In this provocative new study, one of the world’s most distinguished anthropologists proposes that an understanding of cognitive science enriches, rather than threatens, the work of social scientists. Maurice Bloch argues for a naturalist approach to social and cultural anthropology, introducing developments in cognitive sciences such as psychology and neurology and exploring the relevance of these developments for central anthropological concerns: the person or the self, cosmology, kinship, memory and globalisation. Opening with an exploration of the history of anthropology, Bloch shows why and how naturalist approaches were abandoned and argues that these once valid reasons are no longer relevant. Bloch then shows how such subjects as the self, memory and the conceptualisation of time benefit from being simultaneously approached with the tools of social and cognitive science. Anthropology and the Cognitive Challenge will stimulate fresh debate among scholars and students across a wide range of disciplines.

MAURICE BLOCH, Emeritus Professor of Anthropology at the London School of Economics, is one of the world’s leading anthropologists. He has held a number of academic positions at universities around the world and is currently an associate member of the Institut Jean Nicod of the École Normale Supérieure in Paris engaged in an interdisciplinary research project on comparative epistemics funded by the European Science Foundation. He has published widely on his research interests and his work has been translated into twelve languages. He was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1990.
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Anthropology and the Cognitive Challenge

MAURICE BLOCH

London School of Economics and Political Science
This book is dedicated to the memory of the biologist John S. Kennedy, FRS, my step-father, with whom I began to discuss many of these issues.
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Two chapters of this book have already appeared in a somewhat similar form. Chapter 6 formed the basis of my valedictory lecture at the Free University of Amsterdam and was published in 2009 as ‘Reconciling Cultural and Cognitive Approaches to the Self and the Person’, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. A modified version was published as ‘The blob’ in the first number of the online journal Anthropology of the Twentieth Century. Chapter 5 appeared in a very different form in Portuguese as: ‘Que especie de ser e que os anthropologos assumen estudar. O exemplo da compreenso do tempo’, in Rui Fausto e Rita Marmoto (eds.), Tempo E Sciencia (Lisbon: Gradiva).

This book has long been in the making and, as a result, early versions of many of the chapters have been presented to seminars or in the form of lectures in England at the London School of Economics, in the Netherlands at the Free University of Amsterdam and in France at the Collège de France where the bulk of an early version of the book formed the basis of my teaching. The summer school on the self organised for the Institut Jean Nicod of the École Normale Supérieure by Frederique de Vignemont and Elizabeth Pacherie enabled me to develop the ideas which underlie Chapter 6. In the discussions which have followed these various lectures and seminars I have received much help which I cannot fully acknowledge but I wish to express my thanks to these institutions which enabled me to develop my ideas.
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