

Clyde Kluckhohn, Anthropologist

Clyde Kluckhohn died suddenly of coronary thrombosis on 28 July 1960 in Santa Fe, New Mexico, at the age of 55. His friends had known that he had suffered from a serious heart condition for many years, but subject to that there had been nothing unusual about his state of health until he underwent a severe attack the day before his death.

Kluckhohn was not only one of the few leading American anthropologists of his generation, but also one of those who did most to establish the present level of close interdisciplinary relationships with its academic neighbors, among which sociology and psychology figure most prominently. This aspect of his many-sided career and influence, which is naturally of particular interest to sociologists, was perhaps most conspicuously evidenced in his role as one of the principal planners and founders of the Department and Laboratory of Social Relations at Harvard University, and as the leading senior anthropologist in that department since its foundation in 1946. He was also highly instrumental in promoting and organizing interdisciplinary work—involving a number of sociologists, psychologists, and others—through his directorship of the Russian Research Center at Harvard for its first five years, from 1948 to 1953. Among a variety of other research enterprises, he had a paramount role in the comparative study of values in five cultures, which was carried out in New Mexico from 1949 to 1954.

Kluckhohn was born in Le Mars, Iowa, in 1905. He prepared for college at Lawrenceville Academy, New Jersey, and began his undergraduate studies at Princeton. These were, however, interrupted by ill health and, only after an interval, concluded at the University of Wisconsin. This was, however, one of the "ill winds" of legend, since Kluckhohn went to New Mexico for his health and in this connection developed his first interest in anthropology through the presence of the Navaho in the immediate neighborhood of his sojourn.

After graduation from Wisconsin he went to Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar,

where in particular he came in contact with R. R. Marrett. Then he spent a year at the University of Vienna, studying both anthropology and psychoanalysis. After a brief teaching interval at the University of New Mexico he came to Harvard to complete his graduate work. After he received his Ph.D. in 1936, his whole formal academic career was, with various leaves of absence, spent at Harvard.

The cosmopolitan catholicity of Kluckhohn's choice of places of education was matched by that of his substantive interests. His undergraduate concentration was in classics, with special reference to Greek. This, combined with the linguistic problems of anthropological work, led him into the field of linguistics, which was one of his main lifelong scientific interests. He became thoroughly schooled in physical anthropology and its foundations in general biology and was an important contributor here. He was one of the very first social scientists to undertake a serious study of psychoanalytic theory and its possible relevance to anthropology, an undertaking which included a personal analysis in Vienna. This interest paid off in a number of his anthropological studies, but particularly perhaps in his notable monograph, *Navaho Witchcraft*.

The main trend of Kluckhohn's intellectual interests, however, came increasingly to focus on the problems of culture in relation to human behavior and, within this field, in particular the study of values. For a considerable period he was accounted one of the leading members of the "culture and personality" school of thought, but it can be said that he transcended this framework in his later years, in an altogether original approach to the study of values. This crystallized in connection with the comparative study referred to, and was much further developed in an important paper on American values, and one or two recent theoretical papers.

With this increasingly definite focus on values, however, it can certainly be

said that Kluckhohn was, for his generation, par excellence the *general* anthropologist, a role which was expressed on the more popular level by his *Mirror for Man*. This role as generalist for anthropology was intimately connected with his concern for, and receptivity to, the interests of his neighboring disciplines, which was such a conspicuous feature of his career.

It was not only intellectually, in the more strictly academic sense, that Kluckhohn was a man of many and diverse interests and talents. He was an academic administrator of the highest capacity, as evidenced among a number of cases by his most unusual contribution as director of the Russian Research Center. He was a man of the most balanced and penetrating judgment and was much in demand in this connection, above all in the field of public affairs where he was a consultant in many different connections and on the highest levels but also very much on university and foundation matters. Furthermore, he was not only a student of his beloved Navaho, but was also one of their most powerful friends in their complicated relations with the federal government, a cause to which he devoted untold exertions. That he was also a man of extraordinary personal magnetism and charm, all who have been privileged to know him can testify.

Kluckhohn made major contributions to sociology, from the vantage-point of his deep commitment to his own discipline of anthropology, which were brought to focus, in particular, in the intellectual partnership, which was one important aspect of his marriage, with Florence Rockwood Kluckhohn. Mrs. Kluckhohn is a distinguished sociologist in her own right, and for a number of years has been a leading member of the sociological group in the Department of Social Relations. This marriage both symbolized and promoted the fundamental unity of the behavioral sciences of which Clyde Kluckhohn's career is one of the major monuments. His death, combined with that of his close friend and colleague, Samuel A. Stouffer, which followed it within less than a month, creates a void in this field which can never be filled, not only at Harvard, but in the national and international fields of social science.

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Note

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