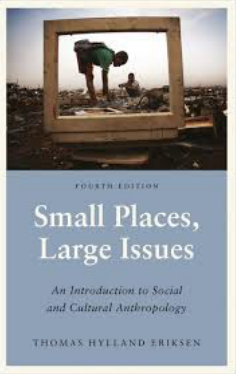
INTRODUCTION: COMPARISON AND CONTEXT



Anthropology is philosophy with the people in.

— Tim Ingold

This book is an invitation to a journey which, in the author's opinion, is one of the most rewarding a human being can embark on - and it is definitely one of the longest. It will bring the reader from the damp rainforests of the Amazon to the cold semi-desert of the Arctic; from the skyscrapers of Manhattan to mud huts in the Sahel; from villages in the New Guinea highlands to African cities.

It is a long journey in a different sense too. Social and cultural anthropology has the whole of human society as its field of interest, and tries to understand the connections between the various aspects of our existence. When, for example, we study the traditional economic system of the Tiv of central Nigeria, an essential part of the exploration consists in understanding how their economy is connected with other aspects of their society. If this dimension is absent, Tiv economy becomes incomprehensible to anthropologists. If we do not know that the Tiv traditionally could not buy and sell land, and that they have customarily not used money as a means of payment, it will plainly be impossible to understand how they themselves interpret their situation and how they responded to the economic changes imposed on their society during colonialism.

Anthropology tries to account for the social and cultural variation in the world, but a crucial part of the anthropological project also consists in conceptualising and understanding similarities between social systems and human relationships. As one of the foremost anthropologists of the twentieth century, Claude Lévi-Strauss, has expressed it: 'Anthropology has humanity as its object of research, but unlike the other human sciences, it tries to grasp its object through its most diverse manifestations' (1983, p. 49). Put in another way: anthropology is about how different people can be, but it also tries to find out in what sense it can be said that all humans have something in common.

Another prominent anthropologist, Clifford Geertz, has expressed a similar view in an essay which essentially deals with the differences between humans and animals:

If we want to discover what man amounts to, we can only find it in what men are: and what men are, above all other things, is various. It is in understanding that variousness - its range, its nature, its basis, and its implications - that we shall come to construct a concept of human nature that, more than a statistical shadow and less than a primitivist dream, has both substance and truth. (Geertz 1973, p. 52)

Although anthropologists have wide-ranging and frequently highly specialised interests, they all share a common concern in trying to understand both connections *within* societies and connections *between* societies. As will become clearer as we proceed on this journey through the subject-matter and theories of social and cultural anthropology, there is a multitude of ways in which to approach these problems. Whether one is interested in understanding why and in which sense the Azande of Central Africa believe in witches, why there is greater social inequality in Brazil than in Sweden, how the inhabitants of Mauritius avoid violent ethnic conflict, or what has happened to the traditional way of life of the Inuit (Eskimos) in recent years, in most cases one or several anthropologists would have carried out research and written on the issue. Whether one is interested in the study of religion, child-raising, political power, economic life or the relationship between men and women, one may go to the professional anthropological literature for inspiration and knowledge.

The discipline is also concerned with accounting for the interrelationships between different aspects of human existence, and usually anthropologists investigate these interrelationships taking as their point of departure a detailed study of local life in a particular society or a delineated social environment. One may therefore say that anthropology asks large questions, while at the same time it draws its most important insights from small places.

It has been common to regard its traditional focus on small-scale non-industrial societies as a distinguishing feature of anthropology, compared with other subjects dealing with culture and society. However, because of

changes in the world and in the discipline itself, this is no longer an accurate description. Practically any social system can be studied anthropologically and contemporary anthropological research displays an enormous range, empirically as well as thematically.

AN OUTLINE OF THE SUBJECT

What, then, is anthropology? Let us begin with the etymology of the concept. It is a compound of two Greek words, *'anthropos'* and *'logos',* which can be translated as 'human' and 'reason', respectively. So anthropology means 'reason about humans' or 'knowledge about humans'. Social anthropology would then mean knowledge about humans in societies. Such a definition would, of course, cover the other social sciences as well as anthropology, but it may still be useful as a beginning.

The word 'culture', which is also crucial to the discipline, originates from the Latin *'colere',* which means to cultivate. (The word 'colony' has the same origin.) Cultural anthropology thus means 'knowledge about cultivated humans'; that is, knowledge about those aspects of humanity which are not natural, but which are related to that which is acquired.

'Culture' has been described as one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language (Williams 1981, p. 87). In the early 1950s, Clyde Kluckhohn and Alfred Kroeber (1952) presented 161 different definitions of culture. It would not be possible to consider the majority of these definitions here; besides, many of them were - fortunately - quite similar. Let us therefore, as a preliminary conceptualisation of culture, define it as those abilities, notions and forms of behaviour persons have acquired as members of society. A definition of this kind, which is indebted to both the Victorian anthropologist Edward Tylor and to Geertz (although the latter stresses meaning rather than behaviour), is the most common one among anthropologists.

Culture nevertheless carries with it a basic ambiguity. On the one hand, every human is equally cultural; in this sense, the term refers to a basic *similarity* within humanity. On the other hand, people have acquired different abilities, notions, etc., and are thereby *different* because of culture. Culture refers, in other words, both to basic similarities and to systematic differences between humans.

If this sounds slightly complex, some more complexity is necessary already at this point. Truth to tell, during the last decades of the twentieth century, the concept of culture was deeply contested in anthropology on both sides of the Atlantic. The influential Geertzian concept of culture, which had been elaborated through a series of erudite and elegant essays written in the 19 60s and 1970s (Geertz 1973, 1983), depicted a culture both as an integrated whole, as a puzzle where all the pieces were at hand, and as a system of meanings that was largely shared by a population. Culture thus appeared as integrated, shared in the group and sharply bounded. But what of variations within the group, and what about similarities or mutual contacts with neighbouring groups - and what to make of, say, the technologically and economically driven processes of globalisation, which ensure that nearly every nook and cranny in the world is, to varying degrees, exposed to news about football world cups, to wagework and the concept of human rights? In many cases, it could indeed be said that a national or local culture is neither shared by all or most of the inhabitants, nor bounded - I have myself explored this myth regarding my native Norway, a country usually considered 'culturally homogeneous' (Eriksen 1993b). Many began to criticise the overly neat and tidy picture suggested in the dominant concept of culture, from a variety of viewpoints, some of which will be discussed in later chapters. Alternative ways of conceptualising culture were proposed (e.g. as unbounded 'cultural flows' or as 'fields of discourse', or as 'traditions of knowledge'), and some even wanted to get rid of the concept altogether (for some of the debates, see Clifford and Marcus 1986; Ortner 1999). As I shall indicate later, the concept of society has been subjected to similar critiques, but problematic as they may be, both concepts still seem to form part of the conceptual backbone of anthropology. In his magisterial, deeply ambivalent review of the culture concept, Adam Kuper (1999, p. 226) notes that'[t]hese days, anthropologists get remarkably nervous when they discuss culture - which is surprising, on the face of it, since the anthropology of culture is something of a success story'. The reason for this 'nervousness' is not just the contested meaning of the term culture, but also the fact that culture concepts that are close kin to the classic anthropological one are being exploited politically, in identity politics.

The relationship between culture and society can be described in the following way. Culture refers to the acquired, cognitive and symbolic aspects of existence, whereas society refers to the social organisation of human life, patterns of interaction and power relationships. The implications of this analytical distinction, which may seem bewildering, will eventually be evident.

A short definition of anthropology may read thus: 'Anthropology is the comparative study of cultural and social life. Its most important method is participant observation, which consists in lengthy fieldwork in a particular social setting.' The discipline thus compares aspects of different societies, and continuously searches for interesting dimensions for comparison. If, say, one chooses to write a monograph about a people in the New Guinea highlands, one will always choose to describe it with at least some concepts (such as kinship, gender and power) that render it comparable with aspects of other societies.

Further, the discipline emphasises the importance of ethnographic fieldwork, which is a thorough close-up study of a particular social and cultural environment, where the researcher is normally required to spend a year or more.

Clearly, anthropology has many features in common with other social sciences and humanities. Indeed, a difficult question consists in deciding whether it is a science or one of the humanities. Do we search for general laws, as the natural scientists do, or do we instead try to understand and interpret different societies? E.E. Evans-Pritchard in Britain and Alfred Kroeber in the USA, leading anthropologists in their day, both argued around 1950 that anthropology had more in common with history than with the natural sciences. Although their view, considered something of a heresy at the time, has become commonplace since, there are still some anthropologists who feel that the subject should aim at scientific rigour similar to that of the natural sciences.

Some of the implications of this divergence in views will be discussed in later chapters. A few important defining features of anthropology are nevertheless common to all practitioners of the subject: it is comparative and empirical; its most important method is fieldwork; and it has a truly global focus in that it does not single out one region, or one kind of society, as being more important than others. Unlike sociology proper, anthropology does not concentrate its attention on the industrialised world; unlike philosophy, it stresses the importance of empirical research; unlike history, it studies society as it is being enacted; and unlike linguistics, it stresses the social and cultural context of speech when looking at language. Definitely, there are great overlaps with other sciences and disciplines, and there is a lot to be learnt from them, yet anthropology has its distinctive character as an intellectual discipline, based on ethnographic fieldwork, which tries simultaneously to account for actual cultural variation in the world and to develop a theoretical perspective on culture and society.

THE UNIVERSAL AND THE PARTICULAR

'If each discipline can be said to have a central problem', writes Michael Carrithers (1992, p. 2),'then the central problem of anthropology is the diversity of human social life.' Put differently, one could say that anthropological research and theory tries to strike a balance between similarities and differences, and theoretical questions have often revolved around the issue of universality versus relativism: To what extent do all humans, cultures or societies have something in common, and to what extent is each of them unique? Since we employ comparative concepts - that is, supposedly culturally neutral terms like kinship system, gender role, system of inheritance, etc. - it is implicitly acknowledged that all or nearly all societies have several features in common. However, many anthropologists challenge this view and claim the uniqueness of each culture or society. A strong universalist programme is found in Donald Brown's book *Human Universals* (Brown 1991), where the author claims that anthropologists have for generations exaggerated the differences between societies, neglecting the very substantial commonalities that hold humanity together. In his influential, if controversial book, he draws extensively on an earlier study of 'human universals', which included:

age-grading, athletic sports, bodily adornment, calendar, cleanliness training, community organization, cooking, cooperative labor, cosmology, courtship, dancing, decorative art, divination, division of labor, dream

interpretation, education, eschatology, ethics, ethnobotany, etiquette, faith healing, family, feasting, fire making, folklore, food taboos, funeral rites, games, gestures, gift giving, government, greetings...

And this was just the a-to-g segment of an alphabetical 'partial list' (Murdock 1945, p. 124, quoted from Brown 1991, p. 70). Several arguments could be invoked against this kind of list: that it is trivial and that what matters is to comprehend the unique expressions of such 'universals'; that phenomena such as 'family' have totally different meanings in different societies, and thus cannot be said to be 'the same' everywhere; and that this piecemeal approach to society and culture removes the very hallmark of good anthropology, namely the ability to see isolated phenomena (like age-grading or food taboos) in a broad context. An institution such as arranged marriage means something fundamentally different in the Punjabi countryside than in the French upper class. Is it still the same institution? Yes - and no. Brown is right in accusing anthropologists of having been inclined to emphasise the exotic and unique at the expense of neglecting cross-cultural similarities, but this does not mean that his approach is the only possible way of bridging the gap between societies. In later chapters, several other alternatives will be discussed, including structural-functionalism (all societies operate according to the same general principles), structuralism (the human mind has a common architecture expressed through myth, kinship and other cultural phenomena), transactionalism (the logic of human action is the same everywhere) and materialist approaches (culture and society are determined by ecological and/or technological factors).

The tension between the universal and the particular has been immensely productive in anthropology, and it remains an important one. It is commonly discussed, inside and outside anthropology, through the concept of ethnocentrism.

THE PROBLEM OF ETHNOCENTRISM

A society or a culture, it was remarked above, must be understood on its own terms. In saying this, we warn against the application of a shared, universal scale to be used in the evaluation of every society. Such a scale, which is often used, could be defined as longevity, gross national product (GNP), democratic rights, literacy rates, etc. Until quite recently, it was common in European society to rank non-Europeans according to the ratio of their population which was admitted into the Christian Church. Such a ranking of peoples is utterly irrelevant to anthropology. In order to pass judgement on the quality of life in a foreign society, we must first try to understand that society from the inside; otherwise our judgement has a very limited intellectual interest. What is conceived of as 'the good life' in the society in which we live may not appear attractive at all if it is seen from a different vantage-point. In order to understand people's lives, it is therefore necessary to try to grasp the totality of their experiential world; and in order to succeed in this project, it is inadequate to look at selected 'variables'. Obviously, a concept such as 'annual income' is meaningless in a society where neither money nor wagework is common.

This kind of argument may be read as a warning against ethnocentrism. This term (from Greek *'ethnos',* meaning 'a people') means evaluating other people from one's own vantage-point and describing them in one's own terms. One's own *'ethnos',* including one's cultural values, is literally placed at the centre. Within this frame of thought, other peoples would necessarily appear as inferior imitations of oneself. If the Nuer of the Sudan are unable to get a mortgage to buy a house, they thus appear to have a less perfect society than ourselves. If the Kwakiutl Indians of the west coast of North America lack electricity, they seem to have a less fulfilling life than we do. If the Kachin of upper Burma reject conversion to Christianity, they are less civilised than we are, and if the San ('Bushmen') of the Kalahari are illiterate, they appear less intelligent than us. Such points of view express an ethnocentric attitude which fails to allow other peoples to be different from ourselves on their own terms, and can be a serious obstacle to understanding. Rather than comparing strangers with our own society and placing ourselves on top of an imaginary pyramid, anthropology calls for an understanding of different societies as they appear *from the inside.* Anthropology cannot provide an answer to a question of which societies are better than others, simply because the discipline does not ask it. If asked what is the good life, the anthropologist will have to answer that every society has its own definition(s) of it.

Moreover, an ethnocentric bias, which may be less easy to detect than moralistic judgements, may shape the very concepts we use in describing and classifying the world. For example, it has been argued that it may be inappropriate to speak of politics and kinship when referring to societies which themselves lack concepts of 'politics' and 'kinship'. Politics, perhaps, belongs to the ethnographer's society and not to the society under study. We return to this fundamental problem later.

Cultural relativism is sometimes posited as the opposite of ethnocentrism. This is the doctrine that societies or cultures are qualitatively different and have their own unique inner logic, and that it is therefore scientifically absurd to rank them on a scale. If one places a San group, say, at the bottom of a ladder where the variables are, say, literacy and annual income, this ladder is irrelevant to them if it turns out that the San do not place a high priority on money and books. It should also be evident that one cannot, within a cultural relativist framework, argue that a society with many cars is 'better' than one with fewer, or that the ratio of cinemas to population is a useful indicator of the quality of life.

Cultural relativism is an indispensable and unquestionable theoretical premiss and methodological rule-of-thumb in our attempts to understand alien societies in as unprejudiced a way as possible. As an ethical principle, however, it is probably impossible in practice, since it seems to indicate that everything is as good as everything else, provided it makes sense in a particular society. It may ultimately lead to nihilism. For this reason, it may be timely to stress that many anthropologists are impeccable cultural relativists in their daily work, while they have definite, frequently dogmatic notions about right and wrong in their private lives. In Western societies and elsewhere, current debates over minority rights and multiculturalism indicate both the need for anthropological knowledge and the impossibility of finding a simple solution to these complex problems, which will naturally be discussed in later chapters.

Cultural relativism cannot, when all is said and done, be posited simply as the opposite of ethnocentrism, the simple reason being that it does not in itself contain a moral principle. The principle of cultural relativism in anthropology is a methodological one - it helps us investigate and compare societies without relating them to an intellectually irrelevant moral scale; but this does not logically imply that there is no difference between right and wrong. Finally, we should be aware that many anthropologists wish to discover general, shared aspects of humanity or human societies. There is no necessary contradiction between a project of this kind and a cultural relativist approach, even if universalism - doctrines emphasising the similarities between humans - is frequently seen as the opposite of cultural relativism. One may well be a relativist at a certain level of anthropological analysis, yet simultaneously argue that a particular underlying pattern is common to all societies or persons. Many would indeed claim that this is what anthropology is about: to discover both the uniqueness of each social and cultural setting *and* the ways in which humanity is one.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ANTHROPOLOGY

> *I have spent over 8 months in one village in the Trobriands and this proved to me, how even a poor observer like myself can get a certain amount of reliable information, if he puts himself into the proper conditions for observation.*
>
> *— Bronisław Malinowski (letter to A.C. Haddon, May 1916)*

Like the other social sciences, anthropology is a fairly recent discipline. It was given its present shape during the twentieth century, but it has important forerunners in the historiography, geography, travel writing, philosophy and jurisprudence of earlier times. There are, in any case, many ways of writing the history of anthropology, just as, in any given society, there may exist competing versions of national history or origin myths, promoted by groups or individuals with diverging interests. History is not primarily a product of the past itself, but is rather shaped by the concerns of the present. As these concerns change, past events and persons shift between foreground and background, and will be understood and evaluated in new ways. In an important book on the state of the art in (chiefly) American cultural anthropology, Bruce Knauft (1996) distinguishes between at least

four 'genealogies of the present' - four different ways of accounting for the present situation. This ambiguity of the past not only has a bearing on the writing of our own professional history, but is itself a subject of anthropological inquiry to be dealt with in a later chapter.

In other words, there can be no neutral history of anthropology (or of anything), but what follows below is nevertheless an attempt to provide a brief and - as far as possible - uncontroversial description of the development of the subject.

PROTO-ANTHROPOLOGY

If anthropology is the study of cultural variation, its roots may be traced as far back in history as the ancient Greeks. The historian Herodotus (5th century bc) wrote detailed accounts of 'barbarian' peoples to the east and north of the Greek peninsula, comparing their customs and beliefs to those of Athens, and the group of philosophers known as the Sophists were perhaps the first philosophical relativists, arguing (as many twentieth-century anthropologists have done) that there can be no absolute truth because, as we would put it today, truth is context-bound. Yet their interest in human variation and differing cultural values fell short of being scientific, chiefly because Herodotus lacked theory while the Sophists lacked empirical material.

A more credible ancestor is the Tunisian intellectual Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), a remarkable man who anticipated the social sciences by several centuries. His main work, the *Muqaddimah* ('An introduction to history'), was written in the years following 1375, and contains a remarkable wealth of observations on law, education, politics and the economy. Khaldun's main achievement nevertheless lies in his non-religious, theoretical framework, where he stresses differing forms of *social cohesion* as a key variable in accounting for historical change and the rise of new groups to power.

In Europe, scholarly interest in cultural variation and human nature re-emerged in the following century as a consequence of the new intellectual freedom of the Renaissance and, perhaps even more importantly, increasing European explorations and conquests of distant lands. Illustrious intellectuals such as Michel de Montaigne (sixteenth century), Thomas Hobbes (seventeenth century) and Giambattista Vico (eighteenth century) belonged to the first generations of European thinkers who tried to account for cultural variability and global cultural history as well as, in the case of Montaigne, taking on the challenge from relativism. In the eighteenth century, theories of human nature, moral philosophies and social theories developed, taking into account an awareness of deep cultural differences dividing humanity. David Hume (1711—76), along with Adam Smith the most important thinker of the Scottish Enlightenment, argued that experience was the only trustworthy source of valid knowledge. Hume's philosophy almost immediately became a source of inspiration for early social scientists, whose pioneers did not trust thought and speculation, but would rather travel into the social world itself in order to obtain first-hand experience through the senses (empirical means, literally, 'based on experience').

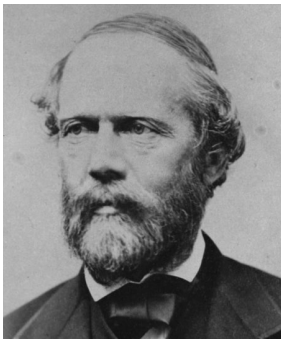
Many other eighteenth-century philosophers also made important contributions to the beginnings of a systematic, comparative study of culture. The most famous is perhaps Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-78), who saw the social conditions of 'savages' as an Utopian ideal; but of equal interest is Baron de Montesquieu (1689-1755), whose *Lettres persanes* ('Persian Letters', 1722) was an early, fictional attempt to describe Europe seen through the eyes of non-Europeans. Further, the great French *Encyclopedic* (1751-72), edited by Denis Diderot (1713-84), contained many articles on the customs and beliefs of other peoples. One of its youngest contributors, Marquis de Condorcet (1743-1794), who died in a Jacobin jail, tried to combine mathematics and empirical facts to produce general laws of society. In Germany, different but no less important developments took place in the same period. Johann Gottlieb von Herder (1744-1803), a founder of the *Sturm und Drang* movement that became Romanticism, challenged French Enlightenment philosophy, in particular Voltaire's universalist view that there existed a single, universal, global civilization. Herder argued that each people *{Volk)* had its own *Geist* or 'soul' and therefore a right to retaining its own, unique values and customs - in a manner reminiscent of later cultural relativism. Indeed, by the end of the eighteenth century, several of the theoretical questions still raised by anthropologists had already been defined: universalism versus relativism (what is common to humanity; what is culturally specific), ethnocentrism versus cultural relativism (moral judgements

versus neutral descriptions of other peoples), and humanity versus (the rest of) the animal kingdom (culture versus nature). Twentieth-century anthropology teaches that these and other essentially philosophical problems are best investigated through the rigorous and detailed study of actual living people in existing societies, and by applying carefully devised methods of comparison to the bewildering variety of 'customs and beliefs'. It would take several generations after Montesquieu's comparative musings about Persia and France until anthropology achieved this mark of scientific endeavour.

VICTORIAN ANTHROPOLOGY

Henry Maine

A characteristic of the anthropology of the nineteenth century was the belief in social evolution - the idea that human societies developed in a particular direction - and the related notion that European societies were the end-product of a long developmental chain which began with 'savagery'. This idea was typical of the Victorian age, dominated by an optimistic belief in technological progress and, simultaneously, European colonialism, which was frequently justified with reference to what Kipling wrote of as 'the white man's burden'; the alleged duty of the European to 'civilise the savages'.



Lewis Henry Morgan

The first general theories of cultural variation to enjoy a lasting influence were arguably those of two men trained as lawyers; Henry Maine (1822-88) in Britain and Lewis Henry Morgan (1818-82) in the United States. True to the spirit of the times, both presented evolutionist models of variation and change, where West European societies were seen as the pinnacle of human development. In his *Ancient Law* (18 61), Maine distinguished between what he called *status* and *contract* societies, a divide which corresponds roughly to later dichotomies between traditional and modern societies, or, in the late nineteenth-century German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies' terminology, *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (society); status societies are assumed to operate on the basis of kinship and myth, while individual merit and achievement are decisive in contract societies. Although simple contrasts of this kind have regularly been severely criticised, they continue to exert a certain influence on anthropological thinking.

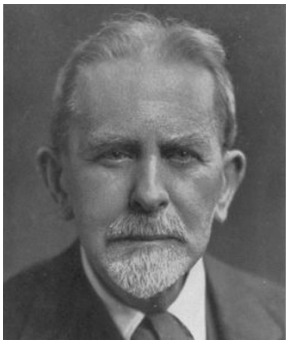
Morgan's contributions to anthropology were wide-ranging, and, among many other things, he wrote a detailed ethnography of the Iroquois. His evolutionary scheme, presented in *Ancient Society* (1877), distinguished between seven stages (from lower savagery to civilization), and the typology was mainly based on technological achievements. His materialist account of cultural change immediately attracted Marx and Engels, whose later writings on non- (or pre-) capitalist societies were clearly influenced by Morgan. Among Morgan's other achievements, his concern with kinship must be mentioned. Dividing human kinship systems into a limited number of types, and seeing kinship terminology as a key to understanding society, he is widely credited with making the study of kinship a central preoccupation of anthropology, which it has indeed remained to this day. Writing in the same period, the historian of religion Robertson Smith and the lawyer J.J. Bachofen offered, respectively, theories of monotheistic religion and of the (wrongly) assumed historical transition from matriliny to patriliny.

Edward Tylor

An untypical scholar in the otherwise evolutionist Victorian era, the German ethnologist Adolf Bastian (1826-1905) reacted against what he saw as simplistic typological schemata. Drawing inspiration from both Herderian Romanticism and the humanistic tradition in German academia, Bastian wrote prolifically on cultural history, taking great care to avoid unwarranted generalisations, yet he held that all humans have the same pattern of thinking. This idea would later be developed independently, to great sophistication, in Claude Lévi-Strauss's structuralism.

The leading British anthropologist of the late Victorian era was Edward Tylor (1832-1917), who influenced Darwin's thinking about culture, and whose voluminous

writings include the famous definition of culture mentioned in the first chapter: 'Culture or Civilization, taken in its widest ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society' (Tylor 1968 [1871]), This definition is still seen as useful by many anthropologists. Tylor's student James Frazer (1854-1941), who would eclipse his teacher in terms of fame and who held the first Chair in Social Anthropology in Britain, wrote the massive *Golden Bough* (1890, rev. edn 1911-15), an ambitious comparative study of myth and religion. Both Tylor and Frazer were evolutionists, and Frazer's main theoretical project consisted in demonstrating how thought had developed from the magical via the religious to the scientific.Neither Tylor nor Frazer carried out detailed field studies, although Tylor spent several years in Mexico and wrote a book there.



James Frazer

A famous anecdote tells of a dinner party where William James, the pragmatist philosopher, asked Frazer whether he had ever become acquainted with any of those savages he wrote so much about. Frazer allegedly replied, in a shocked tone of voice, 'Heaven forbid!' (Evans-Pritchard 1951).

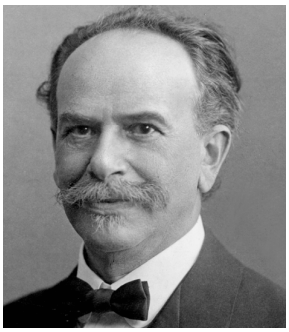
Important intellectual developments outside anthropology in the second half of the nineteenth century also had a powerful impact on the field. Darwin's theory of natural selection, first presented in his *Origin of Species* from 1859, would both be seen as a condition for anthropology (positing, as it did, that all humans are closely related) and, later, as a threat to the discipline (arguing, as it seemed to do, the primacy of the biological over the cultural; see Ingold 1986). The emergence of classic sociological theory in the works of Comte, Marx and Tönnies, and later Durkheim, Weber, Pareto and Simmel, provided anthropologists with general theories of society, although their applicability to non-European societies continues to be disputed.

The quality of the ethnographic data used by the early anthropologists was variable. Most of the scholars mentioned above relied on the written sources that were available, ranging from missionaries' accounts to travelogues of varying accuracy. The need for more reliable data began to make itself felt. Expeditions and systematic surveys - among the most famous were the British Torres Straits expedition led by W.H.R. Rivers and the large-scale American explorations of the Indians of the north-western coast -provided researchers around the turn of the century with an improved understanding of the compass of cultural variation, which would eventually lead to the downfall of the ambitious theories of unilineal evolution characteristic of nineteenth-century anthropology.

An Austro-German speciality proposed both as an alternative and a complement to evolutionist thinking, was diffusionism, the doctrine of the historical diffusion of cultural traits. Never a part of the mainstream outside of the German-speaking world (but counting important supporters in the English-speaking world, including Rivers), elaborate theories of cultural diffusion continued to thrive, particularly in Berlin and Vienna, until after the Second World War. Nobody denied that diffusion took place, but there were serious problems of verification associated with the theory. Within anthropology, diffusionism went out of fashion when, around the time of the First World War, researchers began to study single societies in great detail without trying to account for their historical development. However, a theoretical direction reminiscent of diffusionism returned in the 1990s, under the label of globalisation theory, which is an attempt to understand and account for the ways in which modern mass communications, migration, capitalism and other 'global' phenomena interact with local conditions.

In spite of these and other theoretical developments and methodological refinements, the emergence of anthropology, as the discipline is known today, is usually associated with four outstanding scholars working in three countries in the early decades of the twentieth century: Franz Boas in the USA, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown and Bronisław Malinowski in the UK, and Marcel Mauss in France.

BOAS AND CULTURAL RELATIVISM



Franz Boas

Boas (1858-1942), a German immigrant to the United States who had briefly studied anthropology with Bastian at Heidelberg, carried out important research among Eskimo and Kwakiutl Indians in the 1890s. In his teaching and professional leadership, he strengthened the 'four-field approach' in American anthropology, which still sets it apart from European anthropology, as it encompasses not only cultural and social anthropology, but also physical anthropology, archaeology and linguistics. In spite of this, Boas is chiefly remembered for his ideas. Although cultural relativism had been introduced more than a century before, it was Boas who made it a central premise for anthropological research. Reacting against the grand evolutionary schemes of Tylor, Morgan and others, Boas took an early stance in favour of a more particularist approach. He argued that each culture had to be understood on its own terms and that it would be scientifically misleading to judge and rank other cultures according to a Western, ethnocentric typology gauging 'levels of development'. Accordingly, Boas also promoted *historical particularism,* the view that all societies or cultures had their own, unique history that could not be reduced to a category in some universalist scheme of development. On related grounds, Boas argued against the unfounded claims of racist pseudo-science, which were supported by most of the leading biologists of the time. Boas's insistence on the meticulous collection of empirical data was not only due to his scientific views, but also the realisation that cultural change quickly obliterated what he saw as unique cultures, particularly in North America. Already in *The Mind of Primitive Man* (1911), Boas argued that anthropology ought to be engaged on behalf of threatened indigenous populations.

Ruth Benedict

Perhaps because of his particularism, Boas never systematised his ideas in a theoretical treatise. Several of his students and associates nevertheless did develop general theories of culture, notably Ruth Benedict, Alfred Kroeber and Robert Lowie. His most famous student was Margaret Mead (1901-78). Although her bestselling books from various Pacific societies have been criticised for being ethnographically superficial, they skilfully used material from non-Western societies to raise questions about gender relations, socialisation and politics in the West. Mead's work shows, probably better than that of any other anthropologist, the potential of cultural criticism inherent in the discipline.

Margaret Mead

One of Boas's most remarkable associates, the linguist Edward Sapir (1884-1939), formulated, with his student Benjamin Lee Whorf, the so-called *Sapir-Whorf hypothesis,* which posits that language determines cognition, and that the world's languages differ enormously. Consistent with a radical cultural relativism, the hypothesis implies that, for example, Hopi Indians see and perceive the world in a fundamentally different way from Westerners, due to differences in the structure of their respective languages.

Edward Sapir

Due to Boas's influence, the materialist tradition from Morgan fell into the background in the USA during the first half of the twentieth century. It would later re-emerge as cultural ecology and neo-evolutionism, and Morgan's legacy would also be acknowledged by many Marxist anthropologists. But for now, Morgan's evolutionism was firmly sidetracked, as was any potential influence from Darwin's theory of evolution.

THE TWO BRITISH SCHOOLS

While modern American anthropology had been shaped, on the one hand by the Boasians and their relativist concerns, and on the other hand by the perceived need to

record native cultures before their feared disappearance, the situation in the major colonial power, Great Britain, was very different. The degree of complicity between colonial agencies and anthropologists working in the colonies is debatable (Goody 1995), but the very fact of imperialism was an inescapable, if usually implicit, premise for British anthropology at least until de-colonisation.

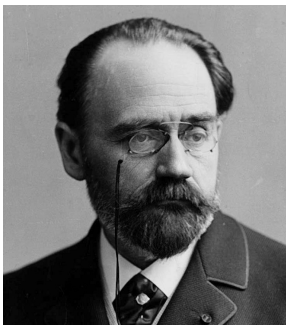
Bronisław Malinowski

The man who is often hailed as the founder of modern British social anthropology was a Polish immigrant, Bronisław Malinowski (1884-1942), whose two years of fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands (between 1914 and 1918) set a standard for ethnographic data collection that is still largely unchallenged. Malinowski stressed the need to learn the local language properly and to engage in everyday life in the society under scrutiny, in order to learn its categories 'from within', and to understand the often subtle interconnections between the various social institutions and cultural notions. Malinowski also placed an unusual emphasis on the acting individual, seeing social structure not as a determinant of but as a framework for action, and he wrote about a wide range of topics, from garden magic, economics, technology and sex to the puzzling *kula* trade, often introducing new issues.

Although he dealt with many topics of general concern, he nearly always took his point of departure in his Trobriand ethnography, demonstrating a method of generalisation very different from that of the previous generation, with its more piecemeal local knowledge. Malinowski regarded all institutions of a society as intrinsically linked to each other, and stressed that every social or cultural phenomenon ought to be studied in its full context. He also held that inborn human needs were the driving force in the development of social institutions, and therefore his brand of functionalism is often described as 'biopsychological functionalism'.

A. R. Radcliffe-Brown

The other leading light in inter-war British social anthropology, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown (1881-1955), had a stronger short-term influence than his rival, although it faded rapidly after the Second World War. An admirer of Émile Durkheim's sociology, Radcliffe-Brown did relatively little fieldwork himself, but aimed at the development of a 'natural science of society' - in the spirit of the Encyclopedists - where the universal laws of social integration could be formulated. His theory, known as structural-functionalism, saw the acting individual as theoretically unimportant, emphasising instead the social institutions (including kinship, norms, politics, etc.). Most social and cultural phenomena, according to this view, could be seen as functional in the sense that they contributed to the maintenance of the overall social structure. Some of his most important essays are collected in *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* (1952), where he shows how societies, in his view, are integrated, and how social institutions reinforce each other and contribute to the maintenance of society.



Émile Durkheim

Radcliffe-Brown's scientific ideals were taken from natural science, and he hoped to develop 'general laws of society' comparable in precision to those of physics and chemistry. This programme has been abandoned by most anthropologists - like structural-functionalism in its pure form - but many of the questions raised by contemporary anthropologists, particularly in Europe, were originally framed by Radcliffe-Brown.

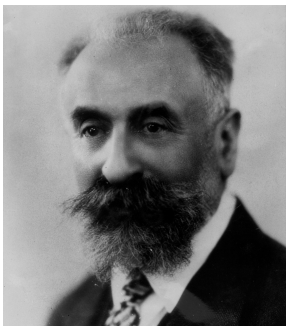
Despite their differences in emphasis, both British schools had a sociological concern in common (which they did not share with most Americans), and tended to see social institutions as functional. Both distanced themselves from the wide-ranging claims of diffusionism and evolutionism, and by the next generation of scholars, the influences of the two founding fathers may be said to have merged (Kuper 1996), although the tension between structural explanations and actor-centred accounts remains strong and productive in anthropology even today.

Malinowski's students included important names such as Raymond Firth, Audrey Richards and Isaac Schapera, while Radcliffe-Brown, in addition to enlisting E.E. Evans-Pritchard and Meyer Fortes - arguably the most powerful British anthropologists in the 1950s - on his side, taught widely abroad and introduced his brand of social anthropology to several colonial universities (notably Sydney and Cape Town) as well as Chicago. British anthropology, as typified by the first generation after Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, was characteristically oriented towards kinship, politics and economics, with Evans-Pritchard's masterpiece *The Nuer* (1940) demonstrating, perhaps better than any other monograph of the period, the intellectual power of a discipline combining detailed ethnography, comparison and elegant models. (Later, his models would be criticised for being too elegant to fit the facts on the ground - a very Malinowskian objection.)

E.E. Evans-Pritchard

MAUSS

Although anthropology and ethnology were still important subjects in the German-speaking region, they were set back seriously after the Second World War. With France, it is different, and along with the UK and the USA, France was a major centre of anthropological thought and research throughout the twentieth century. Already, in 1903, Durkheim had published, with his nephew Marcel Mauss (1872-1950), an important treatise on knowledge systems, *Primitive Classification* (Durkheim and Mauss 1963). In 1909, Arnold van Gennep published *Les Rites de passage,* a strikingly original analysis of initiation rituals (a topic which was to become a staple in the discipline), and the philosopher Lucien Lévy-Bruhl presented a theory, which was later to be refuted by Evans-Pritchard, Mauss and others, on the 'primitive mind', which he held to be 'pre-logicaf. A major expedition from Dakar to Djibouti (1922-3), led by the young ethnographer Marcel Griaule, and the profound writings of the missionary-turned-ethnographer Maurice Leenhardt on the natives of New Caledonia, furnished the French with much fresh empirical material.



Marcel Mauss

Lucien Lévy-Bruhl

Less methodologically purist than the emerging British traditions and more philosophically adventurous than the Americans, inter-war French anthropology, under the leadership of Marcel Mauss, developed a distinctive Continental flavour, witnessed in the pages of the influential journal *L'Annee Sociologique,* founded by Durkheim. Drawing on his vast knowledge of languages, cultural history and ethnographic research, Mauss, who never did fieldwork himself, wrote a series of learned, original, compact essays on topics ranging from gift exchange to the nation, the body and the concept of the person. This exceptional body of work has regularly been rediscovered and duly praised in the English-speaking world ever since.

Mauss's theoretical position was complex. He believed strongly in systematic comparison and in the existence of recurrent patterns in social life at all times and in all places, and yet, he often ends on a relativist note in his reasoning about similarities and differences between societies. Like Radcliffe-Brown, Mauss was inspired by Durkheim, but in a very different way. Rather than developing 'a natural science of society' complete with 'laws', his project consisted in describing and classifying greatly different societies in order to look for structural similarities. In this way, he hoped to develop an understanding of general dimensions of social life. Mauss never actually published a book in his own name, and his famous *The Gift* (1954 [1923-24]) originally appeared in the journal *L'Annee Sociologique,* which Mauss himself edited after Durkheim's death in 1917.

Mauss also never carried out ethnographic fieldwork, but his vast knowledge of languages and cultural history enabled him to present some of the most penetrating analyses to date of phenomena such as sacrifice, gift-giving, personhood and the nation. Much of his energy in the inter-war years nevertheless was spent on completing and publishing unfinished work left by colleagues who died in the First World War.

The Gift is seen by some as the single most important text in twentieth century anthropology, and Mauss's shorter studies also continue to be read and admired. Ironically, recalls Dumont (1986), Mauss, who never did fieldwork himself, spent many of his weekly seminars giving detailed instructions in techniques of observation.

The transition from evolutionist theory and grand syntheses to more specific, detailed and empirically founded work, which in different ways took place in the UK, the USA and France during the first decades of the twentieth century, amounted to nothing short of an intellectual revolution. In the space of a few years, the work of Tylor, Morgan and even Frazer had been relegated to the mists of history, and the discipline had in reality been taken over by small groups of scholars who saw intensive fieldwork, cultural relativism, the study of single, small-scale societies and rigorous comparison as the essence of the new discipline. Today, the academic institutions, the conferences and the learned journals all build on a view of anthropology as a discipline that came into its own with Boas, Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown and Mauss. To a greater or lesser extent, this is also true of the anthropological traditions of other countries (see Vermeulen and Roldan 1995), including India, Australia, Mexico, Argentina, the Netherlands, Spain, Scandinavia and, partly, the German-speaking world. Soviet/Russian and East European anthropologies have followed different itineraries, and have retained a connection with the older German *Volkskunde* tradition, which is more descriptive.

Later developments in anthropology, to which we now turn briefly, reveal both continuity with and reactions against the foundations that were laid before the Second World War.

THE SECOND HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The number of professional anthropologists and institutions devoted to teaching and research in the field grew rapidly after the Second World War. The discipline also diversified, partly because of 'population pressure'. New specialisations such as psychological anthropology, political anthropology and the anthropology of ritual emerged, and the geographical foci of the discipline multiplied: Whereas the Pacific had been the most fertile area for new theoretical developments in the 1920s and Africa had played a similar part in the 1930s and 1940s, and the American preoccupation with North American Indians had been stable throughout, the 1950s saw a growing interest in the 'hybrid' (or *'mestizo')* societies of Latin America as well as the anthropology of India and South-East Asia, while the New Guinean highlands became similarly important in the 1960s. Such shifts in geographical emphasis could be consequential in theoretical developments, as each region raises its own peculiar problems.

From the 1950s onwards, the end of colonialism has also affected anthropology, both in a banal sense - it has become more difficult to obtain research permits in Third World countries - and more profoundly, as the relationship between the observer and the observed has become problematic since the traditionally 'observed' peoples increasingly have their own intellectuals and spokespersons, who frequently object to Western interpretations of their way of life. Anthropology has grown not only in size but in intellectual and academic importance, but the current situation also poses its own peculiar challenges.

STRUCTURALISM

The first major theory to emerge after the Second World War was Claude Lévi-Strauss's structuralism. An admirer of Mauss and, like him, not a major fieldworker, Lévi-Strauss (1908-) developed an original theory of the human mind, based on inspiration from structural linguistics, Mauss's theory of exchange and Lévy-Bruhl's theory of the primitive mind (which Lévi-Strauss rejected). His first major work, *Les Structures elementaires de la parente (The Elementary Structures of Kinship,* 1969 [1949]), introduced a grammatical, formal way of thinking about kinship,

with particular reference to systems of marriage (the exchange of women between groups). Lévi-Strauss later expanded his theory to cover totemism, myth and art. Never uncontroversial, structuralism had an enormous impact on French intellectual life far beyond the confines of anthropology, and many leading contemporary French anthropologists have been students of Lévi-Strauss. In the English-speaking world, the reception of structuralism was delayed, as Lévi-Strauss's major works were not translated until the 1960s, but they had both major admirers and detractors from the beginning. Structuralism was criticised for being untestable, positing as it did certain unprovable and unfalsifiable properties of the human mind (most famously the propensity to think in terms of contrasts or binary oppositions), but many saw Lévi-Strauss's work, always committed to human universals, as an immense source of inspiration in the study of symbolic systems such as knowledge and myth.

Claude Lévi-Strauss

A rather different, and for a long time much less influential, brand of structuralism was developed by another student of Mauss, namely Louis Dumont (1911-99), an Indianist and Sanskrit scholar who did fieldwork both in the Aryan north and the Dravidian south. Dumont, closer to Durkheim's teachings on social cohesion than Lévi-Strauss, argued for a holistic perspective (as opposed to an individualistic one) in his major work on the Indian caste system, *Homo Hierarchicus* (1980 [1969]), claiming that Indians (and by extension, many non-modern peoples) saw themselves not as 'free individuals' but as actors irretrievably enmeshed in a web of commitments and social relations, which in the Indian case was clearly hierarchical.

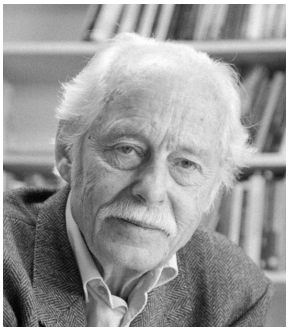
Louis Dumont

Most major French anthropologists of later generations have been associated with either Lévi-Strauss, Dumont or Balandier, the Africanist whose work in political anthropology simultaneously bridged gaps between France and the Anglo-Saxon world and inspired both neo-Marxist research and applied anthropology devoted to development.

REACTIONS TO STRUCTURAL-FUNCTIONALISM

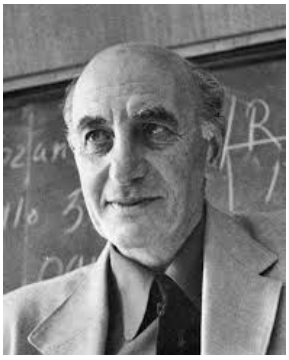
In Britain and the colonies, the structural-functionalism now associated chiefly with Evans-Pritchard and Fortes was under increased pressure after the war. Indeed, Evans-Pritchard himself repudiated his former views in the 1950s, arguing that the search for 'natural laws of society' had been shown to be futile and that anthropology should fashion itself as a humanities discipline rather than a natural science. Retrospectively, this shift has often been quoted as marking a shift 'from function to meaning' in the discipline's priorities; and a leading American anthropologist of the period, Alfred Kroeber, expressed similar views in the USA. Others found their own paths away from what was increasingly seen as a conceptual straitjacket, for example Malinowski's student Edmund R. Leach, whose *Political Systems of Highland Burma* (1954) suggested a departure from certain orthodoxies, notably Radcliffe-Brown's dictum that social systems tend to be in equilibrium and Malinowski's view of myths as integrating 'social charters'. Later, Leach, always a controversial and unpredictable thinker, would be a main promoter and critic of structuralism in Britain. A few years earlier, Leach's contemporary Raymond Firth had proposed a distinction between social structure (the sets of statuses in society) and social organisation (Firth 1951), which he saw as the actual process of social life, where choice and individual whims were seen in a dynamic relationship to structural constraints. Later in the 1950s and 1960s, several younger social anthropologists, notably F.G. Bailey and Fredrik Barth, followed Firth's lead as well as the theory of games (a recent development in economics) in refining an actor-centred perspective on social life, where the formerly paramount level of norms and social

Edmund R. Leach



Fredrik Barth

institutions were re-framed as contextual variables (or even, as in a programmatic statement by Barth, as unintended consequences of intentional action). Following a different itinerary, Max Gluckman, a former pupil of Radcliffe-Brown and a close associate of Evans-Pritchard, also increasingly abandoned the strong holist programme of the structural-functionalists, reconceptualising social structure as a rather loose set of constraints, while emphasising the importance of individual actors. Gluckman's colleagues included a number of important Africanists, such as A.L. Epstein, J. Clyde Mitchell, Victor Turner and Elizabeth Colson. Working in Southern Africa, this group pioneered both urban anthropology and the study of ethnicity in the 1950s and 1960s.



Max Gluckman

NEO-EVOLUTIONISM, CULTURAL ECOLOGY AND NEO-MARXISM

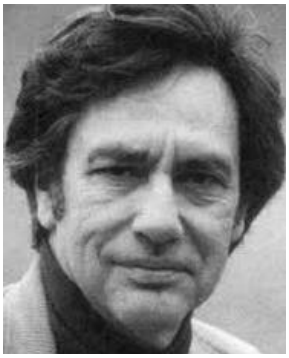
The number of practising anthropologists has always been larger in the United States than anywhere else, and the discipline has also been very diverse there. Although the influence from the Boasian cultural relativist school remains strong to this day, other groups of scholars have also made their mark. From the late 1940s onwards, a resurgent interest in Morgan's evolutionism as well as Marxism led to the formulation of several non-Boasian, evolutionist and materialist research programmes. Julian Steward, a student of Robert Redfield at Chicago (who had himself been a student of Radcliffe-Brown), proposed a theory of cultural dynamics where he distinguished between 'the cultural core' (basic institutions such as the division of labour) and 'the rest of culture' in a way strongly reminiscent of Marx, an influence which could not be acknowledged openly at the time for political reasons. Steward led research projects and supervised work among Latin American peasants as well as North American Indians, and encouraged a renewed focus on the relationship between culture, technology and the environment. His contemporary Leslie White held views that were more deterministic than Steward's (who allowed for major local variations), but also - perhaps oddly - saw symbolic culture as a largely autonomous realm. Among the major scholars influenced by White, Marvin Harris has retained the materialist determinism in his own theory, which he calls cultural materialism, while Marshall Sahlins in the 1960s made the move from neo-evolutionism to a symbolic anthropology influenced by structuralism.

Victor Turner

Cultural ecology, largely a North American speciality, sprang from the teachings of Steward and White, and represented a rare collaboration between anthropology and biology. Especially in the 1960s, many such studies were carried out; the most famous is doubtless Roy Rappaport's *Pigs for the Ancestors* (1968), an attempt to account for a recurrent ritual in the New Guinean highlands in ecological terms. However, the upsurge of Marxist peasant research, especially in Latin America, in the 1970s, was clearly also indebted to Steward.

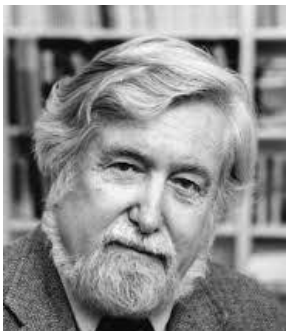
Julian Steward

The advent of radical student politics in the late 1960s, which continued to have an impact on academia until the early 1980s, had a strong, if passing, influence on anthropology virtually everywhere. Of the more lasting contributions, apart from the string of peasant studies initiated by Steward and furthered by Eric Wolf, Sidney Mintz and others, the French attempt at synthesising Lévi-Straussian structuralism, Althusserian Marxism and anthropological relativism must be mentioned here. Emmanuel Terray, Claude Meillassoux and, probably most importantly, Maurice Godelier were among those who tried to combine a concern with local conditions and a universalist, ultimately evolutionist theory of society. Although both Marxism and structuralism eventually became unfashionable, scholars - particularly those engaged in applied work - continue to draw inspiration from Marxist thought.



Roy Rappaport

SYMBOLIC AND COGNITIVE ANTHROPOLOGY



Clifford Geertz

More true to the tenor of the Boasian legacy than the materialist approaches, studies of cognition and symbolic systems have developed and diversified enormously in the decades after the Second World War. A leading theorist is Clifford Geertz, who wrote a string of influential essays advocating hermeneutics (interpretive method) in the 1960s and 1970s. While his originality as a theorist can be questioned (possible precursors include the philosopher Paul Ricceur, whose influence Geertz acknowledges, as well as Evans-Pritchard and Malinowski himself), his originality as a writer is beyond doubt, and Geertz ranks as perhaps the finest writer of contemporary anthropology. His contemporary Sahlins is, along with Geertz, the foremost proponent of cultural relativism around the turn of the millennium, and he has published a number of important books on various subjects (from Mauss's theory of exchange to sociobiology and the death of Captain Cook), consistently stressing the autonomy of the symbolic realm, thus arguing that cultural variation cannot be explained by recourse to material conditions or inborn biological properties of humans.

Marshall Sahlins

In British anthropology, too, interest in meaning, symbols and cognition grew perceptively after the war, especially from the 1960s (partly owing to the belated discovery of Lévi-Strauss). British social anthropology had until then been strongly sociological, and two scholars who fused the legacy from structural-functionalism with the study of symbols and meaning in outstanding ways were Mary Douglas and Victor Turner. Taking his cue from van Gennep, Turner, a former associate of Gluckman, developed a complex analysis of initiation rituals among the Ndembu of Zambia, showing both their functionally integrating aspects, their meaningful aspects for the participants and their deeper symbolic significance. Douglas, a student of Evans-Pritchard and justly famous for her *Purity and Danger* (1966), analysed the human preoccupation with dirt and impurities as an indirect way of thinking about the boundaries of society and the nature/culture divide, thus joining the structuralism of Lévi-Strauss with that of Radcliffe-Brown, so to speak. Prolific and original, Douglas is perhaps the main defender of a reformed structural-functionalism today (see Douglas 1987).

Mary Douglas

Against all of these (and other) perspectives regarding how 'cultures' or 'societies' perceive the world, anthropologists stressing the actor's point of view have argued that no two individuals see the world in the same way and that it is therefore preposterous to generalise about entire societies. The impact of feminism has been decisive here.

Since the 1970s, feminist anthropologists have identified often profound differences between male and female world-views, showing how classic accounts of 'societies' really refer to male perspectives on them as both the anthropologist and the main informants tended to be male (Ardener 1977). In a different vein, Fredrik Barth, who had earlier criticised structural-functionalism from a methodological individualist perspective, presented analyses of knowledge systems in New Guinea and Bali (Barth 1975, 1993) revealing great variations within societies, even very small ones. A more radical critique came from the United States, especially following the publication of the influential volume *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus 1986), where most of the contributors tried to show that notions of cultural wholes and integrated societies were anthropological fictions, arguing that the real world was much more complex and ambiguous than anthropological writings would suggest. These and other publications contributed to a sense of crisis in the discipline in the 1980s and early 1990s, as some of its central concepts, including that of culture, were under severe strain.

Although symbolic anthropology often emphasises the culturally unique and thereby defends a relativist position, this sometimes conceals a deeper universalism. The most influential theory in linguistics during the latter half of the twentieth century was Noam Chomsky's generative grammar, which stressed the similarities between all languages. Even strong relativist positions need a notion of the universal in order to make

comparisons. This universal is ultimately located to the human mind in structuralism and many varieties of cognitive anthropology (see D'Andrade 1995), and, from this perspective, it can even be said that the relativity of cultures is merely a surface phenomenon since the mind works in the same way everywhere.

Anthropology at the beginning of the new millennium is a sprawling and varied discipline with a strong academic foothold in all continents, although its intellectual centres remain in the English- and French-speaking parts of the world. It is still possible to discern differences between American cultural anthropology, British social anthropology and French *ethnologie,* but the discipline is more unified than ever before - not in its views, perhaps, but in its approaches. Hardly a part of the world has not now been studied intensively by scholars engaging in ethnographic fieldwork, but since the world changes, new research is always called for. Specialisations proliferate, ranging from studies of ethnomedicine and the body to urban consumer culture, advertising and cyberspace. Although the grand theories of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries - from unilinear evolutionism to structuralism - have by and large been abandoned, new theories claiming to provide a unified view of humanity are being proposed; for example, new advances in evolutionary theory and cognitive science offer ambitious general accounts of social life and the human mind, respectively. The puzzles and problems confronting earlier generations of anthropologists, regarding, for example, the nature of social organisation, of knowledge, of kinship, of myth and ritual, remain central to the discipline, although they are explored in new empirical settings by scholars who are more specialised than their predecessors.