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THE CONCEPTS OF "CULTURE" AND "AREA" IN RESPECT TO THE STUDY OF COMPARATIVE POLITICS

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I

The proposition that political science has carried specialization too far is now rather generally accepted by even its more consecrated practitioners. The results of the process have become too obvious and too serious to be longer ignored. Faced with the ever-increasing complexity of knowledge and society the discipline long ago marked off as its special domain a large and important, albeit variously defined, segment of human activity known as "political", divided this into sub-fields and set about the task of ordering and analyzing its preempted subject matter into complex categories of impressive scope and detail. As in most of the other social sciences, strong impulses towards disciplinary exclusiveness, self-sufficiency and esotericism soon became manifest, a development which did not go unremarked in professional circles. Many years ago protests and reform movements sprang up--more rapidly and prolifically in some fields than in others--and there was no dearth of prophets to point out the correct path.

The reform movement--or, more properly, movements--among political scientists today probably differs from most of its predecessors in at least two important respects. The fervor and consecration of its members, their relative degree of sophistication, even their numbers within the profession may not be markedly different from those of the discipline's rebels of earlier days. One quality which the great majority of its members shares, however, and which does distinguish the present movement from its predecessors is a uniform desire to break down some at least of the artificial barriers dividing political science from other social science disciplines in order that a meaningful cross-fertilization may take place. It has long been the fashion for political scientists to make polite but noncommittal bows towards the

contributions which other disciplines could in theory make to the elucidation of man's political activities. This is probably the first time, however, that *a considerable number* of dissatisfied political scientists have actually troubled to acquire a serious professional competence in major branches of economics, sociology, statistics, psychology, geography and anthropology and have systematically based their research and teaching on such multi-disciplinary foundations. The degree and the depth of this interest in the lessons to be learned from sister disciplines is one characteristic of the current reform movements.

A second characteristic is perhaps to be found in their common devotion to methodological issues. Heretofore political science has not displayed any marked tendency to concern itself with the systematic elaboration of methodologies tailored to its peculiar disciplinary needs. The inclination has been to accept methods in large part prefabricated during the last century for the use of historians and legal scholars. Some of the consequences of this have been a frequently excessive emphasis on description at the cost of analysis, on legal theory at the cost of empirical fact, on static cross-sections rather than functional processes, and on the amassing of information for its own sake rather than a purposeful attack on specific problems. It is against such emphases and the methodological assumptions which engendered them that the present reform movements level their attacks. They do not deny the utility or the brilliance of much earlier work but claim that a stage has now been reached where political science must re-evaluate and reshape its basic premises and methods to meet new and more rigorous needs.

The reformers have tended to center their attacks and innovations on the field of domestic politics, but it was inevitable that other fields be affected also. Recently the shortcomings of research in comparative politics have been receiving an increasing amount of much-needed attention and one has been conscious of considerable speculation as to the manner in which professional performance in this field might be improved. Since concern for inter-disciplinary cross-fertilization and for methodological problems in general was already prominent in the minds of most political scientists, it was quite natural that the faults of research and teaching in comparative

politics as well as in other political science fields have frequently been diagnosed in these terms and remedies suggested accordingly. Among the proposed remedies none has received more support or publicity than the concept of area programs.

It is the purpose of this paper to describe and evaluate certain aspects of the theory of area programs with reference to the study of comparative politics. It is the writer's belief, however, for reasons which he hopes to make clear in the body of the paper, that the term "area program" is a somewhat misleading catch-phrase which does less than justice to the full content of such programs.

When the theory and practice of all existing area programs with which the writer is familiar are analyzed into their prime component parts, at least these three elements emerge: 1) the concept of culture; 2) the concept of area; and 3) the method of integrated, interdisciplinary work carried on cooperatively by specialists in each of the social sciences, with assistance from natural scientists when necessary. Since this paper is intended as an assessment of the potential contributions of such programs to individual students of comparative politics, the third element will be largely neglected and attention will be focussed on the first which, to the writer's mind, is both logically prior to the concept of area and distinctly the more useful to political scientists, and to a lesser extent, on the second. It should, of course, be noted that both the concepts of culture and of area, in this context, are of primarily anthropological derivation and have simply been borrowed and embellished by area programs for their special purposes.

II

The concept of culture is complex and in respect to it there still exist significant areas of doubt and dispute among the scholars best qualified to judge. Despite this the areas of agreement overshadow those of disagreement and an adequate working definition of the concept has long been available. Precise statements of this differ in wording but the core concepts are substantially identical. According to Lowie, culture is "the whole of social tradition"; according to Linton, it is equivalent to "social heredity"; according to Kroeber's more formal definition, culture is "the mass of learned

and transmitted motor reactions, habits, techniques, ideas and values and the behavior they induce...."¹. When these definitions are spelled out by their authors they reduce to largely the same thing - a series of propositions about culture, the forms it takes and the manner in which it works, which today command the substantial agreement of most anthropologists.²

This single concept, thus elaborated into a series of propositions or postulates, embraces a surprising proportion of the basic methodological premises underlying contemporary ethnological and sociological research. Its principal value is explicable along the following lines. It gives to the social scientist, confronted with the bewildering complexity of a subject matter which embraces in some degree the totality of human experience, a means of imposing some order and arrangement on his otherwise chaotic data. In theory and in practice a great variety of such principles exist at varying levels of abstraction tailored to the facilitation of different purposes. Their sole justification is their utility as devices for furthering the investigation at hand.

The concept of culture has met this empirical test. It has probably been of greater importance to the progress of anthropological and of area studies than has any other single concept check manuscript. something omitted here or combination of reference within which all his data can be placed. It tells him such things as the following: that all people at all times are possessed of some culture; that the content of culture varies in time and space;

1). See A. L. Kroeber, *Anthropology* (rev. ed., N. Y. 1948) pp. 252-56 for a discussion of definitions of culture; also the same author's *The Nature of Culture* (Chicago, 1952), pp. 3-11.

2). A number of these propositions have been well formulated by Professor M. J. Herskovits in the following terms:

- "1. Culture is learned.
- 2. Culture is derived from the biological, environmental, psychological and historical components of human experience.
- 3. Culture is structured.
- 4. Culture is divided into aspects.
- 5. Culture is dynamic.
- 6. Culture is variable.
- 7. Culture exhibits regularities that permit its analysis by the methods of science.
- 8. Culture is the instrument whereby the individual adjusts to his total setting and gains the means for creative expression."

See *Man and His Works* (New York, 1948), p. 625.

that different cultures produce different value systems; that culture can be differentiated into various aspects or parts; that the arrangement of the elements composing a culture is not haphazard but displays patterning and a secular tendency towards internal consistency; that culture powerfully conditions and channels the actions, institutions and aspirations of man; or that culture exhibits regularities which make it amenable to scientific analysis. Above all it assures the researcher that all aspects of a particular culture are systematically related and that together they constitute an entity greater than the sum of its parts. These are simple-sounding, almost platitudinous propositions, yet they are of fundamental importance. They give to anthropology and -- together with certain important additions -- to area studies as well, a core concept which tends to produce an agreed basic viewpoint among all their practitioners. At the same time it provides a methodological framework which is capable of embracing all relevant data, which suggests interrelationships and functional connections among these data, which is hospitable to hypothesizing and which enhances the probability of compatible research results.

III

It is not suggested that the concept of culture affords any sort of philosophers' stone of sovereign efficacy for the problems of students of comparative politics. No single concept of whatever breadth promises that. It is claimed, however, that when one analyzes the past and present professional practice of political scientists, especially in the field of comparative government, that certain shortcomings, errors and biases crop up with discouraging regularity. The precise nature of these will be elaborated shortly. At present, however, the writer desires only to point out that constantly repeated shortcomings and biases in research reflect directly on the adequacy of the basic premises or methodologies upon which such authors are operating. It is precisely the recognition of this fact by considerable numbers of dissatisfied political scientists which has engendered the methodological ferment and experimentation alluded to earlier.

Under these circumstances there is broad agreement that political scientists must devote more attention to their methodological problems than has heretofore been customary and that outworn or disproved assumptions must be

replaced by new ones of greater empirical value. Disagreement begins when one poses the questions - what old assumptions are to be discarded and what new ones adopted? The writer has no desire to add to the complexity or vehemence of this contest, but he would like to assert and try to demonstrate the general and fundamental values to students of comparative politics which he believes could flow from the adoption of the concept of culture as a way of viewing the political process at any level. The change suggested is no more than the deliberate inculcation of a new, broader and more realistic point of view in respect to political scientists' major frame of reference when studying comparative politics. Let us examine the benefits which might reasonably be expected to flow from the effective conversion of political scientists to this new point of view.

Perhaps the most telling criticism leveled against studies of comparative politics refers to their alleged lack of essential cultural context. The same attack is sometimes made in somewhat different terms when critics denounce the single-disciplinary or compartmentalized approach to problems of comparative politics which they claim characterizes most political scientists. Their argument stated as simply as possible runs as follows. The essential unity and interrelatedness of human experience has long been recognized. In terms of this it is obvious that excessively specialized approaches to the study of any aspect of human experience along narrowly disciplinary lines are unrealistic. Institutions and practices of all kinds, and especially high level political institutions, can only be fully analyzed and understood in terms of their total role and context in a society, and the specifically political elements of such an analysis are only a part, albeit a critical one, of any satisfactory explanation. Due weight must also be given the economic, geographic, psychological and other factors involved. Against this background our critics claim, with unhappy validity, that students of comparative politics have in the long course of disciplinary specialization become accustomed to thinking of their subject matter as *Politics*, an at least semi-autonomous branch of human experience with more at less tangential relations to other aspects thereof. It is further alleged that, where the work of political scientists has been at all concerned with the actions of men as distinguished from the description of organization, they have tended implicitly to accept, while

explicitly denouncing, the unsound concept of "the political man".

It is difficult to deny the seriousness or the substantial truth of this indictment. It is confirmed by an unfortunate proportion of the published literature. Under these circumstances the question becomes largely a remedial one. What can be done to make students of comparative politics more effectively aware of the total context of problems and to produce a more equitable distribution of attention between their political and non-political elements?

The concept of culture shows promise in this connection. It is by no means a total solution, but, if political scientists could be adequately trained in its tenets and implications, it is quite certain that their awareness of the importance of total context studies would be greatly enhanced. The very nature of the concept of culture insures this. The proposition that the experience of any human group taken as a whole is more than the sum of its parts and that any part can be adequately explained only with reference to its relations to both the whole and other related parts is of its very essence. This necessarily implies an approach of a suitably broad and interdisciplinary type.

The relevance of the preceding paragraph to the comparative aspects of the study of comparative politics should also be noted. The facile assumption that there is some value in allegedly comparative descriptions of legislative, executive and judicial organization in, for example, England, France, Italy, Germany, the USSR, Japan and China with little or no regard to the highly variant roles and significances of these institutions in their respective societies has long been a bane of the profession. Meaningful comparisons are possible only when it is realized that the institutions compared are not self-contained and do not have autonomous values, but that they derive their significance from their total role in their particular culture, that is from their context. Political comparisons on a total or piecemeal scale are possible and useful for the solution of certain problems, but only when the writer keeps constantly in mind the essential relations of the institutions being compared to the total ways of life of the people involved.

It is frequently objected that a contextual approach of this kind makes impossible or difficult detailed studies of narrowly defined political institutions

or practices, that every monograph in its search for context inevitably ramifies into a global survey of the entire society. Such need not be the case in practice. It is important that an author be as knowledgeable about and sensitive to the total context of his particular political problem as possible, but there is no reason why in a monograph he need treat more than those non-political factors which are of major importance to the elucidation of the question he has chosen. No general standard capable of segregating factors of "major" from those of "minor" importance or of signalling precisely what depth of penetration or analysis of relevant non-political factors is desirable is known to the present writer. This does not mean, however, that the problem of criteria of relevance is in any sense insoluble. An empirical solution to particular problems of this sort is usually to be found on the following basis: first, the fact that such specifically non-political but directly relevant factors usually tend to decrease in quantity as the problem under consideration is more narrowly defined; secondly, the fact that a well-formulated research project should be posed as a specific problem capable of solution, in which case the nature and scope of the answer sought will do much to establish its own criteria of relevance; and thirdly, the fact that a well-trained and talented research worker possesses a semi-intuitive understanding of and "feel" for his subject for which there can be no methodological substitute and which should enable him to determine with satisfactory precision the limits of his inquiry.

It is also objected that the interdisciplinary approach involved in the effective placing of political studies in their larger cultural context calls for the acquisition of more sophistication in the lore and skills of other fields than even the most talented students can master. Ideally speaking, this is true, but practically two responses are possible. The first is that for many research purposes the day of the lone wolf may be waning. Cooperatively planned and executed research by teams and institutes is undeniably increasing, though there is certainly no sign and no desire that it should supplant the individual research worker except in those areas where it is demonstrably more effective. The second is that perfection is no more attainable in this respect than in any other. It is not proposed that we substitute perfectly trained "generalists" in social science for the much-maligned "speci-

alist." It is only suggested that we broaden the horizons and extend the disciplinary tools of the student of comparative politics, at the expense of somewhat less intensive intra-disciplinary training if need be.

In the writer's mind it would be an accomplishment of great practical value if it were possible simply to alter the initial mental set with which the student approaches the study of the politics of a foreign land. Judging from the published literature the average student of, let us say, the politics of prewar Japan has approached his task with concepts resembling the following foremost in his mind: a theoretically absolute monarchy in which power is actually wielded by shifting oligarchic factions operating behind the facade of a constitution and a semi-parliamentary system; a habitually aggressive state with little or no respect for international law or the rights of its weaker neighbors and one in which the military possess great power; a highly centralized government which has been drifting more and more towards a Fascist-type of authoritarianism; political terrorism and assassinations are frequent. These are not naive judgments. There is substantial truth to them and they have a limited utility -- which would be enormously increased if they were made a real corollary of major premises along the following lines: a tiny, seriously over-populated, island kingdom strategically situated off the coast of Asia; a primarily agrarian, rice-raising society with a food deficit making it vitally dependent on imports and a favorable balance of trade; the Orient's most industrialized nation, far ahead of all its neighbors in plant, skill and national income, yet lacking most essential raw materials; a family-oriented, not individualistically-oriented, society; a people but seventy-odd years removed from late-feudal mores and social circumstances; a nation but superficially Westernized and modernized, but that in record time; a people habituated to oligarchy and political submissiveness for ten or twelve centuries; a state of great and locally overwhelming military strength, yet a late-comer on the imperialist scene, etc. etc.

Individually these are reasonably well-known and accepted concepts, by political scientists as well as by others. There is nothing startling about them. Yet it is difficult to overstate the methodological importance for political research of giving intellectual primacy to general contextual factors such as those sketched above and of thinking and hypothesizing about political

factors *only* within this frame of reference. The essential values to be derived from such contextual treatment, but absent from the more restricted approach, are primarily functional understanding and practical utility. The restricted approach does not explain or analyze with any adequacy; it simply describes a narrow segment with but slight attention to other intimately related segments, the total interaction of which constitutes a whole. Understanding is to be gained only when the specifically political institutions being examined are first placed in total cultural perspective and secondly considered as processes functioning therein both historically and presently for the accomplishment of certain purposes. It is only by such an historical and functional approach that one begins to understand a country's political institutions, to detect the all-important patterning thereof in relation to other aspects of the culture and, perhaps, to gain therefrom some understanding of political causation. Similarly it is only against a background of this sort that one can achieve practically and systematically useful knowledge of comparative politics on a significant scale. Predictive knowledge may or may not be attainable in the distant future, but certainly our recent experience with military occupation and overseas aid programs should have demonstrated conclusively the limitations of the restricted research or training approach and the urgent need for the broadly contextual one as an indispensable basis for specialization.

It should be added that lip-service to this type of integrated scheme is not sufficient. One does not discharge his obligations to contextual study by one or more prefatory chapters of arid summarization of the main ecological and historical facts about a society. The need is for constant sensitivity to the interrelatedness of political and non-political elements and the development of balanced analyses which are continuously "integrated" in more than name only.

The general adoption by students of comparative politics of the concept of culture would in no sense insure the uniform achievement of these desirable results in future publications. It would, however, render their approximation more probable because it tends to produce a frame of reference and a set of mind far more contextually oriented than the concepts presently employed by political scientists as well as to suggest and facilitate at every turn

the search for the broad patterned interrelationships of social data.

Closely associated with the above described merits of the concept of culture as a device for producing awareness of the integrated and contextual nature of politics is its faculty of instilling somewhat more sophisticated views of the nature of social causality. Students of foreign politics have perhaps been overly fond of political explanations couched in terms of what might be called first-level or proximate causality. In its simplest and quite common form this takes the shape of single-factor analysis. "Such and such a party lost the election because they alienated the farm vote," or "war broke out because an aggressive and desperate clique of militarists had obtained control of the government and deliberately precipitated it." These are oversimplified examples but their more or less artfully disguised fellows are all too familiar to every political scientist. Of somewhat greater complexity if not profundity are causal explanations couched in terms of multiple factor analysis but still at the proximate level. "The cabinet fell as a result of cumulative popular dissatisfaction with its legislative program made critical by the defection of the "X" Faction from the government coalition and a thinly disguised ultimatum from the Corporal's Clique of the Imperial Guard." The example is again distorted for the sake of clarity, but the frequent occurrence of explanations of this sort leads one to inquire as to whether the profession is satisfied with treatments of foreign politics keyed to this level of analysis.

The phenomenon of social causation is in itself enormously complicated and, on the whole, would appear to have been given small consideration by political scientists.³ Realizing, however, that there are several reasonably distinct types and innumerable levels of causation and that the causal background of any particular social event or institution ramifies almost indefinitely, the essential question is: to what depth can and should causal analysis of political phenomenon be pushed? To the writer's mind such a question can only be answered in terms of the empirical dictates of the particular political problem under examination. It is even conceivable that for

3.) The interested reader might refer to A. L. Kroeber, *The Nature of Culture*, op. cit., pp. 9-10, 12-19 and 107-109 for some provocative although all-too-brief reflections on this subject.

some purposes the above types of proximate analysis are satisfactory. In general, however, it would seem obvious that serious scientific investigation usually demands much deeper plumbing of the ranges of social causality. Politics, among other things, is an arena in which conflicting power groups compete for control of governmental machinery. Underlying this conflict are a range of affective interests and groups as broad and diverse as the total culture of the society. Most are not specifically political, yet much of political change can be understood only in terms of their policies and permutations and the sometimes remote effect which these exercise on political decisions. Any adequate theory of political causality must be both broad and deep enough to plumb as far into the sphere of such more remote causes as the inquiry dictates.

It must be said that students of the domestic political process have, quite understandably, pushed their investigations of political problems far deeper and displayed considerably more sophistication in respect to both causality and technique than have students of comparative politics. Some degree of such lag is undoubtedly both justified and permanent, but the gap today has grown unjustifiably wide.

The concept of culture seems equally useful when considered from the standpoint of this professional shortcoming. It is difficult to imagine a student adequately trained therein being guilty of single-factor or proximate analyses of political causality. The entire genius of the concept is too strongly opposed, too overwhelmingly oriented towards the proposition that all social institutions, the political included, are interrelated and mutually affective. It is perhaps not too much to say that multi-factor and multi-level analyses of causality are the only types presently reconcilable with the concept of culture.

The concept is also applicable along similar lines to another of the most serious charges leveled against students of comparative politics, the allegation that their work is essentially descriptive and seldom comes to grips with real problems of functional analysis except on the inadequate terms described above. The substantial justice of the claim is all too clearly demonstrated by the most casual reference to the literature. The causes of the phenomenon are less obvious.

One school would attribute it to a combination of a traditional disciplinary emphasis on detailed and highly organized description plus the greater ease of producing this sort of work. Others would regard it with more or less cogency as a by-product of the quest for professional objectivity. Without denying the partial validity of such theses, the writer would add another. In his opinion this concentration on the descriptive approach to foreign politics is also a function of the student's lack of a specific problem-oriented focus. If you confront a political scientist with the totality of either the political process or of a particular political institution in France or Germany, or worse yet, with the entire range of politics or of a particular institution in all of Western Europe and simply require him to produce a publishable study thereof, there is a strong probability that he will devote himself to a professionally categorized and elaborately detailed description of his subject matter. What else is he to do, if he lacks a more specific goal for his study precisely defined in problematic terms? Description is a natural substitute for true analysis under such circumstances.

One does not analyze in a teleological vacuum. Schemes of causal analysis are developed with primary reference to the solutions of particular problems. There is thus a close connection between truly analytic rather than descriptive research and the problem-oriented approach. Practically, at our present stage of development, it also seems more fruitful to phrase our problems and conduct our analysis on a scale smaller than the total cultural or national political survey level. Real problems of this high order undoubtedly exist, but the number and complexity of the factors causing them are so great as to transcend the capacity of our present analytic equipment.

The palliative virtues of the concept of culture are of a somewhat lower order in this connection than in those earlier discussed. The concept is not specifically problem-oriented to the same extent that it is context-oriented or disposed in favor of multi-factor and multi-level analysis. The prevalence of purely descriptive studies in the literature of anthropology attests this. On the other hand it is appreciably less neutral and less hospitable to a purely descriptive approach than are the concepts presently employed by most students of comparative government. It places constant emphasis

on the existence of complexly related patterns and integrations within a culture and directs attention to the isolation and analysis of these as a prime research goal. This amounts in practice to an orientation towards the analytic problem-oriented approach.

Another major accusation made against students of comparative government concerns their Euro-North American bias in the selection of subject matter. This charge, has been progressively less justified during recent years but it is still true that an undue preponderance of personnel, course offerings and research in the field of comparative politics is concentrated in such areas as Great Britain, with some attention to the older dominions, Western Europe and, quite recently, the USSR and its Central and Eastern European satellites. The process of redressing this disproportionate allocation of resources has been long and difficult and must doubtless continue for many years to come before a more intelligent equilibrium will be achieved.

The reasons for such a condition are fairly obvious. This is the area of Western European culture, the tradition which has produced both the modern social sciences and the vast majority of their professional practitioners. The individual scholars are bound to it by thousands of ties, personal and professional, and quite naturally share its value systems. It is culturally easier, more natural and, in many ways, more useful for them to study the politics of relatively familiar and closely related lands within this major culture area rather than venture into the more alien surroundings of other culture areas. This inclination is strengthened by the well-established custom on the part of Euro-North Americans of identifying their own as the area of "civilized" culture and all others as "backward" to varying degrees. A strong attribution of the greater importance of "civilized" areas goes with this distinction. These are the fruits of ethnocentrism, and it is in no way surprising that they affect the distribution of academic resources within a culture.

Here the problem for the student of comparative politics is to substitute for the irrational selections of ethnocentrism some more reasonable and useful criteria for the allocation of resources to the study of foreign politics. In this respect the concept of culture is of enormous, if indirect, use. It is

not particularly helpful in the actual development of such criteria, but it is invaluable in creating awareness of ethnocentrism, in emphasizing its irrationality and in driving home in a meaningful way the eternal truths of cultural relativity. Above most others the student of comparative politics must beware of applying his own value system to the study of foreign politics. The failure to realize and observe this caution is directly responsible for the downright naiveté and superficiality of an unfortunate proportion of our literature on the politics of so-called "backward" areas. A healthy awareness of the uniqueness and moral equality of all cultures combined with a high sensitivity to the dignity and internal coherence of their value systems, political as well as general, is essential to the student of politics in any foreign land, and increasingly so as the culture of this area varies more and more from that of his native land. It is difficult to imagine a better tool for the achievement of such perspective and objectivity than the concept of culture.

Against this background it would seem that the concept of culture has much of value to offer students of comparative politics. In particular it promises the following advantages:

- 1) A greatly heightened awareness of the multiple connections between the sphere of politics and other aspects of a culture, which may be described as a feeling for total context and for the overall integration and patterning of cultures.

- 2) In terms of this, an incentive towards the adoption of an interdisciplinary approach and the utmost possible utilization of the knowledge and skills of allied disciplines. It thus attempts to raise the student's methodological equipment to a level and potency more compatible with the dimensions of his problems.

- 3) A framework for political comparison across national and cultural boundaries far more realistic and meaningful than that supplied by the partial and out-of-context institutional framework generally utilized.

- 4) An awareness of the shortcomings of political explanations couched in terms of single-factor and proximate level causality and an impulsion to plumb more deeply into the complex ranges of social causality.

5) Some aid in avoiding the purely descriptive approach to political institutions and some incentive towards its replacement by a problem-oriented approach.

6) As effective a counterbalance to the irrational effects of ethnocentrism as a determinant of "proper" areas of interest and terms of appraisal as has been discovered.

These are significant advantages, the basic importance of which becomes particularly apparent when one studies their close relation to specific charges in the bill of indictment against much of the existing research and teaching in the field of comparative politics. No claim is made that the borrowing by political scientists of the concept of culture will result in automatic improvements along the above lines. It is submitted, however, that there exists extensive dissatisfaction with the state of research in comparative politics, that its major shortcomings are fairly well-known and that these reflect in significant part the inadequacy of the methodological assumptions consciously or unconsciously made by past and present students in the field. It is further claimed that the concept of culture is a methodological tool which has proven its practical utility in other fields and that it shows promise of being able to redirect the intellectual stance or set of mind with which the student of comparative politics now approaches his substantive problems along lines considerably more fruitful than those now prevailing. It thus proposes change at a high level of abstraction but one which has a great deal to do with the character and caliber of research results.

IV

The second major theoretical element of area programs with which this paper is concerned is the concept of "area" itself. A coherent analysis or explanation of this concept is far more difficult than in the case of the concept of culture. Judging from current practice an "area" for the purposes of area programs is anything from a culture area which is largely embraced within the boundaries of a state e.g. China or Japan; through culture areas embracing many states or dependencies e.g. Latin

America, Africa or the Near East; to sub-culture areas larger than or coincident with states e.g. Scandinavia or Brazil, and areas of marginal or competing cultures larger or smaller than states e.g. Eastern Europe, the Pacific Islands or Inner Mongolia. In almost every case some sort of cultural criteria are of major importance in delimiting the area of study but they are applied so variously and at so many levels as to preclude definitional formulation. In practice then, since culture and geography are in a physical sense unavoidably related, an area seems to be anything which the research institute or area program concerned says it is, with some preference usually being displayed for culture or sub-culture areas including more than one state. Since historically the term "area" or "culture area" once had a reasonably specific meaning, it is of some interest to examine the difference between its established anthropological significance and its present usage.

The concept of "culture areas" is of quite recent origin, apparently having first been developed early in this century as a device for facilitating the presentation and arrangement of ethnographic specimens in museum work. A little later it was made far more explicit and systematic by Wissler in his work, *The American Indian*.⁴ Here he used it as a technique for grouping tribal units into clusters and mapping the geographical distribution of such clusters. The resultant areas characterized by the possession of similar cultural traits he called culture areas. Since that time the utility of Wissler's concept has been widely acknowledged, his criteria refined and considerable progress made towards the definition and mapping of culture areas in North and South America, Africa and Madagascar. Less thorough and less generally accepted attempts of a similar nature have also been made for Asia and the Pacific Islands.⁵

The operational element in this mapping of culture areas was the concept

4.) C. Wissler (New York 1922).

5.) It should be said, however, that this anthropological attempt to define culture areas in terms of their basic "culture traits" has encountered serious difficulty in ascertaining and agreeing upon the nature of a "culture trait". It is of obvious theoretical importance that such traits be primal units not further divisible into still more primal ones. The practical problems attendant upon distinguishing such elemental units seem to have been as great in the field of culture as they have been in the field of atomic physics. As a consequence certain aspects of the concept have recently been subjected to rather critical scrutiny.

of traits and trait-complexes. Traits are primal aspects or elements of a culture such as source of food, means of transportation, etc. Traits may be positive or negative, i.e. present or absent in a given culture. Where the Plains Indians are concerned, for example, Wissler used such traits as: dependence on bison, absence of fishing, lack of agriculture, movable tepees, skin clothing, no weaving, men's societies, the sun dance ceremony and scalp dances, etc. By plotting the frequency of occurrence of such traits among tribes of the Plains area he established a graded cluster of some thirty-one tribes identifiable in these terms as Plains Indians. He then had a culture area graded outward from a vague cultural center or nexus of tribes possessing all or most of these traits to marginal groups possessing only enough to relate them to this rather than some other culture area.

Certain important qualifications attach to this anthropological concept of culture area. In the first place it is a static device for classifying culture-types and arranging data in respect to considerable numbers of fairly primitive cultural units over large geographic areas. In all cases it has reference to traits and patterns of culture prior to their disturbance by the advent of European culture, colonialism, etc. It treats of conditions as they were several centuries ago and has no historical or dynamic dimensions to it. Secondly, this concept of culture area does not seem particularly relevant to contemporary Euro-American or other culturally advanced societies. This follows from the nature of culture itself. The peculiar function of culture is to enable humans to adapt to and exploit their environment. Thus while it is true that a society's culture inevitably reflects its environment and, therefore, tends to be geographically delimitable, it is equally true that the more advanced the culture the greater its relative freedom from the direct dictates of its environment. Consequently, as a society's culture develops, its one-to-one relation to geography tends to diminish and it becomes increasingly difficult to demarcate uniform culture areas. Among other things the specialization and class stratification characteristic of our culture has so distorted and skewed the relatively simpler geographic patterns of distribution of culture traits existing in primitive societies as to make the application of the concept of culture areas difficult. It is not so much that it is completely inapplicable to modern Western culture as it is the fact that other criteria

than geography now seem to be more relevant and useful.

It is obvious that culture areas conceived in this manner have little in common with the areas of current research programs. The discrepancy is so great in fact as to have induced Steward to distinguish the "primitive culture areas" of standard anthropological type from "contemporary culture areas or world areas."⁶ These latter have had largely separate origins. Precursors existed before the Second World War but the typical current program has developed primarily from the theory and practice of wartime area programs set up to facilitate the speedy production of persons of "general" rather than "specialized" competence in various politically defined geographic areas then possessed of politico-military importance. Furthermore, whatever other criteria may have been applied in outlining the "areas" in which present programs are interested, political factors -- plus the theoretically extraneous but practically all-important factor of the availability of foundation or other financial support -- have almost certainly been given great consideration. The usual area program is concerned with a region, state or group of states of present or of clear potential importance to the foreign policy of the United States. In these days of globally defined foreign policies, this is not a particularly restrictive factor but, in combination with other elements, it does tend to minimize or render less intensive the focus on some areas. Most present programs also emphasize the production of knowledge of practical value about their areas. In other words, they are consciously and systematically more policy or problem-oriented in their teaching and research approaches than are the majority of traditional academic departments. This orientation is more apt to be of a long-range fundamental character than devoted to the solution of immediate day-to-day problems, though these last are by no means excluded.

The questions remain, however, as to how valid and how valuable to the student of comparative politics is the concept of area, defined at either the "primitive" cultural or "world" level. To take up the question of validity first, quite clearly the concept of "primitive culture areas" is the more cogently and persuasively enunciated of the two. Although it has recently

6.) Julian H. Steward, *Area Research, Theory and Practice*, (N. Y. Social Science Research Council, 1950), pp. 9-10.

been subjected to a certain amount of criticism, it still enjoys general acceptance. The concept of "area" as espoused by current area programs, however, is quite a different case. It is amazing, considering the importance and popularity of the "area approach", that so little systematic attention has been accorded the problem of defining and elaborating the concept of "area" itself. One seeks in vain in the published literature a formal definition of any sort. The problem has in general simply not been faced, despite the fact that it must be solved, if area programs are to develop on a sound theoretical and methodological foundation.

The present writer knows of no better formulation of the area concept than that advanced by Professor Preston E. James in a recent article.⁷ There he defines a region [area] as "an area on the earth's surface homogeneous with respect to announced criteria." He goes on to say that "The criteria which are selected must be in terms of a stated objective or problem" and that "a system of regional [areal] differences is justified if it illuminates the factors or elements of a problem; it is not justified if it obscures the factors of a problem." These statements cast a good deal of light on the "area" concept and at the same time have implications of great methodological importance for area programs.

In the first place they make clear the fact that the concept of area is essentially a methodological tool, a classificatory device useful in ordering an unruly mass of raw data so that the researcher can better analyze, understand and utilize them in the furtherance of his task. Secondly, they establish the essential relation between the concept of area and the problem-oriented approach. The former is meaningful only when phrased in terms of the latter. This is an admonition of fundamental importance. Research lacking in a specific problem-oriented focus leads only to aimless description not to functional or causal analysis and the more fruitful understanding to be gained therefrom. Thirdly, these statements enjoin caution in the outlining or acceptance of areas defined in terms of their total content. Given the number of phenomena and processes of social importance existing and operative within any area of significant size and the variety of measurements

7.) "Toward a Further Understanding of the Regional Concept", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. XLII, no. 3 (Sept. 1952), pp. 195-222.

appropriate to each, any attempt to embrace all or any large number of these within a single simplistically-defined area is subject to grave danger. This is a point which area programs would do well to keep in mind in planning and describing their research projects, though it does not, of course, invalidate their use of loosely defined area terms for taxonomic and publicity purposes.

Where the student of comparative politics is concerned the foregoing definition of area has these consequences. It does not seriously affect the status or utility of the standard units of areal classification, i.e. states and their civil divisions of all sizes, levels and purposes. For many important purposes there is no new areal substitute for the traditional territorial units. However, the emphasis on the problem-oriented approach implicit within the definition does suggest the desirability of hypothesizing new types of political areas for particular purposes. The writer can readily envisage, for example, the research utility of political areas defined in terms of common configurations of popular (or oligarchic, or despotic) control over decision-making processes of public concern or again of areas characterized by a deep-seated popular aversion to formal judicial process as a means of settling social disputes. To be sure the problems involved in the establishment and measurement of relevant criteria would be great, but so too would be their value. Such a definition should be, therefore, not only sympathetic to but positively stimulative of experimentation with fresh and promising research applications of the concept of area.

When against this background one inquires more particularly about specific values of the concept of area - in its variant interpretations - - to the student of comparative politics, its applicability would seem to lie largely along the following lines. Where the concept of "primitive culture areas" is concerned it does not appear relevant to those regions where social differentiation and specialization along Euro-American lines has proceeded far. Applied to much of sub-Saharan Africa, to the primarily Indian areas of Latin-America, to the Pacific Islands and to many less developed parts of northern, southern, central and southeastern Asia it might still be of distinct use. It is, of course, a lamentable fact that very few political scientists have so far deigned to pay professional attention to such allegedly

"sub-political" and "backward" areas; but, for the small but increasing minority who do, it would be of appreciable research advantage to have culture area distributions for these peoples and regions. Their pedagogical uses are obvious, as is their utility for either natives or foreigners called upon to administer such areas. Beyond this, from a research standpoint, such a patterned correlation of traits and trait complexes with geographic distribution provides a floor or point of departure from which to evaluate the effects and range of programs aimed at the accomplishment of political change. To achieve optimum utility for such purposes, however, it would be highly desirable, wherever possible, to increase the general level of political sophistication entering into the construction of the original list of culture traits.

It should also be noted that the trait lists underlying the demarcation of primitive culture areas provide at least a partial basis for inter-areal comparisons. They would, however, be of considerably greater use if their current one-dimensionality (i.e. simply noting the presence or absence of a particular trait) could be broadened to include some indication of its intensity or importance in the total cultural picture along the lines suggested by Kroeber.⁸

The potential utility of the concept of "world areas" to students of comparative politics is both less specific and more controversial. It seems to lie principally in the sphere of that most neglected of all aspects of comparative politics - actual comparison. It is not the function of this paper to present a theory of comparison or a discussion of the relation thereto of the factor of uniqueness claimed for all historical events. It is sufficient for present purposes to state that the writer holds the following general view of the problem of comparability. It seems obviously true that all historical events and institutional experiences are, strictly speaking, unique; they never recur in precisely the same pattern and context. To state this is not to deny the possibility of comparison, a procedure which seems to lead to conclusions of empirical value. Events and institutions have common as well as disparate elements. Comparison in social contexts is essentially

8.) A. L. Kroeber, "Cultural and Natural Areas of Native North America," *University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology*, vol. XLVIII.

a process of abstracting from the totality of two or more events, institutions or complexes thereof certain elements deemed to be in significant measure similar and attempting to ascertain the actual degree of such similarity and the operative factors producing it. Practically what one does is wrench things out of context, i.e. abstract them, and ignores temporarily, or holds constant, the uniquely determining aspects of their total context in the search for common elements possessed of some utility. Obviously one does violence to reality in so doing. The greater the degree of abstraction necessary to reach a level where meaningful similarities appear, the greater the violence done and, probably, the more risky the comparison. In this process the degree of abstraction utilized, which is another way of indicating the relative weight allocated to context, is a factor of great importance. Comparisons are the richer, the more persuasive, the more obvious and, usually though not necessarily, the sounder in inverse proportion to the degree of abstraction necessary to obtain them. This does not, of course, argue that such relatively low-degree comparisons are intrinsically more valuable.

It is in this connection that concept of area becomes relevant. It has already been seen that "world areas" are defined with reference to some, even if vague, cultural criteria and that, as a consequence, they are usually coterminous with some sort of recognizable cultural or sub-cultural area. Not infrequently they also contain several other politically comparable units, e.g. Latin America, the Near East or Scandinavia. It is under these circumstances that they perhaps offer certain methodological advantages where comparisons of specific political problems are concerned. Important contextual factors, both physical and social, are more apt to be roughly similar within such culture areas. As a result less abstraction is required and the process of comparison is facilitated.

Given our present level of sophistication where political and social processes are concerned, it would seem wise to make maximum use of what few situations we have or can create which -- in however crude a manner resemble laboratory situations i.e. situations in which certain factors can be held artificially constant in the course of analysis. It is not suggested that Latin America or the Near East provide even approximately ideal laboratory conditions for political comparison and analysis, but only that the con-

textual circumstances there are far more satisfactory for purposes of limited comparisons of political value than they are in culturally more heterogeneous and complex areas. This is to say that there would seem to be a case for intra-area comparisons before cross-cultural comparisons in the hope that they will be more conducive to the development of techniques and knowledge which can later be applied to more difficult cases and circumstances.

Along similar lines the concept of area affords some potential comfort to the searchers for a general theory of politics. Culture areas are more amenable and coherent units for the political scientist to work with than the chaos of international political society as a whole. It would thus seem methodologically and substantively profitable to concentrate some effort on the attempt to build up a general theory of politics inductively within a given area as a stepping stone to larger endeavors and an indication of the feasibility and limitations of the entire undertaking.

These then are the elements of direct value to students of comparative politics which seem to emerge from an analysis of the concept of area: 1) in relatively primitive regions where "primitive culture areas" are isolable in terms of trait analysis, the concept of area, besides practical pedagogical and administrative advantages, affords for researchers a point of departure from which to evaluate or measure political change; 2) the concept of "world area", whatever its lack of precision, does offer a research unit possessed of significant advantages for purposes of the comparative study of political problems as well as for the development of a general theory of politics.

These are significant advantages, but when viewed from the standpoint of their relative contribution to the study of comparative politics, it will be appreciated that the concept of culture seems considerably more central and more productive of values than does the concept of area. However, the two complement each other in a decidedly neat and useful manner and, if utilized conjointly, show promise of improving significantly the methodological armament of the average student of comparative politics.