

# ANTHROPOLOGY

*By*

A. L. KROEBER



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## PREFACE

In the preparation of Chapters II, III, and VI of this book I have drawn on a University of California syllabus, "Three Essays on the Antiquity and Races of Man"; for Chapter VII, on an article "Heredity, Environment, and Civilization" in the *American Museum Journal* for 1918; and Chapter V makes use of some passages of "The Languages of the American Indians" from the *Popular Science Monthly* of 1911. In each case there has been revision and for the most part rewriting.

Whatever quality of lucidity the volume may have is due to several thousand young men and women with whom I have been associated during many years at the University of California. Without their unwitting but real co-authorship the book might never have been written, or would certainly have been written less simply.

A. L. K.

Berkeley, California,  
January 22, 1923.

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# ANTHROPOLOGY

## CHAPTER I

### SCOPE AND CHARACTER OF ANTHROPOLOGY

1. Anthropology, biology, history.—2. Organic and social elements.—3. Physical anthropology.—4. Cultural anthropology.—5. Evolutionary processes and evolutionistic fancies.—6. Age of anthropological science.

#### 1. ANTHROPOLOGY, BIOLOGY, HISTORY

Anthropology is the science of man. This broad and literal definition takes on more meaning when it is expanded to "the science of man and his works." Even then it may seem heterogeneous and too inclusive. The products of the human mind are something different from the body. And these products, as well as the human body, are the subjects of firmly established sciences, which would seem to leave little room for anthropology except as a less organized duplication. Ordinary political history, economics, literary criticism, and the history of art all deal with the works and doings of man; biology and medicine study his body. It is evident that these various branches of learning cannot be relegated to the position of mere subdivisions of anthropology and this be exalted to the rank of a sort of holding corporation for them. There must be some definite and workable relation.

One way in which this relation can be pictured follows to some extent the course of anthropology as it grew into self-consciousness and recognition. Biology, medicine, history, economics were all tilling their fields of knowledge in the nineteenth century, some with long occupancy, when anthropology shyly entered the scene and began to cultivate a corner here and a patch there. It examined some of the most special and

non-utilitarian aspects of the human body: the shape of the head, the complexion, the texture of the hair, the differences between one variety of man and another, points of negligible import in medicine and of quite narrow interest as against the broad principles which biology was trying to found and fortify as the science of all life. So too the historical sciences had pre-empted the most convenient and fruitful subjects within reach. Anthropology modestly turned its attention to nations without records, to histories without notable events, to institutions strange in flavor and inventions hanging in their infancy, to languages that had never been written.

Yet obviously the heterogeneous leavings of several sciences will never weld into an organized and useful body of knowledge. The dilettante, the collector of oddities who loves incoherence, may be content to observe to-day the flare of the negro's nostrils, to-morrow the intricacy of prefixes that bind his words into sentences, the day after, his attempts to destroy a foe by driving nails into a wooden idol. A science becomes such only when it learns to discover relations and a meaning in facts. If anthropology were to remain content with an interest in the Mongolian eye, the dwarfishness of the Negrito, the former home of the Polynesian race, taboos against speaking to one's mother-in-law, rituals to make rain, and other such exotic and superseded superstitions, it would earn no more dignity than an antiquarian's attic. As a co-laborer on the edifice of fuller understanding, anthropology must find more of a task than filling with rubble the temporarily vacant spaces in the masonry that the sciences are rearing.

The other manner in which the subject of anthropology can be conceived is that this is neither so vast as to include everything human, nor is it the unappropriated odds and ends of other sciences, but rather some particular aspect of human phenomena. If such an aspect exists, anthropology vindicates its unity and attains to integrity of aim.

## 2. ORGANIC AND SOCIAL ELEMENTS

To the question why a Louisiana negro is black and thick lipped, the answer is ready. He was born so. As dogs produce

pups, and lions cubs, so negro springs from negro and Caucasian from Caucasian. We call the force at work, heredity. The same negro is lazy by repute, easy going at his labor. Is this too an innate quality? Off-hand, most of us would reply: Yes. He sings at his corn-hoeing more frequently than the white man across the fence. Is this also because of his heredity? "Of course: he is made so," might be a common answer; "Probably: why not?" a more cautious one. But now our negro is singing Suwanee River, which his great-grandfather in Africa assuredly did not sing. As regards the specific song, heredity is obviously no longer the cause. Our negro may have learned it from an uncle, perhaps from his schoolmates; he can have acquired it from human beings not his ancestors, acquired it as part of his customs, like being a member of the Baptist church and wearing overalls, and the thousand other things that come to him from without instead of from within. At these points heredity is displaced by tradition, nature by nurture, to use a familiar jingle. The efficient forces now are quite different from those that made his skin black and his lips thick. They are causes of another order.

The particular song of the negro and his complexion represent the clear-cut extremes of the matter. Between them lie the sloth and the inclination to melody. Obviously these traits may also be the result of human example, of social environment, of contemporary tradition. There are those that so believe, as well as those who see in them only the effects of inborn biological impulse. Perhaps these intermediate dubious traits are the results of a blending of nature and nurture, the strength of each factor varying according to each trait or individual examined. Clearly, at any rate, there is room here for debate and evidence. A genuine problem exists. This problem cannot be solved by the historical sciences alone because they do not concern themselves with heredity. Nor can it be solved by biology which deals with heredity and allied factors but does not go on to operate with the non-biological principle of tradition.

Here, then, is a specific task and place in the sun for anthropology: the interpretation of those phenomena into which both organic and social causes enter. The untangling and determination and reconciling of these two sets of forces are anthropology's

own. They constitute, whatever else it may undertake, the focus of its attention and an ultimate goal. No other science has grappled with this set of problems as its primary end. Nor has anthropology as yet much of a solution to offer. It may be said to have cleared the ground of brush, rather than begun the felling of its tree. But, in the terminology of science, it has at least defined its problem.

To deal with this interplay of what is natural and nurtural, organic and social, anthropology must know something of the organic, as such, and of the social, as such. It must be able to recognize them with surety before it endeavors to analyze and resynthesize them. It must therefore effect close contact with the organic and the social sciences respectively, with "biology" and "history," and derive all possible aid from their contributions to knowledge. Up to the present time, a large part of the work of anthropology has consisted in acquiring the fruits of the activity of these sister sciences and applying them for its own ends; or, where the needed biological and historical data were not available, securing them.

### 3. PHYSICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

The organic sciences underlie the social ones. They are more directly "natural." Anthropology has therefore found valuable general principles in biology: laws of heredity, the doctrines of cell development and evolution, for instance, based on facts from the whole range of life. Its business has been to ascertain how far these principles apply to man, what forms they take in his particular case. This has meant a concentration of attention, the devising of special methods of inquiry. Many biological problems, including most physiological and hereditary ones, can be most profitably attacked in the laboratory, or at least under experimental conditions. This method, however, is but rarely open as regards human beings, who must ordinarily be observed as they are. The phenomena concerning man have to be taken as they come and laboriously sifted and re-sifted afterward, instead of being artificially simplified in advance, as by the experimental method. Then, too, since anthropology was operating within the narrow limits of one species, it was driven to

concern itself with minute traits, such as the zoölogist is rarely troubled with: the proportions of the length and breadth of the skull—the famous cephalic index—for instance; the number of degrees the arm bones are twisted, and the like. Also, as these data had to be used in the gross, unmodifiable by artificially varied conditions, it has been necessary to secure them from all possible varieties of men, different races, sexes, ages, and their nearest brute analogues. The result is that biological or physical anthropology—“Somatology” it is sometimes called in Anglo-Saxon countries, and simply “anthropology” in continental Europe—has in part constituted a sort of specialization or sharpening of general biology, and has become absorbed to a considerable degree in certain particular phenomena and methods of studying them about which general biologists, physiologists, palæontologists, and students of medicine are usually but vaguely informed.

#### 4. CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

The historical or social sciences overlies the organic ones. Men's bodies and natural equipment are back of their deeds and accomplishments as transmitted by tradition, primary to their culture or civilization. The relation of anthropology to historical science has therefore been in a sense the opposite of its relation to biological science. Instead of specializing, anthropology has been occupied with trying to generalize the findings of history. Historians cannot experiment. They deal with the concrete, with the unique; for in a degree every historical event has something unparalleled about it. They may paint with a broad sweep, but they do not lay down exact laws.

Moreover, history inevitably begins with an interest in the present and in ourselves. In proportion as it reaches back in time and to wholly foreign peoples, its interest tends to flag and its materials become scant and unreliable. It is commonly considered useful for a man to know that Napoleon was a Corsican and was defeated at Waterloo in 1815, but a rather pedantic piece of knowledge that Shi Hwang-ti was born in northwestern China and unified the rule of China in 221 B.C. From a theoretical or general point of view, however, one of these facts is

presumably as important as the other, for if we wish to know the principles that go into the shaping of human social life or civilization, China counts for as much as France, and the ancient past for as much as the nearby present. In fact, the foreign and the old are likely to be inquired into with even more assiduity by the theoretically minded, since they may furnish wholly new clues to insight, whereas the subjects of conventional history have been so familiarized as to hold out less hope of novel conclusions still to be extricated from them.

Here, then, is the cause of the seeming preoccupation of social or cultural anthropology with ancient and savage and exotic and extinct peoples: the desire to understand better all civilizations, irrespective of time and place, in the abstract or in form of generalized principle if possible. It is not that cave men are more illuminating than Romans, or flint knives more interesting than fine porcelains or the art of printing, that has led anthropology to bear so heavily on the former, but the fact that it wanted to know about cave men and flint knives as well as about Romans and printing presses. It would be irrational to prefer the former to the latter, and anthropology has never accepted the adjudication sometimes tacitly rendered that its proper field is the primitive, as such. As well might zoölogy confine its interest to eggs or protozoans. It is probably true that many researches into early and savage history have sprung from an emotional predilection for the forgotten or neglected, the obscure and strange, the unwonted and mysterious. But such occasional personal æsthetic trends can not delimit the range of a science or determine its aims and methods. Innumerable historians have been inveterate gossips. One does not therefore insist that the only proper subject of history is backstairs intimacies.

This, then, is the reason for the special development of those subdivisions of anthropology known as Archæology, "the science of what is old" in the career of humanity, especially as revealed by excavations of the sites of prehistoric occupation; and Ethnology, "the science of peoples," irrespective of their degree of advancement.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ethnography is sometimes separated, as more descriptive, from Ethnology as more theoretically inclined.

## 5. EVOLUTIONARY PROCESSES AND EVOLUTIONISTIC FANCIES

In their more elementary aspects the two strands of the organic and the social, or the hereditary and environmental, as they are generally called with reference to individuals, run through all human life and are distinguishable as mechanisms, as well as in their results. Thus a comparison of the acquisition of the power of flight respectively by birds in their organic development out of the ancestral reptile stem some millions of years ago, and by men as a result of cultural progress in the field of invention during the past generation, reveals at once the profound differences of process that inhere in the ambiguous concept of "evolution." The bird gave up a pair of walking limbs to acquire wings. He added a new faculty by transforming part of an old one. The sum total of his parts or organs was not greater than before. The change was transmitted only to the blood descendants of the altered individuals. The reptile line went on as it had been before, or if it altered, did so for causes unconnected with the evolution of the birds. The aeroplane, on the contrary, gave men a new faculty without impairing any of those they had previously possessed. It led to no visible bodily changes, nor alterations of mental capacity. The invention has been transmitted to individuals and groups not derived by descent from the inventors; in fact, has already influenced their careers. Theoretically, it is transmissible to ancestors if they happen to be still living. In sum, it represents an accretion to the stock of existing culture rather than a transformation.

Once the broad implications of the distinction which this example illustrates have been grasped, many common errors are guarded against. The program of eugenics, for instance, loses much of its force. There is certainly much to be said in favor of intelligence and discrimination in mating, as in everything else. There is need for the acquisition of exacter knowledge on human heredity. But, in the main, the claims sometimes made that eugenics is necessary to preserve civilization from dissolution, or to maintain the flourishing of this or that nationality, rest on the fallacy of recognizing only organic causes as operative, when social as well as organic ones are active—



when indeed the social factors may be much the more powerful ones. So, in what are miscalled race problems, the average thought of the day still reasons largely from social effects to organic causes and perhaps vice versa. Anthropology is by no means yet in a position to state just where the boundary between the contributing organic and social causes of such phenomena lies. But it does hold to their fundamental distinctness and to the importance of this distinctness, if true understanding is the aim. Without sure grasp of this principle, many of the arguments and conclusions in the present volume will lose their significance.

Accordingly, the designation of anthropology as "the child of Darwin" is most misleading. Darwin's essential achievement was that he imagined, and substantiated by much indirect evidence, a mechanism through which organic evolution appeared to be taking place. The whole history of man however being much more than an organic matter, a pure Darwinian anthropology would be largely misapplied biology. One might almost as justly speak of a Copernican or Newtonian anthropology.

What has greatly influenced anthropology, mainly to its damage, has been not Darwinism, but the vague idea of evolution, to the organic aspect of which Darwin gave such substance that the whole group of evolutionistic ideas has luxuriated rankly ever since. It became common practice in social anthropology to "explain" any part of human civilization by arranging its several forms in an evolutionary sequence from lowest to highest and allowing each successive stage to flow spontaneously from the preceding—in other words, without specific cause. At bottom this logical procedure was astonishingly naïve. We of our land and day stood at the summit of the ascent, in these schemes. Whatever seemed most different from our customs was therefore reckoned as earliest, and other phenomena disposed wherever they would best contribute to the straight evenness of the climb upward. The relative occurrence of phenomena in time and space was disregarded in favor of their logical fitting into a plan. It was argued that since we hold to definitely monogamous marriage, the beginnings of human sexual union probably lay in indiscriminate promiscuity. Since we accord precedence to descent from the father, and generally