

## References

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- Popper, K.** (1935) *Logik der Forschung*. Springer, Vienna.
- Popper, K.** (1960) *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*. Hutchinson, London.
- Further references to authors mentioned above are given in the book reviewed.

**Essays on Cultural Transmission.** By Maurice Bloch. Pp. 174 + xi. (Berg, Oxford, New York, 2005.) £16.99, ISBN 184520287-2, paperback. doi: 10.1017/S0021932007002350

Entitled *Essays on Cultural Transmission*, this volume brings together nine articles by Maurice Bloch, now a professor of anthropology at London School of Economics. Though most of these articles have been published in different places, their re-collection in one volume with the addition of some unpublished works and introduction about the general theoretical contents of these works makes this volume invaluable. It presents to some degree the author's career in social anthropology as well as his personal and theoretical reflections on the discipline in general. He laments that anthropologists' lack of interest in general theoretical issues of human beings has made the discipline less coherent in theoretical building, and unable to co-operate with other subjects that study the phenomenon of the *Homo sapien*. Generally speaking, this work shows Bloch's efforts to re-vitalize the discipline. 'By bringing these pieces together,' he writes in the preface, 'it attempts to characterize a particular approach to anthropology which, in many ways, goes against the grain of contemporary fashion' (p. ix).

The subject that he chooses here is cognitive theory. Using data from the Zafimaniry of Madagascar, in which Bloch has conducted a series of intensive fieldworks, he discusses a number of different issues through the lens of not only social anthropology but also cognitive theory. Among the topics that Bloch writes about are the meaning of tree symbolism (chapter 2), the use of carvings among the Malagasy (chapter 3), the meaning of commensality (chapter 4), whether religious beliefs are intuitive or not (chapter 7) and the nature of rituals (chapter 8). With the support of cognitive theory, Bloch generally argues that social cultural explanation of human behaviours will not be complete without considering what really happens at the level of individual psychology. Other than that, he also criticizes many of his colleagues who ignore the biological nature of human beings in their explanation of social and cultural matters.

According to Bloch, cultures can be better understood by also considering mind-internal factors, which are individual/psychological, and mind-external factors, which are physical/environmental. He believes that even though cultures are historically constructed, and transmitted through symbolic communication so that they can be free from natural constraints, 'it does not mean that the attempt to invoke natural factors or even biological factors as explanations of such cultural representations must be abandoned' (p. 145). In 'Kinship and Evolved Psychological Disposition' (chapter 9), which is written with Dan Sperber, Bloch indicates how the interaction of psychological dispositions, which are located inside the individual, and the mind-external factors in a population could lead to the recurrence of certain cultural norms

and behaviour such as the specific relations of mother's brother and sister's son. Such relations of culture and biological dispositions, whether there is intuitive biology inherited from birth parents or not, are more intensely discussed in 'What is Passed on from Parents to Children' (chapter 5), written with Gregg E. A. Solomon and Susan Carey.

Looking at the issues and how they are discussed here, Bloch's attempt to present a specific approach in anthropology seems to show its fruitfulness. But further effort is needed to develop such a coherent as well as influential approach in anthropology. Indeed, this volume is a significant contribution to this effort, but a more compact and integrated work would be much better. Maybe because of the limited space an article could afford, with Bloch sometimes moving from one argument to another very quickly, it is quite difficult to follow his whole ideas. But overall, this book is really insightful. With its broad coverage, both of issues and theoretical perspectives, this book really gives good food for thought, not only for anthropological students but also for psychologists, sociologists and those interested in culture and human beings in general.

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