

Book Reviews

Perspectives on Nomadism W. Irons and N. Dyson-Hudson (eds), Brill 1972; and 'Comparative Studies of Nomadism and Pastoralism', Anthropological Quarterly, Special Issue Vol. 44, No. 3, 1971.

A move seems to be afoot to establish 'nomadism' as an important discipline of its own. For too long, say some, anthropologists have thought of nomadism in a paternal manner as that esoteric offspring of geography and ecology dealing with desert herders and their tents, and of course the unique relationship between these people and their harsh, harsh environment. The problem is that other anthropologists, say these same malcontents, realise that the age of environmental determinism is past but wish it wasn't when looking at sun-burned desert-dwellers. It would be much more comfortable to be able to explain away coincidental cultural phenomena in terms of environmental adaptation when that environment is of so obvious an importance, than to search for other formative interrelations in the social milieu. Of course this does not work when the forces of comparative social studies take the field, and so attempts are made to show/causation can be left on one side and behaviour patterns can replace it. Johnson for example (The Nature of Nomadism, 1969, Chicago) provides a very typical old-fashioned structure based upon movement patterns, but it fits into the game played by so many before (Bacon, Patai, Krader, etc.) as to who are nomads and what are the common characteristics that allow us to use this special category in any useful way.

Today, anthropologists working in areas where the harshness of terrain, coupled with a seemingly arid cultural heritage, and where characteristics such as movement and herding are common factors, seem to feel that a framework of reference unique to these areas is essential. Possibly a compensation deemed necessary to replace what might appear to be the richer cultures in other parts of the earth. It is reminiscent of the situation analysed by Barth for the Basseri nomads of south Persia. He found no overt evidence of ritual behaviour, felt this augered against the structure of this kind of society, and interpreted the rigid timings and changes in the movement pattern as a substitute for the gap in the Basseri social model.

A spate of justificatory symposia, essays and books about nomads has recently been released upon an unsuspecting anthropological world. To those working in related areas a proportion of these studies are welcome. To others, they have a somewhat embarrassing 'justify the field' stress that seems a long way behind the analyses in most of modern social anthropology. That there is likely to be some relationship between the physio-biotic environment and the socio-cultural organisation of a group comes as no surprise to anyone. Neither does the idea that "social, political and cultural factors in the environment are often the determinants of adaptation" (Salzman, A.Q. intro.) and as most of the articles in the collections under review indicate, a balance of the two is the most obvious and certainly the least startling sociological fact brought out in these works. Salzman believes that the physio-biotic environment is only a secondary factor in a process of adaptation and he cries out for substantive generalisations, presumably to place the study of 'nomadism' on the anthropological map. But anthropological theory in the 20th century has not been geared to 'non-nomadic' societies - it was probably a

great mistake for Barth to call his work Nomads of South Persia for it seems to have given an identity to the student of the arid-land pastoral nomad that was not thought necessary before.

The two most recent important works on so-called nomadic societies are those edited by Salzman ('Comparative Studies of Nomadism and Pastoralism') and by Irons and Dyson-Hudson (Perspectives on Nomadism). Both of these are based upon successive symposia attended by almost the same people and can really be considered companion works. They contain many excellent individual essays, but it is for their contribution to area and group studies that they will remain important. It is interesting to observe the different ideals of the two writers in their respective introductions. Salzman, as already mentioned, is after substantive-generalizations; comparative studies that use the material already available in the ethnography. Dyson-Hudson, on the other hand, asks for realism, behaviouralism and detail. It is just because of the fragmentary data of the fifties and earlier that attempts to categorize, classify and homogenize nomadic societies have been so weak. This is exemplified in the articles where the author feels an obligation to pop in a semantic statement to avoid the condemnation due for misuse of the words 'nomadism', 'sedentary', or even 'pastoral'. Which returns us to the urgency felt by these writers for a theoretical framework different to those acceptable to other anthropologists. It is most enlightening to look through the bibliographies appended to the essays and to see with one or two exceptions, the dominance of Barth (used by everyone except Nada Dyson-Hudson) and the extraordinary lack of any other theoretical material. This again seems to be a reflection of the fear of the 'nomadists' of not being recognised as mainstream anthropology, but it is just that which makes this esoteric group so vulnerable, even though there is such a wealth of material in their work.

When the essential pastoral-farmer balance is discussed (Horowitz, Spooner, Bates) or the demographic-environment balance (Irons, Paine, W. Swidler), it is refreshing that it is done not as a means of establishing the identity of the nomadic group but rather as a use of variables and the relationships between them. Most writers have left Ibn Khaldun back in the 14th century and aren't too worried about the 'image' of the nomad and peasant (noble, free wanderer as contrasted with the oppressed, inferior farmer).

Finally, a word of praise for the introductory essay by Dyson-Hudson in Perspectives on Nomadism entitled 'The Study of Nomads'. It is one of the most useful, careful analyses of the contents of a book by its editor I have ever read. What is particularly good is the honest manner in which Dyson-Hudson looks at the symposium material. There is no attempt at conciliation between the authors and himself and an intellectual setting is established for the volume as a whole.

Both these volumes are important for anthropologists whether 'their people' migrate, live in tents, have herds, live in a semi-arid environment or not, for it is the fundamental problem of how to approach other cultures that is under discussion.

André Singer

Words about God. Ian T. Ramsey (ed), 1971. S C M Press Ltd.
£1.50 paperback.

A selection of readings which begins with the Early Christian Fathers, Plotinus, Moses Maimonides and Aquinas, and ends with extracts from the famous fifth chapter of Nuer Religion, must be of considerable interest to anthropologists. One of Ramsey's special concerns is to show some of the ways in which the 'narrow' empiricism of the earlier decades of this century has 'broadened' into a form more amenable for a true understanding of religion. In 1946, Russell distinguished between 'knowledge by acquaintance' and 'knowledge by description'. We see here, albeit in an adumbrated form, the idea that there is a hierarchy of languages. There is, however, no recognition that anyone might be interested in understanding religion: 'every proposition which we can understand must be composed wholly of constituents with which we are acquainted', when acquaintance involves direct sense data of the type religion cannot afford. The extract from Ayer clearly shows the poverty of logical positivism when applied to religion.

According to Ramsey, Russell's 1948 work marks a break with crude 'physical realism'. Developing his theory of types, the conception of a hierarchy of languages now bears the message that meaningful language is not a totally homogeneous mass but is logically variegated. From this it is but a short step to the reading extracted from Waismann's paper 'Language Strata'. The verificationist theory of meaning used by Russell in 1946 is no longer in evidence; words like 'meaning', 'truth', 'verification' and even 'logic' are taken to be context-dependent, which entails that there is no sharp divide between meaning and non-sense.

Waismann, of course, makes good reading for Wittgensteinian fideists or Winchian-styled anthropologists. A true-one is inclined to say 'religious'-understanding of religion can now be imagined within the confines of empiricism. It is possible, as the extracts from Ramsey and Evans indicate, to be a philosopher of religion and a believer. However, Words about God has been compiled not so much to make this well-known point as to suggest the scope of the empiricist tools which are now available for those whose job it is to translate, interpret and characterise religious discourse and modes of 'thought'.

Let us approach this from the other side. To the best of my knowledge, anthropologists have not developed many tools of a comparable type. Such distinctions we have - magic/religion, age set/age grade, sorcery/witchcraft, preferential/perscriptive, metaphor/metonymy - either belong to a lower order of things or are involved in analyses which rest on a prior understanding of the relevant phenomena. Since we have to begin with what participants have to say, it seems reasonable to suggest that it might be just as well to start catching up on lost time. This is where Ramsey's collection comes in: a set of tools which begin at the beginning with participant discourse.

The core of modern empiricism is relativistic: statements are construed as belonging to different logical styles according to context, how they are used, etc. Waismann, in the extract mentioned, asks how such styles can be characterised from within. This leads him to examine types of ambiguity - including the logic of metaphor - and the fascinating question of whether the fact that 'the law of excluded middle' cannot be readily applied to aphorisms, poetry and mysticism renders these modes of discourse illogical. Think, in this connection,

of Lévy-Bruhl, Frazer, and the many others who construe religious talk as 'non-rational'.

Ryle attends to a closely related topic, 'systematically misleading expressions'. The grammatical or verbal form of an assertion, he argues, is not a sure guide to the logical form of the same assertion and indeed can be positively misleading. Attention to the logic of category mistakes, in the sense that inferences drawn from verbal form easily encourage inaccurate equations and assumptions, could well help anthropologists develop their own logic of questions. Is it, for instance, a category mistake to ask, 'well, don Juan, did I really fly?', or 'what is the magical power of words'?

The extracts from Austin also deal with logical landscapes, only this time not with logicity as such, or questions, but the issue of how words are used. His distinction between performative and constative aspects of utterances, utterances which 'do' and those which 'say', might not appear to be of such anthropological interest. Personally, I do not think that Austin can provide us with a general solution to the problem of magic, but there remains Finnegan's application. More generally, the notion 'performative' allows us to take a new look at a traditional anthropological insight which goes back at least to Kant's 'regulative' view of religion: religious systems and to some extent magic and witchcraft beliefs can be read in terms of the logic of moral discourse. Although we find no mention of the notion 'performative', the extracts from Mansel, Hare and Hepburn all concern this point of view. Hepburn, for instance, argues that the historicity, even ontological truth, of religious stories is relatively unimportant: 'the moral pattern of life is the fundamental thing, the story its vehicle'. Doing is more important than saying, even though stories have a vital role to play.

Apart from Strawson's remarks on the relationship between formal logic and the logic of ordinary usage, and on the logic of persons, Words about God contains two other main perspectives which add to our understanding of the logical styles involved in religious language. In both cases the word 'metaphor' is all-important. That is why the index contains more references to this topic than to any other.

The second section of the book ('The language of Religious belief: some Classical discussions') is almost totally dedicated to extracts which approach religious discourse from the primordial division between metaphorical and literal readings. The great problem is: if the Bible is read literally it makes religious (and mental) nonsense, but if it is read metaphorically the ontological status of God is placed in jeopardy. Two solutions emerge. One is given by Aquinas, namely the middle way provided by the notion analogy; the other by Otto - talk of God is symbolic (largely metaphorical) but has substance because these 'ideograms' are grounded in the numinous.

Turning to the last section, 'The logical character of Religious language', we find that Ramsey and Evans have, very generally speaking, more to do with Otto than Aquinas. This is most apparent in the case of Ramsey, although we should mention that he gained many of his seminal ideas from Max Black. Very briefly, Black argues (but not in the extract included) that the theoretical models used in science function in a manner not all that far removed from the role of metaphors in poetry and common usage. They afford, that is to say, a unique and distinctive form of cognitive insight which cannot be translated into a non-metaphorical idiom. In this context the

'picture' theory of language is replaced by one in which 'model' discourse 'discloses' the phenomena being talked about without being able to capture it in a one-to-one replication fashion. Black specifically states that such models differ from the analogue variety by reason of the fact that they do not work by analogy but through a hoped-for underlying analogy.

Applying this to religious discourse, Ramsey has to make some adjustments. Why this is so need not concern us for the moment, but we should realise that this is where some of Otto's ideas reappear: religious disclosure models (i.e. most, if not all the Bible) are grounded in situations of 'cosmic disclosure'; are grounded, if you like, in certain special experiences. It need not worry us as anthropologists that Ramsey the empiricist philosopher is arguing for Christian claims because he nowhere, or at least importantly, introduces a priori claims of an objectionable variety. Instead, his descriptive approach irresistably reminds us of such works as Divinity and Experience. His 'anthropological value' is threefold: (a) religion is defended as religion, which means that the participants' universe is regarded as primary, (b) we learn much of the nature of models, the logic of metaphorical systems and why some such systems are more suitable than others, and (c) we gain new insights into the relationship between religion, science and poetry for the imagination always grasps the lesser known by following one basic strategy.

Ramsey, it will be realised, traces a firm path between the 'only literal or merely metaphor' choice. Anthropologists need no longer be trapped by the old positivistic oppositions such as 'at face value'/'x does not mean what it appears to', literal/metaphorical, informative/expressive, etc. Evans adds further subtleties to this development. Inventing the notion 'onlook', he analyses this into such features as 'commissive', 'autobiographical', 'expressive', 'behabitive-postural' and 'verdictive'. He then classifies this 'looking on x as y' language in a broad literal/non-literal division, subdividing the latter into 'parabolic' and 'analogical' onlooks. Again, religious ontological claims are defended by saying that parabolic onlooks do not involve more 'as if' metaphors. We learn more about the 'is's' of Nuer Religion. And as the words 'commissive' and 'verdictive' indicate, Evans is developing aspects of Austin's position.

Finally, how does the extract from Nuer Religion fit into all this? Ramsey suggests it should be read alongside those from Maimonides. It is difficult not to agree with the implication that Evans-Pritchard's work belongs to the 'classical discussions'. Of course, this has to be the case: Evans-Pritchard wrote before the new solution to the metaphor/literal distinction had been fully articulated. Accordingly, we can construct the following analogy: 'Maimonides, Otto and the rest: Evans-Pritchard if not Godfrey Lienhardt::the modern empiricists and philosophers of religion:?' A gap waits to be filled. Words about God suggests the tools we can use. Many modern theologians are writing for a secular age; some of them even kill God. So there is nothing to prevent us from profiting from their work. As Ramsey puts it, perhaps with anthropologists in mind, this book 'may help the reader to develop his own empirical approach to religious themes'. All I can add is, 'don't stop here. Try reading Models and Mystery (1964), Religious Language (1957), Prospect for Metaphysics (1961)...'

Man, Culture and Society. Shapiro, Harry L. (ed) Second edition.
Oxford University Press, 1972. £1.60p.

Dehydrated food, though full of artificial flavouring and colouring, often fails to satisfy the palate. The same may be said of "potted" versions of any subject: economy is achieved, but with an awful loss of originality and interest.

This collection of essays, which originally appeared in 1956 was, at the time, one of the finest efforts to present anthropology as a "whole". The papers by Lévi-Strauss and Godfrey Lienhardt, again re-printed, soon became well known to undergraduates. The archaeological summaries were indicative of both the time at which they were written and of their authors. The whole was reasonably balanced.

It was inevitable with the passage of time and the modern craze for general readings in anthropology that a new edition of this book would appear. Some of the archaeological papers have been re-written reflecting the great increase in archaeological material and changes in ideas, though with no real appreciation of the new methodologies in this area. The paper by Meadow on the emergence of civilization is a good synopsis, but the re-printing of Gordon Childe's paper on the New Stone Age, a paper already dated in 1956, is rather shocking.

Social anthropology, it appears, either has not changed or the editor just thought the papers could not be updated. The only new paper in the whole of the 'cultural' section is that by Rappaport on "ecological anthropology", a misnomer if ever there was one.

The book, one feels, would have been better left as a model of past anthropology (Ruth Benedict included). One has visions of the book forever being "brought up to date", the original unity of the book disappearing as it grows in contributors and pages. As it is, the book has some articles on the archaeological knowledge of the present and anthropological models of the past. It is possible to divide archaeological matter into periods and areas, but the divisions of social anthropological subjects are no longer so clear as was once thought.

No doubt the book will sell to libraries as an "instant" reference book, but many readers will find it lacking somewhat in nutritional value.

James Urry

JOURNEY TO IXTLAN: The Lessons of Don Juan. Carlos Castaneda.
New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972.

This book, the third in the don Juan saga, continues a number of trends developed in the first two. As, in A Separate Reality in comparison with The Teachings of Don Juan, the account was more personal as Castaneda accepted more of don Juan's teachings as at the least meaningful; so in this book Castaneda looms larger still, and don Juan loses all appearance of charlatanism. The 'non-ordinary reality' of the first book, the 'separate reality' of the second, drop out of the explicit picture - they have become an unqualified 'true' reality. It is in Castaneda's treatment of don Juan's 'other' reality, his view of its nature and status, that the most significant progression (and progress) is made through the series.

This is manifested in the content of each book. The first deals with don Juan's sayings as a detached system of belief. The second deals with the 'other world' of the sorcerer in relation to the psychotropic plants which help induce it. The third deals with Carlos Castaneda, and his relations with the world - especially his relationship with the 'other world'. After the anthropology and the psychology, we have at last come to the philosophy.

The latest work is the best of the three; at least it is the most satisfying to sympathetic readers. In each of the first two books one becomes frustrated with Castaneda for his insistence on 'looking', 'thinking', talking and, especially, his own 'rationality'. One is infuriated when he breaks off his apprenticeship at incomplete stages because of a supposed incapacity to enter the 'other world'. In the third book however Castaneda achieves the task of 'seeing' and 'knowing'; he admits both the achievement and the 'other world'. If he does not choose to enter the 'other world' permanently and completely forsake 'this world', we can at least respect his decision as one made of free will, not one forced on him through his own human inadequacy. This is the main reason why the book is so much more uplifting and optimistic than the first two, especially at a personal level. And as I have tried to explain, that is the primary level at which the book must be judged. The book is also the most satisfying yet in that, by at last accepting don Juan's premisses, Castaneda allows himself a better and more concrete starting-point (see Heelas, especially p. 135).

The book is also a much better constructed work than either of the other two. In place of the rehashing and somewhat forced 'structural analysis' that rounds off the first book, in place of the depressing tailing away into dejection and failure of the second, there is a truly dramatic climax. After seventeen chapters of old field notes (1960-1962) we end with three chapters covering the most recent experiences (1971), in which Castaneda 'stops the world', 'sees', talks to a coyote which in turn talks (or rather feel-talks) back; in which don Genaro makes Castaneda's car disappear (in fact he transports it to the 'other world', whence Castaneda has the unique experience of driving it back to 'this world'). The dramatic quality of this book in contrast to the previous ones is apparent in the shift from a sense of impending danger to Castaneda's identity and sanity, to impending physical danger from actual attacks (by various forces).

Nevertheless, the major failing of the book lies in its construction: although the first seventeen chapters are indispensable for an understanding of the events of the last three chapters, almost all the impact (and import) of the book come in these last forty pages. In themselves, the first 275 pages are of little value, adding but little to what we knew and felt from the first two books.

This is a very personal book; after reading it, it seems more natural to call the author 'Carlos' than 'Castaneda'; even the sorcerers are infinitely more personalized - if only because they hardly ever seem to stop laughing. And by personalizing his account, Castaneda has concretized it. Previously, in dropping out of the system as a failure, Castaneda left a bitter feeling that both systems/worlds were insignificant. He has now, by opting out of the system as a success, not only accepted and demonstrated the importance of don Juan's world, he has also reaffirmed the importance of (all) our own.

For those I have managed to enthuse, for those who are already enthusiastic, for all those who want to read for themselves the solving of this mystery, British publication of the book has been announced for this May. And the fourth episode, Tales of Power, is scheduled for publication in America next year.

Martin Cantor

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