



Editorial

Author(s): Tim Ingold

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EDITORIAL

TIM INGOLD

I was recently asked, in connexion with an inquiry commissioned by the Economic and Social Research Council (UK) into future opportunities for the Social Sciences, to comment on the prospects for anthropology. It was evidently assumed that, as the Editor of a leading journal, I would have my finger on the pulse of the discipline, and would be well-placed to deliver a prognosis. In responding, I found it virtually impossible to distance my assessment of how anthropology is *likely* to move into the next century from my own vision of how I would *like* it to move. Of one thing, however, I am convinced: that the discipline presently stands on the verge of one of the most exciting and fruitful periods of its history. For this reason, I am taking this opportunity to place on record the burden of my response, and to indicate what I see to be the principal directions for the future. I do so in the form of four theses, and elaborate briefly on each in turn.

Thesis 1. *The task of anthropology is to help dismantle the intellectual barriers that currently separate the humanities from natural science.* The experiment that was launched earlier this century under the banner of 'social science' has conspicuously failed, crippled both by its lingering commitment to a positivist programme long since abandoned by the 'harder' sciences, and by irreconcilable epistemological disputes concerning the very possibility of scientific inquiry into the forms of human life. It is not with social science, then, that the future of anthropology lies. Nor, however, should it be content to remain as it has been up to now, cleaved down the middle into the humanistic study of society and culture on the one hand, and the scientific study of human biology on the other. Anthropologists, of all people, must realize that the heavily institutionalized division of academic labour, between the natural sciences and those disciplines collectively known as the humanities, is founded on a pervasive ontological dualism that has a specific history in the Western world, and that is not generally shared by the peoples among whom they have worked. Our task is not to appropriate what we have learned from these peoples in terms of an alienating discourse – as so many cultural constructions erected upon a universal foundation in nature and biology – but to bring indigenous knowledge to bear in a critical engagement with the underlying presuppositions of that discourse. Far from reproducing, in our writing, the ossified separation of humanity and nature, we should thus be leading the way in showing how it is possible, in thought and practice, to move beyond it, taking as our starting point the inescapable fact of human participation in the one world in which we all live. If anthropology is a science at all, it must be a science

of *engagement*. As such, it stands to make a vital contribution, above all in the context of the growing concern with environmental issues.

Thesis 2. *Social/cultural anthropology, biological anthropology and archaeology form a necessary unity.* The history of anthropology in the twentieth century has been one in which these components of the discipline, once combined in nineteenth-century evolutionism, have drifted ever further apart. It is time for the trend to be reversed: indeed this reversal is already under way. The links between archaeology and biological (or 'physical') anthropology are, of course, of long standing, especially in the study of human evolution, and scarcely require elaboration. That the study of what have conventionally been known as cultural differences is itself a kind of biological study may be harder for many anthropologists to swallow. Have we not all been brought up on the doctrine that variations of culture are independent of human biology? Encumbered with this doctrine it has taken quite some time for social and cultural anthropologists to rediscover the body, not just as a source of symbolic imagery but as people's most fundamental mode of being in the world. Such, indeed, has been the force of this discovery that it has had an overwhelming impact on recent literature. Yet one further step has still to be taken, which lies in the recognition that the body, with its peculiar intentions, dispositions, aptitudes and capabilities, is the human organism, an organism that has come into being, as the particular kind of organism it is, through a biological process of development. The practical skills of everyday life, language and speech, memory, perception and cognition – all these are developmentally embodied in the human organism: in its neurophysiology, its musculature, even in its anatomy. Cultural differences *are* biological. (By the same token, of course, biological differences are *not* – or at least not exclusively – genetic.)

Human life, however, is lived not only through the body but also in an environment or landscape. Moreover it is a process that involves the passage of time. And this, above all, is where archaeology comes in. Time and landscape, I believe, are the essential unifying themes of archaeology and social/cultural anthropology. Under 'time' I include the conjunction of processes in the very long term with more immediate, medium and short-term changes; under 'landscape' I include what is generally known as the built environment as well as the artefactual domain of 'material culture'. The specific contribution of archaeology lies in its ability to demonstrate the essential *temporality* of the landscape regarded as no mere backdrop to human history, but as forever coming into being in and through the activities of the people who live in it. Every landscape, in this regard, is the crystallisation of a historical process. That the craft of the social or cultural anthropologist bears a relation of affinity if not identity to that of the historian is, of course, already widely accepted. Yet by and large, only the more recent and powerful of the world's peoples have left any documentary record of their activities. Archaeologists, reading the landscape as historians might read documents, are alone able to give history back to the people to whom it belongs (though this often means returning their remains as well, appropriated as they were by the archaeologists of an earlier generation). Thus anthropology *needs* archaeology if it is to substantiate its claim to be a genuinely historical science.

Thesis 3. *Anthropology deals, in the first place, not with entities and events, but with relations and processes.* Anthropologists have always professed their holistic aspirations, their concern to bring together aspects of life that are otherwise parcelled up among other disciplines for separate study. They have, however, been inclined to take this holism as entailing an approach that focuses on ‘wholes’ – conceived as total societies or cultures – as opposed to their parts or members, individual human beings. The effect of this procedure is to draw relations and processes off from the real world in which people dwell and to re-ascribe them as constituent properties of higher-level entities, leaving the individual as a residual, self-contained isolate. Reality is thus fragmented, only to be reconstituted on the plane of its representations, whether these be the alleged ‘folk models’ of the people or the theoretical models of the analyst. The problem is already widely recognized, and we are beginning to see the emergence of a quite different approach, one that attends directly to the relational properties of the real world. The point of departure, in this kind of relational or processual realism, is not the orthodox dichotomy between individual and society/culture, but the agent-in-an-environment, situated from the start in a context of relations with others (both human and non-human). Yet to collapse the distinction between the individual and society/culture is also to dissolve the boundary, as it has been conventionally drawn, between the disciplines of psychology and social/cultural anthropology. All at once, topics previously reserved for psychological study – perception, cognition, memory, learning, intentionality and feeling, consciousness and the unconscious, the constitution of the self – have risen to the top of the anthropological agenda. There is no doubt that the future will bring a radical realignment of anthropology’s interface with psychology. And it will come not so much from the application of established principles of psychology to the analysis of ethnographic material, as from the application of ethnographic understanding in the delivery of a resounding critique of the foundations of contemporary academic psychology.

Thesis 4. *Anthropology is not the study by Westerners of the non-Western ‘other’.* For in anthropology we study ourselves. I do not mean by this that a privileged class of Westerners should be uniquely licensed, in the name of the discipline, to preen their academic feathers in the mirror of other cultures, or that anthropology should regress into a kind of hyper-reflexivity, dwelling exclusively upon the conditions of its own inquiry. We have seen plenty of both in recent years, much of it inspired by a fashionable preoccupation with literary theory; and whilst this may have advanced a number of careers, it has done rather little to advance anthropological understanding. My point is a different one. It is that the future of anthropology lies in changing our conception of who ‘we’ are, from an exclusive, Western ‘we’ to an inclusive, global ‘we’. If we study ourselves it is because we (men and women, adults and children) are all fellow travellers on this earth, and because we care about where we have come from and where we are going. In fieldwork we go to study with, or under, other people who become our guides and tutors. And we do so because the knowledge that these people can impart to us, sharpened as it is by their practical experience of everyday involvement in the world, can help us to reach a deeper and richer understanding of the human

predicament. Philosophers, of course, have speculated on this predicament for centuries, and might even claim such activity as their special preserve. Rarely if ever, however, do they enlist the help of ordinary people in their enterprise, or test their insights against the wisdom of common sense. Anthropology is a kind of philosophy too, but it is not so exclusive. There are, of course, as many definitions of anthropology as there are anthropologists, but my own is as follows: *Anthropology is philosophy with the people in.*