
Anthropological Theory

AN INTRODUCTORY HISTORY

SECOND  EDITION

R. Jon McGee • Richard L. Warms

ANTHROPOLOGICAL THEORY

An Introductory History

Second Edition

R. Jon McGee
Richard L. Warms

Southwest Texas State University



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*To our families: Stacie and Jacob McGee and
Karen, Benjamin, and Nathan Warms*

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Preface

*T*heory is the core of anthropology. Theorists determine the types of questions anthropologists ask and the sort of information they collect. Without a solid understanding of the history of theory, anthropological data remains a collection of exotic ethnographic vignettes. Students face two choices, then, if they wish to understand the theoretical perspectives that ultimately drive ethnographic fieldwork: they can read classic theoretical articles or they can read someone's interpretations of those articles. For readers who are not well versed in anthropological theory, neither choice is ideal. We created this volume to provide a more accessible means of introducing students to the past century and a half of theorizing in anthropology.

We believe that it is essential for students to read original essays by the field's important thinkers. Reading original works promotes depth of understanding and opens possibilities of analysis that even the best books describing the history of theory can never provide. What better introduction to Herbert Spencer can there be than actually reading Spencer? Yet many students find reading original essays extremely demanding. The language is sometimes difficult, and the intellectual disputes, references to other thinkers, and historical context are often obscure. Sitting down to read an essay by Spencer is, for many, an arduous task. We have attempted to make the task less onerous by providing detailed commentary, in close proximity to difficult passages in the original essay, that illuminates obscure references, arcane language, and unfamiliar contexts.

We have assembled an exceptional collection of essays by some of the most important thinkers in anthropology. We have favored essays that provide vivid ethnographic examples of theoretical positions over those that are simply declarations of the-

ory. The collection begins in the mid-nineteenth century and ends in the 1990s. It is divided into chapters encompassing well-known theoretical positions that are represented by authors generally considered to be the outstanding spokespersons for their points of view.

We have provided extensive support material to help students understand these 40 essays. Each of the 13 chapters begins with a brief introductory essay to acquaint readers with some of the most important proponents of the school of thought, the problems they set out to solve, the methods they used, and the dilemmas they faced. Extensive editorial footnotes that provide additional information to help the reader actively understand and interpret the reading accompany each essay. In addition to providing definitions, translations of foreign phrases, and historical information, the notes help students trace the intellectual connections among thinkers both inside and outside of anthropology. The notes are designed to inform, raise interesting questions, and foster further creative and original thought. They make essential but sometimes difficult information accessible to students and provide some interesting little-known background details. Anthropological theory, even that of a century ago, is alive and vital. We hope our commentary helps readers see it that way.

No book of theory and commentary can ever be entirely without bias, but we have tried to come as close to this ideal as we can. In our introductions and commentary, we point to both the strengths and weaknesses of each theoretical position. Though astute readers will realize our likes and dislikes, we do not intend to promote one theory at the expense of another. In fact, we come from quite different theoretical perspectives: McGee's interests tend to the symbolic and

interpretive side of anthropology and Warms generally favors positivist and materialist approaches. Every introductory essay and note in this volume was written and rewritten by both of us; obviously, we have sympathies for the opposing position and have been willing to accept substantial criticism of ideas we hold dear.

For us, editing this volume continues to be an exciting process of discovery and interpretation. Research, careful reading, discussion, and argumentation as well as the comments of numerous reviewers and readers of the first edition have greatly deepened our understanding of the works of the great thinkers in anthropology. Writing this book has forced us to rethink what we believed we knew, and in the process we have become far better scholars of theory. Selecting these essays and writing the introductions and commentary for them continues to be profoundly rewarding for us. We hope that reading the essays and our comments will be as productive for students and colleagues.

NEW IN THE SECOND EDITION

Preparing the second edition has given us a chance to reconsider both our selection of essays, the notes we wrote as commentary to the essays, and our introductions. We have made substantial improvements in all three of these, incorporating new information and bringing a wider selection of authors and opinions to the volume.

Most notably, this edition includes four new essays. A fifth essay has been moved to a new position. We have expanded the chapter on Materialism to include Bourgois' essay "From Jibaro to Crack Dealer," a compelling example of contemporary Marxist analysis. We have substantially altered the chapter on Anthropology and Gender to better reflect different positions in that theoretical perspective. We have chosen Leacock's "Interpreting the Origins of Gender Inequality" to represent a Marxist approach to gender stratification and Stoler's "Making Empire Respectable" to reflect an approach focusing on the different ways in which race, class, and gender structure cultural institutions. You may have noticed that we have also moved Ortner's essay "Is Female to Male as

Nature is to Culture?" to the Structuralism chapter. It is an outstanding example of this school of thought. Finally, we have added D'Andrade's "Moral Models in Anthropology" to the Postmodernism and Its Critics chapter. There are now numerous critiques of specific aspects of postmodern theory. We have chosen this essay because it provides a thoughtful analysis of some of the assumptions underlying postmodern thought.

We have, additionally, revisited all of our introductions and footnotes. We have updated and revised many of these in light of new material that has come to our attention and to redress some issues that were omitted from the first edition. For example, the introduction to Culture and Personality now includes much more information on Margaret Mead, and the introduction to Historical Particularism examines Boas' censure by the American Anthropological Association. The roles Weber and Durkheim played in anthropological theory are described in greater detail and the contributions of European thinkers, such as Gramsci and Foucault, are given much more coverage. We have gone over each of our footnotes, correcting and revising them according to the information that we have gathered since the publication of the first edition. We have also tried to improve the index, increasing the level of detail and making the book a more useful research tool.

We have been particularly gratified by the reactions of readers of the first edition. We have received many letters and e-mails from all over the United States, Canada, and Europe. Many people have sent thoughtful commentary and recommendations. We have been able to incorporate some of these into this edition. We deeply regret that editorial constraints and issues of timing have prevented us from including more of your suggestions. We look forward to being able to act upon them in the future. Keep those cards and letters coming!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing this book has involved the labor, support, and forbearance of many people. First and foremost, we would like to thank our families, Karen, Benjamin, and Nathan Warms and Stacie and

Jacob McGee. Without their support, this project would have been impossible.

We also thank our professors at Rice and Syracuse, both for what they taught us and for what they left us to discover on our own. We hope they will view this work with approving eyes (but we're sure they won't be pleased by all that they find).

We are indebted to the many scholars who reviewed and commented on this book in various stages of preparation. Our work has benefited greatly from their comments and our ideas were altered by their insights. We deeply appreciate their advice even though we were not always able to follow it. We would particularly like to thank John H. Bodley, Washington State University; Daniel L. Boxberger, Western Washington University; Castle McLaughlin, Peabody Museum, Harvard University; Mary Jo Schneider, University of Arkansas–Fayetteville; and Christopher P. Tourney, University of Kentucky.

The comments of students in our history and anthropological thought classes have also been invaluable. Our students have often shed new light on old issues and forced us to look at problems in new ways. We are thankful for the help we received from the Anthropology Department staff at Southwest Texas and extend our thanks to them, particularly our Administrative Assistant Sharan Smith. We would also like to thank our student assistants Glenda Gaunt, Cara Laubach, Jennifer Pennington, A. C. White, and Elizabeth Airhart for their time and patience.

Finally, we are grateful to the people at Mayfield, particularly Jan Beatty, for her consistent backing of our work, Star MacKenzie for her help with acquiring permissions to reprint articles, production editor Julianna Scott Fein, and our copyeditor Judith Brown. Their knowledge, editing skills, and many superb suggestions have contributed greatly to this work.



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Introduction

*A*nthropology is concerned with understanding the “other.” Typically anthropologists study the behavior, beliefs, and lifestyles of people in other cultures. Some examine current cultures; others study the remains of past societies to re-create the lives of people who disappeared long ago; yet others study primates to see what our closest relatives can tell us about being human. What unites this diverse work is a common ground in some fundamental theoretical ideas concerning biological evolution and social behavior.

We team-teach a course on theory in cultural anthropology at Southwest Texas State University. Each fall, as the semester begins, we face the same issues: some students want to know why the theory course is required, and others worry about reading original works by authors and delving into a subject that seems esoteric. Because both matters are important, we have chosen to begin this book by telling you why we think theory is essential in anthropology, and why it is valuable to read original works rather than predigested theoretical summaries.

WHY STUDY THEORY?

Theory is critical because, while anthropologists collect data through fieldwork, data in and of themselves are meaningless. Whether stated explicitly or assumed, theories are the tools anthropologists use to give meaning to their data. Anthropologists’ understanding of the artifacts they collect or the events they record in the field is derived from their theoretical perspective. A wink and an eyelid twitch look identical to an observer, but one carries information (“I’m kidding,” “you’re cute,” “that’s OK”), while the other signi-

fies nothing more than dust in someone’s eye. So, to paraphrase Clifford Geertz, a famous cultural anthropologist, how does one differentiate between winks and eyelid twitches? Anthropologists distinguish the two through their understanding of the context in which the action occurs. Theories guide that understanding. They are the tools anthropologists use to sort significant from meaningless information. In fact, one’s choice of theory largely determines the data to be collected in the first place. A structuralist interested in the unconscious meaning of mythology will probably not spend too much time studying subsistence patterns. An economic anthropologist might well ignore ritual and religion. Without theory, one cannot do anthropology.

Although this is a book about theory in socio-cultural anthropology, the different branches of anthropology have always freely borrowed ideas from each other and from other sciences. In the nineteenth century, Herbert Spencer, a sociologist, and Charles Darwin, a naturalist, greatly influenced each other’s work. Sigmund Freud was well versed in nineteenth-century ethnological studies, and his work is imbued with ideas taken from anthropology; anthropology, in turn, has been greatly influenced by his theories. Sociobiologists study human behavior in terms of evolutionary biology and cultural adaptations. Symbolic anthropologists and postmodernists rely on tools developed in the study of literature. Contemporary archaeology relies, in part, on theoretical developments in cultural anthropology in the 1940s and 1950s. In the course of their research, anthropologists today delve into biology, geology, psychology, history, literature, physics, chemistry, medicine, and other subjects.

Modern anthropology is built on the work of earlier generations of theorists. Indeed, anthropologists today ask many of the same questions that occupied scholars in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Nineteenth-century theories continue to resonate in popular culture. Have you ever heard the phrase “survival of the fittest,” for example? It was coined by Herbert Spencer in the middle part of the nineteenth century. Do you think that technology is a measure of a society’s development? Then you will be comfortable reading Lewis Henry Morgan’s *Ancient Society* first published in 1877. To fully comprehend anthropological writing, you must appreciate the history of the ideas that inform it. These are, ultimately, the principles upon which current work is based.

Anthropological theory is also important because it helps us think about who and what we are as human beings. It does this by forcing us to consider the ways in which we understand the “other.” At its most basic level, anthropology asks how we are to understand other people in the world—those who look different than we do and have different languages and customs (what anthropologists have come to call different cultures). Are such people inferior to us, superior to us, or just different? Are their cultures unchanging, following their own paths of evolution, or bound to ours in a grand evolutionary scheme? How should we behave toward such people?

At a second level, anthropology forces us to consider the otherness of nature itself. It forces us to ask if we, as human beings, are fundamentally part of the natural world. If so, perhaps we can be studied by the scientific methods and principles used by biologists, physicists, and other scholars in the traditional physical sciences. Alternatively, are human beings sufficiently different from the rest of the world that studying them with these methods will permit only trivial and confusing results? If that is true, the skills needed might be creative insight, imaginative interpretation, and soul-borne empathy—analytic tools traditionally associated with the arts and humanities.

A final level of discourse deals with the otherness of culture itself. By directing us, sometimes only implicitly, to the comparison of cultures, anthropology ultimately points toward the study of

universal human nature. If we could strip away the cultural clothing of all peoples, would we be left with some set of basic principles or underlying essence? Would this be equivalent to finding untrammelled human nature before us in the buff? If so, how are we to understand human culture? Is it that which permits the full and satisfying expression of human nature, or that which prevents human nature from destroying human society?

At some level, all theory in anthropology, whether written in the eighteenth, nineteenth, or twentieth centuries, addresses these essential questions. Sometimes, individual theorists take extreme postures and score telling points against those who hold alternative positions. However, no definitive conclusion has ever been reached on any of these issues. Perhaps these questions are ultimately unanswerable by their very nature. However, the fact that no authoritative conclusion has been reached does not lessen the importance of the debate, for how we answer these questions has practical applications in our world. The answers determine our understanding of ourselves and our behavior toward other individuals and groups. In a world of instantaneous communication and virtually unlimited capacity for violence, in a world of ethnic strife and national warfare, surely these are among the most important questions that face us.

WHY READ ORIGINAL WORKS?

We believe it is important to read original works for several reasons. First, commentary on a theory cannot replace the original work because commentators unavoidably (and frequently quite intentionally) place their own interpretations on the material. For instance, Robert Lowie’s 1937 *History of Ethnological Theory* and Marvin Harris’ 1968 *The Rise of Anthropological Theory* are both comprehensive summaries of anthropological theory, but they provide strikingly different perspectives on the field.

Second, part of the importance of classic works in theory is their subtlety and complexity. The creation of theory is part of an ongoing dialogue with earlier thinkers, and these essays (and many others) are a portion of that dialogue. As

our understanding changes, we return to these old writings, where we find insights that advance our thinking or perceive errors against which we react. Through this process, new theory is generated. When works are summarized or when we read only analyses, the theoretical dialogue is flattened, simplified, and ultimately impoverished. In this volume, we provide what we believe is accurate and fairly sophisticated commentary on the essays we present, but reading such analysis cannot replace careful reading of the original text. As new insights are made, many of our notes may become dated and stale. The essays themselves have a much longer shelf life.

Finally, a firsthand reading of the original sources helps one avoid inaccuracies. In preparing this text, we have run across numerous cases where the popularly accepted information passed to us by our professors or found in textbooks was incorrect. Some of the folk wisdom of anthropology consists of half-truths or is frankly inaccurate. We bring this up not to point fingers or assign blame, but to suggest that reading original sources can serve as a partial corrective for this problem.

USING THIS TEXTBOOK

This book is designed to help you understand where some of the great minds in anthropology have been before you and to help you formulate your theoretical position in the field today. It is a historical overview of some of the principal developments in culture theory since the 1850s. The book is different from others because it contains our introductions and paragraph-by-paragraph comments to inform your reading and raise interesting points or questions.

Theory texts are problematic because their contents tend to become accepted doctrine. Readers and critics suppose that the authors of such a text have chosen to present those pieces universally considered the most important works in the field. When the editors of such a volume have the audacity to write detailed comments on the essays they have chosen, they seem to elevate the texts they chose to scripture and their work to Talmudic authority. Should you entertain these notions, let us disabuse you of them. No group of professional anthropologists, however small, will agree

on a single set of critical essays. We have selected what we feel are representative articles by individuals traditionally associated with particular theories and works that seem to us to be good examples of theories in practice. We will gladly agree with anyone who claims that better works can be found, but we insist that this will always be the case. An enormous corpus of work in anthropology now exists. We believe that the best way to study anthropological theory is to read as widely as possible. No collection of essays, however artfully chosen, will be able to substitute for years of reading in the field, and that is what is ultimately required for a solid background in theory.

You will find that our commentary on the texts varies from extremely straightforward definitions and explanations to fairly elaborate speculation on the motives of authors and influences upon them. Although it is almost impossible to entirely eliminate mistakes, we have checked our work carefully; when we point to a fact, you may be reasonably certain that it is correct. However, please remember that our interpretations are just that, our interpretations. They are meant to guide your reading, stimulate discussion, call your attention to certain ideas, and get you to think about different issues. You are invited to disagree with them and propose alternatives. If you read through this book and find nothing with which to disagree, you are not reading carefully enough or critically enough.

While our likes and dislikes may become apparent to the conscientious reader, we do not intend to promote any particular viewpoint to the exclusion of others. In fact, we come from very different theoretical perspectives (McGee tends to the interpretive-symbolic side of anthropology, Warms to the positivist-materialist). We have tried to present the key strengths and weaknesses of each position, but we frequently differ in our interpretations of theory and amuse our students by arguing about them.

In short, while we hope that scholars will agree with most of what we have written, we have tried to write at least something bound to offend your theoretical sensibilities, no matter who you are. You are invited to disagree with the text and debate us about it if you wish. We can be contacted by e-mail at RW04@swt.edu for Warms or

RM08@swt.edu for McGee or by traditional mail at the Department of Anthropology, Southwest Texas State University, San Marcos, Texas 78666. If, by chance, you reach the end of the book without finding something to offend you, you may contact us at one of the addresses above, and we will try to remedy that situation as well.

THE ARRANGEMENT OF ESSAYS AND THE NOTATIONAL SYSTEM

The arrangement of essays within a reader presents a surprising number of problems. Should they be arranged strictly chronologically or by intellectual association or descent? If the text is to be divided into sections, what about those authors who do not quite fit? One reviewer of this book felt that placing postmodernism as the final section proved that our intention was to promote the postmodern position. We assure you, this is not the case. We have chosen to arrange the theories in a rough chronological order to show readers the progression of ideas in cultural anthropology and to demonstrate the relationship between concepts. We have divided our chronology into named sections. Each begins with an introduction describing the theorists represented in the section and the principal ideas presented in their work. However, our scheme is not entirely consistent. Different schools of thought often overlap both intellectually and chronologically. Freud's speculations on anthropology, for example, were largely based on nineteenth-century evolutionary assumptions even though they were written in the early decades of the twentieth century. Exploiting these inconsistencies and thinking about other possible arrangements of the text

may prove an intellectually useful experience. New arrangements may provide new insights.

Space limitations and, occasionally, copyright regulations have forced us to make difficult decisions about the essays we have reprinted. Several entire essays included in earlier drafts of the book have been removed from the final form. More importantly, we have, in many cases, eliminated fairly large passages of those essays that we have retained. In some instances, we have also chosen to remove some lengthy sets of footnotes or endnotes. These are not decisions we took lightly, nor do they indicate that we believe the notes and passages removed were of no importance. It was simply a question of choosing between removing notes and passages or losing several entire essays. While there are good intellectual reasons for selecting either of these options, we believe that most readers are better served by the first. In doing this editing, we have tried to preserve a sense of the original by including notes telling the reader exactly how much text was removed and briefly summarizing the content of the lost passage. We also note how many footnotes appeared in those passages, which allows readers to see the subjects about which the authors wrote notes and those they did not and gives a feel for the frequency and pacing of notes.

Each essay in the volume is accompanied by our notes, which appear as footnotes and are numbered with Arabic numerals. Footnotes or endnotes created by the original authors are indicated by lowercase letters and appear as endnotes to the essays. Where authors have provided references in their work, they appear at the end of the essay. Our own references appear in the Bibliography at the end of the volume.



Nineteenth-Century Evolutionism

In the English-speaking world, the word *anthropologist* first appeared in print in 1805 (Kuklick 1991:6). It was another seventy-nine years before the first university position in anthropology was created. The discipline of anthropology, however, did not just appear, but rather combined two long-existing streams of thought. The first was the study of what we have come to call cultural differences among societies, and the second dealt with the biological origins of humans and other species. In Europe, both of these areas have been the subject of investigation and speculation for much of the past millennium. While it is far beyond the scope of this text to analyze all the antecedents of anthropology, we will briefly review some of the principal developments that led to it before exploring evolutionary and anthropological thinking in the nineteenth century.

It is probably fair to say that wherever literate civilizations came into contact with members of different societies, something like ethnographic writing occurred. For example, ancient authors such as Herodotus, a Greek historian of the fifth century B.C.E., offered readers fanciful descriptions of other societies. In the fourteenth century, Ibn Khaldun, a Tunisian politician and historian, wrote the *Muqaddimah*, or *Introduction to History*, in which he proposed to create a science for studying “human society and its own problems vis the social transformations that succeed each other in the nature of society” (quoted in Lacoste 1984:169).

In Europe there was a long tradition of interest in the exotic. Writings such as *The Wonders of the East* and *The Travels of Marco Polo* had fascinated Europeans. Until the fifteenth century, however, Europe remained relatively isolated and

provincial. Then, developments in sailing technology and advances in weaponry allowed Europeans to expand their influence across the globe. For the first time, they were in frequent contact with people from societies radically different from their own. This confrontation raised a host of philosophical problems. Were these other people human in the same way that Europeans were? Did their societies function according to brute natural law, or were they moral beings possessed of a free will? How were social differences to be explained?

Degenerationism provided an early explanation of cultural diversity. Degenerationists held that there was a biblical cause for variation in human society. In this view, prior to the destruction of the Tower of Babel, all people belonged to a single civilization. When God destroyed the Tower, creating differences in language and dispersing the people, some degenerated, losing their civilization and eventually becoming savages.

Progressivism was an alternative view of social life. Progressivists believed that, rather than deteriorating from a previously civilized condition, societies had started out primitive but were progressing toward a more advanced state. One proponent of this approach was the British philosopher John Locke (1632–1704). In his *Essay Concerning Government* (1939 [1690]), Locke proposed that the human mind was a blank slate and that knowledge and reason were derived from experience. The corollary of this was that different sorts of experiences would provide different sorts of ideas. Consequently, individuals growing up in different societies would have varied experiences, and the differences between human societies could thus be explained.

The idea that people had progressed rather than degenerated became popular as scientific investigation and empirical observation increasingly yielded both academic and commercial results. By the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, few Europeans doubted that humankind was making progress, and Europeans generally believed that they were the most advanced of all people.

With the general idea of progress firmly entrenched, philosophers devised various schemes to explain the nature and course of this social evolution. Their goal was generally to construct a universal history of humankind that moved from a primitive past to the development of European nations. One of the most influential of these works was Edward Gibbon's (1737–1794) *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (orig. 1776–1788), but there were others as well. Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico (1668–1744), in his 1725 work *The New Science*, attempted to write a universal history of humanity. Vico believed that human nature was shaped by history and hence changed over time. Thus he thought that history was a better guide than the natural sciences to understanding humanity. French statesman Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot (1727–1781) published his *Plan for Two Discourses on Universal History* in 1750. He submitted that, after the biblical flood, humans had passed through stages of savagery and barbarism to agricultural- and urban-based civilization. One last example of this perspective is *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*, written by the French mathematician and philosopher Marie Jean Antoine Nicolas Caritat, the Marquis de Condorcet (1743–1794). In this work, written in 1794 while he was in hiding from his radical revolutionary enemies, Condorcet proposed a ten-stage scheme describing human progress from early tribal society through the founding of the French Republic and on to a future in which human society was perfected. These ideas played pivotal roles in much of later sociocultural evolutionary thinking (Stocking 1987:15).

The European expansion into different parts of the world that began in the fifteenth century had a profound effect on the natural sciences as well as philosophy. Explorers' accounts of the

flora and fauna of these new lands challenged the biblical view of life, which had been based largely on the story of the flood. Long before Darwin, naturalists began to try to account for the plant and animal distribution and variation they were now confronted with, which could not be explained in biblical terms.

The foundation of biological-evolutionary speculation was laid down in the descriptive writings of seventeenth-century naturalists such as Gilbert White (1720–1793) and John Ray (1627–1705), who attempted to classify and describe the diversity of life-forms they observed (Eiseley 1961). Ray influenced Carolus Linnaeus (1707–1778), best known for his taxonomic categorization of life-forms presented in *Systema Naturae* in 1735. Previously, the naming of plants and animals had been confused. Linnaeus's taxonomic system provided a systematic, organized framework for the classification of life-forms that was necessary for the scientific investigation of biological evolution to take place.

One aspect of Linnaean thought was belief in the immutability of species. That is, Linnaeus, along with most scholars, believed that life-forms were created by God as they were and could not change. The task of biology was to name and classify them. However, challenges to this position were developed by a number of scholars. For example, in *Telliamed: or Discourses Between an Indian Philosopher and a French Missionary on the Diminution of the Sea, the Formation of the Earth, the Origin of Men and Animals, etc.*, a book widely read in the mid-eighteenth century, Benoit de Maillet (1656–1738) outlined a scheme for biological evolution. He speculated that the age of the earth was much greater than popularly believed, recognized that fossils were the remains of life-forms, and suggested that some of these fossils represented extinct species (Eiseley 1961:29).

Another naturalist, second in importance only to Linnaeus, was Georges Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon (1707–1788). In his forty-four-volume *Natural History* (1752–1799), he outlined an evolutionary theory that he called "degeneration" but which contained many of the elements that Darwin used in his theory of natural selection over 100 years later. Some of Buffon's key obser-

variations were that there was physical variation within species; that different animals had underlying structural similarities; that life multiplied faster than its food supply, promoting a struggle for existence; and that some life-forms had become extinct.

Jean Lamarck (1744–1829) and Charles Darwin's grandfather, Erasmus Darwin (1731–1802), were two great evolutionists of the late eighteenth century, and their work exerted a profound influence on the development of later evolutionary theory. Although they held similar views, Lamarck's theories were more systematically presented, and his work is better known today. Lamarck believed that changes in geographic and climatic areas placed pressures on plant and animal life. Over long periods of time, these pressures resulted in the transformation of life-forms. In this view, evolutionary changes were due to the effort with which life-forms employed those body parts that were most useful under changed conditions. Thus, physiological need promoted the formation of new organs or alteration of old ones. These acquired characteristics were passed on to future generations. While various versions of this theory were common in the eighteenth century, Lamarck and the elder Darwin are significant for clearly recognizing the importance of the relationship between organisms and environment.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the philosophical and biological framework for anthropology was in place. Nineteenth-century thinkers, driven by an abundance of new data, from fossil finds in England to explorers' accounts of Africa, built on this framework. They produced new theories of biological and social evolution that were key to the development of anthropology. The insights of Charles Darwin (1809–1882) and Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) were particularly important.

Darwin held that change within species must follow natural laws like those found in the physical sciences. In *On the Origin of Species* (1988 [1859]), he outlined the theory of natural selection and proposed that it was the fundamental principle of biological change. Darwin began with the idea that more organisms were born than survived to adulthood, a widely accepted concept derived from "An Essay on the Principle of Pop-

ulation" by Thomas Malthus (1766–1834); then he speculated about the factors that determined which individuals survived and which did not. Given that small variations occur in the appearance or behavioral characteristics of members of any population and that these individuals must compete for food, mates, and shelter, Darwin hypothesized that these variations were instrumental in determining survival in particular environmental circumstances. Simply put, some individuals were better equipped than others to survive in their environment. Darwin called the characteristics that help them survive "adaptive." He believed that this relationship between physiology, behavior, and environment determined those who would survive, mature, reproduce, and thus pass their adaptive traits on to the next generation. Thus, environmental changes could affect the characteristics selected—or passed on—in a given species and, over a long time, alter the appearance of that species. Darwin's theory thus accounted for fossil evidence that indicated physical changes in life-forms had occurred.

Natural selection was controversial in religious circles and met with ridicule from the popular press. It was disparaged by French intellectuals (and presented in seriously flawed mistranslation when it first appeared) and was generally rejected in Germany until the twentieth century. However, in Britain and America, Darwinian evolution was readily accepted by the scientific community. In fact, Herbert Spencer had been working on a theory of human social evolutionary change several years before the publication of Darwin's work. Darwin even applied some of the concepts developed in Spencer's work in his own theory of biological evolution.

Spencer was interested in evolution as a general phenomenon, not just the evolution of specific human societies, and he applied his evolutionary approach to many fields of study. Garbarino (1977:21) calls him a "philosopher of universal evolution" because Spencer considered evolution to be one of the fundamental natural processes in the universe. His ideas had enormous impact in Britain and the United States, not only on anthropology and sociology but on literature, politics, and popular culture as well

(Carneiro 1967:xi). Spencer believed that evolution was progressive and change was from simple to more complex states — ideas that were later incorporated into a variety of anthropological theories. He believed that change was driven by a struggle for survival. Spencer is also famous for his organic analogy.

As illustrated in the selection reprinted in this book, Spencer compared human societies to biological organisms (see essay 1). He used this analogy to link biological and social evolution, implying that biological and social development from simple, undifferentiated states to complex, interrelated states followed the same processes. This suggested that social evolution could be studied in the same way that one studied biological evolution. Spencer's organic analogy was so influential that his definition of primitive societies as those societies with simple technology, undifferentiated social structure, and lack of economic specializations achieved widespread acceptance. Spencer viewed Darwin's work as supporting his own and used the organic analogy as a mechanism for applying evolution to his theory of social change. It is Spencer, not Darwin, who coined the phrase "survival of the fittest."

All humans are ethnocentric to one degree or another, and nineteenth-century Europeans and Americans were no exception. Looking with pride at their industrial advances and burgeoning economic and military power, Western societies believed they were at the pinnacle of social evolution. One consequence of Spencer's work was the popularization of a point of view called social darwinism. Social darwinists interpreted natural selection to mean that if evolution was progress and only the fittest survived, then it was the right of Western powers to dominate those who were less technologically advanced. According to this line of reasoning, the domination of one society by another proves its superiority and its advanced level of fitness. Conquest of an inferior society by a superior one was the result of the action of natural law and hence not only moral but also imperative. This was a convenient philosophy for the rapidly expanding European powers and was used to justify their imperialism, colonialism, and racism. In the United States, social darwinism was invoked as a justification for free enterprise capitalism.

It should be remembered, however, that while most of the evolutionary thinkers represented here believed their own society to be the most evolved, they were also highly critical of that society. They believed Western society was a long way from the perfection it could, in the future, obtain. It is true that Spencer argued that state welfare, education, and public health programs were contrary to the laws of nature and should be avoided because they slowed the evolutionary process that was weeding out the unfit members of society. On the other hand, he also argued against the military, the Church of England, and the perquisites of the landowning class. Despite the use of theories like his to justify colonial conquest, Spencer himself was an adamant opponent of British imperialism and criticized his nation for "picking quarrels with native races and taking possession of their lands" (quoted in Carneiro 1967:xlvi).

Two other nineteenth-century anthropologists interested in the evolution of culture as a general human phenomenon were the American Lewis Henry Morgan (1818–1881) and the Englishman Sir Edward Burnett Tylor (1832–1917). Both men believed there were universal evolutionary stages of cultural development that characterized the transition from primitive to complex societies. Because of this belief, Morgan and Tylor are known as unilineal evolutionists. Although Morgan and Tylor shared a similar evolutionary framework, their studies examined different aspects of culture. Morgan focused on the evolution of elements such as the family and subsistence patterns. Tylor's major contribution was a theory concerning the evolution of religion.

Morgan's early interest in Native American cultures, in particular patterns of marriage and descent, led to his 1871 book *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity*, the first comparative study of kinship. But Morgan's most famous work was *Ancient Society*, published in 1877. In this book he attempted to trace the evolution of human society from primeval times to the Victorian era (which he considered the high point of human civilization). Following Turgot and other eighteenth-century writers, he divided human cultural development into three grand stages — savagery, barbarism, and civilization, with the first