SOME POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITATIONS OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL RESEARCH

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SOME POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITATIONS OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL RESEARCH

It appears proper, that on such an occasion as this, I should attempt to indicate to you the scope of my study, as I see it, and its possible contribution to that understanding of the universe, with which all university studies are concerned. I wish to dwell particularly on those aspects of the study which are growing points at the present time.

Social anthropology is very closely related to sociology, the distinction between them being a historical accident, rather than a real division; there are, however, certain minor differences in subject and method. Sociology has been concerned primarily with modern western society, and social anthropology with primitive peoples; sociologists emphasize that social relationships are the subjects of their study, and they deal with these relationships in relative abstraction, while social anthropologists have devoted a great deal of attention to culture, and its diversities. As I see it, the anthropologist is also primarily concerned with social relationships, but in order to understand these relationships he has to study in detail every activity of the society. He does not know beforehand which activities may, or may not, be relevant to the particular relationship in which he is interested, and can only begin to abstract when he has found out how the members of the society with which he is concerned get a living, and bring up their families, and worship. The sociologist, working within a known society, can take a great deal for granted, and proceed directly to an analysis of relationships within the family, or village, or factory, or whatever group may be his field of study.

There are also differences in method adapted to work among primitive people on the one hand, and modern western society on the other, but it is noticeable that a number of field workers in recent years have sought to combine the techniques of both disciplines. Some anthropologists, impressed with the statistical techniques of the sociologists, have been wrestling with the collection of statistical data among primitive peoples; while others have been applying methods worked out among primitive peoples to civilised societies, the most notable achievement

in the latter field being Lloyd Warner's six volume study of "Yankee City." Lloyd Warner did his first field work among the Australian Aborigines, and he sets out to apply the methods of research he used among the Black Fellows to a New England town.

What then is the specific contribution of anthropology in the social field? I think social anthropology has two major contributions to make. The first is that it provides comparative material. It is concerned with the study of a great number of societies, many of them fantastically different from our own, and this material is necessary to the social sciences, for it is only by comparison of a wide range of societies that it is possible to discover what is essential to society and what is not, what is innate in human nature and what is culturally determined. The possibilities of experiment in the social sciences are limited, and it is commonly only by making wide comparisons that we can isolate at all. For example, the hypothesis that the techniques of a society determine the form of its family and political institutions, and its values, has been tested by a comparison of 650 primitive societies by Hobhouse, Wheeler and Ginsberg.[1] They found a measure of correlation, but not nearly so close a one as many political theorists would have us believe. This hypothesis, like many others, can be tested by such comparisons; the variety of cultures is the social scientist's laboratory. The anthropologist regards those who study social facts within one society alone as parochial in outlook, and is always insisting on the essential comparability of human societies, and the necessity of formulating hypothesis in such terms that they may be tested by the comparative method.

The historians, of course, have long provided rich comparative material, and many of our ideas about social institutions, such as the state, or the family, or private property, are based on a comparison of Greek, Roman and Medieval societies with our own, but the variety of societies on which the historian has the sort of material which is necessary for comparative study of social structure, is limited. Essential questions regarding those societies which differ widely from our own are left unanswered, and there is no hope of getting an answer. When, on the other hand, we compare contemporary primitive societies, we can usually get most of the necessary facts if we take the trouble to do the field work.

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[1] L. T. Hobhouse, G. C. Wheeler and M. Ginsberg: *The Material Culture and Social Institutions of the Simpler Peoples.*

The modern anthropologist is concerned with the study of social morphology, the classification of types of society through the comparison of whole societies. Earlier students made very wide comparisons of particular customs, such as the practice of sacrifice, or the cult of totems, or the practice of exogamy, but these piecemeal comparisons, even when made by scholars of the stature of Tylor and Frazer, have not got us very far, for they were comparisons of customs taken out of their social context, and distorted. A student of Africa, reading some of Frazer's African examples, hardly recognises the people he knows in the description of some queer custom, given in isolation, with perhaps an unwarranted interpretation attached. Hence the insistence to-day that we compare whole societies, or institions in their social context, and the pre-requisite for such a comparison is a detailed study of the societies to be compared. Through the detailed study and comparison of African political systems, kinship systems, and local organisation, which is now being pursued, certain social types begin to be defined. We can distinguish a type of primitive state with centralised organs of government, from stateless societies lacking such organs:[1] we can distinguish the societies in which lineage groups form local units, from those in which they do not,[2] and so on. But we do not yet know how far different structural characteristics are correlated, nor are we agreed on the citeria of classification. We think our problems are more complex than those which the botanists and zoologists have solved . . . certainly they seem so in our present pre-Linnaean stage, if I may coin such a phrase.

Radcliffe-Brown and others have insisted on the comparison of contiguous and somewhat similar societies, for it is by such comparisons that we can begin to demonstrate connections between particular variations. For example, I am working on a society in Central Africa, that of the Nyakyusa, of which the most obvious peculiarity is that its male members live all through their lives with age-mates. Boys between the ages of six and eleven set up villages of their own, and later, when they marry, they bring their wives to these villages, continuing in them until death. Each age-set establishes its own village in turn. All the other people in Africa about whom we have information live in kinship villages, a man setting up house either in his father's village, or that of his wife's father, or

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[1] cf. Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (Editors): *African Political Systems.*
[2] cf. M. Gluckman and others: Unpublished material.

possibly that of his own or his wife's mother's brother. Why then age-villages among the Nyakyusa? We shall probably never know enough of the history of Central Africa to answer that question completely, but we can show that certain other peculiarities of the Nyakusa system, such as an exceptionally strong taboo on familiarity between father-in-law and daughter-in-law (who may never see one another, much less enter the same house, or speak to one another) and a belief in the mystical power of village neighbours to bring illness on a wrongdoer, are associated with age-villages and probably not found in societies with kinship villages. I say probably, for we still know very little about most Central African groups, and as a field-worker I rarely commit myself to saying that a particular custom does not exist; I can only note that it has not been reported. I am seeking further evidence of an association betwen age-mates living together, and a belief in their mystical power over one another, in the warrior villages of the Masai, where young men live together in age-sets until marriage, and among the Kikuyu and Nandi-speaking peoples of Kenya, where members of each age-set have a club house in which they may meet and sleep.

One of the great contributions of the comparative study of societies is that it enables us to distinguish that which is culturally conditioned from that which is general, and may be assumed to be biologically conditioned. There is a tendency to assume that forms of behaviour which are common in our own society are biologically determined, but comparison with other societies shows that some of these assumptions are false. Freud, for example, assumed that the oedipus complex, the existence of which he demonstrated in Western Europe, was universal and biologically determined, but Malinowski showed that he was wrong. No conflict betwen father and son appears among the matrilineal Trobrianders, where authority lies not with the father, but with the mother's brother, and the tension which does occur between mother's brother and sister's son is not comparable to that between father and son in a patriarchal society, for the Trobriand mother's brother is in no sense a rival for the mother's affections, as is the western father. The whole pattern of the family is different, and consequently the conflicts which occur are different.[1] We may push this point somewhat further, and show that relationships in which there is tension are

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[1] B. Malinowski: ***Sex and Repression in Savage Society.***
The Father in Primitive Psychology.

culturally, not biologically determined. In one society the common conflicts are between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law—this is especially true when they live in the same homestead, as the Xhosa do—in another society mother-in-law and daughter-in-law may scarcely meet at all, but there is acute tension between a young husband on the one hand, and his father- and brothers-in-law on the other, for it is in their homestead that he must live and work. In other societies again, family tensions are concentrated in the relations of co-wives and half-brothers.

Dr. Mead, an American anthropologist, made a special study of adolescence in the South Seas, and she same to the conclusion that the emotional instability which we associate with adolescence was again culturally, not biologically, determined. She went on to a study of the variation in the approved types of personality in men and women in different societies, and showed that in a considerable measure the difference in type betwen men and women is culturally determined. She concludes that " temperaments which we regard as native to one sex (are) mere variations of human temperament, to which the members of either or both sexes may . . . be educated to approximate."[1] Male and female personalities are socially produced.

Apart from sex differences, it is quite clear that different cultures have different values, and foster different types of personality. Some societies foster competitive and acquisitive tendencies, while others do not; some foster aggressiveness, while others suppress it. Benedict argues that " the vast proportion of all individuals who are born into any society always, and whatever the idiosyncracies of its institutions, assume the behaviour dictated by that society."[2] The eccentric, the psychotic, is culturally determined—what is queer in one society is not queer in another. This difference exists in a lesser degree between different groups in our own society, where values vary in some measure within the society, and an artist in a stock-broker's family may be regarded as so eccentric as to border on madness, but yet be honoured among his fellow artists. Many of our novels turn on the difference in the values of different groups in our society, and the difficulties of the individual who is eccentric in the group into which he is born.

Considerable attention is now being directed to the methods by which different types of personality are

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[1] M. Mead: *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies*, p.xxii.
[2] R. Benedict: *Patterns of Culture*, p.254.

formed in different societies, and the ways in which aggressiveness or docility, competitiveness or co-operation, sociability, and independence, are developed. We can observe how far a sense of guilt is developed in different societies, and to what things it is attached. Is the fearless child a myth like the noble savage or not? Certainly, not only the things to which a sense of guilt is attached, vary, but also the degree in which such a sense is developed, and through our comparative studies we may hope to show just how it is formed. A field yet to be explored, and one I think likely to be fruitful, is that of the form and incidence of neurosis in different primitive societies. The notion that primitives do not suffer mental conflict is false.

The relevance of this kind of investigation to education is obvious; the comparative material indicates the malleability of human nature and the limits of that malleability, as well as the means by which different types of personality are formed.

The whole study of the relation between personality and culture has, I think, very great potentialities, and all honour is due to the group of American scholars—Mead, Benedict, Linton and Kardiner—who have led it, but the value of their results is in some measure limited by the quality of the field work on which it is based. All comparative and theoretical studies depend ultimately on the quality of the field material available, and when it comes to analysing values, and the training of children, we have to know a very great deal about the societies we are discussing to provide convincing evidence for each point made. This the students of personality and culture have not yet done.

In one respect their material is especially inadequate, and that is in the demonstration of the values of the societies they study. Here I want to suggest a line of approach which I believe to be particularly fruitful. The values of a society may be studied through an analysis of the types of behaviour punished and rewarded: we can discover, through an analysis of cases, the behaviour which incurs public disapproval, or action against the offender in the courts, or which is thought to be punished by illness and misfortune sent by angry relatives and neighbours, through the mystical powers they are believed to wield. We can show, for example, the kind of behaviour likely to lead to an accusation of witchcraft against a man, and the kind of behaviour that is thought to excite the malice of witches. We can discover also the types of behaviour

approved by the society, and the forms of reward in wealth, office, and prestige. The other approach to the study of values is through an analysis of the rituals performed, and of the associations made by the people concerned with the events of the ritual. This latter approach has scarcely yet been used, for though anthropological monographs contain endless accounts of rituals, and sometimes the observer's own interpretation of these rituals, they rarely give more than the barest hints as to the associations made by the participants. These associations are discoverable, in some societies at least; a good deal on the associations made by the Swazi in their ritual of kingship has recently been published by Dr. Kuper,[1] and there is a mass of material yet to be published on Nyakusa symbolism.

Freud in his *Totem and Taboo* appears to assume that symbolism is universal and that he can interpret primitive totemism through the symbolism of Western Europe. It may be true that some symbols are universal, while others are culturally defined, we do not know; but cerainly some vary with the society. For example, in Western society we do not take fire as a symbol of rank, yet in more than one African society subordination and dependence—as of people on a chief, or a junior leader on a senior—is symbolized by the dependent taking fire from the superior. The Nyakyusa have a myth that ten generations ago the ancestors of their chiefs came down from the Livingstone mountains to find, in the valley in which they now live, a barbarous people who had no fire and ate their food raw. The newcomers brought fire with them, and were made chiefs because of the great benefit they conferred —such is the myth. And still whenever a new chief is installed, all the fires in the country are extinguished, and new fire is made ceremonially, each village leader in order of rank taking it from the fire of his chief. If one asks why, the Nakyusa refer to their myth. We were told by a chief: " New fire is made at the installation of a chief because we chiefs came with fire, the commoners had not yet got it, they ate raw food only. When we came we slept in men's houses, and we made fire and cooked food. Men were astonished and said ' Ha! What is this?' They were burned with fire and they said: ' These people are chiefs because they brought this fire!' It is this they remember even to-day."

Not only for studies of personality and culture, but for most other comparative work also, our field

[1] H. Kuper: *An African Aristocracy.*

material is still inadequate. The work I have already mentioned of Hobhouse, Wheeler, and Ginsberg, in which they attempt to correlate techniques with the form of political and family institutions is in a measure invalidated by the quality of the field material used. Hence Malinowski's insistence that the first essential in anthropology was field-work, and he himself not only set a new standard in such work, but succeeded in training students to produce work of like quality.

I want you to consider a moment some of the conditions of effective field-work. The first is time—no one can learn a language and understand a hitherto unknown people in a few months: many of us think that three years is the minimum we should spend with one group. The second condition is adequate training, with anthropology and languages as the basis. The third is experience—a good field-worker does not emerge from the university ready-made, he learns his job partly in the field. And the last point, one often overlooked, is leisure to digest the material collected before finally leaving the field. The field-worker must be someone with a capacity for making friends with people of another culture and getting them to talk—often a difficult task. It is sometimes suggested the reason why there are many women anthropologists is that they like gossiping so much they can do it under any circumstances, and the gossip of another society is the anthropologist's gold. However, that may be, the field worker requires also application, patience, and a certain integrity and method, to which we shall refer again later.

As I have tried to show you, the diverse primitive groups that exist to-day can provide the testing ground of many social theories, if they are studied adequately now, but the opportunity for such study is fast disappearing. Innumerable groups of primitives are either dying out or being merged in Western society. We in South Africa will, no doubt, be thought singularly stupid by our descendants for neglecting to study closely a particularly interesting society, that of the Bushmen, until it was too late. Had Stowe pursued his studies to the north of the Amatole mountains 100 years ago, we might really have understood the kind of society that produced a stirring art, with the most elementary tools.

The second major contribution of anthropology to social studies is, I think, the insistence of synthesis. One after another the field-workers emphasise the inter-relation

of different aspects of society, insisting that economics is not to be understood apart from religion, or law apart from either of these; that the form of kinship, and local grouping, and the form of religious beliefs, are inextricably related.

One generation of anthropologists viewed this inter-relation in the contemporary moment alone—indeed Malinowski, the leading exponent of functional connections between contemporary institutions, was suspicious of any attempt to add time to his field—but most of his successors are agreed that to understand a primitive group we must study the relations between past and present generations, as well as between contemporary institutions, that is, that functionalism, in Malinowski's sense, must be applied in two dimensions, not only in one. A society or community is to be defined in time as well as in space.

The historians may protest that this is nothing new—they have long related economics to politics, and both to religion, and have shown that no institution is to be understood apart from its development. The anthropologist's reply is that he wants to push the synthesis a bit further. Though the historian may relate economics, and politics, and religion, he still leaves out essential facts—he will, for example, discuss in great detail mediaeval witch beliefs, and their relation to theology and politics, but leave out any account of the family organisation, or sex code of the people believing in witchcraft,[1] a knowledge of which an anthropologist holds essential to an understanding of the beliefs.

Synthesis is possible for the anthropologist because his fields of study are relatively small. Some of the primitive groups proving " intelligible fields of study " in Toynbee's sense are very small indeed—Tikopia, an island in the Pacific studied by Professor Firth, of London, is extremely isolated, its only direct contacts with the outside world being an annual visit from a mission steamer, and Tikopia had only 1286 inhabitants when Firth was there. The time scale of these primitive societies is correspondingly limited, few having a time depth of more than ten or twelve generations. In the primitive view time seldom begins more than 500 years back.

The anthropologist argues that having worked out methods of analysis and synthesis on small scale models,

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[1] e.g. R. Trevor Davis: *Four Centuries of Witch Beliefs.*

he is better able to study large and complex societies. Certainly in two recent studies of civilised groups by anthropologists, that of Lloyd Warner, which we have already noted, and that of Ruth Benedict on Japan, a synthesis of the type worked out in the primitive field is attempted.[1]

Social anthropology was dominated, in its earlier stages, by antiquarian interests. It was closely associated with physical anthropology and archaeology—I still find that the laity expect me to deal in stones and bones—and even within the social field, students were primarily concerned with origins. They discussed the origin of the state, the origin of marriage, the origin of religion, mixing a very small ration of observed fact with much speculation. Within recent years the emphasis has changed, and my generation has been concerned first with the study of existing primitive societies as they are, and secondly with the process of social change as we can observe it. We are wrestling with the problems of selective conservatism and selective borrowing, with the reasons why one primitive group accepts certain western techniques while another rejects them, why a group accepts some things and rejects others.[2]

Hitherto this problem has been discussed mainly in terms of cultural traits, and it has been stultified by the fact that many things included under "traits" are not comparable. I myself have come to the conclusion that selection in change is more profitably considered in terms of relationships—of why people enter into this type of relationship and reject that. I suggest that men enter into such relationships as appear to them to involve a rise in their relative social status, or to be necessary to maintain their existing status, and reject such relationships as appear to involve a loss in relative social status. The radicals are those who think they gain by change in one way or another, the conservatives those who think they lose by change. This is a line along which I have been thinking for some years, but there is no leisure to develop it this evening.

Three hypotheses about social change have emerged, which are supported by the evidence so far col-

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[1] R. Benedict: *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword.*
[2] cf. F. C. Bartlett, F.R.S.: *Psychology and Primitive Culture* 1923.
"Psychological Methods for the Study of Hard and Soft Features of Culture" in *Africa*. July, 1946.
M. Hunter: *Reaction to Conquest*, 1936. pp. 548 ff.

lected in Africa. The first is that when any one thing in a society is changed, the whole social structure is affected. Even if it is only that a few trade knives are introduced, relationships throughout the society are modified by the introduction. Goods or services must be directed to paying for the knives, rivalry for the possession of knives appears, perhaps the young men strengthen their position vis-à-vis their elders by their capacity to go out and work, and earn the coveted knives. The change is complex.

The second hypothesis, growing out of the first, is that the different aspects of society are so related that they ncessarily change together. There is a degree of autonomy between them, but it is relative. Economic changes cannot continue beyond a certain point without corresponding religious changes. A society *cannot* become civilised in some aspects and remain primitive in others.

The third hypothesis is that the measure of autonomy which exists between and within different social aspects allows of uneven change, and one of the manifestations of uneven change is disorder, incoherence, and disharmony. It is argued that the friction which exists in Africa at the present time is not primarily due to the rapid pace of change, but to its unevenness. These ideas have been worked out with reference to Central Africa in a recent book *The Analysis of Social Change*.[1]

If we can begin to understand social change we can begin to control it, and here we come to the contribution of anthropology to practical problems.

It is clearly necessary that any people ruling, teaching, and employing those of a different culture should know something about their culture. It is no accident that the foundation of our knowledge of the Bantu cultures of Southern Africa was laid by missionaries and administrators—men like McLean, Charles Brownlee, Callaway, Junod, Edwin Smith, and Dale, who found that they could not get on with their jobs without studying the people among whom they were working. Ignorance is inefficient.

So keenly do some anthropologists feel this that they are reluctant to teach people whose values they do nt approve. My own revered teacher in African anthropology at Cambridge, Jack Driberg, professed to dislike having intending missionaries at his lectures, on the ground that

[1] Godfrey and Monica Wilson: *The Analysis of Social Change Based on Observations in Central Africa.*

his teaching would make them what he called " too damned efficient." (That did not prevent him from taking a lot of trouble with people whose values were suspect.)

The need for specialist knowledge for administrators in Africa has long been recognised by the British Colonial Office, courses in social anthropology and in African languages being compulsory for those entering the Colonial Service, but in the Union it is still commonly assumed that growing up in this country automatically equips you with such a knowledge—it is taken to be part of the birthright of a South African. I am a South African myself, born and brought up in a Native area, and I went to school with Africans as a child. I know that the knowledge acquired through this background is useful, but also that it is very limited. Just as a child growing up in the country acquires some knowledge of plants and insects, but no systematic knowledge of botany, or entomology, without special study, so a South African may know somthing about African cultures from his own observations, but he can have no exact and systematic knowledge without special study.

We are still extremely ignorant of social facts in Africa. Not only do we lack the social statistics commonly available in civilised societies (a point repeatedly made by the Social and Economic Planning Council), but our knowledge of the traditional cultures, and the ways in which they are changing is meagre. The most obvious gaps in our knowledge of Southern Africa are in Southern Rhodesia, and in the South-West, and in the towns of the Union. We know nothing systematic about the main Bantu speaking groups of Southern Rhodesia—the Ndebele and Karanga people, or of the Herero and Ambo of South-West Africa. We know extremely little also of the life of Africans in the rapidly growing towns of southern Africa. When we come to consider a problem such as the causes of labour turnover among African employees in factories, for example, we lack not only the relevant statistics, but also much of the necessary information about the changing cultural background.

A certain difficulty arises here. The practical men —administrators, employers, missionaries—want studies directed to their particular problems with what they call " all the irrelevant stuff " left out. But since the different aspects of a society hang togther closely—and remember that there is less separation of economics and kinship, law and religion, in primitive, than in civilised societies—it is

not possible to make a particular study until you know a great deal about the culture, for you do not know beforehand what is going to relevant.[1] For example, the International Missionary Council is at present planning a study on marriage in Africa, with special reference to the causes of the instability of marriage among Africans, and it is clear to the anthropologist that they can only proceed directly to the main problem in those areas in which we already know a great deal about the social structure—about kinship, religion, economics, and law. Even if the anthropologist is co-operating in such a matter-of-fact investigation as a nutritional survey, he may find himself involved in a lengthy study of religion and kinship, in order to understand the taboos on particular foods.

I feel very strongly that studies of urban locations taken in isolation both from the traditional societies, and from the rest of the town to which they are attached, are misleading. The location alone, in the contemporary moment, is not an intelligible field. Our unit of study should rather be a township, with several racial groups. and several cultural traditions, and the kernel of the study is the relationships and interaction of these groups and traditons.

I argue then, that studies of particular problems depend upon the knowledge of the whole society, and point to the fact that a great deal of the solid work done by anthropologists during the last twenty years on political institutions, kinship, law, religion (including witchcraft), and economy, is directly relevant to administrative and economic problems. The African Studies Department here at Rhodes is concerned in a particular application at the present time, for like a number of other Departments of the College, it is co-operating in a survey of Keiskamahoek district, to provide the essential knowledge for conserving the land and water of the area, and increasing the production of the people living in it. For this purpose an understanding of the social groups and the relationships between them in the area, is necessary, as well as particular studies of the working of the present system of land tenure, the extent and nature of labour migration, and of the income and expenditure of families. The background to such study is the considerable body of material already published on Xhosa-speaking people.

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[1] cf. A. I. Richards: "Practical Anthropology in the Lifetime of the International African Institute" in *Africa* 1944.

And what of anthropology and our most pressing problem of race tension? Few would deny that fear is one of the roots of race antagonism, and ignorance and fear go hand in hand. If we accept the principle enunciated by our Vice-Chancellor, that mutual understanding of language and culture is a condition of unity between the different groups in South Africa—and no student of society can, I think, question the principle—then there is an unanswerable case for devoting much time to the study of Bantu languages and cultures. The population of South Africa does not, after all, consist only of 2,000,000 Europeans: it includes 11,000,000 people, and four main languages and cultures—English, Afrikaans, Xhosa-Zulu, and Sotho-Tswana. Our survival as a nation depends ultimately on the mutual understanding and co-operation of the whole 11,000,000. The necessity for study is all the greater when the languages and cultures are very different from our own. I do not suggest that knowledge alone will dispel race antagonism; I do insist that ignorance fosters it. Men always fear the unknown, the different, the inexplicable.

But while I insist upon the need for exact knowledge I want at the same time to point out the limitations of science. It was suggested some months ago by certain of my colleagues at one of our sister universities, that a commission be appointed to formulate what they called "a scientific Native policy." I suggest to you that there can be no such thing as a scientific Native policy, for science cannot determine values: it cannot tell us what is good or bad in society, it can only show what is efficient or inefficient *for a given purpose*. Value is the field of philosophy and theology, anthropology as a social science is concerned with means, not ends. The function of the social scientist, in the practical sphere, is to devise means to achieve agreed ends, or to show the implications of a given policy, not to judge of good and evil.[1] This is not to suggest that all of us as citizens, and many of us also as Christians, do not make judgments of value—we must all do so—but we cannot invoke science to prove our values right and others wrong. One of the characteristics of contemporary society is the chaos of values, many of which are incompatible, and here I think the social scientist has an essential part in demonstrating that incompatibility, for the intellectual understanding of the contradiction is part of its resolution, but

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[1] cf. Godfrey Wilson: "Anthropology as a Public Service" in *Africa* 1940, p. 43.

he cannot demonstrate scientifically that one value is just, and another false.

I emphasise this limitation of science, for though it will be obvious to many of you, it has not yet been generally grasped by the man in the street, and I think that if the social scientist is to be useful, he must be aware of his limitations, as well as perhaps somewhat insistent on his importance in the modern world.

You may well ask at this point whether we *can* exclude judgments of value, whether any social study can be wholly objective. I think that the answer is no: all knowledge of social fact is modified in some measure by the social position and personality of the observer, that is, there is always a bias of some sort.[1] We know that for the field worker there is unconscious selection in observation—one man notices what another does not—and selection in remembering[2] as well as in the analysis of material, in sorting out what is held to " relevant " and what is not. The common jibe against anthropologists, that they always seem to investigate people remarkably like themselves, has a fraction of truth in it, for field monographs reflect those aspects in which the investigator is personally interested. It is very easy to suggest (believing it oneself) that these are the aspects in which " my people," the subjects of study, are interested.

It is argued that objectivity may ultimately be achieved through refinement of our techniques, and through the synthesis of different approaches. However that may be, the immediate problem is how to mitigate bias, and here we have some clear rules of method.

The first condition of objectivity is that the investigator should have an honest intention, that there should be no deliberate distortion of the facts, and the work of anyone whose scientific integrity is suspect is likely to be discounted. The second condition is that observations should be exact, repeated, and adequately documented, with case records, texts, and statistics. We have not much use for such statements as " everyone is afraid of the ancestors " without case records to prove it, nor for a vague statement that " polygyny is frequent " without at least some sample counts to support it. The third condition is that observation should be systematic: this is the chief means of elimin-

[1] cf. K. Mannheim: *Ideology and Utopia.*
F. Kaufmann: ***Methodology of the Social Sciences.***

[2] cf. F. C. Bartlett, F.R.S.: ***Remembering.***

ating selection, and insuring that the investigation takes account of all the facts. The fourth is that whenever possible observations within one field should be made by different people, with different positions in society. If a team is working it should include people with different social positions such as men and women, Europeans and Africans, and so on; as well as people with different trainings, such as psychologists, and economists, as well as anthropologists and sociologists. The fifth condition of objectivity is one we have already dwelt on, that is the necessity of making wide comparisons. It is not only true that one tends to be more objective in a society other than one's own (though not wholly objective even there), but that comparison of different societies helps one to view each more dispassionately.

Some have argued that by holding aloof from all practical problems the social scientist is better able to maintain his objectivity—Herskovitz criticised Malinowski bitterly for his concern with applied anthropology, on just this ground—but most of us are agreed that ignoring practical problems does not in fact produce greater objectivity.

Myrdal, the Swedish economist, argues that we should not hesitate to investigate fields in which feeling runs high, but in doing so we should state what he calls our "value premises," that is, the basic assumptions with which the investigation is made, and relate our observations and conclusions to these premises. It is true that any investigation is based on assumptions which are usually not stated and are often not even fully conscious to the investigator: they are the things he takes for granted. His reader probably does not notice that they are assumptions either, unless he happens to disagree with them. He, too, takes them for granted if he accepts them. We cannot in fact abandon all preconceived ideas in undertaking an investigation—all categories of thought imply preconceived ideas—but we can make them explicit and treat them as hypotheses. Myrdal argues that "there is no other device for excluding biases in the social sciences than to face the valuations and introduce them as explicitedly stated, specific, and sufficiently concretised value premises. If this is done it will be possible to determine in a rational way, and openly account for, the direction of theoretical research."[1] He goes on to argue that the ideal method would be to work with alternative sets of value premises.

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[1] G. Myrdal: *An American Dilemma.* Vol. 11, pp. 1043-4.

I am not altogether in agreement with Myrdal's method as worked out in his study of Negroes in the United States, and I see difficulties in its application, but I accept the principle that the premises from which one starts modify observation, and should be stated. Sixteen years ago, Sydney and Beatrice Webb taught that every investigator in the social field should start with as many mutually inconsistent hypothesis as possible, and look for evidence for and against each of them.[1] Myrdal, as I understand him, wants alternative sets of hypothesis grouped, each set consistent in itself, and with the premises behind each set—the general hypothesis containing it—stated. He would, I think, argue that the assumptions on which the Webbs worked were never explicitly formulated as hypotheses, yet the whole direction of their work was determined by their Fabian faith.

There remain just two points which I wish to make: first the admission that bias enters into all investigations, that objectivity is something sought, but not yet achieved, does not imply that there is no regularity in the social order to be observed; it is merely an admission that our techniques of observation are inadequate. Social anthropologists, or most of them, proceed on the assumption that a social science is possible; that facts within the social field are comparable to other facts of nature in that they are also capable of scientific treatment; that connections between social facts exist and can be discovered; that human freedom is bounded by social, as well as by biological necessities, social laws determining human behaviour within certain limits. Without such an assumption there can, of course, be no social science; to deny it is to imply that there are no regularities within the social field at all.

The second point is that all the social sciences are still in their infancy; anthropology in particular is still in its swaddling clothes, having scarcely reached the stage which biology reached a century ago. This is hardly surprising when you consider that professional field-work only began fifty years ago, with Boas' work in British Columbia, the Cambridge expedition to the Torres Straits, and the Jesup expedition to the North Pacific, and that all the social sciences have remained the starved step-children of Western thought, with an infinitesimal ration of time and energy accorded them, compared to that lavished on the elder natural sciences.

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[1] S. & B. Webb: *Methods of Social Study.* pp 61 ff.

I have pointed out to you the limitations of science—that it cannot make choices for us, or judge of good and evil—but I yet insist on the necessity of exact knowledge within the social field. There is fine talk of our scientific age, but in the social field it has barely dawned. To cure the agues of our time we still hunt witches, rather than labour to discover the nature of our social constitution, and the causes of its disorders.