

CULTURE, KINSHIP AND HUNTING

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## INTRODUCTION

Culture means many things to many people. To some, it is an adaptive process. To others, culture is the end result of adaptive process. But to most, culture is a definition of human behavior (a guide for potential action).

But what led to culture?

To A. Irving Hallowell, culture rose from a combination of actions and adaptations he refers to as protoculture. Protoculture appears, judging from a brief review of existing literature, to be discussed very little (Cohen 1974 :152). Why is this? Perhaps this problem arises from a failure on the part of scholars dealing with this subject to fully understand all it is and implies? Therefore, what I will attempt to do in the following essay is briefly define protoculture and from this definition, advance some thoughts on what and how protoculture became culture (Hallowell 1974:163).

Before defining protoculture, however, let us define culture as a basis for comparison. The following definition is taken from the July, 1975 issue of Current Anthropology in an article by Morris Freilich in which he defines culture as:

"Culture, Kluchohn and Kelly (1945:97) long ago taught, is best described as 'historically created designs for living, explicit and implicit, rational and irrational, and non-rational, which exist at any given time as potential guides for behavior (masks, totems, tools, weapons, etc.), and not necessarily rational (adaptive, functional, efficient, effective).' Culture is a potential guide for action; its mother is history or time and its father is continuity or order (Freilich 1975:208)".

Thus, it would appear that culture is a process etched in time with the defining element being order.

But then, where do these elements, time and order, 'fit-in' when viewing the ascent of man to a total cultural milieu? A. Irving Hallowell feels these concepts of cultural definition (time and order), are found in what he describes as protoculture (Hallowell 1974:163-164). But just what is protoculture? The following is a summary of Hallowell's definition:

Protoculture, first of all, is a hypothesis of what may have existed before culture (Hallowell 1974:163). Therefore, taking into account the elements of time and order, and the fact that protoculture is a hypothesis, it becomes apparent that what we are discussing is not concrete, but abstract, a process of transformation, like fire, that played a role as intermediary, as man emerged from nature to culture.<sup>1</sup> Hallowell feels then that protoculture is a process of adaptation (ibid:162). This adaptation is based on group value transmission and the continuity of these values by means of selection for intelligence (ibid:164). To Hallowell man's mental ecology is based on:

1. Brain-intelligence development
2. Speech-communication abilities
3. Kinship-groups aware of social ties; consanguinity/affinity, collaterals/generationals (time and order), and marriage
4. And a fourth element I will add, hunting as a way of life

However, as Y. A. Cohen so aptly reminds us:

"It should be reiterated that the concept of man's inheritance of such capacities from his prehuman ancestors in no way suggests that homo inherited specific modes of behavior from his nonhuman forebears, any more than one man's kinship with another is an index of their similarity (Cohen 1974:162)."

Essentially then, kinship and a greater need for social organization in regard to intelligence and the capacity for learned behavior took primates from a state of nature, through

the process of transformation referred to as protoculture, to a state of culture. Man no longer was an animal.<sup>2</sup>

#### HUNTING AS CULTURE

"Neither man's architecture nor his culture alone embodies his adaptive and evolutionary potential; both are required, and there is constant feedback between the two. Man's physical equipment could not have developed to its present level without culture, nor could man have achieved his capacity for culture without his physical evolution. Culture enables man to maximize his physiological potentials and to adapt to a variety of habitational conditions; it provides man with the potential for freeing himself from the limitations of his biology and habitat. With every major advance in his cultural milieu, man has capitalized on and exploited his ability to adapt, and in these terms Homo sapiens is the most advanced living form (Cohen 1974:158)."

Thus, to Y. A. Cohen, the ground work for man's ascendance to culture is steeped in an ancestry that led him (man), from a "natural" life to a "cultural" life. But what part did hunting play in this transformation? This question and the role of kinship vis-a-vis protoculture as a process of transformation are the questions I shall examine in the concluding section of this essay. Along with this analysis, some comments on hunting as a sacred commitment shall be noted as well.

Such a picture of culture emerging from protoculture is a product of the human intelligence adapting to the physical environment, to band, clan and tribal organization, to the division of labor in hunting and gathering, to long life and delayed immaturity, to the hunting of megafauna, dangerous to approach, living in herds in the open habitat -- in short, to an environment and a way of life, a culture of hunting.

Culture, kinship, and a social way of life were shaped by

the rise from an ancestry, through protoculture, to a full cultural milieu surrounding hunting. As Hallowell remarks:

"It was terrestrial living that provided the ecological framework of this development and, when the necessary psychological capacities, experience, and technological traditions had been developed, enabled the hominids to accelerate the behavioral differences between themselves and other primates by exploiting the resources of their environment through knowledge of it and a succession of discoveries and inventions (Hallowell 1974:166)."

Thus, natural selection for hunting has directly created the most subtle and delicate aspects of the cultural behaviors alluded to above. Now to the aspects of kinship and hunting, proper.

The approach is simple, as E. B. Taylor remarked, "... the simple, practical alternative (is) between marrying-out or being killed-out (Tylor 1888)." Thus, the theory of exogamy is a starting point.

Our paleolithic hunting-and-gathering bands--patrilocal bands in all probability (Keesing 1974)--exchanged women in order to live at peace with each other. If it were made a firm rule that no man of the band must marry any woman of it -- or rather that each man should marry a woman of some other band, then each band would become dependent on the other bands for marriage partners. This would form bonds of alliance between the bands. They would enter into a connubium -- a system of marital exchanges. Thus, two categories of bands would be set up: those with whom we had a connubium, and those with whom we did not.

This theory of exogamy then, was part of the transformation (protoculture), that led to a cultural lifeway for man. In

other words, what comes out of this theory of exogamy is that the exogamic rule is a positive rule for regulating relations between descent groups by means of connubium. But one might ask why they could not have exchanged something else besides women? The answer to that may be fairly obvious, there was little else to exchange! These were hunters and gatherers, not merchants or traders; they had their weapons and their skills which were not exchangeable, and their women who were. The hunting-bands of males stuck together but one woman was very much like another -- her skills were transferable -- so it was she who was passed on in exchange for another.

We cannot of course know exactly why the earliest groups of men decided to exchange women, but we can perhaps see the consequences of their not doing so. Pre-human primate groups are obviously well-ordered internally (Jolly 1974) -- the dominance hierarchy sees to that; but relations between primate groups are either non-existent, unordered or plainly hostile (Jolly 1974). At the sub-human primate level, this does not matter much, but with the advent of man the organized predator, things changed. The weapon is to some extent the characteristic of man that noticeably changed this relation. Relations between non-weapon bearing bands of apes are bad enough (Jolly 1974), but with the advent of the hand-axe and club (among other weapons), and the large cunning brain that went with them, there must have been a danger that protohuman groups would rapidly extinguish each other. If they were to exploit the same area (habitat), then they had to come to some agreement: form some relationship other than the simply hostile relationship. Nature had already provided within the structure of primate bands, the ideas of sharing and cooperation;

the basic idea of reciprocity seen most often in the activity, among primates, of mutual grooming (Jolly 1974). This concept only needed to be extended across the band boundaries to provide for some form of inter-band cooperative relationship. In other words, you would not try to exterminate a band whose wives were your daughters and whose daughters were your potential wives; you would become, in one sense at least, one people; you would be dependent on each other for your continuity and survival.

All species which develop fighting instincts and efficient means of killing in the struggle for survival, have the problem of not using these means to wipe themselves out in intra-species warfare (Lorenze 1963). Nature develops many means to this end, and exogamy (kinship), was the human species' answer to the universal problem. In that it had survival value, it flourished. Larger and larger groups of cooperating hunting bands exploited larger and larger habitats, with little or no hostility toward others.

#### THE ECOLOGY OF HUNTING-GATHERING

Most of what we know of a true human ecology is of an empirical nature. In the past, faced with the vast complexity of human behavior, in a socio-biological sense, classifying and describing was the common approach. In fact, until a considerable amount of this work had occurred, it was impossible to erect a valid theoretical framework. It was not until the twentieth century that the basic laws of natural selection (evolution as process) and the accumulation of ecological facts became sufficient for the formulation of general hypotheses. However, it is now possible to state that man's present ecological dilemma is the direct result of alienating himself from the only way of life he

has ever known, hunting, in the only space he is conscious of, the habitat, and in his only time, the Pleistocene. Deprived of these defining features, man is not fully human.

What in effect is basic to this or any other discussion surrounding hunting as opposed to not hunting (the goal of domestication), is that one group exposes a position of interpretation of life-nature-human ecology as being man-centered. These are the agriculturalists; whereas, in the case of hunter-gatherers, life to them is not man-centered. Paul Shepard states in his introduction to the English translation of the monumental work, Meditations on Hunting, by the Spanish philosopher, Jose Ortega y Gasset:

"Comparative studies of many different primates suggest parallels to the prehuman situation of our evolution and the steps by which social, intellectual and even ethical traits came into existence in an ecological context associated with the human animal's niche and, more particularly, his place in the paleolithic food webs (Shepard 1972:12)."

We are gradually accepting our form and physiology as that of a long-distance running hunter. The process of evolution selecting for knowledge orally transmitted, and the development of the human memory as a connecting intermediary, transforming the time and space of the hunter as he moves through his habitat, fulfills the realization that reality is a continuum of persistent process and that knowledge, in whatever form, is made up of the same reality. This includes death as well as life. To hunters such cultural subtleties are revealed in the kill. The paradox being, that in the moment of death, life is perpetuated. From this point culture takes over. And as a process is both self-fulfilling and self-sustaining. It assumes the role of mediator between life and death.



Therefore, man-centered philosophies only produce ideologies which in effect are not only useless but for the most part, meaningless. Thus, as Ortega y Gasset states, "Man is an animal, but something more than an animal, too". Ortega notes that man is trying to become an animal. As Ortega remarks, "Man has never really known what an animal is." Defining then, ecology as the study of predator/prey relations in the food chain, it should be realized that man is only human when he hunts. And I would add, sanctifies the process of hunting by preparing and eating the animal he has killed.

Life not only becomes, but is sacred. Culture provides the vehicle through which this sacredness may be both realized and perpetuated. In this life then, is found all that is human. Paul Shepard states:

"The hunter's vision is itself a part of nature. His perception of the signs of passage and the signals of events is continuous with those events. His eye roves across a landscape which is itself living. The hunger in man lives an eventful life, a present, sound-filled pulse which collectively is the dynamic, oral, traditional society, where the poet is historian and men are bound in myth and music to a generous and religious existence (Shepard 1972:14)."

It is exactly this "generous" and "religious existence" that hunters profess is at the center of their universe. This life is sanctified in what I describe to be, 'a sacred commitment to hunting.'

#### CONCLUSION

Thus, man the cultural hunter became man the cultural creature. This was the direct result of the process of protoculture being selective for intelligence and the knowledge intelligence was capable of transmitting over the generations (vis-a-vis kinship).

In closing out this essay, a brief quote from Paul Shepard might be appropriate to our synthesis at this juncture:

"A view of man so humble in the scale of nature and so audacious in its challenge to the homocentrism of our traditional philosophy will not be easily accepted. Yet, like the idea of ecology -- indeed, as part of ecology -- it will in time reach out to all areas of concern and thought.

First, however, it must penetrate the husk of 5,000 years of 'civilized' (my own emphasis) fear and hostility toward nature in general and hunter-gatherers in particular. Only when our culture accepts the needs of living men as shaped by a prehistory which is still urgent in them, communicated to each by his chromosomes, will we be ready to follow the lead of Ortega's 'Meditations on Hunting' (Shepard 1972:15)."

Kinship then, as it was directed by hunting as the organizing principle of a cultural setting, took man from his pre-human state vis-a-vis the process of protoculture to a fully cultural way of life.

NOTES

1. As C. Levi-Strauss uses this dual contrast.
2. The use of the word "animal" is meant to relate to the more natural state of instincts, genetically transmitted in animals, than the culturally transmitted behaviors learned in man (Dobzhansky, in Hallowell 1974:171).

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