11. *Eighteen Professions*[1]

A. L. KROEBER (1876–1960)

ANTHROPOLOGY TODAY INCLUDES two studies which fundamental differences of aim and method render irreconcilable. One of these branches is biological and psychological; the other, social or historical.[2]

There is a third field, the special province of anthropology, concerned with the relation of biological and social factors. This is no-man's-land, and therefore used as a picnic-ground by whosoever prefers pleasure excursions to the work of cultivating a patch of understanding. Some day this tract will also be surveyed, fenced, and improved. Biological science already claims it; but the title remains to be established. For the present, the labor in hand is the delimitation of the scope of history from that of science.[3]

In what follows, historical anthropology, history, and sociology are referred to as history. Physical anthropology and psychology are included in biology.[4]

1. *The aim of history is to know the relations of social facts to the whole of civilization.*

Civilization means civilization itself, not its impulses. Relation is actual connection, not cause.[5]

2. *The material studied by history is not man, but his works.*

(1915)

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[1] Readers expecting an excursion into the uses of anthropology in the early twentieth century are bound to be disappointed by this essay. Kroeber uses the word *professions* to mean items of belief rather than jobs that an anthropologist might do. Most Boasian anthropologists prided themselves on replacing what they considered the empty theorizing of nineteenth-century scholars such as Morgan and Tylor with the scientific reasoning of Franz Boas. They often reminded students that Boas was trained in the physical sciences. By using the word *professions,* Kroeber is emphasizing the notion that he considers these points to be the bedrock of anthropology.

Kroeber's early training was in English, and he held both a B.A. and an M.A. in that subject. Even though he earned a Ph.D. in anthropology (his doctoral dissertation was a twenty-eight-page paper on Arapaho art that attacked nineteenth-century evolutionary assumptions about the meaning and form of symbols), he retained a deep interest in history and the humanities throughout his life. He believed that anthropology should be objective, but he differed with Boas on its subject matter. Boas believed that anthropologists should focus on the intensive study of a single society. Kroeber was more interested in regional surveys of general traits (Jacknis 2002:525).

[2] Anthropologists today often bemoan the collapse of the four-field approach, the notion that they should be trained in physical, archaeological, linguistic, and cultural anthropology. We tend to look at the early American anthropologists as masters of all of these fields. However, tension among the fields dates from the early twentieth century, and even Boas and his students argued about whether all of these areas could be covered in a single field of study. Kroeber devoted his life to the study of cultural anthropology, archaeology, and linguistics but did little with physical anthropology.

[3] At the time this essay was published in *American Anthropologist* (1915) very little was known of human evolution and the biology of human variation. In this paragraph, Kroeber is making fun of the physical anthropology of his era. Much anthropology of this time was devoted to showing that people other than Europeans were biologically, intellectually, and socially inferior. Here he pokes fun at this work but his comments indicate that he considers biology's claim to physical anthropology to be an open issue.

[4] Like Boas, Kroeber understands anthropology as a type of cultural history. Cultures are created by their own histories, and therefore understanding them is a form of historical research.

[5] Kroeber uses the term *social facts* in his first profession. In doing so, he is referencing Durkheim (see essay 6). Kroeber looked to both Durkheim and Spencer as critical nineteenth-century thinkers in anthropology and sociology. To some extent, this essay and Durkheim's are designed to

It is not men, but the results of their deeds, the manifestations of their activities, that are the subject of historical inquiry.[6]

3. *Civilization, though carried by men and existing through them, is an entity in itself, and of another order from life.*

History is not concerned with the agencies producing civilization, but with civilization as such. The causes are the business of the psychologist. The entity civilization has intrinsically nothing to do with individual men nor with the aggregates of men on whom it rests. It springs from the organic, but is independent of it. The mental processes of groups of men are, after all, only the collected processes of individuals reacting under certain special stimuli. Collective psychology is therefore ultimately resolvable into individual human psychology, just as this in turn is resolvable into organic psychology and physiology. But history deals with material which is essentially non-individual and integrally social. History is not concerned with the relations of civilization to men or organisms, but with the interrelations of civilization. The psychic organization of man in the abstract does not exist for it, save as something given directly and more or less completely to the student's consciousness. The uncivilized man does not exist; if he did, he would mean nothing to the historian. Even civilized man is none of history's business; its sphere is the civilization of which man is the necessary basis but which is inevitable once this basis exists.[7]

4. *A certain mental constitution of man must be assumed by the historian, but may not be used by him as a resolution of social phenomena.*

The historian can and should obtain for himself the needed interpretation of man's mind from familiarity with social facts and the direct application to them of his own psychic activities. This interpretation is likely to be of service in proportion as it emanates immediately from himself and not from the formulated laws of the biological psychologist. Whether an understanding of civilization will or will not help the psychologist is for the latter to determine.[8]

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serve similar ends. In both, the authors try to delineate anthropology or sociology as particular fields of study separate from other fields. However, there are several critical differences. First, Kroeber uses the term *social fact* without defining it. This makes its meaning much broader than that given to it by Durkheim. Second, Durkheim set out to model sociology on the natural sciences, but Kroeber was opposed to such modeling.

[6] In this profession Kroeber is emphasizing the Boasian focus on fieldwork and patterns of diffusion between areas. Further, although we do not remember Kroeber as a museum curator today, a major part of his early work at Berkeley was setting up the anthropology museum there, collecting material for exhibits, and curating those collections. The focus on material works in the second profession reflects Kroeber's background in museum work and emphasis on the diffusion of cultural traits in his research.

[7] In professions 3 and 4, Kroeber proclaims that civilization is totally separate from the individuals who compose it. Like Durkheim, he rejects the notion that culture or society can be reduced to the actions of human minds, working either separately or as a group. One of the key tenants of Kroeber's anthropology (and one that he will develop further in this essay) is that individuals count for little or nothing in culture. Following Spencer and Durkheim, Kroeber claims that culture is superorganic; that is, that it has an existence separate from the human beings who compose it, and follows a pattern of its own.

Kroeber also argues here that the focus of anthropological research should be on wide cultural patterns that could be demonstrated by studying the diffusion of cultural traits. Despite Boas' urgings for him to settle down and study one group, Kroeber was more interested in conducting comparative surveys of data over large geographical areas (Jacknis 2002:525–526). These interests are the background for his statements about "civilization," by which he means culture, as an entity in itself.

[8] There are two very important aspects of this statement. First, note the primacy that Kroeber gives to social facts and culture. He notes that psychology, "man's mind," cannot explain culture, but rather culture, social facts, can be used to help explain human psychology. Second, note that Kroeber advises historians to examine their own minds. In so doing, he reflects his own experience and the dictates of Freudian psychoanalysis. This essay was written in 1915, in the years that Kroeber called his "Hegira," a word generally used to refer to the prophet Mohammad's years of exile from Mecca. It was a tragic era in Kroeber's life that began with the death of his first wife, Henriette Rothschild, in 1913. There were numerous calamities in the years that followed, including the death of Ishi, a Yana Indian who

5. *True instincts lie at the bottom and origin of social phenomena, but cannot be considered or dealt with by history.*

History begins where instincts commence to be expressed in social facts.

6. *The personal or individual has no historical value save as illustration.*

Ethnological genealogies are valuable material. So are the actions of conspicuous historical personages. But their dramatic, anecdotic, or biographic recital is biographic or fictional art, or possibly psychology, not history.[9]

7. *Geography, or physical environment, is material made use of by civilization, not a factor shaping or explaining civilization.*

Civilization reacts to civilization, not to geography. For the historian, geography does not act on civilization, but civilization incorporates geographical circumstances. Agriculture presupposes a climate able to sustain agriculture, and modifies itself according to climatic conditions. It is not caused by climate. The understanding of agricultural activity is to be sought in the other phenomena of civilization affecting it.[10]

8. *The absolute equality and identity of all human races and strains as carriers of civilization must be assumed by the historian.*

The identity has not been proved nor has it been disproved. It remains to be established, or to be limited, by observations directed to this end, perhaps only by experiments. The historical and social influences affecting every race and every large group of persons are closely intertwined with the alleged biological and hereditary ones, and have never yet been sufficiently separated to

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had lived and worked with Kroeber. Throughout it all, Kroeber had an ear infection that was misdiagnosed as "neurasthenia," a nineteenth- and early twentieth-century term for a neurotic mental disorder. This, combined with an apparent mid-life crisis, led Kroeber to psychoanalysis in 1917. After undergoing analysis by a student of Freud, he returned to California and practiced for several years as a Freudian psychoanalyst, taking partial leave from his university position to do so.

[9] Here again, Kroeber stresses the importance of the social and cultural above the individual. Kroeber and many other American anthropologists arrayed themselves against the Great Man theory of history. Much of history was then (and still is) taught as biography. Historians and students tend to understand policies and practices as the result of the ideas and will of single individuals. Thus, books about the American presidents are extraordinarily popular and people debate whether or not World War II would have happened without Hitler. Kroeber and others such as Leslie White (1949) argued that such individuals made no difference at all; they were merely placeholders, representing trends and tendencies in their social and cultural systems.

Kroeber's radical deemphasis of the individual led him away from Boas and others such as Sapir and Radin, who believed that culture was the result of the interplay of individuals and their society. Kroeber's condemnation of the use of the individual to explain history raises another issue: Kroeber himself developed a close personal and research relationship with a single individual, Ishi, and relied primarily on information from Ishi in his work on the Yana. If culture was really superorganic and "ethnological genealogies" are not history, i.e., anthropology, then why did Kroeber go to such great lengths to cultivate and maintain his relationship with Ishi?

[10] In profession 7, Kroeber rejects any role of environment in shaping culture. In this he follows his mentor Boas. The idea that environment determined culture was popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Europeans and white Americans often explained cultural differences by reference to climate and geography. One typical example was the notion that northern Europeans were hardworking and hardy because they had to deal with harsh winters whereas Africans, Mexicans, etc. were uncivilized because tropical climates made them lazy. The Boasians rejected formulations such as this. In the 1880s, Boas was interested in the relationship between environment, geography, and society but this interest clearly waned after his experiences on Baffin Island. According to his student Gladys A. Reichard (1893–1955), Boas came to believe that the Eskimo "did things in spite of rather than because of the environment" (quoted in Herskovitz 1957:115). Most Boasians followed this line of reasoning and saw very little connection between culture and environment.

Kroeber's student, Julian Steward (see essay 19), was an important exception. Steward formulated a theory in which the relationship between environment and culture was the cornerstone of anthropological study.

allow demonstration of the actual efficiency of either. All opinions on this point are only convictions falsely fortified by subjectively interpreted evidence. The biologist dealing with man must assume at least some hereditary differences, and often does assume biological factors as the only ones existent. The historian, until such differences are established and exactly defined, must assume their non-existence. If he does not base his studies on this assumption, his work becomes a vitiated mixture of history and biology.[11]

9. *Heredity cannot be allowed to have acted any part in history.*

Individual hereditary differences undoubtedly exist, but are not historical material because they are individual. Hereditary differences between human groups may ultimately be established, but like geography must in that event be converted into material acted upon by the force of civilization, not treated as causes of civilization.

10. *Heredity by acquirement is equally a biological and historical monstrosity.*

This naive explanation may be eliminated on the findings of biology; but should biology ever determine that such heredity operates through a mechanism as yet undiscovered, this heredity must nevertheless be disregarded by history together with congenital heredity. In the present stage of understanding, heredity by acquirement is only too often the cherished inclination of those who confuse their biological thinking by the introduction of social aspects, and of those who confound history by deceiving themselves that they are turning it into biology.[12]

11. *Selection and other factors of organic evolution cannot be admitted as affecting civilization.*

It is actually unproved that the processes of organic evolution are materially influencing civilization or that they have influenced it. Civilization obviously introduces an important factor which is practically or entirely lacking in the existence of animals and plants, and which must at least largely neutralize the operation of any kind of selection. Prehistoric archaeology shows with certainty that civilization has changed profoundly without accompanying material alterations in the human organism. Even so far as biological evolution may ultimately be proved in greater or less degree for man, a correspondence between organic types and civilizational forms will have to be definitely established before history can concern itself with these organic types or their changes.[13]

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[11] The complete rejection of biologically based racism was one of the most critical achievements of Boas and his students. Boas fought long and hard against the idea of race and the practice of racism. He attracted students sympathetic to his notions about race and imbued them with a passion for the idea that all human differences are the result of culture rather than biology. In this profession and the several following, Kroeber summarizes and reiterates this Boasian belief.

Kroeber's discussion of profession 8 closely resembles the argument that Boas made when attacking theories of unilineal evolution (essay 10). Like Boas, Kroeber says that the evidence is inadequate to conclude whether or not the human races and their cultures are equal or not, and until better data can be gathered one must assume their equality.

[12] This profession was more controversial in 1915 than it sounds today. Kroeber is not typically remembered for his political or social activism, but this statement was a major stand on his part. In Kroeber's day, Lamarckian evolution (the inheritance of acquired characteristics, or "heredity by acquirement") was a common belief. Mendel's laws of genetics had been rediscovered only recently and were not very widely known. It was popularly believed that undesirable behaviors such as crime, prostitution, and alcoholism were hereditary, and that certain classes and ethnic groups were predisposed to these behaviors. This belief in part fed the American eugenics movement of the first decades of the twentieth century during which there was a call for the involuntary sterilization of "undesirables." It is this sort of public policy that Kroeber is calling "monstrous."

[13] Like those above it, this profession continues Kroeber's direct attack on scientific racism and the notion that there were superior or inferior cultures. Much of anthropology (particularly physical anthropology) between the Civil War and the 1920s was aimed at proving the hereditary and biological superiority of northern Europeans. Social Darwinists of Kroeber's day argued that the technological superiority of the industrialized nations was proof that they were evolutionarily superior. Kroeber, like Boas, rejects all notions of biological superiority or inferiority.

12. *The so-called savage is no transition between the animal and the scientifically educated man.*

All men are totally civilized. All animals are totally uncivilized because they are almost totally uncivilizable. The connecting condition which it is universally believed must have existed, is entirely unknown. If ever it becomes known, it can furnish to the historian only an introduction to history. There is no higher and lower in civilization for the historian. The ranging of the portions of civilization in any sequence, save the actual one of time, place, and connection, is normally misleading and always valueless. The estimation of the adult savage as similar to the modern European child is superficial and prevents his proper appreciation either biologically or historically.[14]

13. *There are no social species or standard cultural types or stages.*

A social species in history rests on false analogy with organic species. A stage in civilization is merely a preconception made plausible by arbitrarily selected facts.[15]

14. *There is no ethnic mind, but only civilization.*

There are only individual minds. When these react on each other cumulatively, the process is merely physiological. The single ethnic or social existence is civilization, which biologically is resolvable purely into a product of physiological forces, and historically is the only and untranscendable entity.[16]

15. *There are no laws in history similar to the laws of physico-chemical science.*

All asserted civilizational laws are at most tendencies, which, however determinable, are not permanent quantitative expressions. Nor are such tendencies the substitute which history has for the laws of science. History need not deny them

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[14] This profession is a resounding statement of Boasian cultural relativism and an attack on the social evolutionary theories of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Throughout this essay, Kroeber has used the term *civilization* as synonymous with culture. He does so to shock the reader and make a point. In Kroeber's day, readers would have been surprised by the usage because scholars equated civilization with either ancient state-level society or the fine arts. The notion that technologically simple societies were civilized would strike them as incongruous. Today, the usage is equally surprising but for a different reason. Now, anthropologists generally equate civilization with state-level societies and use the term *culture* to speak of all societies. However, by insisting that all human societies are civilizations and all humans are equally civilized, Kroeber proposes radical equality, not only of societies but, by implication, of individual human beings as well. This was a touchstone of Boasian anthropology.

Note too that in profession 12, Kroeber explicitly rejects the unilineal evolutionary theories popular in the late nineteenth century and the "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny" argument that was common in the fields of biology, psychology, and medicine in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This is discussed in greater detail in the notes on pages 32 and 66.

The notion that an adult savage was equivalent to a European child was widely popularized by Freud's 1913 book, *Totem and Taboo*. In that work, Freud proposed a psychoanalytic theory for the origin of culture that depended on the notion that primitive people were similar to European children and neurotics. Given his deep involvement in psychoanalysis, it is curious that Kroeber so willingly attacked one of Freud's cherished ideas.

[15] In this profession, Kroeber provides a one-sentence summary of Boas' argument against evolutionism. Boas charged that evolutionist thinking was unscientific because evolutionists chose facts without regard to their historical and ethnographic context in order to fit their theories (see essay 10).

[16] In other words, culture is superorganic. It generates itself and cannot be reduced to the group thinking of the individuals who compose it. However, it is interesting that while many of Kroeber's statements closely track Durkheim's notions of social facts and *l'âme collective*, here he makes a decisive break. Durkheim proposed that the origin of culture was a process of "social condensation" created by a critical mass of individuals coming together. Here Kroeber says that when minds react cumulatively the result is purely physiological. He is unwilling to speculate on the origin of culture.

and may have to recognize them, but their formulation is not its end.[17]

16. *History deals with conditions sine qua non, not with causes.*

The relations between civilizational phenomena are relations of sequence, not of effect. The principles of mechanical causality, emanating from the underlying biological sciences, are applicable to individual and collective psychology. Applied to history, they convert it into psychology. An insistence that all treatment of civilizational data should be by the methods of mechanical causality is equivalent to a denial of the valid existence of history as a subject of study. The only antecedents of historical phenomena are historical phenomena.[18]

17. *The causality of history is teleological.*

Psychological causes are mechanical. For history, psychology is assumable, not demonstrable. To make the object of historical study the proving of the fundamental identity of the human mind by endless examples is as tedious as barren. If the process of civilization seems the worthwhile end of knowledge of civilization, it must be sought as a process distinct from that of mechanical causality, or the result will be a reintegration that is not history. Teleology of course does not suggest theology to those free from the influence of theology. The teleology of history involves the absolute conditioning of historical events by other historical events. This causality of history is as completely unknown and unused as chemical causality was a thousand and physical causality three thousand years ago.[19]

18. *In fine, the determinations and methods of biological, psychological, or natural science do not exist for history, just as the results and the manner of operation of history are disregarded by consistent biological practice.*

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[17] In many of the earlier professions, Kroeber's ideas seem similar to Durkheim's: Kroeber mentions social facts and he talks about the existence of something that sounds very much like Durkheim's notion of *l'âme collective* (in 1917, two years after this paper, Kroeber published a famous essay called "The Superorganic" in which he described his notion of culture in greater detail). However, in profession 15 he breaks from Durkheim and from the British social anthropologists who followed Durkheim. For Durkheim, the point of describing social facts and *l'âme collective* was to search for the laws by which societies happen. Durkheim believed that a science of society similar to the natural sciences could be developed. Kroeber rejects these notions entirely. In professions 15 and 16, he claims that while laws might exist, anthropologists should not be interested in finding them. Like Boas, Kroeber believes that cultures are understandable only in the context of their own historical and environmental circumstances.

[18] Here Kroeber says that the cause-and-effect relationships seen in the biological sciences do not apply to cultural phenomena. It is interesting that Kroeber rejects the notion that anthropology can be scientific but supports the idea that psychology is scientific. On the one hand, in the nineteenth century, Wilhelm Wundt and others developed a psychology that was based on laboratory experiments. Clearly, using such a technique was not possible for anthropologists. On the other hand, the form of psychology to which Kroeber was personally drawn was Freudian psychoanalysis, one of the least scientific theories of psychology imaginable.

[19] In this profession, Kroeber uses the word *teleology* in an interesting fashion. Teleology is the study of ultimate causes and is often linked to some religious conception of the world; the search for ultimate causes usually implies a series of beliefs about human destiny. Thus, Herbert Spencer's theory that evolution was a universal force driving everything to a destiny of perfection was teleological. Echoing Boas, Kroeber says that the cause of history is history, or in other words, culture is *sui generis* (see page 135). In the last sentence of the profession, Kroeber declares himself to be at the dawn of a new era of study. History has been dominated by studies of great men and the acts of literate nation-states. Now that we understand that history is anthropology and that it is not the biography of the great or the property of technologically advanced nations, Kroeber says, we can begin to document and understand it. For Kroeber, the goal of anthropology was to be knowledge itself—understanding for understanding's sake. In 1959, only a year before his death, Kroeber wrote: "The pursuit of anthropology must often have seemed strange and useless to many people, but no one has ever called it an arid or a toneless or a dismal science" (1959:404).

Most biologists have implicitly followed their aspect of this doctrine, but their consequent success has tempted many historians, especially sociologists, anthropologists, and theorists, to imitate them instead of pursuing their proper complementary method.[20]

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[20] Kroeber and most other Boasians maintained a strong stance against a scientific anthropology throughout their lives. In the same 1959 essay quoted above, Kroeber writes: "Now, maturity has stolen upon us. The times and utilitarianism have caught up with us, and we find ourselves classified and assigned to the social sciences. . . . As our daily bread, we invent hypotheses in order to test them, as we are told is the constant practice of the high tribe of physicists. If at times some of you, like myself, feel somewhat ill at ease in the house of social science, do not wonder; we are changelings therein; our true paternity lies elsewhere" (1959:404).