

metaphor and the point is lost. Drawing interestingly on Adam Smith, Boltanski goes on to model a moral society, to describe a politics of pity, based on the relationship between the sufferer and (moral) spectator, assuming that the interest of the latter in the former is disinterested. While the sufferer's condition does not directly affect the spectator, the spectator sympathizes with the sufferer. Each is able to understand the 'sensations' of the other. In fact, the spectator is not one but two, for the ordinary, impartial spectator is scrutinized by an ideal and internalized spectator, the spectator of one's own actions, a reflexive observer. He argues further that individuals abhor the realism of 'that's how it is' representations. That in the case of suffering, a flat, objective account is necessarily callous and will not do. All this makes sense up to a point. The problem is that it is often not at all clear whether he is describing the world as it is, or how it ought to be, whether this is true of every case or only of a certain though unspecified range of cases.

The second section is, for this reader, both the most difficult and the least useful. Here, Boltanski discusses, in very broad terms, the topics of denunciation, sentiment, and sentimentalism, each of which has provided a means of talking about the relationship between sufferer and distant spectator since the eighteenth century. There follows a thoughtful and complex discussion of the aesthetics of suffering in which he considers the writings of Sade, Nietzsche, their contemporary interpreters, and others. The final chapter in this section deals with the possibility of the heroization of sufferers.

Part 3, 'The crisis of pity', is very strong indeed. In these two final chapters, Boltanski introduces interesting examples and his writing has a more obvious and immediate relevance. He uncovers four uncertainties which may affect our response to different suffering as presented by the media. First, the question of evaluative belief – out of the vast ocean of sufferers which ones do we choose to dwell on? More importantly, who decides where our pitying gaze shall fall? Then there is the increasing problem of whether the distant suffering presented to us is real. To what extent, in any one case, are we considering not real but virtual suffering? Thirdly, to what extent is the spectator's altruism and disinterestedness authentic? Can we trust ourselves? Are there reasons why the spectator wants to see suffering on his TV screen? An unpleasant but necessary question. Finally, after the spectator has oriented themselves to act to bring an end to the suffering, how do they proceed? If the spectator's action is (as is likely) restricted to making public the distant suffering witnessed, how can they be sure that they will be acting on reality rather than merely on a media representation? These are

questions which might inform an anthropologist's work. All in all, this is a fascinating, frustrating, and sometimes infuriating book. Probably not one for first-year reading-lists.

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CRONK, LEE. *That complex whole: culture and the evolution of human behavior*. xvi, 160 pp., bibliogr. Boulder, Oxford: Westview Press, 1999

In this succinct, readable book, Lee Cronk seeks to reconcile contemporary behavioural ecology with cultural anthropology. He begins with E.B. Tylor's classic definition of culture – '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'. Cronk deletes 'habits' from this list. He requires a concept which – like the replicatory 'selfishness' central to the modern concept of a gene – explains behaviour while not forming part of it. Only culture defined as pure ideation can serve this function. Otherwise, behaviour is being explained by itself.

Cronk distances himself from the cruder versions of neo-Darwinian fundamentalism. 'The hubris of the sociobiologists of the 1970s', he writes (p. 49), 'was to suggest that they could absorb and even preempt the social sciences without first taking into account what really is special about human society and culture'. So what, for Cronk, is this special dimension? Cronk accepts that human culture is exceptional. Unfortunately, however, his definition limits culture to '*socially transmitted information*'. This defeats his own purpose, since he readily admits that many non-human species have 'culture' in this sense. Cronk does not distinguish human culture as 'symbolic'; neither 'symbols' nor 'symbolism' appear in his index. For that matter, speech itself – also missing from the index – is only cursorily touched on.

In asking how and why cultures evolve and diversify, Cronk invokes Richard Dawkins's idea of 'memes'. Cultural replicators on the model of 'genes', 'memes' may be reduced to combinations of neurochemicals and electrical charges in the brain. More familiarly, they are ideational entities – representations in people's heads – which replicate by utilizing brains as hosts. An implication is that humans participate in two quite separate levels of evolution – genetic and memic – whose precise relationship therefore needs specifying. Cronk attacks the idea that memic replicatory success necessarily tracks genetic success. There is no basis for the view that ideational culture defines what is biologically adaptive. Cronk prefers the 'parallel track' idea – culture may

lead people to do things which are maladaptive but that help cultural traits themselves to spread (p. 85). Memes are in such cases exploitative and harmful – replicating selfishly on the model of ‘viruses’.

Would we not then predict genes for resistance to memic infection? ‘Perhaps’, Cronk muses, ‘if cultural traits are sometimes like viruses, then, just as we have an immune system to fight off biological viruses, so should we also have one to fight off cultural ones. And we do: It’s called the brain’ (p. 86). An alert reader might recall that for Dawkins, it is precisely because the childlike human brain is so gullible – designed as it is to soak up the local culture – that memic replication is possible in the first place. Cronk conveniently overlooks this, seeing the brain by contrast as a ‘cultural immune system’, enlarged enormously in the human case to resist religious and other exploitative memes. So what – one might ask – would have happened had evolving humans never got beyond chimp-sized brains? On Cronk’s logic, we might infer that, lacking a cultural immune system, our primate ancestors would have been plagued by maladaptive religious and other memes. Cronk himself, however, inexplicably reverses this conclusion, surmising instead that, had cultural viruses been common during our evolutionary past, ‘we would be chimps, at best, and our culture would be rudimentary or nonexistent’ (p. 87).

Cultural replication theory would be of some interest if it could tell us *how* ‘memes’ succeed in redirecting behaviour so as to oppose the replicatory interests of genes. Cronk acknowledges that, unfortunately, this is where the whole ‘meme’ approach fails. According to the memeticists’s own logic, it is precisely those memes which are least relevant to behaviour – hence least likely to entail fitness costs – which are most likely to replicate: harmless memes simply avoid activating the ‘cultural immune system’. We are left with a theory not of consequential behaviour but of religious and other platitudes ‘more often ignored than observed’ (pp. 90–1). Anthropologists interested in what people actually do – and Cronk counts himself as one – must therefore look beyond memetics for an explanatory framework. Why, for example, do all recorded human societies expend effort in institutionalizing religious beliefs? Why do they have rituals, including rites of passage? Why do they recite poetry – with lines that take about three seconds to say? When a list of cultural universals is drawn up, says Cronk, we encounter a surprisingly homogeneous package. How is this to be explained?

In addition to an explanation based on biological constraints – most individuals, after all, are either male or female – Cronk offers historical determinism. Once a society has started down a particular path, it may be

unable to leave that trajectory by reversing direction or jumping to a non-adjacent point. While human imagination may conjure up infinite possibilities, it may be that only certain pathways through ethnographic hyperspace are actually possible. ‘A society’s current form’, comments Cronk (p. 27), ‘is obviously a product of the way it used to be, and it may be that history itself constrains culture’.

Forsaking Darwinism in this way, Cronk in the final analysis offers no more than a half-hearted appeal to cultural and historical theory. It is a fudge which epitomizes the whole book. Lacking any big idea – and in particular, lacking a consistently Darwinian theory capable of accounting for the evolution of symbolic culture – the author can only urge mutual tolerance and greater understanding across the great nature-culture disciplinary divide. Not only does Cronk backtrack on Darwinism, he also ignores – or perhaps lacks familiarity with – the major achievements of a century of materialist social science. Human brains embody no special ‘cultural immune system’. Religious representations are implausible fictions which no alert primate would entertain for more than a few seconds. If they persist in human brains, it is because they are installed through costly and often painful ordeals, such as initiation rites. Culture is not just mental patterning. We have to ask where the relevant ‘memes’ – the morally authoritative representations central to religious belief – come from. Of fundamental importance in this context is the domain of ritual, which in modern scholarship has become intimately intertwined with Bourdieu’s subtle concept, *habitus*. When religious ideas defy all incredulity to thrive and replicate in people’s heads, it is thanks to habitual performances including domestic rituals whose function is precisely to put them there. A purely ideational definition of ‘culture’ condemns us to mind/body philosophical dualism – hence to an endless yet vain attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable. As prelude to a genuinely materialist reunification of anthropology, Cronk would do better to restore Tylor’s original definition.

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DARNELL, REGNA. *And along came Boas: continuity and revolution in Americanist anthropology* (Amst. Stud. Theory Hist. ling. Sci., Ser. 3, 86). xviii, 331 pp., illus., tables, bibliogr. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1998. Hfl. 178

In 1969, Regna Darnell completed her dissertation at the University of Pennsylvania. Titled ‘The development of American anthropology, 1879–1920: from the Bureau of