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# **Anthropology Full Circle**

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**To Irene, Paul, and Anne**

# Preface

Social relevance is a quality of utmost importance to the present generation of students; the quest for relevance has therefore been one of the criteria we used to select the articles in this text. We hope our choices will help students to gain a cross-cultural perspective on such issues as race, sex roles, the ecology crisis, political responsibility, spiritual and material affluence, the cultural roots of social alienation, and the contemporary appeal of astrology, witchcraft, and hallucinogens.

The coverage of anthropology, however, should not be limited to areas of immediate and practical relevance. For this reason we have represented the four interrelated fields of physical and cultural anthropology, archaeology, and linguistics by including classic pieces from the works of anthropologists such as V. G. Childe, Edward Sapir, Bronislaw Malinowski, Marcel Mauss, Leslie A. White, Robert Redfield, A. P. Elkin, E. E. Evans-Pritchard, and from leading contemporary anthropologists such as John J. Gumperz, E. Adamson Hoebel, Andrew P. Vayda, Carlos Castaneda, Charles O. Frake, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Marshall Sahlins, David M. Schneider, Clifford Geertz, Raymond Firth, S. L. Washburn, George Gaylord Simpson, and David Pilbeam.

Each section contains a theoretical article on the general and comparative state of the field and an ethnographic case study; the introductions and headnotes offer an integrated presentation of the major themes of each topical area so that the volume serves as a supplementary text as well as an alternative to a standard textbook.

Ino Rossi provided the selections and introductory material for the general introduction, and the archaeology and cultural anthropology sections. John Buettner-Janusch and Dorian Copenhagen provided the selections and introductions for the physical anthropology section.

The senior editor, Ino Rossi, owes special thanks to his wife, Irene, for her contribution in improving the clarity of the introductions. Special thanks go also to the following people who have offered suggestions concerning either the introductions or the selections in sections on archaeology and cultural anthropology—N. Ross Crumrine, John Gumperz, William Leap, Jacques Maquet, James Peacock, R. Reiner, and Michelle Rosaldo.

I.R.

J.B-J.

D.C.

# **Anthropology Full Circle**

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# INTRODUCTION

## Anthropology: The Comparative Study of People in Culture

Anthropology is an academic discipline that has always attracted the interest of the general public. The imaginations of professionals and laymen alike have been stimulated by accounts of the links between fossil remains and early human species; by archaeological reconstructions of ancient cultures; and by theories of the technological, environmental, and social conditions which explain the origin of civilization. Many people are interested in the so-called exotic customs of past and contemporary preliterate people. Anthropologists who have studied these societies claim that a thorough understanding of their nature and functioning can aid in the comprehension of the cultural roots of frustration and maladjustment—conditions which are widespread in our own society. The mass media titillate the interests of the public not only with accounts of travel to remote islands of Oceania and stories of cargo cults, but also with reports on contemporary explorations into the structure of the mind and its relationship to the organization and functioning of culture.

These areas of general interest illustrate

the subject matter of the major divisions of anthropology. Anthropology is the comparative study of the origins and evolution of man as a biological organism (*physical anthropology*) and of his cultural achievements as they can be reconstructed through the examination of material remains (*pre-historic archaeology*), and documented through the ethnographic study of patterned social activities, beliefs, and artifacts (*general cultural anthropology*). The anthropologist studies the relationship between culture, on the one hand, and people's psychological functioning (*psychological anthropology*) and capacity for formulating and communicating meaning (*anthropological linguistics*), on the other hand.

By *culture* we mean the complex of ideas, values, and norms which underlie and guide social behavior, in addition to the totality of techniques and inventions that human groups have devised to adapt to the environment. How culture influences all that we observe in various societies is the common theme not only of archaeology but also of cultural anthropology as well as

physical anthropology where the influence of culture on the biological evolution of man is studied. Anthropology has a different scientific perspective from that of sociology, economics, psychology, and other social sciences because it pays special attention to the pervasive influence of culture and because its subject matter encompasses all aspects of human functioning, be they biological, psychological, technological, cultural, or social.

This definition of the subject matter of anthropology reflects the development and present academic state of the discipline in the United States. British anthropologists have conceived anthropology as the study of the types of groups which compose society, their ways of functioning and reciprocal influences; they consider physical anthropology, archaeology, and linguistics as fields of research which are related to anthropology properly understood. American anthropologists emphasize that "anthropology" is the "study of man" and that we cannot understand the significance of man's existence and accomplishments unless we study man in his totality as a biological and "cultural" animal.

Anthropology differs from other social sciences not only in the comprehensiveness of its subject matter and "cultural point of view," but also in the importance given to the historical and comparative perspective. Anthropologists maintain that the full significance of a cultural remain or custom can be understood only when it is compared with other cultural traits and customs. They distinguish two stages of comparative

anthropological analysis: the comparative description of cultures (or ethnography) and the explanation of similarities and differences among cultures (or ethnology).<sup>1</sup>

What cultures do anthropologists compare? Traditionally, anthropologists have focused their attention on *preliterate cultures*, as many selections in this volume illustrate. The term "preliterate" is preferred to the term "primitive" because premodern cultures cannot be called inferior to our culture or said necessarily to have existed before our culture. As a matter of fact, certain aspects of "primitive" cultures seem to be more humanly functional than certain aspects of our own culture and some preliterate cultures have a history as old as ours and are still in existence. The so-called primitive societies differ from modern societies because they do not have writing, are small, have simple forms of social organization and technology, and make of their values and moral principles the platform and motivating forces of daily behavior.

Besides comparing various types of preliterate societies, anthropologists also study peasant and modern societies to enable them to formulate cross-culturally valid explanations. As many selections in this volume show, in order to explain the characteristics of preliterate and peasant societies, anthropologists very often refer to characteristics of our culture. Whatever the society or subject matter studied, the comparative perspective of anthropologists is an invaluable instrument for a deep understanding of our own culture as well.

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<sup>1</sup>In Europe the term "ethnology" indicates the study of the history of people without writing, a study which in the United States is called history or ethnohistory. The term "anthropology" in

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Europe is often used to indicate only the study of human biology, which we call physical anthropology.

# 1. WHAT IS ANTHROPOLOGY?

George D. Spindler

Anthropology is a complex and diversified subject that goes in a number of directions and utilizes a variety of methods and organizing ideas. I shall attempt to describe it by discussing three questions: What is anthropology? What do anthropologists do? Where is anthropology going today?

Anthropology is the study of man and his works. This sweeping subject is divided into a number of major subdivisions.

*Cultural anthropology* is concerned with the differences and similarities in the many ways of dealing with the problems of existence. Its building blocks are ethnographies—detailed descriptions of whole ways of life in particular places and times.

*Archeology* is the anthropology of extinct cultures—the study of past ways of life as represented by their own actual remains. Archeologists study artifacts (tools, weapons, houses, etc.), and the traces of man's use of the earth's surface (mounds, terraces, irrigation systems, etc.) in order to reconstruct the cultures of past epochs. Archeology joins forces with cultural anthropology and historiography at many points.

*Linguistics* is the study of man's language—the distribution of different languages grouped into families and stocks, the internal structure of separate languages, and the relationships of language to other parts of culture.

*Physical anthropology* studies biological man—the characteristics of different human types through time and in space. In its study of human evolution physical an-

thropology joins with cultural anthropology, for man creates his own environment with culture and thereby directly affects his own evolution. Physical anthropology and archeology also work together closely, for remains are often found with the artifacts that were used when the culture was a whole entity.

Anthropology is comparative. Different ways of life are seen in the perspective of the many dramatic forms human life has assumed on this earth. When an anthropologist describes marriage, government, religion, education, or technology for a particular society, he is describing these forms of behavior in the light of his knowledge of other forms quite different.

Sometimes he makes cross-cultural comparison the major purpose of his work, and he has great collections of comparative data available to help him in this purpose. At other times his work is only comparative by implication, but he collects and analyzes his material quite differently than a psychologist or sociologist ordinarily would because of his cross-cultural, comparative point of view.

Anthropology is holistic. Almost always the anthropologist studies one manifestation of the culture in relation to other dimensions of the whole way of life. He sees the structure of the family, for example, as related to the methods of subsistence the people use to earn a living. He studies religious beliefs and concepts of disease causation and cure in relation to patterns of child rearing, because the former are seen, in part, as projections of the latter.

Anthropology is both scientific and humanistic. Sometimes its methods are objective, precise, and rigorous; sometimes they are empathetic, intuitive, and almost liter-

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Source: George D. Spindler, "Anthropology." *National Education Association Journal* 52 (Sept. 18, 1963), 28-31. Reprinted by permission of the National Education Association and the author.

ary in quality. Anthropologists agree that one must live as close as possible to the people one is studying and under the same conditions whenever feasible, in order to understand how they feel, and to see life from their point of view. The basic method of data collection in anthropology is, therefore, what anthropologists call participant-observation.

An anthropologist studying a new culture usually establishes residence with the people for a period of time varying from several months to a year or two and tries to maintain a friendly low-pressure kind of interaction with the people. He tries to observe them unobtrusively in the daily round of work and play so that, insofar as possible, they are unaffected by the fact they are being studied.

Anthropologists are strongly committed to the principle that people do not usually know exactly why they behave as they do. Just as the speaker of a language cannot usually describe the grammatical structure of his native tongue, so too is it rarely possible for a parent to tell the inquirer why children are reared as they are, or why the given and time-honored sequence in an initiation rite is followed to the letter or why a seemingly cumbersome and complex system of kinship terms is in use.

The anthropologist's purpose is to examine behaviors and infer the reasons why these behaviors exist in their particular forms, or for that matter, exist at all. For this purpose, the anthropologist, like other scientists, needs theory, for theory provides the logic of inference and, therefore, guides his interpretation of observed behavior. Theory in modern anthropology is undergoing rapid change at the present time, and many anthropologists are just becoming aware of the need for systematic, rigorous theory.

## WHAT DO ANTHROPOLOGISTS DO?

In what has been said already, there are some hints as to what anthropologists do.

They study human behavior and interpret its meaning. They collect genealogies in order to trace relationships among the present members of the group and their ties with former members. They collect censuses of the population they are studying so that they know its distribution, the relationship between population and subsistence, the composition of households and other small social groupings.

Anthropologists transcribe languages, using phonetic systems, or they store them on tape for future analysis in order that their patterns can be analyzed and compared to other languages. They collect personal documents—accounts of dreams, autobiographies, personal experiences—in order to understand the ways in which culturally patterned experience is interpreted by the individual. And they try to be at least marginal participants in all the important events which take place among the people they are studying and to record observations of these events and the reactions of people to them.

Although anthropologists spend a considerable proportion of their professional lives in the field, the majority have positions in universities or colleges where they teach both undergraduate and graduate students. Their courses bear such titles as Primitive Religion and Philosophy, Social Organization, Culture Change, Personality and Culture, Language and Culture, the Evolution of Man, New World Prehistory. Some courses deal with special fields such as education, law, and medicine, so there are courses called Legal Anthropology, Medical Anthropology and Anthropology of Education.

An increasing number of anthropologists are in demand as consultants, advisers, and analysts for federal agencies that deal with emerging nations and underdeveloped areas of the world. Many anthropologists with positions on university faculties act occasionally as consultants and analysts for industries or governments—both our own and others—and take temporary leaves of absence from their positions for these purposes.



One of the problems of the profession is that there aren't enough anthropologists to meet the demand. There are only about 900 fellows in the American Anthropological Association at present, and this fellowship is not expected to increase rapidly because of the long period of graduate training—from five to seven years—required for the Ph.D.

## WHERE IS ANTHROPOLOGY GOING TODAY?

This last question is one of the most difficult ones to answer, for each part of anthropology is generating new ideas, new methods of study, and building new theory. The whole field is in ferment at present.

Human evolution is one of the perennial problem areas that has received special attention lately. Anthropologists realize that man has always been a creature of culture. Every new tool, no matter how crude or how advanced, directly affects the course of human evolution. In the beginning the use of a simple club reduced selective pressure upon the teeth and jaws, so that those of our remote ancestors who had clubs but smaller jaws and teeth could survive better than similar creatures with bigger jaws but no clubs. And since the hand and the brain are intimately related, selective pressure resulted in larger brains that could guide better tools to man's purposes.

Today evolution continues. Man is fast creating a new physical environment through technology. Smog, pesticides, industrial and household pollutants, radioactive wastes, and fallout are new hazards that have already begun to affect the future course of human evolution. Anthropologists are studying these problems armed with knowledge from biology (the field of genetics is supplying new knowledge about the mechanisms of human heredity), and from their study of how culture adapts to man's needs on the one hand and adapts man to its conditions on the other.

Another trend in anthropology today is the emphasis upon cultural change and cul-

tural stability. The concerns range from questions about the sequence of developments that led to the emergence of great urban centers among the Aztec, Maya, and Inca to the minute details of cultural change within a period of a decade in an American Indian tribe, or in a village in the highlands of New Guinea.

Changes in social groupings, in value systems, in technology, in political leadership, in language, and in personality structure as it adapts to conditions of life brought about by cultural transformation are all being scrutinized with new theories and methods of study. One of the particularly interesting problems is what makes cultural patterns persist in the face of what seems to be overwhelming pressure for change.

Sometimes the answer is quite simple—as in the case of the German villagers who bought tractors but continue to do most of the work in the vineyards by hand. Because the terraced hillside plots are too small to use mechanized equipment, the tractors merely replace the cows (yes, really cows, not oxen) formerly used to haul carts full of workers and equipment up to the vineyards. Sometimes it is very complex, as in the case of some American Indians who continue to use native methods of treating illness despite the availability of modern medicine. The reasons the native practices continue in use are tied in with concepts of disease causation that are a part of a world view vastly different from ours.

Anthropologists are currently giving special attention to many other problem areas, but I shall mention only one. They are developing new methods and techniques of research which will make their studies of behavior more precise.

For example, they are using symbolic logic and formal mathematical models to separate and manipulate the elements of observed behavior. They are applying microanalytic methods of study to the use of space between persons in social interaction with each other (the study of proxemics) and to the gestures and bodily movements that communicate content beyond words