

ANTHROPOLOGY

PRELIMINARY DEFINITION:

ANTHROPOLOGY, ETHNOLOGY, ETHNOGRAPHY

Anthropology cannot be distinguished from other social and human sciences by its own particular object of study.* Apparently concerned with the so-called “primitive” peoples, or peoples “without writing,” it developed into a science at the same time that these peoples were declining, or at least losing their distinctive characteristics. For the last ten years or so, some anthropologists have turned to studying the so-called civilized societies. Clearly, then, anthropology issues less from the existence of a specific object of study than from an original way of formulating problems which are shared by all the sciences of man. Anthropology acquired its importance by studying social phenomena which, because of their strangeness and difference from those of the observer’s own society—and not because they were any simpler—afforded an insight into certain properties which are at once general and basic to all social life. We could compare the anthropologist’s position in the social sciences to that of the astronomer in the natural sciences: man is apprehended through

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his remotest manifestations, over a distance which acquires temporal, spatial, and moral value. The distance which separates the anthropologist from his object of study reduces the complexity of what he can see, but, making a virtue out of this constraint, it forces him to perceive only those phenomena which may be considered essential.

In the first place, this distance allows the anthropologist to be more objective, by forcing him to abandon not only his own beliefs, preferences, and prejudices, but also, and perhaps most importantly, his own methods of thinking and reflection. The anthropologist tries to formulate his problems and his conclusions in such a way that they appear to be reasonable not only for him, and the honest and objective observer he would like to be, but for any other possible observer. He creates new mental categories, tries to apply and adapt notions of space and time, of opposition and contradiction, which will reliably translate a particular social experience into a code that can be understood in the context of some other social experience.

Secondly, the aim of total objectivity is guided by the desire to preserve the human meaning of phenomena so that they remain intellectually and emotionally understandable from the individual's point of view. What was initially observed from the outside must be reconstructed so that both the observer and the reader can re-experience it from the inside. Instead of opposing causal explanation to understanding, anthropology views the latter as a special case of proof: proof that the anthropologist has grasped the essential meaning of certain phenomena, objectively very remote from him, but subjectively very real for the individuals who participate in them. Social facts cannot be considered in isolation; they are subjectively experienced by human beings, and this consciousness, just as their objective features, constitutes a dimension of their reality.

Finally, anthropology aspires to totality. It conceives of social life as a system whose various parts and aspects are all organically linked. Its preferred method is the *monograph*, the most impressive example of which is undoubtedly to be found in Raymond Firth's six volume work, produced over a period of forty years, which he devoted to Tikopia, an island of the Pacific. It is an historical as well as a functional analysis of a single society, small enough for its organization to rely mainly on personal relation-

ships: concrete interactions among individuals for which kinship provides the general model. Hence the importance that kinship studies have held, and continue to hold in anthropological thinking. Anthropology remains relevant to the extent that certain areas of contemporary life are still based on personal relationships.

These monographic studies are for anthropology what laboratory experiments are for the physical and natural sciences. With the difference, however, that in anthropology the experiment comes before the observation and the formulation of hypotheses: the small scale societies studied by anthropologists constitute ready-made experiments which they have neither the time nor the means to manipulate. They are conveniently prepared, but unmanageable experiments which the anthropologist cannot control. In order to compare one society to another, to process the data experimentally, and to extract the common forms and essential properties, the anthropologist must replace them with models: a system of symbols preserving the characteristic features of the experiment which can then be modified by adding or subtracting certain variables and by hastening their evolution. The alternate use of these two methods, the one empirical, the other deductive, distinguishes anthropology from all the other sciences of man. Anthropology seeks to convert the most intimate subjectivity into a tool for objective demonstration. In the field, the anthropologist lets himself be taken in and fashioned by the experiment. But once in the laboratory, the same anthropologist undergoes another set of mental operations which, without altering the earlier experiences, transforms them into a model. The model itself will be valuable only to the extent that, returning to the heart of the experiment in a third phase of operations, it sheds new light on, and contributes new dimensions to the original data.

The complexity of the aims and methods explains why anthropological terminology has remained vague for such a long time. From the end of the eighteenth century to the twentieth century, and according to the emphasis that was placed on one or the other of these aspects of research, the terms ethnography, ethnology, or anthropology were alternatively preferred. Even today, one or the other of these terms still prevails among the various scientific languages. A general consensus, however,

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seems to be emerging which would identify these terms with three successive phases of a single research project.

By and large, we can say that *ethnography* consists in the observation, description, and analysis of human groups in their particularity, aimed at giving an accurate and reliable account of their existence. It is, therefore, typically monographic. *Ethnology*, which was once defined as the study of human races, their distinctive characteristics and their geographical distribution, today covers the comparative examination of documents obtained from ethnographers working in the field. It corresponds, therefore, to the second phase of research. Lastly, following an increasingly widespread usage, *anthropology* integrates the two preceding phases and adds a third dimension: the data obtained from ethnography, systematized by ethnologists, is used to generate general statements and knowledge about man which constitute a basis for dialogue with other social sciences that aspire to a certain level of generality, among them, history, linguistics, psychology and philosophy. Thus, anthropology is to ethnology what, in turn, ethnology is to ethnography. They do not constitute three different disciplines, or even three conceptions of the same field, but rather three stages or moments in a single research project. The unity of this conception is all the more compelling today since anthropologists are all willing to recognize the fundamental importance of field-work as a prerequisite for all researchers: the life-long ethnographer, the ethnologist interested in comparative studies, as well as for the anthropologist and self-styled theoretician.

This terminological consensus over the forms of research is, however, only a relative thing: the tenuous result of a gradual evolution, which obliges us to consider the origins of anthropology as a discipline and the historical stages of its development.

AN HISTORICAL REVIEW

Man has always been intrigued by the origins of his own institutions and customs, and curious about those of other peoples. Such matters interested and preoccupied historians as far back as those who accompanied Alexander the Great to

Asia, Xenophon, Herodotus, Pausanias, and in a more speculative vein, Aristotle and Lucretius. In the Arab world of the fourteenth century, Ibn Batouta, a passionate traveller, and Ibn Khaldoun, historian and philosopher, both possessed an anthropological curiosity; similarly, the Buddhist monks who travelled from China to India starting in the seventh century.

Europe discovered the Orient during the Middle Ages through the writings of Plan-Carpin and Rubruck, the former sent by the Pope, the latter by Louis IX, on mission to the Mongols in the thirteenth century, and especially through Marco Polo's extended trip to China in the fourteenth century. The variety of sources which converged in anthropological reflection was already apparent at the beginning of the Renaissance. In addition to those mentioned above, we must cite the literature which grew up around the Turkish invasions of the Mediterranean and eastern Europe; the speculations inspired by Aristotelian conceptions of barbarism; the fantasies of medieval folklore, influenced by those of Antiquity, concerning the physical and moral monstrosity of savage peoples; and above all, the information that was beginning to come in from Africa, Oceania, and America as a result of the great discoveries, and described by the first voyagers: for example, the accounts of America in the sixteenth century by the Frenchmen Jean de Léry and André Thevet, and the German Hans Staden.

Travel diaries and their compilations came to be very much in demand from the beginning of the sixteenth century on. The oldest of these works are undoubtedly *Omnium Gentium Mores* by the German Johannes Boehme (1520) and the *Cosmographies* of the Swiss Sebastian Münster (1544) and the Frenchman André Thevet (1575). In the sixteenth century the collections of travels by Richard Hakluyt began to appear in England, and, in Germany, collections of the *Grands Voyages* of Théodore de Bry which continued into the seventeenth century. In England, *Purchas his Pilgrimage*, by Samuel Purchas, was published in 1613.

This enormous travel literature constituted the foundation for anthropological thinking which began in earnest in the eighteenth century. Three different orientations coexisted from the very start. Firstly, there were the neutralists, such as Linneus, Buffon, Camper, White, and Blumenbach, who were

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especially interested in the similarities and differences among the human species, and in determining man's relation to the animal kingdom. Secondly, there were the moralists and philosophers: in France, Montesquieu, Fontenelle, Rousseau, Diderot, all of whom were preceded by Montaigne; D'Alembert, Condorcet, Turgot, who together were to prepare the way for Saint-Simon and Comte who, in turn, were the predecessors of Durkheim and his school. In England, there were the Scottish philosophers, from Hume to Adam Smith; Kant in Germany. Finally, great works of compilation were undertaken, involving both a more systematic effort of classification and more serious reflection; we can mention the Dane, Jens Kraft (1760), the Frenchman Dêmeunier (1776), and the Swiss Chavannes (1788) who was already using the terms anthropology and ethnology in a very modern way. The term ethnography appeared in Germany around 1790, and Ampère spoke of ethnology in his lectures at the Collège de France in 1831.

A separate place must be reserved for two works, of unequal importance, which announced a turning point in the history of anthropological thought. *Moeurs des sauvages américains* by the Père Lafitau, published in 1724, introduced the method of comparison, between the techniques and customs of the Indians and those of the the most ancient peoples of our own civilizations. In 1730, Giambattista Vico published his *Scienza Nuova*, which constituted a clean break with the Cartesian tradition of the introspective study of man, proposing instead to study man through his cultural achievements and especially through linguistic facts. But in spite of these precursors, the real "take off" of modern anthropological thought was to occur much later, during the decade which began with the publication of Maine's *Ancient Law* and Bachofen's *Das Mutterrecht* in 1861, followed by the appearance of *La Cité Antique* by Fustel de Coulanges in 1864, *Primitive Marriage* by McLennan and *Researches into the Early History of Mankind* by Tylor in 1865, and ending in 1871, with Tylor's *Primitive Culture*, and Morgan's *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family*.

The years preceding this "taking-off" were also extremely important, for they witnessed a split between two tendencies, almost two alien sets of mental categories, which had coexisted

in the anthropological tradition until then, and whose differences were to mark all the subsequent development of anthropology. This split first emerged in the conflict between the "monogeneticists" and the "polygeneticists." Do the various human races stem from one and the same family tree or, on the contrary, do they represent families which were originally distinct? In accordance with the teachings of the Bible, the first thesis prevailed at a time when any investigation into human nature was sacrilegious and constituted a threat for the foundations of the social and spiritual order. Yet the monogenetic thesis implicitly challenged the social order since, by asserting the original unity of all men, it provided a source of criticism of liberal aspirations and morality. It must not be forgotten that these speculations developed against the background of the struggle against slave trading which was not only backed by powerful interests, but also supported by the arguments for the original separateness and inequality of Whites and Blacks. This conflict, however, very rapidly assumed a more technical aspect, crystallizing in the opposition between ethnology and anthropology.

Ethnology was conceived as the study of man's diversification into particular racial, linguistic, and cultural groups, the investigation of their histories and inter-relations. It postulated the common origin of man. Anthropology, on the other hand, sought the anatomical and physiological foundations of these differences which lay beyond empirical observation. The analysis of the human species was supposed to determine the location of one race with respect to another, and of mankind in general with respect to the animal world. Formulated in biological and positivistic terms, anthropology provided an alibi for all sorts of racial prejudices which proved to be congenial to the social and moral order, as well as to the economic interests of an expanding colonialisation; much more acceptable, in any case, than the speculations of ethnologists whose arguments contained a large measure of glaring ideology, the kernel of cultural relativism, and an incipient social criticism based on the comparison of beliefs and customs.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF PHYSICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Anthropology and ethnology developed independently from one another, the first based on biological considerations and styling itself as positivistic, the second founded on philosophical and moral ideas, with a strong humanitarian concern. Although their early differences were sometimes very acute, the term anthropology, first in Anglo-Saxon countries and later elsewhere, came to cover all the research that was once separated into these distinct orientations. What then became "physical anthropology" had the task of defining its own domain, distinct from the other two branches of anthropology, one social, the other cultural.

The issue remained controversial for some time: were ethnologists to define their study of human groups primarily in terms of race, that is, somatic traits, or by some other means such as language or culture? Without challenging the role of physical anthropology in the study of human paleontology, where bones constitute the principal, and sometimes the only documents, ethnologists increasingly disapproved of the tendency of physical anthropologists to consider prehistorical tools as mere anatomical extensions of man, assimilating them to racial characteristics. It is above all Franz Boas (1858-1942), preceded in this direction by Horatio Hale (1817-1896), who established the primacy of language and culture as the major criteria of classification. Re-affirming the value he assigned to linguistic facts and cultural manifestations, Boas entitled the collection of his most important articles *Race, Language and Culture* (New York, 1940).

Ethnology's opposition to the studies of physical anthropologists can be explained in several ways. First of all, in attempting to define human "races," anthropologists limited themselves to the description and measurement of visible somatic characteristics, such as height, skin coloration, the shape of the skull, and type of hair. Admitting that all observable variations in these areas are convergent, nothing proves that this is also the case with other, no less real but hidden characteristics. Secondly, these characteristics cannot be defined in any absolute way; it is invariably a matter of degree. The permissible variations in the dosage of a particular trait will therefore be somewhat arbitrary. Since they vary in infinitely small quantities,

the upper and lower limits that are set by a researcher will depend on the type of phenomena he chooses to classify.

Based on these arguments alone, the notion of race already seems to be extremely fragile. The distribution of elementary characteristics—let us say the distinction between Blacks, Yellows, and Whites—does not in any way help the ethnologist confronted with a multitude of cultures each different from the other. Moreover, experience has amply proven that it is impossible to associate every culture with a separate racial type. The total number of cultures which exist, or which still existed a few centuries ago, greatly outstrips the number of different races which the most meticulous anthropologists ever managed to classify. The ratio is several thousands to some twenty or thirty. This enormous disparity explains why physical anthropologists and ethnologists have had little opportunity of working together over the last century.

Beyond this, it must be seen that the characteristics used to determine the racial type of human groups can only be employed if they are devoid of adaptive value; otherwise they prove nothing. The predominance of a trait in one group or another would simply be the result of natural selection, and not constitute the proof of a distinct origin. Nearly every racial characteristic that physical anthropology chose to study has, one after the other, been shown to possess some value of adaptation. And nothing allows us to say that this would not also hold for other phenomena which might replace the physical ones.

This “fixist” position inherent in traditional physical anthropology explains why, in the second half of the nineteenth century, scientists of orthodox Darwinian persuasion, such as Huxley and Wallace, in spite of the fact that they were biologists, found themselves closer to the “ethnologists” whom they favored in their rivalry with the “anthropologists.” The former, who believed that the whole of mankind stemmed from a common origin, were therefore more willing than the latter to regard evolution as the cause of the diversity of mankind; Tylor is a case in point.

Whatever the ethnologists’ reservations may have been, they did agree to collaborate with anthropologists and even—though not without a certain disgust and sometimes self-reproach—adopt the designation of anthropology for their own research.

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Hence general anthropology, which is by definition a social science, has the particularity of encompassing both the human and the natural sciences, the latter of which physical anthropology still relies on today. This double affiliation is totally justified in view of the biological knowledge and methods required by physical anthropology; but it should not conceal the now quite obvious fact, namely, that physical anthropology is essentially a social science in that man, as already observed in the eighteenth century, is a domesticated animal and, what is more, the only one to have domesticated himself. For instance, it would be absurd to attribute the varieties of dogs to natural causes without taking human interference into consideration. Similarly, the physical differences between human groups depend more on the past configurations of their social existence than the latter can be said to have resulted from racial characteristics.

The evolution of man from animals and his present distribution into what are held to be anatomically or physiologically distinct racial groups does not, and will not constitute a natural history of man. Human evolution occurred under totally different conditions from those that influenced the development of other living species. With the acquisition of language, man came to control the modalities of his own subsequent evolution; he has usually, however, never been conscious of the fact. Every human society modifies the conditions of its physical perpetuation by imposing a complex system of rules, such as the prohibition against incest, endogamy, exogamy, preferential marriages with certain categories of kin, polygamy or monogamy, and the more or less systematic enforcement of social, moral, economic and aesthetic norms. In this respect, physical anthropology, in spite of its wide use of the perspective and methods of natural science, is nothing more than the study of the anatomical and physiological transformations which took place in a certain living species as a result of the emergence of social life, language, and systems of value. These are the factors which, above all else, fashioned and oriented the course of natural selection in human groups. Rather than asking ourselves whether or not culture depends on race, as in the nineteenth and even the twentieth centuries, we are beginning to realize today that the observable physical differences between men are, to a large extent, simply one among many elements of culture.

The impetus for this change of perspective did not come from traditional physical anthropologists, who would probably never have accepted it, but primarily from geneticists and thus also from biologists. By creating a field of population genetics, they opened up the possibility for a viable science of physical anthropology, with which ethnologists could usefully collaborate. Substituting the notion of population for that of type, the notion of genetic stock for that of race, and by demonstrating the enormous difference between hereditary traits due to a single gene and the practically indeterminable ones due to the work of several genes, genetics effectively shattered all the fixist theories, and among these, racism. Furthermore, it attenuated the differences between biological phenomena, which could be studied very accurately and finely, and cultural phenomena. Instead of defining populations by means of the illusory, and strictly speaking abstract notion of race, they can now be described in terms of concrete combinations of various genetic characteristics.

Henceforth there appears a certain similarity, at least on a formal level, between the roles of genetic and of cultural recombination in the history of human populations. Both stem from the same problematic question: do certain elements in a given system have a regulatory function while others have a concerted effect upon a single characteristic or, on the contrary, do several characteristics depend on a single element? While cultural traits, which are not genetically determined, can affect the organic evolution of a population, it is easy to see that they could initiate a course of physical development which, in turn, would have a repercussion on culture. By taking all the intermediary stages into account, we can hope to uncover the possible correlations which exist between certain social or cultural facts and certain biological phenomena.

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EVOLUTIONISM AND DIFFUSIONISM

The quarrel between evolutionism and diffusionism displaced onto the field of culture the debate which had existed between monogeneticism and polygeneticism in the field of nature. The rationalist tradition of the eighteenth century had entertained the

hope that, as in the physical world, it would be possible to discover universal laws of human nature, developing perhaps at different rates, but always passing through identical stages.

Thus the notion of evolution in sociology and anthropology long preceded its biological formulation. This is not to say that Darwinian theories did not constitute a powerful support. But in the nineteenth century, anthropologists tended to emphasize the similarities between cultures and underestimate their differences. They applied themselves to linking the latter to various stages along a path of unilinear progression; all societies had necessarily to pass through each stage in order to arrive at the ultimate level, which was actually defined in terms of the beliefs and customs inherent to the societies and the times to which these thinkers belonged. They invariably placed the institutions and customs which differed most radically from their own at the beginning of a long unidirectional evolution. The entire history of mankind could thus be reduced to a logically ordered succession of stages, each of which was documented with appropriately selected ethnographical data. As Radcliffe-Brown emphasized, an arbitrary and conjectural history was elaborated, invariably dominated by moral and social prejudices. All observable forms of life, activity and thought were compared to those with which the theoretician was most familiar and which he therefore considered to be the most advanced manifestations on a universal path of progress.

But ethnographic observation quickly demonstrated that cultures do not appear and develop spontaneously, like plants which mature from identical seeds that are merely sown at different times in the season. Even a superficial historical approach bears witness to the fact that there are contacts between cultures, that relations are established and antagonisms are allowed to develop which have consequences on certain aspects of both cultures: each borrows elements from the other and, positively or negatively, influences it. Tylor, who was one of the founders, with Klemm, of evolutionary theory, rightly defended the relevance of historical research. As early as 1896, Boas invoked vehemently the abuses of comparative studies. But it was in Germany and Austria that the methods and theories of diffusionism were the first to develop, with the studies of F. Graebner (1877-1934), L. Frobenius (1873-1958), and Father W. Schmidt (1868-1954).

Their work was based on a meticulous inventory of cultural characteristics and the examination of their geographical distribution. Their aim was twofold: first, to delimit cultural areas that were determined by the predominance or the exclusivity of certain traits or a group of traits, and secondly, to discover the centers of origin from which these traits developed and spread throughout the whole cultural area and even beyond.

Whatever the interest and usefulness of the studies compared to the evolutionists, they rapidly fell into the opposite excess. Above all, they disallowed the possibility of independent invention, and neglected a phenomenon which Boas had energetically pointed out, namely, convergence: elements which may have been totally different at the outset, but which acquire superficially identical appearances under the influence of widely variable conditions.

Victims of too systematic a logic, the diffusionists developed a history that was no less conjectural and ideological than the one the evolutionists had elaborated. By shattering the idea of species, on which comparativism was based, in order to reconstruct individuals (that is, phenomena or groups of phenomena that are spatially and temporally individualized), the diffusionists used temporal and spatial factors derived more from the manner in which these details were selected and structured than from any real unity of the object itself. On an equal footing with the "stages" of evolutionism, the cultural "cycles" or "complexes" of diffusionism were the result of an abstraction that could never be empirically corroborated. The continuators of the so-called "historical-cultural" school, notably Paul Rivet in France, Zambotti and Grotanelli in Italy, were forced to modify, each in his own field, the contentions of its founders.

The simultaneous criticism of evolutionism and diffusionism, unremittingly advocated by Boas, was derived from the teachings of A. Bastian (1826-1905) who excluded the possibility of discovering universal causes that would imply the necessary development of certain ideas in all men. According to Bastian, there is no common source from which universally distributed ideas, inventions, customs and beliefs emerged. There may have been various origins, but they will remain unknown. Rather, we must acknowledge them as "elementary ideas," which combine in different ways in different cultures, and moreover, may be exchanged and borrowed. Multiple combinations of such elements

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may appear or disappear during the course of history, but their origin can be traced only to the extent that sufficient proof is available. The thought of Bastian was characterized by moderate measures of evolutionism and diffusionism, emphasizing the ultimately psychological character of cultural facts. This double orientation persists in all those who, following Boas, have limited their study of diffusion to small enough geographical areas to ensure the existence of historical relations between its inhabitants, and who interpret their data primarily according to the ethnographic context and the conscious or unconscious psychological expression which a population gives of its institutions and beliefs, to itself or to others.

Evolutionism in biology, which greatly reinforced the conception of a unilinear progression of cultures and societies, was also to evolve in a Boasian line. Biologists noticed that their idea of evolution governed by a few simple laws actually concealed a very complicated history. The notion that all living forms had to follow a unique progression in their evolution was first replaced by the notion of a tree, allowing for kinship relations to exist between species, if not always direct filiation. The tree itself was eventually replaced by a bush, or rather a trellis: a figure in which the lines meet as often as they separate. The historical description of these obscure meanderings came to replace the simplistic diagrams in which anthropology, as well as biology, expected to capture the numerous, and at times regressive paths taken not by one but several types of evolutionary processes differing in their rates, directions, and consequences.

Cultural relativism, which was to originate in Boas, therefore abandoned the idea of a continuous unidirectional progression, in which the West was thought to have raced through the various stages while other societies had stayed behind. It was replaced by the idea of a choice among alternative directions, such that a culture may lose something in one or several areas for having wanted to gain in others. Rather than considering Western civilization as the most advanced expression of human society and the so-called primitive ones as the survival of preceding stages—the order of appearance of which was supposed to coincide with their logical hierarchy—cultural relativism drew its inspiration from an insight into the multiple dimensions on which cultural facts could be structured, such that no society

is ever at the same level in all dimensions at any one time.

These arguments certainly remain valid against the neo-evolutionary tendencies which have appeared, especially in the United States, for example with L. White and M. Harris. The former proposed to order all societies in relation to a single criterion: the average amount of energy available for each member. But many of the societies without writing differ little on this score, and one would have to rely on other criteria in order to assign each one a rank in the hierarchy. Using other criteria, however, such as Gutman scales, it might be possible to determine significant evolutionary sequences concerning certain types of cultural phenomena within specific historical and geographic constraints. The old ideas of Bastian might then acquire a new relevance: it would be possible to define precisely certain evolutionary sequences, not necessarily headed in the same direction, with indistinct phases of disorder, stagnation, and regression, all variously combined, and linked to phenomena of diffusion.

THE COMPARATIVE METHOD VERSUS THE HISTORICAL METHOD

In the nineteenth century, anthropology was completely dominated by the comparative method. Its goal was to construct a science of man comparable to the natural sciences, based on the observation and classification of a large number of facts taken from the most varied cultures. From this it was hoped that operational laws of evolution could be inferred. In fact, it was maintained that societies could be treated exactly like natural systems, such as organisms: their manifestations could be studied empirically, then classified; types could be established, and all these phenomena could be correlated.

We owe a great deal to the comparative method: for a systematic inventory of all the available information, from the oldest to the most recent; the cataloging and organizing of this information; the discovery of many characteristics common to geographically remote cultures, or those shared by exotic cultures and ones existing before our own civilizations. The works of J. Frazer (1854-1940), such as *The Golden Bough*, *Totemism and Exogamy*, *Folklore in the Old Testament*, constitute irreplaceable repertoires of ethnographic facts which are still valid references,

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and at the same time have the merit of drawing all sorts of parallels between recurrent beliefs and customs in a large number of different societies. Even when the interpretation of certain regularities appears naïve and old-fashioned today, it must be admitted that these problems could, and needed to be raised.

Historians were the first to challenge the approach and methods of comparativism. In order to understand the evolution of the Roman family, was it better to compare it to the Chinese, Jewish, or Aztec family, or to restrict the investigation to a single case and study the interrelating features of a certain type of life in society and what it came to? The encyclopedic thirst of the comparativists led them into two serious pitfalls. On the one hand, for purposes of comparison, they put data from societies in different phases of their evolution, on the same plane. On the other hand, they isolated often inseparable aspects of culture from one another, and compared elements which had been selected from extremely heterogeneous types in their original social and cultural contexts. Under the influence of Boas in the United States, and Malinowski in England, anthropology was very quick to abandon this mechanical use of the comparative method, and to replace it with the monograph, that is, the in-depth study of an institutional system, of the ways and customs of a particular society, by a researcher and field-worker who could investigate their interrelations and, to the extent that it could be reconstructed, given the lack of documents, its historical development. Aside from the classical study of Malinowski on the natives of the Trobriand Islands, we can mention the exemplary work of Raymond Firth on the island of Tikopia, of G. Bateson and R. Fortune on some Melanesian societies, of Meyer Fortes on the Tallensi, of Evans-Pritchard on the Azande and the Nuer, and of E. Leach on two societies of Burma and Ceylon.

The methodological relations of anthropology not only with the natural sciences, as the adherents of comparativism had claimed, but also with the traditional humanities and especially with history therefore assumed importance. Independently from one another, and only a year apart, Levi-Strauss (1949) and Evans-Pritchard (1950) formulated the problem in almost identical terms, emphasizing the fact that the comparativists, who took themselves to be historians, were actually elaborating an ideological and conjectural history which all historians would spurn,

whereas the ethnologists—who were preoccupied with translating into the language of their own culture an on-going moment in the life and thought of a native culture—were actually working like historians constrained by the absence or dearth of written documents.

The opposition between the comparative and the historical methods was reflected in the perspectives of two of the leaders of the English school: A.R. Radcliffe-Brown (1881-1955) and E.E. Evans-Pritchard (1902-1974). The former held that anthropology—he preferred to call it sociology—was an inductive science whose goal was to infer general propositions from the examination of special cases; it was therefore based on a comparative and systematic examination of data from a large number of different societies. The latter, however, objected that these so-called sociological laws were speculative, too general to be of any interest, and, as Boas had already stated, were mainly platitudes and tautologies. They teach us less about culture than actual field-work, in which individual behaviors are grounded in their social context, the various aspects of which are related from a functional and an historical point of view.

A quarter of a century later, these two positions appear to be less irreconcilable. The objections to the comparative method stemmed, at least in part, from the fact that comparisons and generalizations were based on ancient descriptions written by travellers and missionaries, that is, documents of questionable reliability. And whenever the best sources were used, they were invariably impoverished and reduced to their lowest common denominator to satisfy the needs of comparison. Today, anthropology possesses spatially and temporally well-circumscribed analyses, relations between phenomena can be confirmed with much greater certainty than what was once discovered on the basis of superficial study. As the contents became richer, more complex, and involved more dimensions, certain common properties emerged which were over and above certain of their aspects with which initially they were often confused.

Thanks to the historical method, we are now better prepared to start some real analysis, beyond simply organizing the data. Just as the linguist first extracts the phonetic reality of words, the phonemes, from which he then determines the logical and physical reality of their distinctive features, so the historian and

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anthropologist can now hope to attain a deep enough level for them to cease comparing individually distinct units and grasp the invariant elements whose recurrence, in continually varying combinations, insures the identity of superficially distinct objects. Instead of using comparison as the basis for generalisation, as was once thought, we find that just the inverse is true: the generality of certain invariant properties is the basis for comparison.

Advances in documentary techniques and statistical methods, which Tylor had already advocated in his time, allowed G.P. Murdock to undertake a project the outline of which had been worked out by the Dutchman Steinmetz (1869-1946) at the end of the last century: an inventory and typological analysis of all known cultures, primitive, historical, as well as contemporary. Initiated about thirty-five years ago, this "Cross-Cultural Survey," followed by an ethnographic atlas, constituted the basis for its initiator's important work *Social Structure* (1949) as well as for numerous studies, done with the help of electronic computers, establishing the correlations and incompatibilities between two or several cultural characteristics.

Murdock's efforts and results have raised the level of the comparative method, supplying it with a larger quantity of more reliable and discriminating data. New adherents of comparativism have appeared, such as the American R.B. Texter and the Dutchman A.J. Köbben, who pointed out that anthropology has reached a stage of development in which the historical-functional and the comparative approaches, instead of perpetuating their old rivalries, can effectively work together. Advances in the former, have allowed the latter to refine its data and select them at equivalent levels. Conversely, with the help of statistical tools, the comparative method has discovered regularities which, in turn, the second approach will have to examine and interpret separately. Comparative analysis can also assist the field-worker in verifying whether or not, and to what extent, a specific characteristic observed in one society is found in others. We should not forget, however, that while statistical regularities indicate the problems, only the observation of concrete societies and individuals can lead to the solutions.

FUNCTIONALISM

The rival reconstructions of the evolutionists and the diffusionists both appeared to be pseudo-histories, the former being closer to the philosophical novel, the latter to the archeological novel. Hence the nearly simultaneous reactions of Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski. They maintained that since it was impossible to study and understand the history of societies without writing, through the documented experiences of its members, it was better to abandon history and study the present existence of such societies.

Between 1916 and 1918, Malinowski (1884-1942) spent two year-long periods among the natives of the Trobriand Islands, east of New Guinea. He thus initiated a new type of ethnological research, based on a knowledge of the language and an intimate participation in the life of the society. Instead of simply gathering more or less unconnected facts, the observer discovers that the various aspects of the native culture are only parts of a totality. The researcher's goal is to reconstitute his knowledge of a culture that he has experienced from the inside, from a member's point of view.

Each separate institution thus appears to be linked to all the others: commercial exchanges are linked to the law and to political organization, all three of which are, in turn, linked to technology, on the one hand, to religion and magic on the other. The inert elements of cultures which used to be collected a bit like entomological specimens finally came alive. Areas which had been totally ignored in the past, such as the sexual life and legal practices, were made available for investigation.

Following Malinowski, ethnologists could not conceive of working in any other framework. The theoretical aspects of Malinowski's work, however, have often been criticized. He tended to make a principle out of his personal distaste for history, without realizing that he was, in fact, advocating a necessarily historical type of research, even if it were limited to several months or a few years. And since the ethnologist, in spite of everything, is a historian, he has no reason for ignoring older sources when they are available. Above all, by discovering that even those customs which appear the most bizarre and shocking to the outside observer have a definite function in the society that

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practices them, Malinowski came to preach a sort of ethnological optimism: every society is as good as it can be under the conditions in which it exists, and all institutions are, in the last analysis, explained in terms of the solutions they bring to universal human needs. Universal needs undoubtedly exist, and should therefore be studied by biologists and physiologists. In attempting to reduce everything to such universals, the ethnologist risks forgetting that his particular role consists in describing and analyzing the different ways the needs emerge in each society.

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THE FUTURE OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Some people believe that anthropology is condemned to disappear along with its traditional subject matter, the so-called primitive peoples; in order to survive anthropology will supposedly have to abandon fundamental research and devote itself to the problems of developing countries, on the one hand, and to the pathological phenomena which can be observed in our own societies, on the other. Thus, applied anthropology came into existence. Without challenging the legitimacy, the relevance, and the practical interest of these studies, we must emphasize the fact that there are still enormous tasks to be accomplished in the classical field of anthropology. In Africa, Indonesia, Melanesia, South America and elsewhere, a considerable number of original societies continue to exist which have either never been studied, or only very inadequately.

It is not too late for anthropology to concentrate on these tasks. The impending disappearance of these distant societies has been prophesied time and time again over the last hundred and fifty years. The argument was used in England between 1830 and 1840 to justify the importance and necessity of anthropological research. Frazer advanced the same idea in 1908 in his inaugural lecture at the University of Liverpool. Yet at that time the ethnological investigation of Melanesia had just barely gotten under way. And it was not until the Second World War that the inland populations of New Guinea could be properly studied: six or eight hundred thousand inhabitants distributed among scores of different and original societies. The information from

these societies, which is still far from being complete, was to have completely renewed the foundations of anthropological theory.

But this opportunity is undoubtedly the last one, and we must not underestimate the frighteningly rapid extinction of the so-called primitive peoples throughout the world. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, there were some 250,000 aborigines living in Australia; today, there is only a quarter or a fifth of that number left. Even when the demographic situation of these societies remains satisfactory, their traditional institutions, if they have not already disappeared, tend to be obliterated. In Brazil between 1900 and 1950, more than ninety different tribes and at least fifteen languages were simply wiped off the map; in the last few years, barely thirty tribes have managed to maintain their distinctive personality, and only then in a very relative way. The construction of the trans-Amazonian highway and internal colonial enterprises condemn these tribes to only a few more years of existence.

In addition to the physical extinction threatening groups which to the very end remained faithful to their traditional beliefs and way of life, anthropology is confronted today by another danger. Some peoples in Africa, Southern Asia, and Latin America always enjoyed an absolute or relative demographic density which is now often on the increase. These populations have escaped the scope of anthropology not because they have disappeared, but because they have changed: their cultures are rapidly evolving in the direction of Western models, for which anthropological methods are neither exclusively nor even primarily relevant.

Furthermore, on gaining national independence, for the most part after the Second World War, these peoples rebelled against the idea of being observed from the outside as simple objects of study. Because they themselves, or their elites, consider their ancient customs and beliefs to be a sign of cultural retardation from which they wish to emancipate themselves as swiftly as possible, they censure the anthropologist for showing an interest in these customs, assigning them a value and a dignity which they themselves are trying to discredit. This attitude is ever more widespread, to the extent that it is adopted by ethnic minorities, such as the Indians of North America and their affirmation of Red Power, partly inspired by the resistance movements of

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Black Americans. Anthropologists are less directly involved with the latter because their exposure to the life of the Blacks was more sporadic and above all more recent. Ethnologists are resented by the Indians for having exploited them in books and publications from which they really gained nothing, and for not being sufficiently interested in problems which, for these minorities or their most advanced elements, are the only real ones, namely, the defense of their material and moral rights, and the struggle against a social order in which these rights have been violated and continue to be denied.

Thus the anthropologist is currently confronted with a paradoxical situation. The theory of cultural relativism, already present in Montaigne, was motivated by a basic respect for cultures that are different from our own. Boas and his successors gave cultural relativism its most vigorous expression and established its definitive form. Today, however, this theory is repudiated by the very peoples in whose interests it was originally formulated. At the same time, the idea of a unilinear evolution is reappearing, and, at least implicitly, gaining unexpected support among societies and states whose strongest desire is for rapid industrialisation. They would sooner consider their traditional culture as being temporarily backward than recognize its difference should this specificity prove to be more stable than they would like.

Hence, traditional anthropology encounters oppositions in various parts of Africa and Asia. Whereas economists and sociologists, whose research will supposedly contribute to the intended transformations, are unhesitatingly welcomed, ethnologists are hardly tolerated; their passports and visas are revoked for fear that their studies and publications will focus on customs which would best be ignored until they have completely disappeared. In the event that such practices persist, they should not be made known to the outside world, lest someone suspect that, contrary to what one would like to imagine, and perhaps actually believe, the national culture has not yet attained the level of a modern civilization.

Anthropologists themselves belong to a civilization which for too long entertained the same prejudices not to measure the irreplaceable losses which threaten these young states. Whatever treasures may have been collected in the National Museum of

Popular Arts and Traditions (Musée national des Arts et Traditions populaires) inaugurated in Paris in 1972, one can only imagine how much greater they might have been had we started before the First World War instead of before the Second. The vocation of anthropology has also become, in part, didactic. It consists in teaching others how to avoid repeating the mistakes that we made: we thought of preserving the last remains of our historical past and popular life just when they had almost disappeared; only then did we notice the extent and the seriousness of our mistake. It is therefore necessary to convince all peoples, including ourselves, of the importance of preserving the unique forms of thinking and acting which, in each society, constitute the only viable foundation for a humanistic culture of its own.

The danger for peoples who have not possessed writing for very long would be to impose this task from the outside. It would be equally futile for them to train ethnologists similar to our own who would come to do field-work in our societies as we do in theirs. The reasoning behind this idea is that each society would accommodate itself better to being the object of research if it could alternatively be the researcher in others. But we tend to forget that anthropology is not a contemplative discipline that can be considered independently from the historical conditions that fostered its development. There would never have been any anthropology in the sense that we understand the term if a vast portion of humanity had not been dominated by another; if for decades and even centuries, men had not ravaged the natural resources of others and exterminated them, intentionally or not, with diseases that their bodies were not equipped to fight.

In the beginning, anthropology often protested against such abuses: all the English ethnological and anthropological societies grew out of the Aborigines Protection Society, affiliated with the Quakers. It was initially devoted to fighting Black slavery in the English colonies and, more generally, protecting the native populations of the Empire. But the Quakers and the Evangelists were not anti-colonialist in principle. Gathering information on the ways and customs of non-civilized peoples was more a reparation that the intellectual world demanded in exchange for its disinterest in the colonial enterprise, than an effort to curb the barbaric practices of the colonialists. It would be unwarranted and incorrect to say that anthropology served the interests

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of colonialism; it did, however, take advantage of the situation and develop in its shadow. On an epistemological level, the effort to study man objectively undeniably reflects a situation in which one part of humanity is controlled by another. It would be absurd to hold this against anthropology today, just as it would be to neglect the discoveries in physics or biology that were made on the basis of wartime technology. In a similar vein, astronomers might be accused of lending support to the capitalist system because their telescopes are made by workers who do not control their productive labor. It is nevertheless true that anthropology developed in the West, not because of any intellectual superiority, but because exotic cultures were treated as objects, and could therefore be more easily studied as objects. They were of no real interest to us. But we cannot go back on their intense interest in us, an attitude which they cannot easily undo. The perspectives cannot be reversed.

Anthropology must cease being considered as a sequel of colonialism and an elitist activity which continues to exist through a system of extended economic inequality. This is the only way it will gain any legitimacy in the eyes of peoples who, once objects of study, are now aspiring to control their own destinies. Anthropology is a science of man which, intellectually and methodologically, fulfills a specific need: the investigation of societies that lack writing, for which traditional methods of social science are therefore practically irrelevant.

Until now, anthropologists have always provided for the absence of written documents by using other methods, such as direct observation. But once the use of writing became generalized in these societies, the problem was no longer of accommodating oneself to a lack but of filling the gap. When a culture is studied by one of its own members, anthropology loses its traditional "make-do" character, and comes to resemble the classical social sciences, linguistics, philology, history, and archeology.

Anthropology may be thought of as the knowledge and reflection about man in terms of his societies and artefacts. As such it merely extends an interest which began in the Renaissance to new geographical areas. The only reason no one in the sixteenth century considered anything beyond the ancient civilizations of Greece and Rome was that hardly any other sources were as readily available. Our knowledge of the inhabited world has

constantly expanded since then: first to the Arab world, then toward India, and finally to China and Japan. By seriously considering facts pertaining to the most distant and disdained cultures, anthropology pushed the universal aim of humanistic thought to its logical extreme. The inherent conditions of the undertaking obliged the first phase to be conducted from the outside. It must be hoped that the peoples who were at first objects of study will preserve the original inspiration of the undertaking, and claim the right—which is a duty for them with respect to mankind as a whole—to increase their knowledge of their own past and the traditional forms of their culture. They shall have to work from within, and what they do may no longer be termed anthropology. But in the Renaissance, those who worked as historians and philologists on the ancient forms of their own civilization were already doing a brand of anthropology.

The two tasks which anthropology faces today are only different in appearance. Traditional anthropological research must be pursued and intensified wherever native cultures, even those threatened with imminent extermination, have managed to preserve some part of their moral identity. And wherever populations remain physically vigorous while their cultures change and come to resemble our own, anthropology in the hands of native scholars must fix its goals and adopt methods comparable to the ones which, ever since the Renaissance, have proven their value in accumulating information on our own culture. Since the end of the nineteenth century and in many regions of the world, anthropologists have trained native researchers to whom we owe many fundamental works: in North America, for instance, Francis La Flesche, the son of an Omaha chief; James Murie, a Pawnee Indian; George Hunt, a Kwakiutl; Henry Tate, a Tshimshian. For their own benefit and that of mankind in general, knowledge about societies that are different from our own will only progress if they choose to take on the task themselves.