Cultural Anthropology Today

This is one of a series of books commissioned by the Council of the Humanities of Princeton University the purpose of which is to examine the accomplishments of American humanistic scholarship in recent decades. The task of the humanist, in the words of the editor of the series, is to "sift the whole of man's culture again and again, reassessing, reinterpreting, rediscovering, translating into a modern idiom, making available the materials and the blueprints with which his contemporaries can build their own culture, bringing to the center of the stage that which a past generation has judged irrelevant but which is now again usable, sending into storage that which has become, for the moment, too familiar and too habitual to stir our imagination, preserving it for a posterity to which it will once more seem fresh." The decision to include a volume on anthropology emerged from the conviction that the discipline has a contribution to make in this endeavor.

In the opening pages of his essay, **Anthropology** (Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1964. 127 pp., $4.95), Eric Wolf addresses himself directly to this aspect of the subject and reverts to it from time to time. Wolf quite properly does not make it his central concern, for the humanistic orientation of the discipline, particularly in the past, is well known to social scientists. It is, in fact, too well known for the intellectual comfort of many who prefer to view it, and to practice it, as a science. The author is not himself disquieted by this dual orientation. He characterizes the discipline as "the most scientific of the humanities, the most humanistic of the sciences." It is clear, nonetheless, that in his view its hope for the future depends on its success as a science: "If anthropology has been defined as a science of man, then a science of man it must be, or perish."

The body of the essay is an attempt to delineate developments in American anthropology over the past 25 years, that is, roughly since the outbreak of World War II. These limitations in time and space are imposed only to establish a focus for the discussion. It is noted that anthropology in the United States owes much to influences from Europe, and that many of its current trends have origins which antedate 1939. Nevertheless, it retains an indigenous quality, and the war "certainly altered both its social organization and its intellectual materials."

Two major shifts accompanied these alterations. One was a consequence of the confrontation of many technologically underdeveloped societies with the tremendous resources and power of the Western nations. The magnitude of the gap impressed both the anthropologist and the people who have traditionally been his sources of data, with the result that, as their frame of reference, both adopted Western culture rather than its many primitive counterparts. The second shift was from a sense of almost unlimited individual freedom and self-sufficiency to one of dependence on others, from a belief in man's ability to design his own future to a feeling of subjugation to the total society of which he is only a tiny part. These shifts affected everyone, but they entailed particular consequences for anthropologists. Five major changes in anthropological thinking are attributed to them.

One change has been the repression of the romanticism and the yearning for the exotic that have for so long imbued anthropological research and discourse. There is presently more objectivity, more concern with problem solving, an increased acceptance of the scientific ideal. Another is marked by a questioning of the potential of human beings to develop an endless variety of cultures, a renewed search for cultural universals and the limitations set by man's physical constitution and his environment. The third change is that anthropologists have increasingly turned away from the study of primitive groups to investigate their own society and culture. Fourth, we hear much less today about cultural relativism. It is no longer emphasized, lauded, and defended, especially in the context of morality. Finally, there has been a change in perspective with respect to the role of the individual in the transmission of culture. The new concept is that the individual is "a cog in a depersonalized social machine." The organization and perpetuation of culture is not dependent upon any person, but upon a complex interaction among many. The maintenance mechanisms are not within the individual; they are outside him, in society. Consonant with this is a new view of the social contract as one whereby men agree to communicate, and of culture as the code by which they communicate.

The author not only describes these trends, he urges their further development. The overall objective should be "the creation of an image of man that will be adequate to the experience of our time." In this endeavor American anthropologists should give more attention to the accomplishments of their British colleagues, especially with respect to insights into the pervasive influence of political and social organizations. They must also develop a middle ground of inquiry and theory, with less emphasis placed on form and more on function, less on objects and more on concepts. They must also take a fresh look at symbolic systems, such as religion, which have hitherto been treated as an unsystematized, detached, residual category. But the supreme obligation of all anthropologists is to develop a true science of man. For the first time in history, we are told, this is possible. We have achieved a perspective on the totality of human culture, having transcended a narrow preoccupation with specific manifestations of it. We are now in a position to study that totality, which is the aim of science.

The author advises the reader that his essay should be regarded "as an exercise of the anthropological imagination." As such it is provocative. However, if it is approached critically, exceptions can be taken not only to its characterizations of postwar trends

but to several of its more particular assertions. It is, for example, a misconception that applied anthropology "by definition represents a reaction against cultural relativism, since it does not regard the culture that is applying anthropology as the equal of the culture to which anthropology is to be applied." This may or may not be the case. At times its purpose has been the preservation of cultural differences. Similarly, the alleged shift from the concept of culture as a mechanical sum of its parts, or as an organism, to its conceptualization as a construct of the anthropologist is by no means evident. On the contrary, there is a vigorous and militant philosophy which rejects this subjective estimate of culture. Although some of the alleged changes in anthropological research and theory are verifiable, the reasons ascribed to them are questionable. A differentiation between "culture" and "society" has indeed emerged in American anthropology in the last 25 years; but this is not because they are now treated as polar concepts demanding a choice between one or the other. Rather, they have come to be accepted as complementary aspects of socialized human behavior in place of the earlier American notion that all such behavior could be termed "cultural." The insistence upon this differentiation can be attributed to the sociologists, and its effects are clearly discernible if one compares the 1923 and the 1948 editions of Kroeber's *Anthropology*. It is also true that anthropologists have turned more and more to the study of Western culture, but not so much as a result of the war as (i) to accept the challenge that their research methods are inapplicable to complex societies, (ii) to participate in the booming fashion to study cultural and social change, and (iii) to face the simple fact that they are rapidly being precluded or excluded from the study of the human groups with which they usually are identified—the so-called untouched primitives.

Finally, it may be said that Wolf has overlooked one of the most conspicuous changes in anthropology in the last 25 years—its fragmentation into its several subdisciplines. If it is true, as Wolf contends, and as it seems to be, that anthropology is less a subject matter than a bond between subject matters, then we are now witnessing the dissolution of those bonds and thereby the loss of its most distinctive feature. It can scarcely become a science of man, any more than can economics or psychology, if it succumbs to the seemingly inevitable strains that divide it into its archeological, physical, linguistic, social, and cultural components. It is becoming increasingly difficult to treat them as a unit. That is probably one reason why the attempt was not made in this essay, which is concerned primarily with what is commonly called cultural anthropology. Even this limited field has become so diversified that the characterization of its frontiers is very much a matter of preference. It can be maintained, for example, that the emergence of the subfield of applied anthropology, or the popularity of cultural change studies, are at least as remarkable as the decline of romanticism, and that the latter is in fact more apparent than real if one considers its prevalence among new recruits to the profession. It may be that the muffling of cultural relativism as well as romanticism are functions of individual maturity rather than signs of the times.

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Hormone Mechanisms

Actions of Hormones on Molecular Processes. Gerald Litwack and David Kritchevsky, Eds. Wiley, New York, 1964. xii + 583 pp. Illus. $17.

The status of the problem of hormone mechanisms has been described as a plethora of information accompanied by a dearth of understanding. In the 140 years since the first effect of a humoral agent was recognized, some 20 types of hormones have been obtained in essentially pure form, and the precise chemical structures determined for at least a dozen. A voluminous literature describes the effects of hormones on the growth, function, composition, and metabolism of tissues and organs. In view of this wealth of knowledge about what hormones are and what they do, it is remarkable that in not one instance do we know how they do it.

Current efforts to elucidate the biochemical (or biophysical) mechanisms of hormonal regulation of cellular function will be aided by *Action of Hormones on Molecular Processes*. Although the book cannot, at the present state of knowledge, disclose how hormones actually perform at a molecular level, it does provide, for certain classes of hormones, (i) a convenient summary of their important physiological effects, (ii) a discussion of phenomena at the cellular and intracellular level which might represent the primary hormonal actions, and (iii) a well-documented description and evaluation of experiments, both in vivo and in vitro, relevant to the mechanisms of hormone action.

The book consists of 19 contributions that vary considerably in length and approach. In the opening chapter, T. R. Riggs presents a comprehensive discussion of the rather general ability of hormones to modify the transport of nutrients across cell membranes. In the subsequent treatment of individual hormone classes, the influence of thyroid hormones on protein synthesis is discussed by S. Price, on lipid metabolism by D. Kritchevsky, and on enzyme systems in vitro by G. Litwack; J. R. Tata presents an extensive general consideration of the action of thyroid hormones at the cellular level. The action of insulin on carbohydrate metabolism is discussed by J. Ashmore and L. Carr, on lipid metabolism by A. I. Winegrad, and on protein biosynthesis by I. G. Wool; the latter paper also provides a perceptive evaluation of the overall insulin problem. Epinephrine and norepinephrine are considered with respect to their disposition and metabolic fate by I. J. Kopin, their effects on metabolic systems by J. H. Hagen and P. B. Hagen, and their action at the molecular level by J. A. Buzard.

The steroid hormones receive less comprehensive coverage, but certain aspects of their actions are treated in excellent fashion. Studies of the mechanism of cortisone action are described by P. Feigelson and M. Feigelson and adaptive changes in enzymatic activity induced by glucocorticoids by C. A. Nichol and F. Rosen. The effects of sex hormones on the metabolism of amino acids and proteins is competently discussed by E. H. Frieden and their action on the structure and activity of glutamic dehydrogenase by G. M. Tomkins and K. L. Yielding; H. G. Williams-Ashman and S. Liao objectively evaluate the ability of sex hormones to participate in hydrogen transport by isolated enzyme systems. The mode of action of both androgens and gonadotropins is discussed by R. I.