"Why Do Men Barbecue?" and Other Postmodern Ironies of Growing up in the Decade of Ethnicity
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Source: Daedalus, Vol. 122, No. 1, America's Childhood (Winter, 1993), pp. 279-308
Published by: The MIT Press on behalf of American Academy of Arts & Sciences
Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/20027159
Accessed: 10-09-2018 14:35 UTC
"Why Do Men Barbecue?" and Other Postmodern Ironies of Growing Up in the Decade of Ethnicity

PREAMBLE

I once had lunch with Margaret Mead at an American Anthropological Association meeting. It was a round-table event. The year was 1971. Someone asked her, "Which society is the best place to raise children?" "Not so fast," Mead replied. "It depends if it is a boy or a girl. If it's a boy I would raise him in England, send him off to one of those public schools and get him away from his mother. If it's a girl I would raise her in America, right here, right now in the thick of the women's liberation movement. This is the best time ever for a girl to be alive."

I do not know how Margaret Mead would reply to that same question today, twenty years later, when the images of reality and ideals for flourishing made up by the women's movement are so various (from liberal feminism to tantric goddess worship, from inventing "parenting" to rediscovering "motherhood") and when the very idea of what it means to grow up as an American is being contested along religious, racial, and ethnic lines.

But I think I know how I would reply: There is no single best place to be raised, whether you are a boy or girl, but one of the really good places to be raised is any place where you learn that there is no single best place to be raised, whether you are a boy or a girl. I call that place "postmodern humanism," and in this essay I try to take you there.

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The essay is not directly about "America's Childhood." It is about the way "difference" is pathologized, medicalized, demonized or criminalized in public policy debates about normal family life, healthy life styles, and proper ways for parents to bring up their children. It is about the Puritanism inherent in the desires of those in the public health and public policy arena who want to make progress against the male-female relationships, kinship traditions, sexual patterns, and family life practices of whole segments of American society. It is about the responsibilities of an anthropology and cultural psychology of childhood in the postmodern world. It is about the ironies of life in America in its decade of ethnicity.

"IT'S A CULTURAL THING"

It is widely known that at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland the 1990s is the decade of the brain and the genome project. Less widely appreciated is the fact that at many other institutions where research agendas are discussed and defined, the 1990s is the decade of ethnicity and world culture comparisons. For a variety of reasons—the long-term consequences of the 1964 United States Immigration Laws and the debates over "multiculturalism"; the decline in the authority of the hegemonic bureaucratic state and the reemergence of primordial "tribal" identifications; the economic success associated with the practices and values of Japanese society—there is a mounting concern in the social science academy to examine ethnic, cultural, class, and gender-based diversity in health and human development outcomes, to "internationalize" or diversify social and psychological theory, and to raise questions about "voice" and "authority" in the authorship of science. In forums such as the Social Science Research Council, the Russell Sage Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation, the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, and among others, difficult and even unsettling questions about the facts of cultural variety are being posed as the social sciences undertake to develop new theoretical and ethical conceptions of diversity based on recent research.

Another sign of these times in which questions of ethnicity and cultural differences are very much in the air is the reemergence of a new interdisciplinary subfield called "cultural psychology" at the interface of anthropology, psychology, and linguistics. Cultural psychology is concerned with the way culture and psyche make each
other up. It seeks to understand why so many apparently straightforward questions about human psychological functioning (for example, Under what conditions does classroom learning take place?; Are there basic human emotions?; What is the relationship between the sacred and the profane in human choice behavior?) have not resulted in consensual responses among qualified scientists, and why so many generalizations about the cognitive, emotional, and somatic functioning of one particular and very self-privileging population (the contemporary, secularized, urban Euro-American white middle class) have not traveled well across sociocultural, historical, and institutional fault lines.

The premises of cultural psychology are pluralistic in spirit—there is no single population, for example, urban white middle-class Euro-Americans, whose experiences, practices, and ideals can be presumed to be a universal normative base line for health and human development—that Western social science theories are codifications of Western perspectives which may have integrity as ethnotheories but should not be universally authorized over the various other ethnopsychological and ethnosociological theories of the world.

I have been inspired to write this essay by the very idea of a discipline called cultural psychology, by my enthusiasm for its mission to "internationalize" social and psychological theory, and by my belief that in the postmodern world no mission can be important that is lacking in irony.

This essay is in three parts. Its final concern is to discuss the importance of anthropology and cultural psychology as antidotes to the neo-Puritanism of current public policy debates about family life practices and children's lives in the United States. The intermediate concern of the essay is to focus the discussion of family life on the gender ideologies of different ethnic groups. The essay begins, however, by locating anthropology and cultural psychology within the context of contemporary postmodern discourse, a discourse which is by character, if not by nature, deeply ironical.

In this case, the irony begins with the very idea of the "internationalization" of social and psychological theory. One quickly discovers in multicultural and international arenas that, from the perspective of many scholars and intellectuals from Third World countries, to "internationalize" theory means to have access to Western journals, institutions, and resources and to contribute au-
thoritatively to the formation of precisely that social science theory in the West which many First World intellectuals in New York, Boston, and Chicago view as ethnocentric. From the perspective of many First World scholars and intellectuals, however, to "internationalize" theory is to give voice to precisely those Third World indigenous theories and paradigms which many Third World intellectuals view as backward, superstitious, fundamentalist, and archaic.

Over the last few years, at various meetings of men and women and representatives of majority and minority groups from First and Third World countries, I have found that the indigenous "voice" of the Third World is most likely to be voiced by a Westerner, while the voice of Western theory often comes straight out of Africa or Japan. The effect of all that intellectual place switching is to induce a sense of metaphysical jet lag across genders, cultures, and continents and to open up a conversation about the full range of interpretive possibilities for thinking about the significance of "difference." At such meetings, phrases such as "speaking as a woman," "speaking as a man," "speaking as a Westerner" take on new meaning, which is to say no meaning at all, as a multiplicity of perspectives dissolves any unitary voice. Tongues keep getting twisted in the middle of every pitch. As we enter the 1990s, the time has become ripe for a heightened self-consciousness about the ironical nature of "difference" in this decade of ethnicity and world culture comparisons.

The essay that follows is informal and literary in style, which is one way to be serious when taking a look at the sardonic face of the diversity of intellectual and political viewpoints in the postmodern world. The usual disclaimers apply. As I try to give character to the problem of diversity and the voice of irony, I will be advocating a position which might be described as postmodern humanism or "universalism without the uniformity." Because it is no longer possible these days for any one person to speak with a single voice, I cannot pretend to speak for everyone else, for anyone else or even for all sides of my self. The best I can do is try to speak for one kind of citizen in our ethnically self-conscious world.

How ethnically self-conscious? I recently found myself in the American West in the Salt Lake City Airport, in transit, where I was unable to locate a single Hispanic person and the only African-American in sight was Michael Jordon, on the television screen in the airport bar. Feeling a bit oppressed by the conspicuous racial and
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ethnic homogeneity of the place, I boarded my plane. As the steward served drinks, the pilot's voice came over the public address system. The pilot made the usual welcoming remarks, concluding his speech with these words: "If us in the cockpit can help, please let us know." I smiled at the steward and asked, "Did he really say if us in the cockpit can help..." The steward replied, "It's a cultural thing, as you will see when you leave the plane." Could it be that the concept of "culture," expressed through a catch phrase ("it's a cultural thing"), has begun to emerge as a progressive lay idea and perhaps even as a partial antidote to racist interpretations of "difference"? In the contemporary world, it is us experts in the cockpit who are in danger of lagging behind, unless we can find a way to map anthropology into the emerging postmodern scene.

THE POSTMODERN SCENE: SANTA CLAUS NAILED TO A CROSS

Perhaps there was a time in the mythic past when the anthropological "other" was pristine, unitary, alien, and lived very far away. If so, things have changed. In the postmodern world that commerce has helped to create, the anthropological "other" is sophisticated, multiplex, near at hand, and deeply embedded in the bureaucratic institutions of the world system. Anthropology is no longer the discipline that adduces good reasons for the customs of others, which they cannot adduce for themselves. United Airlines, CNN, a Visa card, and Western perspectives have usually gotten there first, or are soon to arrive, and encounters between cultures over questions of "authority," "voice," and "paradigm comparisons" more often than not have the feel of a segment from the Monty Python Show.

A few years ago, for example, I heard a story from Clifford Geertz about a visitor to Japan who wandered into a department store in Tokyo, at a time when the Japanese had begun to take a great interest in the symbolism of the Christmas season. And what symbol of the Christmas season did the visitor discover prominently on display in the Tokyo department store? Santa Claus nailed to a cross!

When I first heard that story, I opened a "Santa Claus nailed to a cross" file, which has grown over the years. Some people think that in the postmodern world words have no reference or validity and you can never know quite what you are talking about. When I look at my file, I feel reassured that in our postmodern world truth is still
stranger than fiction, even as it has become more difficult to pin things down. Here are some other entries from the file.

There is an entry about a South Asian Indian woman, married to an American, who applied for US citizenship so that her father who had lived all his life in the Third World could join the American Peace Corps. At the final stage of being “naturalized” in New York, the immigration officer said to her, “Do you swear that you will bear arms in defense of the Constitution of the United States?” Compounding the irony of her situation she replied, “No, I won’t do that.” He asked, “What do you mean?” She said, “I am a pacifist. I don’t believe in killing.” He said, “Who taught you that?” She said, “Mahatma Gandhi.” He said, “Who is he?” She said, “A great Indian religious leader.” He said, “Well, you will have to get a note from him.” She said, “I can’t, he is dead.” He said, “Well, get a note from whoever took his place.”

There is a parallel entry in my file about an American scholar trained as a “symbolic anthropologist” who sought official research permission to do work among the Maori people of New Zealand. As part of the official procedure he found himself interrogated by a “native,” a Maori with an Oxford Ph.D. in anthropology, who was a gatekeeper for the tribe and who had some doubts about the “Chicago school” of symbolism as a way to represent the beliefs and practices of “others.”

There is an entry in my file about a prominent member of an East African tribe, a professional philosopher, who had an interest in reviving traditional practices. As it turned out, the old ways and customs had been discarded and forgotten even by the elders of his tribe. The main repository of knowledge about the past was located in ethnographies published in Europe and the United States. He realized he needed a Western anthropologist as a consultant. He had no difficulty finding someone to take the job.

There is an entry about the origin of the English word “juggernaut,” which is used in the Anglo-American world to mean “a massive inexorable force or object that crushes anything that is in its path.” It just so happens that Juggernaut lives in a temple in the town of Puri on the East Coast of India about 40 miles from where I do anthropological fieldwork. He is in fact a beneficent god, the ninth reincarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu, the protector of the universe. Once a year Juggernaut gets sick, recovers from his illness, and then
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go on a vacation to visit his maternal aunt at her temple a mile or so down the road. A huge chariot is built for the occasion (in fact three chariots because he is accompanied by his sister and half-brother). Hundreds of thousands of pilgrims come to Puri on the designated day in June or July to pull the chariot and gain religious merit. It is a wild topsy-turvy event, full of jest, complaint, and celebration in which all caste boundaries are relaxed and everyone is equal before god. Occasionally in the tumult someone is injured (and in the past perhaps even killed) under the wheels of the chariots. When, during colonial rule, the British first witnessed the event, they mistook it for a human sacrifice. Hence the image, now enshrined in the English language, of a vicious yet irresistible force crushing things in its wake. Sometimes when one gazes from a distance through ethnocentric lenses across ethnic fault lines things can seem quite the opposite from what they are.

There is an entry in my file about the organizers of a cultural festival in Los Angeles, who lost funding from the Korean government when they decided to “represent” Korea with a performance by indigenous shamans rather than with the ballet company proposed by the Korean government. The Thai community of Los Angeles was also offended because the festival featured a classical dance troupe from Cambodia but only popular street theater from Thailand. The distinction between high and low, primitive and modern is not peculiar to the West. It seems that these days it is largely in the West that people get nervous when the idea of a hierarchy of taste and value is invoked. We prefer to talk about “popular” culture.

There is an entry about all those incredible ethnographic accounts from New Guinea, where in the highlands the men avoid women, and in the lowlands young men inseminate each other in homosexual rites, and here and there married men, loathing the pollution of the sexual act, induce themselves to vomit or bleed their noses after making love to their wives and before returning to the men’s hut. Such accounts have had prominence in the lore of anthropology, yet, after a few years of contact with the West, almost everything that was exotic about New Guinea seems to have disappeared. Anthropologists go back to their field sites to discover that no one knows the names for plants anymore or cares very much for the old rituals. Everyone is going to school so that they can have access to jobs, manufactured goods, and T-shirts from the “Hard Rock Cafe.”
sexual symbolism and avoidance customs of the culture seemed very deep indeed, until they just went away.

There is an entry in my file drawn from a New York Times review of a Bill Moyers’ program “The Arab World,” which the reviewer, Walter Goodman, describes as “a benign attempt to counter the stereotype of the ugly Arab that has been circulating in recent years.” Various scholars of, and spokespersons for, the Middle East argue that apparent emblems of oppression (for example, the female head scarf) are merely a matter of style, that Christianity and Islam share the same fundamental ideals, and that the Arab world is on the road to democracy and social justice. The reviewer notes that “… Mr. Moyers seems glad to hear the good news” and that the effect of the program “is as intellectually stimulating as one of those ‘we’re all different but we’re all the same’ celebrations in junior high school.”

And there are many personal entries. In 1982, for example, I was living in what I thought was a relatively remote district of India when television first landed. It immediately became a dowry item in arranged marriages and a basic necessity demanded by women in purdah. I was invited to watch the unveiling of a television set in a traditional household. What was the first image to appear on the tube? An old segment from “I Love Lucy.” Lucy was out on a blind date with a duck hunter. I was asked to explain.

Some time later I was in Manhattan watching cable television with a parochial “Westerner.” As I flipped stations what did I discover? News from New Delhi and a segment from the Hindu epic The Ramayana. I was asked to explain. I flipped channels again. There was a Japanese soap opera, heavily scripted with facial displays of shyness, embarrassment, and self-effacing apologetic dialogue (“I am sorry for dominating our children,” and “I am sorry for this and especially sorry for that.”). With “public access” to our living rooms, there is more and more to explain, and it is less and less clear how to take a stand on questions of fact and value without seeming hegemonic, dogmatic or prejudiced. It is less and less clear whether prejudgment is always such a bad thing.

My friend, the literary critic, Anatole Broyard used to tell his writing students, “Hang on to your prejudices, they are the only taste you have got.” Almost everyone in the academy these days has heard of the continental dictum that it is our prejudices that make it possible for us to see, which means that in thinking, as in life, if you...
do not fix a starting point you'll never get started. Broyard, who sensed our postmodern predicament and knew how to express it with grace and wit, formulated the aphorism this way: "Paranoids are the only ones who notice things anymore." Nietzsche-like he understood that any prejudice is better than no prejudice at all, and that in a postmodern world of cable television and metaphysical jet lag, the best one can do is stay on the move, keeping your options for prejudice open while developing some sensibility or at least some good sense.

Unfortunately too many have misunderstood such exciting deconstructive insights. They have drawn the conclusion that the authority of a voice or viewpoint has little to do with what is said and everything to do with who says it. They have overlooked the fact that you do not have to be a Westerner or a male to articulate a Western or masculine perspective, and that most Westerners and most males are not very good at it anyhow. Authoritative voices, one is tempted to say, speak for the muse, and you know such voices speak for the muse not because of who they are, least of all their social designation, but because what they say binds you to a reality.

So, with regard to the problem of "difference," what are the options for prejudice, the starting points, the interpretive moves, the authoritative voices on the current theory scene?

One option, and it is an option with a distinguished pedigree, is to reify the other. That is the approach of most "structuralisms" and other modernist accounts of "otherness." When I visited with Claude Levi-Strauss for the first and only time in Paris in 1990, he told me that he hears the term "postmodern" all the time but does not understand what it means, and that he would have preferred to live before the twentieth century, before the postmodern era. "But where in the world would you have preferred to live in the past?," I asked, thinking of Athens in the fifth century B.C., India at the time of Buddha, and all those famous cultures of the world—the Nuer, the Dani, the Bororo, the Samoans, the Trobriand Islanders—studied by anthropologists. "In France, of course," Levi-Strauss replied. "Why France?," I asked. "Because French subjectivity is the only subjectivity I can ever understand," he replied. "But what about all those other cultures you have studied all your life? Can't you enter into their subjectivity?," I asked. "No," he replied: "I can only understand other cultures as objects, not as subjects."
I had a better understanding of postmodernism after that meeting with Levi-Strauss. If postmodern scholarship has done nothing else, it has reduced the distance between the subjectivity of the anthropologist and his or her anthropological object (or is it "subject"?) and persuaded us to revalue the here and the there, the then and the now, the self and the other as an artful (not "literal" and certainly not "fanciful") product of the human imagination. Within the terms of that artful project there are other options for the representation of self and otherness besides treating the other as a thing.

One option is to treat the other as really very much like the self. There are anthropologists—Roger Keesing of Australia National University is among the most articulate—who believe that the differences between peoples have been exaggerated by anthropologists, that anthropologists "choose the most exotic possible cultural data" as their texts and "give them the most exotic possible readings," and that there is a kind of primary knowledge of the world shared by all peoples, a common sense that is both common and sensible.

A second option is to treat the other as an unsophisticated version of the self, as the dark age, superstitious and confused predecessor to our enlightenment. Ernest Gellner of the University of Cambridge is a colorful exponent of this developmental point of view, which argues that the world woke up and became good for the first time in the West about three hundred years ago, when magic disappeared and when it was finally realized that sticks and stones can break your bones but words can never harm you. Gellner's view plays rather poorly in the capitals of Western anthropology, where the idea of constituted realities, performative utterances, and other forms of "word magic" are very much in vogue, but rather well in the relatively disenchanted capitals of the Third World, among the Westernized or Westernizing elite.

A third option is to go native or indigenous, as articulated by my University of Chicago colleague McKim Marriott:

. . . the social sciences used in India today have developed from thought about Western, rather than Indian cultural realities. As a result although they pretend to universal applicability, the Western sciences often do not recognize and therefore cannot deal with the questions to which many Indian institutions are answers.
Marriott went on to argue that “All social sciences develop from thought about what is known to particular cultures and are thus ‘cultural’ or ‘ethno-’ social sciences in their origins. All are initially parochial in scope.” He proposed for India a new set of social science concepts and ideas derived from the parochial realities known to Indian people.

The irony of Marriott’s approach, which has not gone unnoticed in India, is that Marriott is an “outsider” who seems more appreciative of the indigenous perspective of “others” than are many “insiders,” who are in fact members of the Westernizing elite. But that is just the beginning of the irony. The “insiders,” mostly literati who are somewhat distanced from the traditional cultural realities that Marriott has in mind, disagree with each other about who is really “inside.” Do “Indian cultural realities” sum up to a Hindu social science or a Muslim social science? And what about the Jains? Who gets credit for it? And how can Marriott even understand Indian ethnosociology unless he is in some sense an “insider” too. Perhaps the distinction between inside and outside is not so clear, as any respectable Indian ethnotheory ought to assert. Perhaps parochial concepts and ideas can, after all, actually have a more universal appeal.

Indeed, at the end of his essay Marriott himself contrasts “conventional Western social science,” which he believes grows out of Western theology, law, and common sense, with “the [Western] findings of current linguistics, of molecular and atomic physics, of ecological biology, and of social systems theory,” which he believes are quite compatible with the parochial assumptions of a Hindu social science. In the end—if there is an end—it turns out that the radical relativism of Marriott’s ethnotheory agenda is merely apparent, for if we look in the right place, the parochial “other” can be found well within ourselves.

In other words, in this postmodern ironical world that international trade has helped to create in which the inside is out (Coca Cola is everywhere) and the outside is in (the Japanese own Rockefeller Center), a new kind of humanism has begun to emerge. Going native amounts to traveling abroad or across ethnic boundaries to find some suppressed aspect of the self valued and on public display in another land or neighborhood, which one can then bring back as theoretical or cultural critique. The unity of human beings is no longer to be found in that which makes us common and all the same, but rather in a universal original multiplicity which makes each of us so
variegated that "others" become fully accessible and imaginable to us through some aspect or other of our own complex self.

Postmodern humanism—this universalism without the uniformity—challenges us to do several apparently contradictory things. The contradiction is, however, merely apparent because we never do those things all at once, or with the same breath or in the same frame of reference. Postmodern humanism advises us to restrict the scope of our generalizations to local cultural worlds. It grants us permission to cultivate our prejudices so that we can see (there is something to be said in favor of "close mindedness," as a limit on nihilism). Yet it also entices us to stay on the move between alternative prejudices, leaving ourselves open to be astonished by the integrity and value of alien things. It seeks to move the human imagination across great divides in cultural tastes, likes, preferences, and sensibilities, to make it possible for us to comprehend and value each other without requiring that we be the same. It still remains to be seen how this postmodern humanism—this universalism without the uniformity—will fully take shape and for which tribes it will be seen as a thing of great worth.

WHY DO MEN BARBECUE?: NOMADIC VERSUS SETTLED SENSIBILITIES

On a worldwide and historical scale, one of the greatest divides in cultural sensibilities is over the nature and significance of gender relationships and their implications for family life and the rearing of children. Across that divide—a divergence in tastes, likes, and preferences that has been replicated within contemporary American society—we confront each other as alien beings, lacking integrity and value. In what follows I try to restore some value and integrity to the alien voices on both sides of the fault line, by privileging a postmodern humanistic voice and staying on the move between different subcultural realities. It is in the nature of things in the postmodern world that if I manage to succeed at all, my success can only be partial.

In this section of the essay I will propose a distinction between nomadic versus settled sensibilities. The proposal is an idealization, or more accurately a typification of the ideas and ideals of two kinds of cultural worlds. I am going to build a hypothetical model of two types of tastes.
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As everyone knows, Ruth Benedict distinguished Appolonian from Dionysian sensibilities. More useful, however, I believe, in the grand historical scheme of things and as a key to the varieties of contemporary cultural sensibilities and judgments, is the distinction between nomadic versus settled sensibilities. Putting aside everything else, it seems reasonable to imagine that everything follows from that distinction.

A nomadic sensibility does not like a distinction to settle in or become neatly bounded; while, in contrast, a settled sensibility does not like a distinction to wander or become blurred. Thus, one way to classify a people or ethnic group as nomadic or settled is to find out how they handle a fundamental social distinction like male versus female or parent versus child. What, for example, do they do with boys and girls as they enter puberty? Do they push them together or do they pull them apart? If there is any single best key to cultural sensibilities, I would wager that is the one.

Some ethnic groups, those with nomadic sensibilities, not wanting a distinction to settle in, seem to take a special pride in pushing little boys and girls together as they mature. Along with puberty comes parties, dating, “going together,” dancing, kissing games. Later it is “human kind” instead of “mankind,” “parenting” instead of “mothering,” “it” instead of he or she, grown-ups holding hands in public, and adults who now come in “couples,” sleeping together exclusively in the same room and preferably in the same bed. Then the penultimate collapse of the barrier between female and male space: male occupation of the kitchen—indoor cooking human style. Liberal feminists (who are sometimes disparaged by other feminists as “me too” feminists) are appreciative of such groups.

Other ethnic groups, those with settled sensibilities, are more fond of the potentialities for symbolism latent in the contrast between male and female. They take special pride in the difference and separateness of the realms. Along with puberty comes menstrual seclusion, purdah, female cults, female secrets, a muse, a temptress, a witch. The very ground on which you walk becomes a goddess or an earth mother. Later, men and women avoid each other, husband and wife keep their distance, at least in public. Men have their clubs, houses, and rituals, and perhaps even a room or bed of their own. Women do not barbecue. Men stay out of the kitchen. Ecological feminists,
goddess worshipers, and other "tantrics" are fascinated by such groups, in which there is no way to simply "add women and stir."

The distinction between nomadic versus settled sensibilities is, of course, about ideal types, not pure empirical realities, and, of course (it ought to go without saying) there is much that cannot be captured by any simple dichotomy. In the multiethnic pluralistic society that is America today, there are residues and cultural trace elements from many different times and places. While it is important in understanding our contemporary society to recognize that there has been no uniform meltdown of cultural tastes into a single American ideal, it is also important to recognize that settled and nomadic sensibilities do not always live entirely separate lives, except as ideal types.

Within my own local cultural world, in my own particular segment of American society, for example, there are many things my friends and other local cultural counterparts do not like. They do not like the idea of living with their parents. They do not like the idea of their children addressing them as "Sir" or "Madam" or the idea of sleeping in the same bed with their children or separate from their spouse. They do not like the idea of teenagers getting pregnant, and even less the idea of a pregnant teenager actually carrying her baby to term. They would not like it if they heard a woman disparage menses as "the curse." They do not like the idea of "sin." They find it loathsome to even contemplate the Iranian practice of a mother or grandmother kissing the genitals of an infant boy to stimulate his growth and virility. They do not like physical punishment for their children. They would view it as cruel and unusual punishment if any father behaved to his son the way Rabbi (Reb) Saunders, following family tradition, behaved to his ten year old boy Danny in Chaim Potok's novel The Chosen, by refusing to have any conversations with him for eleven years (from age ten to twenty-one), except in the context of Torah study. They would reject without hesitation the (Gnostic?) doctrine advanced by the Hassidic Rabbi in his defense of father-son silence that "A man is born into this world with only a tiny spark of goodness in him. The spark is God, it is the soul; the rest is ugliness and evil, a shell." My local cultural corelatives think that life and this worldliness is basically beautiful, good, and just. They think it is only fair for everyone, male and female, to be treated equally even to the extent of sharing equally in all tasks and household chores.
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If it is possible to be taken seriously without being taken too literally, I have begun to suspect in recent years that in many of those moral tastes concerning relationships between men and women and parents and children there are hints of a recapturing of distant sensibilities, from a time when societies were younger, flexible, and on the move. That was before people settled down and before all things—from "mother earth" to housewives—got put in their place. It was before the invention of the "Irish marriage." (In her recent study of Irish perceptions of family relationships and their consequences for psychological well-being, Maria Sullivan takes note: "One woman recounted that a couple she knows are considered by everyone to have a 'great' marriage, despite the generally known fact that they haven't spoken to each other in twelve years."10 I have wondered from time to time whether the likes of my friends in my local cultural world, in my local segment of American society, might be interpreted as a return of the current to where it started, in a nomadic frame of mind.

In reality, of course, the cultural nomadism of my local cultural world is far from complete, and within any actual community at any point in time nomadic tastes and institutions and settled tastes and institutions may coexist. For example, in the communities where I live women do not barbecue. That "settled" practice—men and women behaving towards each other as though there were two kinds of space, indoor female space and outdoor male space, and as though women were obliged to stay in the home—manages to live side by side with more "nomadic" practices, but not happily. Empirical social reality is not a straight line or a homogeneous enclosed space and it is possible to mix up one's ideal types just as it is possible to mix up one's metaphors.

One harbors the suspicion, however, that when settled sensibilities and nomadic sensibilities live side by side in the same sensibility, as they sometimes do, they do so unhappily or a bit uncomfortably. For contemporary nomadic common sense, the sexual division of barbecuing, whereby women who are the equals of their husbands and who do not typically stay close to home, never cook when the family hearth goes outdoors, is something of an embarrassment, a shameful confusion of ideal types, or at the very least a good topic for conversation.
I am more than aware, of course, that some postmodernists, those who are so deeply skeptical they aspire for (or at least write about) a life of radical eclecticism in which the desire for consistency plays no part, would not acknowledge something as logical as "a shameful confusion of ideal types" as a real state of mind. Such postmodern skepticism to the contrary, I am skeptical of radical eclecticism, both as a description of the way lives are lived and as an ethical ideal. "Santa Claus nailed to a cross," a symbol for eclecticism and an eclectic symbol, if there ever was one, is an example of a droll disaster in understanding or it is a parody, but it is not a self-sustaining cultural form. Social reality is not a straight line or a neatly enclosed homogeneous space but neither is it a scatter of unrelated or random points.

Scientists are fond of saying that it does not matter where your hypothetical model comes from. What matters is whether it is useful. My model is of two types of cultural sensibilities, the nomadic and the settled, which are revealed by whether adolescence is choreographed and experienced as "kissing games" or as "purdah." The nomadic sensibility tramples across those boundaries, male versus female, parent versus child, old versus young, that the settled mentality tries hard to maintain. I do not know whether my hypothesis is useful or true (although I certainly feel it deserves to be), but I am relieved to know that its past will not be held against it.

The first time the hypothesis came to my mind I was thinking about the goddess Durga. That is not too surprising since at the time I was living in an orthodox Hindu temple town in India. The goddess Durga in her many guises, all addressed as "mother," is a force to be dealt with in such communities. According to local "historians," the goddess killed a notorious and previously invulnerable demon who had been terrorizing the gods. Dancing before the demon, Durga exposed her genitals, a celestial striptease. He looked, lost his powers, turned to jelly. She killed him. Freud told us it is the father who is powerful and dangerous. In India I learned it can be the mother who is dangerous, and if you ever actually manage to see through her sari, who knows what might happen to you? Let father take her from your eyes, before Oedipus-like you have to pluck them out. Hindu men are convinced that women are so powerful they may be hazardous to your health. Hindu women are convinced that if they do not reign in their power and rage, the entire universe might be destroyed. A. K.
Ramanujan,11 of the University of Chicago, a scholar of Indian literature and folklore, has even proposed that in India there is an inversion of the Oedipus complex. The son does not rebel against the father to get the mother. Instead the father makes the son an offer too good to refuse: give me your virility and I will give you immorality. The son does it, willingly.

Power is closely related to separateness and secrecy, and, in South Asian ethnic communities, women guard their separateness or have it guarded for them. In one famous story, the goddess posts a sentry, her son Ganesh, at the threshold of her bedroom with instructions to keep out all intruders, especially her husband. It is purdah in defense of the mystique and power of the unknown. In India, and perhaps everywhere, what you do not know just might hurt you.

Where myth ends and reality begins is difficult to say, but almost anywhere in India where one looks, male and female keep their distance. The orthodox do not mix their metaphors or their genres. According to doctrine, the earth is female; once a year she menstruates and is bathed ritually. Yet, if a woman were to pierce the ground with a plow iron, the earth would quake in natural distress, or so it is believed. The kitchen is female space. Women cook, except outdoors. Husband and wife do not eat together, or present themselves as a “couple” to their public. The sacred thread ceremony, a Brahman’s analogue to a Bar Mitzvah, is an all male event. Women keep their own secrets. My close orthodox friends are male; I can have no other kind. In intimate conversations they confess that really, when you get down to it, there are only two castes, male and female, and if each keeps to its proper ways, the age of truth will dawn. The women agree. Orthodox Hindus know what it means to keep male and female apart, and they understand the advantages. The distinction between male and female has settled in.

The second time I thought about my hypothetical model was just after I had said “Yes” to my seminomadic then thirteen year old son. A dance party in the basement. Thirty Hyde Park children, girls and boys, spinning the bottle, “randomly” finding their way, and each other, in the dark. I wondered how I could ever explain it all to my orthodox Hindu friends. This was not the age of truth.

The third time the hypothesis came to my mind I was barbecuing. I was sure my Hindu friends would approve. Their nature was in order.
Their nature is not the nature of a people on the move. The seminomadic sensibility does not like a distinction to settle in. Nomads feel a moral imperative to uproot. In nomad common sense, if you cannot rid yourself of a persistent natural distinction like male versus female, the least you can do is ignore it: hold hands, take a walk, pick up and go somewhere—together. I once explained to my "postmodern" nomadic then eight year old daughter the expression, "Vive la difference!". "Daddy," she replied commonsensically, "even the stupidest things have meaning."

Get-your-roots-in-the-ground, earth-bound peoples do not see it that way. For them it is the only difference that makes a difference. They know you can not get rid of the contrast between male and female, so why not help it settle in? Over several decades the Israeli Kibbutz movement tried very hard to erase distinctions based on sex. Melford Spiro in his book, *Gender and Culture*, has described the experiment; it did not work. Stray marks remained on the tabula rasa of human nature. Pubescent girls did not like taking showers in front of boys. Boys gravitated to tractors. Girls ended up in the mess.

The resplendent male versus female symbolism of the earth-bound peoples has all but faded from consciousness in my own local cultural world, where today there is not much enchantment or danger left in semen and blood. In other local cultural worlds, in Hindu villages in India, for example, forty drops of breast milk make one drop of blood. Forty drops of blood make one drop of semen, the ultimate life force, which you do not want to squander away. Vivekananda, the Hindu saint, chaste and hence radiant, died and transcended to glory long ago. When he died, legend recounts, his body cracked open in a flood of semen.

Where there is semen and menstrual blood so too there is enchantment and danger, or at least there can be. Gilbert Herdt, in his ethnography *Guardians of the Flute*, describes local belief as it once existed among the Sambia of New Guinea. The Sambia once believed that menstrual blood was a hazard and, if you were a young boy, contact with women would stunt your growth. Seven to ten year old boys were protected from the harmful influence by moving them out of their homes. In a forest of male space, for ten years forbidden all contact with women, including their mothers, preadolescent and adolescent boys built strong bodies in eight ways by inseminating each other in homosexual rites. A bizarre and incomprehensible
practice? Margaret Mead, quite unwittingly, helped me see the point. Remember her comment about the best place to grow up if you are a boy. Perhaps in New Guinea they knew what they are doing. They got the boys away from their mothers, all right. All they seemed to lack was the English public school.

By now it is probably obvious to the reader that a postmodern humanistic perspective on nomadic versus settled sensibilities sums up to a single point: viewed in the abstract, as ideal types, they should be thought of as multiple equilibria states, as coequal even if divergent forms. In other words, it is not necessary or useful to try to assimilate them to some Enlightenment picture of progressive cultural development. There is no history to be narrated of a destined substitution or replacement of one sensibility by the other, tied to a successful struggle of reason over superstition, affluence over poverty, sophistication over innocence, modern sensibilities over tradition-laden sensibilities. When one tries to make sense of the relationship between the two types of sensibilities, the image of a straight line inclined upward does not work very well.

Recall for a moment that enlightenment origin myth about the linear ascent of human beings. It goes something like this. You start by contemplating some rudimentary go-out-and-hunt-fish-and-gather-dinner-for-yourself kind of place. Bushmen, Eskimos, Pygmies flash to mind. Then it is onward and upward through the agricultural civilizations—feudal Europe, rural India, the Orient. Serfs and bondage, darkness and domination, religion, ritual, caste, and taboo. Then the penultimate advance, rebirth, enlightenment, the industrial revolution in the West, with the straight line of progress reaching its temporary pinnacle in the postindustrial, high-tech, ever calculating, always renegotiating, foresightful, flexible ("this is the first day of the rest of your life") rational choice consciousness of America 1992.

I want to suggest that when it comes to evaluating the rationality and staying power of the two types of cultural sensibilities—nomadic and settled—the enlightenment origin myth is probably outdated. Both forms of sensibility are with us in the world today and the nomadic sensibility is probably as old as they get. Indeed when it comes to the choice between nomadic and settled sensibilities, the shape of world history may be more like a series of pendulum swings or U-turns than like a straight line.
For example, one spouse only, separate household for each young couple type living arrangements were probably in fashion during the earliest periods of human history, and today are quite popular among peoples living in seminomadic bands. Parents in such places have been observed insisting, like members of my own local cultural world, that their children be self-reliant and rebellious, that they learn to do things for themselves, "tie their own shoes," make their own friends, "go off to camp," get out of the house, find their own mate. In the evolution of sensibilities, it is somewhere in between the beginning and end of the U-turn, in those live-with-your-extended-kin, plow-your-fields, house-away-your-wife type places that parent-child relationships became what Ring Lardner fondly remembered, "Shut up! my father explained." One must remember, however, that the "shut up!" commanded in such places and the ordeals and hardship ideologies of such places, even the prohibitions on conversations between father and son in such places, often had a moral force.14

On one occasion I have even heard an anthropologist suggest that contemporary dancing—the kind of commotion you find in a disco, linear moves, up-down, back and forth, "let's jump"—has long been the rage in the seminomadic bands. Our more advanced ancestors in India, Indonesia, Polynesia, and Japan keep their feet on the ground, winding and entwining their recurve movements to a very different kind of sway.

From this curvilinear perspective on cultural change, contemporary liberal feminism with its independent-minded egalitarian self-consciousness might be viewed as a return to a form of cultural sensibility that preceded intensive agriculture and fixed dwellings. Nomadic !Kung Bush women, for example, did not have to stay close to home. They knew their way around in the world, and if they did not go out from time to time to forage for food, there was 50 percent less for everyone to eat.

My point, however, is not to privilege the nomadic sensibility by claiming it as most ancient, any more than I would want to privilege it by claiming it as most recent, or as my own. Instead I want to argue that if we are to divide cultural sensibilities into two types, the key contrast is not likely to line up with received oppositions between darkness and light, superstition and reason, ancient and modern, poverty and affluence, backward and advanced.
The postmodern humanist view is that cultural sensibilities will probably never fit, or stay, in any one bag or converge into a singular ideal of truth, beauty or goodness. Hegel knew why. Freud knew why. Thesis implies antithesis. The repressed returns. The denied alternative, whether it is push them together or pull them apart, kissing games or purdah, is always off in the wings, waiting to come back on center stage. It is like our politics. First we tolerate offensive regulation in the name of social justice, preparing the way for us to tolerate offensive exploitation in the name of individual liberty. There are just too many “goods” and “truths” in the world, and they cannot all be maximized at once or in the same family, neighborhood or tribe. As soon as we complete one U-turn, we start another. The settled and the nomadic compete for our consciousness, and we vacillate, the first commanding us to put everything in its place, the second not wanting anything to be pinned down. In America we may always be torn between a nomadic thesis and an earth-bound antithesis. It remains to be seen whether it is the entrepreneurs or the bureaucrats, the individualists or the communitarians, the secularists or the fundamentalists who, for the moment, will win the next day or the next election.

THE NEW PURITANISM AND THE CONTEST TO DEFINE CHILDREN’S LIVES

Diversity is always in danger of being turned into a “problem” but it always seems to have its defenders, as well. “Homosexuality” is a case in point. At various times in the Anglo-American world it has been “moralized” as sinful, “criminalized” as illegal, “pathologized” or “medicalized” as sick. Those concerned to defend its integrity have either “nihilized” it as merely a matter of taste, a “gay” life-style, or else, more recently among the thirty and under age set, “naturalized” it as a “queer” yet unavoidable fact of nature, perhaps wired into the brain. Both defensive moves—the extreme subjectivism of the “nihilizers” and the extreme objectivism of the “naturalizers”—remove the “problem” by taking it out of the realm where standards of criticism and moral judgments apply.

Postmodern humanism is also a type of defense of diversity, but it defends diversity from within the realm where standards of criticism and issues of moral responsibility apply. From the perspective of
postmodern humanism, "difference" is interpreted as a measure of the multiplicity of rational or adaptive forms, each with its own integrity and value which it is the job of the postmodern humanist to identify and spell out.

In *The Closing of the American Mind*, Allan Bloom's important and provocative book denouncing what he sees as the "relativism" of contemporary American society, one finds the following remark: "Progress can be made against cigarette smoking because our absence of standards or our relativism does not extend to matters of bodily health. In all other things the market determines the value." The choice posed by Bloom—between monism and a nihilistic absence of standards—has a distinguished history in political and moral philosophy, but in the context of current public policy debates the supposed "nihilistic" option seems rather remote from everyday calculations. It is not the absence of standards that marks American society in its decade of ethnicity but its plethora of standards, distributed unevenly across local cultural groups. The real and agonizing choice before us seems more like this: whether to support those who want to make "progress" against variety (in food habits, family arrangements, sexual practices, etc.) in the name of societal and personal health, or whether to immunize ourselves against the rhetoric of pathology and disease and be on our guard whenever that rhetoric is used to stigmatize the ideals and practices of whole segments of our here unto plural society.

My point, of course, is not to justify pathology or engage in the sophistical rationalization of error and ignorance. Error and ignorance do have points that can be raised in their favor (was it not Levi-Strauss who once remarked "superstition is the best antidote to despotism"?) but those are not the points I am raising here. The point I am raising has to do with the integrity of the idea of a cultural norm and the hazards of making progress against "difference" in a pluralistic society such as our own.

The naming and creation of things as "problems" is a fascinating social, cultural, and political process in its own right and with its own rites. How a "problem" gets created is not unrelated to how it gets named or described, which is closely related to which institutions or bureaucracies in our society—criminal, medical, social welfare, artistic, economic—become invested in its maintenance, and which types of people in society (police, psychiatrists, epidemiologists,
theologians, academics, entrepreneurs, insurance agents) bother about its existence. It is in the context of naming and describing things so as to turn them into “problems” that an anthropological discussion of diversity may have a bearing on contemporary concerns, and may even matter.

Precisely how it may matter can be illustrated, in this case in a breezy sort of way, by Anna Wierzbicka’s discussion of variations in responses to compliments in different cultural traditions. Wierzbicka quotes a “Dear Abby” letter to the Los Angeles Times written by a man who signs his letter, “Perplexed.” The letter reads as follows:

Dear Abby, My wife has a habit of down-grading sincere compliments. If I say, ‘Gee, Hon, you look nice in that dress,’ her reply is likely to be, ‘Do you really think so? It’s just a rag my sister gave me.’ Or if I tell her she did a great job cleaning up the house, her response might be, ‘Well, I guess you haven’t seen the kid’s room.’ I find it hard to understand why she can’t accept a compliment without putting herself down. And it hurts me a little. How do you explain it, Abby?

Abby replies as follows: “Dear Perplexed, Your wife lacks self-confidence and feels somewhat embarrassed to accept praise. Don’t be hurt. Most people have difficulty accepting compliments with grace.”

Anna Wierzbicka comments on this exchange as follows:

A crucial point that is missing from Abby’s response, however, is that responses to compliments differ from culture to culture, and within a complex society such as the United States they depend not only on people’s character traits, such as ‘lack of confidence,’ but also on their cultural background. It is quite possible that ‘Perplexed’s’ wife did not lack self-confidence or self-esteem but was simply Jewish, or was of Eastern European or perhaps Chinese or Japanese background.

Wierzbicka goes on to remark that when the behavior of a lot of people deviate from an analyst’s normative model (for example, in this instance, of the proper or graceful way to accept compliments) then perhaps it is the analyst’s model, and not the people’s behavior, that is inadequate. In such cases she asks: “Shouldn’t one rather speak of a number of different models, operating in different cultures and subcultures?”

How it may matter can also be illustrated, here in a less breezy way, by some comments by Leon Botstein, President of Bard College,
which he offered in the context of an interview about “sexual harassment” problems at Simon’s Rock College, an affiliate of Bard. On the topic of touching and physical contact between students and faculty, Botstein rhetorically asks: “How do you bring people from Asia, Africa, Latin America, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and then promulgate a set of puritanical rules which are derived from the most self-righteous American tradition of moralism, from 17th-century New England?” He remarks: “My putting my arm around someone male or female and giving physical and spontaneous expression of my enthusiasms is not necessarily an act of sexual vengeance or propositioning [In fact, as Botstein recounts, his esteemed teacher Hannah Arendt did it to him].” He notes: “The American standard, highly puritan, extremely unexpressive and cold, is not a universal in daily life.”

How it may matter can also be illustrated, in this case in a downright riveting way, by reference to Caroline Bletso’s study of the moral character of ordeals and hardships in the lives of “foster children”—children living away from their parents and with another family—in a West African culture, among the Mende of Sierra Leone. Bletso begins her essay by pointing out that:

In family studies, three conditions are often taken as indices of aberrant parental attitudes towards children: willingness to send them away for long periods, neglect of their emotional and physical needs and infliction of harsh treatment such as beating, enforced hard labor or food deprivation.

She then documents the normative and moral character of hunger, fatigue, and misery and a host of other ordeals in the lives of Mende foster children, among a people where at least 33 percent, and perhaps as many as 50 percent, of all children between birth and age sixteen are fostered out by their parents and expected to endure the predictable hardships.

Bletso suggests that we “go beyond the facile label of ‘abuse’ to understand the cultural logic underlying these practices.” The normative logic of Mende culture includes the maxim that there can be no success in life without struggle, which provides a charter for a set of practices including ordeals designed to test the child’s capacity for unquestioning loyalty to a potential life-long benefactor or patron. It would be surprising if this well-documented moral tradi-
tion of West African fosterage and ordeal could not be found in West African ethnic enclaves in the United States.

One thing one is likely to find in many of the African-American ethnic enclaves in the United States (rural and urban) is a set of reproductive and sexual norms and practices that differ from the seventeenth-century New England puritan family ideal and from the local family ideals of most public policy and public health experts. For example, the 1988 US National Survey of Adolescents reports that 69 percent of black youths in the United States have had sexual intercourse by the age of fifteen years, which is two or three times the rate for youths with family histories of immigration from Western Europe; there is also good reason to suspect that it is the African-American community in the United States that is most opposed to abortion.

Although there is a comparative literature on sexual behavior and family patterns across ethnic groups and human populations, it has not played a significant part in recent public policy debates. Can it really be news that the idea of establishing an exclusive monogamous union with a coresident male is a moral conception of reproductive legitimacy that is peculiar to certain local cultural worlds, or that not everyone moralizes the reproductive process in the same way? In other cultural worlds, especially those with ancestral or historical connections to regions of the world where polygamy is a moral ideal and where it is not unusual for 40 percent of the married male population to have had extramarital sexual unions during the previous year and for 33 percent of married women to have had sexual affairs at least once during their married life, “out-of-wedlock” childbirth may have a legitimacy, significance, and payoff of its own, and may display a stability and persistence suggestive of an alternative cultural norm.

Traditions of behavior have a way of persisting and diffusing over time and space. With regard to the “African-American” pattern of sexual and reproductive behavior, it may be provocative but it is not entirely unreasonable to speculate that “it’s a cultural thing.” Certainly the pattern has been around for a long time. It is only recently that it has been labeled as a social pathology. According to the historian Linda Gordon,

The Children’s Bureau experts knew that southern African Americans had higher rates of out-of-wedlock births from at least the 1920’s, but
this phenomenon was then seen as a contained, rural, regional pattern, and thus unthreatening, so it remained a very marginal discourse until the 'great migration' brought thousands of blacks to the north. In mid-century social workers began to name Black reproductive behavior as a problem.21

Gordon goes on to argue that "Teenage pregnancy is not ruining girls' lives. When teenagers of similarly poor and otherwise disadvantaged backgrounds are compared, there is no evidence that girls who don't get pregnant do any better. The educational difference between teenage mothers and nonmothers is small and declining."22

Looking in from the outside, it is not always easy, at first blush, to distinguish error, ignorance, and pathology from a genuine cultural difference in norms and values, yet it makes a great deal of difference that we try. A directly relevant example of the integrity and importance of the idea of a genuine "difference" in cultural norms can be found in a recent study by Thomas Weisner and Helen Garnier23 of school achievement at the end of the three to eleven age period. The study was part of Thomas Weisner's twelve year longitudinal "Family Life Styles Project" (which he originally cofounded with the late Bernice Eidson). The aim of the project is to chart the development of Euro-American children from 205 families, who lived in California in the late 1960s. The families span the working-class to upper middle-class socioeconomic status (SES) spectrum. They were selected for study, however, not because of their socioeconomic status but because they differ greatly in household structure and cultural norms, from conventional monogamous married couples to unmarried couples, to single-mother households to communal and collectivist groups of various religious and secular kinds.

The main finding of the Weisner and Garnier study is that, controlling for variations in SES, IQ, and gender, "children in single parent families had similar grades to children in two parent families" and that the children who do best in school are those who come from households (whether "conventional" or nonconventional) with a strong commitment to their family life-style and to a set of values, meanings, and rationales for making sense of their way of life. In other words, when it comes to questions of the well-being of America's children, age three to eleven, growing up in any relatively coherent cultural tradition seems to be better than growing up with
no tradition at all, and there is more than one cultural logic out of which to fashion a way of life.

It has become a noteworthy feature of public policy debates these days that many analysts who care about the lives of children in America sound like prophets of “gloom and doom,” with a ready diagnosis of American society as rife with “pathologies” (teenage pregnancy, “child abuse,” sexual promiscuity and “harassment,” single-parent families, mindless television watching, etc.) and in desperate need of bureaucratic cures. One problem with these public policy debates about the problems of family life in America is that the meaning of “difference” is itself never fully problematized. Instead the discourse of the debate seems to presuppose the existence of an obvious and unitary set of standards of truth, beauty, goodness, and health, which, far more often than not, are the entrenched standards of the local cultural world in which the public policy “experts” live their lives. Behaviors inconsistent with those standards are typically viewed as either ignorant, irrational, abusive, criminal, sick or depraved.

The predictable effect of this mode of interpretation is to stigmatize the ideals and practices of low status or marginalized groups in society, and to inflame a puritanical, even if well-intended impulse to make progress against “difference,” under the banner of a righteous campaign against the incubation and contagious spread of an insidious social pathology or disease. There are even contexts (for example, in the area of public health: “substance abuse,” cigarette smoking, eating behavior) in which this puritanical sense of righteousness is so powerful that well-intended, even “liberal” folk begin to give off the impression that fat people do not go to heaven, that smokers cannot be trusted because they have “addictive personalities” and that certain practices associated with the Bill of Rights (the freedom of speech and the liberty to advertise) are trivial in comparison to the obvious goods of the public policy agenda, and should be qualified or set aside. It will surely be one of the great ironies of history if one day scholars are able to look back in time and discover that the greatest threat to liberty, democracy, and pluralism in the West turned out to be not the communist menace or the CIA but medical insurance companies and the Public Health Service.

As the discerning reader will have noticed, it is not the point of my essay about the fate of anthropology and cultural psychology in the...
postmodern world to argue the radical romantic tenet that "everything that is, is good." There are times when "difference" is a measure of ignorance, irrationality, abusiveness, criminality, sickness or depravity, although not always or even often. Moreover, the fact that the ideals and practices of a cultural community have consequences seems beyond dispute. Those straight-laced, tea toddling, nicotine avoiding Mormons and Seventh Day Adventists, for example, manage to avoid lung cancer and cirrhosis of the liver, and they live, on the average, six years longer than the rest of us. In the disease environment of the contemporary world, puritanical communities may well end up healthier, if not necessarily happier. Nevertheless, when a genuine cultural (that is to say, ethically defensible) difference in norms, ideals, and practices is christened a social "pathology," more often than not something wicked has been done, and it matters a lot that there be some postmodern humanists around who care to have it undone.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Parts of this essay were developed while I was a Visiting Scholar at the Russell Sage Foundation, and with the support of the Health Program of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

ENDNOTES

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