

ANANTAM IAS · OPTIONAL NOTES

Anthropology Optional Anthropological Theories

Paper 1 · Unit 8

The highest-yield theory unit, mapped school by school with the right figure and central claim attached to each, the critiques that moved the field from one school to the next, and a master comparison table for last-mile revision.

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UPSC SYLLABUS

Classical evolutionism (Tylor, Morgan and Frazer). Historical particularism (Boas); diffusionism (British, German and American). Functionalism (Malinowski); structural-functionalism (Radcliffe-Brown). Structuralism (Levi-Strauss and E. Leach). Culture and personality (Benedict, Mead, Linton, Kardiner and Cora du Bois). Neo-evolutionism (Childe, White, Steward, Sahlins and Service). Later theory: cultural materialism (Harris); symbolic and interpretive (Turner, Schneider, Geertz); cognitive (Tyler, Conklin); post-modernism.

The Shape of the Argument — a Map of the Schools

Theory in Paper 1 is a running argument, each school defined by what it rejected in the last. The examiner rewards you for seeing the arc: evolutionism generalised recklessly, so particularism and diffusionism reacted; functionalism dropped history for present use; structuralism went to the mind; culture-and-personality went to the individual; neo-evolutionism brought evolution back on a scientific footing. Hold the map, then fill in each school.

- Classical evolutionism (Tylor, Morgan, Frazer, mid-to-late 1800s) claimed a single ladder of progress for all humanity, reconstructed by the comparative method from the armchair. Every later school begins as a revolt against some part of this.
- The two reactions to evolutionism ran in parallel. American historical particularism (Boas) said each culture is a unique historical product and cannot be ranked. Diffusionism (British, German-Austrian, American) said cultures resemble one another because traits spread, not because minds climb the same stairs.
- Functionalism (Malinowski) and structural-functionalism (Radcliffe-Brown) then dropped the question of origins entirely and asked what a custom does now, the first for the individual's needs, the second for the social structure.
- Structuralism (Levi-Strauss) relocated explanation to the universal unconscious structure of the human mind and its binary oppositions, beneath both function and history.
- Culture and personality, or configurationalism (Benedict, Mead, Linton, Kardiner, Du Bois), a Boasian offshoot, asked how culture shapes the individual personality and how personality patterns a whole culture.
- Neo-evolutionism (Childe, White, Steward, Sahlins and Service) rehabilitated evolution after Boas by making it multilinear or energy-based and testable, not a single moral ladder.
- The unit continues into cultural materialism (Harris), symbolic and interpretive anthropology (Turner, Schneider, Geertz), cognitive anthropology (Tyler, Conklin) and post-modernism, treated in brief at the end so the map is complete.

The major schools, their figures and central claim

School	Key figures	Central claim	Reacting against
Classical evolutionism	Tylor, Morgan, Frazer	Culture evolves through fixed universal stages	Pre-scientific speculation
Historical particularism	Boas	Each culture is a unique historical product, not rankable	Evolutionist comparative method
Diffusionism	Elliot Smith and Perry; Graebner and Schmidt; Wissler and Kroeber	Cultural similarity comes from the spread of traits	Independent invention and evolutionism
Functionalism	Malinowski	Every custom serves individual biological and psychological needs	Historical reconstruction, survivals
Structural-functionalism	Radcliffe-Brown	Institutions maintain the social structure and solidarity	Malinowski's individual needs
Structuralism	Levi-Strauss, Leach	Culture expresses universal binary structures of the mind	Empiricism of function and history
Culture and personality	Benedict, Mead, Linton, Kardiner, Du Bois	Culture patterns personality and personality patterns culture	Impersonal, individual-blind theory
Neo-evolutionism	Childe, White, Steward, Sahlins, Service	Evolution is real but multilineal or energy-driven, not a single ladder	Boasian anti-evolutionism

KEY TERMS

Comparative method — The evolutionist practice of arranging societies from different times and places on a single developmental scale to reconstruct stages; the chief target of Boas's critique.

Psychic unity of mankind — The assumption, shared by evolutionists and Boas alike, that all human minds are fundamentally alike, used by evolutionists to justify parallel development and by diffusionists' opponents to explain independent invention.

Classical Evolutionism — Tylor, Morgan, Frazer, and Its Critique

The founders of the discipline shared three assumptions: psychic unity, a single ladder of progress, and the comparative method. Learn each man's stages and his signature contribution, then the bundle of criticisms that ended the school, because questions here are almost always compare-or-critique.

- E.B. Tylor gave anthropology its working definition of culture in *Primitive Culture* (1871): that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. This is the most quoted line in the paper.
- Tylor's engine of reconstruction is the doctrine of survivals, customs that outlast their original purpose and so betray an earlier stage. His religious scheme, animism to polytheism to monotheism, is the model of a unilinear sequence driven by growing rational capacity.
- Lewis Henry Morgan, in *Ancient Society* (1877), proposed three grand stages, savagery, barbarism and civilisation, with savagery and barbarism each split into lower, middle and upper on technological markers (fire, the bow, pottery, domestication, iron smelting, the phonetic alphabet). Technology, for Morgan, paces social evolution.

- Morgan's deeper contribution is kinship. In Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity (1871) he distinguished classificatory from descriptive terminologies and tied them to stages of marriage and family. Marx and Engels drew directly on him, Engels in The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, which is why Morgan matters far beyond anthropology.
- J.G. Frazer, in The Golden Bough (1890), supplied the intellectual-history version: humanity climbs from magic through religion to science. Like the others he never did fieldwork, and his method is the comparative collection of parallels from around the world.
- The critique that ended the school, mostly from Boas and his students, has several prongs. The unilinear ladder assumes one track for all humanity, which the record contradicts. The comparative method rips traits out of context and lines up superficial resemblances that may have quite different histories, so convergence is mistaken for common descent. The scheme is ethnocentric, placing Victorian Europe at the summit. And it is armchair theorising built on unreliable second-hand reports.
- The doctrine of survivals in particular was attacked as circular: a custom is called a survival because it fits the assumed sequence, and it is then used as evidence for that same sequence.
- The fair verdict for an answer: the evolutionists founded the discipline, put culture and kinship on the agenda, and asserted psychic unity against racial explanations, which was progressive in its day. Their error was method and overreach, not the ambition to explain cultural difference.

The three classical evolutionists

Thinker	Key work	Stages or sequence	Signature contribution
E.B. Tylor	Primitive Culture (1871)	Animism to polytheism to monotheism	Definition of culture; doctrine of survivals
L.H. Morgan	Ancient Society (1877)	Savagery, barbarism, civilisation (by technology)	Kinship terminology; influence on Marx and Engels
J.G. Frazer	The Golden Bough (1890)	Magic to religion to science	Intellectual history of the supernatural

KEY TERMS

Unilinear evolution — The classical view that all cultures pass through the same fixed sequence of stages in the same order, differing only in how far they have climbed.

Doctrine of survivals — Tylor's method: customs that persist beyond their original function are evidence of an earlier evolutionary stage.

Classificatory kinship terminology — Morgan's category for systems that merge lineal and collateral kin under one term (for example one word for father and father's brother), contrasted with descriptive systems.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- How did Morgan explain the evolution of marriage, family and socio-political organization, and how did other evolutionists disagree with his explanation? [2015]
- Critically examine James Frazer's theory of evolutionism. [2025]

Historical Particularism — Franz Boas

Boas is the hinge of the whole unit. He demolished the comparative method, made fieldwork and cultural relativism the discipline's norms, and trained the generation (Kroeber, Lowie, Benedict, Mead, Sapir) that

carried American anthropology. Almost every later American school is downstream of him.

- The core claim is that each culture is the outcome of its own particular history, a unique configuration built from local invention, borrowing and environment. Cultures cannot therefore be ranked on a single universal scale, which is the direct denial of evolutionism.
- Boas's methodological attack is precise: similar cultural traits can arise from wholly different histories, so surface resemblance is no proof of a common stage or a common origin. The comparative method commits exactly this error, and independent invention and convergence must always be allowed for.
- From this follows cultural relativism, the principle that a culture must be understood in its own terms and by its own values, not measured against the observer's. Boas advanced it as a scientific corrective to ethnocentrism, and it became the working ethic of the discipline.
- His method is rigorously inductive: collect exhaustive, detailed empirical data through firsthand fieldwork in the native language, and generalise only cautiously, if at all. He distrusted grand theory built ahead of the facts. His work with the Kwakiutl of the Northwest Coast is the model.
- In *The Mind of Primitive Man* (1911) Boas separated race, language and culture as independent variables, dismantling the racial science of his day and showing that head form itself could change with environment. This anti-racist demonstration is a major reason he matters beyond method.
- The critique of Boas, made by his own successors, is that historical particularism became atheoretical, a planless accumulation of detail that shied away from the generalisations a science needs. His students then swung back towards patterning: Kroeber to the superorganic and culture areas, Benedict and Mead to configuration and personality.
- For an answer, frame Boas as the necessary correction rather than a dead end: he made the discipline empirical, relativist and anti-racist, and the theory-building schools that followed all worked on the ground he cleared.

KEY TERMS

Historical particularism — Boas's position that each culture is a unique product of its own history and cannot be placed on a universal evolutionary scale.

Cultural relativism — The principle that a culture should be understood and judged in its own terms, not by the standards of the observer's culture.

Inductive method — Boas's insistence on gathering full empirical data before generalising, in deliberate contrast to the evolutionists' deductive schemes.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Critically examine the historical particularistic approach of Franz Boas to the study of culture. [1997]
- Write notes on historical particularism and Franz Boas. [2021]

Diffusionism — British, German-Austrian and American

Diffusionism explained cultural similarity by the spread of traits rather than parallel evolution, and it comes in three schools of very different temperament, from wildly monogenetic to soberly empirical. UPSC has asked you to distinguish them directly, so keep the founders and the flavour of each apart.

- The shared premise: human beings are un inventive, so similar customs found far apart are better explained by borrowing from a common source than by the independent working of a universal mind. The disagreement is over how many sources there were and how far traits travelled.

- The British school, also called heliocentric or pan-Egyptian, is the extreme case. Grafton Elliot Smith and W.J. Perry held that civilisation was invented once, in ancient Egypt (agriculture, megaliths, kingship, sun-worship), and radiated from there to the whole world. Perry's *Children of the Sun* (1923) is its manifesto. It is monogenetic and, in that form, discredited.
- The German-Austrian school built the *Kulturkreise*, or culture-circles, theory. Friedrich Ratzel founded the anthropogeographic approach and the criterion of form. Leo Frobenius introduced the culture-circle idea. Fritz Graebner systematised it in *Methode der Ethnologie* (1911), using two criteria of borrowing: the criterion of form (resemblance in arbitrary detail, beyond what function requires) and the criterion of quantity (many linked traits found together).
- Father Wilhelm Schmidt extended the *Kulturkreise* into religion, arguing in his multi-volume study of the origin of the idea of God for a primitive monotheism (*Urmonotheismus*), an original high-god belief that later degenerated into polytheism, reversing Tylor's sequence. Note the confessional motive without dismissing the scholarship.
- The American school is the moderate, empirical one, and it grows out of Boas. Clark Wissler developed the culture-area concept and the age-area hypothesis: since a trait spreads outward from its point of origin, its width of geographical distribution is a rough index of its age, the most widely distributed being the oldest. A.L. Kroeber refined culture areas and added the culture climax, the centre of greatest elaboration.
- The distinctions to hold: the British school is single-origin and speculative; the German-Austrian school is multi-centre, methodical and criterion-driven; the American school is regional, cautious and tied to empirical distribution rather than to world history.
- Criticisms of diffusionism as a whole: it underrates human inventiveness and the fact of independent invention; the heliocentric version is fantastical; and diffusion describes a mechanism of spread without explaining why a trait is adopted, retained or refused. Its lasting deposit is the culture-area concept, still used descriptively.

The three diffusionist schools

School	Founders	Core idea	Verdict
British (heliocentric)	Elliot Smith, Perry	All civilisation diffused from ancient Egypt	Extreme, monogenetic, discredited
German-Austrian (<i>Kulturkreise</i>)	Graebner, Schmidt (also Ratzel, Frobenius)	Culture-circles spread by criteria of form and quantity; primitive monotheism	Systematic but rigid
American (culture area)	Wissler, Kroeber	Regional diffusion; age-area hypothesis; culture climax	Empirical, moderate, still useful

KEY TERMS

Kulturkreise — The German-Austrian culture-circle: a complex of traits that originated together and spread as a unit across wide areas.

Criterion of form — Graebner's test for borrowing: resemblance in arbitrary, non-functional detail indicates diffusion rather than independent invention.

Age-area hypothesis — Wissler's inference that the wider a trait's geographical spread, the older it is, since traits diffuse outward over time from a centre.

Culture area — A geographical region whose societies share a characteristic cluster of culture traits, developed by Wissler and Kroeber.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Distinguish between the British school of diffusion and the Austro-German school of diffusion. [1984]
- How do diffusionism and evolutionism differ as explanations of cultural change? [2015]

Functionalism versus Structural-Functionalism — Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown

These two are constantly confused and constantly examined together, so nail the one difference that separates them: Malinowski's functions serve the individual organism, Radcliffe-Brown's serve the social structure. Both rejected history for the present, and both made fieldwork central, but they point in opposite directions.

- Malinowski's functionalism is biocultural and psychological. Culture exists to satisfy human needs, and every cultural element, however odd, has a present function in doing so. History and origins are irrelevant; what matters is the work a custom does now.
- His scheme, set out in *A Scientific Theory of Culture* (1944), runs in a chain. Seven basic (biological) needs, metabolism, reproduction, bodily comforts, safety, movement, growth and health, are met by cultural responses (commissariat, kinship, shelter, protection, activities, training, hygiene). These generate instrumental needs (economics, social control, education, political organisation) and finally integrative needs (knowledge, religion, magic, art).
- The individual is the reference point throughout: an institution is explained by tracing it back to the human need it ultimately serves. Malinowski's fieldwork among the Trobriand Islanders, and his insistence on intensive participant observation in the vernacular, set the modern standard for method.
- Radcliffe-Brown's structural-functionalism, drawn explicitly from Durkheim, changes the reference point from the individual to society. Function is the contribution an institution makes to maintaining the social structure and the solidarity on which the society's continued existence depends.
- Social structure, for him, is the network of actually existing social relations at a given moment. He used an organismic analogy, custom as organ, society as body, and aimed at a natural science of society yielding general laws by comparison. His works are *The Andaman Islanders* (1922) and the essays in *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* (1952), and he coined the label structural-functionalism.
- The clean contrast: for Malinowski, kinship or magic exists because it meets a biological or psychological need of persons; for Radcliffe-Brown, it exists because it sustains the social order. Malinowski asks what the custom does for the individual, Radcliffe-Brown what it does for the structure.
- Criticisms shared by both: functionalism is ahistorical and cannot explain change well, since it treats society as a self-maintaining equilibrium; it verges on tautology (a custom exists because it functions, and we know it functions because it exists); and it plays down conflict, deviance and dysfunction. Malinowski is charged additionally with reductionism (deriving too much from biology), Radcliffe-Brown with reifying an abstract structure and neglecting the individual actor.

Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown compared

Point	Malinowski (functionalism)	Radcliffe-Brown (structural-functionalism)
Function serves	The individual's needs	The social structure and solidarity
Intellectual debt	Biology and psychology	Durkheim and the organismic analogy
Basic unit	Need and its cultural response	Social structure as a web of relations
Goal	Explain custom by human need	A natural science of society, general laws
Signature fieldwork	Trobriand Islands	Andaman Islands

KEY TERMS

Need (Malinowski) — A biological, instrumental or integrative requirement of human beings that culture exists to satisfy; the basis of his functionalism.

Social structure (Radcliffe-Brown) — The network of actually existing social relations among persons at a given time, whose maintenance is the function of institutions.

Organismic analogy — Radcliffe-Brown's comparison of society to an organism, in which each institution, like an organ, contributes to the life of the whole.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- In what ways is functionalism different from structural-functionalism? [2013]
- Examine Malinowski's theory of needs and state its merits. [1986]
- Write a short note on the basic tenets of structural-functionalism. [2017]

French Structuralism — Levi-Strauss

Levi-Strauss took anthropology beneath both function and history to the universal architecture of the human mind. His unit of explanation is the binary opposition, and his conviction is that the same logical structures underlie kinship, myth and classification everywhere. Keep his structure (a mental model) distinct from Radcliffe-Brown's structure (observed relations).

- The programme, borrowed from Saussurean and Jakobsonian linguistics, is to find the deep, unconscious structures that generate surface cultural variety, just as a grammar generates sentences. Culture is to be read as a system of signs organised by contrast.
- The elementary operation of mind is the binary opposition (nature and culture, raw and cooked, life and death), and thought proceeds by pairing opposites and then mediating them. The psychic unity of mankind becomes, for Levi-Strauss, a unity of logical structure.
- In *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1949) he recast kinship as alliance rather than descent: the incest taboo forces the exchange of women between groups, and this reciprocity, not biology, is the foundation of social order. This alliance theory is his intervention against Radcliffe-Brown's descent-based structural-functionalism.
- In *Totemism* (1962) and *The Savage Mind* (1962) he argued that so-called primitive thought is not pre-logical but a science of the concrete, classifying the world with the same rigour as modern science using different materials. Totems are good to think, and the bricoleur assembles meaning from the bits at hand.
- In his myth analysis (from *The Structural Study of Myth*, 1955, through the *Mythologiques*) myths work to mediate contradictions a society cannot otherwise resolve, and their meaning lies in the relations among their elements across all variants, not in any single version.

- The crucial contrast with British structural-functionalism: for Radcliffe-Brown structure is the observable arrangement of social relations; for Levi-Strauss structure is an unconscious model built by the analyst to explain those relations, lying beneath and generating them. Confusing the two senses of structure is the standard error.
- Criticisms: the method is abstract, difficult to test and often unfalsifiable; it neglects history, agency, emotion and social change; and different analysts recover different oppositions from the same material. Its enduring value is the demonstration that culture has an underlying logic, which reshaped kinship, myth and cognitive studies alike.

KEY TERMS

Structuralism — Levi-Strauss's approach seeking the universal unconscious structures of the mind, expressed as binary oppositions, beneath the variety of cultural forms.

Alliance theory — His account of kinship as built on the exchange of women between groups through the incest taboo, emphasising marriage alliance over descent.

Bricolage — Levi-Strauss's image for mythical thought as a bricoleur assembling meaning from whatever conceptual materials are at hand.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Explain the structural analysis of kinship as proposed by Levi-Strauss. [2021]

Culture and Personality / Configurationalism — Benedict, Mead, Linton, Kardiner, Du Bois

This Boasian offshoot asks how culture and the individual personality shape each other. It has two wings: the configurationalists (Benedict, Mead), who see a whole culture as a personality writ large, and the psychoanalytic school (Kardiner, Linton, Du Bois), who trace personality to child-rearing. Keep each name tied to its concept and its ethnography.

- Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture* (1934) is the configurationalist manifesto. Each culture selects a few possibilities from the great arc of human potential and integrates them around a dominant ethos, so a culture is personality writ large. Culture is patterned, not a random list of traits.
- Benedict's types, borrowing Nietzsche's terms, are the Apollonian Zuni Pueblo (measured, restrained, distrustful of excess) against the Dionysian Plains Indians (seeking ecstasy, vision and excess through the vision quest). She added the paranoid, suspicious Dobu of Melanesia and the megalomaniac, status-obsessed Kwakiutl of the Northwest Coast. Her wartime study of Japan, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946), extended the method to national character studied at a distance.
- Margaret Mead used the same framework to argue that personality traits taken to be natural are in fact cultural. *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928) claimed adolescence need not be a time of storm and stress, since Samoan youth passed through it smoothly, making the case for nurture over nature.
- In *Sex and Temperament in Three New Guinea Societies* (1935) Mead reported three peoples with contrasting gender temperaments, the gentle Arapesh (both sexes mild), the aggressive Mundugumor (both fierce), and the Tchambuli (Chambri), whose male and female roles she read as reversed relative to the West. Her conclusion: gender temperament is culturally constructed. Note that Derek Freeman later contested the Samoa findings, so present Mead's claim with that caveat.

- The psychoanalytic wing, at Columbia, was the Kardiner-Linton collaboration between the psychoanalyst Abram Kardiner and the anthropologist Ralph Linton. Its central concept is the basic personality structure: primary institutions (family form, subsistence, and above all child-rearing practices) mould a personality type common to the group, which is then projected outward into secondary institutions such as religion, folklore and ritual.
- Linton supplied the anthropological apparatus, including the status and role distinction and the ideas of his *The Study of Man* (1936) and *The Cultural Background of Personality* (1945). The causal arrow runs from child-rearing to personality to expressive culture.
- Cora du Bois refined basic personality into modal personality in *The People of Alor* (1944). Recognising that not everyone in a society shares one personality, she made it a statistical idea, the most frequently occurring personality type in a population, and tested it with projective methods such as the Rorschach. This shift from a single type to a distribution is her contribution.
- Criticisms: the school over-generalises from thin evidence to a whole culture's personality (the ecological fallacy of ascribing a group trait to every member); it leans on a debatable psychoanalytic theory of child-rearing; and its ethnography has been challenged, most publicly Mead's Samoa. Its lasting value is the serious study of enculturation and of how culture and psychology interpenetrate.

Culture and personality: who said what

Figure	Key concept	Key work / people	Central claim
Ruth Benedict	Configuration; culture as personality writ large	Patterns of Culture; Zuni, Plains, Dobu, Kwakiutl	Each culture integrates around a dominant ethos
Margaret Mead	Cultural shaping of temperament and gender	Samoa; Arapesh, Mundugumor, Tchambuli	Adolescence and gender are cultural, not natural
Kardiner and Linton	Basic personality structure	Primary and secondary institutions	Child-rearing shapes a shared personality projected into culture
Cora du Bois	Modal personality	The People of Alor; Rorschach testing	Personality type is a statistical mode, not one uniform type

KEY TERMS

Configuration — Benedict's idea that a culture is integrated around a dominant pattern or ethos, so that it can be described as a personality writ large.

Basic personality structure — Kardiner and Linton's shared personality type produced by a society's primary institutions and projected into its secondary institutions.

Modal personality — Du Bois's statistical refinement: the most frequently occurring personality type in a population, replacing the notion of a single uniform type.

Primary and secondary institutions — In the Kardiner-Linton model, child-rearing and subsistence (primary) shape personality, which is expressed in religion, myth and art (secondary).

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Critically discuss the characteristics of the psychological types in the cultures of the American South-West as observed by Ruth Benedict. [2024]

Neo-evolutionism — White, Steward, and the Return of Evolution

After Boas made evolution a dirty word, White and Steward brought it back on a scientific footing, but in two very different forms that examiners want you to distinguish: White's universal, energy-based scheme against Steward's multilinear, ecological one. Get White's formula and Steward's culture core exactly right.

- Leslie White revived general evolution as a measurable, materialist process. In *The Science of Culture* (1949) and *The Evolution of Culture* (1959) he argued that culture advances as the amount of energy harnessed per capita per year increases, or as the efficiency of the technological means of putting energy to work improves.
- His formula states this compactly: $C \text{ equals } E \text{ times } T$, culture as a function of energy captured multiplied by the efficiency of the tools that harness it. Energy is the prime mover, technology the instrument, and social and ideological systems follow. White named the study of culture as a distinct order of phenomena *culturology*, and stressed culture as an extrasomatic, superorganic means of adaptation.
- White's evolution is universal or general: it measures the progress of culture as a whole across human history, deliberately abstracting from particular societies. This is unilinear in spirit and is his main vulnerability, since it says little about why specific cultures differ.
- Julian Steward answered exactly that gap. In *Theory of Culture Change* (1955) he proposed multilinear evolution: cultures evolve along several distinct lines depending on their environment, and the task is to find cross-cultural regularities and parallel developments among societies facing similar conditions, not one universal ladder.
- His method is cultural ecology, the study of how a culture adapts to its environment. The key concept is the culture core, the cluster of features (technology, economy, work organisation) most directly bound up with subsistence and environment, which he distinguished from the more variable secondary features. Similar cores arising independently in similar habitats are his evidence for regularity.
- The White-Steward contrast is the examined point: White is universal, energy-driven and concerned with culture in general; Steward is multilinear, ecological and concerned with why particular cultures take particular forms. White abstracts from environment, Steward makes it central.
- Marshall Sahlins and Elman Service, in *Evolution and Culture* (1960), reconciled the two by distinguishing general evolution (the overall advance of culture through levels of energy and complexity, White's concern) from specific evolution (the adaptive diversification of particular lineages, Steward's concern). V. Gordon Childe belongs to this current too, for his materialist Neolithic and Urban Revolutions.
- Criticisms: White's scheme is technologically determinist and treats a whole society as one energy system; Steward's culture core is hard to bound precisely, since deciding which features are core involves judgement. Still, neo-evolutionism restored long-term comparison and the environment to a discipline Boas had turned resolutely particularist, and it fed directly into later cultural materialism and ecological anthropology.

White and Steward compared

Point	Leslie White	Julian Steward
Type of evolution	Universal / general	Multilinear
Prime mover	Energy captured per capita ($C = E \times T$)	Adaptation to environment
Method	Culturology, culture as one system	Cultural ecology, the culture core
Level of analysis	Culture as a whole across history	Particular cultures in particular habitats
Weakness	Technological determinism	Bounding the culture core

KEY TERMS

C = E x T — White's law that a culture's level equals the energy harnessed per capita multiplied by the efficiency of the technology that harnesses it.

Multilinear evolution — Steward's view that cultures evolve along several environmentally conditioned lines, showing cross-cultural regularities rather than one universal sequence.

Cultural ecology — Steward's method of studying how a culture adapts to its specific environment.

Culture core — The subsistence-and-environment-linked cluster of features Steward held to be central and most subject to regular evolution.

General and specific evolution — Sahlins and Service's reconciling distinction between the overall advance of culture (general) and the adaptive diversification of particular lineages (specific).

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Discuss the approaches of Leslie White, Julian Steward and Marshall Sahlins in the light of cultural evolution. [2022]
- Critically examine the Stewardian view of neo-evolutionism. [2017]
- Evaluate how Leslie A. White's approach is helpful in understanding cultural evolution. [2000]

The Later Schools in Brief — Cultural Materialism, Interpretive, Cognitive, Post-modern

The unit runs on past neo-evolutionism, and though this note concentrates on the classical-to-mid-century schools, you should be able to place the later ones with the right name and claim so your map of theory is complete. Keep these compact and accurate.

- Cultural materialism (Marvin Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory*, 1968; *Cultural Materialism*, 1979) explains culture by material, infrastructural causes, technology, environment and modes of production and reproduction, which shape structure and finally the ideological superstructure. Harris distinguished the etic (observer's) from the emic (insider's) account and pressed infrastructural determinism, his sacred-cow analysis of Hindu cattle being the type case.
- Symbolic and interpretive anthropology reads culture as meaning rather than as function or material cause. Clifford Geertz (*The Interpretation of Cultures*, 1973) treated culture as webs of significance to be read through thick description, culture as a text over the shoulder of the native, his Balinese cockfight the exemplar. Victor Turner analysed ritual symbols as multivocal, condensing many meanings across an ideological and a sensory pole. David Schneider (*American Kinship*, 1968) argued that kinship is a system of cultural symbols, not a reflex of biology, a claim that unsettled kinship studies.
- Cognitive anthropology, or ethnoscience, studies the mental categories by which a people orders its world. Stephen Tyler (*Cognitive Anthropology*, 1969) and Harold Conklin (his Hanunoo colour classification) used componential analysis of folk taxonomies to recover the emic conceptual grid, for example how a people classifies plants, kin or colours.
- Post-modernism in anthropology (James Clifford and George Marcus, *Writing Culture*, 1986; Marcus and Michael Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*, 1986) turned a sceptical eye on ethnographic authority itself, arguing that ethnographies are constructed texts shaped by the writer's position and power, that objectivity is a rhetorical effect, and that the anthropologist's voice should not silence those of the people studied. It reshaped how fieldwork and writing are now discussed.

- Placed on the map: cultural materialism is the materialist heir of neo-evolutionism; interpretive and symbolic anthropology are the meaning-centred reaction to it; cognitive anthropology formalises the emic; and post-modernism questions the very possibility of the authoritative account. Naming them correctly is enough at this level; the deeper treatment belongs to their own notes.

KEY TERMS

Cultural materialism — Harris's theory that material infrastructure (technology, environment, production) determines a culture's structure and ideology.

Emic and etic — The insider's own categories (emic) versus the observer's analytic categories (etic); central to cognitive anthropology and to Harris.

Thick description — Geertz's method (after Ryle) of interpreting an act together with the layered web of meaning that makes it intelligible.

Writing Culture — The 1986 volume marking anthropology's post-modern turn, treating ethnography as a constructed, positioned text rather than transparent report.

Last-mile revision

- The arc: evolutionism overgeneralised; Boas (particularism) and diffusionism reacted; functionalism dropped history for present use; structuralism went to the mind; culture-and-personality went to the individual; neo-evolutionism brought evolution back scientifically.
- Tylor: definition of culture, doctrine of survivals, animism to monotheism. Morgan: savagery-barbarism-civilisation by technology, kinship terminology, influence on Engels. Frazer: magic-religion-science. All armchair, unilinear, discredited by Boas.
- Boas: each culture a unique history, cultural relativism, inductive fieldwork, race distinct from language and culture. The hinge of American anthropology; criticised as atheoretical.
- Diffusion: British heliocentric (Elliot Smith, Perry, all from Egypt); German-Austrian Kulturkreise (Graebner, Schmidt; criteria of form and quantity; primitive monotheism); American culture area (Wissler's age-area, Kroeber).
- Malinowski: function serves individual needs (seven basic needs to cultural responses). Radcliffe-Brown: function serves the social structure (Durkheim, organismic analogy). That is the one difference to state.
- Levi-Strauss: binary oppositions and the unconscious structure of mind; alliance theory of kinship (exchange of women via the incest taboo); totems good to think. His structure is a model, not observed relations.
- Benedict: configuration, culture as personality writ large (Apollonian Zuni, Dionysian Plains, paranoid Dobu, megalomaniac Kwakiutl). Mead: gender and adolescence are cultural (Samoa; Arapesh, Mundugumor, Tchambuli), later contested by Freeman.
- Kardiner and Linton: basic personality structure from primary institutions (child-rearing) projected into secondary institutions. Du Bois: modal personality, a statistical mode, Rorschach, People of Alor.
- White: universal evolution, energy, $C = E \times T$, culturology. Steward: multilineal evolution, cultural ecology, the culture core. Sahlins and Service: general versus specific evolution reconciles them.
- Later schools to place: cultural materialism (Harris, infrastructure determines, emic/etic), interpretive (Geertz thick description; Turner symbols; Schneider kinship as symbol), cognitive (Tyler, Conklin, ethnoscience), post-modern (Writing Culture).

Common errors to avoid

- Confusing functionalism with structural-functionalism. Malinowski's functions serve the individual's biological and psychological needs; Radcliffe-Brown's serve the social structure. This single distinction is the most examined and most muddled point in the unit.
- Confusing Radcliffe-Brown's structure with Levi-Strauss's. For Radcliffe-Brown structure is the observable web of social relations; for Levi-Strauss it is an unconscious mental model beneath and generating those relations.
- Misassigning the diffusionist founders. Elliot Smith and Perry are British heliocentric; Graebner and Schmidt are German-Austrian Kulturkreise; Wissler and Kroeber are American culture area. Swapping them loses the compare question outright.
- Attributing the age-area hypothesis or culture area to the British or German schools. They are American (Wissler, Kroeber). The heliocentric single-Egyptian-origin idea is British, not German.
- Getting White's formula wrong or vague. It is $C = E \times T$, culture as energy per capita times technological efficiency, and White's evolution is universal, not multilinear. Multilinear evolution and the culture core belong to Steward.
- Treating Boas as an evolutionist because he accepted psychic unity. He used psychic unity against evolutionism, to argue for independent invention and against a single developmental ladder.
- Blurring the two wings of culture and personality. Benedict and Mead are configurationalists (whole-culture ethos); Kardiner, Linton and Du Bois are the psychoanalytic, child-rearing wing (basic and modal personality). Keep the concepts with the right names.
- Attributing modal personality to Kardiner or basic personality to Du Bois. Kardiner and Linton gave basic personality structure; Du Bois refined it into the statistical modal personality.
- Presenting classical evolutionism as simply wrong and worthless. In an answer, credit its founding of the discipline and its anti-racist psychic-unity premise, then locate its failure in the comparative method and unilinear overreach.
- Forgetting to critique. Every school in this unit is examined as critique-and-evaluate, so an answer that only describes a school, without the standard objections and what the next school corrected, is answering half the question.