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# Boas, Darwin, Science, and Anthropology<sup>1</sup>

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by Herbert S. Lewis

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This paper presents a new reading of Franz Boas's philosophy of science and his approach to the understanding of culture and behavior. It points out that his approach had important parallels with the worldview of the major figures associated with pragmatism and suggests that a similar perspective can be useful today.

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Although Franz Boas was the dominant figure in American anthropology from the turn of the 20th century, respected both within the profession and by scholars outside the field, his reputation began to be seriously questioned by the 1940s. With the revival of cultural evolutionary thought and a renewed search for "laws of cultural development," members of the post-World War II generation, following the lead of Leslie A. White, leveled serious criticisms at Boas and his work. It is ironic that this critique has remained part of the conventional wisdom of anthropology even though the basis of the criticism is no longer fashionable and the field as a whole has since moved in a different direction. In fact, there may be a trajectory leading some anthropologists closer to the scientific philosophy of Franz Boas, and I shall suggest some ways in which that perspective may still be of use.<sup>2</sup> This paper consists of a new reading of Boas's philosophy of science and his approach to understanding culture and behavior. I argue that Boas shows us a way to navigate between the naive certainties of scientism and positivism on one shore and the nihilistic rejection of science and the "shackles of textualism and excessive reflexivity" (Knauff 1994:117) on the other.

Franz Boas is commonly known as a "historical particularist" whose anthropology was "characterized by a programmatic avoidance of theoretical synthesis" (Harris 1968:250). Leslie White put it more colorfully, referring to Boas's "philosophy of planless hodge-podge-ism" (1943:355). Boas's anthropology and that of his followers is often described as little more than an attempt to collect "as much information as possible from living informants about vanished or vanishing customs of American Indian groups" (Wax 1956:72). Thus we hear repeatedly about the publication of a collection of undigested Kwakiutl berry recipes, and Boas is pictured as a rigid methodological purist whose primary contribution to the field was the collection of raw facts from peoples whose cultures he thought were dying out. According to this view he is seen, at best, as intellectually unadventurous and lacking an understanding of science; at worst he single-handedly impeded the advance of anthropology for decades. In this paper I argue that, on the contrary, Boas's understanding of science and of the work of Charles Darwin in particular was more sophisticated than that of his critics. Furthermore, I contend that the attitude Boas brought to a scientific understanding of human culture and behavior had important parallels with the worldview of the major figures associated with pragmatism, especially William James, John Dewey, and George Herbert Mead, all of whom were also deeply influenced by Darwin. I indicate some of the ways in which this general approach was manifest in Boas's social and cultural analysis, and I suggest, finally, that a similar

2. There are more recent critics and interpreters of Boas, of course, but they have not been concerned with the same issues. Gelya Frank, Faye Harrison and Donald Nonini, Julia Liss, and Kamala Visweswaran, for example, are concerned about Boas's ideas about "race" and ethnic identity. Charles Briggs and Richard Bauman (1999) present a different case against Boas, focusing on the Kwakiutl texts.

perspective can be useful today as we approach the era of *post-postmodern anthropology*.

## The Criticism of Franz Boas's View of Science and Evolution

The first criticisms of Boas for his alleged lack of scientific understanding and his role as an impediment to the development of the science of anthropology came from Leslie White, who attacked the work and ideas of Boas in a series of papers (1943, 1944, 1945, 1963, 1966). These were written as part of White's attempt to revive the reputation of Lewis Henry Morgan, reassert the validity of cultural evolutionism, and bolster his case for what he called "a science of culture" to be modeled after physics. A similar critical approach to Boas's anthropology was taken by Verne Ray (1955, 1956), Murray Wax (1956), John Buettner-Janusch (1957), Marvin Harris (1968), and, more recently, Stephen K. Sanderson (1997: 237).

The core of this case against Boas is that he pursued a historicist rather than a "physicalist" model of science when studying culture (Harris 1968:262); that he chose particularism, a focus on individual facts and individuals, over classification and categorization (White 1963: 64; Wax 1956); and that he eschewed the search for laws of culture such as those found in physics and the "natural world" (Buettner-Janusch 1957:322). Drawing upon Boas's article "The Study of Geography" (1940a[1887]) and upon late articles that express his belief that "cultural phenomena are of such complexity that it seems to me doubtful whether valid cultural laws can be found" (1940h[1932]:257), these critics accurately present certain aspects of Boas's attitude toward the understanding of cultural phenomena. Beyond the presentation of his ideas, however, they offer negative assessments of his work and career. In their view he "held up the development of the discipline" (Ray 1955:140) or at the very least espoused a philosophy of science that "involved errors which are in the long run inimical to the progress of social science" (Harris 1968:261).

These critics wrote from the perspective of "scientism" or "physicalism." They were convinced of the applicability to anthropology of a model of science derived from physics and of the importance of the search for laws in cultural and social life. Those who favor this "nomothetic" approach stress the search for regularities, causal relations, and laws that "take the form of if/then statements" (Sober 1993:14). They seek to create classifications and typologies in the search for cross-cultural generalizations. In contrast, a "historicist" ("idiographic") approach is one that puts primary emphasis on individual phenomena (individuals, specific peoples, and particular histories), human choices, variation, diversity, and chance. This is what is meant, presumably, by "particularism," a term less often used by proponents than by opponents, who consider particularism and historicism naive or worse. (Boas referred to these as "the

old controversy between historical and physical methods" [1940a(1887):641].)

The scientism of White and Harris is associated with both a materialistic perspective and a desire to discover the laws of cultural evolution, positions that Boas rejected. As early as 1882, as he took up the study of geography, he wrote to his uncle: "I became convinced that my previous materialistic *Weltanschauung*—for a physicist a very understandable one—was untenable" (in Stocking 1974:43). And in 1888 he wrote, "Undoubtedly the study of Kant is . . . a powerful means of guarding students from falling into a shallow materialism or positivism" (1888:81).

White and Harris speak of Darwin as a contrast to Boas; White even considers Boas an opponent of Darwin and argues that "*those who opposed Darwin did not labor for, or make contributions to, science*" (1944:219). The irony is that Boas understood Darwin better than White did; Darwin was, in practice and in outlook, a historicist. It was not Darwin that Boas and his students rejected but the entirely different teleological perspective of Herbert Spencer and his followers.

Leslie White writes that Boas "was not interested in generalizing but in particularizing," and he quotes Boas as saying "in ethnology everything is individuality" (1963:64, quoting Boas 1974[1887]). White continues, "It is not surprising, therefore, that Boas never did discover any significant laws." But had he been more assiduous he would have seen that the inspiration for those words came from Darwin himself. In an earlier piece, to which the phrase above was only added emphasis, Boas wrote, "In regarding the ethnological phenomenon as a biological specimen, and trying to classify it, [Otis Mason] introduces [into ethnology] the rigid abstractions species, genus, and family . . . the true meaning of which it took so long to understand. It is only since the development of the evolutionary theory that it became clear that the object of study is the individual, not abstractions from the individual under observation" (Boas 1974[1887]:62, my emphasis). We may paraphrase Boas as follows: Darwin has shown us that the object of study in evolutionary biology is the individual, not abstract types and classifications—and so it should be in ethnology.<sup>3</sup>

These passages foreshadow what is known today as the "populational" approach that is basic to the modern "Darwinian synthesis" (Mayr 1982:45–47; Yu Xie 1987: 274–75) in contrast to an essentialist or typological one.<sup>4</sup> It underlies Boas's way of understanding race and heredity, and it is the foundation of much of his cultural anthropology. It is specifically a lesson from Darwin.

3. Darwin wondered about the possibility of group selection as well, and this is still a live issue (see Sober and Wilson 1998:4–7).

4. The "new synthesis" or "neo-Darwinism" builds on Darwin's findings and ideas with the addition of newer knowledge in biology, genetics, mathematical models of population dynamics, etc. These have confirmed Darwin's understanding of evolution (e.g., Brunk 1991).

## Boas's Understanding of Science

Boas's 1887 paper "The Study of Geography" has often been cited as an example of his historicist bent (Stocking 1974:9–11; Bunzl 1996; Cole 1999:122–24). Here he writes of two basic approaches to science and to geography in particular: "One party claims that the ideal aim of science ought to be the discovery of general laws; the other maintains that it is the investigation of phenomena themselves" (1940a[1887]:641). He points to Comte as an able proponent of the "physical conception" of science as applied to social phenomena, while Alexander von Humboldt's *Cosmos* is offered as an example of the historicist perspective applied to the natural world. "Cosmography, as we may call this science, considers every phenomenon for its own sake. Its mere existence entitles it to a full share of our attention; and the knowledge of its existence and evolution in space and time fully satisfies the student, without regard to the laws which it corroborates or which may be deduced from it" (p. 642).

White (1963) and Harris (1968:268) offer this paper as evidence that Boas, following Dilthey, saw anthropology as one of the *Geisteswissenschaften* (human studies or humanities) rather than as a natural science (*Naturwissenschaft*), but this is inaccurate. In fact, Boas considered the historicist position one way to do the *science* of geography. One could be a scientist without following the model of physics. Different phenomena called for different approaches, and individual scientists might find diverse approaches congenial to their own way of working and thinking.

George Stocking writes, "Boas's scientific and historical outlooks remained in important respects within nineteenth-century traditions" (1974:12). But the debates of those times are still lively today, particularly in the field of evolutionary biology. In order to understand Boas's perspective more fully we must consider the parallels between his outlook and contemporary understandings.

According to a philosopher of science, Elliott Sober, "Some sciences try to discover general laws; others aim to uncover particular sequences of historical events. It isn't that the 'hard' sciences only do the former and the 'soft' sciences strive solely for the latter. Each broad discipline contains subareas that differ in how they emphasize one task or the other" (1993:14). Boas's own work varied, depending upon the problem.

Ernst Mayr contends that "the erroneous search for laws," based on a physicalist model, has been one of the major impediments to the "maturation of theories and concepts" in biology (1982:846 et passim). The material with which evolutionary biologists work and the problems with which they deal are fundamentally different from those of most physicists; there is no reason to suppose that the methods and assumptions that physicists make will work equally well for biologists—or even for

all problems in physics (cf. Sober 1993:14–15).<sup>5</sup> While laws are important to the physical sciences, this has not been true for much of biology, says Mayr. Although he agrees that there are regularities in biology, he finds that the supposed laws which have been proposed are either obvious or too full of exceptions to warrant the name. Referring to the "evolutionary laws" proclaimed by Rensch, Mayr writes, "Most of them have occasional or frequent exceptions and are only 'rules,' not universal laws. They are explanatory as far as the past is concerned but not predictive, except in a statistical (probabilistic) sense" (1982:37). Or, as Boas wrote of "general laws" in anthropology, they "will be necessarily vague and, we might say, so self-evident that they are of little help to a real understanding" (1940h[1932]:258).<sup>6</sup>

According to Mayr, "The physical world is a world of quantification. . . . By contrast, the world of life can be designated as a world of qualities" (1982:54) in which the individual differences among members of a population play a major role. "Species, classification, ecosystems, communicatory behavior, regulation, and just about every other biological process deals with relational properties. These can be expressed, in most cases, only qualitatively, not quantitatively" (p. 55). Among the qualities that distinguish biological phenomena from those with which physicists work are their uniqueness and variability (p. 55), their historical character, and the unpredictability of natural selection (p. 57). Mayr writes of the complexity, randomness, indeterminacy, and the "magnitude of stochastic perturbations" (p. 58) with which the student of evolutionary biology must deal. "Each organic system is so rich in feedbacks, homeostatic devices, and potential multiple pathways that a complete description is quite impossible" (p. 59). The similarities between these processes that call for a qualitative treatment and those of social and cultural life are obvious.

Biology, in Mayr's view, is not inferior to physics, but it is a different kind of science, just as Boas argued in 1887 about one trend in geography. And still more resonant of Boas is Mayr's claim that "recent authors . . . have shown not only that the historical-narrative approach is valid but also that it is perhaps the only scientifically and philosophically valid approach in the explanation of unique occurrences" (1997:65) where chance events present the conditions for succeeding de-

5. Boas's remarks of 1887 regarding the historical nature of social science, as well as of cosmography, astronomy, biology, and geology, are virtually the same as those of Ernst Mayr on "cosmogony . . . geology, paleontology, phylogeny, biogeography" a century later (1997:65).

6. As we shall see, Boas did have hope for the discovery of explanatory principles of the sort that might today be called probabilistic statements. Although such models may take the form of if/then statements, they cannot specify "when or where or how often those conditions are satisfied" (Sober 1993:15).

velopments.<sup>7</sup> "Is not the whole post-Darwinian biology really dependent upon historical perspective?" wrote Boas in 1941 (correspondence February 17, 1941). As Darwin put it, "When we regard every production of nature as one which has had a long history . . . how far more interesting . . . does the study of natural history become!" (n.d.[1859]:371).

## Boas, Darwin, and Pragmatism

The thought of Franz Boas has significant similarities to that of the American pragmatists, especially William James, John Dewey, and George Herbert Mead. It is instructive to look at their key ideas in order to see Boas in the context of his time and to understand the relevance of these ideas for our current intellectual situation.

It is impossible to trace the details of this convergence of perspectives here, but it is clear that Boas and his American contemporaries were exposed to the same general intellectual trends at the time. Aside from the powerful impact of the work of Charles Darwin, the predominant common influences came from contemporary Germany, where Boas was educated and where William James and such other leading American scholars as Josiah Royce, G. Stanley Hall, and George Herbert Mead went to study philosophy and psychology (Leaf 1979: 190). Boas and his American counterparts were exposed to the powerful German historicist tradition derived from Johann Gottfried von Herder and Alexander and Wilhelm von Humboldt (Iggers 1983, Bunzl 1996), to the revival of the thought of Immanuel Kant by the so-called Neo-Kantians (among them Kuno Fischer, Wilhelm Windelband, Heinrich Rickert, and Wilhelm Dilthey), and to developments in academic psychology led by Hermann von Helmholtz, Gustav Fechner, and Wilhelm Wundt.<sup>8</sup> The Americans and Boas brought these ideas back to Harvard, Johns Hopkins, Clark, Chicago, Columbia, Michigan, and Berkeley.<sup>9</sup>

There were more direct links between Boas and the pragmatists, but the extent of their direct mutual influence is still unclear. Murray Leaf traces connections be-

tween Boas and Mead (1979:188–90), and Boas and Dewey were colleagues and academic and political allies for almost 40 years at Columbia University, teaching a seminar together at least once (Ryan 1995:166). James delivered some of the lectures for his *Pragmatism* at Columbia in January 1907, and the *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods*, deeply engaged with problems raised by the pragmatists, was edited at Columbia. There were a number of other like-minded faculty there, "politically progressive, friendly to science, skeptical of appeals to fixed and eternal truths or fixed and eternal values, biased toward cultural analysis rather than abstract analytical categories of classical and neo-classical economics" (Ryan 1995:166). Such Boas students as Alexander Goldenweiser, Robert H. Lowie, Paul Radin, and Alexander Lesser were influenced directly by pragmatist thought and by Dewey himself (see Lowie 1956 for an account of their intellectual world; see also Lowie 1916, n.d.). Boas and some of his students published political writings in *The Dial*, *The Freeman*, *The Nation*, and *The New Republic*, all favorite outlets for the writings of the pragmatists and the progressives.

Although never dominant, pragmatism had a significant impact on academic philosophy, history, and the social sciences, as well as on liberal intellectual and political circles. As Kloppenberg puts it (1996:101), "Early twentieth-century pragmatists envisioned a modernist discourse of democratic deliberation in which communities of inquiry tested hypotheses in order to solve problems." This describes Boas's outlook very well (see also Kloppenberg 1986, West 1989, Ryan 1995).

The convergence of Boas's thought with that of the leading pragmatists may help account for the rapid acceptance of his work in America. As Carl Resek remarks in his biography of Lewis Henry Morgan, "In almost every field of learning, pragmatism effected a turn from all rigid systems and social laws that presumed to reflect reality. It replaced certainty with probability, causality with choice" (1960:156).<sup>10</sup> It was Boas, of course, who led the movement away from social evolutionism and toward a new view of cultures and their histories. A discussion of the major premises of the pragmatist *Weltanschauung* will help to elucidate Boas's anthropology. This is not merely of antiquarian interest, however: the outlook of the pragmatists and Boas shares some important elements—although only some—with postmodernist thinking as well.

## The Tenets of Pragmatism

Pragmatism was "more an attitude of mind than a system of ideas," wrote Horace Kallen (1937:307), but it is

7. Howard Temin, Nobel laureate for medicine in 1975, speaking of the historical nature of biology, pointed out that the chemical basis of DNA was accidental; there is no inherent reason for DNA to be composed of those particular elements (personal communication). William James put it this way: "Evolutionists should not forget that we all have five fingers not because four or six would not do just as well, but merely because the first vertebrate above the fishes happened to have that number" (1956[1897]:238).

8. Leaf accords Boas a larger and more direct role: "Boas drew directly from Kant and Wundt and contributed to pragmatism" (1979: 188). Each individual was exposed to many other influences as well, of course. For Boas these included German geography (Alexander von Humboldt, Friedrich Ratzel) and anthropology (Adolph Bastian, Theodor Waitz). All were aware of the discussions of the nature of science led by Ernst Mach, Henri Poincaré, Wilhelm Ostwald, and Karl Pearson (Lowie 1956).

9. The literature on German thought and on pragmatism is vast. For Boas and pragmatism see Leaf (1979) and Brian Morris (1991: 143–71). On pragmatism and sociology see Joas (1993), Rucker (1969), Kurtz (1984), Strauss (1956, 1991).

10. Morton White (1957) writes of the "revolt against formalism" and abstractionism that transformed American intellectual life in the 1880s and 1890s and led to an emphasis on historical and cultural analysis. Boas participated in this revolt and contributed to the ideas of such other rebels as John Dewey, Thorstein Veblen, and James Harvey Robinson (Boas 1940k:309; cf. Stocking 1968:163).

possible to summarize the major elements of this attitude.

1. *Antifoundationalism*. For James, Dewey, Peirce, Mead, and Boas there was not, nor could there be, any absolute beginning and ending for philosophy or science. Nothing could be taken as axiomatic or a fixed starting point for inquiry; not Descartes's "universal doubt," not the primary importance of the natural environment, not the material life of man, and not the human unconscious (see, e.g., Peirce 1955[1868]:228–30). Neither are there certain principles of abstract reason, logic, or mathematics that can be taken as a fixed foundation for inquiry (Bernstein 1992a:326). Harris is right to point out Boas's rejection of every form of determinism, but Boas was not alone (cf. Cotkin 1990:84–87, on James, and Miller 1973:193, on Mead).

James writes of pragmatism (1955[1907]:61), "She has in fact no prejudices whatever, no obstructive dogmas, no rigid canons of what shall count as proof. She is completely genial. She will entertain any hypothesis, she will consider any evidence." Boas wrote, "An unbiased investigator will utilize every method that can be devised to contribute to the solution of his problem" (1940j[1936]:311).

Nor, for the pragmatists, could there be absolute or final "truth"; all findings and interpretations were understood to be provisional, fallible, and "always and necessarily open to further interpretation, determination, and critical correction" (Bernstein 1992a:327, after Dewey). Peirce, who coined the term, wrote that "fallibilism is the doctrine that our knowledge is never absolute but always swims, as it were, in a continuum of uncertainty and of indeterminacy" (1955:356). The pragmatist view of human understanding and science, however, although inhospitable to all determinisms, accepted that there *are* some "truths" to be discovered, even if they can be sought only by fallible humans with unavoidable preconceptions.<sup>11</sup>

In contrast to the postmodern attitude, the pragmatists respected the enterprise of science and its achievements. As Wiener writes, Peirce believed in the "supreme value of honest, persevering inquiry by individual minds sharing a common desire to learn and a common faith that an indefinite community of such investigators must sooner or later discover the truth and the reality corresponding to it" (in Peirce 1958:viii). Dewey saw pragmatism as a perspective that involved testing of hypotheses just as in science (Kloppenber 1986:383).

2. *Pluralism and diversity*. "Nature is various, temporal and individual," wrote James's friend, acolyte, and biographer R. B. Perry (1907:428). Diversity, history, and individuality were inescapable facts of life for the pragmatists. James wrote, "It would probably astound each of them beyond measure to be let into his neighbor's mind and to find how different the scenery there was from that in his own" (1950[1890]:269–70). James's "plu-

ralistic universe" was a messy place, "a turbid, muddled, gothic sort of affair without a sweeping outline and with little pictorial nobility" (1971[1912]:143). "Pragmatism, pending the final empirical ascertainment of just what the balance of union and disunion among things may be, must obviously range herself upon the pluralistic side" (James 1955[1907]:108).

This same attitude is basic to the thought of Boas. Stocking (1968:195–233) has demonstrated the manner in which Boas established pluralism as a central element in the culture concept, and Boas's stress on diversity is apparent everywhere in his works. Along with James, he did not expect to find neat systems: "It is not justified to conclude from the defects of the available descriptions, which do not reveal a unity of culture, that the whole culture must be a compact unity, that contradictions within a culture are impossible, and that all features must be parts of a system. . . . Have we not reason to expect that here [in primitive cultures] as well as in more complicated cultures, sex, generation, age, individuality, and social organization will give rise to the most manifold contradictions?" (1940i[1933]:446–47).

3. *Contingency and chance*. Another theme in pragmatism is "the awareness of and sensitivity to radical contingency and chance that mark the universe, our inquiries, our lives" (Bernstein 1992a:328). For the pragmatists, in contrast to physicists but similarly to Mayr's biologists, "contingency and chance are not merely signs of human ignorance, they are ineradicable and pervasive features of the universe" (p. 329). Mechanistic causation and determinism were not to be expected in human affairs or in cosmic evolution (e.g., Peirce 1955:324–38). Thus Boas wrote of social change, "Here, as well as in other social phenomena, accident cannot be eliminated, accident that may depend upon the presence or absence of eminent individuals, upon the favors bestowed by nature, upon chance discoveries or contacts, and therefore prediction is precarious, if not impossible" (1928:246; cf. Mayr 1997:68). As Kroeber wrote of Boas, "He did not mind open situations nor a pluralistic outlook" (1956:152).

4. *Individual phenomena versus "the whole."* Boas and James preferred to focus on the individual elements of complex phenomena first and to look upon the wholes as abstractions. In "The Study of Geography" Boas distinguishes two types of scientists, one of which considers individual phenomena worthy of study not for their own sake but only as "a proof or a refutation of their laws, systems, and hypotheses. Losing sight of the single facts, [this type of scientists sees] only the beautiful order of the world." The other type studies a particular phenomenon, "may it occupy a high or a low rank in the system of physical sciences, and lovingly tries to penetrate into its secrets until every feature is plain and clear. This occupation with the object of his affection affords him a delight not inferior to that which the physicist enjoys in his systematical arrangement of the world" (1940a[1887]:644–45).

James draws a similar contrast between "rationalism" and his own *Weltanschauung*, "radical empiricism."

11. Hutchinson (1995:71–73) sees the similarity between Boas's attitude and that of James in "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings" (1967:644–45).

"Rationalism tends to emphasize universals and to make wholes prior to parts. . . . Empiricism, on the contrary, lays the explanatory stress upon the part, the element, the individual, and treats the whole as a collection and the universal as an abstraction. My description of things, accordingly, starts with the parts and makes of the whole a being of the second order" (1971[1912]:24).

5. *The importance of the individual.* For James, Dewey, Mead, and Boas, the center of concern was the individual person, an active agent with needs and perceptions, making choices, taking actions, firmly set within a particular culture and social context. James wrote, "Surely the individual, the person in the singular, is the more fundamental phenomenon, and the social institution, of whatever grade, is but secondary and ministerial" (1911:102-3; cf. Strauss 1956:xx-xxiii on Mead).

Similarly, writing against the notion of the "superorganic," Boas said, "It seems hardly necessary to consider culture a mystic entity that exists outside the society of its individual carriers, and that moves by its own force. The life of a society is carried on by individuals" (1928:245-46). In 1930 he added, "The problems of the social sciences are thus easily defined. They relate to forms of reactions of individuals, singly and in groups, to outer stimuli, to *their interactions among themselves, and to the social forms produced by these processes*" (1940g[1930]:260, my emphasis).<sup>12</sup>

However, for both Boas and the pragmatists, the individual was set into a social matrix as inextricably as the chicken and the egg. As Kloppenberg phrased it, writing of the view of the pragmatists, "Individuals must choose and act, but they act as beings conscious of their membership in a community, and that community is constantly testing the viability of their ideas and their actions" (1986:150).

## The Influence of Darwin

Darwin's ideas and works played a central role in the origins of pragmatism, offering them an alternative to "the rationalistic ideal of the complete determination by fixed law of the behavior of each individual particle of the universe" (Wiener 1972[1949]:4). The results of Darwin's science presented them with a world that was open, undetermined, pluralistic, individual. The development of living things was subject to certain processes, but the outcomes depended upon chance and accident, "the net result of minute variations of individual organisms subject to variable environmental conditions" (Wie-

12. Murray Wax writes, "It fitted with his adherence to radical empiricism that Boas emphasized the reality of the individual and warned against reifying culture" (1956:68). Wax claims that Boas absorbed this approach in Germany with Virchow, Fechner, Mach, and possibly Helmholtz as the major influences, but he does not connect Boas with James or any Americans (p. 64). (Wax also points out that it followed for Boas that, ethically, "each individual should be judged by his actions, not by his nonvoluntary membership in some group or placement in some physical or historical situation" [p. 69]).

ner 1972[1949]:5). The individual variations were unpredictable and undirected, and the process of selection was always subject to accident. "No wonder, then, that all the founders of pragmatism in one way or another were affected by the idea of the contingency of nature and the irreducible individuality of man." They accepted Darwin's nonteleological and nonmechanistic view of evolution but rejected Spencer's ideas of the superorganic and progressive development ("evolutionism"). According to James, "the spencerian 'philosophy' of social and intellectual progress is an obsolete anachronism, reverting to a pre-darwinian type of thought" (1956[1897]:254; cf. Wright 1958; Peirce 1955; Dewey 1910; Strauss 1956:xxii-xxiii; Richards 1987:424).<sup>13</sup>

The pragmatists applied the idea of natural selection to the history of human behavior and institutions as well as to the action of individuals. On the one hand, Dewey and James looked at the element of variation to show that cultural materials had undergone a sort of "trial by experience" through which behaviors that resulted in positive outcomes were "selected." Thus religion, for James, had its pragmatic value because it served human ends (compare Malinowski on religion and on "function" in culture in general [Leaf 1979:186-88; Leach 1957]). On the other hand, they were conscious of the historic role of the individual in social evolution. James wrote, "Now, I affirm that the relation of the visible environment to the great man is in the main exactly what it is to the 'variation' in the Darwinian philosophy. It chiefly adopts or rejects, preserves or destroys, in short *selects* him" (1956[1897]:226). He continued (p. 232),

Thus social evolution is a resultant of the interaction of two wholly distinct factors—the individual, deriving his peculiar gifts from the play of physiological and infrasocial forces, but bearing all the power of initiative and origination in his hands; and, second, the social environment, with its power of adopting or rejecting both him and his gifts. Both factors are essential to change.

Although the pragmatists rejected teleology, grand deductive schemes of development, and neat models of the universe, they did not necessarily give up hope of finding proximate causes for phenomena. One of the pioneers of pragmatism, Chauncey Wright, made this friendly criticism of Darwin in 1871 (1958:36, my emphasis):

He has not . . . repeated with sufficient frequency his faith in the universality of the law of causation in the phenomena of *general physiology or theoretical biology as well as in all the rest of physical nature*. . . . in referring any effect to "accident," he only means that its causes are like particular phases

13. The debate between the Spencerians and the pragmatists was recapitulated in Leslie White's criticism of Boas. As Morton White points out, the Spencerians held that "strict science is a deductive system" whose findings should be true independently of historical chance and idiosyncrasies. This is precisely contrary to Darwin's search for specific historical evidence (1972:134).

of the weather, or like innumerable phenomena in the concrete course of nature generally, which are quite beyond the power of finite minds to anticipate or to account for in detail, though none the less really determinate or due to regular causes.

Darwin agreed (M. White 1972:125). One can believe that there are immediate causes in nature and culture without believing that the outcomes are predictable or part of a grand scheme. Boas did.

Boas did not mention Darwin often, and some writers have expressed doubt as to his adherence to Darwinian evolution.<sup>14</sup> As early as 1887, however, in the debate with Otis T. Mason, Boas showed his appreciation of two of Darwin's major points. He noted that evolution operates on individuals and that the episodes of evolution are historical in nature, wholly dependent upon location in time and space and upon the history of the organism. Boas said (1974[1887]:66),

Former events . . . leave their stamp on the present character of a people. I consider it one of the greatest achievements of Darwinism to have brought to light this fact, and thus to have made a physical treatment of biology and psychology possible. The fact may be expressed by the words, "the physiological and psychological state of an organism at a certain moment is a function of its whole history."

As did the pragmatists, he appreciated the historicism of Darwin's theory of biological and psychological evolution.

In addition to these passages, we now have an unpublished lecture by Boas that demonstrates the depth of his recognition of Darwin's importance for all aspects of anthropology. The lecture, "The Relation of Darwin to Anthropology"<sup>15</sup> (n.d.[1909?]), ends with these words: "I hope I may have succeeded in presenting to you, however imperfectly, the currents of thought due to the work of the immortal Darwin which have helped to make anthropology what it is at the present time." In it he discusses the background of the *Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man* and then summarizes certain key points "regarding the manner of development of man" (p. 4). He emphasizes the idea that the all-important "slight variations" that man and his progenitors were subject to were "induced by the *same general causes* and governed by the *same general and complex laws* as at present" (p. 5, my emphasis). He accepts the idea that evolution proceeds "as the result of blind chance" (Darwin's words) but that there *are* laws applying to heredity, variation, and population growth. He is not antilaw in principle;

he just wants evidence to justify the claim that one has been found.

After this he discusses certain problems in archaeology and physical anthropology (human evolution, human variation, heredity and environment) that have been investigated following Darwin's findings and ideas. There is no doubt that he understands and accepts Darwin's work as it applies to man. For example, at the end of the section on physical anthropology he discusses the results of studies of human variation using biometry, a subject whose development he attributes "to Darwin's eminent cousin, Francis Galton." He concludes: "In short, every one of the factors recognized by Darwin as influencing the development of the human species has been established as a potent factor in the modifications of . . . [modern] human forms. Whether or not the changes that have been observed are progressive and cumulative, cannot be stated at the present time" (n.d.[1909?]:17).

Boas next turns to cultural anthropology and to the question of the evolutionary development of "the mental powers of man." Here he draws upon Darwin's key ideas of purposeless, undirected, "blind" variation and selective retention. He says (p. 19, my emphasis),

Although the idea does not appear quite definitely expressed in Darwin's discussion of the development of mental powers, it seems quite clear that his main object has been to express his conviction that *the mental faculties developed essentially without a purposive end, but that they originated as variations, and were continued by natural selection*. This idea was also brought out very clearly by [Alfred Russel] Wallace, who emphasized that apparently reasonable activities of man might very well have developed without an actual application of reasoning.<sup>16</sup>

Boas adopts the Darwinian model (with credit to Wallace as well) and applies it to the "development of other human activities and beliefs" beyond "the mental faculties" in general. "It is only lately that we recognize more and more clearly how little purposive reasoning has to do with the development of mental activities; that we begin to see how thoughts and customs develop without ever rising into the consciousness of man, and receive only later a purposive or rationalistic interpretation" (p. 19). Here is a major Boasian theme: the tendency of people to do things, to act, to develop new activities without conscious design or awareness but then to invent secondary rationalizations for them after the fact (e.g., Boas 1910:382–83). And he draws upon the key Darwinian metaphor of blind variation and selective retention to express it.<sup>17</sup> (Donald T. Campbell expanded on

14. George W. Stocking writes that Boas was not a Darwinian "save perhaps in the broadest sense" (1968:184). Only Alexander Lesser has noted his debt to Darwin (1981:22–25).

15. It was part of a series of lectures at Columbia University on the 50th anniversary of *The Origin of Species* (cf. Dewey 1910). I was fortunate to have noticed this previously overlooked manuscript in the Library of the APS (B/B61.5).

16. The same idea was expressed by Wright (1958[1873]:246) and was shared by James (see Richards 1987:434).

17. A passage in the draft that Boas crossed out reads, "It would seem that [Morgan's] theories were more directly influenced by Spencerian thought" than by Darwinian.

this idea in the 1960s and 1970s [see, e.g., Campbell 1960].)

### Boas's Early Cultural Anthropology

It is ironic that Boas has been caricatured as a planless gatherer of facts, because he was well aware of that issue himself. In the obituary of his student H. K. Haerberlin, who died at the age of 27, he wrote (1919:72):

He was never a mere collector of facts, but the material of anthropology served him to understand the relations between the individual and society. Anthropological observations were interesting to him because they throw light upon the relations between individual thought, feeling, and action and social environment. In this sense he was interested in the application of the results of anthropological study to the social problems of our day, because the attainment of true freedom of thought and action presupposes a clear understanding of the social determination of our own activities.

Haerberlin was close to Boas intellectually, and this passage can perhaps be seen as a projection of Boas's sense of himself. But as important as "the relations between individual thought, feeling, and action and social environment" were to Boas, he was interested in an extraordinary number of other subjects as well, and he employed numerous approaches to the understanding of these varied phenomena depending upon problems he was investigating (cf. Sanjek 1996:73). Obviously the methods employed in studies of growth and heredity would not be the same as those for the study of problems of language, the growth of culture, or the relations between the individual and culture.

For Boas there was always a point to the collection of facts; it was usually in order to test propositions. His paper on Alaskan needlecases is an example of the controlled use of ethnographic observations from a single study in order to test deductive speculations about art. He uses evidence from his field studies to challenge the evolutionary idea that there is a single and determined direction of change in artistic style from naturalistic to conventionalized depiction or vice versa. He shows that change may go in several directions and then presents observations and generalizations about the psychological processes involved in the changes. His conclusions lead him to stress the role of the creative artist, "the tendency to play, and the play of imagination with existing forms," and "the enjoyment which the maker feels in his own cleverness" (1940[1908]:591-92).<sup>18</sup> This is not merely a negative or destructive result; it liberates the student from misleading preconceptions about the nature of cre-

ativity and style and the "primitive mind." As Lowie remarks of this paper, "He disappoints the seeker of a formula for sequences, but inspires those capable of enjoying new vistas" (1944:324).

Similarly, in "On Alternating Sounds," Boas uses facts both to disprove a cultural evolutionist idea and to produce an original explanation for a general human tendency. Briefly, linguists had problems recording sounds from Indian and other languages with very different sound systems from their own, and it seemed to some that this meant that there were unstable "alternating" and "fluctuating" sounds in these languages. This was interpreted by contemporary anthropologists as "evidence for the evolutionary 'primitiveness' of Indian languages" (Stocking 1968:157-59). But Boas's study, which employed several sorts of evidence, led him to a different conclusion: the hearer, not used to the articulation of sounds in an unfamiliar language and to the normal range of variation of articulation unnoticed by and acceptable to the native speaker, mishears certain sounds and classifies them according to sounds in his or her own language. The phenomenon is shown to be a universal one, and its occurrence is "in no way a sign of primitiveness of the speech in which [alternating sounds] are said to occur" (1974[1889]:52). Thus he simultaneously formulates a universal linguistic principle rooted in psycho-physical tendencies and counters a prevailing notion that had reinforced the idea of the inferiority of "the primitive."

These are only two examples of Boas's use of facts to test propositions as any follower of the hypothetico-deductive method would (Mayr 1982). His studies on human growth, on the physical relationship between immigrants and their children, and on the physical characteristics of "the half-blood Indian" (1940b[1894]) are further examples. In every case he utilizes data he has methodically collected either to test propositions or to organize material that can be used to arrive at far-ranging conclusions. These are not the works of a mindless fact-collector.<sup>19</sup>

Critics such as White and Ray have made much of the almost 5,000 pages of translated but largely unanalyzed and unannotated texts in Chinook, Kathlamet, Tsimshian, Bella Bella, and Kwakiutl that Boas collected, edited, and published. It is true that relatively little has been done with them, but Boas had hopes for their use as part of an attempt to get at the unmediated voice of these peoples by having "a native worker . . . [as] . . . collaborator and principal investigator" collect them directly from native speakers (Goldman 1980:335 et passim; also Sanjek 1997; Hymes 1999; Codere 1959; Smith 1959). Because he believed that "the whole classification of experience among mankind living in different forms of society follows entirely distinct lines" (1910:376), he

18. Compare the parallel conclusions reached by Boas's student Haerberlin about potters in Mexico (1919) and those of David L. Hull in his avowedly Darwinian study of the sources of scientific creativity (1988:520).

19. Even this paper of 1894 seems to have its origins in *The Origin of Species*. Darwin proposed that "the crossing of forms, which have been exposed to slightly different conditions of life, or which have varied, favours the size, vigour, and fertility of their offspring" (n.d.[1859]:232). This is the question that Boas investigated.

thought that these texts, in the speakers' own languages, could help get at various understandings of the world. (This idea eventuated in "ethnoscience" in the 1950s.) These texts can still be used by the descendants of the narrators or by outside analysts.

Boas was suspicious of the construction of subjective classifications, types, abstract models, and systems. Thus the famous unwillingness to classify the Kwakiutl kinship organization, the *numaym*, that so exercised White (1959:177; 1963:52–54; Harris 1968:303–14) was not due to weakness of intellect or a failure of will, nor was it a betrayal of the spirit of science. It was the result of his belief that abstract typologies and classifications and "the imposition of categories derived from our own culture upon foreign cultures" are not fruitful ways to proceed in ethnology (1940[1936]:311). For Boas, writes Marian W. Smith, "Behavior must be studied in its own terms, classified according to its own features. *The thought processes of the investigator must therefore be subjected to similarly rigid examination*" (1959:46–47, my emphasis; cf. Goldman 1980).<sup>20</sup> Boas was always aware of the need for "reflexivity."

## The Study of Process and the Individual

In the 1880s and 1890s Boas stressed the pressing need to record as much as possible of the rapidly changing cultures of American Indians. By the 1920s, however, he was arguing that the time had come to turn away from "the systematic enumeration of standardized beliefs and customs of a tribe" and devote more effort to the dynamics of culture and cultural change and to questions of the individual in culture (1940[1920]:285). In a paper that could serve as a manifesto, Boas wrote about "the important problems of the relation of the individual to society, a problem that has to be considered whenever we study the dynamic conditions of change" (1940[1920]:285; cf. 1940[1930]:268; 1938:673):

The activities of the individual are determined to a great extent by his social environment, but in turn his own activities influence the society in which he lives, and may bring about modifications in its form. Obviously, this problem is one of the most important ones to be taken up in a study of cultural changes. It is also beginning to attract the attention of students who are no longer satisfied with the systematic enumeration of standardized beliefs and customs of a tribe, but who begin to be interested in the question of the way in which the individual reacts to his whole social environment, and to the differences of opinion and of mode of action that occur

in primitive society and which are the causes of far-reaching changes.<sup>21</sup>

True to his Darwinian outlook, he was concerned with the variation that is the background to and the source of change. "We . . . find in the same culture curious breaks in the attitudes of different individuals, and, in the case of varying situations, even in the behavior of the same individual" (1940h[1932]:256; cf. 1938:681). And it is these individuals, acting "singly and jointly under the stress of the tradition in which they have grown up" (1928:245), who determine the direction of change. "They may proceed to act and think according to the transmitted patterns or they may be led to move in opposite directions" (1928:245–46).<sup>22</sup> As his student Robert Lowie put it in a paper on the study of change, "Differences in temperament and ability are an ever present factor; and the definition of 'transition' may conveniently be made to hinge on the differing reactions of individuals to simultaneously presented alternatives—one conforming to tradition, the other to a proposed substitute" (1942:527).

He found the standard ethnographic description inadequate for the study of change because "it is given to us as a list of inventions, institutions, and ideas, but we learn little or nothing about the way in which the individual lives under these institutions and with these inventions and ideas, nor do we know how his activities affect the cultural groups of which he is a member" (1940g[1930]:268; cf. 1940h[1932]:257). He credits W. H. R. Rivers (1906) with recognizing the need to look for individual variation and to see how taboos and marriage laws are actually carried out, calling this "one of the most important steps in advance in regard to ethnological methods, not only for relationships, but as opening the way in which we should observe the participation of the individual in the social life of the whole people" (lecture, May 8, 1917, APS ms. B/B61p:2–3). He calls on the observer to "ascertain the abstract custom of the tribe as it exists in the mind of the people, and then consider how it is carried out actually in their life." Rules are not always obeyed, and laws are not always enforced. "It is important to understand in how far the customs formally acknowledged have really existed in the life of

20. The debate about totemism (ca. 1910–11) provides a good example of the Boasian group's suspicion of classification and of its antiessentialism. Boas, Goldenwieser, and Lowie all questioned the reality and usefulness of the accepted classification of totemism. Desley Deacon captures the mood of the period and writes of "how Goldenwieser deconstructed the concept of totemism" (1997: 105–6; cf. Shapiro 1991).

21. Boas's "failure" to produce a complete ethnography of the Kwakiutl may be due, at least in part, to the fact that he was speaking of himself when he spoke of "students who are no longer satisfied with the systematic enumeration of standardized beliefs and customs of a tribe" (see Codere 1959:72–73).

22. The widespread impression that Boas was interested only in culture in the abstract, not in individuals, is puzzling in view of how often and consistently he insisted on the opposite. As Lowie wrote of his student days, "The entire problem of the individual's relation to his society loomed as one of major consequence—for English-trained Wallis no less than for the Columbia group" (1956: 1010).

the people" (p. 2) and to achieve "a much greater individualization of observation" (p. 5).<sup>23</sup>

The idea that individuals are not only creatures of culture but also directly responsible for bringing about changes is uncongenial—if not anathema—to those who believe that history, society, and culture have their own laws independent of the individuals who carry those cultures. (This group includes Herbert Spencer, Karl Marx, Leslie White, Marvin Harris, and A. L. Kroeber.) From their perspective Boas is a particularizer whose ideas can only obfuscate and mislead. But those who reject the grand narratives should be interested in the work of Boas and his followers.

## Regularities and Laws

Kluckhohn and Pruffer (1959:24) believe that Boas had "enthusiasm for the discovery of laws of cultural development" when he began his career but that he became increasingly pessimistic and eventually gave up the search for them altogether (cf. Stocking 1974:12–13). In fact there was probably not much change in his approach. Boas never thought that anthropology could find the kind of laws that the cultural evolutionists had in mind, such as a law of the progression of religious belief, a sequence for the development of kinship systems, a fixed set of stages through which all cultures must pass, or a law correlating the capture and use of energy with the development of cultures. He did believe that there were certain long-term trends in human cultural history, but the laws he spoke of were of a different order.<sup>24</sup> "If we look for laws," he wrote, "the laws relate to the effects of physiological, psychological, and social conditions, not to sequences of cultural achievement" (1940[1920]:318). They are "the laws governing the activities of the human mind" (Boas 1940d[1899]:624).

As early as 1887, in the debate with Mason, Boas spoke about a twofold program for understanding ethnological and anthropological phenomena. One involved the study of their historical development and geographical distribution and the other "their physiological and psychological foundation." "These two branches are opposed to each other in the same way as are . . . 'physical science and cosmography'; the former trying to deduce laws from

phenomena, the latter having for its aim a description and explanation of phenomena" (Boas 1974[1887]:63).

The first task was to "apply inductive methods for the solution of historical questions" (1940d[1899]:624) by studying the cultures of "definite areas," using archaeology, linguistics, and "geographical" and ethnographic methods, and comparing the cultures and histories of tribes within these areas. This is the task of historical and ethnographic reconstruction—the equivalent of the work of students of evolutionary biology as they use paleontology, taxonomy, and other forms of comparison to discover the facts of the history of biological forms.

Boas made clear, however, that the historical reconstruction of single cultures "is not the ultimate aim of our science"; that aim is to find the "general laws" (1940c[1896]:279). The intermediate step between the intensive historical and ethnographic study of a single culture and the understanding of the general laws would have to be widespread comparison of different cultures. The laws ("largely of a psychological nature") "cannot be clearly formulated nor their relative value appreciated without a thorough comparison of the manner in which they become manifest in different cultures."

From the beginning Boas made a distinction between those phenomena in human life that could be treated as "lawlike" and those that were the result of historical processes, subject to chance. A century later, Ernst Mayr draws the same distinction between causes in biological evolution, distinguishing "proximate" and "ultimate" causation. Ultimate causation is the kind that brings about modifications and major changes in biology, both in genetic programs and in behavior. "They cannot be investigated by the methods of chemistry or physics but must be reconstructed by historical inferences—by the testing of historical narratives" (Mayr 1997:67). "Proximate causation" refers to the regular effects of physiological, psychological, and behavioral causes ("controlled by genetic and somatic programs"), which parallel Boas's "physiological and psychological" causes. Both Boas's anthropology in 1887 and Mayr's evolutionary biology in 1997 recognize a two-part reality: "proximate causes" that operate on a micro level with regularity and "ultimate causes" that depend upon history, events, and chance in ways that are unpredictable except, perhaps, in terms of probabilities.

In evolutionary biology, the causes for changes in form include mutation, natural selection, genetic drift, and gene flow. A great deal is understood about these processes, but evolutionary developments cannot be predicted even with this knowledge. Nor is it possible to answer questions about how things came to be without "the testing of historical narratives" that Mayr speaks of (cf. Sober 1988). Boas explicitly recognized the parallel with culture. "For an intelligent understanding of historical process a knowledge of living processes is as necessary as the knowledge of life processes is for the understanding of the evolution of life forms" (1940h[1932]:

23. Further indications of Boas's concern with the sense of the living artists and craftsmen and their performances and creative processes can be gotten from the letters he wrote to his students and collaborators in the field. He urged Haeblerin, Zora Neale Hurston, Otto Klineberg, Archie Phinney, and Ella Deloria to pay particular attention to the attitudes and styles involved in activities and performances. Ruth Bunzel's account of the origins of her Pueblo potter study (in Mead 1959) does the same.

24. Early in his career he thought that there was evidence for growing dependence upon rational thought rather than traditional custom and emotion as cultures grew more complex. He also believed that there was a tendency for social groupings to grow larger, thus expanding the community of those considered within the society and included in (what would later be called) the "moral community." For more on trends see Boas (1930:110).

255).<sup>25</sup> Later he wrote, "In the case of social phenomena the 'laws' are not so well known [as is, e.g., 'the probability of the movements of a number of bodies distributed in space, the velocity of each being known'], and on account of the multiplicity of contradictory elements prediction is not certain. Nevertheless the general dynamic tendencies of cultural change may be understood by such an analysis" (cf. Goldenweiser 1933:5–32).<sup>26</sup>

## The Attempt to Understand Process

The psychological process that Boas spoke of were to be looked for in the beliefs, perceptions, emotions, and motivations of the diverse individuals with different life experiences and temperaments that are found in any society. He was interested in the psychological factors that explain the origins of beliefs and practices and their stability and change, including rationalization, "imitation, percept, habit, and unconscious associations" (Cole 1999:272). Assuming "the fundamental sameness of mental processes in all races and in all cultural forms of the present day" (Boas 1927:1), he wanted to see how individuals reacted to cultural and social situations in as many different historical settings as possible, seeking generalizations regarding both reproduction and modification of cultural behavior. "Dynamic conditions exist, based on environment, physiological, psychological, and social factors, that may bring forth similar cultural processes in different parts of the world" (p. 5).<sup>27</sup>

In a lecture in 1917 (APS, B/B61p, #17, May 3), Boas pointed to both the social context and the "position of the individual," which, he felt, was "most commonly overlooked in regard to this particular phenomenon . . . i.e. we are accustomed to think that [all] people react the same way to social stimuli" (p. 2). Using the example of individual differences among Indian artists working within the same tradition, he noted, "There are those who are expert, those who imitate, and still others that are creative. . . . I must not consider the art of Dakota in a mass, but individually." He continued, "It is certain that we may expect new forms to creep in through the activities of these more gifted women, and we must find

25. Although this quotation is from 1932, he was speaking about the search for processes at least as early as 1896 (1940c[1896]:276). In the passage often cited to demonstrate Boas's opposition to the search for laws in culture, he grants that "those psychological, biologically determined characteristics which are common to all cultures and appear in a multitude of forms according to the particular culture in which they manifest themselves" do deserve "the name of a law" (1940j[1936]:311).

26. Arnold Krupat (1990) detects postmodernist irony in Boas's calling for the discovery of laws, yet setting standards that are impossible to meet. But Boas did not mean laws "as rigid as those of physics are supposed to be" (Boas 1940k:311, my emphasis). He meant (probabilistic) laws of process that he thought could be discovered (cf. Hymes 1999).

27. The ethnographic and ethnological papers he chose to reprint in *Race, Language, and Culture* (1940k) focus largely on process; many deal with "growth," "dissemination," and invention. He writes in the Preface (p. v), "The dynamics of life have always been of greater interest to me than the description of conditions."

how far it is imitated" (p. 5; cf. Parezo 1992:xii). Similarly, regarding religious change: "The reaction of the whole group shows enormous variation. There are some people who think about religious matters and are deeply touched emotionally by evidence that touches their religious life, and they necessarily contribute to the further development of religious thought" (pp. 7–8; cf. Radin 1914, 1927; Wallis 1918). "In the societies of the southwest, where a single individual repeats the ritual, the individual's power may become exceedingly strong. His behavior is due to his make-up. The stability of religious belief will depend upon the power that an individual has in shaping the religious activities of the whole tribe" (p. 8). He concluded by stressing the need "to understand the reactions of the individual towards the social environment and his contributions to it and the part he takes in the reproduction and in the form of development of social ideas" (p. 8). In his early work on Kwakiutl secret societies, Boas interpreted the growth of secret societies and their rituals as resulting from a combination of human ambition and motivation (above all the desire for distinction), involvement in feasting and ritual activities, and the adaptation of their own cultural ideas and those of their neighbors (1940c[1896]:382).

He was always interested in the sources of stability and conservatism in culture: the force of received ideas, fashion, the power of habit and customary actions, and the influence of public opinion and "the crowd" on the individual (e.g., Boas 1910, Le Bon 1960[1895]). But he was equally interested in the sources of innovation and change and in the ability of the individual to break free of the "shackles of tradition." Boas drew upon *Les lois de l'imitation* by Gabriel Tarde (1903[1890]), which stresses the importance of individual initiative in change and the tendency of others to adopt, or imitate, these innovations. (Course notes taken by Ruth Benedict show Boas's interest in Tarde, innovation, and imitation in cultural change [Mead 1959:37–40].) Tarde opposed Durkheim's emphasis on the precedence and overwhelming power of "society" over the individual, and in some ways the differences between Tarde and Durkheim parallel those between Boas and White.<sup>28</sup> "The causal conditions of cultural happenings lie always in the interaction between individual and society, and no classificatory study of societies will solve this problem" (1940h[1932]:257; also 1940f[1920]:280, 287).

## A Few Generalizations

Late in his life Boas wrote (1938:674–75):

A number of social tendencies that are apparently generally valid may be isolated. Their psychological

28. Comparing Tarde and Durkheim on change, Clark writes: "Tarde stressed the centrality of the creative individual in suggesting new lines of development which the collectivity would subsequently adopt. Durkheim preferred to emphasize the structural conditions which predisposed a given collectivity to change, minimizing the importance of individual factors" (1969:18).

basis and the forms in which they find expression may be studied. Thus the solidarity of social groups and their antagonism toward the outsider; the forms and motives for coordination and subordination; imitation of, and resistance to, outside influences; competition between individuals and between groups; division of labor; amalgamation and segregation; attitudes toward the supernatural. . . . From these studies a cultural morphology may be constructed and a social psychology developed, based on the variety of manifestations of these categories.

We can illustrate Boas's idea of social tendencies with the matter of ethnicity and ethnonationalism at the turn of the 21st century. Few predictions in social science seemed more secure 50 years ago than the one that foresaw the end of "parochial nationalisms" as the result of "modernization." (Even Boas believed this.) And yet today ethnicity is one of the most powerful social and political forces throughout the world. By now we understand a great deal about ethnicity and ethnonationalism: their origins, the passions they induce, the ways in which innovators and entrepreneurs foment them, how followers react to their messages, and the reactions of government officials and members of competing ethnic groups to the ethnic aspirations of others. But we have no reliable way of predicting which movements will "succeed" and which will "fail," how long ethnonationalism will continue to grow in popularity and importance, or what new general trends will arise in the future. We can understand the processes, but specific future developments depend upon particular actions and events that we cannot foresee.

Joshua Fishman, writing of the growing global importance of English as an international language (1998–99), cautions against the assumption that this predominance will necessarily continue to grow. Other languages are of increasing regional importance, there may be growing resistance to English, and shifts in political and economic fortunes that we cannot now imagine will produce more complex outcomes. Just as we cannot predict future biological evolution despite our great knowledge of genetics and ecology, so we cannot predict human events.<sup>29</sup>

In 1930 Boas cautiously attempted a few generalizations about the development of such complex systems as "modern science," art styles, and metaphysical and religious systems of knowledge. "Probably all that can be said is that as long as a certain trend of activity or thought persists it will proceed, on the lines laid down, toward an increasing intensity or complexity. Nothing

can be predicted in regard to detailed style of development, the duration of the trend, and the new direction that action and thought may take after its termination" (1930:110). This is not a trivial observation but a sound generalization about complex systems. We witness increasing intensity and complexity occurring all the time, in all sorts of systems. The organization of American football has become extraordinarily complex, with the growth of specialization of tasks and skill that now requires greatly expanded coaching staffs to deal with all the types of positions. The invention of the skateboard in the late 20th century led to entirely new skills and activities, followed by organizations and forms of display and competition. The growing popularity of running in the United States has given rise to books, magazines, theoreticians, medical specialists, trainers, and the manufacture of special shoes for every conceivable track and condition. Or we may consider the elaboration of tax codes and the preparation of tenure cases in academia and the organization and elaboration of clubs and networks for collectors—even before the establishment of the worldwide web.

Nor is this true only in "late capitalist society." It is a general tendency. The extraordinary elaboration and involution of many Australian marriage and kinship systems seem to represent the working out of the rules of the game and the interests of the people (Kroeber 1938). So does the development of Jewish law and rabbinical commentary, in a very different society.

We cannot predict the most immediate developments, let alone those in the remote future. We have no way of knowing when new interests and activities will arise, how long any will last, or when institutions may be drastically changed. Not only can we not predict major political shifts (such as the sudden collapse of regimes in Indonesia and Serbia in 2000), we cannot reliably guess at the implications of the electronics and information revolution going on at the moment, one whose current form was not dreamt of two decades ago.

## Conclusions

Franz Boas was a "historicist," deeply aware of the historically determined nature of everything in the cultural and natural worlds, but he was not a "particularist," if that means someone unable to generalize. He rejected all simple determinisms and conjectured "laws" and questioned alike the "grand narratives" of Spencerian evolutionists, British, German, and Austrian diffusionists, Radcliffe-Brownian structural-functionalists, and environmental, psychological, and economic determinists, but he was in search of generalizations about culture.

Boas's approach to understanding and explanation in anthropology parallels that which such thinkers as Ernst Mayr and Elliott Sober recognize as appropriate—even necessary—for many aspects of biology and some other natural sciences. It was Boas, rather than his detractors,

29. Despite the theoretical and practical knowledge and the technological marvels of meteorology, the powerful storms that caused havoc in France in the winter of 1999–2000 were totally unanticipated, while the hurricane that hit North Carolina was confidently expected to blow out to sea. The physical principles were understood, there was no lack of data, but chance and unpredictability are ineradicable features of weather systems. This is surely the case in the complex world of culture, society, and history as well.

whose science was similar to that of Charles Darwin—in a way that may also be useful for future social science.

Boas's ethnological writings take on a different look when they are understood in these terms. He hoped to understand the concepts and feelings of members of other cultures and how the world looked to them and how they behaved as a result of these worldviews, but he was antiessentialist and did not reify "culture." He argued against views of cultures, whether "primitive" or complex, as homogeneous, bounded, isolated seamless wholes; he was always concerned with variety and diversity. Despite his desire "to understand each culture as a whole and to define its character," he was aware of the pitfalls of attempts to characterize even the simplest of cultures (1938:680–83). Although he believed that the historically derived cultural traditions by which all human groups live have terrific force, he did not view culture as something all-powerful, forcing all members of a group to conform automatically.

He was concerned about the subjectivity of the anthropologist, both as observer and as analyst (e.g., 1938:681, 683). This prominent theme in anthropology since the 1970s was one of his major concerns from the beginning of his career in the 1880s.<sup>30</sup> But neither did he fall into the trap of conceiving of other peoples as exotic, unable to be understood, operating according to principles totally foreign to us. He insisted upon the common humanity and similar mental makeup of humans of all cultural backgrounds, but he maintained a balanced understanding of the power of culture.

Finally, Boas's view of the dynamics of change put the emphasis upon the interrelations between the individual and the group and their culture, clearly stressing the significance of human agency and what Anthony Giddens (1976) calls "the duality of structure."

But my aim in this paper is not merely to plead for a kinder, gentler understanding of Boas or to say "Boas . . . already 'said something like that'" (Marcus and Fischer 1986:viii–ix). There is more to be gained. Boas and others who thought like him created a perspective that may yet be of use. Here are a few suggestions:

1. There is much in the writings of Boas and his followers that is worthy of reconsideration by a new generation that has had little exposure to them and may not have the negative attitudes of earlier ones. In addition to Boas's many contributions, anthropologists such as A. L. Kroeber, Robert Lowie, Alexander Goldenweiser, Paul Radin, Elsie Clews Parsons, Edward Sapir, Karl Haeberlin, Wilson D. Wallis, Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, Ruth Bunzel, Melville Herskovits, Gladys Reichard, and Alexander Lesser absorbed Boas's key ideas and applied them in their ethnographic and ethnological works. (There are many others who should be included, but it is impossible to do so here.) A period of rediscovery and

reinterpretation seems to have begun. Regna Darnell (1986, 1998a) and Lars Rodseth (1998) have found some of the same qualities that I have attributed to Boas in the work of Edward Sapir, as has Warren Shapiro (1991) in the writing of Alexander Goldenweiser. The ideas of Ruth Benedict have been given new readings by Dell Hymes (1999) and Daniel Rosenblatt (1999), while Ira Bashkow (1999), Matti Bunzl (1999), Andrew Orta (1999), and Pauline Turner Strong (1999) are finding new insights into Boas himself.<sup>31</sup> The works of these older writers are worth considering for both their ethnographic substance and their theoretical insights.

2. Most Boasians were concerned with "culture and agency" before there was practice theory. When Kroeber argued for "the superorganic" as a force over and above individuals (1915, 1917), dismissing them as active agents, he met opposition from Haeberlin (1915), Goldenweiser (1917), Sapir (1917), and Boas himself. Parsons, Lowie, Sapir, Wallis (1915), and Bunzel (1929) were well aware of and concerned about the creative role of the individual, and Goldenweiser lists studies by contemporaries that move beyond standard descriptions of customs (1933:156–57). Of course they were equally aware of the importance of the cultures into which individuals had been socialized and which they both reproduced and modified by their behavior.

3. There is growing interest in the potential of the Darwinian metaphor, derived from evolutionary biology, for the study of cultural change and history. Boas, along with William James and Max Weber (1978:38–39), was aware of the usefulness of the idea of "variation and selective retention" for a model of human history. It is a model of cultural change that recognizes plurality, diversity, chance, and the creative role of individuals both as innovators and as imitators. It does not produce a search for "laws"; it involves the attempt to understand the processes that lead to our understandable but unpredictable futures (see Campbell 1965, Toulmin 1972, Greenfield and Strickon 1981).

This approach should not be confused with those called sociobiology or evolutionary psychology, however. We are not concerned with *genetic* factors at all but only with such cultural and social processes as invention, innovation, imitation and emulation, learning, and diffusion. (Sober [1993:209–15] discusses this approach in comparison with sociobiology and other models of cultural evolution [see also Toulmin 1972:321, 337].) As envisioned by Boas in his lecture on Darwin and by Weber (1978), Toulmin (1972), Langton (1979, 1982), Greenfield and Strickon (1981), Lewis and Greenfield (1983), Richards (1987), Hull (1988), and Burns and Dietz (1992), it is a working metaphor to guide the study of cultural and social change. When cultural anthropologists again turn to questions of process and pattern in history (and rejoin

30. As Hymes writes, addressing Krupat's point, "it is not quite true that Boas was a positivist for whom the facts are 'simply out there.' It is fairer to say that he was an empiricist who had to overcome the ways in which cultural assumptions could distort perception and interpretation" (1999:98).

31. The last five in this list were among the ten participants in a session at the 1999 meetings of the American Anthropological Association entitled "The Pasts, Presents, and Futures of Boasian Anthropology."

the archaeologists) there will still be something to learn from Boas and his followers.

4. Finally, there is the question of what will follow the era of poststructuralism, postcolonialism, and postmodernism. Might it be possible to find some accommodation between Boasian anthropology, pragmatism, Darwin, and *some* of the key ideas that were stressed in the time of the “posts”? Perhaps.

There has been a growing interest in pragmatism in recent years, partly as a response to postmodernism. The discussion of pragmatism has taken place mainly in philosophy, history, and political philosophy and has involved such writers as Richard J. Bernstein, Hilary Putnam, Alan Ryan, Richard Rorty, Cass Sunstein, Cornel West, and Hans Joas (in sociology) (see Bernstein 1992*b* and Kloppenberg 1996). These writers see some common elements in pragmatism and certain aspects of postmodernist thought—basically the ones that I outlined earlier. Indeed, some of them go so far as to contend that “the valuable postmodern claims tend to be not postmodern at all, but instead part of the philosophical heritage of pragmatism” (Sunstein 1993:127; cf. Kloppenberg 1996).

In what ways might this be useful for anthropology? Without entering into debates about the nature and accomplishments of postmodern anthropology, perhaps the following programmatic statement can serve as at least one vision of a postmodern ideal. Steven Seidman offers this summary of Lyotard’s view of postmodern science: “Such knowledges abandon absolute standards, universal categories, and grand theories; they favor local, historically contextualized, and pragmatic types of social inquiry. The value of postmodern knowledge lies in making us aware of and tolerant toward social differences, ambiguity, and conflict” (1994:5). If this is indeed what postmodern social science is supposed to be, an accommodation should be simple, because Seidman’s words describe the Boasian worldview almost exactly.<sup>32</sup>

Post-postmodern anthropology will contain more than one perspective, just as there has always been diversity in the field, even throughout the decades of postmodernist dominance. (Diversity and pluralism are pervasive in anthropology as in every other complex enterprise, regardless of the talk of “hegemonic discourses.”) There will still be anthropologists searching for causes and laws, following a scientific bent; others will continue to resist “positivism,” and still others will be concerned primarily with the application of anthropology to immediate human problems. But those who have absorbed the worthwhile lessons of postmodernism—those suggested by Seidman—and want to return to a more respectful attitude toward science and anthropology itself will find a congenial and useful storehouse of ideas and

32. I thank Melania Alvarez-Adem for bringing the Seidman passage to my attention. There is a major difference between the Boasians and post-Foucault anthropology with regard to the matter of conflict, however. Boas and his followers had relatively little to say about this problem whereas many “post” thinkers have made conflict, domination, and unequal power the very core of their thought.

information in the works of Franz Boas and his followers.<sup>33</sup>

## Comments

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I am in considerable sympathy with Lewis’s effort to recover a Boasian position within what he envisions as an emerging post-postmodernist anthropology. Indeed, I have myself attempted to rehabilitate the Boasian formulation of anthropological questions, if not their answers, establishing continuity within an Americanist tradition considerably more complex than its dominance by Boas and Boasians over much of the past century.

Lewis argues that Boas’s ideas were accepted rapidly in North America because they converged with an already established pragmatist tradition in American social science. He is correct that ongoing Americanist critiques have interpreted Boas relative to the German tradition of his education rather than seeking influences from his adopted homeland. Moreover, disciplinary boundaries were more permeable in the late 19th century, so (some) philosophers and (some) anthropologists read one another’s work. Other American influences, however, were endogenous to his chosen discipline; Boas’s anthropology shared several features with that of John Wesley Powell’s Bureau of American Ethnology: culture was a symbolic product of human minds under diverse cultural conditions, encapsulated in linguistic categories and historical contacts; salvage ethnology recorded disappearing cultures through firsthand fieldwork and systematic comparison of its results. Both Boas and Powell willingly left material culture and archaeology to the U.S. National Museum and Harvard’s Peabody Museum. Boas celebrated collecting both a mask and the story behind it.

Lewis is more interested in influences shared by Boas, Darwin, and the pragmatists than in documenting specific mechanisms of contact and network. The complexities of biography are largely elided within a general episteme of historical and psychological investigation replacing the nonfalsifiable generalizations of nomothetic

33. I do not mean to imply that these are the only anthropologists worth (re)discovering. Regna Darnell, for one, points to a meeting of old and newer perspectives in a slightly different way (1998*b*:xiv). I regret that I have neglected Malinowski and his heirs, whose perspective bears significant similarity to that of the Boasians. (Malinowski was influenced by many of the same intellectual trends as Boas, and this may explain the defensive reaction of the Americans who claimed that Malinowski wasn’t really saying anything new. For Malinowski’s intellectual background see Leach [1957], Leaf [1979], Gross [1986], and Thornton and Skalník [1993].) As I have argued previously (1998), we anthropologists have a goodly—but often misunderstood—heritage.

positivist theory. Certainly, there are shared resonances; Darwin was indeed a cosmologist rather than a physicist in Boas's terms. But Boas's own theorizing reminds us that convergence may mask divergent underlying meanings and histories in the history of science as well as in ethnology.

Some of the shared resonances between Boas and the "post-"s (albeit these are not as monolithic as Lewis implies) indeed transcend the intervening positivism of the postwar period. Others arise from changing metaphors of science. The prevailing metaphor of Boas's early career was natural selection (variation and selection in culture as in biology), that of his mature career relativism (with indeterminacy and contingency built into both the world and human knowledge/judgment). His refusal of premature generalization becomes heroic (again, as in his critique of evolution). The complexity of patterning of underlying variables now nonplusses even the physical sciences, not to mention the social sciences, where the observer effect renders reflexivity a methodological tool.

Lewis emphasizes how Boas tacked between methods, rejecting a mystical superorganic culture in favour of individual agency reciprocally creating and influencing culture itself. Boas was indeed a pioneer in the study of intracultural variation (although Sapir, Radin, and Goldenweiser overshadowed Lowie in theorizing this alternative to Kroeberian culturologism). Boas arrived at the individual via background (socialization) and the dynamics of change (rather than via personality as did Mead and Benedict). But Mead was correct, contra Lewis, that Boas's focus shifted over his career from culture(-history) to psychology, from physics to cosmology. The former was logically as well as empirically prior.

Lewis suggests diversity and pluralism as inherent features of the world, despite hegemonic discourses of which anthropology has had its share. He predicts that science, resistance to science, and applications of anthropological models will persist in the history of anthropology. I envision the humanistic pole of contemporary anthropology, postmodernist or otherwise, as more positive than its instantiation as not-science. It is less a question of claiming some "neo-Boasian" essentialism than of acknowledging continuities, respecting ancestors, and building upon our history. "New" interrogations of Boasian concepts of race and textuality are, in fact, inseparable from the older phrasing in terms of standpoint (a technical term in the writing of Boas, Sapir, and Goldenweiser at least) and the impossibility of producing a complete or synthetic ethnography of the Kwakiutl or anyone else.

Could this history of resonances and reinterpretations have been otherwise? Boas's own notions of contingency so suggest. Douglas Cole's (1999) posthumous biography of Boas's early years portrays his uncertainty and thwarted ambition, doubtless sufficient motivation for his skewing of the history of anthropology to consolidate his own position in the North American version thereof; in the late 19th century this meant deconstructing classical evolutionism. We have inherited a Boasian/Americanist tradition that only begins to be interpreted ade-

quately for our own time and that promises viability relative to whatever comes next. The history of anthropology and emerging praxis cannot and should not be disengaged.

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29 XI 00

Franz Boas borrowed a great deal from that most characteristic philosophy of his adoptive homeland, pragmatism. This much is widely known. Is it possible that Boas also contributed to the pragmatist agenda by operationalizing its key principles in the context of anthropological science? This too seems quite plausible. What is more, this view of science is far from being the sort of antisience that revisionists such as Leslie White accused it of being. Lewis makes a reasoned argument about Boas's embrace, not rejection, of certain tenets of evolutionism.

Like any polemicist, however, Lewis must marshal his evidence selectively. Thus, it is necessary to isolate Darwin's stochastic side from his nomothetic one. Similarly, one must select certain dimensions of Boas's thought. But, at the outset, one questions the need for such a polemic, at least within anthropology. The White critique is given little credence today. White is little read, and his theories, with their almost medieval blend of universalism and deductivism and their idiosyncratic terminology, are of no importance. White appears as scientific rather than scientific, an outsider looking in at what seemed the dazzling world of science much like the science fiction writers also popular at midcentury. At the same time, I think it is fair to say that Boas is indeed a figure that we in the social sciences find congenial in today's intellectual milieu: egalitarian, individualistic, antifoundational, and politically engaged. It is Boas, not White, who is celebrated at the centennial of the American Anthropological Association.

This view of Boas, while accurate, is incomplete. It comes from reading his stand-alone methodological and theoretical writings rather than his ethnographic ones. This is ironic, since the gist of Boas's philosophy is that we should look to the data themselves before the theory. Boas's Kwakiutl oeuvre alone dwarfs his methodological and theoretical one. Lewis mentions only in passing these "unanalyzed and unannotated" texts in several languages. In general terms I would have to agree that Boas's reasons for collecting them do share a common impulse with the later school of ethnoscience: a desire to get at the higher-order concepts that go into shaping a culturally specific world. However, it is equally important to look at the way the texts were collected and the rather serious problems that arose with Boas's methodology.

These problems are mainly of two sorts, what might be called "Kwakiutlism" and "textual fetishism." Kwakiutlism refers to the fact that Boas had deep ethnographic experience only with the Fort Rupert Kwakiutl (an eth-

nonym Boas invented) among Northwest Coast tribes. Unlike his Kwakiutl work, which does tend to be inductive and empirically sound, his forays into other groups, especially those he erroneously called the "Northern Kwakiutl," tend to be driven by his Kwakiutl agenda. Thus, in contrast to the respect for native categories we see in his adoption of *numaym* as an analytical term, he is unable to appreciate the matrilineal inflection of northern groups such as the Heiltsuk (Bella Bella).

Textual fetishism is a stance that equates elicited texts, the product of a complex set of social and economic relations, with a native worldview. Texts are presented as if unmediated, as if the ethnographer had done nothing other than transcribe the very genius of the culture. The role of the anthropologist in eliciting the texts and the role of the narrator in creating texts are suppressed. More deeply suppressed are the methodological shenanigans that involved taking an English text produced by a native scholar such as Henry Tate and "re-eliciting" it, as Ralph Maud (2000) has shown was Boas's procedure for "Tsimshian Mythology" (1916). Boas deliberately concealed the conditions of these texts' production, a topic of keen interest to contemporary scholars such as Maud and Judith Berman (1996). In this sense, Boas is, contra Lewis, the antithesis of the postmodernist.

In addition to distorting the historical Boas to make him into a proto-postmodern figure, this enterprise subjects the tenets of postmodernism to some degree of deformation. One often sees Lyotard quoted in this context, because he coined the term, but Lyotard's vision of a world without grand narratives is far from the lived postmodernism of the American academy. Rather, the narratives of the past have been deconstructed and reformulated to come up with new ones anchored by terms such as "hegemony," "resistance," "gender," and "colonialism." These grand narratives are different from those of the past not least because of a higher degree of awareness of their status as constructed text and the various rhetorical nods and winks that go along with that awareness. However, they retain the illocutionary force of any institutionally situated narrative. Boas may be a postmodernist in Lyotard's sense (which is, indeed, virtually indistinguishable from Jamesian pragmatism) but is certainly not one in the sense that anyone in Santa Cruz would recognize.

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Lewis's essay does the remarkable thing of presenting us with a postmodern Franz Boas who is also fundamentally recognizable to the historian in terms of both several of the larger contours of his career and his guiding intellectual principles. He also proposes a "usable" Boas

whose work and thought suggest to contemporary anthropologists a set of directions for future study.

By way of comment on this presentation of a Boas for our moment, I would like to briefly reverse the historical direction of Lewis's argument, to consider some ways in which the outlook of the turn-of-the-century intellectual, including that of Boas and the pragmatist philosophers, differed fundamentally from the views of contemporary scholars of various disciplines who are attracted to philosophical pragmatism. Consider, first, the issue of relativism. While it is true that Boas was a significant theorizer of the plural conception of culture and that he held to what one might call a moral relativism (the principle that one ought not to make moral judgments of others by standards extrinsic to their own cultural contexts), he was in no way ready to accede to the relativist epistemological position accepted by some neo-pragmatists (I'm thinking in particular of Richard Rorty) and many contemporary anthropologists, namely, that it is impossible to understand another cultural context in a way that is free of the taint of one's own cultural biases. Secondly, Lewis is certainly right to note that Boas and the pragmatists were similar to postmodernist scholars in their rejection of the teleologies of Spencerian social evolution (and Marxism), but I think it is easy to overstate their rejection of teleology in one respect. Despite their suspicion of grand narratives, they were nevertheless creatures of the Enlightenment, convinced of the possibility of an eventual banishment of the cloud of ignorance that surrounded humanity. This, as Lewis suggests, was a significant part of what they understood to be the project of science. Indeed, it was in part because of this faith in eventual human liberation from ignorance that Boas undertook his famous crusade against scientific racism: he believed that if people understood that racism had no basis in fact, was not scientifically defensible, then surely they would give up their irrational beliefs and racism would *go away*. While this faith in the power of rationality is characteristic of various reform efforts of the progressive era, it sharply distinguishes Boas from postmodernist thinkers, including the neo-pragmatists, who have come to question the narrative of Enlightenment in general.

Boas's indebtedness to the Enlightenment also offers a way to understand an apparent contradiction to which Lewis points: that Boas often hinted at the possibility of system building and yet resisted doing it. While I agree with Lewis that this attests to a laudable rigor in Boas's thinking in no way incommensurate with "science," I think it is also possible that Boas regarded system building as a project to be deferred until anthropological knowledge was sufficiently advanced (a point suggested, if somewhat disrespectfully, in Edward Sapir's [1929] review of Boas's *Anthropology and Modern Life*: "It is clear that Dr. Boas's unconscious long ago decreed that scientific cathedrals are only for the future, that for the time being spires surmounted by the definitive cross are unseemly"). In exhibiting this caution, in resisting the leap to potentially refutable generalizations, Boas may also have been concerned to preserve the rhetorically pow-

erful descriptor “science” for the fledgling discipline of anthropology. I wonder whether Lewis, in his final appeal to a “more respectful attitude toward science and anthropology itself,” isn’t partaking of a similar rhetorical strategy.

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Since I explored the relationship between the ideas of Darwin and Boas in a work published 14 years ago to which Lewis does not refer (Ingold 1986:29–73), I find little new in his account. The point that Boas’s critics, from White to Harris, have adopted a profoundly un-Darwinian (and positively Spencerian) version of Darwinism is old hat. Of course, Boas himself was under the same illusion. In *The Mind of Primitive Man* he observed that the ideas of Spencer and Tylor could be understood “only as an application of the theory of biological evolution to mental phenomena” (Boas 1911:175). One of the ironies of the history of anthropology is that in his very rejection of the progressive evolutionism espoused by these writers, which he mistakenly attributed to the influence of Darwin, Boas did much to introduce a genuinely Darwinian perspective into the study of cultural variation. This did not, however, as Lewis thinks, mean that his views were any more closely aligned with Darwin’s, for when Darwin turned from his study of species in general to consideration of the evolution of his own kind he virtually “out-Spencered” Spencer in his confidence in the inevitability of progress.

As Lewis observes, Boas insisted that behind the historical and geographical diversity of cultural patterns there lies a human mind that is basically the same for everyone. But what Lewis fails to acknowledge is that this conviction flies in the face of Darwin’s theory of human evolution. In *The Descent of Man* Darwin had proposed that culture could only be as advanced as the brains that produced it. The brains of “civilized nations,” he thought, were superior to those of “barbarous tribes” in the same measure as the latter were superior to the brains of apes (Darwin 1874:221–24). This view is no longer acceptable today. But the problem of how to reconcile our commitment (from Boas) to the essential unity of humankind with our belief (from Darwin) in the continuity of the evolutionary process remains unresolved at the heart of contemporary science.

In effect, Darwin argued from biology to culture by *extension*: he saw culture as the *product* of a mind (equals brain) that had evolved by natural selection. Boas, by contrast, argued by *analogy*: he saw culture as the *content* of a mind that exerted no selective force in itself but served as a temporary repository in which elements of culture could be fortuitously assembled (Ingold 1986: 55). Indeed, it is a necessary condition for the analogous application of the theory of variation under natural selection to cultural phenomena that the mind be neutral

as regards its specific content. The point of the theory is that it purports to account for design in the absence of a design agent. It can therefore explain the patterning of culture only to the extent that such patterning *cannot* be attributed to human intelligence. Darwin (with acknowledgement to Tylor) thought it could be so attributed; by and large Boas thought it could not—although, as Lewis shows, he was somewhat equivocal on the matter. The contradiction between these two positions continues to plague attempts to apply the Darwinian metaphor of “blind variation and selective retention” to the history of culture. But even more crippling to these attempts has been a fundamental ambiguity about the meaning of history that, like so much else, is glossed over in Lewis’s account.

Boas explicitly recognized the historical element in Darwin’s conception of evolution as “descent with modification.” As many commentators have noted, there is nothing “unscientific” about historical narratives of such descent, even though they conform to no general law and can only be constructed in retrospect. But what kind of history is this? Lewis’s references to the writings of Ernst Mayr, a major architect of contemporary neo-Darwinism, offer a clue. History, for Mayr, is made up of events, but these events do not take place in the lives of organisms. Rather, each individual organism is itself an event in history, within which its entire life is contained. What the individual does, during its life cycle, forms no part of this history; it is merely the “proximate” by-product of preestablished programmes whose “ultimate” cause lies in the variation, replication, and recombination of genetically transmitted elements. Thus history is not brought about *by* the actions of persons in society but takes place *in* populations of individuals (Ingold 1986:118–19). It was in an analogous sense that Boas incorporated the concept of history into cultural anthropology. Such history is not about what people do but about how transmissible elements of culture arrange and rearrange themselves in the minds of individuals, largely without their knowledge, whence they orchestrate their life and behaviour. That this kind of history tells us nothing of the actions of real-life persons or of how these actions affect the circumstances under which their successors grow up and live their lives was belatedly recognized even by Boas himself, who described it as “an error of modern anthropology”—for which he bore some responsibility (Boas 1984:269).

I have nothing against rescuing Boas from the obscurity into which he appears to have fallen. And it is worth reminding any aging postmodernists who still believe that their anthropological predecessors thought of cultures as homogeneous blobs of humanity that this belief betrays a lamentable ignorance of their own disciplinary history. Lewis writes optimistically that “a period of re-discovery and reinterpretation seems to have begun” in which American anthropologists are returning to the works of such long-forgotten masters as Kroeber, Lowie, Sapir, and Lesser, not to mention Boas himself. This, too, is welcome, and one can only wonder why it has taken so long. Were he alive today, I am sure that Boas would

have embraced postmodern pluralism with relish. Doubtless he would have been among the first to put his copious materials on the web, and he would have found the word processor ideal for his scissors-and-paste method of writing, in which he would recycle and rearrange entire passages with little regard for internal consistency. This character of Boas's work makes it possible, through a judicious selection of quotations, to paint him into virtually any picture you please. Lewis has given us one such picture; many others would have been equally plausible.

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12 XII 00

Lewis's antidote to the widely held mischaracterization of Boas represented by White and Harris is accurate, constructive, and long overdue and should be definitive. There is nothing in it I would disagree with except that the mid- and late-19th-century neo-Kantians, represented by Wilhelm Windelband, were idealists trying to reinterpret Kant as the same. Actual Kantians were empiricists.

Kant was not a new kind of philosophical idealist but a new kind of philosophical skeptic, and this is precisely what links together most of the main threads of Lewis's characterization—Boas's recognition of chance and choice, the parallels with pragmatism, his radical empiricism linked to experimentalism, the way his evolutionism came together with the German intellectual background linking him to Wundt, Helmholtz, Herder, and the rest, and not least the very specific way he was reinterpreted not only by White, who appears to have despised him, but by Kroeber and Lowie, who professed to admire him (Leaf 1979:211–14). Skepticism had been the philosophical voice of scientific empiricism and especially experimentalism since Boyle, Harvey, and Hooke. Boas recognized Kant's position and identified with it.

Before Kant it was not necessary to question the notion that while ordinary knowledge might be empirical, knowledge of the "higher sort" (as Richard Rorty has labeled it) could only be that which was based on first principles. Kant destroyed this in two main moves. First, he reaffirmed the earlier skeptical demonstrations that first principles explained nothing, but then he went beyond them to provide an alternative. This was to expand empirical methods into the core philosophical subjects of epistemology, metaphysics, moral philosophy, and aesthetics. He did this by showing that what philosophers had always recognized as their central concepts could be accounted for developmentally, in a sense that was both social-psychological and ontological. Given his fundamental analysis of cognition as manifested in the sensory world rather than somehow mysteriously lying beyond it, he showed that concepts like the soul, God, the universe, the categories of logic, and the categories of ethics

and morality could be accounted for as things we learn wholly within this world of experience in order to communicate, organize our perceptions, and conceive of and attain our ends and, in a word, survive. The argument begins in the critiques and carries through his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (Gregor 1974).

Fechner's discovery of just noticeable differences soon provided an evidentiary way to follow Kant's lead in psychology. Herder's insight that language depended on the ability to form an idea did the same in linguistics, and Savigny's comparative method did it in jurisprudence. The Grimms were students of Savigny, and modern philology took form when Jacob Grimm combined Herder's conceptual insight with Savigny's comparative method. The links between the historical and linguistic developments and Darwin's method seem evident (Leaf 1979: 104–5).

After Darwin Wundt, establishing his laboratory in 1879, talked about evolution but drew mainly on Fechner and Kant. Although it seems to be something of a cliché now to connect the 1872 beginnings of American pragmatism to Darwin, it is their debts to the older and wider skeptical tradition that explain their opposition to Spencer and Comte. Four of the original group were lawyers. O. W. Holmes, by far the most important, was clearly more influenced by Savigny and his successors than Darwin. Chauncey Wright was a mathematician, and while interested in evolution he was more deeply committed to developing an empirical philosophy of science as such. Peirce's *How to Make Our Ideas Clear* is straight out of Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*, as is the term "pragmatic" itself, and James's *Psychology* unambiguously places itself in the line from Fechner and Wundt.

Boas was in the middle of all of this. Consider the introduction to *The Mind of Primitive Man* (1924) and ask whom he appears to take as his major methodological and theoretical touchstones. The most prominent are Wundt and Jacob Grimm, the former for the psychological developmentalism that links Boas to Mead's emergent evolutionism, as Lewis notes, and the latter for the comparative method.

In short, Boas, pragmatism, and Darwinian evolutionary theory represent one tradition of discourse, White and Harris another. Boas was a Kantian, but being a Kantian was just a way to be an empiricist. White and Harris are ideologues. Perhaps Lewis's patient exposition will help people see the difference.

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Lewis's article forces me to reread and rethink what I know about Boas. As in his recent (1998) piece on "The Misrepresentation of Anthropology," here he moves beyond caricatures of historical figures to the reexamination of primary texts. The paper's strength lies in its analysis of Boas's links to pragmatism. Pragmatism's devotion to the tenets of particularism suited Boas well,

and Lewis's effort to tie Boas to pragmatism is well-taken, though I do not share his view that this connection makes him a scientific-law generator.

Lewis is correct to point out that there are occasional statements that could justifiably be called "theoretical generalizations" to be found in Boas's vast writings. My favorite of these synthetic generalizations is found in the 1912 essay "An Anthropologist's View of War," where Boas offered a highly speculative and un-Boasian evolutionary history of warfare. After describing a communal horde of early humanity in which "no one had interests at stake that were not also the interests of his fellows" (1912:5), Boas presented a cosmic overview of cultural history wherein demographic pressure and competition over scarce resources led to armed conflict. Boas described an economic engine wherein "with increasing economic complexity, the hostility between the groups becomes less" (1912:7). He pointed to a pattern of warfare's exterminating "primitive" cultures and unifying advanced cultures, leading to a state of peace through the rule of law. This Boas believed that humanity was evolving toward peace because "the history of mankind shows us the grand spectacle of the grouping of man in units of ever increasing size that live together in peace, and that are ready to go to war only with other groups outside of their own limits" (1912:9). The coming Great War for Civilization helped shake his faith in such developmental eventualities.

Despite these infrequent and cursory ventures into synthetic law building, most of what Boas wrote fits well under the rubric of historical particularism. Lewis is correct to connect Boas to pragmatism, and this is an important insight, but it still leaves us with a Boas who pioneered significant and important ethnographic methods but nonetheless generated a lot of particularistic chaff mixed with rare and inconsistent tinctures of law-generating wheat.

If Lewis asserts that Boas's occasional generalizations about specific cultural processes are tantamount to the development of specific scientific principles, he then moves beyond the consistent, easily located Boas of record to a new Boas built of disparate comments that were never codified in a single statement or work. Lewis celebrates Boas's 1930 statement that "probably all that can be said is that as long as a certain trend of activity or thought persists it will proceed, on the lines laid down, toward an increasing intensity or complexity" as an identifiable instance of Boasian generalization. But at best this is weak generalization, and at worst the tentative provisos embedded in it render it impossible to operationalize or verify (in fact it could be argued to contradict Boas's well-known cultural relativism).

I am less sure than Lewis that Darwin's method is best described as exclusively inductive. There were vital deductive leaps in the development of the principles of natural selection that are wholly absent in Boas's work. While Boas did mention Darwin in a few rare instances, his near silence on the work of Marx seems even more significant given Marx's efforts to establish general principles of cultural life. While Boas was comfortable with

Darwinian models of biological evolution, his aversion to the crude cultural evolutionary models of his day and to Marx's writings clarifies his hesitancy not only to embrace a deductive approach to sociocultural phenomena but also to clarify his theoretical position in relation to prominent philosophical approaches of the day.

Lastly, Lewis's argument that Boas's method should be compared to Darwin's is most informative when we consider the light this comparison sheds on Boas's limits. However similar these two scholars' methods of examining individual cases to search for overarching laws may have been, their greatest difference renders these similarities inescapably irrelevant: in his magnum opus Darwin moved beyond the collection of individual case studies by identifying a significant mechanism governing the patterns of biological similarity and diversity of our planet, while Boas never wrote a synthetic work clearly formalizing what he had learned from all of his case studies. Darwin generated a powerful, testable model, while Boas left us scraps of observations tucked in amongst the berry recipes.

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Since the 19th century, scientific research in the humanities has been guided by two major principles: diachrony and synchrony. The principles as such exclude each other, with each distinguishing a period of anthropological history—diachrony the first, synchrony the second. Diachrony ranged from speculations about a general evolution of culture, language, and society through attempts to address these speculations empirically to their rejection, explaining diachronic processes as particular historical events. Synchrony began with the discovery that empirical phenomena, when their regularities are considered, have time-independent qualities. In anthropology, the study of such regularities may be further subdivided, ranging from studies of function and of culture-and-personality through varying studies of cross- and intercultural phenomena to the analysis of structural and cognitive features. Thus, in both periods, theoretical and methodological changes have been associated with a gradual differentiation of empirical phenomena.

Both the diachronic and the synchronic period are divided into paradigms. Cultural anthropology and linguistics are guided by systemically organized scientific worldviews that periodically disappear when they have become theoretically and methodologically exhausted. In other words, advances in the humanities, as in the natural sciences, are characterized by changing styles of research. The scientific communities are composed of two types of researchers—founders, who create the styles, and practitioners, who apply them. Consider, for example, the way in which the culture concept provided a guiding principle of research from Edward B. Tylor to Franz Boas and Ralph Linton and then to Ward H. Good-

enough. At their best, empirical analyses have executed what the paradigmatically varying culture concepts have proposed theoretically and methodologically.

Postmodernism in anthropology and linguistics has ruled out these two principles and put an end to paradigmatic changes. It is an expression of a crisis in theory and method (Renner 1999), an interregnum that allows almost anything, even equating artistic occurrences with scientific inventions. As long as we have fundamental problems with new guiding principles, the future course of the humanities will remain an open question.

This sketch of the history of (mainly) cultural anthropology may provide coordinates for assessing Boas's position. When Boas began, he was faced with a diachronic paradigm whose premises and results ignored empirical realities, and what he did was to refrain from untenable generalizations and regard empirical data as particular phenomena. While this paradigm remained in effect he was certainly the most influential figure. With the end of the historical paradigm, the immense amount of empirical data made it necessary to discover regularities that could not be analyzed diachronically. Boas's *The Mind of Primitive Man* (1911) clearly shows signs of this change. It is historically conceptualized but unavoidably contains elements of prestructural analysis. More advanced examples of the change come from the next generation, for example, Edward Sapir's studies of the Na-Dene languages (1915), the time perspective of aboriginal American culture (1916), and language in general (1921).

To conclude, the position of Franz Boas in anthropological and linguistic research is clearly distinguishable. In Na-Dene research, which can be divided into four phases—speculation, a stimulating hypothesis, a synthetic construction, and a controversial reality (Renner 1995:40–89)—Boas, with his stylistic orientation, was able to participate only in the first. He had an unstable view of Na-Dene that depended upon historical uncertainties. The later phases were the result of new research strategies dominated by various stages of linguistic structuralism. The same thing happened in anthropological research; Boas played a major role as long as history was a stylistic perspective, however much that was questioned in subsequent generations (Renner 1992:125–67 *passim*). Another example is his culture concept, which he again considered from a historical perspective, whereas the next generations stripped it of time-dependent elements (Renner 1980, 1983). Critical views of Boas's work, including those of Alfred L. Kroeber, George Peter Murdock, Leslie A. White, and Marvin Harris (to mention some of the major figures in the history of anthropology), are expressions of changing paradigmatic positions.

What Lewis discusses is very interesting in many ways and even inspiring for those who want to understand the views of Boas and his opponents about evolution and Darwin, pragmatism and its advocates, history and science, and many other important crosscutting relation-

ships in the humanities. Unfortunately, however, it does not help to demarcate the intellectual position of a great figure in the evolution of cultural anthropology and linguistics.

## Reply

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I want to thank the respondents for their comments and criticism. I am pleased that there is a reasonable degree of agreement among several of the commentators and myself on key aspects of Boas's thought and legacy, but they have also introduced elements into the discussion that are worth addressing. Harkin, Ingold, and Price are in substantial disagreement, however, with each of them representing a different perspective.

Darnell and I seem united in our appreciation of the work and ideas of such ancestors as Edward Sapir, Alexander Goldenweiser, and Paul Radin, as well as Franz Boas himself. I also appreciate the connection she makes between Boas's anthropology and the work of the Bureau of American Ethnology, under the leadership of John Wesley Powell, which also played an important role in shaping the direction of anthropology in the United States. I would respond to her point regarding Boas and Darwin that "convergence may mask divergent underlying meanings and histories" by pointing out that most previous commentators saw only the divergences. Recognition of the convergences leads to a new understanding and, I hope, a different appreciation of Boas's work and ideas.

With respect to Boas's "skewing of the history of anthropology to consolidate his own position," perhaps a more benign interpretation is possible. Whatever the ethnographic and linguistic accomplishments of the pioneers of the BAE and the museums in Cambridge, Washington, and Philadelphia, they did not have the theoretical strength of the German and English thinkers that Boas referred to. It is generally accepted that American postgraduate education, especially in the sciences, took its lead from the German model in the last decades of the 19th century. Perhaps Boas's Eurocentrism was warranted in the case of anthropology as it was in psychology.

Darnell and I appear to agree in general terms on the way out of our current impasse, and I want to second her sentiment: "It is less a question of claiming some 'neo-Boasian' essentialism than of acknowledging continuities, respecting ancestors, and building upon our history."

I am grateful for Leaf's contribution, offering us a clearer exposition of the role of Kant in the development of these ideas in Germany and of the manner of their transmission to American pragmatism and to Boas (via Grimm, Wundt, and Fechner). The point he makes about

the role of philosophical skepticism seems particularly useful and makes me wonder about the possible influence on Kant of Michel de Montaigne. Montaigne was the great articulator of the skeptical perspective for many thinkers after the Renaissance, and he may have exercised an influence on Herder (and thus on Boas) and on the Cambridge pragmatists as well. The influence of Herder also deserves more emphasis and closer examination than it has been given. Herder's view of culture contained almost all the elements of Boas's (Stocking 1968: 230), as did his rejection of classifications and rankings of cultures, of ethnocentrism and political chauvinism.

I believe that Egon Renner makes too rigid a distinction between diachrony and synchrony. Rather than excluding each other as Renner says, it is possible—even necessary—to avoid such dualisms and to bear in mind that these are complementary abstractions that we derive from our experience of complex and ever-changing reality.

Harkin and Price fortuitously combine to illustrate a point I made in the paper: anthropology has never had a hegemonic center but has always been characterized by diverse perspectives—and always will be. For his part, Harkin believes that scientism is quite dead and the case of Boas versus White et al. is not worth discussing. Price, on the contrary, appears to follow that very line, from Spencer, Marx, White, and Harris, and thus he insists that Boas was, indeed, a particularist lost in the berry patches. I regret both responses. Harkin and other postmodern anthropologists reject not only scientism but anthropology as science as well. By abandoning the attempt to understand human history and behavior in social scientific terms they leave the field clear for scholars without the rich empirical and theoretical grounding that developed in American anthropology through the 1960s. They condemn sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists but have no viable alternatives to offer. Price, in contrast, is left with a scientific approach to culture and history that seems played out and sterile. I hope that the middle way represented by Boas and his heirs may eventually be attractive to some of those at both ends of this spectrum.

Harkin and Hegeman both comment on the juxtaposition of Boas and postmodernism in my paper. Here I find myself hoist with my own petard, caught by my rhetorical tactic. I certainly did not mean to present Boas as “a proto-postmodern figure” (in Harkin's words) or to claim that he would have been at home in the world of Barthes, Baudrillard, Derrida, and Deleuze. On the one hand, as Hegeman says, Franz Boas was a grandchild of the Enlightenment. On the other hand, I was somewhat disingenuous when I presented the quotation about Lyotard's scientific ideal. As Harkin says, “Lyotard's vision of a world without grand narratives is far from the lived postmodernism of the American academy.” I know that—and I regret it. I wanted to suggest to any disaffected members of this postmodern generation that there is an alternative available within anthropology. As I have argued elsewhere (1998), older anthropology has been seriously misrepresented since the late 1960s, and aca-

dem generations have grown up not knowing the ethnographic or theoretical substance of the field as it existed before then. Perhaps it is time for anthropologists to take a new look at what already exists within the field rather than continuing to seek inspiration from outside anthropology, from philosophers and literary theorists who know little of the peoples beyond Europe and America (Lewis 1999). By dangling in front of the readers a quotation from Lyotard that points to qualities I wish were truly characteristic of postmodernism, I hoped to convince those who share that vision to take a look at the works of Boas and his followers.

Harkin tells us that in postmodernism “the narratives of the past have been deconstructed and reformulated to come up with new ones anchored by terms such as ‘hegemony,’ ‘resistance,’ ‘gender,’ and ‘colonialism,’” and he calls these “grand narratives.” And so they are—a new form of grand narrative based on a new foundationalism. This perspective rests on the notion that all social life consists of domination. Thus interpretations (deconstructions) consist primarily of attempts to unmask the domination that is always assumed to exist, and thereby new distortions are introduced into our understanding of humanity which are at least as misleading as older ones.

Hegeman rightly points out that Boas would have rejected the relativist epistemological position of Rorty and many contemporary anthropologists who hold that it is impossible to understand and compare other cultures. Neither was he exactly a moral relativist who held to “the principle that one ought not to make moral judgments of others by standards extrinsic to their own cultural contexts.” His view was more complex, and in this, as in other ways, he has been misunderstood. He once wrote (Letter to ACLS, February 17, 1941; see Lewis 2001),

As an anthropologist I feel very strongly that it is possible to state certain fundamental truths which are common to all mankind, notwithstanding the forms in which they occur in special societies.

These general human characteristics are a protection against a general relativistic attitude. I believe that the ability to see the general human truth under the social forms in which it occurs is one of the viewpoints that ought to be most strongly emphasized.

Harkin charges Boas's ethnography with two “rather serious problems”—“Kwakiutlism” and “textual fetishism.” If the worst that Harkin can say about Boas on the first charge is that “he is unable to appreciate the matrilineal inflection of northern groups such as the Heiltsuk (Bella Bella)” I would say it was a grievous fault but perhaps not a hanging offense. The second accusation, that Boas is guilty of “textual fetishism,” deserves more comment.

By “textual fetishism” Harkin means that Boas “equates elicited texts, the product of a complex set of social and economic relations, with a native worldview.”

But Boas had a number of reasons for advocating the collection of texts in native languages. First, such texts were fundamental for both descriptive and historical linguistic study, whether the investigator was concerned with the structure of a language or the historical connections among peoples through both common origin and diffusion (Stocking 1992:60–91). He also believed that folktales could be used to study the dynamics of change through consideration of the transformations they underwent as they were borrowed and adapted by new peoples. He thought that the nature of these transformations could reveal much about the cultures involved and about the creative process as well (e.g., Boas 1940:425–36, 451–90). And because he was always concerned about the distortions introduced by the outside observer with his/her own cultural biases and linguistic habitus he believed that it was preferable to have native speakers give their own accounts. He hoped to grasp the spirit of the people and their cultural psychology through “a presentation of the culture as it appears to the Indian himself” (1909:309).

Boas labored ceaselessly from the 1880s to the day of his death in 1942 to collect, edit, and publish texts and grammars in American Indian languages. He collected on his own, he directed his early graduate students to collect more, and he recruited native speakers to this enterprise whenever possible. Eventually he was able to involve such well-educated people as William Jones, who got a Ph.D. at Columbia, and Ella Deloria, but his first ventures involved two untrained and somewhat marginal individuals, George Hunt (for Kwakwaka'wakw) and Henry Tate (for Tsimshian). These first relationships have recently become the subject of controversy.

The work of Judith Berman (1996) shows us some of the complex realities behind the collection of the Kwakwaka'wakw texts by Hunt, while Ralph Maud (2000) has devoted a decade to unmasking what he sees as gross indecency in Boas's handling of Tate's Tsimshian texts. Berman and Maud indicate that Boas's presentation of these texts left a great deal to be desired, but, as Berman herself points out, they are still of considerable value. (Their significance has been attested to as well by Dell Hymes, Stanley Walens, Ira Jacknis, and Irving Goldman.) But granting the weaknesses in Boas's practice, should he be condemned for his effort to stimulate the production of works featuring “native voices”? Surely those who call for the inclusion of the marginalized and the silenced should honor his pioneering efforts to do just that, fallible as they may have been.

I believe that the term “textual fetishism” applies more accurately to the enterprise of deconstruction, whose whole *modus operandi* involves the analysis of written texts or of photographs, movies, postcards, museum exhibits, etc., that are considered texts. These are interpreted in terms of domination, hegemony, and resistance, and their authors try to convince us that their interpretations of the texts are actual accounts of human realities. Denying the possibility of scientific verification, they nevertheless insist on the veracity of their readings. A good and relevant example of this is the at-

tempt by Briggs and Bauman (1999) to reread the Hunt-Boas Kwakwaka'wakw texts in such a way that they can claim that these texts had dire consequences for American Indians generally and for the “construction of modernity” itself (see Lewis n.d.). This is true “textual fetishism,” and I must agree with Harkin: in this sense, Boas is “the antithesis of the postmodernist.”

Tim Ingold has worked out his own elaborate theory of social evolution, as expressed in his learned and closely argued book (1986). As part of this project he has developed a view of what Boas believed and wrote, and he apparently does not want to consider new evidence that would modify that view. Ingold writes that “Boas did much to introduce a genuinely Darwinian perspective into the study of cultural variation,” but he considers this ironic—a sort of accident, perhaps—because Boas did not agree with Darwin on all other aspects of the evolution of the human species and of culture. For Ingold, the fact that Boas did not accept Darwin's notion that “the brains of ‘civilized nations’ . . . were superior to those of ‘barbarous tribes’” and his Spencerian view of “the inevitability of [cultural] progress” means that he could not have had views that were “aligned with Darwin's.” This is a strange demand for consistency and one that we must be thankful Franz Boas did not meet. Boas understood, accepted, and advocated the central ideas of Darwin on biological evolution but, happily, rejected those others. He was able to separate the original and important ideas of Darwin from the derivative and second-rate.

In an oddly arranged comparison, Ingold writes that while Darwin “argued from biology to culture *by extension*: he saw culture as the *product* of a mind that had evolved by natural selection,” Boas saw the matter differently. But, as we have seen, it is clear from his lecture on Darwin that he shared the notion that “the mental faculties developed essentially without a purposive end, . . . that they originated as variations and were continued by natural selection.” Ingold is disturbed (rightly, I believe) by “selectionists” who see the human mind as nothing but a neutral medium for the replication of memes (or “culture”) and the individual as lacking agency. He has convinced himself that Boas helped foster this view, but he is wrong. As I point out, Boas and his most prominent followers rejected Kroeber's view of an agentless superorganic. In one of many such statements he wrote, “The forces that bring about the changes are active in the individuals composing the social groups, not in the abstract culture” (1928:246).

Ingold's view of evolution relies upon a conception of “agency and structure, about how persons come into being within fields of social relationships, about culture as process rather than transferable content” (2000:2). In fact this sounds like the position of Franz Boas that I presented in my paper, and I quoted passages to demonstrate that he was concerned about “the actions of real-life persons” and “how these actions affect the circumstances under which their successors grow up and live their lives.” Ingold discounts the evidence and claims that one could “paint [Boas] into virtually any picture.” I regret

that he insists on his dated secondhand view of Boas; he might find Boas and his students of more interest than he thinks.

Price believes that the comparison of Boas and Darwin shows Boas's limits because Darwin identified "a significant mechanism governing the patterns of biological similarity and diversity of our planet" while Boas did not. Actually it can be argued that Boas and his students did something like that for culture when they pointed to the mechanisms of invention and diffusion as the key processes that account for patterns of cultural similarity and diversity. Innovation and invention are the parallel to mutation as the source of new cultural material—the source of variation. Emulation (including borrowing, appropriation, reinterpretation)—what Boasians called the process of diffusion—accounts for the spread of ideas and practices in ways that resemble natural selection and gene flow in biology. (It is very unfortunate that the use of the term "diffusion" by American anthropologists is widely misunderstood today. It is often confused with British and European "diffusionism," which was entirely different.) If Boas's contribution to the understanding of the evolution of culture and social life is less striking than Darwin's contribution to the understanding of biological evolution, perhaps it is because biological evolution is so much simpler.

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