WHAT PRICE GLORY? THE COUNTERPLAINT OF AN ANTHROPOLOGIST

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Today is a day of questioning in many sciences. Knowledge grows, but uncertainty continues or is augmented. Innumerable subsciences arise with new assemblages of facts. New theories evolving and "taking on" in a particular field are eyed enviously in another, seized upon and applied or misapplied as individual circumstance may dictate. Behind all this beehive of activity one is vaguely aware of competition and struggle, of the necessity men feel in a competitive, materialistic civilization to justify and increase in the public eye the importance of that branch of knowledge by which they live. If a particular subject seems at the moment to have gained more than its share of attention, hurried efforts are made to acquire its secrets. And if, after the passage of time, the secrets are found to be simple things, or inapplicable, the once admired science is apt to be held up to scorn or berated for arousing false hopes. It makes no difference, on such occasions, that the borrowed science neither held out such hopes, nor made extravagant claims which could not be justified.

Now I gather from Dr. Tomars' stimulating and provocative paper that anthropology, whose followers often regard themselves as abused step-children, has been deemed all this while a popular favorite with the public. Sociology, it would appear, has searched our pockets and, not finding the moon, is looking at us reproachfully. From the remarks of Dr. Leslie White, in a recent article in this *Review*,[1] it seems that sociology is now intrigued by the mysteries of mathematics. Anthropologists, for their part, show a tendency to flirt with psychology, and it may be that sociologists are thus obtaining materials watered thin through three sciences. None the less these alliances, licit or illicit, serve their purpose. Eventually, if sometimes disappointingly, knowledge gets distributed. Occasionally it is found of no particular use in the circles to which it eventually spreads, but even that discovery has a certain negative value.

I would be the last man in the world to object to Dr. Tomars' timely and searching paper. The very fact that in a few spots it caused my hackles to rise and complaints to pass my lips is a good sign. It is indicative that there was meat there to growl over. We need these examinations now and then, and without quarreling at all with the main thesis of Dr. Tomars' article, I should like to direct attention toward a few points which, I believe, deserve added examination.

First of all let us note that Dr. Tomars doubts that "anthropology possesses any scientific methods or procedures unknown to sociologists" and views such procedures as those the sociologist has seen fit to utilize as having been of dubious advantage. He voices extended complaint upon the inadequacies of human paleontology and the way in which the doings of modern primitives have been utilized in picturing the life of fossil man.

Now most certainly vast gaps in the prehistory of man remain to be filled. I should like to point out, however, that it is only within the last few decades that this subject has been getting anything like the sustained attention that it deserves and that it must have if advances are to be made. Yet sociological texts, with few exceptions, continue to over-simplify this subject, to ignore new finds recounted in the technical literature, and to draw, for the most part, only from easily available and standard works which are, in many cases, badly in need of revision.

Dr. Tomars' charge that both sociologists and anthropologists attempt to draw too heavily on the lives of contemporary primitives in order to convey an impression of the life of our primitive forebears has merit in so far as such data are pressed into distorted use or made the background for schemes involving the unilineal development of a particular social institution. On the other hand, it would seem to be retreating into a most narrow and pretentious obscurantism to acquire a great deal of archeological information about our human forerunners only resolutely to refrain from making use of obvious general inferences on the grounds that since these people are extinct, nothing about their world can possibly be learned—even as to whether they did or did not respond to their environment in a manner similar to that of existing primitive folk. As a matter of fact, certain archeological remains would have been impossible of interpretation—they actually remained so for a time—had not extended field work revealed that similar implements were

[1] White, Leslie, "Sociology, Physics and Mathematics," *American Sociological Review*, vol. 8: 373-379, 1943.

still being utilized in obscure marginal areas of the world.[2] The mere collection of bric-a-brac without the use of broad principles of interpretation, reduces archeology to a meaningless and futile antiquarianism. Grahame Clark, the English archeologist, has, in his fascinating little work, *Archaeology and Society*,[3] pointed out how much information we can derive, archeologically, about primitive economics, and how, going on from this and the ascertained size of primitive settlements, we can accumulate much information about the social life of the inhabitants.

It is by the judicious use of both advanced archeological and ethnological techniques that we acquaint ourselves with the ways of our forerunners. To acquire much valuable information about them and to be sensitive to the limitations to which their environment reduced them, both intellectually and physically, it is not necessary for us to be able to postulate the exact political structure of, say, Neanderthal society. But the *limitations* placed upon that structure we can describe with considerable surety. There are religious traits so old that they apparently extend even into the dim world of the Neandrethalians—burial and grave furniture, for example. Must we refrain from any interpretation of these items at all, purely because they were used by a vanished race of men, even though these cultural traits survive? Dr. Tomars says, "Needless to say, all these data are derived from the anthropologist's study of contemporary primitives." I regret it indeed, as I am sure all anthropologists must, if this is the sole way in which sociology attempts to give verisimilitude to the life of fossil man. Rightly utilized, it has uses, but the ground speaks for man with many voices. The techniques by which we hear those voices are still in process of elaboration by untiring effort and research.

Doubtless it is true, as Dr. Tomars triumphantly announces, that we possess no scientific methods unknown to our sociological brethren. But I, for one, have a vague feeling that anthropology has contributed, as Dr. Tomars graciously admits at some point, certain facts which are now widely used and whose original proprietorship is now forgotten. I think it might be said of anthropology that it has been the first to attack some of its own sacred cows even while they continued to be accepted elsewhere. And I think it obvious that whatever the merits or demerits of the methods and techniques which we employ, *we have employed them,* and the results, if not all we might wish at present, have been widely utilized by sociologists, not always, I believe, to the detriment of their science or of science in general.

Dr. Tomars also raises the objection that "the study of primitives has given us only a static or flat picture of a social structure," because the time element involved in long-range historical data such as we possess for our own culture, is lacking. We miss the dynamic element. Now no one would deny the advantages of extensive historical documentation, though it might well be questioned how successfully we might read objectively the records of our own past without knowledge of the other history-less cultures which anthropology has investigated.

No practising ethnologist today would deny the importance of individual variation and its effects on the shaping of culture. Boas, Malinowski and many others have been highly conscious of its importance. Nevertheless, it was necessary, before individual deviation could be correctly interpreted, to obtain the so-called "flat picture"—a concept of the typical cultural behavior of the group—before the deviant and the forces of change could be clearly seen or studied. Moreover, as the late Dr. Boas has pointed out recently, the coercion exerted by the group in terms of demand for conformity makes "the impressionistically derived concept of typical cultural behavior [have] a much higher degree of reality than that of a physical type.[4] It is quite true that there are dangers in deriving document and interpretation from the same source, but this is a fault which even history, for which Dr. Tomars shows great respect, cannot always avoid. The lack of check on the accounts of individual writers is not the fault of the science, as such, but is due, rather, to the handicapping of the science by inadequate support, as I propose to show.

Not least among the many interesting points which Dr. Tomars brings up in his discussion of the relations between sociology and anthropology is the charge that the latter has prestige advantages because of the romantic character of the anthropologists' subject matter—subject matter which, because of its nature, safeguards the science from the dangers of arousing the animosity of vested interest groups. Moreover, insists Dr. Tomars, our esoteric terminology involving all manner of strange tribes and customs gives the anthropologist "an unfair advantage over his fellow social scientists." The

[2] Boas, Franz, "Recent Anthropology," *Science,* Vol. 98: 313, 1943.

[3] Methuen, London, 1939, Ch. 6.

[4] Boas, Franz, "Recent Anthropology," *Science,* Vol. 98: 313-314, 1943.

anthropologist, he insinuates, basks in the prestige of great museums and is on friendly terms with biology. There is a certain amount of truth in this—just enough to lure the unwary. It evidences the old truth of the greenest pastures appearing to be farthest away. How, in fact, does anthropology fare?

If one sets out to examine a large collection of catalogues representing an average group of American colleges and universities, one will be struck immediately by the following facts: (1) That an overwhelming number of these institutions do not possess departments of anthropology. (2) That in many institutions where a certain number of courses of an anthropological nature are taught, they are taught within sociology departments and consist, in many instances, of no more than text book treatments of cultural anthropology. This, in turn, leads to a third point which, I believe has greatly retarded sociological grasp of anthropological subject matter, as well as handicapped the economic position of the average anthropologist.

Since the ordinary college or university has a flourishing sociology department, but seldom one in anthropology, the young anthropologist Ph.D. must seek his fortune, to a very considerable extent, not within his own field, but outside of it. He must be prepared to teach sociology as well as anthropology. Moreover, the average sociology department, which regards anthropology as an incidental side-line, is much more likely to hire a sociologist who can handle a text course in anthropology than to go outside the domain of sociology for its personnel. I can recall, for example, my initial surprise when a student friend of mine who had some interest in anthropology, asked me about the department in a large university to which he was transferring. Not knowing that particular institution had a department in the subject, I asked him for the catalogue.

Under a joint Department of Sociology and Anthropology, I noticed a considerable array of names and the fact that it was possible to acquire an undergraduate major and even an M.A. in anthropology at this institution. The names were strangers to anthropology. Without exception, they were those of sociologists.

Now my point is not whether anthropology was taught well or ill at that particular institution—something about which I possess no information whatever. The point lies in the fact that no other science of which I have personal knowledge is so greatly dependent for the dissemination of its discoveries upon hands other than its own. In no other, save perhaps paleontology, is the young graduate faced with such bitter economic odds.

A few great departments do most of the research, pour out graduates. A few students with private means manage to travel, to do work which will lead them eventually to the great museums. For the rest, the road is rough and difficult. Many drift away into other fields. It is true that during the war period, numbers, particularly those familiar with foreign areas, have found work in Washington, but their future looms uncertainly.

The very nature of anthropological textbooks is added evidence of the precarious economic situation of the science. Textbooks of the subject are, almost without exception, weighted heavily toward cultural anthropology. There are sound reasons for this. Such texts, if they are to achieve any but meager distribution, must appeal to sociology departments, hence the emphasis must be placed upon those branches of the subject which appeal to the sociologist teacher of cultural anthropology. I do not think it at all unlikely that this undue weighting of one branch of the subject as against its other significant phases has contributed, in a certain degree, to the confusion of the sociologist and an over-simplification of many intricate anthropological problems.

The foregoing remarks are not to be interpreted as casting all of the failures and errors of anthropology, of which there are many, back into the lap of sociology. But it seems well to emphasize what has been little said: that there is a difference between headlines in the papers, even a considerable adulation and envy of the sociologist for the joys of a "romantic" profession, and the hard, cold reality of the fact that support for anthropological research is limited, its future insecure, its young men bedeviled by the more than usual lack of opportunity. Even the great museums show signs of retrenching under the tribulations of the last score years. And now comes Dr. Tomars to tell us our secrets are in the hands of sociologists; that they are not secrets, and that they amount to very little.

With an attempt at that complete objectivity for which Dr. Tomars has so ably pleaded, I say that if those who use our material and upon whom we rely for the major dissemination of our ideas have found us out—verily, where shall we turn? Happily it is suggested that the boundaries between sociology and anthropology are now meaningless. There is hope, then, for our forlorn division. It may be that we can teach sociology.