A Brief History of the Origins of the Discipline of Anthropology as a Social Science

the Convergence of Certain Intellectual and Experiential Prerequisites Occurring at a Certain Place (Europe) at a Certain Time (Sixteenth - Nineteen Centuries)

1. Scientific Revolution:

A. Descartes, Locke, Galileo, Newton, Bacon, Comte, etc. of the late 16th thru 18th centuries

– “Cartesian Dualism” and the objectification, quantification, secularization of reality and establishment of the “scientific method”

1. Systematic approach agreed upon and shared by the scientific community

2. Utilizing the methods of deductive logical reasoning (René Descartes 1597-1659 French philosopher) and inductive empiricism (John Locke 1632-1704 English philosopher)

3. Focusing on quantifiable variables and their relationships (discrete numerically-based chunks of reality, i.e., statistics – Galileo 1564-1642 “the language of nature is numbers”)

4. In order to establish generalizations and “laws” to describe, explain, predict and ultimately control (Isaac Newton 1642-1727 and the “laws of motion” and Francis Bacon 1561-1625 utilitarianism and science holds the keys to unlocking power over nature)

5. All within a context of “organized skepticism” (nothing taken on “faith”)

– the behavior of other humans: a. had own existence separate from observer – objectified, b. was governed by certain “laws” that could be discovered

– these are not assumption about reality that are necessarily shared by the rest of humanity

B. as exemplified by Evolutionary theory, e.g., Darwin (though around over 100 years before) – “natural selection” and “evolution of species”

– a model explaining change and diversity in the natural biological and physical worlds
2. **Printing Press** and wide spread literacy – Gutenberg’s *Bible* in 1440

   – enhanced communications, the rapid sharing of information, and widespread dissemination to a big audience

   – helped spawn intellectual class

   – and critically, literacy (vs. orality) facilities objectification of phenomena, rendering (creating) it more easily analytically and quantifiably accessible.

3. **Societal Chaos** (maybe intimate relationship of two) – 17th and 18th dislocation and change

   a. – with collapse of the “Feudal System,” stability and authority of the Roman Catholic Church weakened, and the rise of the “Industrial Revolution,”

       result in tremendous disruption to structure of society – peasants and farmers displaced, emergence of huge cities and urban working classes – internal chaos

       = all of which had to be explained and justified

   b. – in midst of the “Age of Discovery” and “Age of Conquest” – the colonialization of much of the rest of the world – exterior chaos

       – Europe flooded with stories of the “strange and exotic” – “Dr. Livingston I presume” and work of Christian missionaries

       = all of which had to be explained

       – Europe and America had a new appetite (via industrialization) for raw materials and natural resources. Colonialization offered opportunity to exploit and bring home the needed resources to continue industrialization

       = all of which had to be justified

       – part of that colonialization was not only exploiting the natural resources and labor of the conquered, but capture their “souls” as well – “saving the souls of the heathen” — Christian missionizing of world

       = all of which had to be justified
4. **“Justificationist”** – and with these three elements coming together and more, development of intellectual elites, with time on their hands. – to provided explanation and justification theories

What they come up with – **Classical Evolutionist** – “arm chair anthropologist” apply the “Survival of the Fittest” to the “other” – the first “anthropologist”

– it explained world in terms of inevitable “progress” from “primitive” and “barbaric” to “civilized”

A great concept for **explaining why there are differences** and **for justifying conquest of “souls” and exploitation of “resources”**

Simply put:

   **We are advanced – you are “primitive”**  You are where we had progressed from - a sort of archaic hold-over

   – hence you are different (explanation)

   – hence we superior and you are inferior

   – hence we have the “right” and should in fact teach and convert, as well as exploit and enslave you to help bring you up to our level (justification)

Thus, it can be argued that the discipline of anthropology grew out of the social construction involving a confluence of intellectual ideas, technologies and experiences emerging from the European intellectual tradition and societal chaos and colonialization.