individual white, simply because he was white, was more so. As Boas suggested in several popular articles, Negroes had a right "to be treated as individuals, not as members of a class." [56]

In a broad sense, what was involved in Boas' nominalist critique was the passing of a romantic conception of race—of the ideas of racial "essence," of racial "genius," of racial "soul," of race as a supraindividual organic identity. Such notions could survive quantification only through the obscurantism of typological thinking. A rigorously statistical approach to the phenomena of variation and heredity laid bare a lack of correlation among bodily characteristics. In somewhat simplified genetic terms, one might suggest that there was no hiding place for racial "genius" or "essence" among the atomized, randomly assorting elementary units of Mendelian populations. Boas, of course, was not strictly Mendelian. But the implications of a really rigorous biometry were much the same.

In this suggestion, we have moved somewhat beyond the limits of Boas' own inferences. Within those limits, it might of course be objected that many of his arguments were by no means original. Environmental plasticity, the continuity of transitions, the notion that variability between races was less than within the members of a single race—all were points of view monogenists had advanced before 1860. Nor indeed had the heritage of monogenist thinking died out. But the context of debate was very different. Insofar as late nineteenth-century scientific physical anthropology was heir to polygenism and parent to the obscurantism of the type concept, the authority of "science" was all on one side. Offered by the most authoritative spokesman of physical anthropology in the United States and cutting through that obscurantism, Boas' critique of racial formalism began to shift the balance in the opposite direction. Protagonists of environment and of racial equality could now quote science on their side.

9

Franz Boas and the Culture Concept in Historical Perspective

In view of what is perhaps its most frequent subject matter—the conscious rational mental activity of the most self-consciously rational people in any society—it might be assumed that at a certain level of explication, intellectual history should be a relatively straightforward matter. Save perhaps for poets and mystics, the question of what the man actually was saying—especially the scientific man—should not be all that difficult to answer. Unfortunately, there are many reasons why this is not the case.[1] *Some of the more obvious have to do with barriers which stand between the intellectual historian and the content of a man's thought: problems of language, of technical competence, of cultural context and temporal perspective. In addition to the barriers between reader and meaning, there are factors within the thought of a man which may forestall explication: contradiction, confusion, obscurity, as well as development over time. But beyond all these difficulties, there is another which suggests an analogy between individual thought and the processes and patterns of culture itself: the historically significant content and direction of a man's thought cannot always be assumed to have come fully into his own consciousness.*

It is not simply that the questions he was asking are not our questions,

and that we no longer remember the alternatives which his answers were meant to exclude. Professor Levenson's "paradoxical transformation-with-preservation" may have operated within his own thought, so that his own questions, alternatives, and answers may have changed over time without his being fully aware. Indeed, out of this process may actually have emerged, in the case of someone close to us in time, the very assumptions which are in fact our assumptions, again without his being fully aware of the change.

In the case of Franz Boas, all of this is complicated by two further characteristics of his thought in general. On the one hand, there is his method of composition, which was to patch together chunks of previously published material, restructuring, adding here, cutting there, frequently making only those changes which he felt absolutely necessary to bring an older formulation within the framework of his current thinking. On the other hand, there is the fact that Boas was not a systematic theoretical thinker. He did not draw together and present to anthropological posterity a "theory" of culture, which the historian can take in a certain sense as the "given" content of his work.

Nevertheless, many of the anthropologists who have gone on to treat culture in more systematic ways were trained by Boas and bound to him by an ambiguous network of psychological, institutional, and intellectual relationships. Almost all of them revered him as a "founder" of their discipline. It would therefore be very surprising if the culture concept which they elaborated were not strongly influenced by his thought.

The problem, then, is to re-create a pattern of thought on the nature of culture in an individual mind, a pattern which is obscured by all the factors which I have mentioned, but which nonetheless we have good reason to believe may be found. As in all historical reconstruction, a solution has been facilitated by knowledge of the pattern which eventually emerged—by my knowledge of the present state of anthropological thought on culture. In the present case, it has been facilitated by the prior reconstruction of a portion of the pattern out of which Boas' thought in turn emerged. Working between these "fixed" points of pattern,[2] with the indications of change which the patchwork of Boas' composition itself suggested, and always in relation to the corpus of his work,

I have re-created (or perhaps created) the changing pattern of Boas' thought on culture during a certain period in his life.

Leopold von Ranke once spoke of the historian's calling as divine, and in this context, one can perhaps see why. In a secular age, one might better characterize it as colossally presumptuous. But in an a-historical age, there is little more to keep the intellectual historian going than the satisfaction of having reconstructed, however partially and inadequately, a portion of an intellectual world which will never again have any other than a derivative existence.

No doubt the methods of such hypothetical reconstruction can be more precisely defined. No doubt the results can be subjected to a kind of verification by others who care to go back to the relevant material. Without disparaging such efforts, however, I suspect that the ultimate test of the validity—and in a sense of the reality—of such reconstructions may depend on criteria we may never be able to specify exhaustively. For the present, I am satisfied to hope that this one proves useful in understanding Franz Boas and the culture concept.

Needless to say, I do not mean to claim for Boas—as others have claimed for Tylor—the "invention" of the modern anthropological concept of culture. Doubtless, the culture idea was undergoing changes of meaning in other minds than Boas', and it would certainly be worthwhile to investigate further the usage of the word in this period, especially in Germany. Nor do I mean to suggest that the roots of the ideas of cultural determinism and cultural relativism are to be sought only in Boas' work. Disregarding earlier manifestations, one need only note that at this time the cultural and social determination of individual behavior was a matter of concern to thinkers across the whole range of the social sciences, regardless of the specific terminology they used. Similarly, relativism was a problem which engaged the minds of many thinkers, often at a much more sophisticated philosophical level than Boas'. But granting that the development I treat should be thought of as a "germination and growth" of certain general tendencies within an individual mind, I would still argue that Boas contributed much more to their development than has been previously recognized, either by anthropologists or intellectual historians.

I have added a substantial amount of new material to the previously

published version. Even so, it has not been possible to treat here all aspects of Boas' thought on culture or all the ways in which that thought retroacted on traditional racial assumptions. Much more remains to be said concerning Boas' thinking on problems of cultural process. Furthermore, in emphasizing Boas' work on folklore and his critique of racial determinism, I have neglected other areas of his work which affected his thought on culture. In his varied writings on language and on primitive art Boas also suggested various ideas on the unconscious patterning of cultural phenomena, and on the origin and character of systems of cultural classification. But since some aspects of the significance of Boas' linguistic thought for the idea of culture have been treated elsewhere, and since there is a limit to how much can be incorporated within the focus of a single essay, the present emphasis is perhaps justifiable.[3]

The fundamental concepts . . . in any of the disciplines of science are always left indeterminate at first and are only explained to begin with by reference to the realm of phenomena from which they were derived; it is only by means of a progressive analysis of the material of observation that they can be made clear and can find a significant and consistent meaning.

SIGMUND FREUD

. . . this attachment to inherited names appears much stronger as soon as we consider realities of a less material order. That is because the transformation in such cases almost always take place too slowly to be perceptible to the very men affected by them. They feel no need to change the label, because the change of content escapes them.

MARC BLOCH[4]

FREUD wrote of the nomenclature of science; Bloch, of the nomenclature of history. Anthropology partakes of both science and history, and at various points in time anthropologists have been acutely conscious of the hybrid character of their discipline. But in a culture where science has increasingly provided the primary measure of intellectual endeavor, it is hardly surprising that

on the whole they have been inclined to emphasize the scientific character of their study. When two of the most eminent—and historically oriented—anthropologists set about writing a review of the culture concept in anthropology, they found their definitional point of departure not in Bloch but in Freud.

It was in this context that Kroeber and Kluckhohn suggested that in the very process of definition itself one might see "in microcosm the essence of the cultural process: the imposition of a conventional form upon the flux of experience."[5] One might also note that the language of their microcosm would seem to derive at least as much from the modern philosophy of science as from the anthropological study of culture. But for present purposes I would prefer to focus on an ambiguity of meaning that can serve to illuminate both the anthropological idea of culture and the historical process of its definition. Exactly how is "conventional form" imposed "upon the flux of experience" in the definition of concepts in the social sciences? Is it simply imposed by the creative scientist, whose conceptual innovation is subsequently clarified by "progressive analysis of the material of observation"? Or can it also be imposed through the "inherited names" that condition our ordering of the flux of experience? The latter interpretation would of course take us from Freud to Bloch, who argued that history (as "a science of humanity") received its vocabulary "already worn out and deformed by long usage" from men who "gave names to their actions, their beliefs, and the various aspects of their social life without waiting until they became objects of disinterested research."[6]

What is involved here is not simply a matter of epigraphical taste. The denial of parentage has serious implications, especially for a hybrid offspring. For one thing, these alternative interpretations of the process of definition reflect alternatives of usage of the term "culture": the humanist and the anthropological. Kroeber and Kluckhohn were of course quite conscious of this duality. Indeed, they were at some pains to distinguish between the two meanings. Unlike humanist "culture," which was "absolutistic" and knew perfection, anthropological "culture" was "relativistic." Instead of beginning with "an inherited hierarchy of values," it assumed "that every society through its culture seeks and in some measure finds values. . . ."[7] Other antitheses may convey further

aspects of the distinction: anthropological "culture" is homeostatic, while humanist "culture" is progressive; it is plural, while humanist "culture" is singular. Traditional humanist usage distinguishes between degrees of "culture"; for the anthropologist, all men are equally "cultured."

Stretching the uses of analogy just a bit in order to get back to our two alternative processes of definition, I might suggest that humanist "culture" would emphasize the creating, innovating scientist; anthropological "culture," the "inherited names" that condition the ordering of experience. Like most of the antitheses posed above, this one breaks down partially when probed. Historically, humanist "culture" has not been quite so undifferentiated as I will speak of it in this article, and anthropologists, especially in recent years, have also been concerned with cumulative human creativity. Nevertheless, clearly the heritage of names more than the creative individual conditions one leading anthropologist's suggestion that the essence of the culture idea is that "learned behavior, socially transmitted and cumulative in time, is paramount as a determinant of human behavior." [8]

In writing their own history, however, anthropologists have not always maintained a characteristically anthropological posture. Thus the notion of definition as the work of the creative innovator clearly governs Kroeber and Kluckhohn's summary of the development of the culture concept in anthropology. According to this view, the English anthropologist E. B. Tylor, in two volumes called *Primitive Culture* published in 1871, "deliberately" established a science "by defining its subject matter," although strangely enough, the work of clarifying the culture concept through the "progressive analysis of the material of observation" was delayed for more than a generation. Here the notion of "inherited names" enters the definitional process chiefly as a partial explanation for this cultural lag and as an occasion for pique at the failure of dictionaries for over half a century to acknowledge anything but the humanist usage.[9]

Going beyond the words of Tylor's famous definition, we have seen that his notion of culture in its actual usage lacked certain elements crucial to the modern concept: historicity, plurality, integration, behavioral determinism, and relativity. In this context, the late nineteenth-century "lag" in the further clarification of the culture concept would seem to be less an enigma than an anachronism. Kroeber and Kluckhohn could find no instance of definition after Tylor's until 1903. But if the modern anthropological idea had not yet emerged, then the problem of delay in its elaboration evaporates. Looking beyond Tylor to others who might on other grounds be expected to have contributed to that elaboration, one finds at least presumptive evidence for the general validity of this view. It is in the German intellectual tradition that the roots of the culture idea, in both its humanist and anthropological forms, are most inextricably entangled. But it is in fact in German anthropology that one finds the distinction between *Kulturvölker* and *Naturvölker*—that is, between peoples who have culture and peoples who do not. And indeed, it was Germany's leading anthropologist, Rudolf Virchow, who characterized Bismarck's struggle with the Catholic Church as a *Kulturkampf*—a fight for culture—which for Virchow meant a fight for liberal, rational principles against the dead weight of medieval traditionalism, obscurantism, and authoritarianism. The situation in late nineteenth-century anthropology elsewhere is satisfactorily summarized by Kroeber and Kluckhohn themselves:

> the whole orientation of the evolutionary school, whose productivity began just ten years before 1871 and of which Tylor himself formed part . . . was toward origins, stages, progress and survivals, and spontaneous or rational operations of the human mind. . . . In short, the assumptions as well as the findings of the "evolutionists" were schematic and . . . the men remained uninterested in culture as a concept.[10]

Although further investigation is undoubtedly called for, on the basis of evidence already available I would suggest that the argument from Tylor can be generalized. Prior to about 1900, "culture" both in the German and in the Anglo-American tradition still had not acquired its characteristic modern anthropological connotations. Whether in the humanist or the evolutionist sense, it was associated with the progressive accumulation of the characteristic manifestations of human creativity: art, science, knowledge, refinement—those things that freed man from control by nature, by environment, by reflex, by instinct, by habit, or by custom. "Culture" was not associated with tradition—as weighted,

as limiting, as homeostatic, as a determinant of behavior. In general, these connotations were given to the ideas of custom, instinct, or temperament, and they were often associated with a lower evolutionary status, frequently argued in racial terms. The archetypical representative of this point of view was, of course, Herbert Spencer, from whom any number of quotations could be culled portraying the savage (more likely than not, black) as improvident, impulsive, incapable of abstraction, governed by fixity of habit merging imperceptibly over time into racial instinct.[11]

Against this background, we may now turn to Franz Boas. Preoccupied as they were with an imaginary cultural lag, Kroeber and Kluckhohn made Boas one of its causes: "directly he contributed little to Tylor's attempt to isolate and clarify the concept of culture"; "indirectly he hindered its progress by diverting attention to other problems." It is the thesis of this essay that far from hindering the development of the anthropological concept, Boas played a crucial role in its emergence. This role has been obscured for various reasons, among them perhaps the fact that Boas did not formulate a definition of culture for publication until 1930.[12] But the more basic reasons have to do with Boas' status as a transitional figure in the development of a concept that only gradually emerged from the conditioning of its "inherited name," and with the attempt to impose on this transition the developmental model of the epigraph from Freud.

Actually, Boas was not completely unconscious of the change in context of this "inherited name." In fact, his apparent awareness that the word "culture" had changed its meaning offers some of the more interesting evidence for his transitional status. A close reading of Boas' 1894 essay on "Human Faculty as Determined by Race" and those portions of *The Mind of Primitive Man* deriving from it reveals several interesting changes in the use of the terms "culture" and "civilization":

1894—"Was the *culture* attained by the ancient civilized people of such character as to allow us to claim for them a genius superior to that of any other race?"
1911—"Was the *civilization* attained by these ancient people of such character . . ." etc.

1894—". . . each people which participated in the ancient civilization added to the *culture* of others."

1911—". . . each people which participated in the ancient development contributed its share to the general progress."

1894—". . . but there can be no doubt that the general status of their *culture* was nearly equally high."
1911—". . . but there can be no doubt that the general status of their *civilization* was nearly equally high."

Similar changes in the use of the word *culture* were introduced by Boas into his translation for publication in 1940 of a talk he first gave in German in 1887, "The Aims of Ethnology." Considered along with certain passages in the letter diary of his Arctic expedition in 1883, these bits of evidence all lead toward one conclusion: Boas began his career with a notion of culture that was still within the framework of traditional humanist and contemporary evolutionist usage. It was still a singular phenomenon, present to a higher or lower degree in all peoples. By 1911, this meaning in the examples cited above is given instead to "civilization." It would seem that by this time Boas sensed that the word *culture* was better reserved for the "cultures" of individual human groups.[13]

What is involved here is precisely the emergence of the modern anthropological concept. In the case of this particular inherited name, we are fortunate in having an inflectional indicator of the crucial changes of meaning. Preanthropological *culture* is singular in connotation, the anthropological is plural. In all my reading of Tylor, I have noted no instance in which the word *culture* appears in the plural. In extended researches into American social science between 1890 and 1915, I found no instances of the plural form in writers other than Boas prior to 1895. Men referred to "cultural stages" or "forms of culture," as indeed Tylor had before, but they did not speak of "cultures." The plural appears with regularity only in the first generation of Boas' students around 1910.[14]

It is tempting to interpret this change largely in terms of the field experience—especially tempting for modern anthropologists, for whom fieldwork is at once both a subcultural *rite de passage* and the methodological cornerstone of their discipline. In this context, one sees on the one hand the Victorian ethnologist, sitting in his armchair rearranging the fragmented elements of cultures into evolutionary sequences leading from the lowest sav-

agery to the very doors of his own study. Posed against him is Boas, who "must be understood, first of all, as a fieldworker." On this basis it has been suggested that the Tylorian view of culture could not withstand extended fieldwork, and Boas' appreciation of the role of culture has been understood as a sort of conversion experience in the Arctic, or as a direct response to the complexities of Northwest Coast culture.[15]

Indeed, Boas himself suggested that it was the shared "joys and sorrows" of the fieldworker's adaptation to the life of primitive men which underlay his estimate of their mentality and culture. The fact that Boas had garbed himself in Kwakiutl blankets and had himself given potlatch feasts no doubt had something to do with his attitude toward the Kwakiutl and their potlatching. At the same time, it is clear that fieldwork could be quite irritating to a Germanic professor bent on making every moment count for scholarship. One notes the recurring expressions of vexation when an uncooperative Indian slowed up Boas' work or wasted his time with an "idiotic" story, or when he found it necessary to become "a little rough" with informants in order to make "their attitude improve." Furthermore, there is no denying the general failure of a certain kind of field experience to affect the theoretical position of the evolutionists of the Bureau of Ethnology. The point is not to deny the role of field experience in the emergence of the anthropological culture concept, but simply to suggest some of the complexities involved. Boas in fact indicated his own awareness of these in 1904 when he suggested that the fieldwork of ethnologists had been variously conditioned "by the theoretical discussions" of anthropologists, and that the results of detailed empirical study had in turn "retroacted" upon anthropological theory. Enlarging on his argument, we might say that a modern anthropological concept of culture developed out of the interaction of Boas' prior personal attitudes and intellectual orientation, the theoretical issues posed by contemporary anthropology, his experience in the field, and his own library and armchair interpretation of that experience. In this context, aspects of historicity, plurality, holism, behavioral determinism, and relativism which were present in his thought from the beginning were elaborated and the evolutionary elements were either rejected or minimized.[16]

In the year after his first field trip to the Northwest, at a

time when Boas still accepted the evolutionary sequence of family forms and was still discussing the best means to "civilize" the Kwakiutl, this interaction had already produced an orientation in important respects at odds with the prevailing evolutionism of late nineteenth-century ethnology. The differences were clearly evident in the controversy with Powell and Mason in the spring of 1887 over the principles of museum arrangement, in which Boas argued the viability of an empathetic holistic approach to tribal groups against the fragmenting comparativism of the evolutionists, and criticized the "premature classification" of superficially similar phenomena which in fact might be the products of quite different historical processes. As the title of Boas' opening attack suggested, the specific issue underlying the debate was the explanation of "The Occurrence of Similar Inventions in Areas Widely Apart." Like many evolutionists, Mason had offered three alternatives. Two of them—the migration of peoples and the migration of ideas—were in effect forms of "diffusion." The choice between this and "independent invention" was an empirical and theoretical issue central to the whole evolutionist point of view. As we have noted already, evolutionists by no means excluded diffusion from their theorizing. Along with race it served to explain departures from the normal evolutionary sequence. But independent invention was much more central to their nomothetic purpose. Prima facie, the regular, independent occurrence of the same idea in similar circumstances seemed to offer direct evidence that the development of human reason was governed by natural laws. Prima facie, the diffusion of ideas from a single source offered at best indirect evidence for such regularity, and was much more congenial to traditional biblical accounts of man's development. Be this as it may, the evolutionists' preoccupation with the issue is evidence of its theoretical centrality, and such later evolutionists as Powell and Brinton were at times quite dogmatic advocates of independent invention. In contrast, Boas, both by his ties to geography and by his historicist outlook, was predisposed to favor the diffusionist alternative, and his disillusion with geographical determinism simply accentuated this: to him, the "similar circumstances" eliciting the evolutionists' "independent inventions" were simply geographical determinism in another guise.[17]

The problem was more sharply posed for Boas by his first

fieldwork on the Northwest Coast. A year later he recalled that "the problem I had in view . . . was to study the reasons why tribes of different linguistic stocks participated in a common culture. My method is to inquire into the peculiarities of the single tribes, which are obtained by a thorough comparison of language, customs, and folklore." Involved in this was the quite traditional ethnological task of delineating the relationships of the various tribal groups. Despite his recollection the following year, the letter diary of the preceding fall suggests that Boas still tended to see these groups in traditional terms as communities of race, language, and culture. His task was in a sense classificatory, but it was a genetic or historical classification. Boas went, however, with a kind of methodological hypothesis, which he apparently had developed in the course of his work with Bastian: that mythology (viewed in terms of similarities of substance as well as repository of historical data) would be "a useful tool for differentiating and judging the relationship of tribes." Although the "confusion of dialects and languages" threatened in the first days to "overwhelm" him, Boas assiduously collected myths and tales, and within a very short time felt that "this mass of stories is gradually beginning to bear fruit because I can now discover certain traits characteristic of the different groups of people." However, Boas' hypothesis had not entirely prepared him for the results he was to encounter. He was quite surprised by the fact that tribes who were linguistically distinct should share "so great a similarity in myths and beliefs," and that tribes with the same languages should have dissimilar mythologies. Gradually, he modified his initial assumption that the culture of the area was quite uniform and came to the conclusion that it had developed from several different centers. All of this, however, merely confirmed his belief that the "evolution of the culture of these tribes" was an *historical* problem in the sense that one must distinguish for each group what was original and what was borrowed, both as to customs and folklore as well as language.[18]

On his second field trip to British Columbia in 1888, Boas wanted to limit his work to a careful study of several tribes, in order to consider their relationships in detail. But its scope was in fact defined by the interests of the British Association committee, as interpreted by their chief American agent, Horatio Hale, who

was in direct charge of Boas' work. Hale pushed Boas toward a general ethnographic survey and toward physical anthropology and social organization. The emphasis on the latter reflected the current theoretical concerns of E. B. Tylor, the guiding spirit of the British Association committee, who was at that time working on a paper "On a Method of Investigating the Development of Institutions Applied to Laws of Marriage and Descent." In this major theoretical effort of his later years, Tylor published the results of a tabulation of data on the kinship systems of some 350 peoples. Noting the "adhesions"—or the more than chance tendency for clusters of customs to occur together—Tylor interpreted his results as supporting the uniform evolutionary sequence from maternal to paternal marriage forms.[19]

Shortly after his return from British Columbia in 1888, Boas received from Tylor an abstract of this paper. It seems to have hit him with catalytic impact. Tylor had in fact been stimulated in part by Bastian's conception of a *Gedankenstatistik*—a statistical study of folk ideas. Boas was of course already familiar with this notion, and also had been influenced by Bastian's conception of the "geographical province" as the area of differentiation of *Völkergedanken*. In this context Boas immediately thought of applying Tylor's method to his own studies of folklore, which up until this time had been carried on in terms of a rather impressionistic approach to the similarity of folktale elements. Tylor provided him with a method by which the problem of historical relationships of diffuson could be dealt with in much more rigorous terms. It must have had a great appeal for a man whose holistic historicism coexisted with an elementaristic comparativism inherited from the natural sciences. For a time, Boas felt that "everything could be solved by methods" implicit in Tylor's paper.[20]

But if Tylor opened up new ethnological vistas for Boas, they were quite different from those Tylor saw in his armchair at Oxford. It was not merely that Boas was interested in historical diffusion. As he indicated in a letter to Tylor early in 1889, he was also concerned with the psychological problem of how "foreign material taken up by a people [is] modified by preexisting ideas and customs." Noting that the question bore on the issue of independent invention, Boas concluded with the suggestion

that "it is a most characteristic sign of the diversity of our present methods of thinking in physical and psychological science that in the former we are inclined to derive similar forms from one source; while in psychical science we are inclined to believe that an idea can develop independently in different communities or individuals." By physics, Boas seems to have referred to the natural sciences in general, and specifically to evolutionary biology; by psychology, to evolutionary ethnology. He had in fact put his finger on a little noted but fundamental discrepancy between the two. Perhaps out of deference to Tylor's own evolutionism, Boas deleted the last phrase from the final draft of his letter. Nevertheless, he was clearly cutting at the root assumptions of evolutionary ethnology.[21]

He elaborated his new approach in various studies of myth and folklore published between 1891 and 1896. The issue of independent invention and diffusion was particularly sharp among folklorists. As an antidote to the farfetched efforts of older writers to "trace the migrations and affinities of nations by similarities" of myths, Daniel Brinton—the leading scholar of American Indian mythology—had advanced the theory that these similarities were almost invariably the result of the tendency of savages to invent independent but similar explanations of natural phenomena. Diffusionism, however, was still a respectable point of view among scholars of European folklore, and these men played an important role in the recently formed American Folklore Society, the audience to which Boas directed his most important statements on the issue.[22]

Based on the tabulation of plot elements of folktales by tribe within a single geographic region, Boas' version of Tylor's method of "adhesions" set up two major criteria for determining when similarities in folklore were the result of dissemination rather than invention. On the one hand, "wherever a story which consists of the same combination of several elements is found in two regions, we must conclude that its occurrence in both is due to diffusion," and the more complex the story, the stronger the conclusion. On the other hand, "whenever we find a tale spread over a continuous area, we must assume that it spread over this territory from a single center." In a later article, Boas went on to suggest corollaries: a gradual diminution of elements across a

geographical region was "clear and undoubted" evidence of dissemination; and the larger the "number of common incidents," the "more intimate the relation of two tribes." Applying these criteria to tales of the Raven, the Earth-diver, the Dog-woman, and the Cannibal-witch, Boas argued that each group of tales had its "peculiar province"; that many so-called "nature" or "creation" myths were in fact complex historical growths combining elements from various sources; that there had been an extremely wide diffusion of tales in North America; and, indeed, that "similarities of culture on our continent are always more likely to be due to diffusion than to independent invention." [23]

During the same years, Boas' work on the Northwest Coast had led him to similar antievolutionary conclusions in regard to other aspects of culture. Thus his work on primitive art led him to conclude that geometric designs originated by various other means than the conventionalization of natural forms. Similarly, in the area of social organization, Boas found in the Northwest a complexity which, while it led him to confusion of interpretation which has been a matter of recent critical concern, clearly did not seem to fit the evolutionist picture of the development of totems, clans, and marriage forms. In particular, Boas found that the peculiar mixture of kinship regulations among the Kwakiutl was the result of the adaptation by borrowing of "maternal laws by a tribe which was on a paternal stage"—a conclusion which directly contradicted the traditional evolutionary sequence from maternal to paternal forms, which Boas himself had advocated in 1888.[24]

In 1896, Boas drew together the threads of his developing critique of evolutionism in a paper he read to the American Association for the Advancement of Science, to which Brinton had the previous year given a presidential address taking an extremely dogmatic position in favor of independent invention. But if Brinton provided an appropriate polemical target, Boas' analysis of "The Limitations of the Comparative Method of Anthropology" was in fact an attack on the methodological presuppositions of "modern"—or evolutionary—anthropology in general.[25]

By focusing on the similarities of human culture which implied the existence of laws of human development, modern anthropology had captured the public interest in a way that the older

descriptive and historical ethnology never could. So far, so good. But modern anthropology had gone much further. It had assumed that these similarities were the products of the same underlying psychic causes, that they were the regularly recurring independent responses of the human mind to similar environments. On this basis, it had embarked on "the more ambitious scheme of discovering the laws and the history of the evolution of human society," and had gone on to subsume that history under "one grand scheme" of human development. If, however, the same phenomena were not always due to the same cause, then the logical basis of the whole approach was undercut. Offering examples from his own work, Boas argued that in fact apparently similar phenomena could be the end results of such varied and complex historical, environmental, and psychological factors that the similarity of their causes could no longer be assumed.[26]

In this context, the comparative derivation of laws of human development remained the goal of anthropology, but it receded into an indefinite future. First it was necessary to carry on "a detailed study of customs in their bearings to the total culture of the tribe" and "in connection within an investigation of their geographical distribution among neighboring tribes" in order to determine the "environmental conditions," the "psychological factors" and the "historical connections" that had shaped them. This approach was no less than "the much ridiculed historical method." It was not, however, the "old" historical method, which made "indiscriminate use of similarities of culture for proving historical connection." It was a "new" historical method which, like that of his own folklore studies, would be based on "the careful and slow detailed study of local phenomena" within a "well-defined, small geographical area," with comparisons limited to "the cultural area that forms the basis of the study." Out of this study would emerge "histories of the cultures of diverse tribes." It was only by comparing these individual histories of growth that the "general laws" of human development could be discovered.[27]

If the subsequent work of Boas and his students did not produce such "general laws of human development," there is no doubt that the extension of his critique of evolutionary anthropology did much to stamp the next half-century of American

anthropology with a strong antievolutionary bias. Recently, however, Boas' critique of evolutionism has itself been subjected to criticism by writers for whom his ideas exist not as history but as the subject of current theoretical dispute. It has been suggested that his "antievolutionary crusade" had "exceedingly unfortunate" effects on anthropology. Without venturing an opinion on this issue, it is worth noting that many of these criticisms miss the historical point. Thus it has been suggested that Boas did not appreciate the difference between the "culture history of *peoples*" and the general "evolution of *culture*." In fact, Boas' critique was built on precisely that distinction. If the point was rather that Boas did not do justice to evolutionism as a theoretical point of view, then it should simply be noted that he was not attacking evolutionism as a timeless abstraction but as an abstraction derived from a particular point in time. Evolutionism in 1896 was no longer a fresh and innovative point of view, but had hardened over a quarter of a century into a sometimes almost rococo elaboration. What was actually at issue was not simply the general evolution of culture but the extrapolation of evolutionary stages in every area of cultural life—the presumed sequences of art forms, of marriage forms, of stages in the development of myth, religion, and so forth. If Boas attacked a stereotype, it was the product of an historical development as well as of his own polemical analysis. Even Tylor—an evolutionist but never a dogmatic one—felt that Boas' work pointed to "a most necessary reformation" in anthropology, in which "the logical screw" would have to be "very much tightened up."[28]

On the other hand, it has been said that Boas' own approach was not really historical, since it did not provide the basis for the reconstruction of actual sequences of historical development. Indeed, it was difficult to accomplish this, unless one made further assumptions which Boas' own spare outlook would not permit him to make. All one could normally do was to suggest the existence of certain historical relationships. But it is nevertheless true that Boas' approach did focus attention on the fundamental historicity of cultural phenomena—on the fact that they were the results of specific and complex historical processes—as well as on the historical processes which conditioned them. In this, he stood in marked contrast to the evolutionists. Some writers have noted

the occurrence of the term "acculturation" in the 1890s as evidence of modern anthropological thinking. But for W J McGee, the main point was to distinguish four stages of acculturation—martial, marital, commercial, and educational, corresponding to the general evolutionary stages of savagery, barbarism, civilization, and enlightenment, and illustrating the general progress of mankind. For Boas, acculturation had to do with the process of dissemination of cultural elements, with the conditions that governed "the selection of foreign material embodied in the culture of the people, and the mutual transformation of the old culture and the newly acquired material." Needless to say, it was out of the latter, not the former, that the modern study of acculturation developed.[29]

But even to say all this does not get to the most important point. It has been suggested by Leslie White that Boas was so "obsessed with particulars" that he "could not see general outlines or forms." White finds the key to Boas' mind and work in the latter's suggestion that once the "beautiful simple order" of evolutionary ethnology had been shattered, "the student [stood] aghast before the multitude and complexity of facts that belie the symmetry of the edifice he had laboriously erected." In this situation, Boas, according to White, was left with little more than the "chaos of beliefs and customs" that he found in the data of his field studies. This, however, is to overlook the positive residue of Boas' critique of the method and theory of evolutionism. True, once the single "grand system of the evolution of culture . . . valid for all humanity" had lost its plausibility, it was difficult to "bring under one system" the "multiplicity of converging and diverging lines" which stood revealed in its place. But it was precisely in the process of shifting attention to these diverging lines, of focusing attention not on "the features common to all human thought," but on its "differences," of recognizing that "before we seek what is common to all culture, we must analyze each culture," that the singular "culture" of the evolutionists became the plural "cultures" of modern anthropology.[30]

Furthermore, this historically conditioned cultural plurality had important implications for the problem of racial capacity. Although the later development of Boas' thought on this issue will be treated below, it is worth noting at this point some implications which he had already drawn by 1894, in the context of developing his critique of evolutionism. Because of the widespread diffusion of cultural elements, none of the early civilizations of mankind could be regarded as "the product of the genius of a single people." "Proofs without number have been forthcoming which show that ideas have been disseminated as long as people have come into contact with each other and that neither race nor language nor distance limits their diffusion." The crucial factor was the specific conditions of cultural contact: African Negroes had derived much from the Arabs in the Middle Ages and little from the culture of modern Europe. In summary, Boas argued that European civilization had cut short the promising beginnings of civilization in other areas, and he felt that the earlier rise of civilization in Europe, viewed in the perspective of millennia, was no more than a chance historical occurrence. "In short, historical events appear to have been much more potent in leading races to civilization than their faculty, and it follows that achievements of races do not warrant us to assume that one race is more highly gifted than the other."[31]

So far, we have traced the development of Boas' critique of evolutionism, and argued that—in addition to its implications for racial thought—this critique left as positive residue the concept of a plurality of historically conditioned cultures in place of a single sequence of evolutionary stages. At this point it is necessary to confront one of the underlying antinomies in Boas' thought. In a sense, this plurality had been there all along, for the romantic cosmographer who could perceive the subjective unity of each tribal group. But if Boas' critique of evolutionism was conditioned by the cosmographer's perception of wholes, it was, somewhat paradoxically, carried on largely from within the natural scientific point of view by applying rigorous logical and empirical criteria to the comparison of elements. Nor did Boas abandon the approach to culture in terms of its elements. He simply proposed another method for the study of those elements—a method which was to eventuate in the fragmenting view of culture which characterized an important current in American anthropological thought down to about 1930. But the fact that the notion of cultural plurality had been elaborated largely in the course of the study of the historical diffusion of individual cultural elements should not

be allowed to obscure the continuing duality in Boas' thinking on culture which is evident in remarks he made on tribal mythologies in 1898. "The mythologies of the various tribes as we find them now are not organic growths, but have gradually developed and obtained their present form by the accretion of foreign material." But although often adopted ready-made, this foreign material was "adapted and changed in form according to the genius of the people who borrowed it." On the one hand, culture was simply an accidental accretion of individual elements. On the other, culture—despite Boas' renunciation of organic growth—was at the same time an integrated spiritual totality which somehow conditioned the form of its elements. This latter interest in whole cultures and their psychological meaning—in the "geniuses" of "peoples"—was also to have important implications for the development of the anthropological culture concept. When around 1930, American anthropology turned to problems of the patterning of cultural wholes and the interrelation of culture and personality, it may be argued that it was simply picking up the other thread of this duality.[32]

"The genius of a people"— the phrase itself is full of suggestive overtones. Specifically, it recalls the ethnological concerns of men who had a direct influence on Boas' work: Bastian's *Völkergedanken,* and the "folk souls" of Moritz Lazarus and Heymann Steinthal.[33] Beyond this, there are of course resonances from German romantic thought, from Herder's conception of history in terms of the embodiment of the human spirit in organismic ethnic or national forms. Indeed, the phrase even recalls traditions of nineteenth-century racial thought to which Boas' work was in quite explicit opposition. But if this seems paradoxical, it is in fact appropriate. Many of the roots of racial thought can be traced to the organismic diversitarianism of Herder. Boas' thinking on ethnic diversity was rooted in the same soil. Furthermore, his problem as a critic of racial thought was in a sense to define "the genius of a people" in other terms than racial heredity. His answer, ultimately, was the anthropological idea of culture.

In this context, let us turn more systematically to Boas' treatment of the question of racial mental differences—or to what in the linked evolutionary hierarchies of race and culture was much

the same thing: the problem of primitive mentality. Boas first attacked this problem in the above-mentioned "Human Faculty as Determined by Race," which he chose as the topic of his address as retiring vice-president of the anthropological section of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 1894. Most of the arguments against traditional racial assumptions that Boas was to use seventeen years later in *The Mind of Primitive Man* were employed here: the emphasis on the historical conditions of diffusion and the relativity of standards of valuation as the basis for rejecting traditional assumptions about racial achievement; the emphasis on the overlapping or divergent character of physical differences and the functional, environmental factors affecting them; the explanation of apparent racial mental differences in terms of differing cultural traditions.

But if there was already an emphasis on the cultural determination of behavior, it is worth noting the limitations of Boas' cultural determinism in 1894. He offered as authoritative the opinion of his close friend the neurologist Henry H. Donaldson that at adolescence there was a great divergence between "lower and higher races" in their capacity for education, and that this was related to a cessation of growth in the cerebral cortices of the lower races. However, Donaldson's opinion was quite clearly an inference from the observed, but, as we now know, culturally conditioned, fact that "lower races" became difficult to teach in adolescence. This would suggest that the idea of the cultural determination of behavior was not well enough developed in 1894 to cope with such a problem as the differential performance of various racial groups within the American educational system. Quite the contrary: in calling for psychophysical tests of "the senses and of the simpler mental activities of children," which might give the first satisfactory answer to the much mooted question of racial faculty, Boas suggested that the schools would be an ideal place to investigate "great numbers of individuals of different races who live under similar conditions."[34]

Boas was not the only anthropologist in this period who was looking to the new experimental psychology of the 1870s and 1880s for a more precise definition of racial mental differences. But in fact the results of the few systematic applications attempted were somewhat ambiguous. This is true even of two major racial

tests that have since been referred to as landmarks in the rejection of racial mental differences. In 1898 the British anthropologist A. C. Haddon led an expedition to the islands in the Torres Straits between New Guinea and Australia. There the psychologists accompanying the expedition, W. H. R. Rivers and his students C. S. Myers and William McDougall, experimentally investigated a wide range of sensory abilities in the native population. Much of the hoped-for significance of the tests lay in the fact that these people had been only thirty years before "in a completely savage state, absolutely untouched by civilization." They were thus at or near the very bottom of the scale of cultural evolution. However, the results of these investigations were inconclusive. In some cases the differences between Papuan savages and civilized Englishmen were slight; in others, the investigators were inclined to explain them in cultural terms. Nevertheless, some differences were clearly assumed to be innate. McDougall concluded that the Papuan sense of touch was "twice as delicate as that of the Englishmen, while their susceptibility to pain is hardly half as great." Myers, despite the equivocal results of his own tests, suggested that differences in reaction times might be the "expression of racial differences in temperament." [35]

Perhaps because they were not clear-cut, the overall results of the Torres Straits investigations were variously evaluated. Although Rivers was pushed toward the conclusion that "pure sense-acuity is much the same in all races," he still felt that the apparent insensitivity to the color blue he found in the Papuans, and later among the Todas and the peasants of Egypt, lent support to the theory first suggested by William Gladstone in 1858 that the color sense of man had evolved with advancing civilization. He was also much impressed by the fact that the Todas, who in general "cultural" development "undoubtedly" stood intermediate between Papuans and Englishmen, also occupied an intermediate position on a number of his sensory measures; this suggested to him that there was a connection between these and "general intellectual development." [36]

No matter how they were later interpreted, the Torres Straits studies did not lead William Rivers immediately to the conclusion that there were no racial mental differences of evolutionary significance. As for McDougall, he went on to become a spokesman

for the inequality of races, and in fact recalled his Torres Straits experience as evidence for the extroverted, sympathetic, and submissive racial temperament of the Negro. Finally, it may be noted that reviewers also differed in interpreting the results; some saw them in Spencerian, others in Boasian, terms.[37]

A much more extensive study of racial mental differences was carried out in 1904 at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis. In order to demonstrate the "course of progress running from lower to higher humanity and that all the physical and cultural types of man mark stages in that course," W J McGee gathered together a remarkable collection of "ethnic types" from all the major races, including those "least removed from the subhuman or quadrumane form": Pygmies, Negritos, Ainu, Patagonians, and various American Indians. In this archevolutionary context, Columbia University psychologist Robert Woodworth and his student Frank Bruner examined some 1100 persons. Besides taking standard anthropometric measurements, they tested vision and hearing and "intelligence as well as we could with form boards and other simple performance tests. . . ." Bruner, in the only systematic published treatment of their results, found "an obvious superiority of whites" over "inferior races" in keenness of hearing. In interpreting these results, he suggested that since the tests required an interpretation of stimuli in which intelligence played a role, the poorer performance of Pygmies might be because they were in general "stupid and dense." Reviewing Bruner's work in the *American Anthropologist*, Clark Wissler felt that Bruner had fallen into "the popular way of considering the traditional cultural ranks of peoples as identical with corresponding differences in intelligence." But he also concluded that the results "made it practically certain that racial differences exist." [38]

By 1914, Bruner seems to have changed his mind about primitive mentality. He now sharply criticized a writer who postulated wide racial differences in mental organization, "ignoring such authorities as Boas, Haddon, Rivers, and others." By this time, however, Bruner's mentor Woodworth had made his own analysis of "Racial Differences in Mental Traits." Reviewing the results of the 1904 studies Woodworth concluded, in 1910, that "sensory and motor processes, and the elementary brain activities, though differing in degree from one individual to another, are

about the same from one race to another." As far as intelligence was concerned, there were as yet no adequate tests. True, the simple "form test" used in 1904 had differentiated two groupings that differed also in relative cranial size. But even this small "crumb" of racial difference was doubtful since the "fairness" of the test for "wild hunting folk" was questionable.[39]

Woodworth did not mention the name of his own mentor, but the structure of his argument made this perfectly clear. He began with a statement of the methodological problems that cast doubt on apparently clear-cut results. Thus the two-ounce difference in the mean weights of Negro and white brains must be viewed in the context of a range of variation of twenty-five ounces within each race that was largely overlapping. He went on to offer for every presumably "racial" difference an alternative explanation in cultural terms. Thus differences in pain thresholds might reflect a difference in the "conception of pain" rather than in the "pain sense." He concluded by arguing the role of accidental or historical factors in the development of civilization. It should not surprise us that Woodworth had taken his anthropometric and statistical training under Franz Boas, and had gained from him "some appreciation of the value of anthropology to the psychologist." [40]

The following year, 1911, Boas published *The Mind of Primitive Man,* and in it incorporated much of his 1894 address on racial mental capacity. Although scattered through the book under the various categories of a much elaborated discussion, large chunks of the 1894 text were virtually unchanged. His basic skeptical, agnostic posture remained essentially the same, and he still proceeded by attacking traditional racial assumptions and by positing alternative cultural explanations. But it is fairly clear that his estimate of their relative probabilities had changed over the intervening years. In part this may have been due to an accumulation of negative evidence. Boas cited the conclusion of Franklin Mall that there was as yet no evidence of racial difference in brain structure "that will endure serious criticism." So also Karl Pearson's "elaborate attempt" to investigate the relationship between intelligence and headform had led Pearson to conclude that "the onus of proof" might now "be left to those who a priori regard such an association as probable." The argument of Boas' friend

Donaldson was still noted, but to an entirely different point. And as for the anticipated evidence of psychological testing, Boas cited Rivers and Woodworth to suggest that "up to this time the results are, on the whole, not very favorable to the theory of the occurrence of very fundamental differences between different races." [41]

But the change in Boas' estimate of probabilities was not due only to the negative character of the recent evidence. On the contrary, the fact that the evidence was negative was largely because it had been subjected to the same sort of skeptical criticism that Boas had employed in 1894. The change took place mainly because Boas had in the intervening years greatly elaborated the alternative explanation of mental differences in terms of cultural determinism.

Already in 1894 Boas had attacked a number of Spencer's generalizations about primitive mentality on the basis of his own experiences with Indians in the field. Did Spencer charge the savage with inattention, and document his charge with a traveler's account? Boas offered in rebuttal his own field work with the same tribe: the Kwakiutl of Vancouver Island. To a Kwakiutl, most of the questions asked by casual travelers seemed "trifling," and he soon tired of conversation carried on in a foreign language. But once arouse his interest and it was Boas who was often "wearied out first." The supreme test was of course the potlatch, in which the Kwakiutl, with "great foresight and constant application," and "without mnemonic aids," planned the "systematic distribution of their property in such a manner as to increase their wealth and social position." Summarizing, Boas suggested that descriptive psychological evidence was not "a safe guide," for the observer was "always liable to interpret as racial character what is only an effect of social surroundings." [42]

When Boas returned to the question of racial mental differences in 1901, the cultural argument was no longer subordinated to the discussion of brain weights and body types. Cultural determinism was now the central theme. In 1894, the only suggestion of a theoretical psychological framework for the explanation of this determinism was a reference to the social psychologist Gabriel Tarde, who had demonstrated in 1890 the force of unconscious "imitation" among civilized as well as primitive men.

By 1901, in conversations with his colleague the psychologist Livingston Farrand, Boas had worked out a more systematic psychological approach in associationist terms. The central issue in the discussion of primitive mentality was whether groups of men differed in the basic mental organization governing the fundamental psychological processes, or simply in the repetitive experience in terms of which these processes operated—it being one of the "fundamental laws of psychology that the repetition of mental processes increases the facility with which these processes are performed, and decreases the degree of consciousness that accompanies them." [43]

Regarding the basic organization of the mind, Boas considered the evidence of three characteristic mental functions: abstraction, inhibition, and choice. The existence of numerical and grammatical categories in all languages showed that abstraction was common to all men. Similarly, all human groups subjected their impulses to the inhibition of some type of customary control and exercised choice among perceptions or actions in terms of some sort of aesthetic or ethical standards. Granting that these capacities must have evolved in time, granting they might differ in development, Boas argued that the differences were not great enough to allow living men to be placed on different evolutionary stages.[44]

Turning from the organization of the mind to the variety of experience, Boas argued that the variation in the products of these mental functions was largely due to the "influence of the contents of the mind upon the formation of thoughts and actions." Apparent primitive deficiencies in the "logical interpretations of perceptions" were the result of the "character of the ideas with which the new perception associates itself." The education of the civilized child transmitted to him a large body of knowledge based on the investigations and speculations of generations of scientists and scholars. Most people, however, received this knowledge simply as "folklore." Hearing of the explosion of a "previously unknown chemical," they simply assumed that certain materials had the "property of exploding under proper conditions." But for the primitive, the traditional context of a sudden explosion was a world in which he had been taught as a child to regard the heavens as animate and the very stones as endowed

with life. Small wonder he should cower in superstitious fear! Neither he nor the European offered a causal explanation of the new perception. They simply amalgamated it with "other known facts." The difference was largely "in the character of the traditional material." It was in this context that Boas argued the "immense importance of folklore in determining the mode of thought." [45]

In this and several other articles written in the same decade, Boas offered various suggestions concerning the actual mechanisms of the tyranny of custom. Giving his argument a greater integration than in fact it had, we might say that for Boas the origin of custom was rooted in an historical past largely inaccessible to the present-day observer. Evolutionists like Tylor and Spencer had attempted to re-create the origin of customary beliefs and actions as products of "conscious reasoning" by savages handicapped by an inadequate view of nature. Granting that patterns of customary belief and behavior might have been conscious inventions, Boas felt it more likely for them to arise unconsciously out of the "general conditions of life." This was certainly true of the complex morphological categories that lay hidden in every language. Why not then of the equally complex Australian kinship system or the "fundamental religious notions"? But in any case, once established, a piece of customary behavior tended to become more unconscious the more it was repeated. Paradoxically, this went hand in hand with an increase in its "emotional value"; for "the more automatic any series of activities or a certain form of thought has become, the greater is the conscious effort required for the breaking off from the old habit of acting and thinking, and the greater also the displeasure . . . produced by an innovation." Although such displeasure was in the first instance a "reflex action accompanied by emotions not due to conscious speculation," this displeasure itself brought customary behavior to consciousness. To justify their emotional reaction, men offered a rationalistic pseudoexplanation for the custom at issue.[46]

An even more potent factor tending "to bring customary behavior into the consciousness of the people practicing it" was the necessity of transmitting it from one generation to the next. Unconscious imitation was never completely efficacious. Children

would misbehave or ask questions, and adults would have to explain. The character of such secondary explanation depended, however, not on the actual historical basis of the custom, which was either unconscious or long since obscured, but rather on the context of ideas in which it existed in the present. Among primitives, this context was religious and symbolic, and "apparently trifling actions" came to be associated with ideas so sacred that the resistance to deviance took on the character of a taboo. In modern Europe, the religious context was giving way to the rational-utilitarian, and our secondary explanation for the reflexive abhorrence of incest, for example, had changed accordingly. But in whatever stage of culture, the rationalistic secondary explanation gave to customary action a moral cast, and the breach of custom was considered "essentially unethical." It was in this context that Boas maintained that the difference between our own and primitive mentality was the "product of the diversity of the cultures that furnish the material with which the mind operates" rather than a reflection of "fundamental difference in mental organization." [47]

In developing the argument against racial mental differences, Boas had begun by maintaining that the mind of the dark-skinned primitive shared with that of the white-skinned European all of the characteristic human mental powers: abstraction, inhibition, and choice. But this depended in turn on showing that these powers were largely determined in all stages of cultural development by the body of custom and traditional material that was transmitted from one generation to the next. If he was still enough of a Victorian liberal-positivist to retain a limited belief in the progress of civilization, the general effect of Boas' argument was to show that the behavior of all men, regardless of race or cultural stage, was determined by a traditional body of habitual behavior patterns passed on through what we would now call the enculturative process and buttressed by ethically tainted secondary rationalizations—in other words, by the particular "cultures" in which they lived.

Another perspective on this same problem can be gained by considering Boas' idea of "culture" both from the point of view of its content and its dynamics. There were certain ambiguities in Boas' early conception of the content of culture. It has been

noted that his ethnographic work reflected a "very strict" definition of culture in that he "neither recorded nor caused to be recorded much about informal behavior, as distinct from formal public affairs, myths, family histories, and such surely cultural matters." Historically, this "strictness" undoubtedly reflects the fact that Boas' idea of culture was still quite close to its roots in humanist usage. On the other hand, in his early work Boas' idea of culture clearly shared with the evolutionist usage of Tylor and with German folk-psychology a somewhat broader inclusiveness than that of the humanist tradition, although this inclusiveness still tended to be seen in hierarchical developmental terms. Thus, it looked for the developmental germs of culture among primitives and found them in their language, knowledge, art, skills, customs, folktales, and mythology. It is clear from Boas' usage that all these are from the very beginning in principle included in the "culture" of primitive groups. At the same time, they were not all of equal weight in his anthropological thought or practice. Although Boas recorded for the British Association details of economic life, social organization and "customs regarding birth, marriage and death," his primary concern was clearly mythology and folklore—which for purposes of the present discussion may be equated.[48]

There were a number of reasons for Boas' emphasis on folklore. For his early geographic interests it was a source of data on migrations. As he moved to historical ethnology, its importance was simply heightened. Folklore was an easily collected and fruitful source of information on "flying visits" to one tribe after another: it revealed "customs which easily escape notice, or are extinct," and was "the best means of tracing the history of the tribes." At the same time, the emphasis is also clearly an inheritance from Bastian which from the beginning gave a certain character to Boas' ethnology. Bastian's conception of the *Völkergedanken* as *Weltanschauungen*, or world views, his tendency to see material culture as the reflection of the world of ideas, and his emphasis on the study of mythology all find continuing resonances in Boas' thought and practice. For Boas, it was above all in their folklore that the "genius of a people" was manifest. Folklore provided the "best material for judging their character," because it embodied their values—what they "considered good

and what bad, what commendable and what objectionable, what beautiful and what otherwise." It was in the folklore of the Eskimo that one found "a clear insight into the passions that move Eskimo society." The mythology of each tribe embraced its "whole concept of the world," its "individuality"—one might almost say, its "genius." [49]

Boas' tendency to identify folklore and culture was not, however, simply a matter of content. The dynamics of the two were also related. Thus in 1895 he suggested that because membership in Kwakiutl secret societies gave certain "advantages and prerogatives," there was a tendency among the Kwakiutl to create new societies, each of which required its own set of validating traditions. Although the Indians did not set out consciously to invent these, their imaginations, impelled by status-striving and heightened by fasting, received in hallucination the required traditions—"the material for which was necessarily taken [by imitation] from the existing ideas [of the tribe], or from the ideas of neighboring tribes." Two decades later Boas argued that folklore and mythology were founded on "events that reflect the [everyday] occurrences of human life, particularly those that stir the emotions of the people." At the same time, because the "power of imagination of man" was "rather limited," people much preferred to "operate with the old stock of imaginative happenings than invent new ones." Their imagination thus "played with a few plots, which were expanded by means of a number of motives that have a very wide distribution," and which each group selectively borrowed and adapted "under the stress of a dominant idea" or institution characteristic of its own culture. Although in each of these examples Boas was concerned with specific issues relating to folklore, by implication he suggested a good deal as to the general dynamics of cultural processes—or the processes by which "the genius of a people" acted to mold borrowed elements to a traditional pattern.[50]

The problem of "the genius of peoples" was more directly at issue in Boas' work on racial differences in mental function. In this area, too, folklore and culture tended to be identified both from the point of view of content and dynamics. As we have seen already, Boas discussed primitive mentality in terms of secondary explanations or rationalizations of customary behavior

rooted in tradition and charged with emotional value. Although these secondary explanations were arbitrary as far as the individual custom they explained was concerned, they were not arbitrary in relation to the culture as a whole. They depended on the general cultural context, and on the range and character of the clusters of ideas brought into association with one another within that context. Viewed collectively, these secondary explanations formed a body of historically conditioned traditional material which validated not only the habits and customs, but also the social organization, the ritual, and the values of a primitive group. When in this context folklore was defined as "the total mass of traditional matter present in the mind of a given people at any given time," it was in effect equated with the body of inherited material that determined their behavior—or with their culture.[51]

Involved in this equivalence was a profound change in the concept of folklore. Folklore had also been central to Tylor's ethnology. But Tylor's concern was with the survival among the lower orders of modern civilized society of explanations which had been but were no longer rational. For Tylor—as for European folklorists generally—folklore was continuous with the culture in which it appeared, but no longer functionally integral to it. In the United States, there was a radical discontinuity between the European culture out of which the anthropologist came and the Indian cultures in which he studied folklore. But the functional integration of folklore with the rest of Indian culture was more clearly evident. It was in this context that Boas suggested that the study of folklore, which had begun as the record of "curious superstitions and customs and of popular tales," had now "become the science of all the manifestations of popular life." In the process, however, Boas had inverted the meaning folklore had for the evolutionary anthropologists. Tylor had seen folklore as as originally rational in origin, but surviving as irrational custom. Boas saw it as unconscious in origin, but central to the maintenance of society through its rationalization of traditional forms of behavior.[52]

At the same time, however, Boas' equation of folklore and culture had implications for the idea of the "culture" of civilized men. Just as folklore at the primitive level tended to be seen as

encompassing culture, so also the culture of more advanced peoples was now largely seen as folklore. From the very beginning, Boas had tended to emphasize the role of authority, tradition, and habit in affecting the thought of men at all stages of culture. But it was only in the context of his developing anthropology that Boas came to view culture itself in these terms. Here again his folklore studies are suggestive. In tribes where there were small groups of priests or chiefs who had charge of certain ceremonials, there arose an esoteric doctrine which systematized "the heterogeneous mass of beliefs and practices current in the tribe." Boas argued that this esoteric doctrine—the primitive equivalent to the philosophical systems of civilized men—was founded on "the general culture of the tribe," and interpreted as "a secondary phenomenon." Similarly, Boas found an analogy between the process by which primitives "remodeled activities, thoughts, and emotions under the stress of a dominant idea" and the processes by which "extended groups of mental activities are systematized by retrospective thought" in modern science. The one produced the ethnic phenomenon of totemism. The other produced the evolutionist's concept of totemism. Both concealed the variety of historical causes that underlay the actual totemic manifestations. Thus Boas subordinated science itself to the same processes which conditioned primitive thought. More broadly, Boas' view of folklore implied a general view of the human creativity which was traditionally associated with the idea of culture. For the evolutionists, cultural creativity was expressed in independent invention. For Boas, man was essentially rather uninventive, but his creativity was expressed in the imaginative manipulation and reinterpretation of elements given to him by his cultural tradition, or borrowed from other cultural traditions. [53]

Once again, the full significance of Boas' thought on folklore can only be seen in the context of his thinking on racial mental differences. Although he felt that civilized men were in important respects less bound by tradition than primitives, Boas nevertheless argued that "we cannot remodel, without serious emotional resistance, any of the fundamental lines of thought and action which are determined by our early education, and which form the subconscious basis of all our activities." Manifest in "the attitude of civilized communities" toward art, politics, and religion, this

tyranny of custom was extended by Boas even to "the fundamental concepts of science." The history of scientific progress offered "example after example of the power of resistance" on the part of old ideas, "even after increasing knowledge of the world has undermined the ground on which they were erected." Indeed, their "overthrow" could only come with the emergence of a new generation of scientists, "to whom the old is no longer dear and near." Beyond science, there were the "thousand activities and modes of thought that constitute our daily life." Until "we come into contact with other types of life, or until we are prevented from acting according to our custom," these activities and modes do not even rise to our consciousness. Nor could they claim any greater rationality than alternative ways of behaving and thinking. And yet we cling to them. Learned "less by instruction than imitation," these customs were "hardly less numerous in civilized than in primitive culture," and with good reason: "because they constitute the whole series of well-established habits according to which the necessary actions of everyday life are performed." In this context, the body of folklore that was nearly all that Indians could claim in the way of traditional humanist culture served by analogy to define the crucial aspect of culture on all levels of human development and in all its manifestations. It was in this context that the idea of culture, which once connoted all that freed man from the blind weight of tradition, was now identified with that very burden, and that burden was seen as functional to the continuing daily existence of individuals in any culture and at every level of civilization.[54]

Drawing together the argument to this point, we have seen how Boas' critique of evolutionism brought more sharply to the forefront his underlying appreciation of the historically conditioned plurality of human cultures. We have seen in this context how the freighting of behavioral determinism which is central to the modern anthropological culture concept can be viewed as developing on the one hand out of his study of racial mental differences, and on the other out of his study of folklore—two interrelated aspects of "the genius of a people." In the process, we have seen how the sense of holistic integration implicit in this idea of "genius" was brought down from the level of metaphysical abstraction and racial assumption. Moreover, we have

learned how the basis was suggested for an explanation of the processes by which individual behavior was molded to a common pattern, and the elements of culture given a common focus, within each of the human cultures which were the positive residue of Boas' critique of evolutionism.

In this context the relativism present in Boas' thinking from the outset was reinforced, elaborated, and integrated into the methodological and theoretical framework of his anthropology. Indeed, in a certain sense relativism might be regarded almost as a corollary of the development of other aspects of Boas' anthropological thought. In 1894 Boas was still capable of discussing racial faculty in terms which took a hierarchy of cultural achievement pretty much for granted. But the rejection of evolutionism, the pluralistic approach to cultural wholes, and the cultural determination of behavior each had implications which tended to undercut any singular standard of cultural evaluation.

Boas suggested in 1904 that "the subjective valuation which is characteristic of most evolutionary systems was from the beginning part and parcel of evolutionary anthropology." And as we have seen already, cultural evolutionism was in fact methodologically dependent on the idea of progress in all realms of human activity. The "comparative method" attempted to arrange the coexisting manifestations of human culture in temporal sequences of progressive development which were ordered in a single cultural hierarchy at whose peak stood western European civilization. Insofar as the basis for this arrangement was not in fact a question-begging comparison to an a priori European standard, it was often some variant of the related Spencerian assumption that evolution moved always from simplicity to complexity. Boas' research showed, however, that in regard to many cultural phenomena, this was not true. The grammatical categories of Latin and English were far less complex than those of most primitive languages. The complexity of much primitive music was such as to tax "the art of a skilled virtuoso." In general, Boas felt that while "the history of industrial development" followed the Spencerian pattern, "human activities that do not depend on reasoning do not show a similar type of evolution." [55]

Beyond this, the general effect of Boas' critique of evolutionism was to show that various elements of human culture did not

march together in any sort of lock step or regular sequence. Once the "one grand scheme" of evolutionism was rejected, the multiplicity of *cultures* which took the place of the cultural *stages* of savagery, barbarism, and civilization were no more easily brought within one standard of evaluation than they were within one system of explanation. Each was an integrated way of life, and although they might be based on "different traditions" and on a different "equilibrium of emotion and reason," they might still be of "no less value" than our own. In language reverberant with romantic overtones, Boas spoke of nineteenth-century science as having produced a "grand picture of nature in which for the first time the universe appears as a unit of ever-changing form and color, each momentary aspect being determined by the past moment and determining the coming changes." Unfortunately, this conception had been obscured by a "subjective element, emotional in its sources, which leads us to ascribe the highest value to that which is near and dear to us." The paradoxical persistence of this emotionally based subjectivism in a cultural tradition emphasizing scientific rationality he explained by the cultural determination of behavior. A large part of what we deemed rational was as much determined by cultural tradition as the primitive customs whose differentness was the sole measure of their inferior rationality. Just as it was "impossible for us to appreciate their values without having grown up under their influence," so also "the value which we attribute to our own civilization" was "due to the fact that we participate in this civilization, and that it has been controlling all our actions since the time of our birth." [56]

Here again, it is hard to keep separate Boas' thinking on culture from his thinking on racial capacity, and a final comment on the latter problem may be in order. In the older framework of racial thought, the ultimate measure of racial "capacity" was racial "achievement." As Daniel Brinton had argued in 1891, "The final decision as to the abilities of a race must be based on actual accomplished results, not on supposed endowments." But if the measures by which achievement was judged were treated, not as the end points of evolutionary progress, but rather as reflecting specific culturally determined systems of valuation, then traditional conclusions as to racial capacity were obviously seriously undermined.[57]

It should be clear that Boas' cultural relativism was to a large extent conditioned by considerations of anthropological method. His rejection of "premature classification" thus reacted upon the attempt to derive a uniform ethical standard on the basis of the positive evaluation of human life. The "common concept of murder" concealed the varied motives of the man who killed for revenge and the altruistic youth "who kills his father before he gets decrepit" so that he might live vigorously in the hereafter. Similarly, the alternating sounds which evolutionists saw as relative to a stage of human linguistic development Boas saw as relative to the differing cultures of the scientific observer and his informants. Similarly, it was "the needs of anthropological research" which led the anthropologist to adapt himself "as thoroughly as may be to the ways of thinking and feeling of foreign tribes and peoples," to "divest himself entirely of opinions and emotions based upon the peculiar social environment into which he is born." Relativism, in the sense of the withholding of judgment by any external or a priori standard, thus came in Boas' work to be a fundamental premise of anthropological method, a necessary basis for accurate observation and sound interpretation. But if "anthropological method" underlay the more general philosophical conclusion of "the relative value of all forms of culture," that method was clearly not the "comparative method of anthropology." It was rather the method which Boas had developed concomitantly with his critique of evolutionism.[58]

Summarizing all of the various strands of this rather discursive argument, we may say that a number of central elements in the modern anthropological culture concept—historicity, plurality, behavioral determinism, integration, and relativism—can be thus seen emerging from older evolutionist or humanist usages in the work of Franz Boas. Perhaps "germinating and growing in" would be a more apt phraseology, since the word remained the same, but for its inflection. It might be argued that the anthropological concept of culture which I have described is extrapolated from Boas' work, rather than explicit in it. But this is precisely the point. Boas was transitional, and his own thinking retained strong residual elements of older thought about the nature of culture.

In relation to the problem of cultural relativism, for instance, it could easily be shown that Boas was not a relativist in a consistent sense (if a consistent cultural relativism is in fact psychologically possible). I will not attempt to argue this at length, but it is worth noting that Boas still thought in terms of a "general theory of valuation" which, aside from teaching us "a higher tolerance than the one which we now profess," would also enable us ultimately to arrive at standards "that have a greater absolute truth than those derived from a study of our civilization alone." Furthermore, it is clear that even in the context of his relativistic, pluralistic critique of evolutionism, Boas still found in the general development of human culture at least qualified affirmation of the specific values most central to his personal world view: reason, freedom, and human fellowship.[59]

Nor was Boas' usage of the term culture consistently that of modern anthropology. Even in *The Mind of Primitive Man* he still used culture in several senses, speaking on one occasion of the "most highly cultured families." No doubt some of these inconsistencies of usage could be explained away as products of the scissors-and-paste method by which Boas put the book together. But they are perhaps more illuminating if we accept them simply as contradictions arising from his transitional role. It was not Boas but his students who were largely responsible for the elaboration and development of the anthropological concept. Nevertheless, as several have noted, the were very often simply elaborating leads that are to be found in Boas' work. Furthermore, these leads are not there as random elements, as adventitious manifestations of ideas long current in western European anthropological thought. They are there as part of a systematic critique of what was for at least thirty years the prevailing anthropological point of view.[60]

It might also be objected that the cultural determinism that I have discussed could exist without being associated with the word *culture* itself (or that the idea of cultural plurality might be present before the term itself had taken a plural). And in a sense this is quite true. The idea that human behavior is conditioned by the historical tradition out of which it arises is hardly an innovation of the late nineteenth century. Nor was it only in anthropology that human behavior was subjected to a deterministic ordinance. But even granting this, it is nevertheless true that the specific linkage of the idea of behavioral determinism with the idea of culture (like

the inflectional recognition of cultural plurality) not only symbolized but facilitated a great change in our ways of thinking about mankind. That thinkers in other areas were also involved in this process simply emphasizes its magnitude.

Focusing only on those aspects of the change having specifically to do with the culture idea, one might say that it involved the rejection of simplistic models of biological or racial determinism, the rejection of ethnocentric standards of cultural evaluation, and a new appreciation of the role of unconscious social processes in the determination of human behavior. It implied a conception of man not as a *rational* so much as a *rationalizing* being. Appropriating somewhat loosely the language of Thomas Kuhn, it might be said that this change, taken as a whole, was a crucial part of the emergence of the modern social scientific "paradigm" for the study of mankind. The idea of culture, radically transformed in meaning, is the central element of this paradigm, and indeed much of the social science of the twentieth century may be seen as a working out in detail of the implications of the culture idea. While the anthropological idea of culture still carries with it the element of human creativity that is part of the heritage of its name, the context of that creativity will never again be the same as it was for E. B. Tylor.

Having mentioned Kuhn, I would like now to introduce a quotation from his *Structure of Scientific Revolutions;* it might have served as a third epigraph for this essay, but can serve instead as the text for its peroration. It provides, I think, a framework that can encompass the epigraphs of both Freud and Bloch, that can allow both for the element of human creativity and for the conditioning of cultural tradition:

> Verbal definitions like Boyle's [of an "element"] have little scientific content when considered by themselves. . . . The scientific concepts to which they point gain full significance only when related, within a text or other systematic presentation, to other scientific concepts. . . . It follows that concepts like that of an element can scarcely be invented independent of context. Furthermore, given the context, they rarely require invention because they are already at hand.
>
> What then was Boyle's historical function in that part of his work that includes the famous "definition"? He was a leader of a scientific revolution that, by changing the relation of "element" to chemical manipulation and chemical theory, transformed the notion into a tool quite different from what it had been before and transformed both chemistry and the chemist's world in the process.[61]

Boas did not, as Tylor has been assumed to have done, offer a definition of anthropological "culture." But what he did do was to create an important portion of the context in which the word acquired its characteristic anthropological meaning. He was a leader of a cultural revolution that, by changing the relation of "culture" to man's evolutionary development, to the burden of tradition, and to the processes of human reason, transformed the notion into a tool quite different from what it had been before. In the process he helped to transform both anthropology and the anthropologist's world.