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Culture: The Anthropologist's Account (review)

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**Samuel C. Wheeler III, *Deconstruction as Analytic Philosophy*
(Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 294 pp.**

According to Davidson, Quine, by overcoming the distinction between analytic and synthetic truth, made the philosophy of language a serious subject. According to Rorty, Davidson, in concluding that “there is no such thing as a language,” attains its most advanced position. How impoverished philosophy has become! It even becomes a kind of accomplishment to show that work that *seemed* new and different (deconstruction) is really the same old thing. Wheeler’s book domesticates deconstruction for analytic philosophers, with their snuffy ideas about their own rigor and their indifference to anything unfamiliar. Derrida emerges as a same-sayer, saying the same as Quine, who says the same as Davidson, who says the same as Wittgenstein. The same old same old. Analytic philosophers should find this comforting. Others may worry that it might be true.

—*Barry Allen*

**Adam Kuper, *Culture: The Anthropologist’s Account*
(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 298 pp.**

A lively historical critique of the way anthropologists use the very idea of culture. Kuper is a British anthropologist of South African origins who did his first field work in the Kalihari desert, and who has become a major theorist. He does not like the way in which *culture* is so often invoked, especially by American anthropologists, as a term that picks out everything that defines a group, and to which all patterns of behavior and activity are relativized. The idea enters anthropology in 1871 and matures with Talcott Parsons. Kuper’s early genealogy of the concept is quite mild, but his critique of later uses is devastating. Everyone should read the assault on Clifford Geertz; even if it makes you admire his work more than ever, you will have had to answer a lot of questions along the way. David Schneider and Marshall Sahlins are treated more gently. This is a provocative essay, clearly written and a good read.

—*Ian Hacking*