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Abstract

Scientific anthropologists tend to argue for the veracity of their approach and assume that the most logical approach will ultimately reclaim the discipline from postmodernists and extreme-naturalists. This article advocates scientific anthropology but stresses that being logically coherent is only part of the process of scientific revolutions. It demonstrates that anthropology is broadly in the grip of those who are implicitly religious—not rational—and then presents a libertarian manifesto on how anthropology—in practical terms—might be returned to the scientific fold.

Introduction

The aim of this research report is to look at how scientists might begin to reclaim social anthropology from the anti-positivist and especially the postmodern tradition which has risen to some prominence within it. The article is, I fully concede, a series of suggestions and possibilities but I think that advancing such possibilities is useful in setting-off what I see as an important debate about anthropology’s future. The arguments advanced are suggestions but they are justified because they attempt to answer a significant question asked—but as yet not satisfactorily answered—by scientific anthropologists. Persuaded of the veracity of scientific anthropology, ‘Where do we go from here?’

Accordingly, this article is an exercise in practical philosophy. Based on the premises that anthropology should be scientific—as we will discuss—in order to meaningfully assist in developing more nuanced theories of human nature and that it is potentially useful in this regard, and, moreover, the premise that civilization is required for science to flourish (see Popper 1966a/b, 1963, Sandall 2001), what practical action should be taken to return anthropology to the realm of science?

Anthropology and Science

Physical anthropology is the study of the evolutionary origins of humans. To a great extent, this remains a science. Social—or cultural—anthropology grew out of physical anthropology in the nineteenth century. Beginning with tribes or folk life, it attempted to record and to scientifically understand what are commonly called ‘cultures’, often underpinned by a belief in at least partial biological determinism. This discipline began by drawing upon sources—‘armchair anthropology’—but by the 1920s it was becoming accepted that anthropologists should engage in fieldwork (‘participant observation’) and so produce ‘ethnographies’ (see Gellner 1995, Ch. 1). But it has moved away from its scientific origins. From the 1920s, scholars such as Margaret Mead (1928) began to argue that all cultures are equal, can only be understood through their own terms (cultural relativism), there is almost no hereditary influence on personality (cultural determinism) and so the anthropologist’s duty is to describe and preserve the culture. Cultural determinism was pulled apart by Derek Freeman’s (1983) refutation of Mead’s shoddy research in Western Samoa, which purported to show a ‘negative instance’ in terms of teenage angst. This shattering of anthropological orthodoxy—by a ‘scientific’ outsider—plunged anthropology into crisis but, even by 1983, Mead’s form of anthropology was being criticised from the postmodern perspective as well.

Accordingly, there has developed a divide in social anthropology between those who believe that social anthropology should be ultimately underpinned by science—and so evolution—and the ‘naturalists’, who do not. According to postmodern and critical factions have taken the field apart by Derek Freeman’s (1983) refutation of Mead’s shoddy research in Western Samoa, which purported to show a ‘negative instance’ in terms of teenage angst. This shattering of anthropological orthodoxy—by a ‘scientific’ outsider—plunged anthropology into crisis but, even by 1983, Mead’s form of anthropology was being criticised from the postmodern perspective as well.

In his book, Reclaiming a Scientific Anthropology (Kuznar 1997), he provides ample evidence for this summary. A ‘crisis of representation’ began, in social anthropology in around the 1970s in which all of anthropology’s fundamental assumptions came to be questioned and some have insisted that anthropology remains in this state of crisis (e.g. Rees 2010a). Hymes (1974) criticised anthropologists for imposing ‘Western categories’—such as Western measurement—on those they study, arguing that this was a form of domination. Asad (1973) criticised field-work based anthropology for ultimately being indebted to colonialism and it has been argued (e.g. Sandall 2001) that this has led some anthropologists to focussing on their own psychologies, and their fallibility as scientific instruments, more than their observations. Andreakis (1974, 109) might counter that this reflects ‘methodological perfectionism’ as does the essentialist1 demand that anthropological concepts be dissected in detail to the neglect of actual analy-
sis.² The instruments of physical science are also fallible as is a zoologist in relation to that which he observes. Others drew upon the postmodern deconstruction of texts to argue that anthropology was ultimately composed of ‘texts’—ethnographies—which can be deconstructed (e.g. Marcus and Cushman 1982). By extension, as all texts—including scientific texts—could be deconstructed, some anthropologists began to accept that reality itself was tenuous and only ‘within the text.’ Indeed, for anthropologists such as Wagner (1981) there is, in effect, no objective truth. All attempts at constructing reality are subjective responses to the ‘culture shock’ caused by the cultural ‘other.’ Watson (1991, 79) is explicit that there is no objective reality. Anthropological accounts are ‘constitutive of reality.’

Other scholars have pursued postmodern deconstruction by questioning anthropological categories. For example, Rees (2010a) is sceptical of ‘culture’ because it has a starting point in history, plays down nuance, is static, and imposes a Western category on the other . . . but this is, of course, true of all categories of apprehension. In the nominalist tradition, they are to be used cautiously if they are helpful (see Dennett 1995, 95) and to term such categories ‘reified’ or ‘essentialist’ is really a straw-man argument. Equally to suggest that the changes since the 1980s have been so radical that culture is no longer useful fails to understand the broad anthropological definition of the word and that, for a nominalist, words can be malleable and employed as and when useful. Some argue that ‘representation’ and ‘theory’ are problematic (e.g. Rees 2010a) but fail to appreciate that any description is inherently an act of representing and even language is underpinned by some kind of theory (see Gentner 1982). They may counter that understanding arrives ex nihilo, in the break-down of fieldwork, but this seems closer to religious understanding than scientific (see Wiebe 1999). And Denis Dutton (1999) observes that other social scientists reflect postmodern influence with scholarship that says very little but is verbose and makes use of intellectual-sounding jargon such as, in anthropology, ‘reified,’ ‘emergent,’ ‘problematised,’ ‘discontinuities’, ‘agency’ and so on³ as well as fallacious arguments, such as that ‘culture’ should be dismissed because it is old-fashioned or too popular (e.g. Barth 2002).

The problems with postmodern anthropology are fairly clear as Gellner (1992) observes. Its cultural relativism is hypocritical, best summarised by Richard Dawkins (2003, 15) with the lines: ‘Show me a cultural relativist at 3000 feet and I’ll show you a hypocrite . . . If you are flying to an international conference of anthropologists . . . the reason you will probably get there, the reason you won’t plummet into the ploughed field is that a lot of Western, scientifically trained engineers have got their sums right.’ It is also inconsistent because it attempts to use the logic of Western science to question the usefulness of logical reasoning itself. Its extreme essentialism—in radically deconstructing categories of apprehension—leads us to a situation where we cannot begin to understand anything so postmodernism, as Scruton (2000) puts it, takes us into a void of Nothing where we can understand nothing. It is epistemologically pessimistic. And as Bruce (2002) argues it makes many ideological assumptions; for example that all cultures are equal or that colonialism is inherently wrong.

Edward Wilson (1998) argues, in my view persuasively, for Consilience of the various academic disciplines. In summary, he maintains that knowledge is reached both by fragmentation—in the sense of reductionism in order to gain purchase on an object of study—but also, crucially, by reconstruction. We are witnessing an ‘ongoing fragmentation of knowledge’ (8) as we divide into innumerable subdisciplines and ‘consilience’ would consequently be positive for scholarship. Consilience is metaphysical but the ‘success’ of science provides a strong case for its veracity and, indeed, Kuznar (1997, Ch. 3) gives examples of the proven success of scientific anthropology above its naturalist competitors.

Wilson (1998) notes that ethics, social policy, environmental policy and social science are clearly closely related domains yet they stand apart with separate practitioners, modes of analysis, language and standards. The result is confusion with regard to the areas of overlap yet it is here ‘where most real world problems exist’ (10). Wilson therefore argues that these specialists must, and can, reach an agreement on standards of abstract principles and evidentiary proof. He then proceeds to prove how humanity and social science explanations are ultimately question-begging (and, in some cases, simply ideological) and fully make sense only with ‘consilience’ into biology and psychology. Wilson’s idea has been criticised with critics citing a belief that a ‘rational society’ is not the same as a ‘scientific society’ but it has been countered that these critics then use ‘science’ as their ultimate model for a rational society. Wilson has also been criticised for an idiosyncratic view of ‘the Enlightenment quest’ but this does not undermine the logic of consilience (Segerstråle 2000, 360-361).

Consilience characterises scientific enquiry. It must be possible to reduce research in a particular discipline down to the discipline which ultimately underpins it. This is an important sign that a discipline is scientific. ‘Science’ must also involve certain agreed characteristics. Lawrence Kuznar (1997, 22) argues that these are the following:

1) It must be solely empirical. If a discipline is based on unprovable or inconsistent dogmas it is not scientific and if it places something—such as ‘empathy for informants’—above the pursuit of truth it is not science.

2) It must be systematic and exploratory.

3) It must be logical. This means, in particular, that fallacious arguments, such as appeal ad hominem, appeal to motive or any other form of rhetoric must be avoided. It also means that the research and arguments must be consistent.

4) It must be theoretical, it must attempt to explain, to answer questions and, where possible, predict. In this regard, it engages in nominalism and only cautious
essentialism.
5) It must be self-critical, prepared to abandon long-held models as new information arises.
6) Its propositions must be open to testing and falsification.
7) As it wishes to be falsified and as anybody can, in theory, do so; science should be a public activity.
8) It should assume that reality is actually real and can be understood; it should be epistemologically optimistic. Accordingly, it must accept that there is an objectively correct understanding of how the world works which can be discovered.

Rees (2010b, 900) has defined science as ‘thoughtful, sincere research’ but this is so broad that it would not distinguish science from art.\(^4\) If we accept Kuznar’s model of science and that anthropology, to be logically coherent, must be part of it then it is reasonable to ask ‘Where do we go from here?’ and this is how Kuznar (1997, 11) ends his book.

Religion, Science and Paradigms

Kuznar accepts that social anthropology has become dominated by what he terms the latter-day ‘religious’—those who fervently hold to inconsistent, illogical views, what Bailey (1997) terms the ‘implicitly religious’. Despite the veracity of scientific anthropology, it has been pushed to the sidelines and, indeed, Kuznar observes that Kuhn’s (1963) model of scientific revolutions accepts that being scientifically correct is only part of a successful scientific revolution. Once a new paradigm is widely accepted, a form of tribalism will rear its head and there will be a reactionary and irrational response—by those who have built their careers on the new paradigm—to those who attempt to logically challenge it, as observed in the reaction to Derek Freeman’s (1983, 1999) critique of Margaret Mead (1928) (see Freeman 1996). Andreski (1974) and many others (e.g. Jenkins 2009) have observed the parallels between scientific practice and religion. Andreski (1974, 249) argues that scientists should be ‘iconoclastic’—relentlessly tearing down that which is widely accepted in pursuit of the truth. But iconoclastic scientists soon gain a cult-like following of scientists who wish to preserve the new status quo, ironically rejecting the very kind of iconoclastic scientist whom they have originally followed.

Kuznar makes various suggestions on what should be done but this involves little more than repeating that anthropology should be scientific. This may persuade thinking, critical anthropologists who have only ever been exposed to naturalist or postmodern anthropology. Kuznar may have rescued anthropology intellectually but he is not being practical. Anthropology’s takeover by cultural relativists was a kind of revolution. If Kuhn is right, it may take a counter-revolution to return it to science. And if Kuznar (1997, 211) is correct then social anthropology is in a state of crisis induced by the postmodern critique. This ‘crisis’ is, as is widely acknowledged, the most auspicious circumstance for a revolution (see Kuhn 1963, Goldstone 1980), whereby anthropology is brought back into the scientific-fold. What can be done to hasten it in practical terms?

How to Create a Revolution

Italian revolutionary Antonio Gramsci diverged from Marx’s view that only if revolutionaries take hold of the means of production and distribution can they take power from the ruling class and thence take their place. Instead, the ‘ruling class’ posit a ‘hegemonic’ ideology which ‘legitimises’ their position. They then impose this ideology on the populace through their control of the ‘ideological state apparatus’—legal and political administration, schools, universities, churches, the media, the family and the underlying assumptions of popular culture (Giddens 1997, 583). In general, the revolutionary wants to bring about ‘manufactured consent’ (Gramsci 1971, 215). The revolution has been truly successful when the ideology ceases to be controversial but, instead, becomes regarded as common sense, as something that no reasonable person would question. In such a situation, counter-revolutionaries do not—usually—need to be actively persecuted by the state. Most citizens will regard them as at best laughable and at worst dangerous and treat them accordingly.

So, can such a theory be applied to ‘anthropology’? With many nuances, I would argue it could be. Anthropology (and many disciplines) is rendered far more complicated than a nation-state because it is increasingly international and beyond the control of individual nation states which are, in turn, influenced by transnational forces (e.g. Becher and Trowler 2001). The ideological ‘apparatus’ takes the form of peer-reviewed journals and books, conferences, anthropology societies and anthropology departments. In addition, the broader non-academic media is an important piece of the apparatus. The way in which this apparatus works, in terms of power-dynamics, has been discussed, more broadly, by a number of scholars (see, for example, Andreski 1974, Martin 1999 or Welch 2009) and I will summarise their essential arguments.

Anthropologists can influence whether or not dissenting anthropology is published through the kind of peer-reviews which they write for journals or publishers. As rhetoric-expert John Welch (2009) puts it, ‘Blind peer review can also be a way to abuse privilege. Someone with a score to settle can do so by using the blind review process punitively.’ Or, if they are journal editors, influence is wielded through the ability to decide whether an article is peer-reviewed at all or whether, sometimes, to over-rule the reviews and this may even done for financial reasons. As Welch (2009) suggests, ‘Malaria is more abundant today than it ever was, yet medical journals are more likely to publish works about Cialis or whatever other big-money drug funds the ads that keep that journal afloat.’ If they are asked to write books reviews, these can be used as attempts to smear and sink a book with which they
disagree for ideological reasons. Equally, conference organi-
sers can control what kinds of papers are given at a con-
ference. Scholars will be nominated as reviewers, or
editors, because of previous publishing success in journals
and books and, indeed, academic positions which they
hold, though they were may review papers only tangen-
tially related to their area. They will in turn be appointed
to these positions because of their publishing success and
will, if they ascend the academic ladder, be able to control
who else works in their department, perhaps on ideologi-
cal grounds if they wish. In turn, they will be more likely
to be published by academic publishers if they have pub-
lished in the right journals, hold an academic position and,
especially in the case of a PhD thesis, been funded by a
prestigious funding body where funding distribution can
itself be politically manipulated as can the process of the
‘PhD Defence’ or viva voce. The distribution of funding is
another piece of apparatus which can make or break re-
search and influence.

Finally, a scholar is far more likely to be of interest to the
media if he has published academic books and articles and
holds an academic position or higher qualification, be-
cause these provide him with authority rendering any con-
troversial statements he might make far more newswor-
thy. Media coverage will, in turn, affect his academic
reputation.

As Andreski (1974, Ch. 1) argues, a power structure is by
its very nature conservative. It is controlled by the domi-
nant ideology and established academics and any challenge
to this ideology, or the system involved, is likely to be a
challenge to the life’s work, social position and even salary
of those in control, a point which Westbrook (2008)
makes about postmodern anthropology. Accordingly, as
Andreski (1974, 49) notes, the challenge may come from
daring small publishers, less prestigious journals, scholars
outside the discipline, popular academic writing and even
from publishers and scholars in academically peripheral
countries.\

Of course, in practice some pieces of the apparatus are far
more important than others. It is reviewers, writers and
editors of the leading journals—and for the leading pub-
lishers and the most prestigious funding bodies—who have
the real power over the most important parts of the
apparatus. Perhaps it is not unreasonable to argue that the
real centres of power are journals published in the
USA and Britain and especially American Anthropologist,
Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute and related jour-
nals. The most significant publishers might include Ox-
ford University Press and Harvard University Press and
these might also be amongst the most important depart-
ments.

A counter-revolution involves advocates of scientific an-
thropology taking hold of these organs of influence by
effective use of the influence they already have. Scientific
anthropologists should insist on teaching their under-
graduates—as part of their courses—about the philoso-
phy of science and be quite explicit with them about the
implicitly religious nature of postmodern and cultural rela-
tivist anthropology, thus inculcating the next generation
with scientific anthropology. Equally, anthropologists
could use their influence in departments to strongly argue
against the appointment of potential colleagues who seem
to advocate anti-scientific anthropology and employ their
influence as reviewers to prevent the publication of anti-
scientific anthropology literature and highlight the flaws of
that which is published in letters to the editor, critical
book reviews (specifically requesting to review books by
postmodern anthropologists) and even articles for the
popular press and on the internet.

There are many possibilities for provocative articles in the
press which could damage postmodern anthropology.
For example, all practicing anthropologists—or members
of anthropological societies—could be invited to sign a
document from which no genuine scientist could possibly
demure; stating that they accept scientific principles. Fail-
ure to do so would then be publicly highlighted which
would likely be damaging to the reputations of the schol-
ars in question and their departments. There may be phi-
losophical objections to science but these are no more
matters for anthropologists then they are for chemists if,
indeed, social anthropology is genuinely a science. In the
Sokal Hoax (see Sokal and Bricmont 1998) American
physicist Alan Sokal sent a lampoon of postmodern writ-
ing (Sokal 1996) to a postmodern cultural studies journal
as a test to see whether they would publish it, which they
duly did. Similar lampoons could be sent to leading an-
thropology journals. I suspect—and hope—that many
would be rejected but some might not be and, if this oc-
curred, media attention could be brought to this which
would accordingly pressure the journals and highlight the
failures of postmodern anthropology.

The Need for a Libertarian Society

But I would submit that the influence of postmodernism
in anthropology is ultimately a reflection of the nature of
the society in which the apparatus operate. Andreski
(1974) observes that the dominant discourse in social sci-
ences tends to be the dominant discourse in society at
large. Though social science may influence society, in
general it reflects the dominant ideology to a far greater
extent than physical science because it is more difficult for
physical sciences—with their greater degree of empirical
rigour—to be hijacked by the implicitly religious. More-
over, Gellner (1996, Ch. 1) notes that the various anthro-
pological disciplines have been founded on implicitly reli-
gious ideas. Nineteenth century Western anthropology
drew upon the ‘Great Chain of Being’ to assert a racial
and even religious hierarchy whereby the Northern Euro-
pean was, in every way, superior. It was dominated by
biological determinism, something which developed into a
dogma. Eastern anthropology developed in the context of
small-nation nationalism, assuming that its purpose was to
build a nation—accepting many elements of Romantic
nationalism—and so preserve and document its folk cul-
ture.
Accordingly, postmodern anthropology is part of a broader cultural revolution where the apparatus of power—including politically significant university departments that relate to how we treat and understand people—has been taken over by those in the Gramscian tradition. As such, scientific anthropologists should campaign, in all countries, for the form of government most conducive to science and I would submit that this would be one without a clear and lauded ‘ideology’ and so not a government in the implicitly religious Romantic traditions of socialism or nationalism (see Scruton 2000) let alone explicit religion. This may be a form of moderate, libertarian conservatism and Kuznar (1997, 22) observes that science, by its very nature, is libertarian. Nevertheless, a government of this kind – motivated by a desire for freedom —would not only defend the interests of science but would realise that postmodernists, cultural relativists and the like were ultimately a manifestation of the power of the opposition, of the displaced ‘ruling class.’ Intelligent lobbying would, therefore, be far more likely to persuade such a government that direct or indirect government-funding for research should be based on the degree to which the research is actually scientific. Academics could be made to justify their research—according to the criteria outlined—and if it were not scientific (or broadly so by contributing to a civilization conducive to scientific practice) funding would be cut from the scholar and from the department until it would be financially very difficult to engage in unscientific research.

Moreover, any justification would have to include a summary—written in clear language—making clear the usefulness of the research for an academic in an entirely different area of study. Evidence of verbosity and jargon would, accordingly, be extremely costly.

Libertarian philosopher Sean Gabb (2007) goes further in a broader manifesto on how to win back England from postmodernists. He delineates in detail how to destroy—at great speed—what he sees as the semi-totalitarian state which has been constructed in England since World War II and especially under the New Labour Government of 1997 to 2010. In terms of holding society together, he also implicitly argues in favour of some limited form of ethnicity-based identity (54). I would argue that his methods—such as abolishing almost all restrictions on free speech and association, guaranteeing these as unsailable rights and abolishing and destroying all the records of most government departments and commissions and generally making government insignificantly small by privatising almost everything—would aid such a revolution. However, I would nuance his attitude to education. He argues that once a libertarian government is elected—assuming it can be elected—all government funding should be withdrawn from universities.

‘. . . we should cut off all state-funding to the universities. We might allow some separate, transitional support for a few science departments. But we should be careful not to allow another penny of support for an Economics or Law or Sociology or Gov-

ernment and Politics Department . . . Doubtless, many students will be upset to lose their chance of getting a degree . . . bearing in mind the mixture of worthless knowledge and ruling class indoctrination from which we would be saving them, they would not suffer on balance’ (Gabb 2007, 58).

I would counter that lawyers are necessary in a society governed by the Rule of Law and this is the form of society which Gabb wants as opposed to totalitarian society where the law is enforced unfairly. Also, all the departments he lists can make a contribution to civilization as long as they are scientific and this is why I suggest that funding should be withdrawn on a case-by-case basis in the manner which I have advocated, though as Gabb is suggesting action to avoid a counter-revolution perhaps such departments could be initially relieved of funding and the issue reassessed in less pressing times. If universities were to receive no government-funding, then social science departments would be beholden to the interests of benevolent donors. I would argue that this would only make them as corruptible as if they were beholden to the interests of the government of the day. This is a problem, of course, but it must be understood in the context of the benefits to science of a relatively libertarian government.

It might be argued that if all government funding were withdrawn from universities then scientific research would likely gain funding from industry and the medical profession, paid for by the public, and so would continue. There would always be a need for lawyers—so the Law would gain funding from the public and could be self-sustaining. Such a situation might also see substantial cutbacks in higher education and a rise in ‘independent scholars,’ especially in history, philosophy and so on, whose research could not be corrupted by the desire for promotion and the like.

And, of course, once anthropology is returned to science a counter-revolution must be prevented. Welch (2009) argues for radical reform of the peer-review process such that scholarship is published online and continuously updated as it is constantly peer-reviewed. The form of peer-review which is widely practiced, he argues, is slow, easily corruptible, reliant on a degree of good luck, most journals and publishers who employ it inherently restrict access to science (through expensive, jargon-filled publications which few people read); it is essentially a form of vanity publishing. Replacing this kind of peer-review undermines the power-base of established scholars but it could only be done once the ‘revolution’ had occurred. Prior to scientists taking control of anthropology’s major journals, scholars would be unlikely to follow Welch’s idea fearing their publications would lack impact and prestige. As in my own case, they may also fear that they will not be read by other scholars and so fail to contribute to the debate or receive feedback allowing their ideas to be critiqued and further developed. Accordingly, to introduce such an idea anthropologists would have to take over and shut down the competing journals.
But the problem is that—for the scheme to work—there would have to be some degree of ‘authority’ involved, such as that potential reviewers have PhDs (the provision of which is corruptible) or books published and that those that run the new system be respected experts. And scholars will desire a way to sift through all the dross and academic books and journals provide such a means, if not a perfect means, of doing this. They gain prestige by virtue of the calibre and influence of the people published in or by them and the extent and nature of their readership. Perhaps this can be achieved by an initial insistence that any submitted article, no matter how bad, is anonymously reviewed in the traditional fashion by two or three recognised scholars, the suggestions at least responded to,8 reviewed and further responded to before publication which then occurs even if the reviews are broadly negative. Once published, all scholars are invited to read it and anonymously send reviews continuously. Following Welch’s vision, it might be difficult to find the best scholarship other than through a system whereby it was ‘liked’ or cited by eminent scholars, which would not be that dissimilar to what occurs now. However, the system would make it far more difficult to abuse peer-review (by using it to prevent publication for ideological reasons) and would render a counter-revolution far more difficult.

More than just ‘good luck’

Kuznar (1997, 224) ends his defence of scientific anthropology thus: ‘Anthropology should centre and orchestrate around a principle theme, the quest for understanding the human condition using scientific principles, yet be tolerant of the discordance that will, in the end, make it rich and meaningful. I wish the best of luck to us all.’ I partly agree with Kuznar and admire his positive attitude and magnanimousness. But he also seems to reflect the kind of implicit religiosity which I have highlighted. Tolerating ‘discordance’ (by which he means postmodern anthropology, creation science and other shoddy research) may ‘in the end, make it rich and meaningful’—in that it forces scientists to be more self-aware and hone the expression of their arguments—but it may sink anthropology and science more broadly because some postmoderns are openly opposed to science. So Kuznar’s assertion smacks of bien pensant prophecy. And while anthropologists may need auspicious coincidences, wishing us ‘the best of luck’ doesn’t really help unless you believe in the genuine power of such blessings.

It may help in that it makes Kuznar and, perhaps by extension, other scientific anthropologists seem like very nice people and this, in turn, may make others more inclined to support them. I’m sure Lawrence Kuznar is a very nice man and his book shows him to be an extremely thoughtful one. But though being nice may help, I would suggest that the—albeit tentative and brief—manifesto I have suggested may help as well in ensuring that anthropology returns to a quest to understand the human condition and human nature through scientific means.

But, of course, it is tentative and I would welcome the suggestions of other scientific anthropologists on how it might be developed. Perhaps one of the obvious problems is whether such action is in the spirit of caution and self-criticism which underpins critical rationalism. Can scientists be sufficiently ‘sure’ to ‘act’ in such a decisive way?

Notes

(1) For Essentialists it is the task of science to describe the true nature of things and thus focus on the definitions of terms. Nominalists are more interested in understanding how something behaves in different circumstances and they make use of a concept if it is helpful.

(2) As we will see below, this can be a useful means of suppressing dissident research. A peer-reviewer can simply insist that a category that has been criticised by postmodernists (such as ‘culture’) must be ‘problematised’ in so much depth that there is no space—in the word limit of an article—to engage in actual analysis, forcing the scholar to either give-up on the article or the category which the reviewer dislikes.


(4) This is a rejoinder to Dutton (2010).

(5) For example, Gellner was a philosopher before turning to anthropology. Malinowski and Andreski were both from Poland but challenged British anthropology and sociology respectively.


(7) A number of scholars (e.g. Salter 2006) have argued that some kind of hallowed worldview is required to hold civilization together in the face of those who would bring it down and the idea of a genetic extended family, and passing on one’s genes, is a prime motivator in any animal including humans. This form, in effect, of ancestor-worship avoids stifling intellectual dissent—as in when society is held together with dogmas (see Benoist 2004)—but I appreciate there are difficulties with it.

(8) Of course, there is room for corruption here because the editor could insist that they have not responded even if they have so strict guidelines on what constitutes a ‘response’ would have to be drawn up and mutually accepted.

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