1.

BY R.A. SHWEDER

Post-Nietzschean Anthropology: The Idea of Multiple Objective Worlds

Kurt Vonnegut in his novel *Slaughterhouse Five* has some things to say about his education in relativism: “I went to the University of Chicago for a while after the Second World War. I was a student in the department of anthropology. They taught me that nobody was ridiculous or bad or disgusting. Shortly before my father died he said to me—‘You never wrote a story with a villain in it.’ I told him that was one of the things I learned in school after the war” (1988, p. 8).

The aim of relativist teachings is to give permission to diversity and difference by justifying the permission it grants on the grounds of the coequality or noncomparability of divergent forms. I have tried to imagine myself listening in on a lecture promoting relativism as it might have been delivered by one of Vonnegut’s anthropological mentors.

As I imagine it, the mentor approaches his lecture anticipating that within the minds of his highly reflective modern audience resides unconsciously and comfortably a habit of mind called ethnocentrism—the belief that our ways, because they are ours, must be closer to truth, goodness, and beauty than are the ways of others. In Vonnegut’s time in academic circles ethnocentrism was thought to be a uni-
versal presumption of native thinking. Our mentor enters the lecture hall eager to raise that presumption to consciousness and then to banish it through schooling.

So he begins his lecture with a challenging series of rhetorical questions: What is the proper language for human beings: English, Tamil, Chinese, or French? What is the proper diet for human beings: vegetarian or nonvegetarian? What is the proper mode of artistic expression: the surrealism of Dali, the cubism of Picasso, or the impressionism of Renoir?

It is a strong opening. A modern educated mind, even a relatively ethnocentric one, boggles at the presumptuousness of such questions; for, as our lecturer must have known, when we compare the diverse languages of the world or the diverse modes of artistic expression, we are not typically tempted to make overall judgments about which is better or which is worse. Rather we are tempted to respond that they are just different but in some sense equal, or perhaps that their differences are good for different things, and the different things they are good for are just different but in some sense equal. By stimulating in his audience a few relativistic intuitions the mentor has got his lecture off to a good start.

The lecture, as I imagine it, continues with a fascinating and detailed description of variations in human languages, musical forms, terminological classifications for kinsmen, preferences and aversions and tabous in food, and aesthetic standards and fashions for art, clothing, and hair style.

Finally the lecture concludes with the posit of a moral principle: there are no universally or uniformly valid (objective, binding, constraining, authoritative) requirements for what languages to speak or what foods to eat or what clothes to wear and so on. Others may speak Tamil or eat soured curds or wear kilts, etcetera, even if we do not.

Now I am confident that any thoughtful University of Chicago student in Vonnegut’s era presented with that moral principle would have been up all night pondering the “etcetera”; and I suspect that for any thoughtful and liberal student engaged in “etcetera pondering” late at night it must have seemed but a short step to the idea that ethical injunctions, customary practices, and supernatural (that is, metaphysical) beliefs are like the languages, foods, and aesthetic standards of human beings—different but equal. Others may have extramarital sex, circumcise their daughters at adolescence, or believe that “enthusiasm” is a heresy or that there is no random (or accidental) event, even if we do not.

It must have seemed an even shorter step to the conclusion that no one is “ridiculous or bad or disgusting,” or wrong or deluded or confused, etcetera.

That conclusion, of course, is fallacious. The fact that there is no single valid mode of artistic expression does not mean that any doodling with paint on canvas is a work of art or is entitled to our respect.

The fallacy can be stated in quite general terms: The fact that there is no one uniform objective reality (constraint, foundation, godhead, truth, standard) does not mean there are no objective realities (constraints, foundations, godheads, truths, standards) at all. The death of monotheism should not be confused with the death of god(s). Ontological atheism or subjectivism is not the only route into relativism. Polytheism or the idea of multiple objective worlds is the alternative.

Over the past several decades the practice of ridiculing with stuck counterarguments certain fallacious interpretations and absurd exaggerations of the doctrine of relativism has become a customary recreational activity in a few scholarly disciplines (especially philosophy); and one of the favorite and easy targets is the burlesque claim that nothing is the same across cultures or that nothing can be ruled out as immoral or bad, etcetera. Perhaps the ridicule is deserved, and Vonnegut’s teachers should have been more precise and thorough in tracing out the implications of their lectures.

Yet as an anthropologist today I think there may have been something important and valid (and perhaps even subtle) in their message. So by examining two major routes into relativism, ontological atheism (God is dead) and ontological polytheism (monotheism is dead), I am going to hazard to get that message right.

Seeking to get a message right, however, is not necessarily an innocent act; especially so when we live in a conflated world in which for every truth it is possible to serve some political (or personal) interest or end by drawing that truth to our attention or keeping it out of sight. The main aim of relativist doctrine in anthropology is to give permission to diversity and difference, by indicating why and when such permission ought to be granted. The truth in relativism is that there are times—not all times yet some times—when permission ought to be granted to diversity and difference. In drawing our attention to that truth by trying to be clearer about it, anthropology and
other modern scholarly disciplines interested in relativism have in fact played a political role.

The Confrontation with Difference

For anthropologists the confrontation with diversity in belief, desire, and practice can be a radical one. Here is a short list of the things we can observe out there in the world of human beings if we look in the right places and with the right clearance: people hunting for witches, exorcising demons, propitiating dead ancestors, sacrificing animals to hungry gods, sanctifying temples, waiting for messiahs, scapegoating their sins, consulting the stars, decoding their dreams, flagellating themselves in public, prohibiting the eating of pork (or dog, or beef, or all swarming things except locusts, crickets, and grasshoppers), wandering on pilgrimage from one dilapidated shrine to the next, abstaining from sex on the day of the full moon, refusing to be in the same room with their wife’s elder sister, matting their hair with cow dung, isolating women during menstruation, seeking salvation by meditating naked in a cave for several years, and so on and on.

Let us restrict our observations for the moment to one community in one part of the world. For some years I have been conducting research on moral development and moral reasoning in a Hindu temple town on the east coast of India among various Oriya Brahman subcastes and among various castes referred to as “scheduled” castes (because they are scheduled for affirmative action programs) by the government of India, referred to as “Harijans” (“children of God”) by Mahatma Gandhi, and referred to as chuman (unclean, polluted, untouchable) by the local Brahmans (see, for example, Shweder 1986; Shweder, Mahapatra, and Miller 1987; and Chapters 3, 5, 6, and 9 of this volume).

In all sorts of ways, though certainly not in all ways, Oriya Brahman belief, desire, and practice challenge our own. Eating beef is prohibited. Marriages are arranged. Dating and prenuptial sexual play are strictly forbidden. Widows may not remarry, and restrictions exist concerning the foods they are permitted to eat and the clothing they are permitted to wear. Menstruating women are not allowed to sleep in the same bed with their husband or enter the kitchen or engage in prayer or groom themselves or touch their children. Adult men prefer to eat their meals at home alone, and it is considered shameless for a husband and wife to eat together. Certain kinsmen—for example, a woman and her husband’s elder brother or a man and his wife’s elder sister—are not permitted in each other’s presence. Children sleep in the same bed with a parent or grandparent (though not with a menstruating woman) until at least the age of six or seven years. Adult women are not allowed out of the house without permission. Untouchables are not allowed in the local temple, and no one can enter the temple for twelve days following a birth or death in the family. The corpse of an adult must be cremated, never buried, with the exception of a holy man, who must be buried, never cremated.

Each of those practices has associated with it a line of argumentation. For example, it is argued by Oriyas that many people, including ancestral spirits, are affected in serious ways by the person you marry. How can the marriage decision possibly be left up to one young, vulnerable person driven by sex, passion, and infatuation?

Or it is argued that the human body is a temple with a spirit (what we call the self or the observing ego) dwelling in it, and it is a proper end in life to preserve the sanctity of the temple and keep it clean and pure. The body of a menstruating woman is impure. Hence she must stay or be kept at a distance from all holy or sanctified ground, including all temples, such as the body of her husband, the household prayer room, and the kitchen.

Each line of argumentation presupposes, makes use of, or culminates in several posit sets about what the world is like: people have souls, and they transmigrate in proportion to their sanctity; the body is a temple with a spirit dwelling in it; eating food is an ablation; you reap what you sow; nature is just, and received inequalities are a form of just desert; to be born a woman and to survive the death of your husband are indications of previous sin, which should be absolved before you die; ancestral spirits return to your wife’s kitchen to be fed, and they will not accept food from your wife unless her caste status is appropriate; and so on. Many residents in the temple town design, organize, and interpret their experiences according to those conceptions of reality.

Confronted with such apparently different conceptions of reality and associated practices, anthropologists have reacted in one of three ways.

Some—let us call them the universalists—have tried to look beyond the differences and search for significant or deeper or more abstract points of similarity, while treating the diversity as merely apparent and the differences as trivial or unimportant or irrelevant.

Some—let us call them the developmentalists—have tried to see within the diversity a continuous or perhaps stagelike process of
growth and adaptation, viewed as a battle between reason and superstition, education and ignorance, science and religion, enlightenment and darkness, secondary process thinking and primary process thinking, sophistication and innocence, rationality and irrationality, modernity and traditionalism.

Some—let us call them the relativists—have tried to give permission to the diversity by documenting the significance, relevance, and importance (that is, the genuineness) of the differences between apparently divergent forms, while arguing that not all differences should be ranked into higher and lower levels of development or adaptation.

In the eyes of their respective antagonists the relativists look “soft on superstition,” the developmentalists appear “ethnocentric,” and the universalists seem “colorless, vacuous, and banal”; the universalists (as the “late” Wittgenstein, an antagonist, might have put it) try to find the real artichoke by divesting it of its leaves.

In this case it is not difficult to see something of value in all three types of responses. Each has its (partial) point within the terms of a well-known and powerful metaphysics of form (or conceptual architecture of likeness and difference).

When it comes to thinking through the metaphysics of form, it is useful to start with the truism that no two things are identical, from which it follows inexorably that in some way any two things are different. The assertion of difference, however, raises the question “different in respect to what?” which presupposes a higher-order likeness. So it also follows that in some way any two things are alike. Any and all two things, it turns out upon reflection, are both different and alike.

Within that tidy conceptual structure for likeness and difference there are separate rooms, each with a view, for universalism, developmentalism, and relativism.

When the differences between things are trivial, unimportant, or irrelevant (that is, when what is true about the functioning of one thing is also true of the other things regardless of their differences), universalism is at a premium, and nonidentical things can, with profit, be treated as equivalent.

Yet sometimes the differences between things do matter, and nonidentical things should not be treated as equivalent. The universals that unite the things are insufficient to explain their functioning: because of their differences the dynamics of their functioning are different, even though in other respects the things are alike.

When the differences between things matter in that way—because of their differences things function differently, even though in other ways they are alike—those differences are sometimes revelatory of progress or advance. This is especially true when the differences represent points or stages in the attainment of some adaptive equilibrium or some proper end state. At such times developmentalism is at a premium.

Sometimes, however, the differences are significant, but neutral with respect to the issue of relative progress. This is especially true when they represent the existence of multiple equilibria or noncomparable end states. At such times relativism is at a premium.

The merit of the relativistic stance is that it gets us to recognize that there are cases of genuine and significant diversity that are not matters for developmental analysis, although not every case is such a case. And by that account it should be possible to construct a version of relativist doctrine resistant to stock ridicule and misunderstanding.

In that version of the doctrine relativism becomes a type of explanation for diversity, in which it is argued that cases exist in which differences are to be expected, because there is no authority worthy of universal respect defining the proper way to classify and understand reality or the proper ends of life or the proper way to design a society, etcetera. As we shall see later, it is possible to differentiate different subtypes of relativist doctrine by examining the reasons and justifications adduced in support of that claim (“different but equal”).

This version of relativist doctrine does not prohibit universals, although it does require the absence of any authority simultaneously worthy of universal respect and capable of specifying the proper way to understand and experience the world or the proper way to live. Relativism is perfectly compatible with the existence of authorities worthy of universal respect (for example, the logical principle of non-contradiction—“a thing cannot both be and not be”; or the moral principle of justice—“treat like cases alike and different cases differently”) as long as those universal authorities are insufficient (they may be necessary) for drawing substantive conclusions about what to think or feel and how to live.

What a proper doctrine of relativism does claim is that to derive substantive conclusions of that sort (what to think or feel and how to live) we must also appeal presumptively to local authorities (scripture; communally held theories and assumptions about truth, beauty, and goodness) that are not entitled to universal respect. Thus a proper
doctrine of relativism must provide an account of the differences between the mandatory and the presumptive (discretionary) aspects of authority. And the doctrine must help us see why both aspects of authority, the mandatory and the presumptive, are necessary if we are to have practical guidance about how to think, feel, and live in the world.

For example, in some relativist accounts mandatory authority is equated with whatever can uniquely be induced from universally available experience or evidence or logically be deduced from undeniable first principles. According to that account there are major aspects of the authority of, say, the Old Testament or Darwin’s origin story about the evolution of complex biological forms that are local or presumptive, for their first principles are not undeniable, and the evidence they powerfully interpret by means of their quite deniable assumptions can be powerfully reinterpreted from alternative conceptual starting points; or, at the very least, we must allow for that possibility.

In other words, the doctrine of relativism denies that it is the sine qua non of reason that its requirements converge or are uniform across space and time. According to the doctrine it is natural for human beings to be as different from one another as is allowed by their common rationality. Their common rationality is, after all, not all of their rationality but only that part that is common. Any total system of authority capable of giving guidance about what to believe or value or how to live will consist of interacting elements some of which are mandatory, common, or ecumenical and others of which are presumptive, variable, or denominational. In other words, and again, others may have two wives, or believe that all learning is reminiscence, or believe that human beings, “suspended between the angels and the beasts,” descended from the angels, even if you do not believe so.

The story of relativism in anthropology, however, is not that simple. Complications arise because there are subtypes of relativist doctrine, each built on a somewhat different conception of the relevant state of mind (for example, pretending that ____, fantasizing that ____ belived that ___) associated with the apparently alien ideas and practices of the “other.” And each subtype of relativist doctrine is built, as well, on a somewhat different conception of the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity, interiority and exteriority, fantasy and reality, and imagining and witnessing in the interpretation of symbolic forms.

Rationality, Realism, and the Interpretation of Symbolic Forms

Those complications arise because crosscutting the distinction among universalists, developmentalists, and relativists is an independent issue of interpretation and evaluation concerned with the question of the realism or rationality of symbolic forms. The issue concerns the proper way to attribute states of mind (for example, pretending, believing, wishing) when interpreting and translating the symbolic forms of other peoples. For example, how are we to translate and interpret all those things that people around the world say and do about witches, ghosts, and spirit possession? (See, for example, Malinowski Maleficsarn 1928 [1489]; Trevor-Roper 1967; Obeyesekere 1981; Chapter 9 of this volume.) What state of mind should we attribute to them (knowing, believing, pretending, imagining, wishing, hallucinating?), and why?

The answers given to that question divide the “God is dead” school for the interpretation of symbolic forms from schools of interpretative realism. That division roughly parallels the split between subjectivists and objectivists, emotivists and cognitivists, nonrationalists and rationalists. It is possible to be a relativist or universalist or developmentalist on either side of the divide, although here I shall focus only on the two schools of relativism opposing each other across the emotivist versus cognitivist divide.

Before discussing the two sides of that divide, however, some terms and concepts need to be clarified concerning the interpretation of symbolic forms.

A symbolic form, like many other “appearances” or “sensations” or “experiences” (such as a retinal image or a verbal utterance or a drawing on a pad) is a reality-posit. A reality-posit is a representation of a particular state of the world (for example, “There is a unicorn in my garden”) that functions as the content, the topic, the object, or the aim for any of the various states of the mind that we designate which such labels as fantasizing (that ____ or wishing (that ___) or believing (that ___) or perceiving (that ___) or remembering (that ___) or what have you. Symbolic forms are the reality-posit that fill in the “that” clause for a state of mind.

Just like many other “appearances-sensations-experiences,” reality-positis are symbolic forms because they are about something else. Through their content reality-positis (for example, “There is a unicorn in my garden”) refer or point beyond themselves to another realm,
that exteriorized framework that we call reality or the world, connecting us to it by positing of it (as in fantasy or in memory or in belief) or positing for it (as in desire) a particular state of the realm.

A state of mind, on the other hand, is an interpretation or classification of the status (dream, fantasy, imagination, hallucination) of a reality-posit (for example, "There is a unicorn in my garden") as a representational object or symbolic form. State-of-mind classifications are designed to interpret the nature of a reality-posit (for example, seen "as if through a glass darkly"), the conditions of its occurrence (for example, witnessed only while sleeping) or reproduction (for example, brought to mind at will), its degree of availability as an experience to audiences of different kinds (for example, witnessed only by me), and ultimately its source (for example, it's only in the head).

States of mind (believing, fantasizing, wishing) can be postulated, but they cannot be directly viewed or known, which is why one of the most important things up for interpretation in the evaluation and classification of symbolic forms is the state of mind suggested by any particular reality-posit. How is this particular people's particular reality-posit (for example, "people entering into compacts with the devil") to be translated? Is it indicative of a belief, a wish, a fantasy, a desire, and how can one tell? What is the difference, anyway, between, for example, perceiving that — believing that — imagining that — or wishing that —, and how is it possible, if at all, to distinguish those reality-posit as symbolic forms that are realistic or rational or proportionate to "actual" states of the realm from those that are not?

The issue of the interpretation of the state of mind associated with any particular symbolic form or reality-posit is multileveled. First there is the problem of how to define the proper or ideal ratio of subjectivity to objectivity in reality-finding reality-posit, or in those rational or realistic reality-posit is that thought to be proportionate to or in graceful coincidence with actual states of the world.

Some claim that reality-posit that are rational or realistic or reality-finding are those in which subjectivity has been reduced to zero. That means that perfect rationality or realism (subjectivity set at zero) consists in a perspective-free ("unbiased") witnessing of the world. The idea is one of stepping completely out of our mind, personality, and position in the social order, so as to see the world the way it really is, as a thing in itself, uncontaminated and undistorted

by projected traces of our intellectual point of view, wishes, desires, goals, emotions, and interests.

Others agree, but argue that since that is impossible, rationality and realism can never be achieved. As that argument goes, perspective-free perception is a godlike state of mind unattainable by human beings. Others argue that the least we can do is strive to be godlike, correcting for projections and distortions wherever possible. Still others argue that perhaps it is our prejudices that make it possible for us to see; perhaps our prejudices even make it possible for us to see some things as they really are.

Then there is the issue of how to define, label, and classify all the kinds and varieties of states of the mind (see D'Andrade 1987). Every state of mind (for example, believing that —, wishing that —, perceiving that —, remembering that —, dreaming that —) carries us through the here-and-now appearance of a symbolic form (for example, the verbal utterance: "There is a unicorn in my garden") into the exteriorized framework (the reality or conceivable world) to which the posit refers.

But what states of mind are there, and how are they interrelated? Some argue, for example, that imagination is opposed to perception, and that it is bad to confuse one with the other. Some argue that perception is a form of imagination (for example, that visual perception is a "construction"), while others argue that imagination is a form of perception (for example, that dreaming is the witnessing of a plane of reality). Still others argue both ways, and dialectically, for imaginative perception and perceptive imagination.

Finally there is the issue of how to identify, interpret, and translate the particular state of mind (wishing that —, knowing that —, believing that —, pretending that —, imagining that —) suggested by any particular symbolic form, such as the reality-posit "I am a witch."

What state of mind should we attribute to our neighbor in the sixteenth century when she confesses she is a witch? Is it a case of knowing that —? Or is it a case of believing —? or pretending —? or wishing —? or dreaming —? Or is it a case of knowing that — because of dreaming that —? or perhaps of believing that — because of wishing that —? And should that attribution, a sixteenth-century attribution about a sixteenth-century state of mind, be any different from the attribution we should make today about the sixteenth-century state of mind? What if the reality-posit ("I am a
imagining and perceiving, and in certain intellectual domains they confuse fantasy with reality and permit primary-process thinking to become a prominent feature of their mental functioning.

It is the search for an alternative to that third hypothetical possibility (and its developmental and monistic implications) that unites relativists, spanning the divide between the ontological atheists ("God is dead"); reality is a fabrication) and the ontological polytheists ("monotheism is dead"); cultural variety illuminates the multiplicity of objective worlds). The aim of relativism is, after all, to find defensible ways, if there are any, to give permission to diversity.

To write the slogan "God is dead" is to invoke the very much alive spirit of Friedrich Nietzsche, and it is with Nietzsche that any story about ontological atheism ought to begin. Nietzsche was not a cultural relativist. He was too much of an existentialist and individualist for that. And we should not forget that it was Nietzsche who once described Asia as a dreary place where they still do not know how to distinguish between truth, poetry, and other fictions (1982, p. 57). Nevertheless, it is Nietzsche's conception of the nature of cultural things that has set the agenda for modern interpretations of the states of mind associated with symbolic forms. According to Nietzsche's conception reality-posit or symbolic forms have null reference, for the realities they posit do not exist. Thus spake Zarathustra. Ontological atheism was born.

Thus Spake Nietzsche

Friedrich Nietzsche is not an acknowledged founding father of cultural anthropology, yet, far more than is realized, his way of thinking propagated and took over modern anthropology (on the Nietzschean foundations of modern social and political consciousness see MacIntyre 1981). Around 1882 Nietzsche thought he had the answer to the witch question. Many contemporary cultural anthropologists think he was right.

Nietzsche not only suspected (and regretted?) that God was dead. As a propositive relativist, Nietzsche had doubts about the realism or rationality of all unperceived or unseen things (including God, witches, souls, sin, necessity, rights, values, and morality).

Positivism is empiricism in its purest form. At the risk of oversimplification, it might be stated that the central doctrine of positivism is that only seeing is believing and that, therefore, one should stick with appearances or experiences, for they are the only reality, while any
other claim to knowledge is either tautology or metaphysical nonsense.

Nietzsche put it this way: "Today we possess science precisely to the extent to which we have decided to accept the testimony of the senses—to the extent to which we sharpen them further, arm them, and learn to think them through. The rest is miscarriage and not-yet-science—in other words, metaphysics, theology, psychology, epistemology—or formal science, a doctrine of signs such as logic and that applied logic that is called mathematics. In them reality is not encountered at all, not even as a problem" (1982, p. 481).

Nietzsche's answer to the witch question flows from his no-nonsense positivism: "Although the most acute judges of the witches, and even the witches themselves, were convinced of the guilt of witchery, the guilt nevertheless was non-existent." He goes on to say, shockingly, "It is thus with all guilt" (1982, pp. 96–97).

Nietzsche gives what might be called a null-reference answer to the witch question. While the reality-posit "I am a witch" has reference to an externalized frame containing "witches" as its content, the reality it posits is associated with a state of mind known as fancy and does not exist. Nietzsche then generalizes his null-reference argument to every case in which the following two conditions hold: (1) a supposed objective-external yet invisible entity is invoked (for example, natural rights), and (2) with respect to that unseen thing the self is supposed to be subordinate, bound, or guilty.

The gist of a null-reference argument goes something like this: When it comes to God, sin, morality, necessity, and witchery, there is nothing real "out there" in the nature of things to be guilty of or to be bound by. Thus no objective basis exists for the subjective sense of being commanded by God, or for a feeling of sin, or for a pang of conscience, or for a perception of inevitability and necessity, or for the conviction that one is a witch. Such senses, feelings, pangs, perceptions, and convictions tell us nothing about the external world but much about phantoms that haunt the human mind.

Nietzsche reasons on. Moral obligations are phantoms, not objective facts out there waiting to be discovered through positive inquiry. As he wrote in his notes of 1880–81: "Being moral means being highly accessible to fear" (1982, p. 74). Similarly, belief in the God-phantom, sin-phantom, conscience-phantom, necessity-phantom, and witch-phantom is little more than slavish susceptibility to custom, suggestion, indoctrination, conformity, reward, or social pressure. At best, we believe the things we believe because the expression of those beliefs produces agreeable feelings in powerful or significant others who are the upholders of the phantom order. We certainly do not believe them because they are true, for there is nothing out there for them to be true of.

Enter the Übermensch (sometimes translated as "overman"; mocked by George Bernard Shaw as the "superman"), Nietzsche's ideal of the fully developed and mature autonomous individual. "Behind your thoughts and feelings, my brother, there stands a mighty ruler, an unknown sage—whose name is self. In your body he dwells; he is your body" (1982, p. 146).

Thus spake Zarathustra. The self strives to realize its essential, objective, or inherent nature, which is to be self-caused or free. To be self-caused or free is to resist all external constraints, especially phantoms of the imagination disguised as cold necessity or objective truth.

The liberated individual (the Übermensch) seeks to rid its self of phantoms. It strives to manifest its deepest nature, the self's will to possess the power of total autonomous self-control (the so-called will to power). The Übermensch (who, ironically, in Nietzsche's account seems to be quite godlike) realizes that it is only it who is necessary and real, the creator through reification and projection of what it previously mistook for the discovery of the external constraints of reality.

Thus, according to Nietzsche, men and women are the makers of the reality before which they bow down as its slave. If the self is to authenticate its self and fully realize its nature (essential autonomy or self-creative freedom), apparent realities must be permanently transmogrified or, at least, repeatedly remade. Just as a "snake that cannot shed its skin perishes," so too perishes the self that cannot shed the "received wisdom" of the past and, so to speak, make its own mind up, for its self.

The Übermensch attains this-worldly transcendence. Looking through and penetrating the shroud of tradition, it sees and recognizes a terrible truth. At once aware that much that was supposed to be natural and real is merely a reified phantom of mind, it discards the shackles of convention, disencumbers itself of the yoke of tradition, and sets itself free. There, in Nietzsche's conception of the Übermensch, is born, perhaps reborn, existentialism's ego, the idea of a really real plane of ultimate self-determination existing prior to or outside of society, the idea of the creative source behind the phantom of custom-bound constraint. Indeed, Nietzsche used existentialism and positivism reciprocally to define each other.
God Is Dead: The Nietzschean Anthropology of Phantomlike Culture

Nietzsche's answer to the witch question has become, ironically, the conventional wisdom of modern anthropology. Prominent theorists of culture, who are in dispute about almost everything else, share the Nietzschean assumption that tradition-based reality-posit is imaginary phantoms of mind. In general, supernatural entities, moral obligations, and society itself are presumed to have standing only as imposed or projected mental representations or symbolic forms (reality-posit); and the realities that are posited are viewed either as unreal, or as real only as reality-posit.

George Peter Murdock (1980), for example, expresses the now common contemporary Nietzschean view when he states: "There are no such things as souls, or demons, and such mental constructs as Jehovah are as fictitious as those of Superman or Santa Claus (it is not Nietzsche's Übermensch he has in mind, but rather the Superman who is able to bend steel in his bare hands). Neither ghosts nor gods exert the slightest influence on men and their behavior" (p. 54).

That Nietzschean null-reference argument is also forcefully reiterated by David M. Schneider (1965).

There is no supernatural. Ghosts do not exist. Spirits do not in fact make storms, cause winds, bring illness or effect cures. The gods in the heavens do not really make the stars go around and neither do they decide each man's fate at his birth. Since there are no real ghosts, spirits, gods, and goddesses, it follows logically . . . that their real and true nature cannot decisively shape man's beliefs about them or the social institutions related to them. Man's beliefs about ghosts and spirits must be wholly formed by man himself. Whatever unity there is to man's beliefs about the supernatural derives, therefore, from the nature of man himself and not from the nature of the supernatural. (Pp. 85–86)

Of course, as Schneider was well aware in 1965, that news had not yet arrived in all circles; and over the centuries, in most circles where the news that God is dead has arrived, it had been strenuously resisted. That fact continues to lend great fascination to the problem of interpreting the state of mind associated with so-called supernatural reality-posit and symbolic forms.

Cornelius Loos, for example, had a hard time getting his book published in 1592. The thesis of the book was that the devil did not exist, that there were no such things as witches, and that all those confessions by women throughout Europe stating that they had flown through the night to an orgiastic Black Sabbath were nothing more than products of their imagination. Loos's book was never published; instead he was widely viewed as an enemy of reason and was denounced, imprisoned, and forced to recant. It is sobering to read Hugh Trevor-Roper's brilliant account "The European Witch-Craze of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries" (1967). For one comes away feeling that it was the promoters of the witch-hunts and witch-burnings who were the guardians of reason and science, while it was the skeptics who seemed to shy away from the reasonable implications of their own conceptual reference points.

One conceptual reference point widely accepted during those two centuries was that the devil, fallen from heaven, had established his own kingdom and that the church was engaged in a mortal struggle against Satan's attempts to regain his lost empire. Rational inquiry was not necessarily incompatible with belief in the doctrine of the kingdom of Satan; and, as Trevor-Roper documents, many of the promoters of witch-hunts were the leading intellectuals of their time, who knew all about the canons of scientific objectivity and logical consistency and applied them to the evidence at hand. A powerful scientific case was developed in defense of the witch-hunts.

The evidence at hand was a corpus of detailed confessions by women, which was scrutinized for its objectivity. Confessions in Scotland were found to converge with confessions in distant Prussia, and certain common themes were identified: a secret pact with the devil to help him recover hegemony, anointment with the fat of a murdered child (so-called devil's grease), an aerial night journey to a sabbath ground, worship of the devil, dancing, macabre music, cold and tasteless food, and a sexual orgy. Aware of the seriousness of a witchcraft accusation, some defenders of the witch-hunts examined the alternative "subjectivist" hypothesis and dismissed it; for if the confessions were all delusions, induced by some subjective state such as melancholia, then why should there be such convergence in reported accounts from separate corners of Europe? The consistencies or common elements in the stories of confessed witches, stories from women who spoke different languages and came from different countries, lent credence to the accounts.

Some defenders of the witch-hunts also entertained the alternative "method effect" hypothesis and dismissed it. The skeptics had argued that the common elements in the confessions of witches could be ex-
plained by reference to inquisitors' use of certain standard leading questions and techniques of torture. Skeptics argued that the identity of the elicitation procedures, not the identity of the experience with the devil, explained the similarities in the contents of the confessions. Upon examination, the skeptics turned out to be wrong. Many confessions were voluntary, torture was not used in every country, and even without leading questions the same story unfolded: a pact with the devil, a night flight, a Black Sabbath.

In the face of this onslaught of reason and evidence, the skeptics remained for two centuries on the defensive. For 200 years, the best they could do was advance some wildly speculative claims about the living conditions of the devil (for example, that he had been locked up in hell and could not possibly intervene in human affairs) or else about methodological and procedural issues such as the cruelty of torture or the possibility that some innocent people might be convicted. As Trevor-Roper notes, "To the last the most radical argument against the witch-craze was not that witches do not exist, not even that the pact with Satan is impossible, but simply that the judges err in the identification" (1967, p. 149).

"Malpractice" claims of that sort do not pose a serious threat to the underlying rationality of an ideological region, for they presuppose the conceptual reference points in question. A case in point was reported in Sudan Notes and Records (1920). Parents and villagers in a Nubian district of Sudan stood by and watched a female child cease to live while a native healer, by lashing, beating, and choking, tried to cast out of the girl a possessing devil, a "jinn." At the subsequent trial, the healer claimed to have been contacted in a dream and empowered to use his tampura (a mandolin-like instrument) to drive out afflicting demons: "Each devil has its special note. When it is struck the devil speaks, and makes his demands for what he wants, which has to be provided by the friends of the patient, when he is satisfied and leaves the patient." The healer claimed that in this case the devil's requests were refused by the family, and when that happens, the jinn is likely to "break the neck of the afflicted person." The healer claimed to have entered into physical battle with the demon in the girl's body. "My jinn and her jinn entered on a struggle for mastery. Mine in me was throttling hers in her and vice versa . . . Her jinn overcame my jinn . . . Hers killed her because its demands were refused. Mine would do the same to me if I refused its demands."

At the trial it was apparent that for the Nubians involved, if not for the colonial court, this was a potential case of malpractice, which was understood by the participants within the framework of a well-established Islamic theory of satanic beings that no one had reason to doubt. Appearing as a witness was another native healer, a woman, who had originally been consulted by the dead girl's parents: "Azab and Medim brought me their daughter and stayed two nights. Then I told them I could not put her right. They were no ordinary devils [dšātir] but malicious jinns who had made her make water on my bed clothes." And the witness told the court that when the accused healer first appeared on the scene and started beating the girl, the witness had said to the girl's father, "There is no medicine for jinns; if you are going to have treatment of this kind [beatings] take her away from my zariba." The witness also revealed that, at the time, the accused healer had told her that the devil was a foreign Christian devil that the witness did not know how to treat.

The father of the girl was cross-examined by the court: "Why did you not stop this cruel treatment?" The father replied, "He told me it would effect a cure and I believed him." A farmer, who observed the beatings, was examined: "How could you stand there and see a girl throttled?" He replied, "It was our ignorance . . . [The healer] said, 'Don't say anything. The more you object the more you encourage devils and handicap me.'" The farmer revealed that he himself had tried to tell the healer that if he wanted to drive out devils, there was a way of writing holy passages and a way of smoking demons out of the body.2

A striking feature of the trial is that while objections were raised about the competence of the healer, his particular diagnosis, and the procedures used, Nubian theories of illness and cure left open the possibility, and no rational Nubian had reason to doubt, that the girl might have been possessed by a spirit—just as no rational European in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries could coherently or credibly raise doubts about the existence of the devil (if God exists, then so must the devil). When Cornelius Loos tried to raise such skeptical doubts in 1592, he was punished as a reckless enemy of reason and forced to recant.

A comparable situation today might be that of an evolutionary biologist trying to prevail upon the secular academic community that the evolution of biological forms does not occur by a process of natural selection. He might, for example, try pointing to the lack of transitional forms in the fossil record or to the difficulty of plausibly explaining how highly integrated biological systems or subsystems—which require complex integration among diverse parts to function at
all—could exist in incomplete transitional states or be the product of a piecemeal, intermittent, or random process. The biologist might suggest that the facts of natural history are not inconsistent with the idea that all that neatly organized yet increasing complexity is the product of invention and foresight and that it is time to start searching through the galaxies for a possible designer of biological organisms.

Peoples whose symbolic forms posit gods, ghosts, spirits, or witches appear to live under the impression that there is something there for them to be mindful of. Thus their reality-positis have often been interpreted as instances of "believing that ——". Indeed, in those cultures in which such symbolic forms exist the native who posits spirits does not seem indifferent to external reality-referencing questions such as: What makes spirits angry? Can they invade a person's body? How can invading spirits be exorcised? (See Obeysereke 1981; Nuckolls 1986; Swedler 1986; Chapter 9 of this volume.) And, as we have seen, if we go back not so far in the English and American historical traditions, those who believed in witches went out hunting for them in external reality, where they sometimes found them, occasionally roasting them alive when they had.

In Nietzsche's Prologue Zarathustra comes to a forest where he meets "an old man who had left his holy cottage to look for roots in the woods." "And what is a saint doing in the forest?" asked Zarathustra. The old man answered: "I make songs and sing them; and when I make songs I laugh, cry and hum: thus I praise God. With singing, crying, laughing and humming, I praise the god who is my god. But what do you bring us as a gift?" (1982, pp. 123–124).

The text goes on as follows: "When Zarathustra heard those words he bade the saint farewell and said: 'What could I have to give you? But let me go quickly lest I take something from you!' And thus they separated, the old man and the man, laughing as two boys laugh. But when Zarathustra was alone he spoke thus to his heart: 'Could it be possible? This old saint in the forest has not yet heard anything of this, that God is dead'" (p. 124).

God is dead for contemporary anthropologists. The major measure of his fate is that in contemporary anthropology almost all theory designed to explain the origin and function of other people's reality-positis is made possible by a Nietzschean null-reference assumption. Murdock and Schneider have already been quoted. We can tell that we are dealing with assumptions very deep within the anthropological worldview, very central to its web of belief, when George Peter

Murdock and David M. Schneider end up in agreement. When it comes to the existence of gods, ghosts, witches, and demons, there is agreement.

Melford Spiro (1982, pp. 53–55, 63; 1984), another leading culture theorist, adopts Murdock's and Schneider's identical line of reasoning and, with characteristic clarity, follows it to its logical limit. Spiro argues that precisely because ghosts, spirits, gods, and witches do not exist, the main significance of those ideas is that they are fanciful states of mind analogous to dreams-as-dreamt and other hallucinations in which "stimuli originating in the inner world are taken as objects and events in the outer world" (p. 52), and mental constructs or symbolic forms are taken for external reality. He wonders why it is that "the religious believer does not (like the awakened dreamer) awaken from his religious slumber and recognize that the mythico-religious world exists not in some external reality, but rather in the inner reality of the mind" (p. 55).

As Murdock's, Schneider's, and Spiro's arguments suggest, the received wisdom of the day in anthropology is founded on Nietzsche's null-reference solution to the problem of interpreting the state of mind associated with symbolic forms. Indeed, so commonplace is Nietzschean thinking among anthropologists that it has made its mark on anthropology's central concept, the concept of culture.

According to that Nietzschean conception of culture, posited realities exist outside or externally to us only to the extent that we misperceive them as such. Such reality-positis (for example, of a world in which the ill will of others can make you sick or the spirit of a dead ancestor is a force to be contended with, or in which it is objectively wrong to carry any object more than six feet on the sabbath) are interpreted as mystifying or delusive reifications of our own projections.

In that contemporary conception of culture, reality-positis are theorized to be "constituted" or "constructed" from within a mental zone occupied by such states of mind as fancying, pretending, or wishing. In that mental zone subjectivity predominates over objectivity, and the realities we posit do not exist except as reality-positis. Nothing is objectively or factually good or bad, right or wrong; only falsely believing that it is so makes it seem that it is so.

Contemporary anthropology is very modernist without being self-conscious about it or assuming much responsibility for it. Being modern, most anthropologists are Nietzschean individualists; and being Nietzschean individualists and anthropologists, they are prone to
analyze other people's posits about reality, constraint, and obligation as though "reality," "constraint," and "obligation" ought to be put in quotation marks. The received anthropological view of things is that a traditional culture's view of things consists of meanings (aspects of subjectivity) imposed or projected by human beings onto the world, imposed meanings first dignified by each generation as objective knowledge about the world and then passed off as received wisdom from one generation to the next. According to some contemporaneous theorists of culture, there is always a small elite of philosopher-kings (for example, contemporary theorists of culture) who know that the whole thing is "made up" or a necessary sham or the innocence of Nietzsche's forest saint.

Indeed, I would speculate that one of the appeals of theory in anthropology is that theory in anthropology is atheistic by assumption. There is no need to spend time arguing whether God, sin, or sorcery exists. They are presumed to be fabrications of the mind, figments of the imagination, or imposed meanings whose origin (from within the subject) and ontological status (as a null-reference category) are never in doubt.

Much debate in cultural anthropology thus starts on a common ground of null-reference reasoning—for example, gods and witches (and sin, the evil eye, and so on) do not exist. The common ground then gets divided, often passionately, over a secondary question: Is the native really aiming or intending through his reality-posits and symbolic forms (the idea of a witch) to say something true about states of the world? Is the native's state of mind really a matter of belief?

Those who answer yes to the secondary question (for example, the Marxists or the Freudians) interpret the reality-posits and symbolic forms of other peoples as primary-process thinking or irrational consciousness (false objectivity or reified subjectivity). They are Nietzschean in their interpretation of symbolic forms, but they are not relativists, for their aim is to remove our differences through education rather than permit them.

Those who answer no (for example, the so-called symbolic anthropologists) interpret other people's reality-posits and symbolic forms as some form of poetics or stylistics or drama or pretense or "performative" devoid of any reality-finding intent (or function) vis-à-vis an objective world. They are Nietzschean ontological atheists, and they are relativistic as well.

In either case the reality-posits of the other (for example, the idea of a witch) are assumed to refer to fanciful worlds that do not exist except as reality-posits. In either case the Nietzschean null-reference assumption of the modern liberated individual qua anthropologist goes unquestioned and unexamined as it is put to work, but at a great cost.

The Cause That Triumphed: The Cost of Victory

Nietzsche advised: part from your cause as soon as it triumphs; hold suspect all received wisdom and cross-examine it as a prejudice from the past. At this historical moment in the West our received wisdom, obvious truths, and innocent suppositions are Nietzschean: the things to which gods, ghosts, souls, witches, and demons refer exist solely as elements in a fictive or fancied reality; they are posits that human beings impose on the world.

As Nietzsche knew, it is never easy to argue against received wisdom. We always run the risk of being dismissed as passion-driven, as nihilistic, as ridiculous. Yet, if you are a Nietzschean, there is always good reason to try, even when the received wisdom is Nietzschean. In this case there are two good reasons. A null-reference, God-is-dead, phantoms-of-mind conception of culture has two notable consequences, which seem unacceptable to the oversoul I know the best, and which, perhaps, will be judged unacceptable by other oversouls like mine.

The first consequence of a null-reference conception of culture is the degrading of other peoples once the symbolic forms (reality-posits) and states of mind of the other are viewed as alien to the symbolic forms and states of mind of the self. The second consequence is the degrading of society (tradition, custom, ways of life) once society is viewed as alien to nature and to the objective world.

Among anthropologists, as among all other thoughtful people, there are those who feel obliged to go wherever they are led by their preconceptions, while others (and in this case I am one of them) become suspicious when their preconceptions lead them where they do not want to go.

The Other Made Alien to the Self

Because of the prevalence of null-reference reasoning, a characteristic feature of theory in anthropology is the unilateral degrading of other people's (apparently) supposed truths about nature and the world.
Specially targeted for unilateral degrading are those beliefs about natural law that other peoples view as most noteworthy and significant, reality-posit associated with beliefs about wandering and reincarnating souls, witchcraft and sorcery, spirit possession and exorcism, pollution and purity, illness and health, karma and sin, gods and their goddesses, and so on.

The anthropologist, often acting unwittingly or with noble or "liberal" intentions, degrades other peoples' posit associated with natural law by approaching and analyzing them as though they were supernatural, rhetorical, imaginary, or fantastic. Indeed, it is noteworthy, and perhaps reminiscent of Nietzsche's positivism, that in anthropological theory the notion of the supernatural comes close to meaning null reference, which, if you are a positivist, means metaphysical, which in the language of positivism is a synonym for "nonsense."

It is striking how much the contemporary anthropologist's conception of the native resembles the positivist's conception of the metaphysician. One witty definition of a metaphysician goes like this: "A metaphysician is a man who goes into a dark cellar at midnight, without a light, looking for a black cat that isn't there." How reminiscent of the metaphysical native, on his knees, searching in the inner sanctum of some decrepit temple for a beneficent god.

The received view, then, is that culture consists of received meanings or reality-posit that human beings impose on the world, with the emphasis on the imposition of meaning. The meanings that get imposed are assumed to have null reference even when, perhaps especially when, the native is adamant that his ideas about nature and the world are not simply creations or phantasms of mind, but rather conceptions of reality that illuminate experience and take us beyond ourselves to reality.

The more stubborn the native's commitment to his culture's fantastic or metaphysical or supernatural beliefs, the greater the feeling of confidence of the Nietzschean null-reference reasoner. The Nietzschean all along assumed that culture, custom, and tradition exercise their phantom grip over the human mind in direct proportion to the underdevelopment of full and exclusive rationality and individual autonomy. What better evidence of a failure of reality-testing or a confusion of fantasy with reality than the adamant reiteration of the accusation that one's neighbor is a witch, or, worse yet, the neighbor's confession that the accusation is correct?

Accordingly, anthropological theory under the influence of Nietzschean thinking and Nietzsche's philosophy of science has been designed to explain the origin and function of ideas prejudged through positivist null-reference reasoning to be phantomlike, hallucinatory, or fictive.

Not surprisingly, the explanations offered are typically Nietzschean. Hypothesized is some irrational or extrarational process, defined by a diminution or displacement of complete, exclusive, autonomous rational functioning. That irrational or extrarational process is then invoked in order to help explain how so many phantomlike, metaphysical, supernatural, delusional, and arbitrary reality-posit could have got themselves lodged and stuck inside people's heads.

One type of explanation (culture as conditioned response) argues that human beings impose meanings on the world because human beings are slaves of their culture who believe what they are told. A second type of explanation (culture as defensive mechanism) argues that human beings believe what they wish to be true and that culture is a massive projective system put out there to satisfy their wishes. A third type of explanation (culture as symbolic) argues that human beings, masters of rhetoric, play, sham, and drama, do not, after all, really believe the things we think they believe, or, if they do believe them, they do not literally believe them but rather comprehend them as metaphors or tropes or imaginative creations.

Spiro (1982), for example, only one step removed from Nietzsche through Freud, explains "mythico-religious" reality-posit (for example, the idea of God) as the reified and emotionally motivated projection of one's childhood images and fantasies concerning parents and parental figures. Indeed, the concept of God is interpreted as a need-driven, mixed-up idea of a parent ("Entirely helpless from birth, and absolutely dependent on these beings, young children form highly distorted, exaggerated and even bizarre representations of these parenting figures," which then provide a basis for mental representations of the "superhuman figures of the religious world"; pp. 59, 62), and so-called supernatural beliefs are glossed as primary-process failures of reality-testing, wherein "fantasy is taken for reality" (pp. 52–53).

Murdock (1980, p. 89), who argues Nietzsche-like that the ethical doctrines of other peoples are often arbitrary and devoid of objective justification (he has in mind the fact that among the Semang it is, for example, a sin to comb your hair during a thunderstorm or to tell a joke to your mother-in-law), thinks Nietzsche-like that ethics has its origin in fear of the sanctioning power of a phantom called God—a learning process by which one phantom (God) begets another phantom (sin).
Others point to the weight of history or tradition or social-class position to explain the origin of reality-posit. People believe the fantastic things they believe about the way the world actually is because that is what their teachers told them to believe. And why did their teachers believe it? Because that is what their teachers told them to believe. And why did the first teacher to believe it believe it? Irrational projection. Fear of sanction. Servitude to class interest. Wish fulfillment. Long in advance of research, the Nietzschean anthropologist has ruled out, by presupposition, at least one possibility: that some aspect of experience is actually illuminated by being placed under the description of a god, or a witch, or an invading demonic spirit, or pollution, or karma, or original sin.

Thus, in the end it is a consequence of the Nietzschean anthropology of phantom culture that, wittingly or unwittingly, it represents the 'other,' the native, the alien, under the aspect of the innocent, the bizarre, the comic, the burlesque, the theatrical, or the absurd, as the history of culture becomes the record of mankind's sometimes staged, sometimes passionate positing and pursuit of things that do not exist.

**Tradition Made Alien to Nature**

Besides the unilateral degrading of other peoples' ideas about reality, a second consequence of a Nietzschean null-reference conception of culture is the degrading of society, custom, and tradition once they are alienated from nature and set in contrast to the objective world. There is a long history of attempts by theorists to equate customary practice with "convention" and thereby radically separate society from nature. Let us consider only one incident in a much longer story.

Anthropology became the study of phantom reality-posit, in part, because a more general transformation was taking place in our culture's idea of an objective world governed by natural law. Beginning about the time of the Enlightenment, our culture became obsessed with stripping "Mother Nature" of her animus and reinterpreting the concept of what is natural, or a law of nature, as equivalent in meaning to what is mindless, involuntary, and mechanical, without feeling, intention, or plan.

In that enlightened world the designation "natural" science and "real" and "objective" science came to be restricted to those physical and biological disciplines that conceive of nature or the objectivething-world as a force field of external causal constraints, devoid of any mental or subjective life. Social "science," now a decidedly suspect category, got a reputation for being "soft" and unreal, and for talking in tongues or "jargon."

By the time anthropology first got to know them, society, tradition, and custom had already suffered humiliation through exposure to the Enlightenment. Within the terms of the emerging Western dualism of mindless nature and self-determined minds, physical nature and the natural environment had a legitimate place in the scheme of things, as did individuals, and jointly they typified the really real—but not society, tradition, and custom. It was an achievement of the Enlightenment to cast them out of reality as the heteronomous (that is, authoritarian and arbitrary) impositions of ancient and disposable regimes. Modern anthropology was first introduced to society, tradition, and custom only after they had been denied a rightful and important place in the modern Western scheme of things. Some will say that it is a black and terrible fate, and they will say it with some reason.

That Enlightenment thesis—mindless nature devoid of subjectivity—not surprisingly produced its hypothetical (and nihilistic) antithesis—mindful persons devoid of natural law or objective constraint, for whom "social" constraints were unnatural, hence unreal, and represses. One hundred years into the Enlightenment, Nietzsche was quite prepared to play both sides of the dualism against any middle.

We have seen how Nietzsche did it: null-reference reasoning pressed to its "enlightened" positive science limit, beyond which there is said to exist a realm of ideal existential freedom. By now the argument is familiar. Nature is mindless, objective, and visible. It is empty of such unseen, unobservable, metaphysical things as god, sin, obligation, value, and morality. If such things exist at all, they exist only as reality-posit in the mind. And if they exist only in the mind, they are not objective and thus ought not be allowed to be constraining. If human beings feel constrained by such things, it is only because, not yet realizing their essential nature (self-determination), they do not distinguish between truth and poetry, confusing, quite irrationally, external reality with what exists nowhere else but in their minds.

Nietzsche is thereby led by his flirtation with positivism to the anticipation of Sartre and many other existentialists, who later try to implement his individualistic and liberationist agenda. Freedom and self-creation are identified as the essential features of self. A finger is pointed at custom, convention, and tradition, which stand accused of
being little more than bad faith and self-deception persisting over time, a self-deception founded on the spurious belief that man-in-society is bound by necessary external constraints.

Today, not surprisingly, with our contemporary and now popular Nietzschean consciousness of free individuals and mindless nature, tradition-bound people are widely apprehended as curious or exotic or innocent leftovers who have not yet seen the light. The modern Nietzschean individualist has available a discriminating and impressive vocabulary (innocent, childlike, quaint, simple, primitive, exotic, undifferentiated, misguided, ignorant, uneducated, pious, sentimental, dogmatic, conformist, cultist, brainwashed, authoritarian, fanatical, neurotic, strange, superstitious, and so on) for braggadocio or for stigmatizing or for keeping at a distance all those who would insist that it is precisely the strictures and disciplines of their tradition that put them in touch with reality.

To us “moderns” they (for example, the Amish, the Hassidim, or members of the Hare Krishna “cult”) seem “out of it,” lost in their (quaint or passionate or mindless) illusions off the peripheries of the modern world we know; whereas the modern world, we know, sits right on top of the pulse of the really real, or, at least, pretty close to it.

The moral of this little parable of “the history of tradition made alien to nature” repeats a central thesis of this essay: anthropology assumed its modern form by stepping into the shadow of a protopositivist, protoexistential Nietzschean vision of reality. Quite naturally, all too naturally, anthropology became, in that Nietzschean world, the discipline for the systematic study and critique of the apparent self-deception and bad faith that is tradition—people hunting for witches that never existed, praying to gods that are dead, sacrificing animals to an empty sky, tormenting themselves with guilt over sins no more substantial than a dream or hallucination; searching in the dark, without a light, for a black cat that isn’t there.

An enlightened anthropology just kept things going. Society, tradition, and custom became the objects of a richly elaborated Nietzschean (read “modern”) scholarly rhetoric of degradation or displacement. Armed with ever more sophisticated versions of that antisocietal rhetoric, custom became “mere convention” (obligations for which no rational justification can be offered); and it was redefined as either dogma, or as thoughtless habit and routine, or as a quaint relic of outdated ways of doing things; or perhaps, in romantic response, as a somewhat cryptic symbolic code designed to give surreptitious expression to imaginary or fanciful or wishful posits about the world.

As for tradition, it got redescribed in some quarters as arbitrary and oppressive injunction. Arbitrary because the content of its injunctions (for example, no driving of cars on the sabbath day) seemed difficult for reflective individuals to justify through appeals to logic or scientific evidence. Oppressive because, after reason was put aside, the injunction still remained, backed only by power. (“‘Shut up! My father explained,” as Ring Lardner put it) and sustainable only by virtue of terrifying or, at least, unpleasant sanctions.

Anthropology is no innocent in the modern world. It has played its proper Nietzschean parts in a reality consisting of (and exhausted by) free individuals and mindless nature, in which tradition has become problematic and has been turned into something burdensome to be overcome or as something fanciful or fashionable to be marketed with “arts and leisure.”

Today, anthropology’s favorite Nietzschean role is that of the “ghost buster,” the enlightened critic who steps outside of and transcends his own tradition. Indeed, many anthropologists spend their time promoting free individualism (rebellion and liberation) through the criticism of social institutions and customary practices and by means of the revelatory unmasking of received wisdom, dramatically exposed as phantom culture. Many phantoms have been added to the modernist’s list of things that do not exist except in the minds of their beholders: not only the obvious phantoms such as God, sin, sorcery, witches, and the evil eye but also other phantoms such as childhood, mental illness, sex roles, kinship, sacredness, authority, and even ethnographic writing itself (see, for example, Foucault 1965; Schneider 1984; Clifford and Marcus 1986).

Another favorite Nietzschean role is that of the “psyche analyst.” The “God is dead” presupposition presents anthropologists with the apparent problem of having to explain the imaginary reality-posit, primary-process thinking, and phantom culture of others. Hence the intellectual agenda of the psyche analyst in anthropology: to develop a science of other-than-rational or less-than-rational states of mind (for example, wishing, fantasizing, fearing, the motivational integration of culture) to account for the perplexing worldwide distribution of slavish susceptibility to custom and tradition (see, for example, Whiting and Child 1953; Whiting 1959; Spiro 1965, 1982, 1983).
A Postpositivist Philosophy of Science

Nietzsche probably never realized that he was held prisoner by the phantom of positivism. Through its famous (and somewhat notorious) "verifiability principle" and its demand for "operational definitions," the phantom holds that only seeing is believing and that only the data of the senses should be treated as real. With a wave of its antimetaphysical and atheistic hand the phantom of positivism rejects all unseen postulated forces or entities as nonsense that ought never to play a part in our knowledge of the world. The first commandment of positivism is the prohibition on transcendent entities (Gellner 1985), and the first transcendent entity to go is the idea of a reality hidden behind appearances. (Hence the great risk in positivism that it will devolve into solipsism, for how can I ever know for certain if my appearances-sensations-experiences are the same as yours?)

Bewitched by the phantom, yet faithful to its modernist spirit, Nietzsche reasoned himself into a corner. He forced upon himself, within the terms of positivism's conception of objectivity, a rather unfortunate dichotomous choice.

According to positivism either postulated forces and entities are directly verifiable through observation or experience, or else they are unreal. Nietzsche's forced and unfortunate choice was as follows: either classify people's reality-positis about gods, ghosts, witches, and sin as objective, and hence, in principle, directly accessible to the senses of any (reliable? trained? normal?) observer; or else classify people's reality-positis as subjective or imaginary entities with null reference, projected onto the world.

The rub with the first choice is obvious. To argue that God, ghosts, witches, and sin are objective in that sense (directly perceptible) is, in the modern world, to run the risk of being branded an enemy of reason and common sense, dismissed, denounced, committed, or forced to recant. With sufficient qualification (and ingenuity) that rub can perhaps be smoothed out. But it would require a good deal of other-than-modern and antidemocratic confidence in the fidelity or veracity of the visions, testimonials, and mystical or miraculous experiences of a self-privileged minority who claim to have special or superior powers to see or experience what no one else is able to observe.

That first choice will, of course, seem both plausible and attractive to those who believe in "seers" and in the extraordinary sightedness of "experts" or "virtuosos" credited with a unique ability to make
"contact" and to peer into reality as it really is. The rest of us, however, a diverse collection of modern and postmodern scholars and scientists, admittedly have great difficulty with the idea that knowledge of reality should be established on the basis of "revealed" truths or from the reports of a seer recording his or her visions. Nietzsche's Übermensch was not someone with better eyesight, nor was it someone with keener ears, able to listen carefully to voices that no one else could hear.

The second choice, the "God is dead" alternative, was discussed above. As we have seen, it is not difficult to understand what it means to claim that other people's reality-positives have null reference or exist "only in their heads." In evaluating the cogency of the claim the issue is not one of coherency but rather of the plausibility and acceptability of the consequences of certain presuppositions about the reality-posit of the "other."

In the cases with which I am most familiar (that is, orthodox Hindu conceptions of karma and reincarnating souls: Shweder 1986; Shweder, Mahapatra, and Miller 1987; and Chapters 4 and 6 of this volume) all of the following seems to be true of the reality-posit of the other: (1) the other does not view his or her own ideas as arbitrary, conventional, or consensus-based, or as emotive expressions of imagination, desire, or will; (2) the other believes that her or his reality-positives express significant insights into what the world is like and that the reality posited can be used to illuminate or interpret the facts of experience; (3) the other remains convinced that his or her reality-positives are a form of knowledge about the world, ever after we explain that he is suffering from a deluded false consciousness or that it is all fanciful or made up; and (4) the other does not reason irrationally with her or his ideas (see, for example, Malleus Maleficarum, a closely reasoned treatment of the theory of witchcraft, 1928 [1489]; also Shweder 1986).

The idea is, of course, a familiar one in the modern world that under certain kinds of circumstances certain classes of people may be highly motivated to resist disillusionment and to deny that their consciousness is false. That idea is not incoherent either, and it may even be true in certain fascinating cases. Yet what is the justification for using the idea axiomatically to interpret the long-term refusal of most peoples around the world to abandon their so-called supernatural, phantomlike, metaphysical beliefs (about gods, witches, spirits, fate, and so on)? At this point in the history of modern social science such irrationalist accounts have yet to establish their inherent plausibility through firm empirical backing, and for the most part they have consisted of provocative and sometimes quite spectacular handwaving and much speculation about unseen forces.

Modern thought is also rich in labels ("reification," "naturalization," "naive realism") for the supposed error of taking our "symbols" or reality-positives too directly or too literally, for the supposed mistake of treating our representational scheme as a part of the reality it describes, and for the supposed confusion of conflating the sign with the signified and apprehending our own subjective creation as an objective discovery. Yet, while there are many names for those supposed blunders, there is no convincing explanation for their near universal occurrence. There may even be good reasons to think that the "blunders" themselves are not always blunders (see, for example, Goodman 1968).

Faced with the two unacceptable alternatives posed by positivism's phantom—the choice between reality reduced to perception and the imagination reduced to fancy—a third alternative is to reject them both; or, in this case, to try to struggle free of the phantom's quite special preconception of the idea of objectivity (reality directly observable by means of the senses) found hovering over the alternatives. It should be possible to get free or, in this case, to reconstitute a bond, perhaps an indissociable link, between objectivity and subjectivity without totally destroying either term of their supposed opposition.

Years of postpositivist reflection have yielded an understanding of some of the ways objectivity and subjectivity may need each other and can live together without either pushing the other out, although it may well be an irony in the history of the philosophy of science that, as Michael Friedman (n.d.) has argued, many postpositivists (Michael Polanyi, Thomas Kuhn, N. R. Hanson, Stephen Toulmin, Paul Feyerabend, I. Lakatos, Mary Hesse, Nelson Goodman) have recapitulated ideas already available in positivist circles (for example, the relativistic conclusions of the Marburg school and the doctrine of "logical idealism").

The main thing to be drawn on in postpositivist reflection is a two-sided idea that can be expressed in variant ways as follows. Although (side 1) nothing in particular exists independently of our theoretical interpretation of it (the principle of subject-dependency) and although all theories are inherently underdetermined by the facts (the principle of cognitive undecidability), there still does exist (side 2) the reality and accomplishment of "normal science" operating within the subject-dependent, cognitively undecidable terms of a paradigm.
While, as Toulmin has put it, (side 1) facts are not self-describing, (side 2) neither are theories self-confirming. While (side 1) paradigms may not be fully commensurate or intertranslatable (the principles of holism and incommensurability), (side 2) rationality and a sound reality orientation may not require uniformity or convergence of belief across competent observers. And, by extension, when it comes to the tradition-based reality-positis of the peoples studied by anthropologists, it is the native's success at reasoning with her or his reality-positis and using them to organize and make sense of certain of his or her experiences that lends those theories their authority as accounts of what is natural, real, or objective.

Those, of course, are "big ideas." I cannot argue them here, nor can I undertake to review revisions in the concept of objectivity in contemporary philosophy of science (see Putnam 1981). I cannot even attempt a full-blown explication, much less a systematic defense of the relevant core aphorism for a post-Nietzschean anthropology: reality-testing is a metaphysical (that is, supernatural) act, for every account of reality is built up out of assumptions not directly checkable against observable evidence or deducible from undeniable first principles.

In brief, however, the basic line of argument goes something like this. The postulation of our own internal mental constructs as external forces lending intelligibility to the data of the senses seems to be a central and indispensable feature not only of imaginary, fanciful, hallucinatory, and delusional thinking but of scientific thought as well. What Jacques Derrida (1977) calls the "metaphysics of presence," consisting of all those essential asymmetrical contrasts of the signifier to the signified, the sensible to the intelligible, the immediate to the hidden, the apparent to the real, is not something we can do without, for, as Derrida notes all too briefly in a passing remark, "nothing is conceivable" without it (p. 13). Although reality is not something we can do without, neither can it be reached (for it is beyond experience and transcends appearances) except by an act of imaginative projection implicating the knower as well as the known.

For example, there are several hundred million people in that ideological region known as South Asia who believe in the transmigration of the soul and the continuity of identity across lifetimes (see Chapter 6). Let us try to step inside their world for a moment. Perhaps one reason for the near universal acceptance of the idea of the soul is that it helps conceptualize the intuitive experience of what we in our secular culture call the self, that direct contact we all have with our own "observing ego." In South Asia, among Hindus, that observing ego is conceptualized as a soul or spirit, and all sorts of searching questions are asked about where it comes from, where it is going, and why it is now occupying the body it happens to occupy (Sivananda 1979). It is at this point in the reflective process that the concept of a reincarnating soul is postulated to exist behind or within experience, and the concept is used to explain or make sense of various facts of life.

Ian Stevenson (1977) has itemized some of the facts of life that can be explained by the concept of reincarnation and the idea of the identity of the soul (self) across lifetimes, and I have added to his list other facts that call out for explanation. The explanation by reference to reincarnation is especially powerful for those who are willing to accept as evidence the pervasive intuitive experience of one's own observing ego and for those who have already adopted a conceptual reference point from which souls exist, for whom reincarnation and the transmission of previous experiences across lifetimes are at least theoretical possibilities. Fact: Identical twins reared together not infrequently display marked differences in personality; for example, one but not the other may become schizophrenic. Fact: The personalities of siblings who grow up in the same family are no more similar to each other than are those of random pairs of people drawn from different families. Fact: Children often have fears or phobias that cannot be accounted for by any known trauma and are not shared by any other members of their family. Fact: Children sometimes have skills or talents, such as mathematical or musical abilities, unlike those of their relatives, abilities that could not have been learned through imitation or instruction. Each of these facts seems resistant to either genetic or environmental explanations or else requires a good deal of handwaving by genetic or environmental advocates. But if the qualities of the self and the record of individual experience in previous lives were preserved over rebirths, the facts could be consistently explained (for example, by reference to musical accomplishment in a former life). Add to these facts several not insignificant questions: Why do I feel as though I've met this person before? (Perhaps you did, long long ago.) Why are some people born into wealth, health, and status and others into poverty and sickness? (Perhaps it is a reward or punishment for conduct in a former life.) What are we to make of those cases in which a child claims to have a memory of a former life in another family at another time and many of the details in the child's account of that family turn out to be accurate? (See
either as expressions of the wishes of the dreamer’s soul or as the expressed wishes of some superior spiritual being, and the Iroquois felt under considerable obligation to fulfill those wishes and feared the consequences if they did not (Wallace 1972, p. 69). Iroquois practices were organized (the “Society of the Masks”) so as to make it possible to realize that obligation.

It is not all that hard to convert a dream into a perception; sharing a dream will do it. Wendy O’Flaherty (1984, pp. 71–73), in a discussion of the phenomenological status of dream events, analyzes the idea of a shared dream and relates an example from a short story, “The Brushwork Boy,” by Rudyard Kipling:

A young boy dreamed again and again of a girl with whom he rode on horseback along a beach until a policeman called Day awakened him. He grew up and joined the cavalry in India, where he drew a map of the place in his dream. When he returned to his parents’ home in England, he heard a girl singing a song about the sea of dreams, the city of sleep and the policeman Day; he recognized her as the girl in his dreams. When he told her of his dream, she told him of the boy she had always dreamed of, in the same dream.

Imagine you have a very detailed dream, with a specific cast of characters, a specific location and setting, and a specific sequence of events. The next day you meet someone for the first time whom you recognize as a character in your dream, and she recognizes you as a character in her dream of the night before and accurately describes, in detail, all the dream events. I suspect it is an experience of that magnitude that would be required to convince the Western skeptic that dream events might sometimes originate from without and not from within. But even that experience might be dismissed as insufficient, coincidental, or just uncanny. Yet for those peoples for whom nature is populated with spirits, gods, and goddesses capable of communication from a world beyond (or, in more mystical cultures, from a world within), evidence of that sort is not required, and it seems eminently reasonable to interpret dream images as blurry perceptions or degraded signals received over a noisy channel. There is nothing irrational about the idea that dream events are real. Most people who believe that dream events are real are quite able in other contexts to distinguish fact from fiction, reality from fantasy, and they themselves, as children, probably once believed that dreams were unreal.

Objectivity-seeking science portrays for us a really real external world so as to explain our reality-positis, but it does so by making use

Stevenson 1960 for the documentation of several such cases.) For the believer, the concept of reincarnation is not without explanatory appeal, and in certain communities in South Asia, rationality and objectivity are not inconsistent with its use.

Robin Horton (1967), in effect arguing that there is an indissociable link between science and the metaphysics of presence, aptly makes the point that to construct a scientific theory is to elaborate “a scheme of forces or entities operating ‘behind’ or ‘within’ the world of common-sense observation” (p. 51). Except for the radical and flawed attempt by positivists to proselytize a scientific atheism, in which everything unseen, hidden, or beneath the surface is eliminated from scientific discourse, Horton’s definition does seem to capture a characteristic feature of reality-finding science.

And, as almost all postpositivists now seem to recognize, the postulation of a world of unseen and unseeable forces or entities operating behind the apparent world is not only an indispensable act of interpretation but also a highly discretionary one, only weakly constrained by the content of experience itself.

An interpretative or hermeneutic or projective element (call it what you will) has long since been incorporated into philosophical conceptions of objectivity-seeking science. Any science must address with great respect all our reality-positis, but it would utterly fail as a science if it ever tried to let all those appearances-sensations-experiences speak entirely for themselves, or if it ever let them by their own authority establish themselves as “observations” or “facts” about reality.

Concepts about dreaming provide an illustration. In our culture, dreams have all but lost their place in our lives, and we treat the events in our dreams as either unreal or fanciful. Interestingly, there is cross-cultural developmental evidence that suggests that even in cultures in which adults believe in the reality of dream events, children become disillusioned with their dreams and, by age ten or so, come on their own to view them as fantasies (Kohlberg 1966, 1969; Laurendeau and Pinard 1972; Shweder and LeVine 1975). Yet despite that universal subjectivism of late childhood, there are many cultures in the world in which adults believe in a spiritual world. In those cultures, the reality of dream events is revived for the disillusioned child through exposure by adults to various theories of soul wandering during sleep (Gregor 1981), communications from guardian spirits (Wallace 1972), visions into the netherworld, or recollections of past lives. Among the Iroquois, for example, dreams were viewed...
of our reality-posit in a selective, presumptive, and partial way. One reason for this is that there is no authoritative feature of a reality-posit per se that can certify it as a perception or a witnessing rather than an illusion, or guarantee, for example, that dreaming or imagining is not a form of witnessing or that any particular reality-posit is a fact about the world rather than a feature of our state of mind or an artifact of our measuring instruments.

Were we to judge that a particular reality-posit represented a genuine fact about reality we might be led, if it were an anomalous fact, to alter a conception of the world. Yet, were we to judge that that same reality-posit really represented measurement error, we might dismiss it as insignificant and not treat it as sign or indicator of the world outside our symbolic forms.

Since no reality-finding science can treat all appearances-sensations-experiences as revelatory of the objective world, and since, at least for the moment, no infallible way exists to decide which reality-posit is signs of reality and which are not, much is discretionary in every portrait of the objective world out there beyond our symbolic forms. Reality, after all, for all we can ever really know, may be far away, or deep within, or hidden behind, and thus viewable only "as if through a glass darkly"; or perhaps the really real really is available only through a privileged state of mind (such as deep meditation) attainable only by a privileged few. Perhaps, as some peoples around the world have long suspected, the royal road to reality is through the reality-posit that appear before us while we are asleep or in reverie. The idea that dreaming or imagining is a form of witnessing or perceiving or illuminating deeper truths certainly has a noble and common lineage.

Many postpositivist accounts of the history of scientific knowledge conclude that there may not exist self-validating methods or procedures for establishing the realism of the picture we have painted of the unseen and unseeable entities and forces motivating appearance-sensation-experience. Those historical accounts typically, and quite reasonably, treat the institutionalized sciences of our own society as relatively good examples, or at least as the best examples we have, of reality-finding, objectivity-seeking reality-positing. The accounts try to demonstrate that the notable accomplishments of those sciences are not produced by accumulating a vast corpus of directly observable facts (perceiving that ___ in contrast to imagining that ___), nor are they the products of some standardized or automated rules and procedures for gaining knowledge.

For example, the rule of parsimony or simplicity has often been pointed to as a formal standard for assessing the relative realism or veracity of alternative accounts of what the world is like and for deciding which reality-posit correspond more closely to reality. Yet, as Michael Friedman (n.d.) has pointed out, that standard suffers from deep inadequacies, for "we have no clear account of what such 'simplicity' really comes to nor, more importantly, any assurance that 'simplicity'—whatever it is—is a reliable guide to truth" (p. 18).

The same story seems to hold again and again in the history and philosophy of science. There have been many proposed criteria (reliability or consensus, confirmation through the prediction of other reality-posit, survival through repeated attempts at disconfirmation, parsimony) for assessing the degree of correspondence or realism of a reality-posit to the unseen objective world it purports to represent. Whatever the criterion, there seems to be no way to guarantee that it is a realistic test of similitude. In that regard there is a unity to science, for both the natural sciences and the human sciences lack a standardized or automated methodology.

The postpositivist philosophy of science seems to have two themes, although it is the first theme that has got most, and certainly too much, attention. That celebrated first theme is about the retreat from the idea of a method (the scientific method), which, if diligently and systematically applied, is guaranteed to paint a realistic portrait of the unseen entities and forces controlling the regularities reported through a reality-posit. That theme is about the impossibility of defining, in the abstract, the borders between good science, bad science, nonscience, and imaginary nonsense.

At times the retreat from generalized scientific methodology has had an intoxicating effect. As a consequence of the retreat there has appeared in the minds of some thinkers the specter that objectivity-seeking reality-finding science itself may be false consciousness, totally imaginary, fictive, or delusional, a Nietzschean phantom of mind (see Campbell 1986; Gergen 1986).

There is, I think, a more fruitful path of interpretation to follow, one less cluttered with Nietzkhean (protopositivist) prejudices and far less debunking of the metaphysical or supernatural in science. At least two responses are possible if we accept the postpositivist claim that physics is indissociable from metaphysics, nature indissociable from supernatural, and science indissociable from religion. If you are a positivist, you will respond, "So much the worse for physics, nature, and science." Those Nietzscheans who analyze science as
ideology or false consciousness make manifest that positivistic response. The second possible response is "So much the better for metaphysics, supernatural, and religion," a response that might serve as a post-Nietzschean's postpositivist retort.

Hence the second theme of postpositivist thinking, the one that deserves far more attention. That theme is about the idea that it is not really cause for alarm that good reality-finding science has important elements that are inextricably subjective or discretionary. Only in a world founded on the presuppositions of positivism will it sound facetious, nihilistic, or ironical to argue that out of respect for Darwin (or Freud) disconfirmability ought to be dropped as a necessary feature of good science, or to argue from the history of successful science that it is not always advisable for scientists to stick to the presumed facts or to strive for agreement on the meaning of core concepts.

In a postpositivist world, or at least in a defensible postpositivist world, that same argument ought to be construed in quite a different way. Postpositivists are no less concerned with what is real than are the positivists, and among sensible postpositivists it is understood that science is good and successful. Yet in a postpositivist world it is also understood that it is possible for us to have important knowledge of the world even if the objective world is subject-dependent and multiplex and even if we give up trying to describe the world independently of our involvement with it or reactions to it or conceptions of it. Hence, the continental chorus singing with Kuhnian overtones that it is our prejudices and partialities that make it possible for us to see, if not everything, then at least something.

Accordingly, it is a core aphorism for the post-Nietzschean position advocated here that the objective world is incapable of being represented completely if represented from any one point of view, and incapable of being represented intelligibly if represented from all points of view at once.

The real trick and the noble challenge for the post-Nietzschean is to view the objective world from many points of view (or from the point of view of each of several prejudices), but to do it in sequence. The proper aim within each point of view is to adopt the stance of what Hilary Putnam has called an "internal realist" ("normal science" operating within the terms of some paradigm), seeing as best one can with the received dogma of the moment. The challenge is always to feel eager to move on to some other worldview, in hot pursuit of the echo of Nelson Goodman's (1984) siren song: "One might say there is only one world but this holds for each of the many worlds" (p. 278).

Mary Hesse, who in her essay "In Defense of Objectivity" (1972) has tried to inform subjectivists and other hermeneutic critics of science that their conception of objectivity-seeking science is about a century out of date, has some stimulating and provocative things to say about divergences in thinking in modern physics. She points out that the description of real-world essences in modern physics has been neither cumulative nor convergent: "The succession of theories of the atom, and hence the fundamental nature of matter, for example, exhibits no convergence, but oscillates between continuity and discontinuity, field conceptions and particle conceptions, and even speculatively among different typologies of space" (p. 282). Other philosophers (for example, Goodman 1984) have recommended for modern physics a policy of "judicious vacillation" between "a world of waves and a world of particles as suits one's purposes (p. 278)." With judicious vacillation one gains access to multiple objective worlds.

There are three implications, as I understand them, to Hesse's observation about divergences in thinking in physics, and none of them is that modern physics has been impeded in its progress or that scientific thinking is a whimsical or nihilistic or ideological process.

One implication is that convergence in imaginative projections about the unseeable or hidden or lurking behind the evidence of the senses is not an essential element of mature scientific thinking. A second implication is that any established and successful vision of what is real is indissociably linked to judgments that are discretionary and presumptive, and that there is thus legitimate scope for disagreement or divergence in world pictures among quite "hard-nosed" reality-seeking scientists, lay or professional. A third implication is that one of the great challenges for any science is to find some way to represent, describe, and explain the multiplicity of the objective world. Of what does that multiplicity consist?

The message of all this for dedicated Nietzscheans is that it is time to shed our skin and adopt a new philosophy of science. It is time to move from the modern into the postmodern era. In a post-Nietzschean world informed by postpositivist conceptions, objectivity, truth, and reality are inextricably associated with, and are not possible without, something prior contributed by the subject. Nothing intelligible remains of reality once we have "corrected" for all the
possible prejudgments or biases of the observer, for all conceptions of reality are, in some measure, irrepressible acts of imaginative projection across the inherent gap between appearance and reality.

In that post-Nietzschean world God is not dead; only positivism and monotheism are dead. Polytheism is alive and well. Its doctrine is the relativistic idea of multiple objective worlds, and its commandment is participation in the never-ending process of overcoming partial views.

Quite rightly there are moderns who will worry about the subordination of the individual with that return of the gods. Yet, in that polytheistic post-Nietzschean world there still remains reason not to be a slave to the received wisdom of tradition. That reason, however, is not that tradition is unreal or fantastic or fictive or empty in its reference. The real reason is that any single tradition is partial, for each tradition is only one piece of reality brought out into high consciousness and enshrined in local doctrine or dogma. The aim for the post-Nietzschean, then, is identical with one of the aims of good anthropology: to be the student and beneficiary of all traditions, and the slave to none.

Perhaps that is a new thing for Nietzscheans: transcendence without superiority, scorn, or cynicism and without the degrading of tradition; and perhaps it is that newness that should recommend it if you are a Nietzschean.

Transcendence without scorn is the kind of transcendence that comes from constantly moving from one objective world to the next, inside and then out, outside and then in, all the while standing back and trying to make sense of the whole journey. It is a state of mind in which there is a detached engagement with each of several traditions, which promotes an engaging detachment from each of one’s many selves.

To orthodox Nietzscheans that state of mind of detached engagement will, no doubt, seem far too involved with, and constrained by, the mundane practices of the everyday world, especially in comparison to the state of mind contemplated by Nietzschean ascetics (the ecstatic otherworldliness of the transcendence into pure spirit) or the state of mind contemplated by Nietzschean nihilists (the this-worldly freedom of the transcendence into pure individualism).

Yet, in a postpositivist world that is what an enlightened and noble anthropology ought to be about, at least in part—going to some faraway place where you honor and take “literally” (as a matter of belief) those alien reality-positis in order to discover other realities hid-

den within the self, waiting to be drawn out into consciousness. In reality the transcendent and the immanent are not that far apart, as polytheistic relativists (and mystics, I am told) come to know.

As for those who fear that if truth is not unitary, then nihilism will reign and that polytheism is merely a code word for anarchy, it is comforting to remind ourselves, again and again, that the fact that there is no one uniform reality (God, foundation, truth) does not mean that there are no realities (gods, foundations, truths) at all.

The Ancient Role of the Casuist

To be a Nietzschean ascetic or liberationist is to be suspicious of pious devotion to tradition or custom. Held hostage, historically, to a positivist conception of reality (only seeing is believing) and a null-reference (phantom) conception of culture, Nietzscheans have not held it legitimate to provide a rational justification for custom or to take seriously the substance or content of other peoples’ so-called supernatural or metaphysical beliefs.

The scope for a Nietzschean anthropology is broadened in a post-positivist world, as the rationalization of custom and tradition becomes a legitimate objective, and as there emerges a type of relativist doctrine (ontological polytheism) in which realism and rationality are compatible with the idea of multiple worlds.

For if there is no reality without metaphysics, and if each reality-testing metaphysics (that is, each culture or tradition) is but a partial representation of the multiplicity of the objective world, it becomes possible to transcend tradition by showing how each tradition lights some plane of reality but not all of it. Since each is but a partial representation, it must be transcended. Since each is a representation of reality, it lends itself to a process of rational reconstruction through which it may become an object of respect.

The art of rational reconstruction is an ancient one, sometimes referred to as casuistry, and it is a modern role for the “casuist” that a post-Nietzschean anthropology needs to reconstruct.

It is ironic that in postmodern times the practice of casuistry has retained its medieval stigma of disrepute, connoting a degenerate and deceptive ability through adroit rationalization to justify anything or to defend any exotic practice, act, or point of view. It is ironic because what the medieval church saw as the corruption in casuistry is, in the contemporary world, no longer a sinful thing.

It was in the late Middle Ages that casuistry first got a bad reputa-
tion, and ever since it has had terrible press. Blaise Pascal described casuistry as the sophistical evasion of the word of God, and it is not too difficult to understand why.

During the late Middle Ages there was a point of view according to which sadness was thought to be a cardinal sin, as though to be disdained was an insult to God. In a world with a God so prone to take offense, the practice of casuistry was naturally very risky; for what could be more irritating to a superior being, confident of his own omniscience, than to have some casuist intent on the corrosion of dogma step forward with a nimble defense of some alternative point of view? The supposed corruption in casuistry is its corrosion of dogma, which today, at least in the democracies of the world, ought to be a virtue. Apparently it takes a long time to overcome the effects of a reckless press.

In fact the much-maligned casuists of the Middle Ages were serious scholars at medieval universities who had the temerity to try to come up with a rational justification for tradition and for those seemingly arbitrary ritual observances and ecclesiastical rules that others slavishly accepted on faith or church authority. What made the casuists such a pain in the neck for the medieval church was that eventually the casuists were able to come up with compelling rational justifications for opposition to authority, for disrespect of fixed or formal rules, and for the adoption of alternative traditions and practices.

Perhaps the most famous casuist of the Middle Ages was Peter Abelard (the so-called "Socrates of the Gauls"), the twelfth-century theologian, logician, and canon of Notre Dame, whose passionate life has been immortalized in the love letters of Héloïse. The young Abelard, a master at rationalization, not only talked Héloïse into the virtue of giving up her virginity; he also reasoned his way into several heresies.

Abelard had a knack for infuriating the authorities and promulgators of dogma in the church. He wandered around France wondering out loud how to reconcile divine oneness with the existence of a trinity, and embarrassing his superiors and teachers with puzzles about the one and the many, uniformity and multiplicity, the same and the different, the universal and the particular. He compiled for himself a collection of authoritative, yet diametrically opposed, opinions on points of church doctrine, with the implication that the discrepancies in interpretation could not be reconciled into a single homogeneous truth. Distrustful of any attempt to canonize morality as a set of fixed and general principles, such as "It is wrong to lie," he kept coming up with exceptional cases that did not fit the rule. He reasoned himself to the view that there could be no culpability for sin if we do not intend to transgress; good intentions and personal conscience, he argued, take precedence over deeds and external observances. He nearly turned the church into a debating club, with adversaries outdoing each other with ingenious justifications for the sometimes baffling and seemingly pointless rules and prohibitions set forth in scripture.

Not surprisingly, many twelfth-century ecclesiastics hated Abelard, with a passion. He was persecuted by St. Bernard, who saw madness as the outcome of Abelard's methods—a calculus for heresy. To his critics, Abelard, the apparent nihilist, seemed to be saying that if our conscience does not bother us, we can do whatever we want. As the church viewed it, by the time Abelard finished an exegesis of a sacred text, the words of God had been erased through interpretation. In 1121 his book Divine Unity and Trinity was burned at an ecclesiastical council. The pope condemned him and kept him quiet by issuing an injunction against his lecturing. And, as we all know with amazement and perhaps with horror, Héloïse's uncle, a canon of the church, took care of Abelard's manhood—divine emasculation on behalf of an exasperated and tongue-tied God.

It would seem from the example of Abelard that casuistry, at its very best, is antidogmatic and quite risky, surprising and deceptive in its ways of seeing, agile and on the move against any single fixed point of view or frame of reference. It presses irreverence into the service of reality, in recognition of the idea that it is only by constantly switching frames that we honor the multiplex world.

Abelard, of course, was not the first casuist, for it is an ancient role. There is casuistry in the talmudic commentaries, where for every letter of the law there are always two or more spirits, or rabbis, with quite alternative views of what it all means.

And the Stoics and the Sophists knew of casuistry. I once was told a story (perhaps apocryphal) about a Greek philosopher who was invited to Rome to give two lectures to the imperial elite. Weary of the single-mindedness, smugness, and absolutism of Roman domination, our speaker anticipated Abelard's tactics. In the morning he expounded the thesis that human society is analogous to the societies of ants and bees and other animal societies, and that even monkeys have a military hierarchy and chain of command. A brilliant lecture shedding much light on human behavior that was well received. In the afternoon, refusing to let any one viewpoint of reality reign, he expounded the contrary thesis that human society and animal society are not analogous, and that animals are fundamentally different from
people. After all, animals have no language or conscience, and they certainly do not know how to cook. The philosopher, obviously a casuist at heart, found himself imprisoned for irreverence.

It is perhaps fortunate for contemporary anthropologists that irreverence is the first commandment of the postmodern world, and that once again the role of the jester has become an admired one, as we have remembered at long last the importance of living ironically and by our wits. Thus there was no church injunction against lecturing, indeed it was by invitation, when in 1983 Clifford Geertz delivered the annual Distinguished Lecture, titled "Anti Anti-Relativism," to the American Anthropological Association (Geertz 1984). One point of the lecture was to rally anthropologists to the task of challenging the received and unquestioned assumptions and classifications of our own contemporary empire. (I have tried my hand at it here.) Unlike Abelard, Geertz walked off the stage unharmed, to applause. What used to be a medieval heresy is now one of several currents in a contemporary discipline called anthropology, in which, barring the reappearance of a St. Bernard, casuists can now practice their art or alchemy without stigma on the same stage as the ghost busters and psyche analysts.