

# Diffusion: Transmission and Acceptance

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## THE HISTORICAL CHARACTER OF ETHNOLOGY

**D**IFFUSION is one of the fundamental phenomena of cultural life, a phenomenon concerning the history of culture. This implies that the present investigation will deal with the historical aspect only of what in Anglo-Saxon countries is termed "cultural anthropology."

History has been defined as "the knowledge of the socially important developments in the world of man and their evolution."<sup>1</sup> It is hardly necessary to say that evolution, thus understood, is very different from the organic evolution of natural history and that it means evolution due to human action and to the unfolding of all that the spirit of man has devised and the power of man has created. Evolution, thus defined, belongs to the realm of history. Are historically minded ethnologists justified in claiming the same principle for their own field? In other words: are the primitive tribes, the special subject of ethnology, comparable to civilized peoples to the extent that historical ethnology may be linked to history as usually understood?

It is interesting to learn what a historian, like E. Bernheim, who specialized in the methods of history, thought about the matter. According to him (1908, pp. 45 ff.) primitive peoples, too, should be a subject

of history. There are no peoples without history.

"Die Identität der Menschennatur ist das Grundaxiom jeder historischen Erkenntnis. Denn in der Tat, gäbe es oder hätte es je gegeben ein Volk oder ein Individuum, das in anderer Logik dächte als wir, dem Hass nicht Hass und Liebe nicht Liebe wäre, so würde uns die Geschichte desselben noch unzugänglicher sein als die Begebenheiten in einem Bienenstock."<sup>2</sup>

These remarks, made half a century ago, have been fully confirmed by ethnological research. Today, the role of the individual personality in primitive societies is generally recognized.<sup>3</sup> This applies even to the most primitive hunters and food-gatherers, though among them the effectiveness of personal initiative is necessarily restricted by the small size of their bands. It is significant that Levy-Bruhl, who in 1910 pronounced his theory of "pre-logic thinking" among primitives, thirty years later felt bound to recant.<sup>4</sup> Mühlmann's recent attempt (1954, p. 165) to save "primitivity" (das Primitive) as a distinctive attribute of the older stages of human development will hardly meet with approval.

The intentional use of fire and the presence of stone tools indicate clearly that even the most ancient men known to us were

<sup>1</sup> Bernheim, E., 1908, p. 192.

<sup>2</sup> Koppers, W., 1928, pp. 249-265.

<sup>3</sup> Leenhardt, M., 1949.

<sup>4</sup> Feder, A. L., 1943, p. 9.



fully human. It is impossible to assume that the makers of those tools were creatures without the power of speech, without family, and without any trace of spiritual culture. Obviously, like the primitives of today, they were fully in possession of the human mental equipment. Therefore they belong, in principle at least, to the subject of history.<sup>6</sup> This is being more and more recognized, as was shown on the occasion of the Wenner-Gren Foundation's International Symposium on Anthropology held in New York in 1952.

It is in the same sense that K. J. Narr (1953, pp. 341-355), concludes his important study, "Menschwerdung und älteste Kultur" with the words (p. 355):

"Als Plattform für alle weiterführenden Hypothesen werden wir also die ältesten sicheren Zeugnisse der Werkzeugherstellung, des Feuergebrauches und der Grosswildjagd ansehen dürfen. Sie mögen auf den ersten Blick als Quellen psychologischer Erkenntnisse nur allzu dürftig erscheinen, sprechen aber doch deutlich von kausalem Denkvermögen, bewusster Zielsetzung, konstruktiver Einbildungskraft, Setzung spezifischer Beziehungen, Abstraktionsfähigkeit, Weltgeöffnetheit, Gemeinschaftsleben und Sprache. Ihre gegenseitigen Beziehungen und Verknüpfungen lassen uns auch den 'Homo sapiens' (in wörtlicher, nicht zoologisch-systematischer Bedeutung des Wortes) (und den 'Homo faber'), das 'Zoon politikón' und den 'Homo loquens' als Aspekte der spezifisch menschlichen Geistigkeit erscheinen, die nicht ohneweiteres von dieser wesensmässigen Ganzheit einzeln losgelöst werden können. Von einer Entstehung der geistigen Grundlagen des Menschen im Sinne langsamer, schrittweiser Entwicklung kann die Urgeschichtsforschung mit ihren Mitteln nichts feststellen. Damit ist eine solche evolutionistisch-materialistische Theorie natürlich nicht widerlegt; aber wer sie vertritt, muss sich darüber klar sein, dass auch er damit eine metaphysische Stellungnahme vollzieht, eine geistige Entscheidung, deren Last und Verantwortung archäologische Forschungen ihm nicht abnehmen können."

The fundamental principle was clearly expressed by a prominent historian, Fr. Kern, who wrote (1952, p. 13):

"Man kann die volle menschliche Natur aus der Geschichte nicht erkennen, wenn man die

<sup>5</sup> Kraft, G., 1942; see also Koppers, W., 1952a.

Naturvölker auslässt. Sobald man diese breite Basis aller menschlichen Geschichte berücksichtigt, stösst man auf eine Historia peccaminis der menschlichen Substanz."

In fact, there is no reason for not linking ethnology and prehistory to history proper. This has not always been recognized. Ideological and practical reasons stood in the way. The difficulties came from both sides. Historians, as for instance E. Meyer, rejected the inclusion of primitive peoples in history by reason of their "not having become historically effective."<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, ethnology had drifted into a kind of evolutionism borrowed from the natural sciences and got itself ipso facto into contrast to history. It was the historian F. Graebner who helped ethnology to overcome this dilemma by applying to it the principles and methods of history.<sup>7</sup>

The difference between history proper and ethnology is merely due to the different character of their sources, history being based mainly on written sources, while ethnology has to rely almost entirely on the study of cultures and culture traits. To the general public, "history" means political history, wars, treaties, and other individual events, and the actions of known personalities. In view of the lack of written evidence, ethnology and prehistoric archeology have to renounce all this, save in a few exceptional instances. They are concerned almost exclusively with culture. With regard to culture, they differ from history proper not in essence, but only in lacking written sources.

Ethnology deals in general with contemporary cultures. However, it is obvious that the various cultures and culture traits differ in age. Are we able to determine their relative chronology, the regions where they originated, and their causal interrelations? It is here that the study of diffusion will have to play its decisive role.

#### PARALLELS AND CRITERIA OF RELATION

Historically directed ethnology will have to rely on cultural parallels for a starting

<sup>6</sup> For a similar view, see Muhlbach, W. E., 1954, pp. 165-177.

<sup>7</sup> Koppers, W., 1952b, pp. 11-65.



*parallels  
cult.*  
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→ point. We speak of such parallels if we meet identical or similar cultural phenomena in different parts of the world. In any given case, the question whether or not we are faced with true relation will depend on the degree of conformity and the number of "parallel" traits, i.e., on the "criteria of form and of quantity." Whenever this question is to be answered in the affirmative, this will have to be considered as a proof of diffusion. It will provide a means of determining the presence of relation, be it direct or indirect, and eventually may also yield a clue for the chronology of the cultures concerned.

The matter will best be clarified by presenting a special case, that of Australia. In this we shall rely largely on Frederic D. McCarthy's article (1953) on "The Oceanic and Indonesian Affiliations of Australian Aboriginal Culture."

#### FIFTY YEARS OF RESEARCH ON DIFFUSION IN AUSTRALIA

McCarthy's investigations have shown that all theories concerning Australia, as far as they were based on the old evolutionist idea of the psychic unity of mankind, will have to be abandoned.

"One of the earliest interpretations of the status of Aboriginal culture was that of Sir W. Baldwin Spencer, an independent evolutionist, who from 1899 onwards, supported by other Melbourne writers, claimed that the Aborigines had developed everything necessary to their well being, considering their wants and the materials available, unaided from other source. This group also believed that all local cultures in Australia are due to local causes, and that any attempt to compare the Aboriginal culture with those of the Old World, with races subjected to periodic invasions of different cultures or in contact with higher or lower civilizations, will lead to error. The explanation of the composition of Aboriginal culture, in all its aspects, is here wrongly attributed to the principle of local causation and independent evolution, as the discussion below will reveal. Professor Porteous, in 1931, claimed that the interior of Australia is the cultural centre but this claim is untenable in the light of present-day knowledge."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> McCarthy, 1953, p. 245.

This also implies the rejection of E. Durkheim's well-known theory concerning the original and primordial character of Central-Australian Totemism.

In contrast to the representatives of the old evolutionist school, McCarthy cites the "diffusionists," beginning with F. Graebner. Of course, neither Graebner nor any one else has been able to solve all the problems concerning the Australian aborigines, but at least a good start has been made.

"On the other hand, an important group of diffusionists have accumulated convincing evidence of the importance of external influences on Aboriginal culture. Dr. Graebner, in 1905, pointed out that there are several related strata or levels of culture in Australia and Melanesia, and that traits from western Papua form an ancient diffusion into Australia where they were pushed into the extreme west by those from eastern Papua."<sup>9</sup>

McCarthy then lists Rivers, Thorpe, Davidson, and others who continued research along the lines inaugurated by Graebner. It is rather surprising that he omitted to mention Wilhelm Schmidt. After all, none other contributed more to elucidate the linguistic, sociological, and religious situation of the Australian aborigines.

"In my own papers on the subject, from 1939 onwards, I have stressed the importance of diffusion, local variation and trade in the development of Aboriginal culture as we know it today."<sup>10</sup>

Development of research in this direction was furthered by the inclusion of prehistoric archeology. Here, too, McCarthy's point of view is definitely historical.

"The Melbourne group led by Spencer, followed by Kenyon, Mahony, Mann and Mitchell, from 1899 to date, accept implicitly the hypotheses that (1), the nature of a stone implement, whether it be ground, chipped or flaked, depends primarily on the nature of the stone available in any particular district, and (2), that there is no such thing in Australia as distinct stages of culture or time periods corresponding to the Eolithic, Palaeolithic or Neolithic. I have criticized this attempted explanation in other

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 245.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.



papers, suffice it to say that such an approach cannot solve the problems of Australian prehistory because current research has demonstrated that many relationships exist between Australian, Indonesian and Oceanic lithic cultures, and the materialistic interpretation, or local causation, must now give way to a broader cultural interpretation in which techniques and diffusion are important factors. The history of Australian axe-types, for instance, is not a local problem, but is an integral part of the history of such implements in the Oceanic region generally just as are those of New Guinea and New Zealand. Australian axes advanced as far as the round and lenticular transverse sections, but in Oceania they developed more fully with the quadrangular and hog-back types, among others. This latter approach is borne out by the establishment of twelve prehistoric cultures, by the study of their geological locale and the excavation of cave floors, in South Australia, New South Wales and Arnhem Land, but their relationships in point of age and time are not yet determined. These cultures represent two main groups of inland and coastal sequences."<sup>11</sup>

"It is now believed that the Eloueran culture of the coast (Eloueran = one of the coastal groups of south-eastern Australia) and tableland region, the Murundian of the Interior, the Oenpellian and Milingimbian (an axe culture) of Arnhem Land, are contemporaneous cultures which existed at the time of European occupation, and that the others extend back into the Mesolithic and possibly late Palaeolithic periods. It has not been possible to associate many of the economic, social, religious and other traits in Aboriginal life with the stone, bone and shell implements, rock paintings and engravings, and a few other items, of which the prehistoric cultures consist."<sup>12</sup>

The last sentence confirms a principle which we (Koppers, 1953/54, p. 56; also 1931, p. 231) stated more than twenty years ago, i.e. that material culture, social systems, and religious beliefs need not spread as one complex.

Turning to the question of the origin of Australian cultures, McCarthy states (p. 248):

"It is becoming more and more apparent that the sources from which Aboriginal culture has been developed lie ultimately in Asia. Professor

Elkin has linked some of the psychic practices with those of Tibet. Hindu culture, which penetrated Indonesia so deeply, appears to have reached Australia in the music of Arnhem Land and in other minor ways."

Recently E. Drobec (1952, p. 305) pointed out that the medical notions and practices of Australian aborigines show definite connections with those of aboriginal tribes in India.

"We have no early or middle Pleistocene cultures, and the typological resemblances between certain biface hand-axes in the Gamberian culture of South Australia and the middle Pleistocene Patjitanian culture of Java (which forms part of Movius's chopping chopper-tool culture of south-east Asia) cannot be accepted as evidence of relationships between the two cultures."<sup>13</sup>

Since in this case typology is not unequivocally convincing, McCarthy rightly refrains from expressing a definite opinion. He does not deny the possibility of connection, but leaves the question open. Future research may possibly change the aspect of the problem. In any case McCarthy does not allow himself to be trapped into the premature conclusion, so often met with, that since connection cannot yet be proved, independent invention must be assumed.<sup>14</sup>

"The most archaic traces of culture in Australia comprise a few Palaeolithic stone-working techniques and types in our prehistoric cultures, such as the faceted and plain-butt knapping techniques, better known as the Clactonian and Levalloisian, and the stone points and flake-fabricators in our short-blade industries, but we do not know when they came to Australia. Another early relationship is that of pebble-choppers chipped on one side, with cores and hammerstones, which are found in Australia as the Kartan culture and south-east Asia and Indonesia as the Hoabinhien I culture. They belong to the late Pleistocene and Mesolithic periods between five and over ten thousand years ago."<sup>15</sup>

Following Graebner's line of thought, McCarthy says (p. 252) with regard to the culture of the first Australians:

"Although we cannot define the original culture as that occurring in either south-western or

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 247 ff.

<sup>13</sup> McCarthy, 1953, p. 248.

<sup>14</sup> Koppers, W., 1952b, p. 24.

<sup>15</sup> McCarthy, 1953, p. 249.



south-eastern Australia because diffusion has affected both regions to a limited degree, it is apparent that the relatively primitive culture of the south-western tribes is not far removed from a culture representing an admixture of Tasmanian and early Aboriginal elements. Many factors enter into an analysis of a problem of this kind, including the origin and diffusion of various customs, migrations of people, invention and local variation, and external affiliations, all of which cannot be discussed in detail here."

Here again McCarthy confirms that Graebner, Schmidt, and others have been fundamentally right in assuming that, apart from Tasmania and the little known South-west, the relatively oldest culture is to be found in the southeastern part of the Australian continent. Moreover, McCarthy realizes that prehistoric data alone do not suffice to solve this problem, and that it is essential to co-ordinate the ethnologic, linguistic, and anthropological facts. J. Haeckel's recently published article (1954) on ethnologic and prehistoric problems of Australia would seem to meet this request as far as possible under present conditions.

It is interesting to follow the trend of McCarthy's reasoning, based on years of intensive study of the Australian "Avenues of Diffusion."

"Earlier writers have laid stress upon separate migrations of Aboriginal people to explain the differentiations of culture that exist in Australia, but I do not believe this factor to be as important as the injections or streams of culture traits which passed through a limited number of entry points in Cape York, Arnhem Land and the Kimberleys. In other words, the Aborigines' is not an isolated culture which developed independently as is commonly supposed; it is one that has thrived, in a limited manner, on the continuous progress of Oceanic cultures with their roots in Asia. Thus we can distinguish a very large number of customs among all aspects of Aboriginal culture which have an unbroken distribution from Australia into New Guinea and Melanesia, and some further afield. They include customs which are ancient in Australia's cultural terms, and many others of more recent origin which have a limited distribution in the north and east, and which leave no doubt that they were introduced via Cape York whence they spread over the continent. The avenues of these cultures are obvious."<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> McCarthy, 1953, pp. 252 ff.

"The contact between the Torres Strait islanders and Cape York Aborigines has been long and intimate, as has that between the former and the Daudai-Fly river district Papuans. Physical anthropologists have shown conclusively that Melanesoid physical characters are present in northeastern Queensland and Cape York, and social anthropologists have revealed how deeply initiation and hero-cults, together with carving in the round, from New Guinea and Torres Strait, have penetrated the aboriginal culture in Cape York where the bow and arrow, skin-drum, and other un-Australian paraphernalia are used. The areas of local variation, in the material culture coincide only to a limited extent with the known distributions of languages, forms of social organisation, and physical variations."<sup>17</sup>

Here are the main facts resulting from McCarthy's study of Australian cultural history:

1. A more or less common basis characterized by a hunters' and food-gatherers' economy.

2. Recurrent participation in the development of cultural traits in Melanesia, etc., though the original appropriative economy was not discarded.

3. The cultural aspect as indicated by ethnology and prehistory agrees to a considerable extent with the results of linguistic and somatological research. However, the distribution of elements of material culture does not always coincide with that of languages and social systems.

The cultural relations between Australia and Melanesia are so numerous that McCarthy (pp. 253 ff.) was unable to list them all and refers readers to the special literature on the subject. The following passage is of particular interest.

"There is a small group of half a dozen traits introduced from Torres Strait into Cape York, and another small group—fish and game nets and netted bags—is present in both Australia and New Guinea but not in Torres Strait. This example of discontinuous distribution does not, in my opinion, negative the probability of a relationship between the Australian and New Guinea occurrences."<sup>18</sup>

McCarthy recognizes that, in this case, the criteria of form and number will not

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 253.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 254.



allow of any doubt concerning the relations between the cultural complexes in question, despite the absence of continuity in distribution. In any case he refuses the easy solution of assuming independent origin. How thoroughly convinced he is of the importance of diffusion in Australian cultural history shows in his own words:

"The process of diffusion is an element of Aboriginal culture that has always been active from the earliest times to the present day."<sup>19</sup>

However, McCarthy realizes that diffusion is not all.

"Apart from diffusion, another very important factor in cultural development is that of local variation caused by the nature and scattered occurrences of raw materials used for making various articles."<sup>20</sup>

"These areas of local variation in the material culture coincide only to a limited extent with the known distribution of languages, forms of social organisation, and physical variations."<sup>21</sup>

As pointed out elsewhere (Koppers, 1952b, p. 33), it is only natural that, given the continuance of a hunters' and food-gatherers' economy, local developments will affect material culture, rather than the respective social systems or religious and mythological notions, although there is no fixed rule in this respect.

McCarthy (1953, p. 257) makes the following significant statement: "Invention, as such, is not a feature of Aboriginal culture." McCarthy attributes this to the Australians' appropriative economy:

"The stabilisation of their economic and ritual life, the limitation of transport, and the satisfactory efficiency of their material culture, have given the Aborigines little impetus to change their artifacts in any radical fashion."<sup>22</sup>

In the introduction of his article (p.244), McCarthy touches upon the same idea, and though he uses Australia as a typical example, he permits himself to glance toward the general history of mankind.

"Thus the historical background, conservatism, isolation and environment are among the principal factors which have led the Aborigines to perpetuate their traditionally established semi-nomadic economy. This mode of living is not altogether undesirable, even though it was followed by man for a million years or so before pastoralism and agriculture were developed. It is adaptable to varying environments, and it forces the inhabitants to integrate themselves both economically and ritually more intensively than do both pastoralism and agriculture."

We mention our expression of similar views thirty years ago (Koppers, 1924, pp. 426 ff.).

The final section of McCarthy's paper (p. 258) deals with "Barter and Exchange." Here too, there are no fixed rules or laws.

". . . some (traits spread) more quickly than others, but generally speaking, the older traits more extensively."

This was also stressed by Birket-Smith (1953), who emphasizes the non-existence of laws in this respect and the necessity to judge any given case according to its special circumstances.

Concerning the chronological problem, McCarthy says (p. 258):

"The time-factor in diffusion is an extremely interesting one about which little is known in Australia. The rapid diffusion of the tobacco and smoking complex in Oceania during the past three centuries illustrates how a trait can be absorbed so completely into a culture that it appears on the surface to be a basic or integral custom. It is paralleled in Australia by the rapid spread of major rituals in the Northern Territory, Arnhem Land, the Kimberleys, and Cape York. Herein, too, is exemplified the manner in which introduced customs either supplant those already practised or are adopted as complementary to the latter. Diffusion is also revealed by the names of objects. There are many tribes in eastern New South Wales which denoted the spear-thrower by *wonmara* or a variation of this name indicating the line of diffusion of both the implement and its name. Many other examples of this type of diffusion may be found in Aboriginal culture."

Concluding (p. 258), McCarthy stresses the fundamental and decisive importance of research on diffusion for the solution of the problems of Australian culture.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 255.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 256 ff.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 257.



"It is obvious from the above discussion that the cultural history and affiliations of aboriginal Australia constitute a problem of some complexity. The evidence for believing that culture infusion has been considerable is so overwhelming that the point can no longer be disputed."

Of course McCarthy (pp. 258-259) realizes that we are not yet able to solve all the relevant problems.

"We can up to a point distinguish the groups of traits, or the culture of the various movements of people which entered or made contact with Australia, including the Tasmanians, one or more waves of Australians, the Melanesians and Indonesians—but the antiquity of these movements is unknown. It has not yet been proved that it followed the classical chronology of Tasmanians, Australians, Melanesians, Polynesians and Indonesians into the Oceanic region, but it is apparent that the Australian problem is an integral part of the Oceanic one."

#### DIFFUSION IN A HIGH CIVILIZATION

Obviously, research on diffusion will yield the best results when written historical sources are available. It was a happy inspiration that prompted Margaret T. Hodgen (1950, 1952), to study the role of diffusion and acculturation in the history of English civilization. She deals with the whole period from about 2500 B. C. to the beginning of the twentieth century A. D. The results are of genuine interest and should be given full attention by ethnologists and prehistorians.

It is surprising to see how many innovations were introduced into England by diffusion from abroad and were eventually fused into local culture. Lack of space here forbids citation of details, tempting though it is. Separate chapters deal with innovations as known by historical documents and their integration into the social surroundings; with the process of diffusion; and finally with the role which historical events, particularly the immigration of new ethnic groups, played in the introduction of new techniques. Miss Hodgen rejects all attempts "to discover and describe the natural laws of change" by applying the meth-

ods of the natural sciences to the study of culture.

"Hence, when students of man adopt the procedure of natural science, when they elect with natural science to discover or describe the natural laws of change, and when, like natural scientists they abstract from the historical and the dated, they at one and the same time ignore that which is most characteristic of man, as a human and historical being."<sup>23</sup>

However, we can hardly agree with Miss Hodgen's notion that the lack of written sources does not permit definite conclusions about diffusion and acculturation in prehistoric times. In this respect we rather side with the opinions of Kroeber (1948, p. 702) and of Childe (1951, p. 13 ff.). We may also refer to the case of Australia as discussed above. True, Herskovits considers the dynamics of diffusion to be the sole legitimate subject of ethnologic research on this matter. This is no doubt too one-sided. Of course, whenever it is possible, we must attempt to establish, not only the fact of diffusion, but also the reason why it took place and the way in which it was effected. In this, Herskovits is right. Diffusion never consists of the mere mechanical introduction of new traits. There is always selection and integration into the existing cultural tradition. However, where there are no written sources and the process cannot actually be observed, the knowledge of the fact itself will still retain its value.

Miss Hodgen (1952, pp. 118 ff.) does not do full justice to Graebner in simply linking him to Elliot Smith and accusing him of having adhered to *a priori* assumptions. She obviously knows his theories only from second hand sources and probably would judge him differently had she read some of his work in the original. Nevertheless, this shall not impair the pleasure we took in reading her book. Miss Hodgen herself is well aware of the service she rendered to ethnology and prehistory.

"... and undated distribution of primitive traits, now attributed by anthropologists to diffusion on slender or undated evidence, would receive some measure of dated corroboration. Its

<sup>23</sup> Hodgen, Margaret T., 1952, p. 29.



confirmation in even one inquiry, that has dated distributions as a problem and other dated resources for eliciting the steps and conditions of a process of distribution, would be added testimony for its adequacy in fields of humanistic study where dated evidence is unobtainable."<sup>24</sup>

THE DIFFUSION PROBLEM AS TREATED BY  
HERSKOVITS, KROEBER, LOWIE, CHILDE,  
AND WHITE

In his book, *Man and His Works* (1948), Herskovits repeatedly touches upon the question of diffusion. In this connection he also refers to the Vienna School of Ethnology. He reproaches us for not giving sufficient attention to the psychological aspects of diffusion, acceptance, and rejection. He admits that our methods suffice to establish the facts of diffusion, but thinks that it fails in answering the "Why." He objects that we do not take into account the psychological background of acceptance or rejection of cultural traits and therefore have nothing to say about cultural dynamics. According to him, our method is but a first step toward the study of culture change.

The hypothetical character of the culture historical methods is said (p. 509) to prevent their being accepted as the basis for the analysis of causes, which, after all, should be the ultimate goal of scientific research in this field. Moreover, we are charged (p. 510) with "a mystical approach to the nature of life and human experience." It is difficult to see of what this "mystical approach" consists. All we can do is to say: "Quod gratis asseritur, gratis negatur." Herskovits' reproach that we consider the fact, rather than the "Why" of diffusion would seem to imply, not mysticism, but an excess of sobriety on our part.

Despite all this, we actually agree on numerous and essential points. This applies particularly to the appreciation of the importance of diffusion and the rejection of evolutionism.<sup>25</sup> Herskovits is perfectly right in pointing out (p. 474) that the selective process which always occurs in diffusion furnishes a decisive argument against evolutionist assumptions and constructions. He

also rejects functionalism, of whose anti-historic tendencies he does not approve.

Herskovits' special concerns are the problems of acculturation, culture change, and cultural dynamics in general. This may, in part at least, be due to inspirations he received during this study of American Negroes. It is obvious that in this field it will not prove too difficult to discern the reasons why cultural changes are taking place. However, it would be unwarranted were we to remain satisfied with such relatively easy cases. The historically minded ethnologist wishes to probe into the greater depths of time, into realms where the determination of the fact of diffusion is still feasible, but the reason why it happened is no longer accessible. Herskovits himself cites, as such an instance, Hallowell's study of bear ceremonialism.

"Yet how all this happened, when it occurred, where it originated, and by whom the change was brought about, in such studies remain only for conjecture."<sup>26</sup>

We may well ask whether the proof of the mere fact of diffusion is not in itself of considerable import. Graebner devotes a whole chapter of his *Methode der Ethnologie* to the question of causality in which, after all, every historical investigation should culminate. However, if there is no, or only insufficient, indication of the causes, the fact itself still will retain its value.

As for the reproach of neglecting "cultural reality," we quote Graebner's words, "Ich suche tastend nach Spuren."

It is inevitable that in such a search for traces, cultural reality cannot always be taken into consideration in its full scope. But, as Graebner said, better no house at all, than a house of cards.

Herskovits correctly recognized (p. 509) the background of the historical character of ethnology in Central Europe.

"In consonance with the intellectual traditions of Central Europe, the insistence on ultimate ends and values of research marks this school off from the more pragmatic approaches of the other groups."

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

<sup>25</sup> Herskovits, M., 1948, pp. 525, 539, 637.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 526.

Herskovits

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We need only to add that this is the natural result of the close relations between ethnology and history proper in Central Europe. Herskovits' inclination towards "pragmatic approaches" is obviously connected with his views concerning "the laws" of history. Although realizing the difficulties in this respect, he wishes (pp. 608 ff.) to save of those laws as much as possible, more than most European historians would be prepared to concede. Might that not be a residue of the former thinking along the lines of the natural sciences? This might explain Herskovits' doubts concerning the capability of the culture historical school.

"... (the culture-historical school) can scarcely be said to have laid the ground for that analysis of cultural causation which must ultimately be the objective of the scientific study of the nature of culture or of culture change."<sup>27</sup>

*Kroeber*  
On the occasion of the Wenner-Gren Foundation's 1952 International Symposium on Anthropology in New York, A. L. Kroeber laid such excessive emphasis on the unity of what in the United States is termed "anthropology" that we could not but raise objections against his statements. In stressing the autonomous character of cultural history we referred to Kroeber's own views as expressed in his *Anthropology* (1948). In this book he makes an unequivocal distinction between biological and cultural anthropology. With regard to the problems of diffusion he takes the same view (pp. 411 ff.) as the culture historians of Europe. This applies also to his not admitting (pp. 415 ff.) the existence of any "laws" in the process of diffusion. From the fact that diffusion of culture traits can be proved to have taken place in historic times he concludes (p. 702) that the same must necessarily apply to prehistoric periods. He admits of course that not everything can be explained by diffusion alone. However, while the study of diffusion offers fairly reliable results "the parallelistic opinion leaves the facts both unexplained and unrelated."

Kroeber does not seem to agree with the objection that Herskovits raised against cer-

tain points of the culture historical methods. According to him (p. 578), it is for the psychologist to study the mechanism of learning and imitation implied in diffusion. The anthropologist (i.e., the ethnologist), however, deals with *what* is being learned (or not learned), that is, the culture, its structure, its patterns, the interrelations between cultures, and of course cultural history. Kroeber does not admit any difference between culture history and cultural evolution. He is right in this: in the humanities history and evolution are indeed identical.

In his *History of Ethnological Theory* (1937), Lowie refers repeatedly to the problem of diffusion. In appraising Lowie's criticism of the culture historical school we must not forget that his book was published eighteen years ago and that much has changed since then. Since Lowie's views have been widely adopted it may not be out of place to rectify some points. He thinks (p. 178) that "Independent origins, while abstractly conceivable are therefore almost always ignored, though Schmidt and Koppers explicitly except the conical roof of Asiatic nomads and of higher hunters." *critica de Lowie*

Hereto, we can only remark that the "Kulturkreis" theory has been abandoned for quite some time and that considerable progress has been made in the application of the criteria of intercultural relations. The same applies to Lowie's remark that the German diffusionists "... mistake analogies for homologous features," a remark which he exemplifies by pointing out (p. 184) the various possible ways in which duel systems may have originated in Australia and in America. It is obvious and has long since been recognized by culture historians that such pitfalls and possible sources of error must be avoided.

Lowie's opinion, according to which there is an evolutionist undertone in W. Schmidt's system, is hardly justified. He seems to have been impressed unduly by a purely superficial similarity with the old evolutionist ideas. Schmidt was deeply convinced of the historical character of his theories. It is really not possible to charge

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 514.



him with having adhered to evolutionism in its true sense.

Among the contemporary prehistorians V. Gordon Childe is more or less a protagonist of historical materialism. However, there can be no doubt but that he ranks among the most outstanding scholars of his field. Therefore it is of particular interest to learn of his attitude with regard to the problems of diffusion.

According to Childe (1951, pp. 12 ff.), diffusionists believe that "savages" are without initiative and ascribe all cultural development to a "chosen people." Obviously, this can only refer to the School of Elliot Smith and Perry. He considers that there need be no conflict between evolution and diffusion. Evolution has nothing to do with the question *why* cultures change—this being a concern of history—, but *how* they change. Here, Childe gets into conflict with Herskovits, but also with almost all historians as well. The latter aspire to both the "how" and the "why." Nevertheless, we note that Childe acknowledges the role of history together with that of evolution. Although much of his own work is definitely of a historical character, he does not renounce the tenets of evolutionism. This causes certain contradictions in his ideas. In this respect he shows a certain affinity to Leslie A. White.

Of course, we agree with Childe when he says (pp. 13–14) that diffusion is a fact, that it can be proved for material culture ever since the Early Paleolithic, and that diffusion of ideas also occurs. We no less agree with him on the difference between social and organic evolution and with his conclusion (p. 179) that cultural evolution is a rational and intelligible process.

Leslie A. White hardly touches upon the problem of diffusion. As does Childe, he attempts (1949, pp. 229 ff.) to separate history and evolution. White, who negates the free will of man, contests Schmidt, as well as Childe—the latter because he still believes (pp. 230 ff.) that cultural change can be intentionally initiated, controlled, or eventually rejected. White's system, which he calls "Culturology," definitely is oriented toward the natural sciences. He

simply calls the driving forces of culture "energy." His "culturology" has not incorrectly been called a kind of "deification" of culture.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Summarizing our results, we may venture to make the following statements.

1. We have seen that man was from the very beginning fully human, possessing and creating culture. Therefore history in its wider meaning comprises the entire period from the appearance of the human race to the present day.

2. No serious scholar will deny the reality of diffusion, transmission, and acceptance. Childe even traces them as far back as the beginning of the Paleolithic.

3. The principle diffusion is particularly important in ethnology and prehistory. This, of course, is due to the fact that they lack written sources and therefore are forced to rely on the comparative study of culture traits for the purpose of establishing the areal, chronological, and causal factors.

4. Comprehension and explanation of diffusional phenomena will have to use the well-known criteria of culture relations, the criteria of form, of quantity, etc. It certainly would not meet the facts should we speak of indications only as Mühlmann does (1954, p. 173) and not of history in the proper sense of the word. The cultural elements in question represent evidence on their own, as well as on grounds of their established interconnections; they cannot be discarded as mere indications, but actually represent some part at least of history.

5. Diffusion will not suffice to explain every historical development. Culture traits alone will never be able fully to substitute for reliable written evidence, but they will always furnish a valuable supplement. Should no written sources be available, it would be unreasonable were we to refrain from considering and interpreting archeological or ethnological facts. This the more so since the earliest periods of mankind, in some respects the most important in human history, lacked any written records.

critica a  
G. Childe



Better incomplete knowledge than none at all.

6. Diffusional research will have to be based primarily on cultural parallels. Whenever these do not yet fully suffice to prove the existence of genuine relation, premature conclusions as to independent origin are nevertheless inadmissible. In general, we simply have to leave the question undecided.

7. The cases of Australia and England have given us a convincing demonstration of the vital part diffusion plays in the life of peoples and the spread of culture. We have seen that in this respect there is no essential difference between primitive cultures and high civilizations. At the same time, Margaret Hodgen's study of England has shown us how much can be learned from written sources for the deeper understanding of the diffusional process.

8. It is of fundamental importance that there are no fixed laws in diffusion, either in transmission, or in acceptance or rejection. Diffusion is always accompanied by some kind of selection and modification, and the apparently arbitrary ways in which these occur frequently have puzzled ethnologists.

9. Since there are no laws governing diffusion, there is no easy and infallible means to discover whether or not it took place. Mere theoretical deductions will be of no help. Every case will have to be judged on its own merit. Full command of ethnological methods, a thorough knowledge of the relevant facts, and, above all, the capacity of coordination will be indispensable.

10. This concerns also the much discussed problem of cultural relations between the Old World and America. The

best method in this case will be to start on the younger and more differentiated culture complexes since they are less disintegrated than the older and more primitive and, moreover, offer more convincing evidence for comparison. This was already realized by Graebner (1911, pp. 144 ff.). It is the approach used by Heine-Geldern and Ekholm. Above all, I wish to refer to Heine-Geldern's recent paper on the Asiatic origin of South American metallurgy<sup>28</sup> which, in my opinion, will prove a landmark in research on Old and New World cultural relations and on the problem of diffusion in general.

11. As mentioned above, we have to reckon with the eventual stability of culture no less than with diffusion. In this respect too there is no fixed law and every case will have to be considered individually.

12. Even though Graebner's and Schmidt's "Kulturkreise" have rightly been abandoned for quite some time, wholesale rejection of all of their deductions particularly as far as they concern Australia would certainly be going too far. As we have seen, their methods yielded results which still can stand up in face of more recent research. It is significant that Birket-Smith (1953, p. 80) still recommends Graebner's and Schmidt's books on ethnological method.

13. Progress made in recent years is largely due to the systematic combination of ethnologic and prehistoric methods.<sup>29</sup> This also emphasizes the oneness of human history and human culture.

<sup>28</sup> Heine-Geldern, Robert, 1954a, pp. 347-423; see also Heine-Geldern, Robert, 1954b; Carter, George F., 1953; Ekholm, Gordon F., 1953.

<sup>29</sup> Koppers, W., 1953, pp. 1-16.

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