

ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE NATURE OF MAN*

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The position of anthropology on the nature of man is directly related to its presuppositions regarding the supernatural. Most anthropologists today studiously avoid bringing in matters of sin, moral absolutes, revelation, or religious considerations. When the philosopher-anthropologist David Bidney wrote of the free will of "man, under God,"¹ University of Michigan anthropologist, Leslie White, criticizing the current state of American anthropology, commented that, "With the re-introduction of God into ethnological theory, Bidney sets a new low in the present trend toward regression."²

Even in the treatment of religion itself anything at all that smacks of the supernatural is similarly avoided. Since the Christian is used to taking God's revelation as found in the Bible somewhat for granted it may come to him as a shock to find so-called objective, scientific approaches to religion explicitly ruling out the one body of evidence with which he is the most familiar. Thus Edward Norbeck, in his textbook, *Religion in Primitive Society*, in treating the origin of religion, states:

...we have entirely omitted the most popular theory of origins: among the nonscholarly population of at least the civilized world surely the most common idea is that religion, if it be 'true,' has been divinely revealed. Divine revelation as an explanation of religious genesis has no place in this book. . . .

Norbeck held that except for certain historically important ideas, all theological interpretations of the origins of religion would be dismissed from considerations as irrelevant or prejudicial.³

...The sum of all of these theories concerning religious origins can be presented in the simple statement that the origins remain unknown.⁴

Such a position is representative of the anthropological consensus today. Its implications for a view of the nature of man are just as clearly

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1. Bidney, David, "The Concept of Cultural Crisis," AA 48, (1946), p. 541. "See p. 227 for abbreviations of periodicals cited."
2. White, Leslie A., *The Science of Culture*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1949, revised edition, 1969, pp. 108-109.
3. Norbeck, Edward, *Religion in Primitive Society*. New York: Harper and Row, 1961, p. 22. For a criticism of this bias as well as that of the missionary see Nida, E. A., "Religion and Anthropology," PA 4:2, (1957), pp. 63-64.
4. Norbeck, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

stated. Man is seen first of all in his natural setting as related unquestionably to an organic past condition which was non-human. G. S. Carter writes:

Man is an animal, and however greatly his present state differs from that of the rest of the animal kingdom, we must accept that he arose from subhuman ancestors by a process of evolution.⁵

Similarly, G. G. Simpson has written:

Man is the result of a purposeless and materialistic process that did not have him in mind. He was not planned. He is a state of matter, a form of life, a sort of animal, and a species of the Order Primates, akin nearly or remotely to all of life and indeed to all that is material.⁶

Conventional anthropology holds, with Robert Redfield that "Revelation has no part in our understanding of man."⁷

Similarly the implications of such a position for any program the Christian might devise to try to change the moral commitment of others is also clear. Thus Christian foreign missions were characterized by Alexander Goldenweiser as "perhaps the most stupid act of racial pride and cultural snobbishness ever perpetrated by White civilization."⁸

In order to appreciate the nature of these expressions it is necessary to understand the premises upon which they are based. If anthropology tries to avoid and deny any relevance of revelation and the supernatural where human nature is concerned, at least it has gone the farthest in refining and elaborating upon man's other distinctive attributes. An examination of these must preface consideration of man's moral nature.

According to anthropology, and the sciences generally, man is an animal, for he is not a plant. However, man is not *merely* an animal in anybody's terms. The primary factor which distinguishes man from the rest of the animal world is "culture." It is the single most important concept in the science of anthropology. Its usage includes reference to the appreciation for and participation in certain forms of esthetic, learned, and creative aspects of civilization. However, to the anthropologist, the term "culture" has a special meaning which, with its implications, he would like members of all of the disciplines, even the whole world, to understand and appreciate.

In the first place it boils down to the fact that man, of all the animal world, is born without any behavior-determining instincts common to his

5. Carter, G. S., "The Theory of Evolution and the Evolution of Man," in Kroeber, A. L., et al., *Anthropology Today: An Encyclopedic Inventory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953, p. 327.
6. Simpson, G. G., *The Meaning of Evolution*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949, p. 344.
7. Redfield, Robert, "Anthropological Understanding of Man," *AQ*, XXIII: 1 (1959) p. 6.
8. Goldenweiser, A., *Anthropology: An Introduction to Primitive Culture*. New York: F. S. Crofts, 1937, p. 429.

species. Other animals of every variety behave throughout their entire lives according to a pattern of behavior provided specifically for the species and inherited genetically. Man alone inherits nothing except the physical and physiological equipment with which he is born and must then learn all of his social behavior and the content, meaning, and expectations of his culture from that moment on. This is not to say that non-human animals do not learn. They learn too and are taught a great deal by their own kind, not to mention what they are sometimes taught by man. But if matured in isolation and then dropped among other members of their species their behavior would be relatively complete as compared with man's under the same hypothetical circumstances. Man would have no way of knowing how the new-found members of his species expected him to act. He would not have their customs nor values; he could not even communicate with them until he learned how.

The *proportion* of the learned behavior of non-human animals in comparison with their built-in behavior is so different from man's that although it might conceivably amount to a difference in degree it is more often conceded that the difference is of such a magnitude as to be a difference in kind.⁹ For animal species vary, to be sure, in the proportion of learning which contributes to their total behavior. But there are no societies of people anywhere who have a lesser proportion of learned behavior and more of genetically determined behavior than others.¹⁰ This is why an Eskimo infant and a Zulu infant, if exchanged at birth and each brought up in the home of the other would become like the people of his foster home in every way except that he would retain the physical characteristics of his own race. These facts have important implications for the approach to problems involving race relations in our own society.¹¹

Another basic distinction emphasized by anthropologists and contained within culture is the capacity for language. Though all animals communicate, only man can communicate symbolically about something which is not present to his senses. Man alone can communicate about the abstract. Thus he is able to accumulate knowledge by means of writing. In language mankind has the key to communications concerning the past and the future. All other animals are limited in their communication to the here and now. It follows, then, that since there is no language common to the human species, it too is a part of culture. Symbolic, cultural behavior, then, is the anthropological hallmark of mankind.

For most anthropologists, religion too is subsumed entirely under the cultural category. Furthermore each religion is seen in its social and

9. A unique presentation of arguments leading to this conclusion is presented by Adler, M. B., *The Difference of Man and the Difference It Makes*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967.

10. The development of this portion is adapted from the author's "Consideration of Man," *JASA*, 18:1 (1966), pp. 20-21.

11. Buswell, J. O., III, *Slavery, Segregation and Scripture*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964, pp. 71-73.

personal meaning as limited to the members of that culture only. Just as a traffic rule that one's vehicle should be driven on one side of the road or the other is *relative* to whether one is driving in England or America, so religions are considered relative by most anthropologists.

Cultural relativism results from a combination of the tremendous variety allowed by man's instinct-free behavior with a rigid rejection of anything above and beyond culture in the methodology of its interpretation. By definition the supernatural is ruled out. "Thus man creates the world in his own image," writes Leslie White. "This is the philosophy of supernaturalism."¹² The levels of organization upon which the sciences have based their specialties reflect the hierarchy of content as well as method in the study of mankind. Man is a chemical, physical, organic, psychic, social, cultural being. "Culture is the top level recognized to date," wrote Alfred L. Kroeber in a famous essay; and added, "Personally I would not have the glimmer of a suspicion as to what a level of organization higher than that of culture might be."¹³

Scientists do not agree upon just where to drive their stakes within the range of "unbelief" in the supernatural. They seem to run the gamut between extremes. At the one pole with those mentioned above is the adoption of "the perpetual heresy" as outlined by Bronowski: (a) "The world is not exceptional;" (b) "man is not unique;" and (c) "an unbroken line runs from the stone to the cactus and on to the camel, and there is no supernatural leap in it. No special act of creation, no spark of life was needed to turn dead matter into living things."¹⁴ For Bronowski "man is not different in kind from other forms of life"¹⁵ and an appeal to something outside of nature, to some supernatural creator, "is something of a philosopher's fraud."¹⁶

Approaching the other pole, perhaps, is the "kind of heresy" espoused by paleoanthropologist Loren Eiseley who, within the range of alternatives including (a) "supernatural explanations or... a dualism which is scientifically dubious," and (b) the view "that life did not arise on this planet, but was wafted here through the depths of space," feels that "we are forced to examine our remaining notion [(c)] that life is not coterminous with matter, but has arisen from it."¹⁷ This is not Eiseley's "heresy." His is the fact that his intimacy with nature and his insight and imagination is such that he cannot bring himself to accept the proposition that the secret of life is attainable through science, at least as presently practiced.

12. White, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

13. Kroeber, A. L., *The Nature of Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952, p. 124.

14. Bronowski, J., *The Identity of Man*. Garden City, N.Y.: Natural History Press, 1965, pp. 3, 4.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 8 (a position ably disputed by Adler, *op. cit.*).

16. Bronowski, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

17. Eiseley, Loren, *The Immense Journey*. New York: Random House, 1957, pp. 200-201.

It is only that somewhere among these seeds and beetle shells and abandoned grasshopper legs I find something that is not accounted for very clearly in the dissections to the ultimate virus or crystal or protein particle. Even if the secret is contained in these things, in other words, I do not think it will yield to the kind of analysis our science is capable of making."¹⁸

Turning to the position of the Christian anthropologist, there are certain Biblical assumptions which the typical anthropologist today does not accept, not because he is an anthropologist but only if he is *not* a Christian. This is very important because there are no data in anthropology regarding man's prehistory and early forms,¹⁹ his racial varieties in the present,²⁰ and his cultural nature in all time and space which conflict with a thorough-going, orthodox Christianity, based solidly upon the Bible.

The assumptions which the Christian adds to the anthropological view of man's distinctive nature are:

(a) The creative activity of a supernatural agent in man's origin resulting in the image of the Creator being stamped upon him as a spiritual, cultural, and as yet sinless living creature.

(b) The subsequent sin and fall of man changing his fundamental nature from the state in which it was created.

The first of these assumptions resting upon the teachings of Genesis I and II, constitutes the basis for the Creationist position regarding human origins.²¹ The second is an essential for the Christian view of human nature. The two assumptions are tied together inextricably. The one cannot be held without the other.

Moreover, the first assumption accepted within the anthropological framework of the antiquity of man in no way jeopardizes the second. Theologians have criticized Christian anthropologists on this count for thereby ignoring, if not denying, the Biblical doctrine of the Fall.²² There need be no intrinsic conflict here. The Christian doctrine of the Fall demands no compromise on the part of the anthropologist.

There are two aspects to this problem: (a) the lack of any necessary connection between the Fall of Adam and the date of his creation, and (b) the positive necessity of retaining the doctrine of the Fall for the view of man to be called "Christian."

In the first place, as the great defender of Biblical inspiration, Benjamin B. Warfield, has written,

18. *Ibid.*, p. 202.

19. See the author's "Piltdown Man," *JASA* 6:1 (1954), pp. 29-30; "A Creationist Interpretation of Prehistoric Man," in Mixer R. L., (ed.), *Evolution and Christian Thought Today*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959; and "Homo habilis: Implications for the Creationist," *JASA* 17:3 (1965), pp. 74-78.

20. See the author's "The Contribution of Anthropology to the Understanding of Race," *JASA* 5:2 (1953), pp. 5-7; and "Segregation: Is It Biblical?" *Eternity* 13:10 (Oct. 1962).

21. Vide supra. fn. 19 and Wilson, Donald R., "How Early Is Man?" *CT* VI:24, (1962), pp. 27-28.

22. Henry, C. F. H., "Editorial," *CT* IX:8 (1965), p. 28. Buswell, J. O., III, "Man's Antiquity and Fall," *CT* IX:12, p. 22.

In a word, the scriptural data leave us wholly without guidance in estimating time which elapsed between the creation of the world and the deluge, and between the deluge and the call of Abraham. *So far as the scripture assertions are concerned*, we may suppose any length of time to have intervened between these events which may otherwise appear reasonable.²³

The data on what "otherwise" appears reasonable has accumulated and changed with the advance of palaeoanthropology. The Scriptural assertions remain the same. The great theologian, Charles Hodge, had written forty years earlier, "the Scriptures do not teach us how long men have existed on the earth."²⁴ Thus it would seem that, for the belief in the doctrine of the Fall, Adam's antiquity is wholly irrelevant.

In the second place if one claims the position of "Christian," especially for the conservative Catholic and evangelical Protestant, the New Testament teachings of the Fall and its meaning are just as important as the Genesis account, if not more so.²⁵

In Romans 5:12-19, and I Corinthians 15:21-22, 45 and 47 we have the clear teaching of a three-fold set of contrasts between Adam and Christ: the Contrast of Identification, the Contrast of Imputation, and the Contrast of Destination.

ADAM	CHRIST
Identification Was made a living being, of the earth; a sinner	Was made a life-giving spirit, the Lord from heaven
Imputation By disobedience many were made sinners	By obedience many shall be made righteous
Destination By sin, through offense, condemnation of death Sin reigned unto death By man came death In Adam all die	By righteousness, through the grace of God justification of life Grace reigns unto eternal life By man came also the resurrection of the dead In Christ all shall be made alive

23. Warfield, B. B., "On the Antiquity and Unity of the Human Race," PTR IX, (1911) pp. 1-25. Reprinted in Craig, S.C., (editor), *Biblical and Theological Studies*. Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1952, p. 247. Emphasis mine.
24. Hodge, Charles, *Systematic Theology*. Three volumes. 1871. Reprinted in Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960. Vol. II, p. 41.
25. For the conservative Roman Catholic position see Cotter, A. C., *The Encyclical "Humani Generis" With a Commentary*. Weston: Weston College Press, 1951, p. 43.

Thus, in the teachings of the Apostle Paul, the identity of the first man, his perfect state, his subsequent sin and changed state, and the implications of this for all mankind, all focus upon the consequent need of redemption for all mankind provided for by Jesus Christ. The pattern in all of its aspects is essential for an understanding of the Christian view of human nature, i.e., fallen until redeemed, and redemption provided for in Christ.

P. E. Hughes has made the same point most effectively in the words of Emil Brunner:

If the Fall is surrendered this would mean nothing less than the shattering of the foundations of the whole Biblical doctrine of man, and indeed the whole Biblical doctrine of revelation and salvation.²⁶

Apart from the doctrine of the Fall it is impossible to understand Sin as the presupposition of the New Testament message of Redemption. Only a *fallen* humanity needs a Redeemer.²⁷

Thus the methodology of the Christian anthropologist adds one more level to those which are already well established in the organization of science. For the position of creationism, for the moral nature of man, and for the cross-cultural relevance of the Gospel the *Imago Dei* and the theological heart of Christianity manifested in the attributes of God, the salvation of Jesus Christ, and the inspiration and convicting power of the Holy Spirit constitute a supercultural²⁸ or supracultural level of reality above and beyond culture, that is, non-cultural. This is the realm of the absolute.

No wonder Goldenweiser, whose position is representative of most anthropologists before and since, could not conceive of any possible legitimation of Christian missions. Indeed such activity would be "cultural snobbishness" from premises limited by cultural relativism. The entire rationale of Christian missions in the face of such accusations stands forthrightly upon the legitimacy of a supracultural mandate to communicate a supracultural message applicable to all cultures though its forms and expressions remain relative and culturally indigenous. It

26. Brunner, H. Emil, *Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1952, p. 50. Quoted by Hughes, P. E., *Christianity and the Problem of Origins*. Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1964, p. 32.
27. Brunner, *op. cit.*, p. 90, quoted by Hughes, loc. cit. My position on this point compared with evolution on the one hand and theological liberalism on the other can be stated in no better way than James Orr stated it in 1905 (*God's Image in Man and Its Defacement in the Light of Modern Denials*. Reprinted in Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948, pp. 19-20, and especially 157-159.)
28. Smalley, W. A. and Marie Fetzner (Reyburn), "A Christian View of Anthropology," in *Modern Science and Christian Faith*. American Scientific Affiliation, Wheaton: Van Kampen Press, second edition, 1950; Taylor, Robert B., "Cultural Relativism for the Christian," *PA* 1:7 (1954), pp. 108-119; Samarin, Wm. J., "Theology and/or Anthropology," *PA* 1:7 (1954), pp. 120-121; Smalley, Wm. A., "Culture and Superculture," *PA* 2:3 (1955), pp. 58-71; and Welmers, Wm. E., "A 'Transformed' Relativism," *PA* 2:1 (1955), pp. 17-20.

must be admitted, however, that Christian missionaries, with notable exceptions, have all too frequently contributed case histories to Goldenweiser's characterization of missions merely by confusing and merging an ethnocentric mandate to civilize with the supracultural mandate to Christianize.

There is one more set of views represented mainly by non-anthropologists which should be considered in this context. The sub-title of playwright Robert Ardrey's popular book *African Genesis* is "A Personal Investigation into the Animal Origins and Nature of man."²⁹ He with ethologist Conrad Lorenz (*On Aggression*³⁰), physician Anthony Storr (*Human Aggression*³¹) and certain others have lately championed a view of man's aggression as based essentially on instinct, or at least on capacities derived out of his supposed pre-human state. Ardrey holds that man's aggression plus the drive to acquire private property, the hostility of territorial neighbors, and a number of other forces are all "human instincts derived from ancient animal patterns."³² He considers the weapon to be "the hallmark of human culture."³³ Thus the origin of man's aggression is explained, with the implication that he is relieved of the responsibility for it. Human society as well as man's conscience are products of animal inheritance.³⁴ We are, for all our tragically ineffective civilization, "Cain's children."

Storr more cautiously comes to the tentative conclusion that, "provided that the term aggression is not restricted to actual fighting, aggressive expression may be as necessary a part of being a human being as sexual expression."³⁵

Ashley Montagu, on the other hand, opposes such views and their predecessors which over-stated Darwin's thesis of the survival of the fittest and which misapplied it to human society. He holds that such views stem from and were essentially attempts to validate the traditional concept of the total depravity of man. On the contrary, he asserts, the total depravity assumption is nonsense. "There is absolutely no evidence—indeed, the evidence is entirely in the opposite direction—that man is in any way 'programmed' to behave aggressively. Throughout the two million years of man's evolution the highest premium has been placed on cooperation, not merely *intragroup* cooperation, but also upon *intergroup* cooperation, or else there would be no human beings today."³⁶ Montagu believes that "The myth of early man's aggressiveness belongs

29. Ardrey, Robert, *African Genesis: A Personal Investigation Into the Animal Origins and Nature of Man*. New York: Dell, 1961.

30. Lorenz, Konrad, *On Aggression*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966.

31. Storr, Anthony, *Human Aggression*. New York: Atheneum, 1968.

32. Ardrey, *op. cit.*, p. 318.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 206.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 358.

35. Storr, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

36. Montagu, M. F. Ashley, *The Human Revolution*. New York: Bantam Books, 1965, p. 121.

in the same class as... the myth of 'innate depravity' or 'original sin.'"³⁷ In contrast to instinct he emphasizes culture but in so doing he includes too much.

Biologist Robert Bigelow in a recent book, *The Dawn Warriors* combines the two positions. On the one hand he considers the thesis that man is innately peaceful to be "one of the gloomiest of modern philosophies,"³⁸ for, after all, we are then collectively a total failure. He considers war to be "the process that made us." On the other hand he sees "cooperation for conflict" gradually being superseded by "cooperation for peaceful competition," believing that "the key to survival is global cooperation."

The two extremes are not the concern of most anthropologists. Nevertheless there is considerable rebuttal in anthropological literature. Works of the Lorenz-Ardrey-Storr variety as well as *The Naked Ape* and *Man and Monkey* by zoologists Desmond Morris and Leonard Williams, respectively, among others, are severely criticized by anthropologists for their manifest naivete regarding the nature and importance of culture as the dominant factor in human behavior.³⁹ Few go as far as Ashley Montagu in emphasizing man's nature as essentially cooperative.

All of them, anthropologist and non-anthropologist alike, are limited by the prevailing naturalistic philosophical presuppositions in the instinct vs. culture argument over why it is that man alone, among all the animals in the world, kills, maims, and tortures members of his own species. *What can one expect of man, after all, if his behavior is deprived of all controlling instincts on the one hand and he rejects all supracultural convictions on the other?*

It is the perspective of the Christian anthropologist that man's aggression and cooperation—both cultural, not instinctive—are prompted by motives *directly* related to whether or not he has "passed from death unto life." For, just as the Scriptural account of the Fall and the comparisons of Adam and Christ indicate, man's initially peaceful, perfect nature was fundamentally altered presumably before cultural traditions were founded. But his subsequent condition under the Fall need not be permanent either as though there were a genetic or primeval die cast to determine forever his predominating aggression. Such a condition may be fundamentally altered by the voluntary acceptance of God's own sacrifice in the person of Jesus Christ.

Periodicals are abbreviated as follows:

AA—American Anthropologist

AQ—Anthropological Quarterly

CT—Christianity Today

JASA—Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation

PA—Practical Anthropology

PTR—Princeton Theological Review

37. *Ibid.*, p. 122; see also Montagu, M. F. A., *Darwin, Competition, and Cooperation*. New York: Schuman 1959; and Montagu, M.F.A. (ed.), *Man and Aggression*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968.

38. Bigelow, Robert, *The Dawn Warriors*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1969. Quotations are from a TV interview, New York, CBS, March 8, 1970.

39. Montagu, (ed. 1968), *op. cit.*; see especially Williams, Leonard, *Man and Monkey*. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1967, pp. 138-139; and Morris, Desmond, *The Naked Ape: A Zoologist's Study of the Human Animal*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967, chapter 1.