

## THE PERSONALITY OF ANTHROPOLOGY

A. L. Kroeber

17 May 1958

To define or characterize the personality or individuality of Anthropology, I will start from a paradox.

When we compare Anthropology and Sociology, it is astonishing how alike they prove to be in their general assumptions and basic theory, and how diverse they yet are in most of what de facto they do or occupy themselves with.

Sociologists and anthropologists agree in dealing with sociocultural phenomena autonomously. Sociocultural data rest on biotic and individual psychic factors, of course, and are therefore limited by them; but they are not derivable or constructively explicable from them. The analysis and understanding of sociocultural phenomena must be made first of all in terms of sociocultural structure and process: "social facts," Durkheim called them; Spencer, "superorganic" effects; Tylor, "culture." As regards man, his societies always exist in association with a culture; his cultures, with a society. A particular study can abstract from the social aspects of a situation to investigate the cultural aspects; or the reverse; or it can deal with the interaction of the social and cultural aspects. This is common doctrine of the two sciences; and in contrast with what they share, it is really a minor matter that sociologists show a propensity to focus their interest on social data, structure, and process, but anthropologists on cultural.

In fact we can go farther. The basic assumptions and principles shared by sociology and anthropology are virtually the only general theory existing in that area which it has become customary to call "social science."

Economics, politics, jurisprudence obviously concern themselves with specific facets of society and culture instead of their totality. Psychology is of course basically oriented toward individuals, or the individual, much as is biology; social psychology represents a secondary extension, in the development of which sociology was about as important, at least in our own country, as was psychology itself. The classical economic theory was formulated earlier than sociocultural. This was possible because it applied to only one special part of the sociocultural totality: it was also a well-insulated model, whose effectiveness rested upon the assumption that economic phenomena could profitably be considered in a virtual vacuum; if motivations had now and then to be admitted, common-sense psychology was sufficient.

Not only do sociology and anthropology then essentially share their basic theory, but this theory is the only holistic one yet evolved for the sociocultural realm.

In view of this sharing of their basic concepts, it is remarkable how preponderantly sociology and anthropology do not share the areas which they work and the methods by which they work them.

Most conspicuous, of course, is the virtually total neglect by sociology of several of the fields which between them constitute probably the majority of the area operated in by anthropology.

These fields are: physical anthropology (a most unfortunate name, but this is not the occasion to try to revise it); archaeology and prehistory; linguistics, general, descriptive, and historical; culture history; primitive ethnology; and the folk ethnography of peasantry in civilized countries as it is pursued in Europe. Sociologists do not hesitate to use results obtained in these sub-disciplines; but they rarely make intrinsic contributions to them, as all anthropologists do in one or more of the fields.

Now it is notable that with one exception -- that of primitive ethnography -- all these fields are, however, shared by anthropologists with non-anthropologists. Physical anthropology of course is only a fragment of biology, and whether a worker is physical anthropologist, anatomist, or human geneticist is largely a matter of what he calls himself or of his job classification. Archaeology inevitably runs into art and classics -- there even are notable departments named "Art and Archaeology", and our Archaeological Institute of America was founded and is run by classical scholars. Somewhat similarly, prehistory merges into protohistory and full history. More scholars have become general linguists coming from the various philologies than from anthropology. Culture history has been pursued also by historians and geographers, and some of the best has come from Sinologists. European folk ethnography is closest to what we call folklore, and in folklore students of English and other current languages of civilization are the more numerous. The result is that unless anthropologists are ethnographers, they share their specialty with collaborators in some natural science or in some humanity and are likely to be outnumbered by them.

What impulse is it that drives anthropologists as a group to participate in so many fields which are already being cultivated by others? It seems to be a two-prong impulse to apperceive and conceive at once empirically and holistically. We constitute one of the smaller learned professions, but we aim to take in perhaps more phenomenal territory than any other discipline. Our coverage must of necessity be somewhat thin. Yet it is rarely either vague or abstruse -- we start with concrete facts which we sense to carry an interest, and we stick with them. Perhaps our coverage can fairly be called spotty; though without implication of being random, irrelevant, disconnected. If a whole is steadily envisaged, the relation of its fragments can be significant, provided the parts are specifically known and are specifically located within the totality. So the holistic urge is perhaps what is most characteristic of us.

This is balanced by a love of fact, an attachment to phenomena in themselves, to perceiving them through our own senses. This taproot we share with the humanities. And we also tend strongly here toward the natural history approach. Sociologists have called us "nature lovers" and "bird watchers," Steve Hart says; and from their angle, the epithets stick. There are anthropological museums of tangible objects, but no sociological ones. We are strong on photographs, films, and tapes that reproduce sights and sounds. We write chapters on art in ethnographies and sometimes offer courses in primitive art. How many sociologists would venture that, or even wish to venture it?

We insist on field work as an opportunity, a privilege, and a professional cachet. We want the face-to-face experience with our subjects. The anonymity of the sociological questionnaire seems to us bloodless, even though its specificity and quantification are obvious assets to which we cannot easily attain by our methods. When the Lynds went in person to study Middletown-Muncie, it was widely heralded as a taking-over of anthropological technique.

To return to the other rpong of the bow, the holism, this seems expressed also in our inclination to historical and to comparative treatment. American sociology is certainly neither antihistorical or anticomparative in principle; but it certainly is heavily interested in the here and now, in our own culture and social structure more often than in foreign, remote, or past ones. Sociology began with a marked ameliorative bent, and with concern for practical matters of utility. Anthropology commenced rather with an interest in the exotic and useless. We did not constitute our Society for Applied Anthropology until 1941. The "action research" of World War II was largely thrust upon us by government and military, and by many is remembered as a sort of spree of forced decision-making.

It is certainly significant that the sharing of anthropological fields is with the natural sciences and with the humanities. The only active overlap with any social science is that on theory with sociology. Specific primitive ethnography and most of the community studies in civilized societies continue to be done by anthropologists, quantifiable studies of problems in civilization by sociologists. The latter tend to define terms more sharply and problems more limitedly. They probably rank next to economists and psychologists in abundance of statistical treatment.

Balancing our virtual agreement on sociocultural theory, there exists, however, a strong drift in sociology to emphasize social structure and social action as compared with cultural product or pattern, and either to ignore the cultural accompaniments or to assume them as being somehow contained in or derivative from the social structure. Anthropologists, at any rate until recently, have contrariwise emphasized culture as their concern. To be sure they have made almost a fetish of kinship and have frequently given close attention to specific social aspects, ever since the initial days of Morgan and Bachofen. But they tend to look upon society as a part or domain of culture, on which one can specialize or not as one can specialize on religion or art or values, or again on subsistence, technology, and economics. Each procedure seems to give consistent results in the hands of those who follow it.

However, there is a point which no one appears yet to have thought quite through. Developmentally, evolutionistically, society far antedates and thus underlies culture, as shown by the existence of complex societies especially among insects, long before any culture existed. In man, who alone of all species substantially possesses culture, this invariably coexists with society. In analytic study they are separable, and in practice one can focus on societies, or on cultures, or try to focus on the interrelations of the two. However, it remains conceptually unclear, at least to myself, how the sociologist can successfully treat culture as something in or derived from social structure, and the anthropologist can with equal success treat social structure as only a compartment or sector of culture. There is some legerdemain of words at work here, I feel, which my rational eye is not fast enough to perceive. I must admit I have found few

colleagues who were seriously troubled by the contradiction that puzzles me.

I encounter a possibly related blocking of thought when I try to define "social anthropology" as a conscious movement or strand within total anthropology. It has emerged since my own maturity, as a successor to "functionalism," and the present generation of British social anthropologists have been trained by the "functionalists" Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown. In Britain, where sociology is little recognized, social anthropologists stress the "social" aspect of their work and appear to accord primacy to social structure much as do American sociologists. At the same time they are obviously interested in cultures holistically, much as the rest of us are, and they are excellent ethnographers, as indeed Malinowski was when he did not let facile theorizing seduce him away from his superb descriptions of concrete culture functioning. But why the separatism, the limited circle?

In America social anthropology seems to have started with Lloyd Warner when he came back from Radcliffe-Brown in Australia. Warner is interested in the interactions of persons in society, especially our own, and perhaps most of all in social mobility. He uses cultural data skilfully to vivify his basically social-structural findings.

Perhaps the British are really still doing ethnography -- reporting on culture --but are giving it additional depth by socializing it more than when Boas, Lowie, and I were doing field work. If so, the fact would take social anthropology out of the category of an exclusive cult, and would leave it as an endeavor at needed and vital enrichment of long-established cultural aims.

In that case "social anthropology" would resemble culture-and-personality, or personality-in-culture, which started out selfconsciously as a revolutionizing new dimension of anthropology, but seems now to be essentially adding greater depth of personalization to the analysis of culture than was at first thought necessary, possible, or meet.

Since personalities are initially determined by their ancestry, it is highly relevant that anthropology was not a social science at all originally. Its father was natural science; its mother, aesthetically tinged humanities. Both parents want to attain reasoned and general conclusions; but they both also want to reach them by way of their senses. After a brief first childlike decade of outright speculation, anthropology settled down to starting directly from experienced phenomena, with a bare minimum of ready-made abstraction and theory, but with a glowing conviction that it was entering new territory and making discovery. Its discovery was the world of culture, an enormous product and a vast influence, with forms and patterns of its own, and a validating principle: relativity. There were far boundaries to this demesne, which included in its totality alike our own and the most remote and diverse human productivities. The visions was wide, charged, and stirring. It may perhaps fairly be called romantic: certainly, it emerged historically about at the point when aesthetic romanticism was intellectualizing. The pursuit of anthropology must have seemed strange to many people; but no one has ever called it an arid or a dismal science.

Now, maturity has stolen upon us. The times, and utilitarianism, have caught up with us, and we find ourselves classified and assigned to the social sciences. It is a dimmer atmosphere, with the smog of jargon sometimes hanging heavy.

Generalizations no longer suffice; we are taught to worship Abstraction; sharp sensory outlines have melted into vague ones. As our daily bread, we invent hypotheses in order to test them, as we are told is the constant practice of the high tribe of physicists. If at times some of you, like myself, feel ill at ease in the house of social science, do not wonder; we are changelings therein; our true paternity lies elsewhere.

I do not end on a note of despondency; for the routes of fulfilment are many. It is well that with all their differences of habitus, of attitude, of building stone, sociology and anthropology have emerged with a substantially common basic theory. That should be an encouragement to both; and a rallying point to others.

