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Biographical Memoir

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When Clyde Kluckhohn was seventeen years old ill health caused him to spend two years in New Mexico and Arizona, on what he later described as “the fringes of the Indian Country.” This experience was to be decisive in shaping his subsequent career as an anthropologist. It brought into focus what, in his own words, was “the fact that I grew up in an English settlement in Iowa and early perceived, however dimly, a cross-cultural situation.” It was this perception, steadily sharpened by continuous field research, omnivorous reading, and constant probing for theoretical implication, that brought him to the point of achievement and reputation he had attained when a coronary thrombosis abruptly ended his life in the very Indian country where he had worked, and which he so greatly loved.

During all his scientific career he consistently followed both microethnographic and macroethnographic lines of anthropological interest. There are, in various parts of the world, those who are distinguished because of the skill with which they have probed ever more deeply into particular cultures, but it is difficult to name one who is as deeply concerned with theoretical significance as with ethnographic fact. The reverse is equally true. Anthropology has its theoreticians. But seldom are those who are committed to the extension of the theoretical base willing to accept an equivalent commitment to the drudgery of gathering and ordering the factual data essential for the testing of their theories. Kluckhohn did both.
The work of Kluckhohn, when taken in its totality, can be best envisaged as a canon on these two themes. Constantly deepening his understanding of Navaho culture by repeated field trips, aided by his command of the language, he used his insights into this particular culture to sharpen the questions he raised concerning the nature and significance of human behavior in general. His work in both these facets of his interest, too, was materially aided by the essential humanism of his approach. It is characteristic of his research that he continuously took into full account the interplay between the individual and the patterns of the culture which orders his life. He never lost sight of the fact that human beings function within the institutional setting of human societies. At the same time he fully recognized the importance of the reciprocal of this fact, that the institutions of any society being studied must be taken as resulting from and reflecting the patterned system of values of the human beings who live their lives in terms of the framework of traditional sanctions they provide.

It was this humanism that led him to what he himself, in a private communication, stated was in his opinion his “most important theoretical contribution . . . the idea of ‘implicit culture’.” Even here, however, his claim was expressed in terms consonant with the best scientific tradition, which recognizes the continuity of scientific thought. “This derived from Boas, Sapir, Linton and others but was, I think, forced upon me by my inability to understand—without some such notion—various assemblages of fact on the Navaho.” And in this direct statement, we see Kluckhohn not only accepting his place as a link in the historic chain of the development of his discipline, but having a clear conception of the canonical interplay between fact and theory to which he was committed, the first informing the second, the second enriching perception of the first.

Another outstanding characteristic of his scientific position was his eclecticism. The history of anthropology, like that of every science, is to be traced in the controversies that have marked the development of its theoretical infrastructure, and Kluckhohn lived during
a period when controversy was much in the foreground of the anthropological canvas. He came into anthropology when the discussion of diffusion was at its height, and his doctoral thesis was a defense of the German-Austrian *Kulturkreislehre* against the heavy attack then being made on it, particularly in Great Britain and the United States. It is of considerable interest that this phase of his development neither led to any further elaboration of his position, nor, apparently, influenced his later work. Except for one paper in the *American Anthropologist*, based on this thesis, the subject was quietly dropped, and almost no mention of it appears in his subsequent writings.

He was, however, not a controversialist, and moved easily, though not uncritically, with the later currents of his time. Diffusionism was succeeded by functionalism, and his Navaho studies show how much he was influenced by it. Yet he never accepted it fully. Thus, in a 1938 paper entitled “Theoretical Bases for an Empirical Method of Studying the Acquisition of Culture by Individuals,” read before an annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association and later published in the British journal *Man*, while he criticized certain scientifically questionable generalizations advanced by Malinowski, the outstanding exponent of the functionalist school, he gave a balanced critique:

... It is not because Malinowski seems to me peculiarly vulnerable that I have singled him out, but rather because in my opinion we have more to learn from him (all things considered) than from any living social anthropologist. ... It would be quite improper to call Malinowski's approach anecdotal. Would it, however, be very far from the truth if we describe his method as the well-documented anecdote set firmly in a ramified context?

Nor was Kluckhohn unresponsive to the other wing of the functionalist movement, led by A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, with its focus on the study of society and its search for generalizations concerning the structural principles that guide human relations. He accepted the social dimension of human life as given, along with the ecologi-
cal, historical, and behavioral aspects, without arguing as to the primacy of any one of these. As one colleague put it, he found “kinship and social structure boring as compared to religion, witchcraft, socialization and implicit cultural patterns and this is why he worked more on these.” On the level of theory, while, like other anthropologists, he was concerned with the problems inherent in the attempt to balance the study of dynamics against the analysis of structure, usually cast in terms of “history” as against “science,” or “theory” as against “fact,” his eclecticism prevented him, here again, from active alignment with either position.

The current in anthropological thought which attracted him most strongly, and which obviously arose from his fundamental humanistic bent, was that which attempted to link the psychological and the cultural in bridging the gap between the study of the individual and of the group. His thinking was much influenced by the writings of Freud and the application of Freudian concepts—he was analyzed while in Vienna. This interest, later extended on the level of methodology to include the various projective techniques, was dominant during the last two decades of his life. Like other early students in the field of personality and culture, or ethnopsychology as it came to be called, he tended to attribute more to this approach than it proved to be able to provide in the way of solving the critical problem of the adjustment of men to their social milieu. But he tempered his earlier enthusiasm, and the psychological approach for him took its place as one of the total range of instruments available to anthropologists in their search for an understanding of human behavior. It is significant that one of his major contributions, his study of Navaho witchcraft, which he himself regarded as something “providing culturally defined adaptive and adjustive responses,” lies in this broader area of ethnopsychology.

It is likely that the study of values, on which Kluckhohn’s interest centered during his later years, will stand as his most important contribution to his science. It perhaps best exemplifies the wedding of fact and theory in all his work. Though it had been in the mak-
ing for many years, albeit without the support it later received, the “Comparative Study of Values in Five Cultures,” as it was called, began in 1949. It was centered on Ramah, New Mexico, and involved work among the “cross-section of Southwestern cultural types” found in the area: “Pueblo, Athabascan, Spanish-American, and two variants of generalized American culture.” The research was, as he put it, “consistently collaborative and cumulative.” With its historic variables in hand, the study enlisted a wide range of interdisciplinary effort. How successful Kluckhohn was in transmitting his enthusiasm and drive to his collaborators is apparent in the listing of the papers that, only two years after its inception, had resulted from it: six published papers or reports, thirty-eight manuscripts in preparation, and nine completed manuscripts and memoranda, not intended for publication. The momentum he gave this project is apparent in the stream of articles and books that have continued to issue from it.

The field of values was, and has remained, a challenge to anthropological science because of its complexity, because of its philosophical implications, and because of the strong emotional component that enters into every step. In a 1955 paper, Kluckhohn advanced a systematization by means of which the differing emphases on values found in different cultures could be compared. In his own words, the question he faced was: “How can we compare with minimal ethnocentrism the more general or thematic value-tones or value-emphases that constitute the structure-points of whole systems of cultural values?” Using the five cultures of the Values project, he essayed a “systematic analysis that departs from bipolar categories,” following the linguists in setting up a series of binary contrasts or oppositions to identify each unit. The resultant series of dichotomies need not concern us here; what is germane is the insight the approach gives to Kluckhohn’s imagination and flexibility in his attempt to bring order into the study of one of the most diffuse areas of anthropological research.

Kluckhohn was born in LeMars, Iowa. His mother died at his
birth. His father remarried when he was about three years old, and
two years later the child went to live with his mother's brother,
who formally adopted him when he was seven. Recognizing the
force of his own drive toward productivity and achievement, he
ascribed these compulsions to an unconscious identification with
his grandfather, to whom he was deeply attached. He attended the
public schools of LeMars until he was thirteen, when he was sent
to Culver Military Academy, from which he was graduated in 1921.
He was thereupon admitted to Princeton University but, since he was
only sixteen years old, his family sent him to the Lawrenceville
School for an additional year before he entered college. It was shortly
after he matriculated at Princeton that the illness which was so im-
portant in shaping his career intervened, forcing him to spend the
next two years in the Southwest. Here, it may be noted, he wrote
his first book, entitled *To the Foot of the Rainbow*, published when
he was twenty-two years of age.

He resumed his academic work at the University of Wisconsin,
and was graduated in 1928. He was a Rhodes Scholar at the Univer-
sity of Oxford, where he made contact with the British anthropologi-
cal group, working primarily with R. R. Marett, whose interest in
comparative religion is reflected in Kluckhohn's later concern with
this aspect of culture. In 1931-1932 he studied at the University of
Vienna, where he came in contact with the *Anthropos* group headed
by Pater Wilhelm Schmidt. Returning to the United States, he was
appointed to an assistant professorship at the University of New
Mexico in 1932, a post he held for two years, leaving to go to Har-
vard University to complete the requirements for the Ph.D., which
he accomplished in the following two years. In 1932, also, he married
Florence Rockwood, who was to attain professional distinction as
a sociologist.

His work was primarily with Professors A. M. Tozzer, Roland B.
Dixon, and E. A. Hooton, the first a specialist in Maya Indian pre-
Columbia culture, the second outstanding for his encyclopedic
knowledge of ethnographic data, the third a physical anthropolo-
gist. Kluckhohn's thesis, one of the first theoretical essays to have come out of this department, represented an aspect of its work that had obviously been lacking, and he was appointed to an instructorship in 1935. His entire subsequent academic career was spent at Harvard, though other institutions attempted to obtain his services, some with offers of high administrative posts. He moved steadily up the ladder, being made assistant professor in 1937, associate in 1940, and professor in 1946. At the time of his death he had just given over the chairmanship of the Department of Anthropology and was eagerly anticipating the opportunities for research and writing that release from administrative duties would allow him.

When one considers the variety of the influences under which Kluckhohn came during his anthropologically formative years, it is striking to note how little real impact the men with whom he studied made on his thinking. We have seen that his studies in Vienna, while they furnished him with a theme for his doctoral dissertation, left no trace in his later thinking except perhaps for a generalized orientation toward an historical point of view in studying culture. While Marett's interest in religion may have had some influence, Kluckhohn seems never to have responded to the evolutionist position to which Marett held so firmly. Kluckhohn was, indeed, quite neutral in the face of the recrudescence of neo-evolutionism after 1950. He was willing to listen; he recognized the vitality of the concept; but he took no part in the controversy. His Harvard University teachers, similarly, had little effect on him. His field area was the Southwest, not the Maya, which was Tozzer's; Dixon's preoccupation with distributional studies and classification of data is reflected in Kluckhohn's work only in the most general way. While he was alive to the importance of physical anthropology, which he learned from Hooton, as he was to that of archaeology and linguistics, such attention as he gave to the problems of physical type was peripheral to his primary concerns.

The anthropologists to whose work and points of view he responded most strongly were two, perhaps three, with whom he
never studied, and with one of whom, indeed, his personal contacts were slight. These were Edward Sapir and Franz Boas and, on a somewhat different level of relationship, Ralph Linton. Sapir stimulated his interest in the field of personality and culture, opening to him at the same time new vistas of relevance between linguistics and ethnology. Sapir's sensitivity to ethnological theory, especially as this was reflected in his exposition of the psychological and psychiatric implications of the concept of cultural patterning, drew a ready response from Kluckhohn. Indeed, it was out of this approach that he later developed the idea he called first "covert" and then "implicit" culture, which, as we have seen, he held to have been his major contribution to anthropological theory. His regard for Boas most probably dates from his association with Tozzer, who was a student and devoted follower of Boas, but also later from Sapir. With time, he came to give Boas' work more attention and to bring Boas' contributions more to the forefront of his own thinking. From him he drew numerous methodological cautions that reinforced his own bent toward scientific eclecticism and kept him from deviating from the median path to which scientific endeavor always returns after the enthusiasm of a given moment has passed. Kluckhohn's relationship with the third figure we have named, Linton, was that of contemporary rather than disciple. The influence Linton had on him was essentially a matter of give-and-take.

Kluckhohn was remarkable for his drive, and his scientific work represents only one facet of his many activities. As he grew older and his work in scientific and other fields became more widely known, calls on him from the outside increased. He was in demand as a speaker and often accepted invitations at a sacrifice of time he could ill afford. He was never robust, and for some years before his death his friends were disquieted at the burden of obligation he carried. He was a fine administrator and was particularly skillful at bringing together those whose different positions were held with firmness and vigor. It was because of this that he ac-
cepted responsibilities as one of the organizers of the Department of Human Relations at Harvard University. It was also because of this that he was selected to head the Russian Research Center, an assignment he took on, as a patriotic duty, with some reluctance, but one which he nevertheless carried through with a brilliant record of accomplishment.

His many extra-University obligations involved commitments to the government, to foundations, to research councils, to scientific bodies. From 1942 to 1948 he was a consultant to the Office of Indian Affairs, Department of the Interior. He was cochief of the Joint Morale Survey of the War Department and the Office of War Information (1944-1945) and expert consultant at General MacArthur’s headquarters in Tokyo (1946-1947). At various times after 1947 he acted as consultant to the Department of the Air Force, Department of State, Central Intelligence Agency, and the Research and Development Board of the Department of the Army; from 1956 until his death he was a member of the advisory committee to the Foreign Service Institute of the Department of State. In 1952 he was elected to membership in the National Academy of Sciences. He was chairman of the Division of Anthropology and Psychology, National Research Council, from 1956 to 1958, and was chairman of the Section of Anthropology of the Academy from 1958 to 1960. Many honors came to him. He was President of the American Anthropological Association in 1947 and received the Viking Medal in 1950. He was Honorary Fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute, of the American Philosophical Society, and of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences; he was a Guggenheim Fellow; the University of New Mexico in 1949 conferred on him the honorary degree of L.H.D.

Yet, with all the calls on his time, he remained the scientist devoted to the furtherance of knowledge in the study of man. He was generous with colleagues and students and collaborated easily and extensively with them. With it all, one sensed beneath the exterior of rich and extended relationships a certain loneliness, a certain re-
serve. He wrote his *credo* in the concluding paragraph of his best-known book, *Mirror for Man*:

Human life should remain as a home of many rooms. But the world with all its variousness can still be one in its allegiance to the elementary common purposes shared by all peoples. Those boundaries that block mutual understanding will be worn dim by much international traffic in ideas, in exchange of goods and services. Within each society the use of scientific methods in the study of human relations can adjust our culture patterns to the changes brought about by the technology and world-wide economic interdependence. This can happen. It probably will happen. But when?
KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

Am. Anthropol. = American Anthropologist
Am. J. Soc. = American Journal of Sociology
Contemp. Phil. Soc. Sci. = Contemporary Philosophy and Social Sciences
J. Am. Folklore = Journal of American Folklore
Sat. Rev. Lit. = Saturday Review of Literature
Year Book Am. Phil. Soc. = Year Book of the American Philosophical Society

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