Theories of Man and Culture

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II

THE RISE OF THE ANTI-INTELLECTUAL

E. B. TYLOR AND FRANZ BOAS

In this chapter we examine the meaning of human affairs as conceived by Tylor and Boas. I bring these two writers together specifically to emphasize the contrast between them: they are representative, respectively, of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century thought. Tylor's work exhibits what may be regarded as an intellectualistic and pre-modern version of culture, whereas Boas is representative of anti-intellectualism and of the modern view of behavior. By comparing the ideas of these two writers it is possible both to show the importance of the changes taking place in anthropological thought at about the turn of the century and to present these developments in their historical context.

E. B. TYLOR

EVOLUTION, INTELLECTUALISM AND POSITIVISM. The idea that progress applied to the field of human activity was central to eighteenth-century Enlightenment thought, but during the first half of the nineteenth-century it seems to have dropped almost out of sight, to return—in full force—during the 1860s and 1870s. These two decades constitute the beginning of anthropology as a self-conscious, professional discipline, and Tylor was one of its principal founders. The central focus of the budding and controversial new science, and the central issue in Tylor's work as well, was cultural evolution.

Much of the evolutionary thought which appeared during the last half of the nineteenth century was the elaboration of a few key principles which had been inherited from the Enlightenment. Two of these are particularly important for an understanding of Tylor. The first is what may be called the intellectualistic view of human behavior, and the second is positivism.

The central element of the intellectualistic approach to human affairs is the assumption that the actor in society governs his behavior by rational principles. In other words, it assumes that if we are to understand a person's actions we must view them as products of his own rational thought. Similarly, according to this point of view, society and social institutions are conscious, rational creations and are entered into because it is sensible to do so. For example, according to Locke, people realized that as long as they lived outside of civil society they would be faced with a degree of uncertainty and injustice. Consequently, by means of the social contract, they established a system of government for their mutual benefit (cf. Parsons 1937:95ff.).

It was just as obvious to the intellectualistic writers of the past as it is to anthropologists today that not all actions and institutions are governed by reason; there are irrational elements in human life, and these were explained away by intellectualists as the result of ignorance and error:

> Either the actor simply did not know certain facts relevent to his action and would have acted differently had he known them, or he based his action on considerations which a more extensive knowledge would have proved to be erroneous. He thought he knew, but in fact he did not (Parsons 1937:66).

According to this version of social theory, institutions are grounded in reason, and practices which are traditional, ritual, or symbolic—and hence "irrational"—are intrinsically unstable. They will be discarded once their fallaciousness becomes evident to the members of the society. Traditional beliefs and practices may have a tenacious hold on people's minds, but they will eventually give way to reason.

To the degree that institutions are not grounded in reason—and it is the task of the social sciences to determine whether or not they are—they are to be uprooted as ignorant traditions. The following description of Herbert Spencer's image of his own work reveals the intellectualistic viewpoint which prevailed in his time:

> Man, freed at last from unreflecting subservience to immemorial customs and institutions, is about to take his future into his own hands and shape it, guided and instructed by science, in the image of rationality and justice. The taboos are broken, nothing is unquestionable. Obviously men born into a generation on the threshold of such achievements bear a heavy responsibility, and the young Spencer was fully aware of it (Burrow 1966:214).

The utopian society in Spencer's mind was to be based upon the principle of laissez-faire, according to which social relations would be essentially rational economic relations stripped of all traditional and irrational encumbrances. The actor in society was to be free to apply pure reason to his everyday affairs (Burrow 1966:205–6, 214–27).

The intellectualistic framework came under heavy attack during the last few years of the nineteenth century, and was replaced by a variety of new approaches which saw both human behavior and rationality in radically new ways (Parsons 1937; Hughes 1958).

Positivism is the second principle which helped inform much of the evolutionary theory which developed during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Whereas the intellectualistic framework has all but disappeared from modern anthropological thought, the same is not ture of positivism, for the latter is probably the dominant viewpoint within the discipline today.

Positivism has no doubts about the reality of the external world or that this world can be objectively apprehended and understood (cf. Dray 1964:21–23), and it therefore stands in opposition to all idealist and relativistic versions of social science and history. An important element of this realism is the view that the world operates according to natural laws, and that this is as true of society and social institutions as it is of molecules or living organisms. Accordingly, explanation in the social sciences is essentially the same as explanation in the natural sciences, and consists in subsuming the events to be explained under natural, empirical laws of the universe (Dray 1964:2, 5). For example, Herbert Spencer was an advocate of the "universality of causation": to him, all things are caused by natural laws, and scientific progress amounts to subsuming a greater number of phenomena under laws of increasing generality. Burrow argues that the notion of causal laws is a more fundamental aspect of Spencer's thought than the theory of evolution; Spencer's belief in causation *led* him to his evolutionary theory, since the idea of evolutionary sequences satisfied the needs of a cause-and-effect scheme (Burrow 1966:205–6).

Positivism implies some form of determinism: within limits, at least, it assumes that human institutions and human behavior are caused by natural laws. In fact, behavioral determinism is frequently taken as the definitive element of positivism (e.g., van Kaam 1969:15–18, and Bidney 1953:177–78).

BACKGROUND. Sir Edward B. Tylor was born in London in 1832. His father was a successful businessman, the owner-operator of a brass foundry, and Tylor left school at the age of sixteen to work for the family firm. He suffered from ill health, however, and while still in his early twenties, in 1855, his physician advised him to leave the business and devote his life to

leisure and travel. This he did, supported comfortably by an allowance from home.

After spending nearly a year seeing the United States, Tylor met another traveler in Havana, Henry Christy. Christy was a well-known antiquarian and a prosperous banker; he was about to tour Mexico, and he persuaded Tylor to accompany him. From the perspective of a middle-class Britisher, Mexico was then an exotic place, a land of archaeological relics and curious traditions. The excursions which the two travelers made into the hinterlands brought the young Tylor face to face with these phenomena.

In 1861 Tylor published his *Anahuac,* an anecdotal travelogue about his Mexican tour. In this chatty and discursive book he gives clear evidence of a growing interest in antiquarian and anthropological matters. *Anahuac* was followed shortly by several articles on anthropological topics (cf. Freire-Marreco 1907:375), and in 1865 by his first substantial anthropological work, *Researches into the Early History of Mankind.* Although cultural evolution constitutes a central focus of this book, its design, as Stocking notes, is "as 'diffusionist' as it is 'evolutionist' " (1968a:79).

Tylor's ideas continued to develop in a series of lectures and articles on such topics as the development of religion and language, and in 1871 he published his monumental *Primitive Culture.* This work is an analysis of primitive religious beliefs and practices, among other things. Although both volumes of *Primitive Culture* are brimming with descriptive material, these data are directed toward the establishment of certain theoretical principles, the underlying one of which is that the culture of mankind is governed by definite laws of evolutionary development. This book had considerable impact on anthropology as a whole and may have served to shift the emphasis away from the study of such topics as law and archaeology toward religion (Burrow 1966:235–39). *Primitive Culture* was the capstone of Tylor's career; although he continued to lecture and write for a number of years after its publication, what followed contained little that he had not already said (Stocking 1968b:174). The only book-length work he was to publish subsequently was his *Anthropology* (1881), a general introduction to the field.

Tylor did not earn a university degree, yet he became one of the leading academic and professional anthropologists in England. In 1883 he was appointed Keeper of the University Museum at Oxford; shortly thereafter he was appointed to a readership in anthropology, and in 1896 he became Oxford's first professor of anthropology. He held that position until he retired in 1909.

Tylor is noted for his careful research, critical use of sources, and his tempered, well-reasoned theoretical stance. Even Lowie, one of the severest critics of the evolutionary school of thought, speaks approvingly of him: "the lapse of time has merely confirmed the earlier judgment of his greatness" (Lowie 1937:68). Tylor was also well regarded as an individual:

> His simplicity, patience, and quiet humor made him popular as a teacher and organizer, and contributed to an easy, persuasive style which won a wide audience for his writings. His writings were always free of jargon or pretension of any kind, a consequence, perhaps, of the fact that he was taken from school at sixteen and never again became a "student" in the academic sense (Kardiner and Preble 1963:52).

REDUCTIONISM AND THE AUTONOMY OF CULTURE. Tylor's scheme is paradoxical. On one hand, it is reductionistic, for it explains culture in terms of the individual: to Tylor, the origin of institutions is to be sought in the natural thought processes of human beings. On the other, his scheme entails the view that human institutions are (at least within limits) *sui generis,* autonomous systems with a life of their own, for he held that there are occasions in which customs persist solely due to the force of tradition. In this sense they "fetter" human thought and determine the individual's behavior.

The intellectualistic view of behavior is fundamentally a reductionistic scheme. According to Locke, for example, government was consciously and rationally designed by individuals for their own ends. Even natural law, which was supposed to govern people's relations with one another, was conceived by him as the expression of individual reason. This theory of government is reductionist in a double sense: first, it views social institutions as purposefully designed for *individual ends;* second, it takes *individual reason* as the principle which regulates the form of these institutions.

Both types of reductionism are pronounced in Tylor's work. Concerning the purposefulness of human institutions, Tylor wrote:

> It is, I think, a principle to be held fast in studying the early history of our race, that we ought always to look for practical and intelligible motives for the habits and opinions we find existing in the world. . . . The very assertion that [the savages'] actions are motiveless, and their opinions nonsense, is itself a theory, and, I hold, a profoundly false one . . . (1866:86; see also 1878:56).

The emphasis which Tylor placed on the purposiveness of behavior and institutions meant that he had a utilitarian view of culture. Institutions are consciously created to serve practical ends, and therefore their utility or usefulness is one of their primary features. For example, Tylor held that language can be explained as the product of a series of conscious choices guided by the principle of suitability or usefulness:

> Language is one branch of the great art of sign-making or sign-choosing, and its business is to hit upon some sound as a suitable sign or symbol for each thought. Whenever a sound has been thus chosen there was no doubt a reason for the choice (1881:128).

Even grammar, Tylor said, is "but the result of man's efforts to get easier, fuller, and exacter expression for his thoughts" (1881:133). Similarly, law and morality were purposefully created by individuals for their own benefit. Tylor stated that the small clan or tribe is "the original lawgiving body enacting its laws for its common interest, the society which is ever sitting in committee and settling public opinion on utilitarian principles . . ." (1873:717).

To Tylor, the principle which guides mankind in devising his utilitarian institutions is that of reason, and social practices are explained by reference to rational processes of thought. Reason, therefore, is the key which we can apply to our own as well as to the most exotic beliefs and practices in order to gain understanding.

Closely associated with the principle of reason in Tylor's scheme is his view that human institutions can be studied in causal terms, as expressions of natural laws. In the opening pages of *Primitive Culture,* he noted that many people are repelled by the idea that human history is but one aspect of the history of nature, or that "our thoughts, wills, and actions accord with laws as definite as those which govern the motion of waves, the combination of acids and bases, and the growth of plants and animals" (1871, I:2). He argued that indeed natural laws do play a role in human behavior, and that he would take one aspect of man's history—Culture—and determine some of the causes which lay behind it (1871, I:5). That Tylor placed this argument concerning natural laws at the very beginning of his *magnum opus* reveals how central the issue was in his own mind.

To what features of the natural world did he look to discover these explanatory laws behind culture? Did he seek them in geography, in the conditions of the environment? Or perhaps in the structure of society itself? Not at all: he located them in a particular aspect of the human mind, in its rational as distinct from its emotional or affective components. The natural laws which explain culture are the natural processes of human reason. According to his theory of animism, for example, the basis of religion is the savage's attempt to explain to himself, by reason, such phenomena as life, death, dreams, and sleep. Animism did not arise but once, accidentally; it arose again and again in all parts of the world, and it is the expression of a natural law of human thought.

If Tylor saw human institutions as purposive and useful creations designed according to rational principles of thought, then he should have regarded customs as instruments eminently worthy of promoting a people's well-being. Tylor never arrived at this conclusion for at least two reasons. First, he held that experience and reason sometimes betray man, giving rise to such ill-conceived institutions as magic. I shall discuss the role of ignorance and error in Tylor's scheme shortly. Second, practices and beliefs sometimes acquire an authority and respect of their own and are adhered to on that basis in spite of their obvious inadequacies. In this sense Tylor regarded human institutions as sometimes autonomous, emergent, or *sui generis.* Speaking of the people of savage society, Tylor states that

> the tyranny of tradition at every step imposes upon them thoughts and customs which have been inherited from a different stage of culture, and thus have lost a reasonableness which we may often see them to have possessed in their first origin (1866:86).

Elsewhere he states,

> Whether a custom is plainly useful or not, and even when its purpose is no longer known, once established as a custom it must be conformed to. Savages may have finger-joints cut off, or undergo such long and severe fasts that many die; but often the only reason they can give for inflicting such suffering on themselves is that it was the custom of their ancestors (1881:4–9).

Although recognizing the relative autonomy of institutions, Tylor never pursued this issue systematically. He touched upon it frequently, but it was always a subsidiary and residual element in discussions about topics that he regarded as more important. He was not indifferent to traditional conservatism, however, for he regarded it as a morbid condition. He stated that "civilization is at a standstill where it is regulated by ancestral custom administered by great-grandfathers" (1881:430). Progress requires unfettered reason, the antithesis of which is traditionalism (cf. Stocking 1968a:82–83). Moreover, to Tylor, a main goal of anthropology is to show which beliefs and practices of civilized society are good and useful, and which are superstitions concealed "in the garb of modern knowledge." To him, "the science of culture is essentially a reformer's science," its role being to strip out moribund and stultifying ideas (1871, II:531, 539).

Traditional conservatism is much more pronounced in primitive than in civilized society, Tylor believed. The civilized peoples consciously improve their institutions by checking them systematically against their experiences, and also by reflecting upon them, whereas

> among the lower races there is obstinate resistance to the most desirable reforms, and progress can only force its way with a slowness and difficulty which we of this century can hardly imagine (1881:439).

Tylor apparently did not discuss in detail how it is possible for a custom to have such a tenacious hold on the minds of a people; he never tried to account for the psychological or social mechanisms which insure the persistence of custom. It is perhaps understandable that he did not do so, since traditional conservatism was a residual issue in his mind. Nevertheless, I think that the essential feature of conservatism in Tylor's view can be summed up by the term "thoughtlessness." Traditional conservatism results when, for whatever reason, a people do not apply their minds to their traditional practices and beliefs, but adhere to them without conscious reflection. For example, Tylor occasionally wrote that the consensus of public opinion is a basis of conservatism: people often believe that "what everybody says must be true, what everybody does must be right" (1871, I:13). Tylor occasionally suggested that ecclesiastical authorities are a source of conservatism when they assign beliefs and practices to the realm of the sacred:

> Egyptian mathematicians, being a priestly order, had come to regard their rules as sacred, and therefore not to be improved on, while their Greek disciples, bound by no such scientific orthodoxy, were free to go on further to more perfect methods (1881:319).

Tylor also held that conservatism is sometimes the result of the savage's regard for his ancestors:

> [The savage's] tendency is to consider his ancestors as having handed down to him the perfection of wisdom, which it would be impiety to make the least alteration in (1881:439).

Whatever it may have been that Tylor took as the ultimate grounding or basis for conservative institutions, it is clear that he gave little emphasis to the role of emotion. In this respect he contrasts conspicuously with later writers, like Durkheim, who laid much weight on collective sentiments, and Boas, who regarded man as governed more by emotion and habit than reason. This is one of the principal contrasts between Tylor and later anthropologists.

To Tylor, culture is like a slow-growing but persistent plant trying to push its way through heavy soil. The minds of people in the early stages of development are severely limited by the conservative fetters of tradition, but rational thought is dogged and sooner or later will prevail. This is not to say that reason always results in progress, however, for errors in judgment are common, particularly in the early stages. Continuing the metaphor, it is as if the plant's growth process were occasionally to err and send the young bud in a sideward direction, or even deeper into the soil. Nevertheless, it is clear why Tylor was content to focus on the growth process itself rather than the binding fetters of tradition. Like the biologist interested in the growing plant rather than the earth through which it struggles, Tylor's central concern was always rational thought.

In summary, Tylor employed a reductionistic framework to explain the development and persistence of rational institutions. The worthwhile features of culture are understood by reference to individual ends and individual, rational thought. On the other hand, it is the morbid fetters of tradition which are emergent, for they are acquired from without and restrict people's thoughts and actions.

TYLOR'S EVOLUTIONISM. As the preceding suggests, Tylor's notion of culture is inextricably bound up with his idea of evolution, for he always conceived of human institutions within a developmental context.

Tylor's evolutionary theory is to be seen largely in relation to one of the leading issues facing anthropology during the 1860s: this was the debate between the degenerationists and progressionists (Stocking 1968a:74–81). The degenerationists argued that savage peoples once enjoyed a better condition, but, having fallen in the eyes of God, they degenerated to their present status. The degenerationist view was coupled with the notion that culture is not a natural phenomenon and that it falls beyond the reach of scientific analysis. Tylor was a leading exponent of the progressionist argument, which was that all societies and institutions go through a gradual—and natural—process of development, and that the various peoples of the world represent different levels of achievement along this line of evolutionary progression.

As crucial as these issues were in shaping the polemical thrust of Tylor's work, my interest here is in a somewhat different set of problems, which is the conceptual framework which underlies his evolutionary theory.

One can almost say that, whereas Durkheim and Spencer took the biological organism as their model for cultural analysis, Tylor, like Comte, took the development of science as the model for cultural evolution. In the process of arriving at truth, the sciences must pass through stages dominated by such erroneous theories as the belief in vitalism, alchemy, and astrology; these ill-reasoned beliefs are slowly transformed or eradicated as evidence mounts and thought develops. Similarly, culture, in its gradual course toward perfection, is characterized by false and inadequate knowledge which is slowly but relentlessly swept aside. Societies low on the scale of development are those which exhibit a high degree of ignorance and error.

The reason for the similarity between Tylor's conceptions of cultural and scientific development is clear enough: he thought that both are founded on rational thought. The savage puzzling over the inadequacies of his tools or laws, or over the natural phenomena of his environment, is like the scientist rationally and unemotionally pondering his problems in the laboratory (cf. Parsons 1937:58). The processes behind culture and science are much the same. For example, Tylor held that a principal difference between science and many of the myths devised by mankind is that science is true knowledge, whereas mythology is a false attempt at knowledge (e.g., cf. 1871, I:385). Even standards of morality have a rational and empirical basis. The "dull-minded barbarian has not power of thought enough to come up to the civilized man's best moral standard." The primitive quickly forgets the experiences of the past and fails to consider the future, for otherwise he would improve his behavior.

> Much of the wrong-doing of the world comes from want of imagination. If the drunkard could see before him the misery of next year with something of the vividness of the present craving, it would over-balance it (1881:407).

Cultural evolution occurs because, in the long run, reason prevails over error:

> Loose and illogical as man's early reasonings may be, and slow as he may be to improve them under the check of experience, it is a law of human progress that thought tends to work itself clear (1881:341).

Elsewhere Tylor states that "through age after age there has gone on a slow process of natural selection, ever tending to thrust aside what is worthless, and to favour what is strong and sound" (1867:93). The context of this statement leaves little doubt that the key to this natural selection is "the test of reason and experience" (1867:93). The result is that human institutions become progressively more true and useful.

Note that the test of institutions is not one of reason alone, but reason together with experience. Tylor was an empiricist (cf. 1881:49ff; 1871, I:240ff., 273ff., 368ff.), emphasizing experience as the source of what men think and believe. He even argued that mathematics is an inductive science, the fundamental truths of which are "based on actual experience." Tylor quotes approvingly from J. S. Mill, who contended that the principle of addition derives not from logic but from the senses, from having observed, say, that two objects added to three objects totals five (1871, I:240–41). I have already indicated the role of experience in the development of moral standards. Certain actions, such as drunkenness, have consequences which the individual recognizes, and when he does so he is on the path to a higher morality.

In addition to his empiricism, Tylor was a determined realist, believing that it is *objective* experience which, together with reason, is behind human behavior and institutions. Ideally, according to Tylor, all people should interpret the same experiences the same way. The savage, "forgetful of yesterday and careless of to-morrow, lolling in his hammock when his wants are satisfied" (1881:407), should react to his own behavior the same way as Tylor. That he does not is explained by the fact that the savage is unable to perceive or imagine the objective consequences of his actions.

In short, Tylor's theory has little more room for cultural relativity than it does for scientific relativity, and for the same reasons. Cultural institutions, like scientific theory, are based upon objective experience and reason. And cultural evolution, like scientific evolution, is uni-directional (although of course it is subject to occasional regressions).

The extent of Tylor's absolutism is sometimes difficult for twentieth-century people to comprehend. For example, he even viewed art in terms of a single evolutionary scale. He spoke of the Egyptian wall-paintings as "a style half-way between the lowest and highest." In spite of their cleverness, the ancient Egyptians "have not quite left behind the savage stage of art." Theirs are "picture-writings rather than pictures," "coloured in childish daubs of colours." Tylor wrote that the landscapes painted by the ancient Greeks were "still in the picture-writing stage," for the forests, mountains, and houses were not faithful representations but "stood as signs of the world outside" (1881:300–5).

Tylor used two principal methods in charting the course of evolution—the comparative method and the analysis of survivals. The latter is a technique for tracing developmental sequences by means of the residues of past institutions remaining among extant peoples. In all societies, ancient patterns of thought and behavior have survived beyond the conditions which gave rise to them, and these patterns serve "as proofs and examples" of an earlier stage of development (1871, I:16). For example, bows, arrows, and slings are mere toys in modern society, but they provide a record of activities in which Europeans once engaged in dead earnest (1871, I:72ff.).

The second method which Tylor employed, the comparative method, is based upon what seemed to him a self-evident fact, that throughout the world the institutions of mankind exhibit remarkable similarities. Such cultural phenomena as stone implements, basket-making, and cooking practices differ in little more than detail from society to society and continent to continent. "Little respect need be had in such comparisons for date in history or for place on the map" (1871, I:6). Similar beliefs, practices, and implements may be gathered from all over the world, and then they may be organized into comprehensive classificatory schemes. Weapons may be organized into the categories of spear, club, sling, bow and arrow, and the like. Myths may be categorized into such classes as myths of sunrise, myths of sunset, earthquake myths, and so on (1871, I:6–8). Once classified in this manner, the data within each category are arranged to show patterns of progression or evolutionary development. For example, in studying firearms, the investigator begins with the early and crude forms of weapons, such as the flint-lock rifle, and moves on to the most modern and sophisticated ones (1871, I:14–16). The direction which evolution has taken is brought to light in this way.

Behind these two methodological principles is the assumption that, to explain cultural evolution, the anthropologist has to "re-think" the steps by which it has come about: since institutions are consciously and purposefully created by individuals for their own ends, it follows that, to understand them, and to discover their causes, one is to recreate the experiences and reasoning upon which they rest. Marett, in a discussion of Tylor's theory of language, notes that Tylor's method was to join minds with the savage, and that this amounted "to a sort of introjection" (Marett 1936:56). In brief, Tylor employed the subjective point of view (Parsons 1937:46) in tracing cultural development.

The subjective point of view entails a difficulty. To "re-think" an institution raises the possibility of imposing on the actor's thought features which are foreign to it. Tylor was quite aware of the problem of subjective understanding:

> The reasoning of the savage is not to be judged by the rules which belong to a higher education; and what the ethnologist requires in such a case, is not to know what the facts prove to his own mind, but what inference the very differently trained mind of the savage may draw from them (1878:5).

To Tylor, the problem of subjective understanding is met by taking account of the fact that the rational principles behind savage institutions are those of "a mental condition of intense and inveterate ignorance" (1871, I:23). In other words, the principle which explains the divergence of savage thought from our own—and hence the reason why there is a problem of subjective understanding at all—is ignorance and error. Once the savage's errors in reasoning are recognized, even the most irrational, frivolous, and despicable beliefs and practices became intelligible.

Using ignorance and error as the key to subjective understanding, some cultural phenomena can be "re-thought" with comparatively little difficulty. This is particularly true of technical skills and inventions. The use and purpose of tools and techniques is self-evident, so a careful description itself contains a fairly adequate account of the reasoning upon which they are based: the anthropologist does not have to go to great lengths to understand what a hatchet or blow-gun is all about, for example. The ignorance and error which explains these techniques and artifacts is simply that savage societies have a more rudimentary knowledge of mechanics and physics than civilized people. Moreover, reasonable developmental sequences of technological phenomena can be constructed on fairly objective grounds: "no one comparing a long-bow and cross-bow would doubt that the cross-bow was a development arising from the simpler instrument" (Tylor 1871, I:15; cf. 1881:16–17). Technological evolution amounts to the simple, linear accumulation of inventions, a process occurring more rapidly among some peoples than others. One can understand why Tylor's discussions of technology appear to be purely descriptive and lacking in "psychological" explanatory principles. I think the "psychological" principles are there, however; they consist in the inventors' processes of reasoning but are implicit in Tylor's account.

Tylor's method of "re-thinking" institutions is much less simple when applied to phenomena like mythology and religious beliefs; Tylor was led to develop fairly elaborate theoretical schemes in order to explain these, for the reasoning and supposed errors on which they rest are not self-evident. This may be illustrated by considering perhaps the most famous of his theories, his interpretation of animism.

Tylor noted that the "lower theologies" are frequently misunderstood by Europeans. He stated that these beliefs are hardly "a rubbish-heap of miscellaneous folly," but are consistent and logical to a high degree. Their formation and development rest upon rational principles, although the rationality that is involved is one of ignorant minds (1871, I:22–23).

Tylor asserted that there is no good evidence that any primitive society is totally without religion (1871, II:1ff.), and that as far as he could judge it is the belief in spiritual beings which is the religious belief common to all low races (1871, II:9). This belief, then, constitutes the very "groundwork of the Philosophy of Religion" (1871, II:10). Tylor's problem was to "rethink" this primitive philosophy: to "look for meaning, however crude or childish," to "search for the reasonable thought which once gave life to observances now become in seeming or reality the most abject and superstitious folly" (1871, II:5). Accordingly, he thought that the origin of belief in spiritual beings is to be found in the savages' attempts to explain two enigmas of life:

> In the first place, what makes the difference between a living body and a dead one; what causes waking, sleep, trance, disease, death? In the second place, what are those human shapes which appear in dreams and visions (1871, II:12)?

The savage mind discovered a principle which explained all these phenomena at once: the doctrine of the human soul. The soul is able to leave the body temporarily during sleep, to wander about and undergo the experiences which are recorded in the mind as dreams; and it can depart for good, leaving the body without life.

It was not only the original doctrine of animism or belief in souls which Tylor explained by "re-thinking," however. He presented an enormous collection of beliefs and practices in his analysis, and each was interpreted as a logical extension of the original doctrine of souls. For example, "The doctrine of a Future Life as held by the lower races is the all but necessary outcome of savage Animism" (1871, II:87). Human sacrifice, too, is derived from the belief in souls; it is a rational inference that, when a man dies, he may need or want others to accompany him in the next life (1871, II:42).

By using reason, or ignorance and error, as keys for subjective understanding, Tylor engaged in a subtle form of circular thinking. He was living in a time of widespread confidence in science, and as an individual he was firmly convinced of the virtues of his own society; he spoke of his as "an enlightened country," and of his age as one "scarcely approached by any former age in the possession of actual knowledge and the strenuous pursuit of truth as the guiding principle of life" (1871, II:536). He never seems to have seriously questioned the assumption that the institutions of Victorian England were, for the most part, rational creations. However, when he applied the principle of reason to savage beliefs and practices it was obvious that they usually did not measure up. The savage hunter quietly but earnestly talking to his arrows before the kill, the barbarian gardener offering sacrifices to the tubers he had just planted—these are hardly examples of the flowering of rational thought. The conclusion which Tylor drew from such evidence was that savage thought is somehow defective. It did not occur to him that the primitives may have appeared stupid because of his own assumption that their institutions must be founded on reason.

It is widely held that Tylor clearly distinguished between culture and race, and that to him the only significant differences between people are of a cultural rather than a biological order. The reason for this interpretation is easily discovered. Again and again Tylor emphasized what has been called the psychic unity of mankind. For example, in his *Researches* he stated that when we consider the arts, knowledge, customs, and superstitions of mankind we are struck by the recurrence of similar forms in the most remote parts of the world. This, he noted, "strikingly illustrates the extent of mental uniformity among mankind" (1873:373). At the beginning of *Primitive Culture* he stated:

> For the present purpose it appears both possible and desirable to eliminate considerations of hereditary varieties or races of man, and to treat mankind as homogeneous in nature, though placed in different grades of civilization (1871, I:7).

And yet elsewhere Tylor made comments which are seemingly quite contradictory. For example, in his *Anthropology* he stated that "There seems to be in mankind inbred temperament and inbred capacity of mind." Some races, he commented, "have marched on in civilisation while others have stood still or fallen back," and this is due in part to "differences of intellectual and moral powers." He stated that the children of lower races appear to learn as well as white children until about the age of twelve, when they are left behind by the white children. "This fits with what anatomy teaches of the less development of brain in the Australian and African than in the European" (1881:60, 74–5; cf. also Harris 1968:140, Stocking 1968a:115–16, and White 1960a:iv). There seems little doubt that, at least by the time he wrote *Anthropology,* Tylor viewed the races of man as different in innate abilities.

How could he reconcile both notions? In Tylor's view the unity of mankind is one of potential, and some races have achieved more of this than others. Tylor probably held a Lamarckian conception of race, so the progress of civilization itself would be a cause of the similarities between the minds of people at like positions along the developmental scale.

Context and Meaning. In what way did Tylor's ideas about culture influence his understanding or interpretation of concrete data? Tylor perceived human institutions in terms of the interaction of two opposing forces—the conservative fetters of tradition on one hand, and progressive, rational thought on the other. Accordingly, his interpretation of a datum took one of

two forms, depending on whether he regarded the fact primarily as the expression of one force or the other.

Tylor viewed conservatism as a morbid condition, and he showed little sympathy when he came upon an example of it. Some anthropologists, like Durkheim, saw the fetters of tradition as a positive benefit; to Durkheim, the restraining force of tradition contributes to the cohesion and stability of society. Other anthropologists, including Benedict, tended to take a neutral position toward conservatism. To Benedict, traditionalism is simply a fact of life, unfortunate in some cases, perhaps, but not in most. Tylor could never regard conservatism as a neutral fact, let alone a positive benefit, without changing the core of his thought about mankind. To Tylor, the history of man is a record of achievement, and the restrictive fetters of tradition are the antithesis of both reason and progress.

Tylor actually devoted little space in his writings to cases of traditional conservatism, for he was more interested in progress than in the hindrances to it. One example he gave is illustrative, however. The incident occurred among the Dayaks of Borneo. When presented by the Europeans with a superior technique for chopping wood, the Dayaks resisted to the point of levying a fine on anyone caught using the new method. The superiority of the European innovation was obvious, nevertheless, and many of the Dayaks surreptitiously used it anyway. Tylor described this as "a striking instance of survival by ancestral authority in the very teeth of common sense" (1871, I:71).

An issue as important as Tylor's antipathy for conservatism is that of the grounds upon which he assigned a custom to that category. He classified as conservative all customs which persisted in use even though he could see no rational and utilitarian grounds for their doing so. Had he been able to shed his intellectualistic assumptions and view the same idata from some other perspective, however, he would have seen that the very customs he regarded as morbid made sense after all. For example, a Durkheimian interpretation of the Dayaks might have shown that these people were behaving quite reasonably. Durkheim would perhaps have seen the Dayaks' reaction as an example of a moral group clinging to a symbol of unity when faced with a disorganizing and threatening way of life. In short, not only did Tylor's perspective lead him to disapprove of conservatism; in addition, it dictated which customs were to be regarded as morbid and which were not.

Tylor's notion of culture also influenced his interpretation of rational (as opposed to conservative) institutions, for he assumed that the meaning of nontraditional social practices is to be seen in terms of the principles of reason and utility. This can be illustrated by his analysis of myth.

The New Zealanders believe[1] that Maui, a mythical hero, can ride or imprison all the winds but one, the West wind. Maui can neither catch the West wind nor find the cave in which it lives. From time to time, however, the hero nearly overtakes the West wind, which hides in its cave until the crisis has passed. It is during these brief periods that the prevailing westerly does not blow (Tylor 1871, I:360–61). Tylor interpreted this myth as a rational attempt by the New Zealanders to make sense of the world around them. It is a nature-myth, the purpose of which is to describe or explain "in personal shape the life of nature" (1871, I:367).

One comparatively modern framework for explaining myth is that which holds that tales are symbolic statements about social affairs. According to this interpretation, myths have important functions to perform at the level of the cultural or social system, in that they contribute to the solidarity of society, among other things.

Tylor did not ignore the relationship between myth and society. For example, he discussed a class of legends which he called "explanatory traditions":

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[1] Throughout this book I frequently use the ethnographic present, in that I employ the present tense to describe cultural practices and conditions which were observed and described in the past and which may no longer exist.

> When the attention of a man in the myth-making stage of intellect is drawn to any phenomenon or custom which has to him no obvious reason, he invents and tells a story to account for it . . . (1871, I:392).

Tylor cites the way in which the African Wakuafi account for their practice of cattle thievery. The Wakuafi assert that Heaven gave all the cattle to them, and whenever they come across an animal in someone else's possession it is "their call to go and seize it." Tylor describes this tale as an "ex post facto" legend which satisfies the "craving to know causes and reasons" (1871, I:392). To Tylor, the tale is a product of rational minds and fulfills the individual's need for explanation. The symbolic and functional significance of the belief is totally missed. In short, Tylor's analysis of "explanatory traditions" is precisely the same as that of nature-myths, and it bears little resemblance to the functional interpretations which proliferated after the turn of the century.

It was not only Tylor's interpretation of myth which was affected by his culture concept. For example, Tylor describes a custom of the North American Indians whereby a mother who has recently lost a baby makes a crude representation of the infant out of black feathers and quills. This is kept in a cradle which the woman carries around with her, and when she stops to work she talks to the infant's effigy as if it were the real child. Customs—or rituals—of this sort would soon be handled by the Durkheimians, and later by Radcliffe-Brown, as symbolic acts, the meaning of which could be reached only by seeing them in their social context. Tylor's interpretation, however, was much more simple and direct. To him, the feathers and quills are merely a rational device which enables the mother to remember her lost child. The savage mind is less developed than that of a civilized person, and it has greater need for material images to assist its thought (1878:106 ff.).

As a practitioner of the comparative method, Tylor has been criticized for wrenching ethnographic facts from their cultural contexts and thereby doing violence to them. Ruth Benedict describes Tylor's as "the anecdotal period of ethnology." She contrasts the anthropologists of his period with Franz Boas, who always insisted "that anthropological theory must take into account not detached items but human cultures as organic and functioning wholes" (1932:1). This criticism is essentially correct, but it misses the point. Tylor was quite concerned with context, although he regarded the *ethnographic* context as a relatively unimportant one within which to couch his material. To him, it is primarily within a comparative or historical context that the distinctive characteristics of a trait emerge. Tylor offered an admittedly trivial illustration, the European custom of wearing earrings. The earring, Tylor believed, is "a relic of a ruder mental condition," a condition in which such things as rings, bones, and feathers are inserted through the cartilage of the nose, or in which ivory studs are inserted in the corners of the mouth. The use of earrings is a custom located near the end of this developmental sequence, and, Tylor implied, it will ultimately die out altogether (1878:1–2). The customs and laws of savage and barbarous tribes "often explain to us, in ways we should otherwise have hardly guessed, the sense and reason of our own" (1881:401; see also 1873, Part II).

It is not only the beliefs and practices of civilized society to which the historical and comparative context is applicable:

> The treatment of similar myths from different regions, by arranging them in large groups, makes it possible to trace in mythology the operation of imaginative processes recurring with the evident regularity of mental law; and thus stories of which a single instance would have been a mere isolated curiosity, take their place among well-marked and consistent structures of the human mind (1871, I:282).

The value of the comparative framework is that it allows the anthropologist to discover, through induction, the common processes of thought behind human institutions, and therefore their meaning.

One reason why Tylor could ignore the cultural or ethnographic context of a trait is that his was a reductionist theory, stressing the causal relations between individual mental processes and cultural phenomena. All traits which share the same cause belong together, regardless of where they are found. To argue that it is necessary to provide the ethnographic context of a trait in order to understand it rests on the assumption that it is the relations between cultural elements which are significant for understanding—that traits have properties which enable them to react upon one another. In short, it assumes that culture is an emergent system. To accuse Tylor of detaching his data from their cultural context amounts to accusing him of failing to achieve a culture concept which was quite foreign to his thought and to the intellectual tradition in which he worked.

FRANZ BOAS

The revolution in the social sciences which took place between about 1890 and 1930 laid the foundations of much of what constitutes present-day social thought (see Hughes 1958 and Parsons 1937). Hughes notes that the people most intimately involved in this revolution were of "the original 'heartland' of Western society: France, Germany (including Austria), and Italy" (1958: 12). Englishmen, Americans, Russians, and Eastern Europeans played little part. The geographical source of this revolution is significant, for the man who later became known as the founder of American anthropology, Franz Boas, was not an American at all, but was born, raised, and educated in Germany. Moreover, the years during which Boas' thought underwent the greatest change—the decade or so before the turn of the century and the years immediately following—were precisely those during which this revolution took place. In short, Boas should be seen in the context of this larger intellectual movement; he was one of the "turn-of-the-century thinkers who were creating the modern image of the human animal" (Stocking 1968a:160).

INTRODUCTION. Boas' academic training was undertaken within the natural sciences or *Naturwissenschaften,* and his anthropological theory was definitely shaped by a desire to approach culture with the rigor of the physical scientist. However, his work was also decidedly influenced by the German idealist tradition of thought. This was a tradition which placed greater emphasis on the subjective idea than on objective, phenomenal reality. Whereas the natural sciences dealt with the phenomenal world on a materialistic basis, the idealists held that the sphere of human activity could only be approached in terms of its "spiritual" or subjective qualities. History was not to be understood as the working out of natural and universal laws, but as the expression of ideas. The *Geist* or "spirit" became the organizing principle for the historian's data, and this *Geist* was a subjectively perceived whole. Each cultural tradition and each period was thought to have its own unique "spirit" which was qualitatively different from any other, and a person from one tradition was able to grasp the events and "spirit" of another through subjective understanding. German idealist writings tended to take one of two approaches. They either focused on the philosophy of history, or they took as their goal meticulously detailed historical accounts aimed at providing the fullest possible knowledge or understanding of a given period or event (Parsons 1937:473–87).

The turn-of-the-century revolution in social thought can be regarded—within limits and in very rough terms—as the infusion of certain elements of idealist thought into the mainstream of positivism. The nineteenth-century positivists held that a single standard of rationality could be used for evaluating human institutions. At that time it was thought that contemporary Western European society had achieved the highest expression of rational thought so far. German idealism, on the other hand, contained a degree of relativism. Each "spirit" was thought to be unique; it had to be understood in terms of itself and not in terms of a universal standard, and therefore the investigator had to leave his own ideas behind when embarking upon the study of another time and place.

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Similarly, the turn-of-the-century revolution in social thought rejected the notion that departures from Western European rationality are to be seen solely or even primarily in terms of ignorance and error. This revolution stressed in particular that human institutions are not at bottom rational, but are founded on emotion. To understand another society the investigator has to forsake his own perspective and take up that of the people he is studying.

Rejected, then, were the image of man as rational and calculating, and the conception of human institutions as rationally conceived artifacts. In their place the view emerged that behavior is largely "irrational" and emotional, and that it is precisely these elements which must be taken into account in order to understand human affairs.

The view of man and society which appeared at about the beginning of the twentieth century is sometimes referred to as anti-intellectualism. This term is used by Crane Brinton, for example, who offers the following definition:

> Basically, the anti-intellectual, in the sense we here use the term, does not regard the instrument of thought as *bad,* but among most men most of the time as *weak.* . . . [T]he anti-intellectual notes merely that thought seems often at the mercy of appetites, passions, prejudices, habits, conditioned reflexes, and a good deal else in human life that is not thinking (1963:213; emphasis in the original).

A prime representative of anti-intellectualism is Pavlov, according to whom behavior is governed by automatic reflexes far more than by conscious, rational thought; another is Freud, who conceived human thought and action as products of such "irrational" factors as drives and neuroses; a third is Pareto, whose focus was upon the nonrational features of behavior and society.

Brinton has attempted to place anti-intellectualism within a historical context of social and political events. He notes that ideas about the natural goodness and rationality of man and about the perfectibility of society reached their fullest and purest expression during the Enlightenment. It was believed that social institutions could be improved by conscious and intelligent effort; if people tried, they could bring about progress through political action. These ideas constituted the underpinnings of democratic society, with its belief that a free electorate has the intelligence and high-mindedness to govern itself wisely. The events of history severely challenged these notions, however. Due to such developments as the excesses of the French Revolution and the rise of Napoleon, a growing disillusionment and pessimism set in. Both the goodness of man and his propensity to follow the dictates of reason were subject to increasing doubts. The same blighted hopes and expectations, continuing into the twentieth century, resulted in anti-intellectualism, which Brinton describes as "one of the characteristic manifestations of the spirit of our age" (1963:212).

It was not only the image of the human actor and his society which were called into question by the innovators at about the beginning of this century. There was also a reexamination of the problem of the observer's understanding of his data, Max Weber's notion of ideal types being perhaps the best illustration (see Hughes 1958).

BIOGRAPHICAL. Boas was born in Minden, Germany, in 1858, the son of a comparatively well-to-do businessman. He studied a variety of subjects at several universities, and in 1881 received his doctorate from the University of Kiel. His degree was in physics, but he had a strong interest in geography, his minor. Not long after leaving Kiel, in 1883, he embarked upon a year-long trip among the Eskimo to try to discover their knowledge of local geography and the patterns of their migrations (Stocking 1968a:138–40). Although the problems he chose were geographical, strictly speaking, his investigations enabled him to move into anthropology with little difficulty.

When Boas returned to Germany he received an appointment at the Royal Ethnographic Museum in Berlin, serving under Bastian, and not long thereafter was appointed Docent in geography at the University of Berlin. But very shortly he left once again for field research, this time among the Bella Coola of the Northwest Coast of North America. For the rest of his life his ethnographic research would focus primarily (although not exclusively) on the Indians of this part of the world.

Boas was a Jew, and for that reason, together with his "left-liberal posture," he wanted to leave Germany for a more congenial social atmosphere (Lesser 1968:99–100; Stocking 1968a:149–50). Between 1887 and 1896 he received several appointments in New York, Worcester, and Chicago, each of which enabled him to pursue his anthropological research. In 1896 he began teaching at Columbia University, where he remained for the most part until his retirement in 1937. He died in New York in 1942.

Boas was a strong-willed man, and he frequently found himself chafing under the authority of those above him. But the force of his personality and his determination were of inestimable importance in the history of American anthropology. Boas was absolutely dedicated to establishing anthropology as a fully professional, rigorous, and research-oriented discipline, and almost single-handedly he trained and directed a corps of students—such as Kroeber, Lowie, Radin, Spier, Benedict—who would distinguish the field as a viable and productive addition to the social sciences. The department at Columbia, strongly identified with Boas himself, soon became the heart of anthropology in the United States.

It is next to impossible to give a capsule account of Boas' research and publications, for his interests covered the entire range of anthropology, and he was a prolific writer. He conducted significant research on human growth, anthropometry, mythology and folklore, linguistics, and primitive art, to name only the most important topics. His work in any one of these areas would have been enough to establish him as an important figure in anthropology. It is easier to appreciate this productivity when it is remembered that he was also quite active in shaping and organizing a new discipline and training its members.[2]

THE DEVELOPMENT OF BOAS' CULTURE CONCEPT. Although Boas began his university training with a rather "materialistic *Weltanschauung*," he soon began to question those assumptions (see Stocking 1968a:Chapter 7, and Kluckhohn and Prufer 1959). At least with regard to his thinking about human behavior, he showed signs of neo-Kantian and idealist influences early in his career. He was sufficiently interested in Kant to have a copy with him while among the Eskimo, and even before that he expressed an interest in the epistemological problem of the effect of the individual's mental state on perception. Before the end of the 1880s he had come to see "each culture as a subjectively perceived whole," and in the very early years of his development—still in the 1880s—he was turning in the direction of historicism, perhaps due to the influence of Dilthey (Stocking 1968a:137–44, 152–56).

Partly as a result of these idealist influences, Boas was in a good position to participate in the turn-of-the-century revolution described above. How, then, did he view the purpose of anthropology and the program of research which it was to follow, and how did he plan to change the discipline's focus? By inquiring into these issues I can reveal some of the most important developments in his thought.

In a paper published in 1887 on "The Study of Geography" Boas distinguished between two fundamentally different scientific pursuits. The first seeks to discover general laws of the universe, and it considers a particular phenomenon of interest only for what it reveals about some natural law. The second form of science consists of "the study of phenomena for their own sake" (1887, in 1940:642). This approach seeks to understand phenomena as they appear to the human observer; interest is directed toward a thorough understanding of the phenomena themselves rather than toward the laws which they express. For example, if a geographer were to take the first approach, he would isolate the various geological, meteorological, or other elements of a region and relate them to other phenomena in other parts of the world which have the same cause. By the second approach he would take all the features of the local area as a unit and seek to understand them as a unique constellation of traits. Boas argued that the two forms of science are compatible and equally valid.

This division of scientific interest is reflected in Boas' early work in anthropology. He was quite explicit that the first form of science occupies an important place in the discipline. He wrote that "certain laws exist which govern the growth of human culture, and it is our endeavor to discover these laws" 1896, in 1940:276). Boas was critical of the earlier comparative method employed by the evolutionists (1896, in 1940:270ff.), however, and argued that a fresh approach was needed. The earlier method was to construct classificatory schemes with which to organize the ethnographic data; these schemes were based on the principle that the simpler and more "irrational" customs are earlier. In other words, the evolutionists assumed that their systems of classification represented history. Boas rejected this assumption, and he argued that the laws of evolution can be derived only from the analysis of the actual histories of delimited regions:

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[2] For a sample of the range of Boas' interests, see his collection of articles in *Race, Language and Culture* (Boas 1940). For an appreciation of Boas' impact, see the articles contained in the two memoirs devoted to him (Kroeber *et al.*, 1943, and Goldschmidt 1959).

> Thus we have come to understand that before we can build up the theory of the growth of all human culture, we must know the growth of cultures that we find here and there. . . . We must, so far as we can, reconstruct the actual history of mankind, before we can hope to discover the laws underlying that history (1898a:4).

In 1897 the Jesup North Pacific Expedition was organized under Boas' direction, and it followed his plan precisely: its purpose was to provide the detailed history of a limited area, the northern Asiatic and North American regions bordering the Pacific. More specifically, the expedition was to discover the degree of influence between the Asian and North American tribes (1898a:4–6).

It was characteristic of the period in which Boas wrote to regard human institutions as expressions of "mental life." Both the positivists and the idealists, in spite of their differences, agreed on this point. Consequently, it is not surprising that Boas believed that evolutionary laws were to be found in "the psychical laws of the human mind" (1896, in 1940:436). Like Tylor, Boas thought that culture could be reduced to individual mental processes.

The second form of science, that which is concerned not with the search for natural laws but with an understanding of phenomena for their own sake, played an even more important role in Boas' early anthropology. He held that the primary means for achieving this kind of understanding is the historical approach: it is possible to attain an "intelligent understanding" of culture by discovering how it came to be what it is (1936, in 1940:305; see also 1908:7–8). In his early work Boas returned again and again to the detailed historical accounts of particular regions, especially in his many articles on folklore.

The historical approach was not the only one which he used in order to achieve this form of understanding, however, for he

also employed the principle of subjective interpretation. In 1885, for example, Boas was at the Royal Ethnographic Museum in Berlin, having just returned from his Eskimo trip. A collection of Alaskan and British Columbian Indian artifacts arrived at the museum, and, Boas states, "my fancy was first struck by the flight of imagination exhibited in the works of art of the British Columbians as compared to the severe sobriety of the eastern Eskimo." Later that year he had a chance to interview some Northwest Coast Indians who had been brought to Berlin, "and opportunity was thus given to cast a brief glance behind the veil that covered the life of those people." He commented that "the attraction became irresistible"; "with the financial aid of personal friends" he set off for research in British Columbia (1909:307). What attracted him so strongly was not history, but the desire to get "behind the veil" that stood between him and the thought of the Indians. An attempt to penetrate this veil is contained in an article on Northwest Coast face paintings published as part of the reports of the Jesup Expedition in 1898. In that essay Boas attempted to show the meaning of facial paintings and of Northwest Coast art in general as seen from the perspective of the Indians themselves (1898b).

All the research which Boas conducted for the Jesup Expedition was motivated to a degree by a desire to penetrate the Kwakiutl veil. In introducing his Kwakiutl ethnography, which resulted from the Jesup project, Boas states,

> It seemed to me well to make the leading point of view of my discussion, on the one hand an investigation of the historical relations of the tribes to their neighbors, on the other hand a presentation of the culture as it appears to the Indian. For this reason I have spared no trouble to collect descriptions of customs and beliefs in the language of the Indian, because in these the points that seem important to him are emphasized, and the almost unavoidable distortion contained in the descriptions given by the casual visitor and student is eliminated (1909:309).

Boas' interest in the subjective side of culture constituted a major theme in his work, and the motivation behind this interest seems to have been the desire for understanding simply for the sake of understanding.

I have said that Boas saw two ways to pursue the second form of science in anthropology, or to arrive at an "intelligent understanding" of culture. One was to study culture history, the other was to achieve subjective understanding.

It appears that Boas did not regard these as clearly distinguishable approaches, for he believed that when people offer an interpretation of their customs they provide an explanation for their historical development as well. By inquiring into a people's ideas, then, the investigator can understand the past, and vice versa. His discussion of ceremonial masks is illustrative. In some societies, he writes, masks "are used for deceiving spirits," whereas in others "the wearer personifies a deceased person whose memory is to be recalled." These statements express the peoples' cultural explanations for the use of masks. However, Boas thought that these brief characterizations also provided a historical account of the respective customs, for he wrote that "These few data suffice to show that the same ethnical phenomena *may develop from different sources*" (1896, in 1940:273–75; emphasis mine). In his pursuit of history, Boas was led to explore the subjective side of culture, the domain of cultural ideas; and in studying cultural ideas he thought he was also studying history.[3]

Boas' original program of research had room to accommodate both forms of science as he conceived them. I now want to show some of the results of this program of research, for it led to revolutionary changes in Boas' thought; it led to the devel-

opment of a twentieth-century version of the culture concept. Although a variety of factors contributed to this emergence (see Stocking 1968a:Chapter 9), here I shall deal with three that are particularly important.

The first factor was Boas' desire to work out the detailed histories of delimited regions. The principal methodological technique he used for this was the study of the dissemination or diffusion of traits. For example, by an investigation of myths he concluded that, at least with respect to mythology, the Navaho were more strongly influenced from the northwest of North America than from the northeast or the Mississippi Basin area (Boas 1897). By means of distributional studies Boas was also able to conclude that the Alaskan Eskimo exhibited greater outside influences than the other Eskimo groups, and he speculated that the original homeland of these peoples was east of the Mackenzie River (1901a).

The 1890s was a decade in which Boas gave considerable attention to folklore studies; much of his effort was directed toward collecting and reporting the tales, but the ultimate purpose was to trace histories. This work eventually led him to a critical conclusion, which was that the ultimate cause of myths cannot be found in the processes of thought of individual human beings. The folklore of a people is built up by the "accretions of foreign material," and each diffused element is then adapted or modified to fit its new cultural context (1896, in 1940:429). Consequently, "the original significance of the myth"—the mental process which constitutes its origin—is necessarily obscure (1898, in 1940:423), and any "systematic explanation of mythological stories . . . [is] illusory" (1933, in 1940:450). In brief, myths are products of such complex histories that the search for origins is futile. The speculations of men like Tylor—who held, for example, that "nature-myths" originate in the savage's desire to understand the universe—can never be proved.

This conclusion was not restricted to folklore, but was soon

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[3] Boas soon gave up the notion that the study of ideas is a safe approach to the study of history (e.g., 1903, in 1940:562, 563). In the first edition of *The Mind of Primitive Man* Boas again discussed the use of ceremonial masks, but he added a significant qualifying remark: "While it is not at all necessary to assume that these explanations given by the wearer of masks represent the actual historical development of the custom, the explanations themselves suggest the improbability of a single origin of the custom" (1911:187).

extended to cover technology, art, social organization, and the rest of culture (e.g., 1924, in 1940:290–94); toward the end of his career Boas wrote,

> the material of anthropology is such that it needs must be a historical science, one of the sciences the interest of which centers in the attempt to understand the individual phenomena rather than in the establishment of general laws which, on account of the complexity of the material, will be necessarily vague and, we might almost say, so self-evident that they are of little help to the real understanding (1932, in 1940:258).

The form of science which was motivated by a desire to understand phenomena for their own sake was to prevail in anthropology, not because of Boas' preference, necessarily, but because of the nature of the data.

Boas' views about the way in which history obscures the causes of cultural phenomena had fundamental implications for evolutionary theory. Boas argued that each culture trait has a complex past, and therefore the total cultural assemblage of a people "has its own unique history" (1920, in 1940:286). He rejected the notion of more or less uniform evolutionary stages (cf. 1911:Chapter 7) since the presence or absence of pottery, metallurgy, or the like in a given area "seems to be due more to geographical location than to general cultural causes" (1911:183; see also 1896, in 1940:270–80).

An even more fundamental result of Boas' conclusions regarding the complexity of history is that he came to regard culture as an emergent system. It is not to be understood as the product of natural mental operations of individual human beings, but as the result of its own *sui generis,* historical principles. In particular, culture traits are to be explained in terms of the principles of diffusion and modification, the latter of which is the process whereby a trait is reshaped to fit the new cultural context in which it is found. Boas' insistence that culture is "historically determined" amounts to saying that it is emergent (1920, in 1940:289).

Closely associated with the development of Boas' view that culture is an emergent system is the growth of his cultural determinism. If culture does not arise from within the human being, then it must come to him ready-made from without. Man learns rather than creates it; his behavior and beliefs reflect, not his native intelligence, but the cultural tradition in which he was raised. Boas' rejection of racial explanations of mental differences is famous, and this rejection "took place mainly because Boas . . . greatly elaborated the alternative explanation of mental differences in terms of cultural determinism" (Stocking 1968a:219). Boas' recognition of cultural determinism, of "the iron hold of culture upon the average individual" (1932, in 1940:259), also led him to see how thoroughly people are modified by tradition. He thought that personality differences between societies are so great that "for most mental phenomena we know only European psychology and no other" (1932, in 1940:250)—because psychologists had limited their research to European subjects.

Some feel that Boas did not go far enough in his views about the autonomy of culture. Leslie White, for example, argues that the guiding principles behind cultural dynamics are contained within the technological system, and that the ideational elements of culture are essentially epiphenomena of technological arrangements. Boas' thinking developed out of a tradition which regarded behavior and custom as expressions of thought; if anything, according to this viewpoint, economics are epiphenomena of ideas. Consequently, although Boas viewed cultural ideas as autonomous with respect to natural processes of thought, he "reduced" much of culture, including social structure, economics, and technology—what Goodenough has called the phenomenal order of culture as distinct from the ideational order (Goodenough 1964:11–13)—to the cultural ideas of a people. For example, Boas seems to have implied that political change among a people is limited primarily by the ideas the people have rather than by the structure of the society, the distribution of power, or the nature of the economic arrangements:

> A political leader may add new ideas to old political forms, although the older forms will exert an influence upon his mind and limit the extent to which the new may become acceptable (1932:163).

Elsewhere Boas speaks of social structure being "based" on concepts (1935:171–72), and of "fundamental concepts underlying" social organization (1932:14–15).

A second important factor contributing to the emergence of Boas' culture concept was his fascination for getting behind the veil separating him from foreign modes of thought. Perhaps in part because of his early German historicist influences, Boas conceived of the problem of subjective understanding in terms radically different from those envisaged by Tylor—according to whom differences in belief between peoples turned essentially on the pivot of reason and mis-reason (or ignorance and error). Boas, like the German idealists, assumed that each people's system of thought is qualitatively different from any other; he had more respect than Tylor for the uniqueness of foreign ideas, and his approach was to understand them on their own terms without imposing a framework of rationality. Boas' analysis of art is an example. Instead of regarding the painting and carving of the Northwest Coast Indians as awkward attempts at realistic representation, as Tylor would have done, Boas tried to see them in terms of the principles which guided the eye and hand of the artist himself (see Codere 1966: xx–xxiii).

Boas' realization that the mental life of a people must be approached on its own terms was not limited to the issue of what people think, but was extended to cover their perception or experiencing of the world as well. An example is his article "On Alternating Sounds," published in 1889. At the time he wrote this essay many philologists believed that primitive languages were less precise than civilized tongues, and that this imprecision was evident in the phonetic systems of the simpler languages. It was found that savage speakers pronounced the same word in a variety of ways, and it was assumed that the existence of these "alternating sounds" in a language was a sign of indefiniteness and therefore primitiveness. Boas showed that the reason the investigator heard sounds as alternating was that the analyst's language did not classify phonetic sounds the same way as his subject's. Since the investigator's language made distinctions which were not meaningful in the foreign tongue, differences were heard which were not intended by the native speaker. In effect, Boas argued that to adequately understand a foreign language the investigator had to learn to think in terms of the phonetic distinctions of that tongue rather than his own. At a more general level, his argument was that experience—in this case, the experience of hearing sounds—was not objective, but was structured and in that sense determined by the cultural tradition in which the individual was raised (cf. Stocking 1968a:159).

By 1894 Boas' appreciation that the mental life of a people must be approached on its own terms resulted in an important criticism of evolutionary thought. Evolutionists like Tylor and Spencer believed that primitive societies are retarded or childlike in intellectual development, and this idea seemed to be confirmed when the principle of reason was applied to their thoroughly absurd customs. The savages' childlike nature also seemed to be corroborated by the reports of travelers and others who had observed primitives first-hand. Boas argued that these reports were unreliable. The observers usually did not know the languages of those about whom they were reporting, they seldom had the time to thoroughly enter into the "inner life" of foreign peoples, and their accounts were frequently biased. Boas singled out several "mental qualities" which were supposed to characterize the lower societies, including impulsiveness and fickleness, improvidence, inability to concentrate, and lack of originality. He discounted each as typical of primitives, and argued instead that travelers and others have erred in judging the behavior of foreign peoples according to European standards. Boas gave as an example the European traveler who hires native help for his journey. Since the traveler regards time as extremely valuable, he wants to reach his destination as soon as possible. But his savage employee is subject to an entirely different set of compulsions and does not feel the need to get started early. He delays, thoroughly irritating his employer, and as a result the traveler regards the savage as fickle and impulsive in work habits. Boas notes that it would be just as reasonable for the primitive to charge that it is the traveler who is impulsive and lacking in self control, because it is the traveler who becomes so "irritated by a trifling cause like loss of time" (1894:317–23).

The point of this argument was that what was widely interpreted as the hereditary inferiority of savages is really a difference arising from social causes. The technique Boas used in this polemic, however, was to show that the supposed inferiority vanishes when the investigator enters thoroughly into the primitive's "inner life" and achieves adequate understanding. In brief, the supposed inferiority of primitives is manifest only when the observer imposes Western European ideas on the savage's thought. The argument was repeated in other contexts and with respect to other facets of cultural life, such as language. Whereas some authorities held that primitive languages lack the "power of classification and abstraction," Boas countered that

> Here, again, we are easily misled by our habit of using the classifications of our own language, and considering these, therefore, as the most natural ones, and by overlooking the principles of classification used in the languages of primitive people (1911:142).

I have already said that Boas arrived at the view that each culture has a complex history; the implication is that each culture is unique. His argument about the need for thorough

subjective understanding brought him to the same conclusion. The exotic beliefs of primitive man cannot be apprehended by the imposition of foreign—European—standards of value and belief, including the criterion of reason, but must be understood in terms of their own distinctive principles:

> The activities of the mind . . . exhibit an infinite variety of form among the peoples of the world. In order to understand these clearly, the student must endeavor to divest himself entirely of opinions and emotions based upon the peculiar social environment into which he is born. He must adapt his own mind, so far as feasible, to that of the people whom he is studying. The more successful he is in freeing himself from the bias based on the group of ideas that constitute the civilization in which he lives, the more successful he will be in interpreting the beliefs and actions of man (1901b:1).

This amounts to an even more fundamental denial of Tylorian evolutionary theory than the failure to find evidence of developmental stages in the historical record. The fact that evolutionary stages are not apparent in the data does not mean that they will not appear some day, but the fact that each cultural system of thought is completely unique means that the evolutionary framework which is to explain these stages is untenable. European standards of rationality could no longer constitute the basis for a single framework for understanding and comparison, so even if evolutionary stages were to emerge from Boas' data they would have to be explained in terms quite different from Tylor's.

Boas' rejection of the European standard of rationality in anthropological analysis was accompanied by an innovation that was a central element in the turn-of-the-century revolution in social thought. In place of reason as the basis of human institutions, Boas substituted emotion. This was the third important factor in the emergence of his culture concept.

The emotional conception of behavior was firmly embedded in Boas' thought by the first decade of this century. Moreover, his early discussions about emotion and tradition were placed in juxtaposition to comments about reason; for example, in 1901 he wrote:

> When we consider . . . the whole range of our daily life, we notice how strictly we are dependent upon tradition that cannot be accounted for by any logical reasoning (1901b:8; see also 1904, *passim*).

This suggests that he may have seen theories which emphasized emotion and those which emphasized reason as in contention with one another, and he may therefore have sensed the historical and theoretical significance of the innovation he was proposing.

The key to Boas' formulation of the role of emotion in culture is the word "habit." Boas thought that when an action is performed frequently over a period of time it becomes "automatic," in that its "performance is ordinarily not combined with any degree of consciousness" (1910:380). For example, a person learns to eat with a knife and fork, and this becomes so habitual that it seems natural. It becomes governed by unconscious rather than conscious thought.

In addition to being unconscious, habitual patterns acquire emotional associations: "Any action that differs from those performed by us habitually strikes us immediately as ridiculous or objectionable." For example, a dog taught to shake hands with his hind rather than front paw elicits amusement, and breaches of habitual standards of modesty are strongly resented. Even linguistic patterns acquire an emotional underpinning, in that "We resent deviations in pronunciation and in structure" of the language we speak. The intensity of the emotional reaction of a people when they are confronted by forms of thought and behavior which are not in accord with their own is illustrated by the persecution of heretics by the Church (1932:139ff.).

As Boas' thinking about emotion developed, he began to see human reason in a new light. According to Boas, habit and emotion are by far the more important principles behind

human behavior: "Even in our civilization popular thought is primarily directed by emotion, not by reason" (1938c:210). This is not to say that the typical individual cannot *give* reasons for what he does. There are occasions in which a habitual pattern is brought into consciousness—such as when an individual observes a breach of custom, or is asked by a child why people perform an activity in a particular way—and he then attempts to provide an explanation. These explanations are no more than rationalizations, however, "secondary interpretations of customary actions" (1910:382). To Boas, reason is not the basis of human behavior and social institutions, for it is comparatively frail and powerless in the face of the dominating influence of emotion and habit.

This view of behavior entails a dramatic shift in the interpretation of the meaning of Western European social institutions, such as Western standards of morality, democracy, and the like. To Tylor and the other evolutionists, these institutions were historical summits, the highest expression so far of the application of reason to social affairs. To Boas, they were simply habitual patterns which Western peoples had grown accustomed to, and the arguments of churchmen and others about their objective reasonableness were illusory:

> The fact which is taught by anthropology,—that man the world over *believes* that he follows the dictates of reason, no matter how unreasonably he may act,—and the knowledge of the existence of the tendency of the human mind to arrive at a conclusion first and to give reasons afterwards, will help us to open our eyes; so that we recognize that our philosophic views and our political convictions are to a great extent determined by our emotional inclinations, and that the reasons which we give are not the reasons by which we arrive at our conclusions, but the explanations which we give for our conclusions (1908:27).

The view that a people's conscious and rational understanding of their own behavior is deceptive was not a minor issue in Boas' mind. He stated,

> In fact, my whole outlook upon social life is determined by the question: how can we recognize the shackles that tradition has laid upon us? For when we recognize them, we are also able to break them (1938a:202).

Boas felt that the evolutionary anthropologists' failure to recognize the shackles of tradition which bound their thoughts was a major defect in their work. In 1904 he noted that there was "a strong tendency" in anthropology toward the "subjective valuation of the various phases of [evolutionary] development, the present serving as a standard of comparison." Indeed, "the grand picture of nature" as a whole, not just the picture of the development of civilization, "is still obscured by a subjective element, emotional in its sources, which leads us to ascribe the highest value to that which is near and dear to us" (1904:515). In brief, one of the principal errors committed by the evolutionary anthropologists is that they mistook their cultural rationalizations for unfettered rational thought. Although they believed that both their theories and Western European social institutions were guided by reason, instead it was emotion.

Similarly, Boas implied that the reason why primitive institutions can depart so radically from the standard of rationality is not because the primitive himself is childlike or simpleminded. Like the evolutionary anthropologist, even the most gifted savage finds it difficult to break through the emotional fetters of tradition. This was another blow to the evolutionists' paradigm. A universal standard of rationality cannot be the basis of a comparative anthropological science precisely because the failure of institutions to live up to that standard is due, not to ignorance and error, but to man's irrational attachment to the customs he has inherited from the past.

In summary, in his early program of research Boas emphasized two different but related forms of science, and in engaging in each he was led toward the development of a modern version of the culture concept. The first type of study was the fairly detailed historical analysis of specific cultural phenomena. This brought him to the view that culture is an emergent system, since he was led to conclude that each culture trait has a complex history and that its origins cannot be traced to the natural operations of the human mind. Culture must be understood in terms of its own distinctive historical processes. Second, in his early research he tended to emphasize that other systems of thought must be understood in terms of their own principles rather than in terms of a single standard of rationality. In doing so he rejected the entire Tylorian evolutionary framework, which imposed Western European principles of thought, in the guise of rationality, on other peoples' beliefs—thereby making cross-cultural understanding impossible. There was a third important element in the development of Boas' culture concept, although its source cannot be traced to his early program of research. It was that the basis of culture is not reason at all, but emotion. In Boas' view, reason is subordinate to emotion, for it is the means by which people rationalize their habitual patterns of thought and behavior.

THE MEANING OF HUMAN AFFAIRS. Soon after Boas undertook the study of the development of culture he concluded that traits can seldom be explained by reference to their causal source, and that they are to be viewed instead in terms of the historical processes which began affecting them as soon as they came into existence and which eventually obscured their origins. Boas explicitly recognized two historical processes, diffusion and modification, and these became key principles for the explanation of culture and the interpretation of meaning.

According to Boas, the cultural inventory of a people is almost entirely the cumulative result of diffusion, a process which has been operating continuously since man first became a tradition-bearing animal. The fabric of a culture is made up of countless disparate threads, nearly all of which are of foreign origin. Once a new trait is acquired, however, it is molded to fit its new cultural context. Due to this process of modification or integration, the body of traits of a society tends to become welded into an integral whole: inconsistencies tend to be worked out over time, and the discrete elements making up the system tend to become interrelated.

It is only a tendency for cultures to become integrated, in Boas' view. For example, Northwest Coast culture is dominated by an emphasis upon social competition and the pursuit of prestige, and yet, Boas notes, there are some very "amiable qualities" in the family life of those people (1938b:685). Elsewhere he states that "in the same mind the most heterogeneous complexes of habits, thoughts and actions may lie side by side, without ever coming into conflict" (1911, in 1940:301). Integration is never complete largely because the process of diffusion never stops.

In virtually all of his analyses of modification or integration, Boas gave primacy to the ideational rather than the phenomenal (the manifest, observable, or nonideational) aspects of culture. Moreover, his work as a whole exhibits a similar emphasis on subjective factors, for he conceived human behavior and social institutions as the spelling out or manifestation of ideas. In short, he employed a subjective approach.[4]

Boas placed so much emphasis on viewing culture from the

"inside"—in terms of subjective principles—that he tended to under-rate or ignore the significance of phenomenal features. An example is his analysis of the potlatch of the Northwest Coast Indians. The potlatch is a ceremonial feast at which the host, a man of chiefly rank, presents a grand display of wealth, which may either be destroyed or distributed to the guests. Boas devoted a great deal of attention to this institution, and yet it is not uncommon to read that he never fully grasped its significance. For example, George Dalton notes that Boas ignored several crucial changes which had taken place since the advent of Western culture in the Northwest Coast region, and that in doing so he failed to understand the potlatch. In particular, Boas did not recognize the rapid decrease in population following about 1840, as well as the increasing use of Western goods in Northwest Coast culture. Both of these changes had fundamental implications for the potlatch (Dalton 1965:63–64, n. 11). I suggest that Boas missed these features precisely because his focus was upon subjective culture. In his view, understanding is achieved by inquiring into the cultural ideas of a people, not by the analysis of systems of exchange or of population statistics.

In view of Boas' emphasis on ideational factors, it is not surprising that he conceived the principle of modification or integration primarily in subjective terms. Integration within the subjective sphere of culture consists in the process whereby traits are progressively modified according to a dominant idea or attitude. I have already mentioned one of the dominant attitudes of the Northwest Coast Indians:

> The leading motive of their lives is the limitless pursuit of gaining social prestige and of holding on to what has been gained, and the intense feeling of inferiority and shame if even the slightest part of prestige has been lost (Boas 1938b:685).

One of the clearest illustrations of this cultural theme is the potlatch, which is a central element in the system of social competition of these people. Even the art of the Northwest Coast Indians is affected by their cultural motif, for the work of the Kwakiutl craftsman "consists in the glorification of the family crest or of family histories" (1938b:685).

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[4] The importance of the subjective approach in Boas' work is highlighted by David Aberle's analysis of the influence of linguistics on American anthropology (Aberle 1960). Early in this century the Boasians achieved some remarkable results in the field of linguistics, and their accomplishments rebounded on the culture concept itself, according to Aberle. A number of American anthropologists, stimulated by successes in the study of language, were tempted to extend certain assumptions derived from linguistics to the study of the total cultural system; linguistics became a model for the further development and elaboration of cultural theory (Aberle 1960:4–5). For example, it was discovered that some of the most important patterns behind language are located at the unconscious level, and this conclusion contributed to the view that some of the key principles behind culture are located within the subjective sphere and are beyond the individual's awareness (pp. 7–8). The validity of Aberle's thesis is difficult to assess—one of its main defects is that it does not give adequate recognition to the German historicist roots of the Boasian school. Nevertheless, his analysis leaves little doubt about the importance of the subjective approach both in Boas' scheme and in the early development of American anthropology.

Boas was explicit that an understanding of custom requires that it be viewed in subjective and integrational terms. For example, he stressed that the history of a culture trait can never be fully understood solely by reference to its distribution; the "historic source" of a trait

> may perhaps be determined by geographic-historical considerations, but its gradual development and ethnic significance in a psychological sense, as it occurs in each area, must be studied by means of psychological investigations in which the different interpretations and attitudes of the people themselves toward the phenomenon present the principal material (1911, in 1940:296).

For example, Boas found that the myths of the Tsimshian and Kwakiutl Indians are quite similar in some respects, as would be expected considering the proximity of the two peoples. But he went to great pains to show that each mythological system has "its own individuality" as a result of the different subjective emphases of the two cultures (1935:171).

One of Boas' earliest integrational analyses is contained in a paper published in 1897 in which he tried to explain how the Kwakiutl secret societies acquired "their peculiar characteristics." He suggests that both the secret societies and the clans in Kwakiutl culture exhibit parallel developments, for once they were borrowed from tribes living to the north they were shaped to fit the Kwakiutl emphasis on social honor and prestige. For example, each clan enjoys exclusive ownership of certain legends, and these tales are guarded with an intense jealousy. Boas states that "the same psychic factor that molded the clans into their present shape"—in other words, the competitive desire for social honor—"molded the secret societies" (1897, in 1940:380). One of the values of belonging to a secret society is that membership entails the acquisition of spirits; this cultural trait resembles the exclusiveness of clan legends,

and it also expresses the competitive emphasis of Kwakiutl life.

Boas did not believe that the study of integration should be limited solely to the level of ideas and attitudes, for he recognized that the principle of modification applies to the level of phenomenal culture as well. To him, the problem of integration within the phenomenal sphere consists in the simple compatibility of traits. He writes, "It is advantageous to investigate those types of social conduct that are mutually contradictory and therefore cannot exist side by side" (1938b:679). Among the examples he cites are the incompatibility of a complex political organization with a sparse population; and small, isolated groups of people combined with an elaborate division of labor. Boas himself devoted little attention to the study of integration at the level of phenomenal culture; this remained an unexplored, residual issue in his scheme.

The principle of diffusion reveals the meaning of human affairs in the sense that a custom acquires significance when it is recognized as a local variant of a more widespread trait. For example, the design motifs or myths of the Kwakiutl Indians become intelligible when they are conceived as varieties of traits which are shared throughout the Northwest Coast region. The depth of understanding which is achieved by this method is not very great, however—little satisfaction is afforded by an explanation which asserts only that a pattern of behavior has been borrowed from neighboring tribes.

Another shortcoming of the principle of diffusion is that it tends to lead to the view that culture is utterly *without* meaning. Boas found that different traits exhibit very different distributional patterns, and that even elements which are closely associated in a particular culture often do not occur together in others. For example, Boas criticized the culture area approach, according to which a large region, usually a continent, was divided into cultural provinces (or culture areas) on the basis of similarities and dissimilarities in material culture. He stated that

> the culture areas were assumed to be natural groups that divided mankind into so many cultural groups. Actually the student interested in religion, social organization, or some other aspect of culture would soon discover that the culture areas based on material culture do not coincide with those that would naturally result from his studies. . . . Attempts to map the distribution of cultural traits that occur over continuous areas prove that various forms overlap irregularly (1938b:671).

The conclusion which this suggests is that the traits of a culture are more or less independent of one another, or that a culture is "a congeries of disconnected traits, associated only by reason of a series of historical accidents" (Spier 1931:455). The principle of diffusion tends to foster the view that traits are wholly fortuitous and virtually without meaning.

Far more important in supplying the meaning of custom is the principle of modification or integration. This reveals the meaning of human affairs in that a custom becomes intelligible once it is recognized as part of a larger, coherent whole. For example, the Kwakiutl trait according to which certain legends are the exclusive property of clans may seem rather meaningless, but its significance becomes apparent when it is seen in the context of the cultural emphasis upon prestige and social competition. The potlatch is made intelligible when it is viewed against the same cultural backdrop. The principle of integration or modification constitutes the most important guide to the meaning of social institutions that Boas' scheme has to offer.

Since Boas held that each culture is unique, he was pessimistic about the possibility of arriving at a body of theory or universal laws pertaining to cultural integration. He felt that "attempts to develop general laws of integration of culture do not lead to significant results" (1930, in 1940:267). On one hand, he believed, cultures are never fully integrated because of the endless effects of diffusion, the constant flux of cultural process. In short, invariant relations between traits will never be found.

On the other hand, he felt that traits can combine in an almost unlimited number of ways. Boas argued that the anthropologist must be content to study "specific forms," like the astronomer interested in "the actual distribution, movements, and constitution of stars, not in generalized physical and chemical laws" (1930, in 1940:268). Boas compared anthropology to the study of the erosion of a mountainside. Although there are natural laws which explain erosion, they can never be used to make predictions because the phenomena are far too complex. A boulder may deflect a stream and cause changes in the water channel; the soil in one direction may be softer than in another. A similar situation obtains in culture. Hostile attacks from neighboring groups may force a society to migrate into a new area, an accident like that of the boulder which helped determine the erosion of the mountainside. "Even a hasty consideration of the history of man shows that accidents of this kind are the rule in every society" (1932:208–11). Each culture is a unique system, just as the erosional pattern of a particular mountainside is matched nowhere else in the world.

Boas' views about the contingency of history and human institutions present a striking contrast with the thought of Tylor, according to whom institutions are not at all vicissitudinous, but are grounded in certain objective conditions or exigencies of the present. To Tylor, the features of culture are anchored firmly in place by the principles of reason and utility. For example, moral principles arise from people's observations about the immediate consequences of their behavior. The moral norms proscribing drunkenness are prompted by the objective effects of drinking and are far from arbitrary. The effects which laziness and negligence of duty have on people's lives result in the development of standards of self-discipline.

Are there no limitations at all on the vicissitudes of historical or cultural development, in Boas' scheme? Do cultures reflect so much historical contingency that they are completely arbitrary with respect to the conditions or exigencies of the moment? Or are institutions rooted in the present somehow by a set of physical, objective factors?

In various places Boas distinguished between two types of force behind culture, "limiting factors" and "creative factors" (e.g., 1932:240, 242, 244; 1938c:174; 1940:255, 265–66). He makes a similar distinction between "static" and "dynamic" factors (1932, in 1940:258), and between "outer" and "inner" forces (e.g., 1932:211; 1930, in 1940:264; 1932, in 1940:257). According to Boas, it is within the subjective sphere of culture that we find the creative forces (or the inner or dynamic factors) behind institutions, and perhaps the most important of these creative elements is the tendency for a diffused trait to be modified or reinterpreted to fit its new cultural context (cf. Stocking 1968a:213–14).

The "static" or "outer" factors consist in the features of the physical environment, for the most part. The environment has a limiting but not a creative influence, for it has the capacity only to restrict the kinds of cultural development which may take place. Boas writes,

> There is no doubt that the cultural life of man is in many and important ways limited by geographical conditions. The lack of vegetable products in the Arctic, and the absence of stone in extended parts of South America, the dearth of water in the desert, to mention only a few outstanding facts, limit the activities of man in definite ways (1930, in 1940:265–66).

Institutions are rooted in the present primarily by virtue of the limitations imposed by the physical world.

Even though Boas was quite clear that "every culture is strongly influenced by its [natural] environment" (1932, in 1940:256), he also insisted that this influence is always mediated by a set of cultural ideas:

> We must remember that, no matter how great an influence we may ascribe to environment, that influence can become active only by being exerted on the mind; so that the characteristics of the mind must enter into the resultant forms of social activity (1911:163).

These "characteristics of the mind" are cultural for the most part. The mistake of geographical determinism, Boas argued, is that it failed to recognize that the members of society inherit traditional patterns of thought. All peoples do not respond the same way to a given environment because they do not share the same subjective culture (1932:241, 242). The implication of this view is that even the unbending, limiting conditions of the environment must be analyzed in terms of the subjective frame of reference of the people themselves.

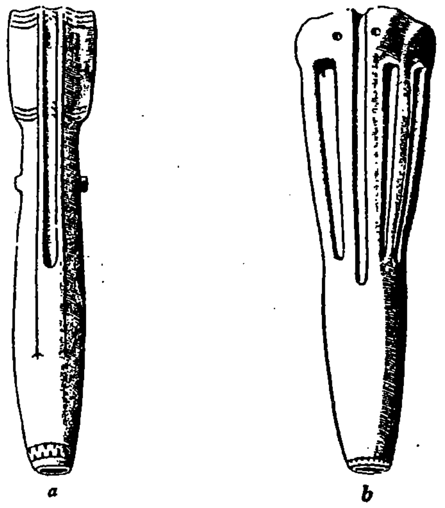
Boas did little more than acknowledge the principle of environmental limitations, for he never pursued this mode of explanation in his own research. His focus seems to have been on the subjective sphere of culture. By all but ignoring the environment, Boas implied that it does not normally need to be taken into account for an understanding of institutions. He implied that the limitations of the environment are actually quite broad and permit a wide range of variations in culture.

In view of Boas' subjective approach and his idea that the creative forces behind culture are ideational, it is understandable that he regarded the study of the individual as an essential problem in anthropology. It is the individual mind which reinterprets and modifies newly acquired culture traits; it is also the individual who feels the stress of changing conditions, and, because of the pressures felt, sets out to alter his social practices along culturally acceptable lines. "The causal conditions of cultural happenings lie always in the interaction between individual and society," or, more properly, between the individual and his culture (1932, in 1940:257). In brief, the study of cultural dynamics must be a study of the individual in his cultural setting. In 1930 Boas called for a reorientation of American anthropology away from the historical reconstructions which had dominated research in the past toward the study of the individual (1930, in 1940:269). Boas states that in 1910 he himself turned from the study of diffusion to that of cultural dynamics (1936, in 1940:311), although Benedict writes that in personal conversations he gave 1922 as the date of this shift (Benedict 1943a:31). Boas' book on *Primitive Art* illustrates his interest in the dynamic features of culture; in that study he attempted to delineate the individual and cultural factors behind the work of the primitive artist.

Boas' work exhibits a very distinctive image of man, and this has considerable bearing on his conception of the meaning of human affairs. A most important characteristic of the individual, in Boas' view, is the tendency for behavior to become dominated by habit. An activity or thought carves a rut on the unconscious through repetition, and this pattern becomes automatic. Boas contrasted animal and human behavior by saying that the former is primarily instinctive in nature, while human behavior consists in an "enormously increased number of learned adjustments" (1930, in 1940:262). In spite of this difference, however, Boas noted an important similarity: neither an instinct nor a habit needs conscious effort to be expressed in overt behavior; both are "marked by an immediate, involuntary reaction" (1932:138). Man's conduct, like that of other animals, tends to be thoroughly unreflective.

Boas' view of the unreflective, automatic nature of behavior is illustrated by his theory of taboos. He suggests that taboos frequently develop when the general conditions of life change, throwing old, habitual forms of behavior into negative relief. He cites the case of the Eskimo taboo against eating caribou and seal meat on the same day. The Eskimo live alternately in coastal and inland regions. When they are inland, they can acquire no seal and eat only caribou; when on the coast, they hunt no caribou and eat only seal. This pattern has become so deeply inscribed on the Eskimo's mind that, even though it is sometimes both possible and practical to consume both at the same time, it is taboo to do so (1910:381–82).

A more elaborate illustration of Boas' conception of the unconscious and habitual basis of custom is his analysis of Alaskan needlecases, which are tubes used by the Eskimo to keep their



ALASKAN NEEDLECASES

(a) A "typical" Alaskan needlecase. (b) A needlecase on which the flanges have been carved to resemble walrus heads. (Reprinted with permission of The Macmillan Company from *Race, Language and Culture* by Franz Boas. Copyright 1940 by The Macmillan Company, renewed 1968 by Franziska Boas Michelson.)

needles from breaking (Boas 1908, in 1940). The needle is inserted in a skin which in turn is pulled into the tube. The tube is slightly bulging in the middle and has two winglike flanges at the upper end, separated by a long, narrow groove on front and back. It has two small knobs on either side immediately below the flanges. Etched on the surface of the flanges are a number of parallel lines cut approximately at right angles to the length of the tube. There is also a pair of lines which border each groove, extend beyond it, and end in two or three spurs. At the bottom of the needlecase is a band encircling the tube; it consists of a pair of lines with short spurs radiating from each (Boas 1908, in 1940:565–68). According to Boas, the

Eskimo needlecase represents a conventional style, and the production of these objects is not a purely creative act but is simply a response to the basic pattern which is contained in the artisan's mind.

Not all needlecases conform strictly to the "typical" pattern, however, for the imagination of the Eskimo craftsman often leads to elaborations and modifications of several kinds. For example, the etched decoration is frequently more elaborate than that of the "typical" needlecase; and the flanges may almost disappear, resulting in modifications of the incised design. Most interesting are instances in which certain portions of the needlecase are modified to look like animals, such as when the flanges are carved to look like walrus heads. These are "secondary interpretation [s] of the design," whereby "the imagination of the artist was stimulated" by the characteristics of the fundamental pattern (1908, in 1940:578–79, 580). Boas states that the elaborations and modifications "may be largely explained as results of the play of the imagination under the restricting influence of a fixed conventional style" (1908, in 1940:588–89).

> The conclusion which I draw from a comparison of the types of needlecases here represented is that the flanged needlecase represents an old conventional style, which is ever present in the mind of the Eskimo artist who sets about to carve a needlecase. The various parts of the flanged needlecase excite his imagination; and a geometrical element here or there is developed by him, in accordance with the general tendencies of Eskimo art, into the representation of whole animals or of parts of animals. . . . Besides this, associations between animal forms and the form of the whole needlecase seem to have taken place, which have to a certain extent modified the manner of representing animal forms which were adapted to use as needlecases; so that the old form and style of the needlecase determined the treatment of the animal form (1908, in 1940:588).

Man's behavior is not totally determined by unconscious, habitual patterns, for culture traits are often reinterpreted and modified by means of the "play of imagination."

Nevertheless, to Boas, these elaborations and modifications are always structured and closely circumscribed by the basic unconscious pattern; the play of imagination actually operates within comparatively narrow limits. Boas' analysis of folklore is illustrative. New tales are continually added to a society's stock of traditions through diffusion, and the whole body of tales is reworked endlessly by "the play of imagination." The result is that the folklore of a given society "consist [s] of combinations and recombinations of old themes" (1914, in 1940:480). The creative process behind the reworking of tales is highly restricted, however; what takes place essentially is the reshuffling of elements from one context to another, and little is produced that is entirely new. Boas writes,

> So far as our knowledge of mythology and folk-lore of modern peoples goes, we are justified in the opinion that the power of imagination of man is rather limited, that people much rather operate with the old stock of imaginative happenings than invent new ones (1916, in 1940:405–6).

Another feature of conscious thought to which Boas frequently alludes is the process of rationalization, discussed earlier, according to which habitual patterns acquire secondary explanations. For example, Boas showed that a particular variety of moccasin design is shared by a number of Indian tribes, but that each tribe has a different interpretation of what the design means. He concludes that the pattern of the design is older, the conscious interpretations later; "the design is primary, the idea secondary" (1903, in 1940:555). Elsewhere he states that "this tendency is not by any means confined to art," but characterizes mythology and ceremonialism as well: "in these also the outer form remains, while the accompanying interpretations are widely different" (1927:128).

These two features of conscious thought—imaginativeness and rationalization—are alike in that both are subordinate or secondary to the unconscious and emotional patterns contained in the mind. To Boas, the guiding force behind human behavior and institutions is located at the unconscious level, and to adequately explain and understand cultural phenomena the anthropologist has to penetrate the conscious veneer. This is as true for grasping social process as it is for understanding moccasin or needlecase designs.

Boas nowhere developed a theory of politics, but a telling illustration of his conception of the unconscious, habitual, and emotional basis of behavior is contained in what little he did say about political process. He held that political segmentation and competition cannot be viewed in terms of competing interest groups rationally calculating advantages in relation to others, as some anthropologists do today (e.g., see Barth 1959a, b). Much of the political strife in the world, Boas thought, is due to an emotional opposition to foreign ways of behaving and thinking, together with the belief that one's own culture is superior to all others. He compared the hostility between modern nations to that between "tribal units that considered every alien an enemy who must be slain" (1932:98).

> It is not any rational cause that forms opposing groups, but solely the emotional appeal of an idea that holds together the members of each group and exalts their feeling of solidarity and greatness to such an extent that compromises with other groups become impossible (1932:102).

In political life just as in religion and everyday habits, "our actions are the results of emotional preferences" (1932:115). A person is Catholic or Jew or Presbyterian primarily because of early family influences, and similarly his political loyalties are essentially habitual responses:

> When, on account of our early bringing up, we act with a certain political party, most of us are not prompted by a clear conviction of the justice of the principles of our party, but we do so because we have been taught to respect it as the right party to which to belong. Then only do we justify our standpoint by trying to convince ourselves that these principles are the correct ones. Without reasoning of this kind, the stability and geographical distribution of political parties as well as of church denominations would be entirely unintelligible (1910:383).

To Boas, only a limited degree of understanding can be achieved if behavior is viewed as the manifestation of conscious, willful thought. Far more important for assessing the meaning of human action is the concept of custom. Man's behavior is dominated by unconscious, customary patterns to which emotional associations have become attached. In order to understand the behavior of the participant in the Kwakiutl potlatch, or the actions of the Eskimo craftsman who is engaged in producing needlecases, or the voting preferences of the United States citizen, the investigator must inquire into the traditions of the society in question.

In summary, to Boas, culture is to be understood in terms of its own *sui generis* principles and not in terms of the natural properties of the human mind. The two principles which stand out in Boas' work are the processes of diffusion and modification. Both of these are subject to a great deal of historical contingency, and the result is that any cultural system is somewhat arbitrary in relation to the conditions and exigencies of the moment. There is a third principle behind culture which Boas sometimes noted but which he virtually ignored, the rather broad limitations of the environment. It is primarily by virtue of the environment that the institutions of mankind are rooted in the present. At the level of the individual himself, Boas gave little scope to the human will; it is culture which makes behavior intelligible, because, for the most part, human actions conform to traditional patterns.

CONCLUSION

To Tylor, traditionalism is the antithesis of progress, for in his view civilization is at a standstill when people accept their customs uncritically. It is unfettered rationality which is the basis for improvement. Tylor's vision was always directed toward civilization and its rational foundations, and he all but ignored tradition, for to him the purpose of anthropology was to chart the course that evolution—the progressive expression of rational thought—has taken.

Boas denied that culture is erected upon the principles of reason and utility. To him, virtually all human institutions are largely irrational, and this is as true of the beliefs and practices of Great Britain and the United States as it is of the Andamanese or Australian aborigines.

In rejecting Tylor's principle of reason, Boas expanded on its antonym. Whereas Tylor placed rationality at the center of his theoretical scheme, Boas gave that position to tradition. To Boas, a living culture is a museum of past forms of behavior, and each trait is comparatively thoughtless in both design and execution. The individual himself is a comparatively unthinking slave to the habitual patterns of behavior which he has acquired. Moreover, because of the emotional grounding of tradition, customs tend to persist in spite of their uselessness or even disutility—a view reminiscent of Tylor's notion of survivals; Boas wrote,

> It may even be shown that old customs, that may have been in harmony with a certain type of environment, tend to survive under new conditions, where they are of disadvantage rather than of advantage to the people. An example of this kind, taken from our own civilization, is our failure to utilize unfamiliar kinds of food that may be found in newly settled countries. Another example is presented by the reindeer-breeding Chuckchee, who carry about in their nomadic life a tent of most complicated structure, which corresponds in its type to the older permanent house of the coast dwellers, and which contrasts in the most marked way with the simplicity and light weight of the Eskimo tent (1911:162).

Boas' culture concept is one which emphasizes the irrationality of custom and the binding of tradition. This image of culture and of man was a distinctive feature of American anthropology

for many years, although it has not been unchallenged by those who believe that culture and the individual are in some sense rational after all (e.g., see Erasmus 1961:33ff., and Harris 1968:354ff.).