

**THE INFLUENCE OF
ANTHROPOLOGY ON THE
COURSE OF POLITICAL
SCIENCE. VOL. 4. NO.1**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649351923

The Influence of Anthropology on the Course of Political Science. Vol. 4. No.1 by John Linton Myres

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

JOHN LINTON MYRES

**THE INFLUENCE OF
ANTHROPOLOGY ON THE
COURSE OF POLITICAL
SCIENCE. VOL. 4. NO.1**

L. S. U. C.
1207 ef.
5.7

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PUBLICATIONS
IN
HISTORY

Vol. 4

No. 1

THE INFLUENCE OF ANTHROPOLOGY ON
THE COURSE OF POLITICAL
SCIENCE

BY

JOHN LINTON MYRES

*Wykeham Professor of Ancient History in the
University of Oxford*

BERKELEY,
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS,
1916

17c 30

THE INFLUENCE OF ANTHROPOLOGY ON THE COURSE OF POLITICAL SCIENCE*

JOHN L. MYRES

Anthropology is the Science of Man. Its full task is nothing less than this, to observe and record, to classify and interpret, all the activities of all the varieties of this species of living being. In the general scheme of knowledge, therefore, anthropology holds a double place, according to our own point of view. From one standpoint it falls into the position of a department of zoology, or geography; of zoology, since man, considered as a natural species, forms only one small part of the animal population of this planet; of geography, because his reason, considered simply as one of the forces which change the face of nature, has, as we shall see directly, a range which is almost worldwide. From another point of view anthropology itself, in the strictest sense of the word, is seen to embrace and include whole sciences such as psychology, sociology, and the rational study of art and literature; since each of these vast departments of knowledge is concerned solely with a single group of the manifold activities of man. In practice, however,

*This essay was originally written as a Presidential Address to the Anthropological Section of the British Association for the Advancement of Science on the occasion of its meeting at Winnipeg in 1909. The address was printed in the Proceedings of the Association at that meeting (London, John Murray, 1910). The investigation is resumed here with more extensive references, ampler quotations from the older writers, and the addition of two sections, on Comparative Philology, and on Polygenism. This re-writing has been the result of my residence in Berkeley as Sather Professor of Classical Literature at the University of California during the months of January to April, 1914.

a pardonable pride, no less than the weighty fact that man, alone among the animals, truly possesses reason, has kept the study of man a little aloof from the rest of zoology. Dogmatic scruples have intervened to prevent man from ever ranking merely as one of the "forces of nature," and have set a hard problem of delimitation between historians and geographers. And the pardonable modesty of a very young science—for modern anthropology is barely as old as chemistry—has restrained it from insisting on encyclopedic claims in face of reverend institutions like the sciences of the mind, of statecraft, and of taste.

Yet when I say that anthropology is a young science I mean no more than this, that in the unfolding of that full bloom of rational culture, which sprang from the seeds of the Renaissance, and of which we are the heirs and trustees, anthropology found its place in the sunlight later than most; and almost alone among the sciences can reckon any of its founders among the living. This was of course partly an accident of birth and circumstance; for in the House of Wisdom there are many mansions; a Virchow, a Bastian, or a Tylor might easily have strayed through the gate of knowledge into other fields of work; just as Locke and Montesquieu only narrowly missed the trail into anthropology.

But this late adolescence was also mainly the result of causes which we can now see clearly. Man is, most nearly of all living species, the "ubiquitous animal." Anthropology, like meteorology, and like geography itself, gathers its data from all longitudes, and almost all latitudes, on this earth. It was necessary therefore that the study of man should lag behind the rest of the sciences, as long as any large masses of mankind remained withdrawn from its view; and we have only to remember that Australia and Africa were not even crossed at all—much less explored—by white men, till within living memory, to realize what this limitation means. In addition to this, modern Western civilisation, when it did at last come into contact with aboriginal peoples in new continents, too often came, like the religion which it professed, bringing "not peace but a sword." The customs

and institutions of alien people have been viewed too often, even by reasonable and good men, simply as "y^e beastlie devices of y^e heathen," and the pioneers of our culture, perversely mindful only of the narrower creed, that "he that is not with us is against us," have set out to civilise savages by wrecking the civilisation which they had.

I need not labour the point that it is precisely these two causes, ignorance of many remoter peoples, and reckless destruction or disfigurement of some that are near at hand, which are still the two great obstacles to the progress of our science. But it is no use crying over spilt milk, and I turn rather to the positive and cheering thought that the progress of anthropology has been rapid and sure, in close proportion to the spread of European intercourse with the natives of distant lands; and that its further advance is essentially linked with similar enterprises.

Anthropology and Politics in Ancient Greece

Instances of what I mean are scattered over the whole history of anthropology. Philosophy, as we all know, begins in wonder; it is the surest way to jostle people out of an intellectual groove into new lines of thought, if they can be confronted personally and directly with some object of that numerous class which seems uncouth only because it is unfamiliar. The sudden expansion of the geographical horizon of the early Greeks, in the seventh and sixth centuries, B. C., brought these earliest and keenest of anthropologists face to face with peoples who lived, for example, in a rainless country, or in trees, or who ate monkeys, or grandfathers, or called themselves by their mothers' names, or did other disconcerting things; and this set them thinking, and comparing, and collecting more and more data, from trader and traveller, for an answer to perennial problems, alike of their anthropology and of ours. Can climate alter character or change physique, and if so, how? Does the mode of life or the diet of a people affect that people's real self, or its value for us? Is the father, as the Greeks believed, or

the mother who bore them, the natural owner and guardian of children? Is the Heracles whom they worship in Thasos the same god as he whose temple is in Tyre? Because the Colchians wear linen, and practise circumcision, are they to be regarded as colonists of the Egyptians? or can similar customs spring up independently on the Nile and on the Phasis? Here, in fact, are all the great problems of modern anthropology, flung out for good and all, as soon as ever human reflective reason found itself face to face with the facts of other human societies, even within so limited a region as the old Mediterranean world.

And I would have you note that these old Greek problems, like all the supreme problems of science old and new, were not theoretical problems merely. Each of them stood in direct relation to life. To take only cases such as I quoted just now from the Father of History—is there, for example, among all the various regions and aspects of the world, any real earthly paradise, any delectable country, where without let or hindrance the good man may lead the good life? Is there an ideal diet, an ideal social structure, or in general, an ideal way of life for men; or are all the good things of this world wholly relative to the persons, the places, and the seasons where they occur? I do not mean that the ancient Greeks ever found out any of these things, for all their searching; or even that all ancient seekers after marvels and travellers' tales were engaged consciously in anthropological research at all. I mean only this: that the experiences, and the problems, and the practical end of it all, were as certainly present to the minds of men like Herodotus and Hippocrates, as they have been in all great scientific work that the world had seen.¹

In the same way it has for some while been clear to me that neither Plato nor Aristotle, the great outstanding figures of fourth-century Greece, was constructing theories of human nature entirely in the air. Their conceptions both of the ideal

¹ I have dealt more fully with this aspect of fifth-century Greece in a paper contributed to *Anthropology and the Classics*, Oxford, 1908.

state of society, and of the elements which were fundamental and essential in actual societies as they knew them, were determined to a very large extent by their observation of real men in Sparta, Persia, or Scythia. But it is also clear that much that had been familiar to the historians of the fifth century, and particularly to Herodotus, had fallen out of vogue with the philosophers of the fourth. Systematic clearness had been attained only by the sacrifice of historic accuracy. Thucydides, in fact, standing right in the parting of the ways between history and rhetoric, might fairly have extended his warnings to a dissociation of history from political philosophy, which was just as imminent.

The "Middle Ages" of Social Despair

From the modern evolutionary standpoint, as in the teleology of Aristotle, the notion that the *original* state of anything has any necessary connection with the perfect or *ideal* state of it, is barely intelligible. Each of these philosophies, like the earlier philosophy of Solon, "looks to the end," and interprets the past and the present in the light of the future and in strict relation to it. But this return to what in practical life would be optimism, is of quite recent growth, and closely related to the revival of Greek ways of thinking which characterizes our time. Almost until living memory, doctrines of a perfect past, and of human history as a series of lapses from past perfection remained dominant no less in what passed for anthropology than in history, theology, and thought at large. Sometimes it was the Golden Age of the Greeks of Hesiod's time, a time of blood and iron, of the wreckage of the older order, and chaotic gestation of a new; when belief (and practice too) was tinged, now with sunset memories of "Golden Mycenae," now with the twilight hope of a *magnus annus*—first fruit of astronomy newborn—which should at length turn full circle and repeat the perfection—and the decadence. Sometimes it was the deciduous "Paradise" of the Semites, once gone and gone forever, with no hope left at all in Babylonia, but that of

a final end to the existing cycle of things; or at best, where Egyptian ideas penetrated, of a day of final reckoning, when Osiris—or another—should come. But whether Greek of the Iron Age, or Semitic in origin, the belief was belief in a decadence. It involved a conception of history as a progress away from the ideal, in the direction of *παρεμβάσεις*, perverted or distorted states, forming a series of progressive degeneration. Plato, whose experience inculcated pessimism, even while the eye of faith saw optimism, accepted from current literature, and from tales of Egypt, Hesiodic decadence and the notion of circularity; and even Aristotle, in politics, never freed himself from a popular impression at variance with his philosophic scheme.

From quite another side of Semitic thought, not unaffected by those Egyptian ideas of a restitution of all things "when Osiris shall come," arises the Christian idea of what we may call the "post-social state," when there shall be "neither marrying nor giving in marriage" but a dissolution of all bonds of civil society as we know it; a state of things which is to be, on the one hand, a complete realization of all that the natural order (conceived still as a decadence) prohibited the individual from attaining, and, on the other, almost the annihilation of individuality by incorporation in the Being of God. The latter solution, of course, is neither Greek, nor Semitic, nor Egyptian, but comes in from the tropical East, and mainly after Alexander's time, though Plato had glimpses of it. And this idea of an evolution *into* a state of Nature which is future, whether conceived as proceeding *ad infinitum*, or as attaining a private consummation, has had profound influence from time to time, both on the growth of political theory, and in the practical administration of states. And besides this kinetic optimism, the static optimism of Greek politicians, and of Aristotle, when he is most nearly reflecting *τά λεγόμενα*—the Greek "man in the street"—faded almost out of existence, except among the barns of the Rich Fool, and in latterday Homes of Lost Causes.