

What is Anthropology?

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Herodotus—father of history, father of anthropology, father of lies—tells of the Egyptian pharaoh, Psammetichus, who was eager to know who, among the world's many tribes and peoples, were most ancient. The Egyptians had long considered themselves entitled to that honor, but Psammetichus wished to be sure. He pursued many inquiries into the matter but found nothing incontrovertible. Then he devised an experiment. As Herodotus tells us:

He took two newborn children of just ordinary people and gave them to a shepherd to bring up among his flocks. The manner of their upbringing was to be this: the king charged that no one of those who came face to face with the children should utter a word and that the children should be kept in a lonely dwelling by themselves. At a suitable time the shepherd was to bring the goats to them, give them their fill of milk, and do all the necessary things. Psammetichus did this and gave these orders because he wished to hear from these

children, as soon as they were done with meaningless noises, which language they would speak first.¹

As social science goes, Psammetichus' protocol was rigorous and rational. Herodotus derides as a "foolish story" the rumor current among Greeks that the Pharaoh had the tongues of the children's nursemaids cut out. But it is clear that Psammetichus took reasonable precautions to avoid any compromise of his data. What then did he find?

After two years had gone by, the shepherd one day went to perform his duties. As he opened the hut, the children rushed forward, "clasped his knees and reached out their hands, calling out *bekos*." When this had happened several times, the shepherd reported it, and Psammetichus had the children brought before him, where they also called out "bekos." With a little further research, Psammetichus ascertained that "bekos" was the Phrygian word for bread, and he ruled that henceforth Egyptians would recognize the Phrygians, a people living in what is now central Turkey, as the world's most ancient people.

Herodotus passes without comment the other remarkable results of Psammetichus' experiment: the children's reaching out and clasping the shepherd's knees obviously encodes humanity's primeval gestural

¹ Herodotus. *The History*. Translated by David Grene. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1987. p. 131

communications and system of etiquette, and the children's choice of the powerfully evocative symbol of bread captures their ancestral memory of the domestication of emmer wheat in the fertile crescent about 8,000 years earlier, as well as the technology of turning the cereal into cooked food.

On August 20 and September 5, 1977, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration launched the Voyager 2 and 1 missions to Jupiter and Saturn, with an ultimate trajectory that would take them beyond the solar system. These spaceships famously had fixed to their sides gold-plated copper discs, the Voyager Interstellar Record, intended to give any intelligent aliens who might come across one of the spacecraft a primer on humanity.

So what in 1977 did NASA consider to be the essence of humanity—the few things that our exploratory spacecraft would try to communicate about ourselves to alien beings? One of the copper discs attached to the spacecraft was called, “The Sounds of Earth.” It includes greetings of peace in 55 languages, pictures of nudes, a barn-raising scene, a message from Jimmy Carter, some excerpts from Stravinsky's *Rites of Spring*, and Chuck Berry's *Johnny B. Goode*. Of course this accomplished nothing that could not have been more succinctly expressed by an image of a child clasping the locomotive appendages of an E.T. and mouthing the word, “bekos.”

But no one in authority listens to the advice of anthropologists. Or if they do, it is at their own peril. Consider the case much in the news the last several months of the anthropologist Napoleon Chagnon, whose thirty years of research among the Yanomami Indians has led to his condemnation by all right-thinking people as a genocidal, war-mongering, Kurtzian monster. Banned from Venezuela for several years, Chagnon got back into the country in 1990 with the help of Cecelia Matos, the mistress of the Venezuelan president. Miss Matos helped Chagnon advance a plan for creating a 6,000 square mile Yanomamo reserve in the Siapa Highlands. The plan, which may or may not have helped the Yanomamo in their desperate fight for survival against gold miners and timber interests, eventually fell apart. Now Chagnon is blamed, by Patrick Tierney in his recent book *Darkness in El Dorado*, and by many others, for igniting warfare between Yanomamo who favored and those who opposed the plan. And what happened to Miss Matos? The president she consoled overthrown, herself indicted for channeling military support to the Yanomamo project, she is an international fugitive, now sneered at in the pages of *The New York Review of Books* by Clifford Geertz and *The*

Washington Post by Marshall Sahlins—perhaps the two most prominent living American anthropologists.²

Miss Matos' plight is extreme but not unique. Politicians who rely on the advice of anthropologists often do not fare well. Our list might include the former president of the Philippines, Ferdinand Marcos. In 1971, Manuel Elizalde, a Harvard-educated associate of President Marcos, announced the sensational discovery of a stone-age tribe deep in the forest on the southern island of Mindanao. The Tasaday, who numbered only 26—seven men, six women, the rest children—lived in a cave and used stone tools. Credulous anthropologists proposed the Tasaday had been living in isolation for 2,000 years. Elizalde took what might be called a proprietary interest in the tribe that the Associated Press reporter John Nance soon dubbed *The Gentle Tasaday*. Elizalde flew in helicopters full of celebrities to his base camp outside the cave, but in December 1972, for the protection of the Tasaday, he shut down the operation. Earlier in the year, President Marcos declared a 19,000 hectare area a reserve for the Tasaday. But Marcos had also put the Philippines under martial law and for many years no one except hand-picked associates of Elizalde visited the tribe.

² Clifford Geertz. "Life Among the Anthros." *The New York Review of Books*. Vol. XLVII, No. 2. February 8, 2001. pp. 18-22.
Marshall Sahlins. "Jungle Fever." *The Washington Post, Guardian Weekly*. January 11-17, 2001. pp. 33-34.

Things began to unravel for Marcos in 1983, when he had his rival, Benigno Aquino, assassinated. Foreseeing trouble, Elizalde skipped the country to Costa Rica, allegedly taking with him millions of dollars raised to assist the Tasaday. The end came for Marcos in 1986, and in April of that year, a Swiss anthropologist named Oswald Iten slipped in to visit the Tasaday, only to find their caves deserted. Iten and a Philippino journalist, Joey Lazano, discovered that Elizalde and his associates had worked with local peoples to fabricate the cave-dwelling Tasaday culture. The Tasaday were Tboli tribesmen impersonating a primitive people, their rice and other food regularly ferried in by other Tboli. But the actors had a challenging part. Said one:

We didn't live in caves, only near them, until we met Elizalde...Elizalde forced us to live in the caves so that we'd be better cavemen. Before he came, we lived in huts on the other side of the mountain and we farmed. We took off our clothes because Elizalde told us to do so and promised if we looked poor that we would get assistance. He gave us money to pose as Tasaday and promised us security from counter-insurgency and tribal fighting.

Alas, even *Cats* eventually closed, and so did the Tasaday show. Elizalde lived out his remaining years in Costa Rica. Having squandered his money, he died drug-addicted and destitute in 1997.³

³ <http://lime.weeg.uiowa.edu/~anthro/webcourse/lost/Tasaday/Tasaday.htm>

The anthropologist Thomas Headland, who subsequently reviewed all the Tasaday evidence, unkindly noticed such things as that the Tasaday spoke a dialect of Cotabato Manobo, one of the well-known languages of Mindinao; that when first encountered, some had bits of clothing made from manufactured cloth; that their bamboo utensils were made from cultivated bamboo; and numerous other such niggling details.⁴

I would like to be able to report that, before he died, Manuel Elizalde and Cecelia Matos consoled each other over paradises imagined and lost, but I have no evidence of that poignant meeting, or that last kiss, sweeter than all the opiates. But one of the pleasures of being an anthropologist today is that I don't need evidence. I can make this up, as revealing a deeper truth that the facts alone could never reach. The need for precision and concern over contamination of the narrative belongs to the age of Psammetichus.

In any case, you will now know what I mean if I call anthropology a *fugitive* discipline. It is a discipline that turns politicians into fugitives. Some, however, are simply killed. The Russian Deputy Minister Galina Starovoitova, also a famed anthropologist, for example, was gunned down on her apartment doorstep in St. Petersburg in November 1998. (If this killing had nothing to do with her anthropology in the narrow sense, it very

⁴ <http://www.sil.org/sil/roster/headland-t/caveppl.htm>

likely had a great deal to do with her social views, which were indeed those of an anthropologist: a critic of Russian anti-Semitism and a proponent of pacifying the unruly natives of the Caucasus.)

But most of the killing in anthropology these days is symbolic, not literal. And anthropologists know a great deal about symbolic killings. Perhaps the most famous anthropological work of all time, Sir James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, is an immense, twelve-volume study of how the ancient custom of actually sacrificing priest-kings came to be replaced in European folk practice with burning straw men and other un-sanguinary executions. Frazer thought that mankind is on a slow upward ascent from an era in which society was mired in mistaken theories of causality, which he called *magic*; to an era in which rational *science* was possible, at least for the few. In between lay an era in which wily manipulators, who realized that magic didn't work, and replaced it with a system of supernatural persons who normally had to be approached through intermediaries—a system he called *religion*.

Frazer's hypothetical progression from magic through religion to science provided a framework for subsuming huge amounts of ethnographic detail. His framework drew, of course, from earlier evolutionary schemes. The most influential of these came from an out-of-the-way source.

The Danish navy had been destroyed by the British in Copenhagen Harbor in 1801 and Copenhagen had been bombarded again in 1807. The Danes turned to the study of their glorious past as a kind of consolation. Excavations on peat bogs had produced masses of ancient debris and, in a nationalistic mood, the Danish government decided to catalog and display the artifacts. That task fell to the son of a wealthy merchant, Christian Jürgensen Thomsen, whose hobby was collecting Roman and other old coins. Between 1816 and 1819, Thomsen devised the first scientific technique of archaeological seriation—the basis for figuring out which artifacts were contemporaneous with each other—a job that is a lot harder than it may sound. In the end, Thomsen created the empirical basis to support an old idea: that prehistory could be divided into an “iron age,” preceded by a “bronze age,” preceded in turn by a “stone age.”⁵

The idea had precedents as long ago as Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, and a specific precursor in Book Five of Lucretius’ *On the Nature of the Universe*, but the Danish model rested on exact evidence, and it became an element in the great transformation of thought that united geology and biology in the first half of the nineteenth century. This was the period in which intimations about the immense antiquity of the earth took shape in

⁵ Bruce G. Trigger. *A History of Archaeological Thought*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 1989. 1992. pp. 73-79

Western science; and the idea that the earth had been shaped by one great catastrophe—the Biblical flood—gave way to Charles Lyell’s uniformitarianism, the theory he advanced in his 1830-1833 volumes, the *Principles of Geology*, that the world was shaped by the slow and cumulative effects of the forces visible today. And in biology, taxonomists were assembling compelling evidence for the close relationships among species.

Anthropology might be said to be one of the consequences of this intellectual ferment. Well before Darwin put pen to paper or even set sail on the *Beagle*, Carl Linneaus had classified man as a mammal. In the tenth edition of *Systema Naturae*, published in 1758, Linneaus created the order “primates,” in which he included the genera *Homo*, *Simia*, and *Lemur*, and he assigned mankind to Genus *Homo*, species *sapiens*. In 1775, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, a German scientist who admired Linneaus, elaborated this scheme. In his book, *On the Natural Varieties of Mankind*, Blumenbach cited detailed anatomical evidence to support the idea that all living humans belong to the same species. Blumenbach went on to develop one of the bases for all future physical anthropology: a list of the specific advanced anatomical features of *Homo sapiens*. He emphasized our erect posture and bipedalism, our broad and flat pelvis, our handedness, and our

dentition as the most salient anatomical features that separate genus *Homo* from the apes.⁶

Incidentally, the usefulness of these characteristics is nicely illustrated by the movements of Psammetichus' little research assistants when they asked for *bekos*. Bidpedalism allows us to rush forward when we beg; the flat human pelvis puts our knees closer together than our hips—the opposite of apes—enabling us to kneel in supplication;⁷ and our handedness—that is, that, unique among hominids, ninety percent of us are right-handed—appears to be a function of the hemispheric brain organization that gave us the ability to speak and therefore to plead for *bekos*,⁸ and our dentition is distinctly evolved for chewing nice soft foods, like fresh-baked bread.⁹

The great debate in the proto-anthropology of the pre-Darwinian era of scientific advancement was whether humanity was a single species or many species. Blumenbach notwithstanding, many authorities were struck more by the evidence of fundamental variety among peoples. Ironically, the term “anthropology” was most closely associated with that view—that humanity is divided into separate races, each with its own origin and line of development. The view that we are a single species in origin and

⁶ Ian Tattersall and Jeffrey H. Schwartz. *Extinct Humans*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press. 2000. pp. 34-37.

⁷ R. McNeill Alexander. “Human Locomotion.” Steve Jones, Robert Martin, and David Pilbeam, eds. *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Human Evolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1992. pp. 81.

⁸ Terrence W. Deacon. “The Brain.” *op cit.* pp. 121-122

⁹ Christopher Dean. “Jaws and Teeth.” *op cit.* pp. 56-59.

development was then usually presented under the rubric of “ethnology.” *Polygenesis*, the theory that we are more than one species, was enunciated by Henry Home, Lord Kames, in 1774, and survived the rise of Darwin’s theory by a few decades, finally to sputter out at the end of the nineteenth century.

It is important to remember the debate between mono- and polygenecists, however, because it explains some of the character of nineteenth century social theory. The burden assumed by the advocates of monogenesis was to explain how the manifest diversity of mankind—both physical and social—could be consistent with a common origin. To that end, the monogenecists proposed frameworks in which all of mankind passed through the same stages of development, but with different peoples progressing at different speeds. This was, emphatically, an anti-conservative position. A Quaker physician in the port of Bristol, James C. Prichard, drew on his observations of sailors from around the world to press the case for man’s essential unity. Prichard’s *Researches into the Physical History of Mankind* appeared in 1813, and grew eventually into a five-volume world

survey by its third edition in the 1840s. Prichard went so far as to declare in 1813 that, “The primitive stock of men were Negroes.”¹⁰

Britain abolished slavery in its Empire on August 1, 1834. Among the humanitarians prominent in the anti-slavery movement was another Quaker physician, Thomas Hodgkin—who gave his name to a disease of the lymph nodes and spleen, and who founded, in 1837, The Aborigines Protection Society. The members of this important group were often ambivalent about whether they ought to advocate keeping natives in a protective quarantine or whether sending missionaries would be of greater help. The Society also attempted to balance scholarly inquiry with practical humanitarian help. Prichard wrote to Hodgkin in 1839, urging more attention to scientific inquiry, and the Society circulated an ethnographic questionnaire. But in a few years, its more scientifically-minded members felt the need for an organization of their own, and in 1843 they established themselves as The Ethnological Society of London.¹¹

But the monogenecists were not yet victorious. In 1863, James Hunt, who earned his *bekos* teaching stammerers how not to stutter, seceded from The Ethnological Society to found the rival Anthropological Society of

¹⁰ James Cowles Pritchard. *Researches into the Physical History of Man*. Ed. By George W. Stocking, Jr. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1973. p. 233

¹¹ George W. Stocking, Jr. *Victorian Anthropology*. New York: The Free Press. 1987. pp. 240-245.

London. Hunt saw himself as a scientific opponent of Darwin and upheld a principle of the essential immutability of the races. In his view, Negroes, for example, were a separate species, biologically close to apes, and better off as slaves than as free men.¹²

Broadly speaking, the idea of making sense of the human past as part of natural history, and the twin idea of accounting for human diversity as the result of universal but differential progress, was established before *The Origin of Species* was published in 1859. Darwin provided a mechanism for evolution and gave the idea its lasting prominence in scientific thought, and he established the line of inquiry that would eventually push the remaining polygenecists like Hunt off the stage. But it is easy to overestimate Darwin's influence on the nascent discipline of anthropology.

For ethnologists such as Prichard had long since moved beyond worrying over the question of how physical species originate. They had established a parallel but genuinely different field of inquiry into the origins of culture and the development of society. And for these purposes, the idea of natural selection had few charms. Anthropologists had to deal with matters such as the invention of basic technologies. Did they happen just once and then diffuse from the original source? Or did humans re-invent

¹² George W. Stocking, Jr. *Victorian Anthropology*. New York: The Free Press. 1987. pp. 247, 251.

things like pottery and archery over and over? And anthropologists of the age struggled with questions about the origin of social organization. Were humans originally organized as groups that recognized common maternal bonds or common paternal bonds? Whichever came first, how should we explain the development of the other?

The theorists who struggled with such questions in the latter half of the nineteenth century—most prominently the Rochester, New York lawyer, Lewis Henry Morgan, and the British researchers John McLennan, Henry Maine, and Edward Tylor—developed several frameworks for interpreting the facts. These are today conventionally called theories of “social evolution,” although the term is quite misleading. None of them wrote about social change as a Darwinian process. They instead developed theories of societal and cultural development that emphasized the transmission of acquired traits, the role of seminal ideas, the institutional foundations of cooperation within groups, and the inherent directionality of social change. These are ideas deeply incompatible with biological evolution as Darwin explicated it.

Frazer’s theory of a progression from magic through religion to science drew from this rich repository of anthropological speculation. He took from it not only the basic schema of social evolution, but also several

other key ideas. Frazer's depiction of rationality as the highest form of human activity is broadly an Enlightenment concept, perhaps filtered through Comte. Frazer's suspicion that human institutions are often founded on ignorance and folly but that they are rational within their own presuppositions has immediate forerunners in the works of Morgan and Tylor. Frazer's attention to European folklore comes at the end of a century in which the brothers Grimm, among others, initiated this line of inquiry. But Frazer is the outstanding synthesizer of folklore, classical studies, and ethnography of savage peoples.

Ethnography, the description of peoples, of course, long predates anthropology. Careful observation of one's neighbors is at least as old as Herodotus, but during the age of exploration, ethnography by Europeans had become a particularly rich genre. The Jesuit missionaries in North America such as Paul Le Jeune, polymaths such as Thomas Jefferson, amateur scholars such as Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, romantic travelers such as Prince Maximilian of Wied-Neuwied, artists such as George Catlin, fur trappers such as Osbourne Russell, and scientific voyagers such as Alexander von Humboldt contributed to a huge, unsystematic, but amazingly rich record of native peoples.

Frazer freely plundered that record, but he did more than make withdrawals. He inspired others, such as British biologist, Baldwin Spencer, and his collaborator, Francis Gillen, the Sub-Protector of the Aborigines at Alice Springs, Australia, to undertake massive new investigations. And Spencer and Gillen's first work, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia*, in turn provided most of the material that Emile Durkheim reworked in 1913 in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*.

Spencer and Gillen, charged by Frazer to learn all they could about Australian totemism, offered a tediously detailed account of such matters as the Intichiuma ceremonies—the magical rites by which the Arunta tried to make totemic species more abundant. Durkheim extracted from this material evidence that the very categories of human thought reflect the specific organization of society. But his theory found few followers among the anthropologists.

Durkheim's nephew, Marcel Mauss, was a more direct contributor to anthropology. Mauss's 1924 essay, *The Gift*, contributed the idea that systems of structured reciprocity are at the core of human societies. Humans in this view are not the calculating maximizers of utility that the economists postulate, nor are we brutishly grubbing after our daily *bekos*. Mauss conjures the image of human societies built on obligations—the obligation

to give, and indeed the obligation to take when a gift is offered, and the obligation to return a gift, equivalent to but different from the one first given.

Mauss' concept can perhaps be illustrated by the flow of academic ideas. The gift of Spencer and Gillen that Durkheim took from British anthropology in Frazer's generation, he returned in the following generation by inspiring a young radical, nicknamed Anarchy Brown, with the idea that a human society is best understood as an orderly whole, including an organized system of sentiments. Anarchy went off to the Andaman Islands in the Indian Ocean and emerged after a while as the author of the Durkheimian ethnography, the *Andaman Islanders*, and with the upper-crust hyphenated name A.R. Radcliffe-Brown.

But Durkheim also contributed in his 1897 study, *Suicide*, the profound idea that social patterns can be discerned even where they are composed of what seem to be highly individualistic acts. Anthropology, perhaps unconsciously influenced by this analysis, proceeded with its first great collective self-immolation: the destruction of its nineteenth century tradition. In the United States, a German immigrant who had written his dissertation on the color of sea water, Franz Boas, launched an incredibly energetic attack on the social evolutionists as theorists who had failed the

first test of assembling reliable data through rigorous first-hand inquiry. In England, a Polish immigrant who had sat out the first World War on a South Sea Island, Bronislaw Malinowski, launched a similar war against theorists who lacked first-hand experience of native life, as might be had, for example, by spending a few years on a South Sea Island. Malinowski's new standard was buttressed by Radcliffe-Brown's curt dismissal of the entire social evolutionary project as "conjectural history."¹³

An ambiguity of sorts has crept into this brief, eventful account. Did twentieth century anthropology commence with symbolic killings of its priest-kings, as per Frazer, or did it launch itself as an act of collective suicide, as per Durkheim? Is anthropology, deep down, a matter of hatred or a matter of shame?

In 1880, a Mr. M. J. Parisot submitted for publication a manuscript purporting to be a fragment of a grammar and poetry of the Taënsa Indians of middle and southern Louisiana. The Taënsa Indians had been extinct since 1740, so the manuscript, rushed into print with an introduction by A.S. Gatschet, the leading authority on native American languages, occasioned some scholarly excitement—not as breathtaking a surprise as the discovery of the Tasaday, but memorable nonetheless. It was several years before

¹³ A.R. Radcliffe-Brown. "The Study of Kinship Systems." *Structure and Function in Primitive Society*. New York: The Free Press. 1941. 1965. p. 49.

another anthropologist, Daniel Brinton, raised some disquieting questions about why the Taënsa sang praises to the sugar maple, a tree not usually found in the Louisiana swamps, and how it happened that they raised sugarcane, which was not introduced until twenty years after their extinction.¹⁴

Every discipline is, to an extent, the sum of its controversies. A discipline that sets out with no smaller quarry than the discovery of human nature may also be the sum of its mischief. From Psammetichus to Margaret Mead's wishful fantasies about the sexual lives of Samoan girls, from the Taënsa songbook to the Tasaday cave, and from Piltdown Man to postmodern epistemology, anthropology has danced on the edge of its own dissolution.

Anthropology is based—or at least once was—on a profound idea, the idea that humanity could know itself by comprehending its myriad differences. The scientific and philosophical project implied in that goal is very large, comprising archaeology, linguistics, human biology, the comparative study of society, and the investigation of culture in all its variety. It should be little wonder that very few anthropologists have risen

¹⁴ John Swanton. "Exposing the Taënsa Hoax." Excerpt from Bureau of American Ethnology. Bulletin. 43. John R. Swanton. *Indian Tribes of the Lower Mississippi Valley and Adjacent Coast of the Gulf of Mexico*. 1911. Reprinted in Regna Darnell, ed. *Readings in the History of Anthropology*. New York: Harper and Row. 1974. pp. 245-259.

to the challenge of making sense of the whole, and have retreated instead to the role of specialists. A little more surprise, however, is owed to the willingness of many anthropologists to jettison the scientific goal altogether. Whether under the banner of ideology—feminism, socialism, evolutionary psychology, or some other—or whether out of conviction that the enterprise itself was mistaken from the outset, anthropology has today spun off into triumphant self-indulgence.

The forms this self-indulgence takes have names and offer theoretical descriptions of themselves, but they have little to do with the larger narrative of who we as a species are and how we came to be that way. Not that the narrative has vanished. We know a lot now that Blumenbach and Prichard could not have known about human evolution. We also have a fuller record of social and cultural variety than Morgan, Tylor, or Frazer could have dreamed. And we have such an abundance of records of sustained and systematic inquiry based on personal experience that Boas, Malinowski, and Radcliffe-Brown would have to bow in deference to our industry, if not our insight.

With these treasures in hand, what should anthropologists do? The anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing in her 1993 book, *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen*, exemplifies one sort of answer. She examines a group

of Dyaks in southern Borneo, focusing particularly on a female shaman, Uma Adang, whose life is of interest because the Dyaks do not recognize female shamans, and she is a peripheral character among a peripheral people. As a lens for understanding female peripherality and the improvised nature of human culture, what could be better?

Another sort of answer perhaps lies in what we have garnered from paleoanthropology—that approximately 60,000 years ago, at a point called the Upper Paleolithic Revolution, *Homo sapiens* transformed itself from a clever tool-making animal into a highly creative and symbolic creature. Cultural variation begins then; fully modern human speech is established, and the modern human diaspora occurs.

One side of anthropology is, more or less, a free-form wandering in the company of Uma Adang. The other side of anthropology is systematic and scientifically ambitious. Between them is undying war. In the camp of Uma Adang, we perhaps find the spiritual heirs of the nineteenth century polygenecists, convinced that human differences are vast and, except by acts of imagination, unbridgeable. In the other camp, the spiritual heirs of the monogenecists still look for the key that will tame the luxuriant jungle of human divergence.

So what is anthropology? It is a discipline unusually susceptible to chicanery, to misconceived methods, and to outlandish hypotheses. It is a field with flimsy safeguards against fieldworkers who make things up or delude themselves that they have found what they expected. It is an eclectic attempt to piece together a view of humanity in defiance of philosophers and social theorists who announce answers deduced from first principles. Anthropology is a social science grown weary of the social and skeptical of the science. It is a field that grew rich by talking up the idea of culture, but which has since devalued its currency.

What is anthropology? It comes down to a single word. *Bekos*.