

B.A. / B.Sc. Sem-IV, Paper-VIII, Unit-II

CULTURAL EVOLUTIONISM

Cultural Evolution is the idea that human cultural change that is, changes in socially transmitted beliefs, knowledge, customs, skills, attitudes, languages, and so on—can be described as a Darwinian evolutionary process that is similar in key respects (but not identical) to biological/genetic evolution.

Cultural evolution is an evolutionary theory of social change. It follows from the definition of culture as "information capable of affecting individuals' behavior that they acquire from other members of their species through teaching, imitation and other forms of social transmission".

Cultural evolution is an evolutionary theory of social change. Previously, it was believed that social change resulted from biological adaptations, but anthropologists now commonly accept that social changes arise in consequence of a combination of social, evolutionary and biological influences

As such, human behavior is shaped by both genetic and cultural evolution. The same can be said for many other animal species; like the tool use of chimpanzees or Caledonian crows or the complex social organization of hives for ants, bees, termites, and wasps.

This passage is from Morgan's masterwork *Ancient Society* (1877), in which he also described seven stages of cultural evolution lower, middle, and upper savagery; lower, middle, and upper barbarism; and civilization.

Cultural evolutionary theory has led to significant advances in our understanding of the effects of nonrandom mating, revealing that the transmission and dynamics of cultural traits can be sensitive to both phenotypic and environmental assorting.

There have been a number of different approaches to the study of cultural evolution, including dual inheritance theory, sociocultural evolution, memetics, cultural evolutionism and other variants on cultural selection theory. The approaches differ not just in the history of their development and discipline of origin but in how they conceptualize the process of cultural evolution and the assumptions, theories and methods that they apply to its study. In recent years, there has been a convergence of the cluster of related theories towards seeing cultural evolution as a unified discipline in its own right.

Cultural evolution has been criticized over the past two centuries that it has advanced its development into the form it holds today. Morgan's theory of evolution implies that all cultures follow the same basic pattern. Human culture is not linear, different cultures develop in different directions and at differing paces, and it is not satisfactory or productive to assume cultures develop in the same way.

A further key critique of cultural evolutionism is what is known as "armchair anthropology". The name results from the fact that many of the anthropologists advancing theories had not seen first hand the cultures they were studying. The research and data collected was carried out by explorers and missionaries as opposed to the anthropologists themselves. Edward Tylor was the epitome of that and did very little of his own research. Cultural evolution is also criticized for being ethnocentric, cultures are still seen to be attempting to emulate western civilization. Under ethnocentricity, primitive societies are said to be not yet at the cultural levels of other western societies. Much of the criticism aimed at cultural evolution is focused on the unilineal approach to social change.

Unilineal Evolutionism

Unilineal evolution, also referred to as classical social evolution, is a 19th-century social theory about the evolution of societies and cultures. It was composed of many competing theories by various anthropologists and sociologists, who believed that Western culture is the contemporary pinnacle of social evolution.

Unilineal Theory

In the 19th century cultural evolution was thought to follow a unilineal pattern whereby all cultures progressively develop over time. The underlying assumption was that Cultural Evolution itself led to the growth and development of civilization.

Thomas Hobbes in the 17th Century declared indigenous culture to have "no arts, no letters, no society" and he described facing life as "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." He, like other scholars of his time, reasoned that everything positive and esteemed resulted from the slow development away from this poor lowly state of being.

Under the theory of unilineal Cultural Evolution, all societies and cultures develop on the same path. The first to present a general unilineal theory was Herbert Spencer. Spencer suggested that humans develop into more complex beings as culture progresses, where people originally lived in "undifferentiated hordes" culture progresses and develops to the point where civilization develops hierarchies. The concept behind unilineal theory is that the steady accumulation of knowledge and culture leads to the separation of the various modern day sciences and the build-up of cultural norms present in modern-day society.

In Lewis H. Morgan's book *Ancient Society* (1877), Morgan labels seven differing stages of human culture: lower, middle, and upper savagery; lower, middle, and upper barbarism; and civilization. He justifies this staging classification by referencing societies whose cultural traits resembled those of each of his stage classifications of the cultural progression. Morgan gave no example of lower savagery, as even at the time of writing few examples remained of this cultural type. At the time of expounding his theory, Morgan's work was highly respected and became a foundation for much of anthropological study that was to follow.

Lewis H. Morgan, an anthropologist whose ideas have had much impact on sociology, in his 1877 classic *Ancient Societies* differentiated between three eras:

(i) savagery (ii) barbarism (iii) civilization,

which are divided by technological inventions, like fire, bow, pottery in savage era, domestication of animals, agriculture, metalworking in barbarian era and alphabet and writing in civilization era. Thus Morgan introduced a link between the social progress and technological progress. Morgan viewed the technological progress as a force behind social progress, and any social change—in social institutions, organizations or ideologies have their beginning in the change of technology. Morgan's theories were popularized by Friedrich Engels, who based his famous work "The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State" on it. For Engels and other Marxists, this theory was important as it supported their conviction that materialistic factors—economical and technological—are decisive in shaping the fate of humanity.

Neo-evolutionism

Neoevolutionism as a social theory attempts to explain the evolution of societies by drawing on Charles Darwin's theory of evolution while discarding some dogmas of the previous theories of social evolutionism. Neoevolutionism is concerned with long-term, directional, evolutionary social change and with the regular patterns of development that may be seen in unrelated, widely separated cultures.

Sociological neoevolutionism emerged in the 1930s. It developed extensively in the period after the Second World War—and was incorporated into anthropology as well as into sociology in the 1960s.

Neo-evolution Theory

Neoevolutionary theories are based on empirical evidence from fields such as archaeology, paleontology, and historiography. Proponents say neoevolutionism is objective and simply descriptive, eliminating any references to a moral or cultural system of values.

While the 19th-century cultural evolutionism attempted to explain how culture develops by describing general principles of its evolutionary process, historical particularism dismissed it as unscientific in the early-20th century. Neoevolutionary thinkers brought back evolutionary ideas and developed them, with the result that they became acceptable to contemporary anthropology.

Neoevolutionism discards many ideas of classical social evolutionism, notably the emphasis on social progress, so dominant in previous sociological evolution-related theories. Neoevolutionism discards the determinism argument and introduces probability, arguing that accidents and free will have much impact on the process of social evolution. It also supports counterfactual history asking "what if?" and considering different possible paths that social evolution may (or might) have taken, and thus allows for the fact that various cultures may develop in different ways, some skipping entire "stages" others have passed through. Neoevolutionism stresses the importance of empirical evidence. While 19th-century social evolutionism used value judgments and assumptions when interpreting data, neoevolutionism relies on measurable information for analyzing the process of cultural evolution.

- **Leslie A. White** (1900–1975), author of *The Evolution of Culture: The Development of Civilization to the Fall of Rome* (1959). Publication of this book rekindled interest in evolution among sociologists and anthropologists. White attempted to construct a theory explaining the entire history of humanity. The most important factor in his theory is technology: Social systems are determined by technological systems, wrote White in his book, echoing the earlier theory of Lewis Henry Morgan (1818-1881). As a measure of societal advance he proposed measuring the energy consumption of a given society (thus his theory became known as the energy theory of cultural evolution). White introduced a formula: $C=E*T$, where E is a measure of energy consumed, and T is the measure of efficiency of technical factors utilising the energy. This theory resembles the later theory of the Kardashev scale proposed in the 1960s by the Russian astrophysicist Nikolai Kardashev (1932–). White differentiates five stages of human development:
 - In the first, people use energy of their own muscles.
 - In the second, they use energy of domesticated animals.
 - In the third, they use the energy of plants (White refers to the agricultural revolution here).
 - In the fourth, they learn to use the energy of natural resources: coal, oil, gas.
 - In the fifth, they harness nuclear energy.

Leslie White and of Lewis Henry Morgan. He views technological progress as the most basic factor in the evolution of societies and cultures. Unlike White, who defined technology as the ability to create and utilise energy, Lenski focuses on information, its amount and uses. The more information and knowledge (especially when they allow the shaping of natural environments) a given society has, the more advanced it is. He distinguished four stages of human development, based on the advances in the history of communication.

- In the first stage, information is passed by genes.
- In the second, when humans gain sentience: they can learn and pass information on by experience.
- In the third, humans start using signs and develop logic.
- In the fourth, they can invent symbols, and develop language and writing. Advances in the technology of communication translate into advances in the economic and political systems, the distribution of goods, social inequality and other spheres of social life. Lenski also differentiates societies based on their level of technology, communication and economy:
 - Hunters and gatherers.
 - Simple agricultural.
 - Advanced agricultural.
 - Industrial.
 - Special (like fishing societies)

- **Julian Steward** (1902–1972), author of *Theory of Culture Change: The Methodology of Multilinear Evolution* (1955, reprinted 1979), developed the theory of "multilinear" evolution, which examined the way in which societies adapted to their environment—a more nuanced approach than White's theory of "unilinear evolution". He questioned the possibility of forming a single social theory encompassing the entire evolution of humanity, however he argued that anthropologists are not limited to descriptions of specific, existing cultures. He believed it possible to develop theories analysing typical, common culture, representative of specific eras or regions. As the decisive factors determining the development of given culture he pointed to technology and economics, and noted secondary factors such as like political systems, ideologies and religion. All those factors push the evolution of a given society in several directions at the same time, hence the multilinearity of his theory of evolution.
- In 20th century there evolved Neo Evolutionism with Leslie White, Julian Steward, Marshall Sahlins and Elman Service as main propounders.
- Leslie White emphasized that the evolutionary stages are abstractions applicable to the growth of human culture. He also believed that culture is to be studied in its own terms. He suggested the term *culturology* to the science of culture. He is known to be the proponent of General Evolution where he says that it has been studied entirely on a culturological level. According to him culture grows out of culture with new combinations, syntheses continually formed. He also says that technology is the basic determinant of cultural evolutionism. He also refers to it as Cultural Materialism. According to him, the other factors remaining constant, culture evolves as energy harnessed per capita, per year is increased, the system not only increase in size but become more highly evolved, they become more differentiated and more specialized functionally.
- Julian Steward says that Cultural Evolution may be defined as quest for regularities or laws. There are three ways in which evolutionary data can be analysed.

Leslie Alvin White (January 19, 1900, Salida, Colorado – March 31, 1975, Lone Pine, California) was an American anthropologist known for his advocacy of theories of cultural evolution, sociocultural evolution, and especially neo-evolutionism, and for his role in creating the department of anthropology at the University of Michigan Ann Arbor. He was president of the American Anthropological Association (1964).

Leslie White, (author of *The Evolution of Culture: The Development of Civilization to the Fall of Rome* (1959), attempted to create a theory explaining the entire history of humanity. The most important factor in his theory is technology. Social systems are determined by technological systems, wrote White in his book, echoing the earlier theory of Lewis Henry Morgan. He proposes a society's energy consumption as a measure of its advancement. He differentiates between five stages of human development. In the first, people use the energy of their own muscles. In the second, they use the energy of domesticated animals. In the third, they use the energy of plants (so White refers to agricultural revolution here). In the fourth, they learn to use the energy of natural resources: coal, oil, gas. In the fifth, they harness nuclear energy. White introduced a formula, $P=E \cdot T$, where E is a measure of energy consumed, and T is the measure of efficiency of technical factors utilising the energy. This theory is similar to Russian astronomer Nikolai Kardashev's later theory of the Kardashev scale.

Julian Haynes Steward (January 31, 1902 – February 6, 1972) was an American anthropologist best known for his role in developing "the concept and method" of cultural ecology, as well as a scientific theory of culture change.

Julian Steward, author of *Theory of Culture Change: The Methodology of Multilinear Evolution* (1955, reprinted 1979), created the theory of "multilinear" evolution which examined the way in which societies adapted to their environment. This approach was more nuanced than White's theory of "unilinear evolution." Steward rejected the 19th-century notion of progress, and instead called attention to the Darwinian notion of "adaptation", arguing that all societies had to adapt to their environment in some way. He argued that different adaptations could be studied through the examination of the specific resources a society exploited, the technology the society relied on to exploit these resources, and the organization of human labour. He further argued that different environments and technologies would require different kinds of adaptations, and that as the resource base or technology changed, so too would a culture. In other words, cultures do not change according to some inner logic, but rather in terms of a changing relationship with a changing environment. Cultures therefore would not pass through the same stages in the same order as they changed—rather, they would change in varying ways and directions. He called his theory "multilineal evolution". He questioned the possibility of creating a social theory encompassing the entire evolution of humanity; however, he argued that anthropologists are not limited to describing specific existing cultures. He believed that it is possible to create theories analysing typical common culture, representative of specific eras or regions. As the decisive factors determining the development of given culture he pointed to technology and economics, but noted that there are secondary factors, like political system, ideologies and religion. All those factors push the evolution of a given society in several directions at the same time; hence the application of the term "multilinear" to his theory of evolution.

Culture:

Culture is a word for the 'way of life' of groups of people, meaning the way they do things. Excellence of taste in the fine arts and humanities, also known as high culture. An integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior. The outlook, attitudes, values, morals, goals, and customs shared by a society.

Culture – set of patterns of human activity within a community or social group and the symbolic structures that give significance to such activity. Customs, laws, dress, architectural style, social standards, religious beliefs, and traditions are all examples of cultural elements.

Culture is the beliefs, behaviors, objects, and other characteristics shared by groups of people. ... Some cultures place significant value in things such as ceremonial artifacts, jewelry, or even clothing. For example, Christmas trees can be considered ceremonial or cultural objects.

Culture is the characteristics and knowledge of a particular group of people, encompassing language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and arts. ... The word "culture" derives from a French term, which in turn derives from the Latin "colere," which means to tend to the earth and grow, or cultivation and nurture.

Language, symbols, values, and norms are among the important elements of culture. Our religious beliefs, customs and traditions, art, as also history, taken together can be considered as the cultural elements.

Cultural trait

A cultural trait is a characteristic of human action that's acquired by people socially and transmitted via various modes of communication. Cultural traits are things that allow for a part of one culture to be transmitted to another. If they combine with other cultural traits, they may change.

Culture has five basic characteristics: It is learned, shared, based on symbols, integrated, and dynamic.

All cultures share these basic features.

- Culture is learned. ...
- Culture is shared. ...
- Culture is based on symbols. ...
- Culture is integrated. ...
- Culture is dynamic.

Culture traits. The least unit of culture is called Culture Trait. There are millions of culture traits, a trait can be an object, a technique, a belief or an attitude. For example; a pencil is a culture trait, football, bat, fishhook, keeping cattle, handshake, gestures, and house.

Cultural Complex

A group of culture traits all interrelated and dominated by one essential trait: Nationalism is a culture complex.

A number of traits when organized together make a culture complex. A watch, football match, attitudes and actions, prayer, Hajj, Eids, agriculture system, market system, a political party, a constitution, an industrial unit, an examination system are the examples of culture complex.

For example; a pencil is a culture trait, football, bat, fishhook, keeping cattle, handshake, gestures, and house. Culture Complex. Culture traits are interrelated with each other, their collective function forms culture complex. Such as a football is a culture trait, and the football match is a cultural complex.

Culture Area

Culture areas are geographical territories in which characteristic culture patterns are recognizable through repeated associations of specific traits and, usually, through one or more modes of subsistence that are related to the particular environment. As one formulation within the general school of historical particularism that has developed in anthropology in the United States, the concept of culture area reflects the theoretical position that each culture, on whatever level it may be analyzed, must be examined with regard to its own history and also with regard to the general principles of independent invention, culture borrowing, and cultural integration. Although many factors at the base of any recognizable culture area are ecological in nature, the culture-area concept is one that conforms to the doctrine of limited possibilities rather than to a simple geographic determinism.

Viewed in this light and assessed according to the size and character of the geographic units and the degree of complexity of cultural similarities within, and differences between, the units, the culture-area concept takes shape as a classificatory device of marked utility in describing the cultural regions of the world. Since "culture" and "area" are both generalized terms, their use in combination gives no real clue as to precise meaning, which must be specified. When contrasting one culture area with another, the level of abstraction must be the same.

In its original formulation the culture-area concept applied primarily to the ethnographic present and occupied an important niche in the natural-history phase of anthropology that was concerned with the orderly description of the cultures of the world. The geographic distribution of culture traits within such areas served as indirect evidence for the reconstruction of cultural histories. The formulations for each of the major continents were used for convenience in the ordering of ethnographic descriptions but were otherwise ignored or discarded as being too limited in time, too static in concept, and too generally conceived to be of much use to the developing trends of concern with inter-personal and social dynamics.

The culture-area concept is a means of organizing a vast amount of variegated ethnographic data into comprehensible units within a classificatory system. Like all such systems, it depends upon an increasing number of criteria or determinants in the isolation of units in a descending order of magnitude. Major considerations in recognizing these areas and subareas are ecological zones, patterns of cultural integration, and correlations of independently diffused traits. Although initial recognition may depend in part upon familiarity and intuition, distribution studies serve as effective controls. Important determining processes seem to be cultural adjustments to the environment and the inward focusing of contacts within an area, caused by regional topographic patterns which produce cultural isolates. These factors persist through time and find expression either in the continuities of cultural traditions or in the reappearance of the same areas and boundaries, even when the local culture history is discontinuous.

Culture Focus

Culture is the ground in which human beings grow. Through things like social norms, customs, prohibitions, and belief systems, culture transmits a complex web of rules that tells people what to pay attention to, what to care about, what to take responsibility for, and what to do in any given situation.

With Best Wishes For Bright Carrier & Future

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