). He divided the Indian cultures (as they were in the latter half of the 19th century) into geographic cultural regions: the Caribou area of northern Canada; the Northwest coast, characterized by the use of salmon and cedar; the Great Plains, where tribes hunted bison with the horse; the Pueblo area of the Southwest; and so on. Others later distinguished culture areas in other continents.

Cultural types

Appreciation of the relationship between culture and topographic area suggests the concept of culture type, such as hunting and gathering or a special way of hunting—for example, the use of the horse in bison hunting in the Plains or the method of hunting of sea mammals among the Eskimo; pastoral cultures centred upon sheep, cattle, reindeer, and so on; and horticulture (with digging stick and hoe) and agriculture (with ox-drawn plow). Less common are trading cultures such as are found in Melanesia or specialized production of some object for trade, such as pottery, bronze axes, or salt, as was the case in Luzon.

Configuration and pattern, especially the latter, are concepts closely related to culture area and culture type. All of them have one thing in common; they view culture not in terms of its individual components, or traits, but as meaningful organizations of traits: areas, occupations, configurations (art, mathematics, physics), or patterns (in which psychological factors are the bases of organization). Clark Wissler's "universal culture pattern" was a recognition of the fact that all particular and actual cultures possess the same general categories: language, art, social organization, religion, technology, and so on.

Viewing culture in terms of institutional structure and functions

Social organization

A sociocultural system presents itself under two aspects: structure and function. As culture evolves, sociocultural systems (like biologic systems) become more differentiated structurally and more specialized functionally, proceeding from the simple to the complex. Systems on the lowest stage of development have only two significant kinds of parts: the local territorial group and the family. There is a corresponding minimum of specialization, limited, with but few exceptions, to division of function, or labour, along sex lines and to division between children and adults. The exceptions are headmen and shamans; they are special organs, so to speak, in the body politic. The headman is a mechanism of social integration, direction, and control, expressing, however, the consensus of the band. The shaman, though a self-appointed priest or magician, is also an instrument of society; he may be regarded as the first specialist in the history of human society.

All human societies are divided into classes and segments. Class is defined as one of an indefinite number of groupings each of which differs in composition from the other or others, such as men and women; married, widowed, and divorced; children and adults. Segment is defined as one of an indefinite number of groupings all of which are alike in structure and function: families, lineages, clans, and so on. On more advanced levels of development there are occupational classes, such as farmers, pastoralists, artisans, metalworkers, and scribes, and territorial segments, such as wards, barrios, counties, and states.

Segmentation is a cultural process essential to the evolution of culture; it is a means of increasing the size of a society or a grouping within a sociocultural system (such as an army) and therefore of increasing its power to make life secure, without suffering a corresponding loss of effectiveness through diminished solidarity; segmentation is a means of maintaining solidarity at the same time that it enlarges the social grouping. A tribe could not increase in size beyond a certain point without resorting to segmentation: the formation of lineages, clans, and the like. The word clannish points to one of the functions of segments in general: the fostering of solidarity. Tribes become segments in confederacies; and above the tribal level, the evolution of civil society employs barrios, demes, counties, and states in its process of segmentation. In present-day society, the army and the church offer illuminating examples of increased size and sustained solidarity proceeding hand in hand.

Economic systems

Division of labour along occupational lines is rare, although not wholly lacking, in preliterate societies—despite a widespread notion that one member of a tribe specializes in making arrows, which he exchanges for moccasins made by another specialist. Occupational groupings were virtually lacking in all cultural systems of aboriginal North America, for example. Guilds of metalworkers are found in some African tribes and specialists in canoe making and tattooing existed in Polynesia. But it is not until the transition from preliterate society, based upon ties of kinship, to civil society, based upon property relations and territorial distinctions (the state), that division of labour along occupational lines becomes extensive. On this level there are found many kinds of specialists: metalworkers, scribes, astrologers, soldiers, dancers, musicians, alchemists, prostitutes, eunuchs, and so forth.

Production of goods is everywhere followed by distribution and exchange. Among the Kurnai of Australia, for example, game was divided and distributed as follows: the hunter who killed a wallaby, for example, kept the head; his father received the ribs on the right side, his mother the ribs on the left side, plus the backbone, and so on; the various parts of the animal went to various classes of relatives in accordance with fixed, traditional rules.

Distribution along kinship lines constitutes a system of circulation and exchange within the tribe as a whole, for everyone is a relative of everyone else. It takes the form of bestowing gifts to relatives on all sorts of occasions—such as birth, initiation, marriage, death. In some cases there is an exchange of goods on the spot, but more often A gives something to B who gives A a gift at a later date. All this takes place in the network of rights and obligations among kindred; one has both an obligation to give and a right to receive on certain occasions and in certain contexts. The whole process is one of mutual aid and cooperation.

The consequence of this form of distribution and exchange is that the recipient receives kinds of things that he already has; each household has the same kinds of foods, utensils, ornaments, and other things that every other household has. Why, then, it might be asked, does this form of exchange take place? Two reasons may be distinguished. First, this kind of exchange fortifies ties of kinship and mutual aid—as neighbourhood exchange among households in modern American culture initiates friendships that in times of need constitute mutual aid. Second, this system of circulation of goods is in effect a system of social security: a household in need, due to illness or accident, receives help from the community (“No household can starve as long as others have corn,” as the Iroquois put it). Here we have an economic system subordinated to the welfare of the society as a whole.

Exchange or circulation of goods and services (a basket is the material form of “a service,” that is, human labour) must, of course, take place in sociocultural systems where division of labour finds expression in specialization: the ironworker must obtain food; the horticulturalist needs an iron hoe.

Exchange of goods between sociocultural systems is universal and takes place on the lowest level of cultural development. In some instances it is the only form of nonhostile communication: in the so-called silent trade the actual exchange takes place in a neutral zone without the presence of the participating parties. Archaeological evidence shows that intergroup exchange occurred in remote times and over great distances, as already noted above in the discussion of diffusion.

An interesting form of the circulation of goods—usually referred to as redistribution—occurs among more highly developed tribes. The head of the sociopolitical system, that is, the chief or priest-chief, imposes levies upon all households, thus acquiring a large amount of goods—food, utensils, art objects, and so on—which he then redistributes to the households of the tribe. This may take the form and occasion of ceremonies and feasts or distribution may be made in cases of need. This widespread and interesting form of redistribution serves the same ends as those served by distribution as a function of the kinship system, namely, fostering solidarity and social security—an equitable distribution that tends to iron out inequalities among households.

Some economic concepts in modern Western culture do not correspond closely with conceptions and customs in many preliterate societies. Ownership is a case in point. Complete possession of and exclusive right to use something in an economic context, such as land, a dwelling, or a boat, is rare, if not wholly lacking, in preliterate societies (although one might have exclusive rights to a dream, spell, or charm). In general, one has merely the right to use or occupy a tract of land or a house; when its use has terminated, anyone can take it over. In some societies it might be said that a boat “belonged” to the men who made it or even to the individual who initiated its construction. But anyone else in the community would have the right to use it when the “owners” (the men who made it) were not using it. It is the right to use, rather than exclusive and absolute possession, that is significant; there is no such thing as absentee ownership in primitive society.

A band or tribe “holds” the land it occupies; here again, it is tenure rather than ownership that is significant; the land “belongs” to Nature, or Mother Earth; people merely hold and use it. There is usually an intimate relationship between the people and “their” land. Navajo Indians fell on their knees and kissed the earth when they were returned to their former territory after forcible detention in an alien land. Land is defended against outsiders, except when they are accepted as guests, but the significant thing is not that the outsiders do not own the land but that they pose a threat to those who occupy it.

In some tribes there is a distinct conception that the land held “belongs” to the tribe, the chief of which allots plots or tracts to individuals or households for their use. But when use terminates, the land reverts to the tribal domain.

During the latter part of the 19th century there was considerable discussion of “primitive communism.” This doctrine came to be interpreted as meaning that private property, the private right to hold or use, was nonexistent in primitive society. It was extended also to communism in wives and children in some tribes; this was interpreted to be a vestige of a former stage of “primordial promiscuity.” Many ethnologists, however, launched a vigorous attack upon “the doctrine of primitive communism.” Some of the conceptions of earlier anthropologists—such as group marriage—were shown to be unwarranted in the light of later research.

Today, with these polemics well in the past, the situation with regard to property rights in tribal societies may be summarized as follows. Tenure and use, rather than ownership in fee simple, were the significant concepts and practices. Private, or personal, possession of goods and use of land were recognized. But possession and right were qualified by the rights and obligations of kinship: one had an obligation both to give and to receive within the body of kindred, according to specific rules. In a de facto sense, things belonged to the body of kindred; rights of possession and use were regulated by customs of kinship. In some cultures a borrower was not obliged to return an object borrowed, on the theory that if a person could afford to lend something, he relinquished his right to its possession. The mode of life in preliterate society, based upon kinship and functioning in accordance with the principles of cooperation and mutual aid, did indeed justify the adjective communal; it was the noun communism that was resented—if not feared—because of its Marxist connotation.

One of the most important, as well as characteristic, features of the economic life of preliterate societies, as contrasted with modern civilizations, is this: no individual and no class or group in tribal society was denied access to the resources of nature; all were free to exploit them. This is, of course, in sharp contrast to civil society in which private ownership by some, or a class, is the means of excluding others—slaves, serfs, a proletariat—from the exploitation and enjoyment of the resources of nature. It is this freedom of access, the freedom to exploit and to enjoy the resources of nature, that has given primitive society its characteristics of freedom and equality. And, being based upon kinship ties, it had fraternity as well.

Education

In the human species individuals are equipped with fewer instincts than is the case in many nonhuman species. And, as already noted, they are born cultureless. Therefore an infant *Homo sapiens* must learn a very great deal and acquire a vast number of conditioned reflexes and habit patterns in order to live effectively, not only in society but in a particular kind of sociocultural system, be it Tibetan, Eskimo, or French. This process, taken as a whole, is called socialization (occasionally, enculturation)—the making of a social being out of one that was at birth wholly individualistic and egoistic.

Education in its broadest sense may properly be regarded as the process by which the culture of a sociocultural system is impressed or imposed upon the plastic, receptive infant. It is this process that makes continuity of culture possible. Education, formal and informal, is the specific means of socialization. By informal education is meant the way a child learns to adapt his behaviour to that of others, to be like others, to become a member of a group. By formal education is meant the intentional and more or less systematic effort to affect the behaviour of others by transmitting elements of culture to them, be it knowledge or belief, patterns of behaviour, or ideals and values. These attempts may be overt or covert. The teacher may make his purpose apparent, even emphatic, to the learner. But much education is effected in an unobtrusive way, without teacher or learner being aware that culture is being transmitted. Thus, in myths and tales, certain characters are presented as heroes or villains; certain traits are extolled, others are deplored or denounced. The impressionable child acquires ideals and values, an image of the good or the bad.

The growing child is immersed in the fountain of informal education constantly; the formal education tends to be periodic. Many sociocultural systems distinguish rather sharply a series of stages in the education and development of full-fledged men and women. First there is infancy, during which perhaps the most profound and enduring influences of a person's life are brought to bear. Weaning ushers in a new stage, that of childhood, during which boys and girls become distinguished from each other. Puberty rites transform children into men and women. These rites vary enormously in emphasis and content. Sometimes they include whipping, isolation, scarification, or circumcision. Very often the ritual is accompanied by explicit instruction in the mythology and lore of the tribe and in ethical codes. Such rituals as confirmation and Bar Mitzvah in modern Western culture belong to the category of puberty rites.

With marriage come instruction and admonition, appropriate to the occasion, from elder relatives and, in more advanced cultures, from priests. In some sociocultural systems men may become members of associations or sodalities: men's clubs, warrior societies, secret societies of magic or medicine. In some cases it is said that in passing through initiation rites a person is "born again." Women also may belong to sodalities, and in some instances they may become members of secret, magical societies along with men.

Religion and belief

Man's oldest philosophy is animism, the doctrine that everything is alive and possesses mental faculties like those possessed by man: desire, will, purpose, anger, love, and the like. This philosophy results from man's projection of his own self, his psyche, into other things and beings, inanimate and living, without being aware of this projection. "To the Omaha," wrote anthropologist Alice Fletcher,

nothing is without life: . . . He projects his own consciousness upon all things and ascribes to them experiences and characteristics with which he is familiar; . . . akin to his own conscious being.

("Wakonda," in F.W. Hodge [ed.], *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico*)

"A belief in spirits is," according to Edward Burnett Tylor, "the minimum definition of religion." Some later students, however, made the same claim for a belief in impersonal, supernatural power, or mana (manitou, orenda, and so on). In any case, these two elements of religion are virtually worldwide and undoubtedly represent a very early stage in the development of religion. In some cultures spirits are virtually innumerable, but, in the course of time, the more important spirits become gods. Thus, there has been a tendency toward monotheism in the history of religion. The German Roman Catholic priest and anthropologist Father Wilhelm Schmidt argued not only that some primitive peoples believe in a Supreme Being but that monotheism was characteristic of the earliest and simplest cultures. Schmidt's thesis, however, has been severely criticized by other ethnologists. Also, as Tylor pointed out many years ago, the Supreme Being of some very primitive peoples is an originator god, or a philosophical explanatory device, accountable only for the existence and structure of the world; after his work was completed, he had no further significance; he was not worshiped and played no part in the daily lives of the people.

In the past there was much discussion—and debate—about the difference between magic and religion. Both were deemed expressions of a belief in the supernatural. Some argued that religion was social (moral) whereas magic was antisocial (immoral). Another distinction was that magic was the use of supernatural power divorced from a spiritual being. The distinction between religion and magic was so beset with exceptions as to render most definitions of these terms logically imperfect. Another difficulty was the tacit assumption that different entities, religion and magic, exist per se, and therefore that "correct" definitions of them must exist also (Adam called the animal a horse because it was a horse). Much confusion and debate would have been obviated if it had been recognized (as it generally is now) that there is no such thing as a "correct" definition—all definitions are man-made and arbitrary—and that the problem is not what religion or magic are but what beliefs, events, and experiences one wishes to designate with the words religion and magic (see also magic).

Custom and law

Sociocultural systems, like other kinds of systems, must have means of self-regulation and control in order to persist and function. In human society these means are numerous and varied. The kinship organization specifies reciprocal and correlative rights, duties, and obligations of one class of relatives to another. Codes of ethics govern the relationship of the individual to the well-being of society as a whole. Codes of etiquette regulate class structure by requiring individuals to conform to their respective classes. Custom is a general term that embraces all these mechanisms of regulation and control and even more. Custom is the name given to uniformities in sociocultural systems. Uniformities are important because they make anticipation and prediction possible; without them, orderly conduct of social life would not be possible. Custom, therefore, is a means of social regulation and control, of effecting compliance with itself in order to render effective conduct of social life possible.

As in the case of religion and magic, much effort and debate have been spent in attempts to achieve a clean-cut distinction between custom and law. There is little or no difficulty when one is concerned with the extremes of the spectrum of social control. The way that a Hopi Indian holds his corn-husk cigarette in his hand is a matter of custom rather than law, as most ethnologists would probably agree. At the other extreme, a state edict prohibiting the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages is a law, not a custom. But in other situations the distinction is far from clear, and disagreement with regard to definitions arises. For example, in marriage the obligation to wed someone within a specified group or class (endogamy) or outside a group or class (exogamy) has been called both law and custom. Probably the most useful distinction between custom and law is the following. If an infraction of a social rule or deviation from a norm is punished merely by expressions of social disapproval, gossip, ridicule, or ostracism, the rule is called custom. If, however, infractions or violations are punished by an agency, designated by society and empowered to act on its behalf, then the rule is called a law. But even here there is difficulty. The same kind of offense may be punished by custom in one society, by law in another—as in, for example, adultery, incest, miscegenation, and black magic.

It is the ethnologist, rather than the historian, who is disturbed by instances of ambiguity with regard to custom and law; in preliterate societies the distinction between the two is not always clear. But in civil societies—that is, states brought into being by the agricultural revolution and their more recent successors—the distinction is usually sharper and more apparent, though instances of sumptuary laws that prohibit the wearing of silk or that limit the length of a garment merge law and custom or reinforce the latter by the former.

One need not be unduly disturbed by the difficulty of making sharp distinctions among sociocultural phenomena and of formulating definitions. The phenomena of culture, like those of the external world in general, are what they are, and if man-made concepts and words do not correspond closely with them, one may regret the lack of fit. But it is better to do this than to distort real phenomena by trying to force them into artificial concepts and definitions.

Leslie A. White

For a general account of man and culture, see William A. Haviland, *Cultural Anthropology*, 5th ed. (1987); Richard A. Barrett, *Culture and Conduct* (1984); Marc J. Swartz and David K. Jordan, *Culture: The Anthropological Perspective* (1980); and Elman R. Service, *Primitive Social Organization: An Evolutionary Perspective*, 2nd ed. (1971). The unique capacity for symbolizing that distinguishes humans from primates is discussed by Leslie A. White, "The Symbol: The Origin and Basis of Human Behavior," in his *Science of Culture*, 2nd ed., pp. 22–39 (1969); Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture* (1944, reprinted 1974); and Terence Dixon and Martin Lucas, *The Human Race* (1982). The many conceptions of culture are discussed in A.L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (1952, reprinted 1978). See also Leslie A. White and Beth Dillingham, *The Concept of Culture* (1973); and Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (1973, reissued 1975). The history of theory and method in social and cultural anthropology is traced in Fred W. Voget, *A History of Ethnology* (1975). Leslie A. White