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## The Anthropological Vision

Anthropology as an academic discipline has its origins in the late nineteenth-century as an attempt to grasp the full range of the human experience: that *all* aspects of *all* people's experience belong together as an indivisible subject of study. To that broad sense of inclusion was added an emphasis on direct fieldwork as the best way to understand how people live and how they experience their lives. In North American anthropology, that sense of inclusion and the commitment to field research were applied initially to native Americans (whose lifeways anthropologists feared would soon disappear); to the people whose lives and work were reshaping the North American continent (white and black, native born and immigrant); and ultimately to the full range of people throughout the world in both technologically simple and complex societies.

Today, anthropology consists of an extensive body of knowledge accumulated by anthropologists and a set of conceptual approaches that help organize that material. Yet anthropology also remains a very personal quest for understanding. That quest usually hinges on long-term, direct immersion in the cultures being studied. That field experience is structured not so much by formal research methods as by the unique talents and interests of the anthropologist guided by the accumulated experience of other anthropologists: the basic questions they have asked and the ideas about human interaction that they have developed in the field. The quest for anthropological understanding also continues to have a strong link to the professional practice of anthropologists as they seek to improve the human condition

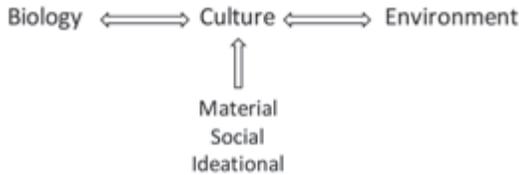
by addressing how people interact with their environments, how their social organization can be made more effective and more equitable, and how they can more fully achieve their human potential given the context of increasingly more intrusive global political and economic forces.

This chapter introduces anthropology in two ways. The first is an overview of anthropological theory, method, and practice. The purpose is to provide a general sense of how anthropologists think about issues (“theory”); how they try to gather information about the world (“method”); and the kinds of work they do—and lives they lead—as they do so (“practice”). The second is a review of the early history of anthropology. The purpose there is to indicate the major intellectual decisions that have formed anthropology as it is today. The most important of these are a commitment to inclusiveness (anthropology is about all aspects of all people’s lives); a recognition that all people have their own distinct histories; and a determination to understand other societies on their own terms. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the way this book is organized around three sets of questions that have emerged in anthropology: how people relate to their environments (“adaptations”), the basic ways in which human society is organized (“structures”), and how people make sense of their lives (“meanings”).

### BIOLOGY, CULTURE, AND ENVIRONMENT

Although anthropologists have many different ideas about how the human world works, there is a common framework shared by most anthropologists. That framework (diagrammed in figure 1.1) includes three major domains: *biology*, *culture*, and *environment*.

Human biology is the specific focus for some anthropologists, but all anthropologists recognize and must factor into their analysis what human beings are in physical terms. Often that consideration of human biology is very much in the background. Thus the specific physical characteristics that permit human language receive little comment in most anthropological research, since those characteristics can generally be assumed. On the other hand, the consideration of human biology may be central in other work. For example, the relative effects of biological sex and the socially constructed issues of gender have long been of concern to anthropologists. Much of the work of Margaret Mead, perhaps the most widely known anthropologist of the twentieth century, was concerned with exactly that interaction between biology and culture. Her first research concerned adolescence in Samoa, particularly how smooth the adolescent experience was there compared with the United States. That suggested to her that the traumas of adolescence in most Western societies had both cultural and biological roots.



**FIGURE 1.1.** Biology, culture, and environment

Human beings, however, do not live in a vacuum. They live in physical environments that broaden their options in some cases and constrain them in others. Much of the uniqueness of human beings lies in their ability to adapt to a wide range of environments. Thus it is impossible to understand the meaning of human biology without studying people in the full range of environments in which they live. This helps explain the anthropological emphasis on the details of the physical places in which people live. Many anthropological case studies begin with extensive discussions of the physical environment: the quality of the soil, the rains, the temperature changes, the kinds of vegetation, the animals. Franz Boas, who held the first university position in anthropology in North America, and who will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, was originally a physicist. His initial aim was to study the physical environment in the arctic but then found that the human beings who lived there were of rather more interest than the environment itself.

Although anthropologists deal with both biology and environment, their greatest concern has been with the third domain in the diagram—culture. Culture, in its broadest sense, is a buffer that exists between human beings as biological entities and the environments in which they live. If the weather changes sharply, human beings have the options of putting on clothes or taking them off, of heating their homes or cooling them. That greatly expands the options that they have. Canadians do not need to migrate south to the United States in winter, though they might like to, and those in the southern parts of the United States do not need to migrate north to Canada in the summer, though some of us do just that.

The buffer that is culture is often very physical and very practical. A simple tool, for example, can sharply change the relationship between human beings and their environment: a stone or bone scraper permits the fashioning of hides into clothes; a piece of chipped stone at the end of a big stick (spear) or smaller stick (arrow) permits better hunting; a plow revolutionizes the cultivation of plants. But culture is not just about tools. It is also about social arrangements. Human beings may not be unique in being social and in having families. Yet the human capacity for social groups is impressive in its variation and in the sheer size of human groups. Those social arrangements also provide a buffer between human beings as biological

entities and their environments. Cooperative groups permit the hunting of big game, fishing with large nets, or even whaling. Small groups, such as the nuclear family, permit people to spread out across a large area and be relatively self-sufficient. Large groups with hundreds, thousands, or millions of members permit massive mobilization of people for large-scale action, whether in peace or war.

Culture is not only about tools and social relationships. It is also about ideas, beliefs, and values. This is the way the word “culture” is usually used in everyday life. At its broadest, this aspect of culture can be understood as referring to the overall vision that people have of themselves, of the world, and of how they should orient themselves to that world and to the other human beings in it. It is what makes them who they are and sets the parameters for what they can accomplish. On a more specific level, culture can refer to ideas that might help people work together (such as a belief in the nobility of sacrifice and service) or that might help people survive against their adversaries (such as a belief in the justness of war).

Anthropologists are thus interested in human beings as biological entities, as located in specific environments, and as cultural entities. That makes anthropology a very broad discipline. On the positive side, this broad framework helps anthropologists avoid simplistic arguments that some aspect of human behavior is “caused” by biology, or “caused” by the environment, or even “caused” by culture. Instead, anthropologists know they must account for the biological, environmental, *and* cultural aspects of human life. As an example, consider race. Whereas many people might accept the idea of race as a simple description of physical differences among people, anthropologists recognize that “race” is, after all, a word. Understanding race thus requires attention to people’s ideas and values—to their culture in the everyday sense. It also requires attention to how supposed racial differences are used in social arrangements. Anthropologists might note, for example, that issues of race in the United States have their origins in a system of slavery that provided cheap labor for difficult work that the original settlers did not want to do themselves. Even though anthropologists know that there are not clear biological differences between so-called races, they readily understand how convenient it is for people who are enslaving or abusing other people to claim that biological differences justify it. One of Franz Boas’s achievements, for example, was to show that supposed racial differences between northern and southern European immigrants to North America actually disappeared among their children.<sup>1</sup>

1 For a round of debate on this aspect of Boas’s research, see Clarence C. Gravlee, H. Russell Bernard, and William R. Leonard, “Boas’s Changes in Bodily Form,” *American Anthropologist* 105 (2003): 326–32; Corey S. Sparks and Richard L. Jantz, “Changing Times, Changing Faces,” *American Anthropologist* 105 (2003): 337–37; and David Haines, “Anthropology and Policy,” in *The International Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, edited by Hilary Callan (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017).

### RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

This anthropological attention to human beings as biological entities, to the environments in which they live, and to their material, social, and ideational culture, affects the way anthropologists go about their work. Anthropological theory greatly affects anthropological methods. If anthropologists are to study biology and environment and culture, they know they will have to locate themselves in a specific place. If they do not, how can they possibly begin to understand the interactions of biology, culture, and environment? So the first methodological rule is “go there.” Since the environment is such an important factor in human life, then the period of time spent in that place will need to be at least a year to grasp the annual cycle. Almost all human environments have sharp seasonal changes of temperature and precipitation; those seasons greatly affect the food people are able to obtain, the shelter they will need, and usually their most important ritual events and celebrations. So the second methodological rule is “and stay there for at least a year.” Finally, since much of culture is ideational and hinges on language, there is a third methodological rule, which is “and learn the language.” Those three rules create the minimum requirements. Many anthropologists prefer to stay longer than a year and to return later to see if what they found was a relatively durable pattern or a more transient one. This standard of fieldwork is daunting. It is extremely time consuming, often disorienting, and sometimes dangerous. It is even more complicated when the people the anthropologist is studying are themselves in motion. Studying migrants, for example, may well require going to the places from which they come, the places to which they go, and the routes by which they navigate between them. Yet the result of that daunting standard is that anthropological fieldwork provides more depth and range of understanding than other research approaches. Thus, the anthropologist often can give the richest portrayal of other cultures: what people do, why they do it, and what they themselves think about it.

The broad anthropological framework of biology, culture, and environment and the demanding method of intensive fieldwork greatly shape the way in which anthropologists go about being anthropologists. Their jobs vary greatly. Of those with PhDs, some go into academic positions: some entirely teaching and some entirely research, though probably most with a combination of the two. Others go into a range of “real” jobs, many of which are continuations of their own anthropological research. For those with MAs, the proportions shift with more in nonacademic jobs. Of both groups, some work in the areas of international development or humanitarian action, often on behalf of people they already know from their fieldwork. Others bring their skills to bear on issues in North America. Some focus on populations of immigrants and refugees. Others focus on ethnic or racial minorities

or on other kinds of diversity by gender, sexual orientation, disability, or legal status. Yet others have become involved in technological areas, for example, looking at computers and other IT products as newer members of the ancient lineage of human tools. The human hand holding a smart phone, after all, looks quite a bit like the human hand holding a scraper. Humans are still tool users—and they still have strong emotional attachments to those tools.<sup>2</sup>

In considering the range of work that anthropologists do, there is a tendency to categorize anthropologists as academics (those in full-time university positions); applied anthropologists (usually split between university and research activities); and practitioners (those in “real” jobs). Yet there is often considerable overlap. Even the most academic of the academics are usually involved in research that has quite practical implications. Often the practitioners are working in areas (such as computerization, genetic engineering, and international migration) that have challenging theoretical implications. Although they sometimes disagree, all share a commitment to an overarching vision of a rich and varied humanity that demands respect for the human condition and for help in moving a complicated and globalized world toward a better and fairer future for all people and all cultures.

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

#### TYLOR AND MORGAN: EVOLUTION, ETHNOGRAPHY, AND HOLISM

The basic theoretical orientations, methods, and practice of anthropology can also be illustrated through a review of the early history of anthropology as a specific discipline. A full review is too hefty a subject for this book, but a short review suggests there are three basic pillars on which the discipline is built: evolutionism, historical-particularism, and structural-functionalism. The labels may seem contorted, but they are actually simply descriptive: the *evolutionists* emphasized the importance of evolution in organizing information about different peoples, the *historical-particularists* emphasized the importance of history and of the particular details of how people live, and the *structural-functionalists* emphasized that societies were indeed structured and that the different elements of those societies had practical functions.

The story of anthropology as we know it today began in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The world was changing rapidly. The industrial revolution had given Europe and North America a vastly increased ability to produce new

2. For a recent review of anthropological jobs, see Daniel Ginsberg, “Anthropologists in and out of the Academy,” *Anthropology News* (November/December 2016): 19.

goods, sometimes goods of better quality, certainly goods of increased quantity, and often goods—such as weapons—of greatly increased destructiveness. This resulted in an enormous power differential between those countries and the rest of the world. That power differential ultimately reduced much of the rest of the world to colonial or near-colonial status. The industrial revolution also resulted in great social dislocations within Europe and North America and a newly urban life of grit, grime, and crime.

Yet the latter part of the nineteenth century was also a time of hope that the human capacity for reason could resolve these social dislocations and create a better material and social world. That belief mirrored the confidence that science had done well in increasing human understanding and promoting great leaps in productive power. The first anthropologists—the evolutionists—were part of that time of change and hope. They had more information about a broader range of people in a world that was being brought more closely together. To their great credit, these first anthropologists recognized the extent of human diversity and accepted that diversity as their focus. They claimed all these different human beings throughout the world as one integrated field of study. Further, they claimed that all aspects of these people's lives were within the scope of this new discipline. Thus anthropology was at its very creation the study of all people (any time, any place) and of all aspects of their lives. As Edward Tylor (1832–1917), the most eminent of the evolutionists, put it, the focus of anthropology was to be culture, for which he offered the following extremely broad definition: “Culture or civilization taken in its wide ethnographic sense is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”<sup>3</sup>

Two of the words he used deserve emphasis because they continue to be central to anthropology today. The first is *ethnographic*. Its literal meaning is the study or description (*~graph*) of a people (*~ethnos*), but it conveys to anthropologists the need to be detailed and thorough in that description. Tylor's use of the phrase *complex whole* is also crucial and is echoed to this day in the anthropological emphasis on *holism*, which means that all the different pieces of what people do add up to a comprehensive whole. We cannot understand the pieces without recognizing the wholeness of human life, but we cannot understand that wholeness without detailed understanding of the pieces.

That broad anthropological vision, however, posed some problems, and still does so today. Even in Tylor's time, there was a wealth of information on different human societies, and it was growing. How could all this information be

3 E. B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture* (London: John Murray, 1871).



**FIGURE 1.2.** Tylor's sequence of religious ideas

sorted into a meaningful structure? Here, influenced by the new popularity of evolutionary theory in biology, Tylor and others began to sort the information they found into general stages of development—of social evolution. It is for this that they are called evolutionists. As two examples of the attempts of evolutionists, consider Tylor's own work on religion and the work of Lewis Henry Morgan on technology.<sup>4</sup>

Tylor was interested in religion and attempted to think through from the available information how human beings developed their sense of the supernatural (see figure 1.2). His argument began with the mystery of death. When someone died, the body was still there, but the something that had made them who they were was gone. That the spirit of the person simply disappears instantaneously without a trace would, he reasoned, be unreasonable to most people. Surely at least there was some brief passing phantom of that person. If people had the notion of some temporary continuation of the essence of a person, then they might well develop a more elaborate notion of a spiritual entity that retained the full personality of the dead person for a longer and possibly indefinite period of time—what we would call a ghost. Surely, Tylor further reasoned, if people had the notion of an enduring spirit of a person who died, they might also develop the notion of an independent spirit that had *not* previously been a person. Perhaps the spirit that is the living person, in fact, comes from somewhere else and enters the child at conception or birth, and then leaves the body again at the time of death. From such notions of spirits, Tylor reasoned that notions of guardian spirits, deities, gods, and ultimately a supreme being would develop not out of simple superstition but as a result of logical reasoning. Tylor was thus proposing an evolution

<sup>4</sup> The discussions that follow are drawn from E. B. Tylor, *Anthropology* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1881); and Lewis Henry Morgan's *Ancient Society* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985; orig. 1877).

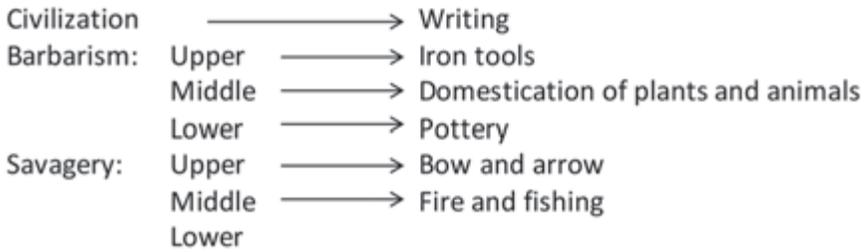


FIGURE 1.3. Morgan's evolutionary stages

of human thought about the supernatural, emphasizing that humans are indeed rational thinkers—at least much of the time. The consideration of that totality of human thought on religion, he implied, gives us a much better way to understand the full human experience of both the seen and the unseen—and to do so without making a priori (before the fact) determinations of what beliefs are correct or incorrect.

Another crucial early anthropologist was Lewis Henry Morgan (1818–81). He was an American who had spent much time with the Iroquois. He developed a framework for understanding societies based on their material culture. His reasoning was that technology had pervasive effects on societies. The items he chose as critical advances were fire, fishing, the bow and arrow, pottery, domestication of plants and animals, iron tools, and writing. Rather than merely note them as important factors, however, Morgan organized them into an evolutionary scheme (see figure 1.3). Those societies that had fire and fishing, but lacked the bow and arrow, were at the middle stage of “savagery.” Those who had pottery made it into the “barbarian” category. Iron tools placed a society at the top of the barbarians, but only a written language lets a society enter the ranks of the “civilized.”

Morgan's evolutionary scheme had much merit to it. The control of fire, the domestication of plants and animals, iron tools, and writing do indeed yield potential benefits for a society. If this were only a technology rating, it would be hard to object to it. However, this threefold categorization of *savagery*, *barbarism*, and *civilization* had broader and more unpleasant implications about aspects of human behavior that had little to do with technology. That evolutionary categorization was frequently used to justify the enormous inequalities of the time. As these more popularized evolutionary schemes became more grandiose and self-serving, they also became more inconsistent and sometimes factually inaccurate. Thus, in the area of marriage, one set of writers saw the evolutionary sequence from “savagery” through “barbarism” to “civilization” as involving a shift from group marriage to polygamy to monogamy. Another set of writers, however, saw the sequence as moving from

promiscuity through matriarchy to patriarchy. Unfortunately for all of them, there was not much correspondence between these stages of marriage and Morgan's more defined technological ones. For example, people with very simple technology often had monogamous marriages. For religion, a similar pattern developed. One set of writers argued that the "savagery" to "barbarism" to "civilization" progression was seen in the shift from magic to religion to science. But how could they themselves, who were supposed to be "civilized," still be religious and attend church each Sunday? Another set of writers thus argued that the transition was from animism (a general belief that there are spirits) to polytheism to monotheism. As with marriage patterns, however, these sequences did not directly match what was found in the field. Technologically simple cultures often had what appeared to be monotheistic views.

#### BOAS: CULTURAL RELATIVISM

Although the specific arguments of the best of the evolutionists—such as Tylor and Morgan—had much merit, the degradation of social evolutionary ideas into crude stages of savagery, barbarism, and civilization caused a negative reaction among many of those interested in this new field of anthropology. This reaction created North American anthropology as we know it today, and it was most forcefully seen in Franz Boas (1858–1942). Boas, with his training in physics, went to Baffin Island in 1883 to study its arctic geography. Once on Baffin Island, he became intrigued by the people. He wrote as follows in his journal, and I quote at length since his comments provided a manifesto for subsequent American anthropology.

I often ask myself what advantages our "good society" possesses over that of the "savages." The more I see of their customs, the more I realize that we have no right to look down on them. Where amongst our people would you find such true hospitality? Here, without the least complaint people are willing to perform every task demanded of them. We have no right to blame them for their forms and superstitions, which may seem ridiculous to us. We "highly educated people" are much worse, relatively speaking. The fear of tradition and old customs is deeply implanted in mankind, and in the same way as it regulates life here, it halts all progress for us. I believe it is a difficult struggle for every individual and every people to give up tradition and follow the path to truth. The Eskimo are sitting around me, their mouths filled with raw seal liver (the spot of blood on the back of the paper shows you how I joined in). As a thinking person, for me the most important result of this trip lies in the strengthening of my point of view that the idea of a "cultured" individual is merely relative and that a person's worth should be judged by his heart. This quality is present or absent here among the

Eskimo, just as among us. All that man can do for humanity is to further the truth, whether it be sweet or bitter. Such a man may truly say that he has not lived in vain.<sup>5</sup>

Boas was setting a new tone for anthropology. As with the evolutionists, anthropology was for Boas about all aspects of the lives of all people. For him, however, those lives were to be understood not as stages in some grand evolutionary scheme, but rather as the common attempt of all people to achieve their full humanity. Boas's phrase "merely relative" should be underlined, for it, like Tylor's invocation of "that complex whole," is now a standard anthropological dictum: cultures must be understood on *their* terms, not ours, whether or not we happen to agree or approve. Thus to the invocation of holism from the evolutionists, Boas added the invocation of *cultural relativism*.<sup>6</sup>

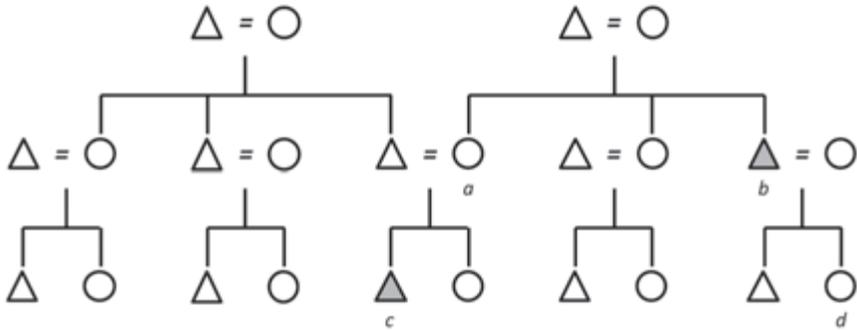
In addition to this commitment to human diversity and human equality, Boas also emphasized the importance of fieldwork. No longer was information to be processed into schemes by "armchair" anthropologists. Rather, anthropologists were now to go to where the people lived to understand the details of their histories and the wealth of their material, social, and ideational culture. Boas, after all, did not have his great insight at home, but out in the field. He would in his later career personally train two generations of anthropologists, who would first spread out across North America to document in detail the Native American experience. That task had priority since these early American anthropologists feared that many Native American cultures might soon disappear entirely. Later, American anthropologists would move outward to more distant places to describe other cultures and to consider what lessons those other cultures might have for us. But here, with the young Boas, the core commitment was made. As with the evolutionists, all aspects of all people's lives were included. However, with Boas that inclusion was to be based on the premise of human equality and achieved through detailed fieldwork. The label "historical-particularist" thus rings with two exhortations as relevant to North American anthropology today as then: "all people have their own history" and "the details matter."

#### RADCLIFFE-BROWN AND MALINOWSKI: STRUCTURAL-FUNCTIONALISM

Boas and the other North American anthropologists were not the only people who reacted against the excesses of evolutionism. The British structural-functionalists

5 As quoted in George Stocking, "From Physics to Ethnology," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 1 (1965): 61.

6 Cultural relativism can be defined in many ways, but the gist of the idea is to understand human behavior in the context of the culture in which people live. It does not imply either judgment or nonjudgment, but it does invoke the importance of understanding why people do what they do (whether good or ill) in terms of how they themselves are thinking their way through life.



**FIGURE 1.4.** The mother's brother. Unlike the situation in patrilineal societies, the closest male relationship by blood in a matrilineal society is between a man (*c*) and his mother's brother (*b*) to whom he is related through his mother (*a*) (see the two shaded triangles). Note that one preferred wife for the man is often the mother's brother's daughter (*d*).

had a similar response. They too were wary of grand evolutionary schemes, and they too emphasized detailed fieldwork. A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and Bronislaw Malinowski, the two most prominent of the structural-functionalists, provide an interesting contrast. Radcliffe-Brown (1881–1955) was very much the theoretician, whereas Malinowski (1884–1942) was very much the fieldworker. Indeed, Malinowski's work in the Trobriand Islands during World War I is often considered as the model for modern anthropological fieldwork. The personal styles of the two men were quite different. Radcliffe-Brown was a rather proper native-born Englishman who wrote books with titles like *The Natural Science of Society* and *The Andaman Islanders*. Bronislaw Malinowski was a flamboyant Pole who subsequently moved to England. His titles included *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, *Coral Gardens and Their Magic*, and *The Sexual Life of Savages*, and, yet again to titillate the populace, *Sex and Repression in Savage Society*.

Despite their differences, both Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski saw societies as working systems that were logical on their own terms. For them history was less important than it was to the Boasians. It was not that all cultures had their own *histories* but that all societies were working *systems*. Those systems needed to be understood on their own terms as they existed in the present. One classic example of their approach involves "the mother's brother" (see figure 1.4). At the time they were doing their research, the relationship between sons and fathers was frequently described as innately tension filled. Freud's view, for example, was based on issues of the son's repressed sexual feelings toward his mother and consequent competition with his father. What both Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski observed, however, was that these ideas were based on the particular family structure of European

society. In European society at the time, inheritance was generally patrilineal (that is, the line runs through the father). Thus sons inherit from their fathers. In other societies, however, Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski noted that inheritance did not run from fathers to sons. In matrilineal societies inheritance is generally from mothers to daughters. When there is inheritance between males in matrilineal societies, it is through female connections: thus from a mother's brother rather than from a father. Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski could also point out that the relations between fathers and sons in matrilineal societies were different in tone from what they were in European societies. In matrilineal societies the relationship between the father and son tended to be warm and flexible. By contrast, the relationship between a male and his mother's brother reflected stress and competition. There are two fundamental lessons to be drawn from this example. First, it is essential to always consider the full range of options in different kinds of societies. For kinship, for example, comparison of matrilineal and patrilineal societies is extremely valuable—and will be pursued at several points in this text. Second, it is always wise to examine the simple and observable aspects of life (such as who inherits from whom—as in, who gets what?) before launching into more complex explanatory theories.

The early history of anthropology can be summarized as follows. From the evolutionists comes the basic sense of inclusion: that all aspects of all people's lives belong on the record. From both the historical-particularists and the structural-functionalists come the emphases on fieldwork and understanding societies on their own terms. For the historical-particularists, "on their own terms" emphasized the history of a people, and for the structural-functionalists it emphasized the practical logic of their social arrangements. The subsequent history of anthropology rests on these foundations. Many current debates can be anticipated from this early work. One is the problem caused by the broad scope of "all aspects of all people's lives." How do you manage that amount of information with that level of detail? Another is the problem caused by the length of fieldwork. It is practically difficult and requires personal wealth or some kind of funding. Fieldwork will also inevitably create a complex relationship with the people studied. Living that closely over many months and perhaps many years, anthropologists will inevitably become personally involved and no longer "objective" outsiders.<sup>7</sup> That will benefit their understanding,

7 "Objective" generally means from an outside and supposedly accurate perspective whereas "subjective" generally means from an inside and personalized perspective. As an example, a social science survey of an immigrant group would generally be classified as objective while a novel by a member of that group would be considered subjective. Beyond that, however, the meaning of the two words becomes contorted and contested. The objective survey, for example, is based on formulated questions that are often quite subjective and culture-bound. The subjective novel, by contrast, may for many readers present a far more real view. For anthropologists both are important: watching attentively and listening attentively—and perhaps also imagining attentively.

but it may also introduce problems of how to analyze information that is so strongly and personally channeled.

### ADAPTATIONS, STRUCTURES, MEANINGS

Anthropology is a broad, cross-cultural, integrative discipline concerned with human biology; the environments in which people live; and the material, social, and ideational culture that serves as a buffer between human biology and the environment. Out of that broad framework comes three general sets of issues. These are addressed in the three parts of this book.

The first part, “Adaptations,” focuses on understanding human societies in terms of how they react to and utilize the environments in which they live. The chapters in part I introduce the standard variations of foraging, horticulture, agriculture, pastoralism, and industrialism. Each of these adaptations creates a society with particular tendencies: large kinship groups for some but nuclear families for others; peace for some but frequent war for others; relative equality for some but sharp disparities for others. The goal of part I is to provide a sense of the variation in human societies and to what degree that variation reflects a people’s relationship to their environment. You will find a bit of Lewis Henry Morgan’s interest in technology here, and much of Franz Boas’s early fascination with the environment and how people adapt to it.

The second part, “Structures,” focuses on social organization. For anthropologists the most important organizing principle of human society is kinship. Ties of blood and marriage are the most predictable and reliable of human ties. The anthropological record shows immense variation in how kinship ties are created, perceived, and used. Anthropologists also look at other ways in which human beings are wound and bound together. Some are political, some economic, and some a combination of these. Religion is also included in this part of the book since much of its effect is to provide a structure for relationships among people—and between people and a wide range of spirits and other supernatural entities. The goal of part II is to provide a sense of the basics of human social relations and what the options are in organizing people by ties of kinship, politics, economics, and religion. You will find many echoes in part II of the structural-functionalists, including discussion of matrilineality, patrilineality, and the famous “mother’s brother.”

The third part, “Meanings,” addresses how people perceive, create, re-create, and express the lived meanings of their lives, sometimes through thought and emotion, sometimes through language and communication, sometimes through play, sometimes through the arts, and sometimes through practical action. The discussion begins with thought (cognition) and emotion, with emphasis on how our minds and bodies organize the world for us. Part III then turns to language, including some

basics about how our speech and writing organize the world, and then to other ways people express themselves, whether in play or art, through physical objects and activities, or through modification of their own bodies and environments. Part III concludes with a discussion of how the human search for meaning is faring in a contemporary world beset by economic and political forces—often global in nature—and by an increasing human control over the human body and over the environment that tilts the framework of biology-culture-environment in new and unpredictable ways.

### WARNINGS AND PROMISES

In reading this book, a few disclaimers need to be made. First, in order to meet the specific purpose of this volume as a supplement to courses that emphasize more detailed ethnographic materials (whether reading them, watching them, or writing them), the approach here is indeed abbreviated. I cannot do justice to the complexity of many issues, nor can I invoke more than a little of the vast anthropological literature that now exists. My decisions about what to include generally have been to emphasize the basics of anthropology rather than anthropological debates about those basics. This is not to say that the debates are unimportant but that they provide a poor place from which to begin an introduction to anthropology.

Second, I have aimed to introduce key ideas first, and only then—and sparingly for reasons of conciseness—give short case examples at the end of chapters. I saw no other choice without lapsing into a more extended narrative format leading to a longer (and more expensive) book. The purpose here is to provide basic guidance so the ethnographic detail of other course materials can take center stage. I have done my best to streamline the presentation and keep the arguments as jargon-free as possible—except for topics such as kinship and linguistics, for which the technicalities are crucial.

Third, despite that need for conciseness, I realize this book may also be used as a reference guide—a kind of concordance for terms and ideas. To that end I have provided some additional resources. The extra references listed at the end of the chapters should help guide you to the next level of detail on each subject. There is also a glossary that will help in identifying terms. In addition, the frequent textbook convention of italicizing significant words is also used. There are also occasional footnotes to explain issues that seemed too technical for inclusion in the main text, including some special terms or references that may be useful but are probably not essential in an introductory class.

Good luck. Anthropology is a terrific field—and a terrific undergraduate course, minor, and major. It is a terrific field because it helps illuminate people's lives and because, since it is such a personal discipline, it also helps activate the minds and



Margaret Mead (1901–78), probably the twentieth century’s most famous American anthropologist and one of the last students of Franz Boas. (Credit: NYWT&S staff photo by Edward Lynch, courtesy of the Library of Congress)



Franz Boas (1858–1942), the first academic professor of anthropology in North America and teacher of an entire generation of anthropologists. (Credit: Popular Science Monthly via Wikimedia Commons)

spirits of the people who do the research. So enjoy learning about how interesting people can be. But also learn from anthropologists as they attempt to do the impossible: to be objective, to be fair to the people they study, to be true to themselves, and to write it up in a reasonably engaging way.

You might also consider how useful the anthropological model can be in a variety of real-world situations. As Tylor himself emphasized, anthropology moves immediately to the practical affairs of the world. As the world becomes ever more interconnected, anthropology's emphasis on inclusiveness makes ever greater sense. Anthropologists' experience in other places becomes increasingly relevant, whether in business or government. Also worth noting are the practical values of the anthropological attention to tools and tool use, to the way people use and play with language, and to an anthropological method that is increasingly used in other disciplines and more practical contexts. Anthropology is, for example, a very strong introduction to the logic and practice of organizational and management studies, much less to governance. The nature of anthropology as an overarching vision of the world has always been alluring but daunting. In the contemporary world it may also be inexorably necessary.

#### SOURCES

For general overviews of theory, three useful volumes are Marvin Harris's *The Rise of Anthropological Theory: A History of Theories of Culture* (Thomas Y. Crowell, 1968; Alta Mira Press, 2001), which is both detailed and argumentative; Philip Carl Salzman's *Understanding Culture: An Introduction to Anthropological Theory* (Waveland, 2001), which is a more recent and succinct approach; and H. Sidky's more detailed *Perspectives on Culture* (Prentice-Hall, 2004). For recent reconsiderations of theory and methods, see James G. Carrier and Deborah B. Gewertz (eds.), *The Handbook of Sociocultural Anthropology* (Bloomsbury, 2013); Hilary Callan (ed.), *The International Encyclopedia of Anthropology* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2017); and the journal *Anthropological Theory*. For earlier sources see L. L. Langness's *The Study of Culture* (Chandler and Sharp Publishers, 1987) for its extensive quotations, which give the flavor of early theoretical arguments. For more detailed historical work on anthropology as a discipline, the work of George W. Stocking is essential, especially his *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays on the History of Anthropology* (University of Chicago Press, 1982). Adam Kuper's *Anthropologists and Anthropology: The Modern British School* (Routledge, 1996) is an entertaining look at anthropology across the Atlantic. There are various compendia on methods, but the heart of anthropological method is probably clearest through autobiographical accounts. For example, Hortense Powdermaker's *Stranger and Friend:*

*The Way of an Anthropologist* (W. W. Norton, 1966) and Margaret Mead's *Blackberry Winter: My Earlier Years* (Kodansha, 1995) provide classic accounts that will take you into the heart of the anthropological approach to field research. Finally, a good sense of anthropological practice can be gained from *Practicing Anthropology*, a career-oriented publication of the Society for Applied Anthropology.

The film series *Strangers Abroad* (1985), though a bit dated now, still provides good introductions to six of the major figures in early anthropology. All the segments are sound, but the ones on Margaret Mead and Bronislaw Malinowski are especially useful in introducing, respectively, the flavor of American anthropology and the issues of fieldwork. The segment on Franz Boas is also useful, but the film on Boas from the earlier *Odyssey* series is more informative. Watching the first half (thirty minutes) of that film will help underline the range of Boas's contributions. A useful film that conveys a more recent vision of the discipline is *The Anthropologist* (2015).

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