

From: Ruth Benedict: Beyond Relativity,  
Beyond Pattern, by Virginia Young

## CHAPTER 1

### Ruth Benedict's Life and Work

#### Knowledge of Ruth Benedict's Thought

Ruth Benedict is a central figure in cultural anthropology, yet her thought is generally known only by one book, *Patterns of Culture*, published in 1934, fourteen years before her sudden death. Her later books, *Race: Science and Politics* (1940) and *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (1946), were widely read but were not principally statements of culture theory, as *Patterns of Culture* was and as were a number of articles and papers on the new investigations she began after *Patterns of Culture*. She began to note observations of social conditions underlying personal security and individual freedom, noting them first in research memoranda and, a few years later, in publications. Her articles on personal freedom seldom have been a subject of commentary. This was an ambitious comparative search in which she attempted to find "laws" for a "cohesive society." In the same period, she published several articles that carried further her viewpoint on the relation of individuals to culture. Later she wrote studies of the national cultures of Thailand, Romania, and the Netherlands that employed further alterations of her concept of culture, particularly by referencing history significantly and by presenting a model for individuals living within the strictures of their culture, a model that grew out of her earlier portrayals of individuals molded by their culture. Benedict's studies of national cultures have been available and circulated in the mimeographed editions prepared for their sponsor, the Office of War Information (OWI), but have seldom been taken into account as representations of her concepts. All of this work is found in numerous manuscripts of lectures and prospectuses of projects archived in her papers.

*Patterns of Culture* would be named a classic by most anthropologists. It drew an image of a people's selection from "a great arc of potential human purposes and motivations . . . material techniques or culture traits," a selection that was the source of a configuration, and it gave coherence and psychological consistency to the culture (Benedict 1934:219). The configu-

ration shaped the social institutions and the ongoing choices, conditioned the thought and behavior of the people, and tended to be maintained. The book also challenged ethnocentrism found in much scholarly work and in public opinion by arguing that the many independent preliterate cultures of the world, which had endured, nurtured generations, and maintained institutional continuity, had proved their success in meeting the fundamental problems of continuing human life. All should be recognized as workable ways of living. Benedict's achievement was in adding a psychological and configurational framework to a fundamental, but not always observed, relativistic position in the anthropology of her times. *Patterns of Culture* presents many other aspects of the idea of configuration, and the reader will find them described for different points to be made throughout this introduction to her subsequent work.

As Ruth Benedict wrote *Patterns of Culture*, new questions engaged her. She wrote in the penultimate chapter: "It is possible to scrutinize different institutions and cast up their cost in terms of social capital, in terms of the less desirable behavior traits they stimulate, and in terms of human suffering and frustration" (Benedict 1934:229). This was the opposite side of the coin. Cultural relativity was not the full lesson of the comparative study of cultures. It was true of forms but not of functioning, as she phrased the point in her course on theory, noting that "cultural relativism breaks through ethnocentrism, but the study of cultural relativism is not final. . . . There is a cultural relativity fallacy" (Theory 1/15/48). Cultures can be shown to function for a general good, or with excessive human suffering, or by exploitation of some members. Benedict took the investigation of the functioning of cultures, and the weighing of culture's effect on individuals, as her first work after *Patterns of Culture*. She thought it was possible to find correlations of cultural "arrangements" with their effects on social life, effects such as "minimizing aggression and frustration," "social cohesion," "vigor and zest," "a sense of being free," and cultural arrangements that were detrimental to social well-being. She sought a method for weighing which cultural arrangements that had been described and assessed in particular societies were broadly beneficial and which ones appeared to benefit only the few. More limited judgments of parts of cultures had been made in *Patterns of Culture*, particularly concerning cultural attitudes toward psychological misfits, attitudes that in some cultures were tolerant and in others labeled these persons as abnormal. In this new search that she soon launched, she envisioned a social science for identifying causes and deterrents of particular "social outcomes." Benedict was explicit in her differentiation of the words "social" and "cultural," the former referring to the relations among individuals and groups and the

latter a more inclusive concept encompassing "habits," "values," "attitudes," and organizational patterns. She initially attempted controlled comparisons within culture areas using a diffusionist model of reinterpretation of selected traits, but she later by-passed this method – apparently because habits, values, and attitudes were not well enough described in many field studies – and she illustrated social effects by whichever ethnographies best elucidated them. Comparison was her principal method for insights and exposition, whether she arrived at her perceptions through comparison of twenty cultures, as she first planned to do, or two cultures, as she found expeditious for brief presentation. Benedict came to emphasize deep perceptions rather than numbers of cases. She designated this problem "an area beyond cultural relativity" (u.p. ca. 1937). As she worked with a social science to connect causal conditions and social outcomes, Benedict began to look more closely at processes of culture change and came to think that, through understanding change, rational direction of change would be possible. The underlying assumption she worked with was that of cultural relativity. It provided perspective in locating cultural causes of social outcomes, and the principle of relativity guided knowledge needed for altering them. This was the first of her post-*Patterns of Culture* projects.

The comparative book she planned was put off because of her "duty" to write a book on race – a few months before her decision the Nazi police condoned a public rampage that destroyed a German Jewish community, the event known as *Kristelnacht*, and American racism was at that time causing great suffering – and when *Race: Science and Politics* was completed in 1940, the comparative book was put off again for an invited lecture series. The lectures, the Anna Howard Shaw lectures at Bryn Mawr College in 1941, were thought never published by Benedict and the original manuscripts lost or destroyed by her, as described in chapter 3. Several parts of the lecture manuscripts had been copied, preserved, and later published by two of her students (Maslow and Honigman 1970). Recently, the complete manuscripts of five of the six lectures have been identified in her papers. Benedict's letters indicate that she initially intended the lectures to be published as a book defining her concepts of anthropology, but as she wrote the series the last two of the six lectures were given over to anthropological insights into the national and world crises of the period. With the manuscripts now available, it is clear that she published the part of the lectures addressed to public issues in periodicals read by general readers. Her letters discuss her plan to use the sections on anthropological theory in a textbook. The textbook, and again her project on an area beyond relativity, was put off when she accepted requests to aid the U.S. government in the tremendous task of understanding

other nations that suddenly had become allies, or enemies, in World War II. Benedict and other anthropologists played a large role in writing guidance for explaining the actions of wartime governments and the thought behind them. Her work on these problems employed the idea of culture pattern, and it also occasioned a major refinement of that idea, a new way of representing patterns that she developed in the set of national culture studies.

Although the comparative book she planned on the functioning of cultures was never written, a very full record of the diverse parts of her thought on this subject remains. Several published articles present the subject, and other unpublished materials include lectures, a first chapter of a planned book, and statements of anticipated findings in grant applications. All of these are now in her papers in the Vassar College Library or in a small collection in the Research Institute for the Study of Man. As I pieced together the scattered manuscripts defining her plans and ideas, I realized that although Benedict's main objective of the late 1930s had never been completed, her manuscripts could be collected and arranged to reveal the development and envisioned outcome of this work. Benedict's later work on national cultures consists of her reports for OWI on Thai, Romanian, Dutch, and Japanese cultures and numerous memoranda for that office on more specialized topics. These papers are available in the National Archives. *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* is in print and still is discussed in studies of Japanese culture. Her writings during the postwar phase of this work, the Research in Contemporary Cultures (RCC) project, as well as the organizational files of that project and all other documents written for it, are filed with Margaret Mead's papers in the Library of Congress. Only when this work is studied as a whole is the consistency of Ruth Benedict's objectives clear.

### Ruth Benedict's Early Life

Ruth Fulton Benedict was born in New York City in 1887 to Bertrice Shattuck Fulton and Frederick Fulton, both from rural Norwich, New York, and both from deeply religious Baptist families. Her parents were professionals, her mother educated at Vassar College and a schoolteacher and her father a New York City homeopathic doctor and surgeon, the same profession his own father practiced in Norwich. She wrote of her childhood in "The Story of My Life," a manuscript from 1935 published posthumously as part of Margaret Mead's selections from her writings, *An Anthropologist at Work* (1959:97-112). Her father died at age thirty-one, when Ruth was twenty-one months old and her sister, Margery, was three months old, after his year-long fight against an infection thought to have been contracted in the medical research

he loved. The bereaved mother and daughters remained on the maternal grandparents' farm, the site of the father's death, until Ruth was past six years old. Her mother taught school in town, and the two young girls were often cared for in the town apartment and on the farm by their three maternal aunts. The frugal grandparental farm was a secure, but severe, place for the child, Ruth. She probably transferred her experience of upstate New Yorkers to New Englanders when she said in a class lecture: "The cultural core is like a centrifugal force . . . organized around a central emphasis, for example, that everything is a fight. Then engaging in agriculture is a fight, as for old New Englanders, in contrast to Italian peasants for whom agriculture was conducted as loving the soil. If everything is a fight, then it is thought one fights women, fights buffalo, and so on" (*Personality and Culture* 12/10/46). She imagined a different family from her own in "the beautiful country on the other side of the west hill where a family lived who had a little girl about my age. This imaginary playmate and her family lived a warm, friendly life without recriminations and brawls" (in Mead 1959:99). She wrote of her staunch grandfather, a Baptist deacon and a farmer, leading the kneeling family in daily morning prayers; he sometimes protected her private world, but he was not a close paternal figure. Since he had four daughters and no sons, the farm work was done by hired hands. The women cooked for a number of persons that far exceeded the family members and probably included farm hands, and Ruth and her sister prepared the vegetables and washed the dishes. While they washed dishes they memorized verses of poetry and the Bible. Because her father died before she could remember him, Ruth would retreat from the family into a fantasy world of nature to try to retrieve or construct memory of her father during his struggle to live, imagining "a worn face illuminated with the translucence of illness, and very beautiful." Shortly before she wrote her brief autobiography, Benedict had been told by an aunt about an incident she had no memory of, that her mother had taken her to see her father in his coffin, where her mother

in a hysteria of weeping implored me to remember. Nothing is left to me consciously of this experience, but if it is suppressed it would go a long way to explain the effect my mother's weeping has always had on me, . . . an excruciating misery with physical trembling of a peculiar involuntary kind which culminated periodically in rigidity like an orgasm. . . . Certainly from my earliest childhood I recognized two worlds whether or not my knowledge was born at that tragic scene at my father's coffin – the world of my father, which was the world of death and which was beautiful, and the world of confusion and explosive weeping which I repudiated. I did not

love my mother; I resented her cult of grief, and her worry and concern about little things. But I could always retire to my other world, and to this world my father belonged. I identified him with everything calm and beautiful that came my way. . . . Happiness was in a world I lived in all by myself, and for precious moments. There were quite a number of ways I could put myself in order for them; I associate them especially with holding a sleeping kitten on my lap on the woodshed steps looking out over the east hills, and with shelling peas for the family – there were thirteen or fourteen to feed and it was a long job – at peace on the front porch while everybody else was busy in the kitchen. The transition back again into the mundane world and all its confusions was likely to be stormy. The family were constantly exercised about my ungovernable tantrums. (in Mead 1959:98–99)

As she described her childhood tantrums, they expressed frustration in her efforts to visit a fantasy world, the world of inner experiences in which she attempted to retrieve memory of her father. With family discipline by means of weeping over her and confining her to her room, she abandoned “tantrums,” but the reality of her other world brought continued rebellion in the form of episodes of vomiting and illness, and later depression, experiences she described as “outside invasions of my person, and it seemed to me that devils swept down on me. . . . [The episodes] were more acceptable than unwanted participation in the ‘other’ world that was not ‘mine’” (in Mead 1959:108). The preferred world of fantasy was the first of the cultures, different from her family’s, that she valued. It was a deeply relativist experience.

The mother and children moved, where she found jobs as teacher, school principal, or librarian in Midwestern towns, and after a few years they settled in Buffalo, New York. There the sisters were given scholarships in an Episcopal girls’ school. They were accompanied on these moves by one or another of their three maternal aunts, who helped care for the family. Ruth had a secure extended family but remained distant from her mother and continued to feel keenly her deprivation of an idealized father. The farm remained the place of summer retreat for Ruth Benedict her whole life.

Ruth and her sister were educated at Vassar College. A family acquaintance sponsored full scholarships for them because the farm family could not have afforded to send them to college. Ruth majored in literature and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. They both graduated in 1909. The parents of college friends sponsored a year of travel in Europe for their daughters and the Fulton sisters. After the year in Europe, Ruth taught at a girl’s boarding school in Pasadena, California, where her recently married sister and her mother

had settled. Ruth kept a journal intermittently as a young woman, selections from which Margaret Mead included in her collection of Benedict's writings. She became dissatisfied with her job because of the chaperoning expected of teachers in a girls' school and returned to the family farm with a plan to renovate the orchard in order to support herself as a writer. She decided that summer to accept the long courtship of Stanley Benedict, a professor of biochemistry at Cornell University Medical School. In the first years of her marriage, she researched the lives of several nineteenth-century feminists whom she admired. She wrote in a journal of the tasks of a suburban housewife, writing at first of their routineness and soon that they were ridiculous and intrusions on her ambition to apply herself to writing, "to speak out the intense inspiration that comes to me from the lives of strong women" (in Mead 1959:140). Instead of writing, however, she spent 1916 and 1917 in "the meddling of social work. . . . In a sense I'm satisfied with the job," and she named her accomplishments in it (in Mead 1959:141). She had expected to have children and wrote in her journal that children probably gave women a sense of fulfillment and at least gave them a useful project, but the marriage was infertile. Stanley's presence was "ecstasy" and "quiet understanding," but when she spoke to him about her frustration in her desire to apply herself to writing he criticized her inability to find satisfaction, and their harsh words further estranged them.

The intimacy is proved, established; all he asks is to keep an even tenor. . . . But I'm made of the exactly antithetical scheme – it is my necessary breath of life to understand, and expression is the only justification of life that I can feel without prodding. The greatest relief I know is to have put something in words . . . so we grow more and more strange to the other – united only by gusts of feeling that grow to seem more and more emptiness in our lives, not part and parcel of them; and by an intolerable pity for each other as human beings cruelly tortured. (in Mead 1959:143)

Margaret Caffrey's biography of Benedict depicts the cultural influences of the times playing on Benedict's ambivalence in her acceptance of a conventional married life and recounts also her attempts to bring humor and imagination into the marriage.<sup>1</sup> Her inability to formulate her thoughts in words drove her to move beyond the satisfactions and compromises in her marriage to seek a vocabulary, a framework, for understanding human life.

A year and a half before she wrote the journal entry last quoted, Benedict had already started seeking such a framework. She had enrolled in a course with John Dewey at Columbia University in January 1919 and was inspired by it. Dewey went on leave the following fall, and she tried the New School for

Social Research, where she became deeply interested in anthropology, which she studied with Alexander Goldenweiser and Elsie Clews Parsons. After two years they recommended her for study with Franz Boas at Columbia University. Boas hastened her Ph.D. degree and publication of her two early monographs. In 1923 he brought her on to the Columbia faculty as lecturer; she was the only continuously appointed faculty in the department in addition to Boas until his retirement. Mead wrote that Benedict sometimes served without salary, and Columbia records confirm this, showing that she received no salary for three academic years beginning in 1925, although she had regular faculty appointments. The middle year of these three carried a salary from Barnard College, where she taught while Gladys Reichard was on leave from that post (Mead 1959:347; CUA-CL). Mead wrote that Boas had to stretch his limited funds, and thought Benedict did not need a salary in addition to support from her husband.

She seldom wrote in her journal after she began her studies. During the 1920s, she intermittently kept a diary of the days' comings and goings. She spent most of the week in Manhattan sharing an apartment with a college friend, and on weekends she joined Stanley at their home in suburban Bedford Hills. She attended classes, wrote, conducted museum trips for Barnard classes, taught her own classes, attended the lectures of visiting anthropologists and visited with them. She continued to write poetry as she had done since 1912 or earlier, and her first published poem appeared in 1925 (Mead 1959:536n8). She went to lunch, tea, and dinner with friends daily and to the theater often. Weekends with Stanley were usually reported to be companionable, but as though they had a truce of silence about their differences. In 1930 they separated, but they never divorced. He willed his estate to her, and he died in 1936. She learned of his death through the newspaper notice, his sisters having withheld the news from her, and she attended the burial service. Stanley's sisters contested his will, but Ruth fought successfully in court for her inheritance. She did not write Mead about her emotions when she wrote the facts surrounding Stanley's death (RB to MM, December 23, 1936, MM B1).

### Among the Boasians

When Ruth Benedict began to study anthropology, Franz Boas's vigorous paradigm for the field was fully formed. It was a body of thought that he had developed in moving from physics to geography and to problems of ethnology. His thought encompassed scientific and historical modes of analysis. He developed his concepts in pursuing fieldwork, first with the Eskimo of Baffinland in 1883 and in many years of work with British Columbia Indians



beginning in 1885. Boas fundamentally revised European and American anthropology by methodically disproving the conclusions of racialist and evolutionist thought of the nineteenth century; by demonstrating the separateness of race, language, and culture; and by arriving at a concept of plural cultures in contrast to a single progressive culture history. In this radical departure, he contested the principal view in American anthropology at that time pursued in the Bureau of American Ethnology, in the ethnological museums, and in the disparate beginnings of university departments of anthropology (Boas 1940; Stocking 1968; Stocking ed. 1974; Darnell 1998a; Lewis 2001). In his post at Columbia University, which he assumed in 1896, he attracted brilliant and productive students to this major shift in ideas, among them Alexander Goldenweiser, Alfred Kroeber, Robert Lowie, and Edward Sapir, students who, by the time Benedict completed her degree, had published their own demonstrations of many parts of Boasian concepts of ethnology, history, language, and culture, thus producing a greater degree of synthesis of the field than Boas's revisionist writings and voluminous ethnographic works had allowed. These men later founded, or greatly influenced, many of the departments of academic anthropology in the United States and Canada, and each of them developed divergent programs within the framework of Boasian anthropology (Darnell 1998a:209). They were Benedict's colleagues, along with the younger Margaret Mead, Benedict's and Boas's student. Particularly congenial for a few years was Edward Sapir, an influential scholar of American Indian linguistics and a published poet, as Benedict was also. The Boasian paradigm would continue to be the framework of American anthropology for two more decades. Furthermore, "the Boasian point of view, which in 1919 had only begun to affect the thinking of social scientists outside cultural anthropology, by 1934 conditioned the thinking of social scientists generally" (Stocking 1968:300). Of particular impact in this regard was the concept of plural cultures and the tenet of the greater force of culture than of race in mental factors (Boas 1911).

Ruth Benedict's first publication, "The Vision in Plains Culture" (1922), concerned variation in the experience and social uses of the sought-after vision in which a tutelary spirit directed the vision seeker in augmenting his or her personal powers through observing a personal ritual. This problem was designed similarly to the studies in variation of traits such as folklore elements, clan/gens elements, and material culture practices and forms, through which Boas and his students reconstructed histories of culture contacts, migrations, and alterations in traits of culture. Benedict was less concerned than they were with these traits and with historical reconstruction, and instead she studied variations in cultural interpretation of an arduous imaginary

experience and the adaptation of it to different social contexts. Her dissertation, "The Concept of the Guardian Spirit in North America," published the next year, traced a more widespread religious practice throughout the continent and compared it in other areas of the world. She noted the fallibility in evolutionary sequences of guardian spirit ideas suggested by European theorists. Her main argument was the unity of the idea of a guardian spirit, its wide diffusion, and its occurrence with and independence of a variety of traits such as totemism, shamanism, and differing economic attitudes and practices. Benedict's interest in religious behavior that enhanced individuals' powers foreshadowed her later inquiry into psychological aspects of culture. At this time she wrote several chapters and an outline of a book on American Indian religious behavior. She would soon abandon this book project for her interest in the totality of a culture. Religion was just one aspect of thought that was psychologically influenced, and she came to think that almost every aspect of culture equally reflected psychological factors.

As Benedict worked within Boasian cultural anthropology, she took up a latent problem it posed, which had not deeply engaged her colleagues: what brings coherence and cohesion to a culture? Her work on this problem was a realization of two undercurrents in Boas's thought, the idea of patterning in culture and the force of psychological factors in shaping culture. She brought together these problems in a striking new formulation that caught the imagination of her discipline and overshadowed other disciplinary trends. In one of her postwar class lectures, she described the new problem, which had emerged to lead her beyond the methods and questions of her colleagues:

The problem had become: coherence in culture and how to study it. The theoretical positions held in the 1920s . . . [included that] culture . . . is something man initiates to structuralize his own human potentialities. . . . Man's imagination in creating culture was seen in the same way as he creates drama and folk dances. The problem was to count man in. Culture does not operate by efficient causes of its own. . . .

In "Psychological Types in the Cultures of the Southwest," the point was that certain psychological sets in the Southwest had eliminated many surrounding traits and had seized certain other traits, giving them an elaborate development which could only be understood in terms of these psychological sets. I was stressing the selectivity of man in changing his whole culture. Cohesion was a psychological problem, not a historical problem, but one arising from a living culture. (Theory 12/11/47)

In the address she refers to here, given in 1928 at the annual anthropology meeting and received with astonished comments by listeners such as Alfred

Kroeber, comments she passed on in a letter to Margaret Mead, and also in her 1932 article, "Configurations of Culture in North America," and in *Patterns of Culture*, Benedict explained coherence and cohesion by the psychological attitudes that came to be preferred in a culture. Her argument in this book, briefly noted above and further discussed in several sections of this chapter, began with the image of "a great arc on which are ranged the possible interests provided either by the human age-cycle or by the environment or by man's various activities" (Benedict 1934:21).<sup>2</sup> A society selects from this arc and thereby constructs its pattern. Through the choice, rejection, and alteration of attitudes and behavior, culture patterns tend to impose limits and bring about a specific configuration unique to a particular group. Cultures tend to be integrated, "like an individual," and to have a pattern, a configuration. The patterning of three cultures was described: the Zuni pueblo Indians of New Mexico, whose calendrical ceremonies kept up the measured equilibrium of civic moderation and extended hospitality to the powerful and benevolent visiting gods; the Kwakiutl Indians of the salmon- and cedar-rich western coast of Canada, whose hereditary chiefs displayed their ability to violate nature and society, and their skills in managing debts owed them, in ceremonial distribution and destruction of the fine manufactures of their kin group;<sup>3</sup> and the Dobuan yam gardeners of a Melanesian island, who practiced magic to protect their produce, their land, and their lives from the sorcery attacks of their in-laws and fellow villagers, yet who achieved social cohesion by minimizing aggression. They phrased malice politely, for example, with the formula for thanks when receiving a gift: "If you now poison me, how should I repay you?" (Benedict 1934a:153).<sup>4</sup> Individuals learn the culture pattern with every experience in life, and enactment of the culture teaches and reinvigorates it. Persons who cannot fit in to the expected behavior may be tolerated; or the culture may include a role in which they can usefully enact their different disposition; or in some cultures, as in the United States, they may be stigmatized as abnormal. Benedict's sources on Pueblo culture were her two summers' fieldwork in the pueblo of Zuni and study of the extensive literature on the culture area. For Dobu, she drew on the field study of Reo Fortune (1932), a New Zealand anthropologist trained in psychology. The Kwakiutl materials came from Boas's extensive field reports and analyses. Boas had drawn an analogy between Kwakiutl potlatches and American economic practices of borrowing, managing indebtedness, and purchasing life insurance (Boas 1899, in Stocking ed. 1974:106). Benedict extended the analogy, adding that Kwakiutl chiefs' great displays had similar psychological motivation to American financial moguls' displays of conspicuous wealth.

Franz Boas wrote an introduction to *Patterns of Culture*, noting its method

of "deep penetration into the genius of the culture," and Benedict had selected three cultures that were "permeated by one dominant idea." He wrote that "extreme cases" make clear "the cultural drives that actuate the behavior of the individual" (Boas 1934). These strong words would seem to rule out the rumors that Boas did not agree with her rendition of Kwakiutl culture. Eric Wolf, in a later reanalysis of the extensive records on the Kwakiutl, described the complex of power in that culture – social, political, and religious mechanisms combining into a constellation of power – an analysis that had different purposes and relevancy from Benedict's earlier thought. Wolf, like Boas, noted that Kwakiutl culture was "extreme" and that there was value in studying extreme cases (1999:16). Benedict recognized problematic aspects of her presentation of the idea of configuration, commenting in correspondence that Raymond Firth had accurately pointed these out in his otherwise laudatory review of the book in the journal *Man*. He had written "a very satisfactory review of my book. . . . His criticisms were ones I myself feel to the full – 'tabloid' naming of cultures, animistic phrasings of how culture acts – though he mentions that I call attention to these phrases as verbal devices – and the need of further evidence. He'd read the book with great care" (RB to MM, February 14, 1936, MM 55).

Differing explanations of the patterning of Kwakiutl culture (Codere 1956) and more extensively of Pueblo culture became, within the next decade and more, a major issue of debate and constituted an important episode in reflexivity in interpretation of culture. Most of the revisionist interpretations of Pueblo culture were based on the Hopi pueblos. Hopi and Zuni cultures shared many traits and could usefully be taken to represent a single type, but they did have important differences that all ethnographers knew, for instance, in Hopi villages' long experience of fissioning, while Zuni maintained a single large community from the time of earliest Spanish exploration in this area. Li An Chi was the first to suggest modification of Benedict's interpretations, noting a few specific points based on his brief fieldwork in Zuni. He considered leadership more assertive than Benedict reported, and he thought the matrilineal system disadvantaged Zuni men even less than Benedict represented (Li 1937). Dorothy Eggan, in a 1943 article, distinguished cultural ideals from real experience and held that the Hopi ideal was Apollonian, as Benedict had characterized Zuni culture, but that real experience was anxiety ridden, demonstrating this with dreams she had collected as well as descriptions of behavior. Mischa Titiev's *Old Oraibi: A Study of the Hopi Indians of Third Mesa* (1944) investigated divisiveness in the community and breakdown in integrative institutions. He also found a deep-running disruptive anxiety that sorcery may be actually

practiced (Titiev 1943). Leo Simmons (1942) recorded the life story told to him by Don Talayesva, a Hopi man who was beset by anxieties, paranoia, and depression. Laura Thompson and Alice Joseph, however, wrote of "logico-aesthetic integration" in Hopi thought and behavior, documenting a culture of greater harmony and personal integration than Benedict had portrayed in Zuni (Thompson and Joseph 1944; Thompson 1945). Esther Goldfrank's alternative interpretation (1945) employed the theory that the practice of irrigation in Pueblo society generated despotic organizational systems, as in early state societies, but she supplied no data on the organization of irrigation in Zuni. No other source described complex irrigation procedures in Hopi, and Ruth Bunzel, a seasoned Zuni field-worker, said in an informal discussion among anthropologists in 1947 that Zuni irrigation was only slightly developed. Where Goldfrank's data was full was on childhood disciplines severely practiced in order to achieve cooperative personalities, reflecting the interest in child-rearing processes that many anthropologists took up at that time and adding a specific psychological causation much narrower than Benedict's configurational causation. In addition to these published differences of interpretation, some anthropologists and students who had visited the pueblos or studied them criticized Benedict's image of civic moderation in hallways of conventions. Benedict let the differences of interpretation stand and did not reenter the fray. To her students, she commented on the practice of sorcery, making a point similar to Titiev's, that in Zuni until recent years sorcery had not been actually practiced – there was no sorcery equipment, no stories of training in sorcery, no known instances of its use or accusations identifying sorcerers – but some Zuni informants implied it was practiced and suspicion was pervasive, as in the saying, "You yourself know how many you have killed." Only under increased stress of incursions of American influence, with a rise in interpersonal hostility, "a system of sorcery detection was worked out within a five-year period" (Religions 2/11, 3/25/47). Benedict, in a class, and Ruth Bunzel, in the discussion reported above, commended Li An Chi's observations on Zuni (Seminar 3/18/47). Benedict also noted differences between Hopi and Zuni culture when she was giving a synopsis of Zuni religion. Hopi kachina gods were invited to the village and entertained for half a year and then sent home, while Zuni kachina gods were always present in the village. Hopi priests must turn the sun at solstice, while Zuni priests must be happy themselves in order to make the sun happy in its course. Hopi letter-perfect rituals were kept secret within each cult, while Zuni rituals were memorized, and ceremonies attended, by many persons who were not cult members (Religions 2/13 and 2/18/47). Her summary chapters, however, generalized the Zuni descriptions as Pueblo

culture, and so the critics had a case. John W. Bennett surveyed the diverse representations of Pueblo culture and noted that all fell into a polarity emphasizing either "organic wholeness" or "repression," and he concluded: "The interpretation of Pueblo culture in these terms is a reflection of preference and value [of the observer] and I do not see how this can be eradicated or corrected by collecting more facts and making more interpretations. Therefore it becomes a problem for the sociologist of knowledge to deal with" (1946:374).

*Patterns of Culture* was criticized for locating cultural causes in psychological factors by the large contingent of anthropologists who confined explanation of society and culture to materialist causes. Also criticized was Benedict's use of analogies to philosophically conceived psychological complexes in describing two contrasting cultural configurations, an Apollonian and a Dionysian configuration, the contrast she borrowed from Friedrich Nietzsche's studies of Greek tragedy, to typify the Pueblo culture of Zuni and the generalized type of the Pima, the Plains, and the Kwakiutl Indians. Her employment of psychoanalytic terms for patterned behavior, "megalomaniac" for Kwakiutl chiefs and "paranoid" for Dobuans, was criticized as well. A frequently cited label for her whole analysis has been her phrase "culture is personality writ large." She did not again employ this phrase or the analogies to psychological types or psychoanalytic terms in her writings or lectures after *Patterns of Culture*. She abandoned these usages, although some of her students and a number of other anthropologists employed them, particularly the contrast of Apollonian and Dionysian. These terms came to be too convenient labels, "tabloid naming of cultures," as she had acknowledged in Raymond Firth's criticism. Some commentators wrote of these terms as though they fully conveyed her understanding of the cultures, ignoring Benedict's detailed descriptions, which were far from being stereotypes and described interrelationships of many facets of culture.<sup>5</sup> In later work, instead of an analogy of a principal type of behavior, she characterized a cultural concept of the self, as in her writings on Japan and other national cultures, characterizations that included a range of variant personal adjustments to the culture pattern. These types of self were not familiar to Western philosophical discourse or to psychiatry, and had no associated labels, and while depicted in fiction and cinema in several of the national cultures, were for the most part not denoted as generalized types by members of these cultures.

The contestation of *Patterns of Culture* was a measure of the book's impact in anthropology. Benedict's silence may have contributed to her reputation for aloofness, which appears to have flourished among some of the Columbia students. Her student Cora Du Bois wrote a comment on Benedict that may

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refer to her silence on other explanations of Pueblo cultures, for otherwise Benedict engaged in critique, as in her many reviews of colleagues' books. The comment was part of Du Bois' remarks for a memorial service held six weeks after Benedict's death, an occasion that gave license for high praise. Du Bois' probable reference to Benedict's silence in the many years of debate over this book and Du Bois' important role in psychological anthropology working entirely independently of Benedict give her eulogy historical interest. Du Bois wrote of Benedict: "Malice and aggression were singularly unvoiced; . . . dispute was an intolerable derogation not only of the self but of others. Achievement was a means of self-expression, and not a weapon of self-assertion" (1949). These highly honorific words are one indication of the strongly divergent opinions current in the discipline. Forty years after its publication, George Stocking Jr. wrote that *Patterns of Culture* "remains today the single most influential work by a twentieth-century American anthropologist" (1974:73). In some anthropological discourses more than half a century after its publication, Benedict's thesis has been reduced to a few remembered labels that do injustice to the ethnographic detail and the solid grounding of her argument in cultural anthropology. Others explore her work and its background and find new messages pertinent to present disciplinary problems. Revisits to this 1934 book will be noted later in this chapter in the section Benedict's Recent Commentators.

Several trying aspects of Benedict's early adulthood had been resolved before she began work on *Patterns of Culture*, resolutions that allowed, and were reflected in, fuller direction of her energies to her anthropological work. She and Stanley Benedict separated in 1930. Shortly thereafter she began living with a woman companion, a relationship to which Benedict was devoted for a decade in spite of the vagaries of her companion. A closer view of aspects of sexuality in her life becomes possible as information on her personal relations comes together in vignettes that appear in later chapters. Her depressions, her "devils," ceased, as indicated in her correspondence and in observations of an insightful colleague, Abraham Maslow (1965). After the success of *Patterns of Culture*, she stopped writing poetry. Although her poems were deeply felt personal statements, and many were published in literary journals (although published under a faint disguise of a pseudonym, Anne Singleton), to be recognized as a poet came to be less compelling after recognition for her anthropological writing (Mead 1959:93). Her friendship with Edward Sapir, which had once been admiring, had become abrasive, and her letters expressed distance three or four years before she began writing *Patterns of Culture*. It was the kind of friendship that he thought allowed criticism of her personal life; probably equally important to her as time went on, they

strongly disagreed in their approaches to the growing field of personality and culture. These points are fully visible in Sapir's letters to Benedict, published by Mead (1959), and in Benedict's unpublished letters to Mead, and they appear in the several, and varied, studies of their relationship (see especially Darnell 1990:172; Handler 1986; Mead 1959:158; Modell 1983:126). The residue of this attenuated friendship was both sadness and anger. These changes seem to have given Benedict a new sense of self-direction and new energy. Furthermore, as she was writing the last chapters of *Patterns of Culture*, she already had in mind a new pursuit of nonrelative aspects of culture.

### Culture or Personality?

In "counting man in" and showing a people's collective selectivity based on a learned psychological bent, Benedict engaged the question of the relationship of the individual and culture. Boas had posed this problem in 1920, but only a few anthropologists had taken it up before her, among them Sapir and Mead. In Benedict's new work, culture was always a strong factor, but culture resided only in individuals. Culture for Benedict was always an enveloping and multifaceted whole, though always malleable by its members. In culture growth and in the transmission of culture in each generation, recasting of meaning often takes place, whether initiated within groups by individuals or as a result of outside pressures, and this was part of her insistence that culture resides mainly in individuals. Pursuing her view of individuals as the fully conscious originators of culture elements, she opposed the psychoanalytic idea of a subconscious mind: "The psychoanalyst believes there is a large sphere of an unconscious. The anthropologist believes the whole personality is evident in behavior" (*Personality and Culture* 5/8/47). This view is a departure from Boas's views of unconscious mental processes and his openness to Freud's thought on the unconscious mind. Stocking has traced Boas's thought on the relation of psychology to anthropological problems, noting Boas's "systematic elaboration of the unconscious origin of psychic phenomena" and his several approving commentaries on Freud's work, noting also, however, Boas's doubt of the universality of, in Boas's words, "the theory of the influence of suppressed desires" (Stocking 2001:59, and quoting Boas 1920). A review of Sapir's use of the terms "unconscious" and "subconscious" concluded that he did not use them in a psychoanalytic sense but in the ordinary sense, as in one example: "unconscious perception of form and pattern in the behavior of others" (Allen 1986:462). Benedict's position is a deliberate distancing of her objectives from the concepts of psychoanalysis,



which had been brought into the personality and culture field at the time she was pursuing a quite different approach.

Because Benedict viewed culture as a major determinant of behavior and thought, she was critical of the weak versions of culture projected by others who joined in the early formulations of the field of personality and culture. Edward Sapir sought ways "to free himself from the necessity of admitting the role of culture" (RB to MM, November 20, 1932, MM B1; also in Mead 1959:325). The sociologist John Dollard presented, in Abram Kardiner's seminar at the New York Psychoanalytic Association, a case study of a black schoolteacher whom he considered to have a "White character structure. . . . When we were drinking afterwards John said to me that it just proved that culture didn't make much difference anyway" (RB to MM, August 22, 1937, MM B1). Although she held culture to be a forceful determinant, Benedict valued psychiatric insights, for example, writing about Dollard's *Frustration and Aggression*: "I'd change the anthropology in it and come to somewhat different conclusions, but it's a stimulating book" (RB to F. DeLaguna, January 29, 1940, RFB 28.2). She thought that Kardiner's development of the idea of a basic personality in each culture was also an important contribution.

*Patterns of Culture* was published at a time when there was little consensus on the parameters of the field of personality and culture and several years before the idea of a "basic personality" was first formulated. It influenced later thought on culturally regular personality structure, but the book was about the concept of culture and not about the complex, organized entity "personality" studied by psychologists and psychiatrists. Benedict described how culture controls and shapes psychological impulses and drives and selects psychological attitudes, but she did not write about individual personality. She said in a lecture that she would have preferred the field of study be called "the growth of the individual in his culture" rather than "personality and culture" (Theory 12/11/47). In contrast, Sapir's phrase for this field was "the impact of culture on personality." For Sapir, personality is in the objective case; he wanted to understand the individual in culture, and he had a particular interest in the creative individual (Darnell 1986, 2001). Benedict emphasized the psychological sources of culture, the representation of culture in individuals, and as her work matured she added learning taking place within culture. I can think of only one mention in her work of creative individuals: "Societies maim themselves by denying exceptional human gifts," she wrote in "To Secure the Blessings of Liberty" (u.p. ca. 1941b:14). Nonconformists and misfits interested her more than gifted individuals because the nonconformists and misfits showed the boundaries of the culture, helping to define it clearly. Her emphasis was on individuals responding to their culture, whether in accord

with it or in opposition. The terms "Apollonian" and "Dionysian" referred to culture types but were not adequate to describe individual personalities. A review of a few points in the history of the personality and culture field, as well as a look forward to Benedict's later work, will confirm that there were varied approaches to this field.

Margaret Mead's first books, on Samoa (1928) and Manus (1930), which influenced Benedict, showed how culture produced relatively uniform motivation and behavior in most but not all of its members. For each Samoan girl in her study, Mead showed in tabular form variations in the girl's household and factors affecting each one's socialization experience; for Manus children and adults, she emphasized the differing effects of kinship position on the roles they were expected to fulfill. Socialization was not uniform, and Mead showed that variations in life history could lead to deviant positions. While the culture may be consistent, and certainly set up parameters for the individual, and personalities were similar for most of the group, they were not seen as uniform. Mead attended to gender-specific behavior in *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* in 1935, finding again dominant cultural types, which in some cultures included both genders and in others differentiated the genders. The direction in which she took these ideas was not in personality dynamics but to analysis of interactional styles in the learning process, as in her and Gregory Bateson's work in Bali (Bateson and Mead 1942). Mead continued analysis of culturally specific emotional learning in her postwar study of Manus (1956), and that work was far removed from formulation of a basic personality.

The concept of a basic personality was developed by the neo-Freudian psychoanalyst Abram Kardiner, working with ethnologists' materials on pre-literate cultures. He applied neo-Freudian explanation to behavior and institutions in these cultures in a seminar that he taught yearly at the New York Psychoanalytic Institute beginning in 1935, a seminar attended and addressed by several anthropologists and which Benedict herself addressed in 1936 on several topics and on the ethnography of Zuni. There was no fanfare and funding from the foundations, which two years earlier handsomely sponsored the Yale interdisciplinary seminar on the effect of culture on personality, a seminar designed by Edward Sapir. Because of Sapir's early death, and probably because the seminar's objective was training students to do national culture research in their home societies and did not attempt to define the subject and methods further, it was a "great synthetic effort [that] had no lasting results" (Darnell 2001:133). Kardiner's seminar, in contrast, greatly influenced the field. In *The Individual and Society: The Psychodynamics of Primitive Social Organization* (1939), he presented his formulation of the

concept of basic personality, adhering to a psychoanalytic theory of mental processes, and he illustrated it with the case material anthropologists had presented in the seminar. That book was the starting point and the reference point for developments and critiques of this concept. Benedict's line of thought was different, but she thought well of Kardiner's book and spoke out for it while others in the field, Margaret Mead and Cora Du Bois, for example, came close to dismissing it. Du Bois, a participant in Kardiner's seminar and her fieldwork sponsored by him, designed her research in the Indonesian island of Alor to compare projections about personality that are based on description of culture with results from personality tests. Her Rorschach test protocols from Alor confirmed, more than any other materials, Kardiner's method of analyzing a basic personality. Before that, a cautious Du Bois wrote Benedict from Alor that Kardiner had written her "one of those supposedly encouraging baubles of, 'we'll know all about it when you come back' which of course throws me into a perfect funk – because I know quite well he won't and I won't" (CDB to RB, July 26, 1938, RFB 28.6). Back in New York and reporting on the Alorese in Kardiner's seminar, Du Bois wrote of her great excitement when Rorschach test specialist Emil Oberholzer's analysis of the Alorese Rorschachs, without knowledge of her ethnographic data, showed personality characteristics corresponding to Kardiner's projections from institutional data of a basic personality type.

The Rorschachs seem to be giving him full confirmation. . . . Oberholzer is gratifyingly cautious. . . . I may have unwittingly selected data to skew K's analysis (which coincides too consistently with my impressions), but I can't have tampered with the Rorschachs. . . . If I ever get time, I may go back to K's first and third portions of his book and try to work out with some semblance of coherence what is constructive in that jumble. Too bad the analysts, with all their clinical insight, have no "scientific" or methodological disciplines. (CDB to RB, February 2, 1940, RFB 28.6)

Benedict replied: "I liked his book a lot. The business about 'primary institutions,' which I do criticize, seemed to me just a bright idea he threw in ill-advisedly; it could have all been left out without prejudice to his main psychiatric insights" (RB to CDB, March 21, 1940. RFB 28.6).<sup>6</sup>

Benedict's focus was always on culture. Milton Singer emphasized this point, as did Virginia Wolf Briscoe and Hervé Varenne (Singer 1961:23; Briscoe 1979; Varenne 1984:285). She did not study personality of individuals or use the concept of a group personality. Her description of a deviant man in Zuni, Nick, the man who had memorized hours upon hours of ritual poetry and found fulfillment in conducting his clan rituals yet whose brilliance

and forcefulness subjected him to persecution, was not remotely psychoanalytic yet showed the inner dynamics of an individual. She probably shared a nonspecialist's view of the psychologists' and psychiatrists' concept that an individual personality was made up of mostly unconscious sets of mind and emotions arising from individual experience and traumas and from the effects of culture. Benedict's own brief autobiography, "The Story of My Life," employed several psychiatric terms in describing her childhood behavior. But her works were about culture and not about personality or individuals. "She saw in the societies she studied compelling evidence for both a process and a product larger in conception and execution than any single individual" (Briscoe 1979:450). When she wanted to refer to others' use of a theory for personality, she referred to the idea of "needs" and "press" as elaborated by psychologist Henry Murray and not to the Freudian concept of the impulses of the id and the "work" of the ego and superego (*Personality and Culture* 5/8/47). Murray's terms, "needs" and "press," which he defined as technical processes, were words of ordinary usage, as were the ideas behind his terms that Benedict used, "adient" and "abient," employing the Latin prefixes for direction, the former referring to experience that furthers positive needs and the latter referring to processes for avoiding harm or blame.

The phrase "psychological type" in her writing was close to "worldview" but included also culturally embedded attitudes and behavior. It denoted what was later called "ethos." Benedict, like Mead, did not move toward the concept of basic personality, both never incorporating the complexity of individual personality in their meanings of "cultural character" or "national character," a point emphasized by Singer (1961:54) and Du Bois (1960). Benedict developed an idea of a "self" in the national cultures she described, but the "self" was not a "basic personality type." It referred to individuals' ways of coming to terms with their culture, of using it to their benefit, and of relating to their social environment. In her most mature work, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, Japanese culture is portrayed as integrated as any culture she had previously described, even though she was well aware that it was a stratified, literate, urbanized society with an aristocracy and variation in religions. Obligations placed on individuals were similar in the different contemporary situations faced in this society, since the obligations derived from a common system of ethics and from the kinship system underlying it. The ethical principles were similar throughout, and at the same time they carried variant degrees and versions of obligations. There were consequently different modes of fulfilling obligations and different circles of obligation. These were furthermore an obligation to improve the self and different options to pursue in self-improvement. Japanese culture was not given a type-name. No

mythological figure, no psychoanalytic behavioral type, would have characterized this cultural behavior. The symbols Benedict took for her book title and discussed in the last chapter did not represent schism in the culture but represented two principles of behavior, which the pattern supported in different circumstances of life: the honored Samurai sword, which Benedict took to symbolize self-responsibility, and the chrysanthemum plant trained with hidden wires.<sup>7</sup> The sword and the chrysanthemum are both themes in *The Tales of Forty-Seven Ronin* and in the plots of Kabuki dramas that remain popular with the Japanese after several centuries. Benedict did not know or explore the Japanese language for a term to typify the culture. The Japanese psychoanalyst Takeo Doi later proposed the Japanese word *amae*, meaning the desire to be passively loved, and described its wide signification for Japanese psychology and culture. Doi had found Benedict's analysis of Japan inspiring (1973). Zuni, Kwakiutl, and Dobu cultures were not necessarily simpler, nor did Benedict mean they were reducible to a single idea, but when the idea of psychological coherence in culture was new, her analogy to single terms redolent with meaning in Western culture had heuristic value.

#### Polarities, Social Outcomes, and Universals

Benedict implied admiration for some cultures over others in her early writing, and this was her point in her studies "beyond cultural relativity." Her admiration was not for particular values, however; as a relativist and a functionalist, she could admire different and incompatible values. What made a culture successful in her view were "attitudes and arrangements" for commonality of benefits, for the support and scope of participation by all members, for rehabilitative measures after punishment, for arrangements that encouraged individual zest. These were social effects, "social outcomes," and this kind of benefit to individuals had been achieved in cultures with attitudes and arrangements incorporating widely differing values. Her categories for analysis were also value free; they were polarities within inclusive wholes, and the whole was as delimited as the opposite poles within it. Apollonian and Dionysian was the polarity she used first to characterize contrasting cultures. Her later work made wide use of the polarity of complementary and symmetrical behavior, the former found in hierarchical and organic societies, the latter found in segmented societies and also in some democratic societies. These categories of societies constituted a complete typology, as they did for their originator, Emile Durkheim. A subtype of complementary behavior, dominance and submission, was another polarity. She compared dominance over children cross-culturally, as well as domi-

nance over ethnic minorities. While dominance was often excessive, absence of some structure of dominance could bring about "dissolution of authority in the larger group" (*Personality and Culture* 10/24/46). Benedict regretted the lack of research that might describe nondominant types of leaders (RB to F. DeLaguna, January 29, 1940, RFB 28.2). She would have admired Waud Kracke's later portrayal of two leaders in Amazonian Kagwahive society, the force-wielding Homero, who was much admired, and Jovenil, who led other families by persuasion and by setting an example of cooperation (Kracke 1978). Another bipolar contrast she used was changes in age status during the life cycle, changing from high social status to low and back to high, as visualized in the shape of the letter U, or moving from low to high to low again, as in an inverted U. These different life-cycle arrangements carried no value judgments with them, and they were minimal schemes linked with other cultural items affecting status. Another polarity she drew up contrasted the culturally regular use of pride and humiliation. This polarity encompassed two different emotional responses to culturally imposed humiliation: shame and guilt. It is characteristic of her use of polarities that she placed shame and guilt within the larger experience of humiliation, a point that became clear in her analysis of Japan, and she contrasted both shame and guilt to pride (Benedict 1939, 1946a; *Personality and Culture* 11/7/46).

Benedict distinguished between cultures that allow "a sense of being free" and those that extend freedom to only the few. This distinction does not rest on particular values but on institutional security and welfare that give support and scope to all individuals within a culture, and a sense of freedom was found in many different institutional arrangements: "The functioning of a society in terms of gratifying needs . . . is not dependent on the set up, whether matriliney, kingship, authoritarian fathers, or other. . . . Egalitarian and hierarchical societies can be arranged to make the parties either secure or insecure" (*Personality and Culture* 3/20/47). Insecurity came in many forms, and a sorcerer could terrorize a community that lacked institutions to control sorcery. Even where sorcery was not practiced, fear of sorcery was sometimes prevalent. In the last lecture in her course in theory, she said: "The former question was, what kinds of social forms are good and what are bad? However, I ask a different question: under what conditions are different ends achieved" (*Theory* 1/15/48). To her mind, cultural relativism allowed defining conditions for a free society, allowed making laws against injustices, and, in world circumstances in 1941, allowed joining war against injustices.

Benedict thought the moral principles underlying human rights derived from human universals. In the Boasian paradigm, relativism and human universals were compatible. The early adaptive inventions of the human species

were universal attributes of humankind. Benedict itemized her version of them in the Shaw lecture series: inventions in material culture, the invention of the supernatural to supplement technology, the invention of incest to direct sexual attraction outside the immediate family, the invention of cultural forms of approval and disapproval and the sanctions behind these forms, the sharing or exchanging of material goods, and arrangements for procreation and care of the child (u.p. 1941b). She noted the striking similarities worldwide, and universal character, of the "making-of-man" cults, with their myth and ceremony of disempowering women (*Personality and Culture* 10/31/47). In her course on social organization, she added to the list of universals some form of control of theft, and she said, "Traits beyond cultural relativity are a common denominator of ethical moral sanctions" (*Social Organization* 12/12/46).

Some human rights advocates represent Ruth Benedict as a proponent of "full relativism," and some have said that cultural relativity should be abandoned because it allows no moral judgments and because ethnic fundamentalists base their defense of violence and in-group aggression on relativism (Zechenter 1997). An additional point appears relevant, however: power-holders seldom need the ideology of relativism to back them up. To sacrifice the important idea of cultural relativism, even in critical political contests, is a high cost.

Not only in attempts to persuade against human rights violations has cultural relativism been attacked but also by a modern-day advocate for absolutist culture, Christopher Shannon, who criticizes Benedict's advocacy for tolerance and her plea in *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* for "a world made safe for differences" (Benedict 1946a:15; Shannon 1995, 2001). He finds fault also with cultural consciousness, which may come particularly through experiencing a different culture from one's own, which Benedict discussed in the same book as a resource for bringing about desirable culture change. He sees becoming culture conscious and consciously bringing about change in culture as marks of the ideology of American liberalism and its grounding in the advocacy of freedom and personal autonomy, positions that he opposes. He implies that Benedict wrote that the Japanese should reform themselves by accepting values and practices similar to U.S. ones. He implies this by means of omitting from a quotation the phrase by which Benedict introduced it, that "the Japanese can not be legislated into" these different practices (Benedict 1946a:314; Shannon 1995:670, 2001:8). He is correct in observing that "their public men," as well as Benedict herself, have seen reforms in these directions as desirable to adapt to their basic values. Shannon stated the context of his position more fully in *Conspicuous Criticism: Tradi-*

*tion, the Individual, and Culture in American Social Thought, from Veblen to Mills* (1996), a full-fledged denunciation of U.S. social science. He examines *Patterns of Culture* as an example of the undesirable aspects of liberalism: "Benedict's cultural relativism . . . reinforces . . . [an] insidious Western assumption . . . that human happiness should be the organizing principle of social life" (Shannon 1996:98). Shannon does not misperceive her views in his critique of *Patterns of Culture*; however, he has a different meaning of culture, an absolutist one, which he identifies as a conservative Catholic position and which he says begins with:

insistence that reason, belief, and even unbelief make sense only in the context of some received tradition of inquiry. From this perspective meaningful inquiry is never free or open; it always entails personal submission on the part of a community of knowers. . . .

*Patterns of Culture* is not a book about the idea of culture but a book about the ideal of cultural consciousness. . . . Ultimately, cultural consciousness offers a synthesis of parasitism and eccentricity, of conformity and alienation, best expressed by the ideal of tolerance. (Shannon 1996:xv, 102-3)

Authoritarian and ensconcing tradition, this view is contrary to Benedict's concept of culture change and reform in culture, and it is contrary to the whole anthropological view. Human rights advocates' turn against relativism encounters strange bedfellows. Relativity is, of course, anathema to absolutism. Social science tussles with its own dilemma between relativism and universalism, and problems in human rights are the world's current aspect of that dilemma.

The issue of human rights, as Julian Steward wrote in criticism of the American Anthropological Association's (AAA) Statement on Human Rights in 1947, made at the request of the United Nations, is not one of science but one of values. Milton Barnett and John W. Bennett agreed with Steward on this point (AAA 1947; Barnett 1948; Steward 1948; Bennett 1949). However, the AAA's statement was well grounded in relativistic science and could be reread. It contained, for instance, this currently relevant advice: "Even when political systems exist that deny citizens the right to participate in their government, or seek to conquer weaker peoples, underlying cultural values may be called on to bring the people of such states to realization of the consequences of the acts of their governments and thus enforce a brake on discrimination and conquest" (AAA 1947:543). The limits of a science of society were nowhere more evident than in Steward's citation of the Hindu caste system, along with EuroAmerican economic imperialism, as not deserving tolerance.



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Benedict defended hierarchical organization. She commented on human rights in hierarchies in one of her classes:

The well-being of an area does not depend on whether the people or an aristocracy has power, but it means the allowance and furtherance of practicing the cultural commitments of the people, that is, increased respect for human rights and obligations as they are understood according to the character structure of those peoples. Legitimacy means the cultural commitments of the people. Human rights involve mutual obligations. Compare, for example, American denial of hierarchy, Japanese insistence on hierarchy and Chinese assent to hierarchy. (Personality and Culture 4/24/47)

Her stress on obligations accompanying rights reminds that rights, and obligations, take place in structured relationships, and denial of rights indicates violation of "cultural commitments." It also means that she considered rights not universal but culturally defined. Her contrast between ideas of hierarchy in American and Chinese cultures tells much about their governments' current differences over human rights and about historical tensions within both nations.

Anthropological knowledge of processes of internal culture change is a basis for advancing human rights and for aiding peoples' own attempts to better their social conditions, and Benedict's critics have contributed toward these ends in depicting the gains that accrue to those who maintain and defend subordination of groups in their societies (Nagengast 1997; Zechenter 1997). Benedict was cognizant of these issues. In course lectures, she described societies able to respond to internal violence, for example, African societies calling sorcerers before a court and obtaining confessions from them. Other societies were helpless to control a sorcerer among them, for example, the Pomo and Yurok in California, who feared the sorcerer and believed his power was effective only in his in-group. They could control a sorcerer only by killing him when he was vulnerable when renewing his powers in the woods. In the western Algonquian area, sorcerers were controlled by the belief that they could kill only when they came from a distance, and sorcerers from another tribe were hired for a useful function they could perform, protection against specific violations of hunting territorial rights (Religions 3/25/47).

In addition to problems in the management of in-group aggression, Benedict saw the problems a society faced from a zealot within: she described the supererogates as "those who take very seriously, and are involved in, ideas of the culture. They bring change by elaboration, or running into the ground, the original commitments of society. . . . A quality can become so entrenched

in a culture that it goes beyond cultural utility and can not be estimated by the culture which pursues it" (*Personality and Culture* 1/9/47). Her discussions of violence sometimes concerned individual aggression, reflecting the influence of contemporary psychological investigation of this topic; however, she also described institutionalized subordination in racism (*Personality and Culture* 2/13/47; Benedict 1940). Cross-cultural study of the manipulation of power was still in the future (Wolf 1999), and problems in attempting to further indigenous reformist programs are only recently receiving analytic debate (Field 2003; Vargas-Cetina 2003). For Benedict, the progressive side of culture change was in culture's responsiveness to its own members' evaluations and initiatives, and this position assumed that in any culture some members may have consciousness of their culture. She did not think "social engineering" and relativism were in opposition.

Cultural relativity and cultural universals are an issue worldwide. Regna Darnell has shown in the history of Boasianism what the dimensions of thought have been on this subject and concludes: "The moral imperative of North American anthropology . . . steered between relativistic tolerance for diversity, whether of language or culture, and the obligation of the anthropologist as public intellectual to bring the fruits of cross-cultural investigation back to the critique of his or her own society" (2001). In 1983 Clifford Geertz compiled the excessively confident – or seeming so – statements of human universals made by anthropologists and by critics of relativism, and in 1998 Micaela di Leonardo added to the survey. Geertz defended relativism while searching for reliable universalistic findings. Geertz himself was not merely "anti anti-relativism," the title he took for his 1983 address, and he identifies his own work as pluralist; but he gleans the literature for a reliable universalistic trend of thought here and research finding there. He has put together research on the cultural construction of emotion, including his own early writings on Javanese emotion words, with developmental psychologists' and linguists' demonstration of the infant mind as "meaning making, meaning seeking, meaning preserving, meaning using" (Geertz 2000:214). To these ideas he has joined research on brain functions' dependence on social references.

### Speaking on Public Issues

The period leading up to World War II was a time of breakdown of international channels of communication, of incomprehension of actions of other nations, of political fears in the United States. A gathering in September 1941 of the nation's great philosophers, scientists, and social scientists was named the Interdisciplinary Conference on Science, Philosophy, and Religion in