research to include inquiry into all forms of human social interaction.

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Non-human primate culture

SIR,

In their article (*Man* (N.S.) **13**, 234–51), McGrew and Tutin seek to develop an operational definition that will make it possible to determine whether nonhuman primates have culture. They abstract six conditions from Kroeber (1928), namely: innovation, dissemination, standardisation, durability, diffusion, and tradition, and add two conditions—that the social behaviours should be non-subsistence and naturally adaptive (not the result of human intervention). It is not clear to us that the additions clarify the definition. However that may be, the authors conclude that, 'If any wild population of non-human beings could be shown to exhibit behaviours which satisfy all eight of these conditions it would seem hard not to grant them the status of cultural beings' (p. 247).

The early definitions of culture were designed to define an area for scientific investigation. That point is made particularly clearly by Lowie (1937: 1), 'By culture we understand the sum total of what an individual acquires from his society—those beliefs, customs, artistic norms, food-habits, and crafts which come to him not by his own creativity but as a legacy from the past, conveyed by formal or informal education.' The purpose of this kind of definition is to define a field for investigation by a positive listing of the behaviours that are of interest, and by stating, or implying, those activities that are not to be considered. The classic definition by Tylor has the same characteristics. It indicates interest in '. . . that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.' Biological topics such as locomotion, brain function, or manual skills are excluded. The point is not that the biology is not important in evolution, or in understanding certain behaviours of contemporary peoples, but that cultural phenomena are not reducible to biology. Or, to put the matter differently, the traditional study of culture (human customs) assumes that the biology of contemporary human populations is fundamentally the same, and that the differences in behaviour between populations are to be understood in terms of learning and history. Today it is easy to forget that freeing the study of social behaviours from nineteenth-century biology was a major intellectual achievement. The traditional definitions of culture should be seen as a part of the necessary intellectual foundation of social science.

The recent field studies of the social behaviour of the nonhuman primates show that learning is far more important than had previously been thought. The sharp division of behaviours into instinctive and learned categories is no longer useful, but biology is important in determining the behaviour of the nonhuman primates. For example, the social organisations of chimpanzees, gorillas, and orangutans are different, and the major differences appear to be biologically determined, modified by learning and local conditions. The interspecific comparisons of behaviour cannot be usefully compared using the human, cultural model. At best, it would apply only to the comparison of the learned behaviour of a single species, say gorillas, in different localities.

When human behaviour is compared to that of nonhuman primates, the comparisons are between different species, and biology cannot be ignored, any more than it can when comparing the behaviours of chimpanzees and baboons. The purpose of the traditional definitions of culture was to free the studies from biology and from precisely the kind of information that is necessary in making interspecific comparisons.

Human social behaviours depend on language (cognitive abilities and speech). The human brain is so constituted that human beings not only learn language with the greatest of ease, but such learning can only be prevented under the most extreme conditions. Human social behaviours depend on this ability to speak, and, although the cognitive differences between ape and man may be quantitative (humans having more of the same structures and abilities), speech is new, depending on large areas of the brain which cannot be demonstrated in any non-

human primates. Even if it becomes possible to show that the behaviours of some species of nonhuman primates show all eight of the conditions described as defining culture, if the animals cannot speak, their behaviours would not include the ability most important for human social behaviour. This can be seen by considering one of the six points abstracted from Kroeber—tradition. Examine the difference between a tradition based on observational learning in a small group of nonhuman primates and human traditions made possible by speech. The difference between human and nonhuman is lost by using the same word for human and nonhuman behaviour because speech makes possible a wealth of new meanings.

The same point might be made relative to the other postulated 'conditions of culture.' The behaviours of a speechless species are necessarily radically different from human behaviour, so even if all eight conditions were met, the behaviour of the species would not necessarily be at all similar to the social behaviour of human beings.

Anthropological definitions of cultures have assumed language as a given, since there are no groups of non-linguistic humans, and anthropology is 'the study of man.' Attempts to define 'culture' for nonhuman animals fail to heed this basic assumption, and this had led to trait listing such as the eight criteria set out by McGrew and Tutin. Such traits, when used by anthropologists, assume a language-using animal—man. It is through language that innovation, dissemination, standardisation, etc. occur. When such traits are listed by students of nonhuman animals, there is the assumption of a non-language-using animal. The difference is basic and is rooted in a difference in biology.

The purpose of this note is to call attention to the importance of language (cognition and speech) as the basic condition that makes possible human cultural behaviour, and to the necessity of considering biology when making interspecific behavioural comparisons. The human learning of language is made possible by evolutionarily new biology, and this major behavioural advance cannot be understood by formulations—such as culture—that omit biological considerations.

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Accuracy, tact and honesty

SIR,

May I comment on the Strathern–Hallpike controversy? Hallpike (*Man* (N.S.) **13**, 477) attributes, correctly it would seem, to Strathern (*Man* (N.S.) **13**, 156–7) the view that 'any negative evaluation of an indigenous people by their ethnographer is inherently false'. This view implies the acceptance of some form of relativism, but, most important, the acceptance of 'cognitive relativism'. This concept, also labelled simply 'relativism' has been explicated by Frankena (1961) as:

> the view that truth is relative and may vary from individual to individual, from group to group, or from time to time, having no objective standard.

This view involves the liar paradox. Vivas (1961: 53) asks:

> Could the relativist assert that all judgements are relative except this one?

The issue is not the possibility, validity, or meaningfulness of value-judgements concerning a culture based on external criteria, as what we are dealing with are cognitive assertions concerning a culture in respect of knowledge, technology, efficiency, co-ordination, adaptation, utility, etc. There is wide agreement that certain attributions to a society or culture are uncomplimentary. Investigators may thus come to be vilified. Maquet (1964, 47) points out:

> scientific studies, precisely because they are objective, are not likely to please everybody . . .

Advocacy of equal respect, and even reverence, for all cultures may well prove to be as great a threat to objectivity as are cultural pride and ethnocentric prejudice.

Writers on cultural relativism such as Benedict (1935), Herskovits (1948, 61 sqq.; 1973) and Bidney (1953) limited themselves to asserting the cultural mediation of experience, advocating cultural tolerance, pointing out the need to avoid culture-induced bias in social investigation, or asserting value relativism.

It was left to Winch to make the move to cognitive relativism. For Winch, 'forms of life' (the concept is left vague by Wittgenstein (1967)) are ultimate and cannot be criticised by some independent standard, because there