Star Trek and the Anthropological Enterprise: Cultural Relativism and Tolerance in Contemporary America

Shaun R. Mulvey

A thesis submitted to the University of Manitoba

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Anthropology

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BY

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A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University of

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of

MASTER OF ARTS

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Abstract

Cultural relativism and an ethic of tolerance have become common values in American culture. Originating in the anthropological tradition of historical particularism, the doctrine became an influential component of anthropological practice and activism since the early twentieth century. Cultural relativism has since become a contentious subject in contemporary America, manifesting itself in American civil society in both debates about a culture war and in human rights discourse. The doctrine's influence can also be gauged in popular and mass culture, especially in the various television Star Trek series.

The objectives of the present thesis are twofold. First, we will consider the doctrine's diffusion into popular American culture with specific reference to its salient features and appearance in the debates about an American culture war. Second, we will consider its appearance in Star Trek and address the manner in which the television show provides a complicated interpretation of its ethical and political implications.

The methodology utilized in the present thesis has been adopted from the work of Roland Barthes. His semiotic method allows for a detailed analysis of the various codes structuring a text and its intertextual nature. Genre analysis has also been used to understand the relationship between Star Trek and science fiction in general.

A theoretical framework has been elicited from the work of Antonio Gramsci, Raymond Williams, and Victor Turner. Gramsci's concepts of

hegemony, common sense, and folklore have been important in suggesting that ideological processes are not unidirectional but are rather complicated by various factors. Victor Turner's concept of liminoid phenomena has been utilized to suggest the medium's status as a forum for the presentation of debates about American culture and values.

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Chapter One: The Context and Scope of the Present Thesis

> The media are now, arguably, our culture's primary symbolic system. They will certainly be so throughout the next century. Those who do not understand how the media work, how they construct meanings, how they can be used, and how the evidence they present can be weighed and evaluated are, in contemporary cultures, considerably disadvantaged and disempowered—Len Masterman (in Pungente 1999:20).

> Education is ideally civil defence against media fallout. Yet Western man has had, so far, no education or equipment for meeting any of the new media on their own terms. Literate man is not only numb and vague in the presence of film or photo, but he intensifies his ineptness by a defensive arrogance and condescension to 'pop kulch' and 'mass entertainment'. It was in this spirit of bulldog opacity that the scholastic philosophers failed to meet the challenge of the printed word in the sixteenth century. The vested interests of acquired knowledge and conventional wisdom have always been bypassed and engulfed by new media—Marshall McLuhan (in Pungente 1999:4).

In retrospect, Marshall McLuhan's prophetic suggestion that the twentieth century would bear witness to the emergence of a global village can no longer be merely acknowledged for its theoretical plausibility. In the brief span of a century, the world has experienced a profound transformation of the manner in which we communicate beyond the insular confines of our cultural heritages. Reverberating with the intensity of earlier technological innovations, such as the printing press and telegraph, these innovations in mass communication have had an undeniable effect on the way we experience and understand our contemporary world. The twentieth century, in effect, has bequethed a radical succession of communication media that have profoundly altered the landscape of our imagination and the means available for its expression.

This can be seen nowhere more significantly than in the medium of television. Although other forms of mass media have predated its advent and continue to exert

influence on contemporary society (such as print media, radio, and cinema) television is arguably the preeminent mass medium. To a certain degree, we have grown accustomed to the not so infrequent lament that television is a blight that needs to be excised from our lives. The medium has drawn the ire of those wishing to subvert its overwhelming presence, chastising those involved in the industry for their laissez-faire disregard for issues of quality and education. Television has come to be regarded as a certain danger to our youth, inculcating a cavalier attitude toward violence and sexual activity in the most impressionable section of our society. We have come to expect hostile indictments from critics on either side of the political spectrum. Conservative commentators have identified television as a serious force that has contributed to the reduction of literacy, family values, and involvement in the democratic process. Conversely, liberal critics have seen television as a detriment to greater equality, neglecting judicious coverage of social issues such as gender and racial relations in favour of formulaic entertainment designed to pacify its audience. It has also drawn criticism for its commercial basis, developing programs established for the sole purpose of encouraging consumerism and conspicuous consumption.

In a sense, we cannot fault either group for their concern about the effects of television. The medium's all-pervasive reach cannot be denied. According to the 1996 Canadian Census, there were 28,846,761 Canadians living in 11,580,000 households across the nation (Pungente 1999:21-2). More particularly, statistics have indicated that "11,482,000 [households] have at least one television set (more than half have two or more); 11,425,000 have a radio; 9,808,000 have a video tape recorder (one in five homes has two or more); and 8,539,000 have cable television" (1999:22). Although this Census

data is several years old, we can assume that television remains an ongoing source of entertainment in the majority of homes in Canada and the United States to the present day. This is made evident in a number of ways. For instance, technological improvements in the home entertainment market have continued to underscore the central role of the television set in most households. DVD technology has brought with it an explosion of merchandise geared toward the consumption of television programming in the home. Television series and films that have been absorbed into the rerun market have since been marketed for private consumption in a DVD format. Star Trek is just one example of a plethora of television products that have received renewed life in this new format. Moreover, technological innovations such as Plasma television and High Definition Television are representative of the medium's ongoing utility. Finally, the appearance of satellite technologies has led the delivery of a multi-channel universe of specialized programming at a relatively inexpensive investment.

Statistics regarding actual television viewing are a further indication of the importance of the medium in people's lives. According to Fr. John Pungente, S.J., a Canadian media analyst and educator, Canadians "watch some 22.8 hours of television a week, compared to the people in the United States who watch about 50.8 hours a week" (1999:22):

> We spend about 700 hours eating, 400 hours a year reading newspapers, magazines, and books, 50 hours a year in church or synagogue, and 1,180 hours a year watching television. By the age of sixty-five, the average Canadian will have seen 3,000 entire days of television, which works out to watching television for nine full years of your life" (1999:22).

As may be expected, television viewing also figures significantly in children's lives. "Canadian children watch television 17.9 hours a week [...] spend[ing] more time watching TV than they spend in any other activity except sleeping" (1999:22):

> By the time they finish high school, the average student has spent 11,000 hours in the classroom. But the average student has also watched 15,000 hours of television, listened to 10,500 hours of popular music, seen 350,000 television commercials, and witnessed 18,000 violent television deaths" (Pungente 1993:14).

Media institutions, therefore, are significant outlets for an "alternative curriculum" that should not be simply seen as an influential source of information and entertainment for children and youth, but equally important for people irrespective of their age. Offering a "dynamic and persuasive curriculum" (1993:14), television and other mass media are profound social and cultural phenomena that require our concerted attention should we hope to determine their place and influence in our lives. As Pungente has noted, "we live in a mediated society [in which] our culture and our business are formed by the mass media" (1999:2). In concurring with his conclusion that we can ill afford to simply dismiss the medium and its popular culture as minor entertainment, we must attempt to "develop an informed and critical understanding of the nature of the media, their impact, and the techniques they use" (1999:2).

Objectives of the Present Thesis

There have been two primary objectives guiding the present thesis research. First, we will consider the influence of anthropological conceptions on twentieth century American popular culture and the extent to which these ideas have become common sense in the American vernacular. As such, the thesis will address the diffusion of anthropological notions regarding cultural integrity, evolutionary development and technology, and cultural relativism. Most importantly, we will attempt to gauge the impact

of an ethic of tolerance as it was expressed in the doctrine of an American society rent by an ongoing culture wars debate. If we are to believe Elvin Hatch's assertion that cultural relativism provoked a radical decentering that "parallel(ed) and [is] nearly as momentous" as the changes wrought by the Copernican Revolution (1983:59), then we can safely assume that its profile will have been registered in American society. An overriding concern of our discussion, therefore, will rest on determining whether these ideas have become relatively diffuse in American culture and, additionally, how these anthropological ideas have been represented in the mass medium of television.

We will focus on the popular culture icon Star Trek with a primary emphasis on the *Original Star Trek* and its first successor, *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. My reason for doing so involves three considerations. The first is determined by the imposing quantity of Star Trek productions. Since the *Original series* was cancelled in 1969, there have been four spin-off series to date (*The Next Generation, Deep Space Nine, Voyager,* and *Enterprise*). This remarkable televisual output is matched only by Trek's transference to the cinema: *The Motion Picture, The Wrath of Khan, The Search for Spock, The Voyage Home, The Final Frontier, The Undiscovered Country, Generations, First Contact, Insurrection*, and most recently *Nemesis*. In addition to this consideration, the two series that have been selected for analysis are important because they arguably occupy a seminal position in the Star Trek franchise. To begin, *TNG* was the first Star Trek descendent to reach television in 1987 following a lengthy process to reintroduce a Trek series to the medium. Had it failed to acquire an audience, the likelihood of Star Trek's continued success would have been in doubt. A final consideration revolves around the fact that the two series are products of distinctive periods in American history and society. Separated

by nearly two decades, the *Original Star Trek* and its initial spin-off are partial glimpses into their respective cultural milieus.

Accordingly, our second objective will be focussed on determining the extent to which Star Trek exhibits traces of anthropological concepts. Assuming that the series has registered a number of prevalent themes that form the content of American popular culture, we can utilize the series for the information we may obtain about anthropological influences on American culture. The series, then, may be recognized as a forum for the exchange of conceptions regarding cultural diversity, tolerance, and cultural relativism.

A Review of the Popular and Academic Literature on Star Trek

We will begin our discussion with a review of the literature associated with the Star Trek phenomenon. For the purposes of the present paper, the literature can be divided into material published for general consumption and work of a more scholarly bent. This distinction is merely heuristic and should not preclude the possibility that critical scholarship on Star Trek is accessible to an audience beyond the academy. As will be identified later, Star Trek provides a telling example of the extent to which television provides an avenue for cultural introspection and reflection on the part of its avid viewers. The series' didactic qualities have been made evident by the varied responses of an active fan culture throughout its successful development on television and film (see discussions of poaching and slash fiction in Jenkins 1992, Jenkins and Tulloch 1995, Jindra 1992,1994, Penley 1997, Zapolsky-Anijar 1994). Moreover, we may cautiously acknowledge its financial viability as an indication of its audience's willingness to further explore the Trek *mega-text* (Bernardi 1998:7). As a result, several publications that have been included amongst the academic material in the following discussion are also likely to

have attracted the attention of non-academic readers (see, for instance, Andreadis 1998, Barrett and Barrett 2001, Hanley 1997, Kraemer, Cassidy, and Scwartz 2001, Penley 1997, and Richards 1997). These publications, however, may be distinguished from other popular material on the basis of their critical analyses of particular features contained in the Star Trek franchise.

Star Trek has attracted the attention of countless authors and commentators during its transformation from a relatively obscure science fiction series lasting a mere three seasons in the late 1960's into a multi-billion dollar entertainment franchise. By the mid-1990's, for instance, Jenkins and Tulloch (1995:3) had noted that "more than 1,300 English-language articles examining every conceivable aspect of the programme, its producer and stars, its exploitation and its reception" had already been published. In addition to an ever-increasing academic literature on the subject of Star Trek has been a concomitant efflorescence of material meant to appease audience appetite for further Trek information. A selection of this material has been utilized throughout the course of the present research and remains an invaluable resource for detailed information on the production processes of the television industry. In this regard, several historical accounts of the development of the series have been invaluable (Gerrold 1973, Lichtenberg, Marshak, and Winston 1975, Judith and Garfield Reeves-Stevens 1997, Solow and Justman 1996, van Hise 1993 and 1995, Whitfield and Roddenberry 1975). Further information regarding its production history has been acquired from biographical and autobiographical accounts of those involved in its production (Alexander 1991,1994, Asherman 1988, Fern 1996, Irwin and Love 1977, Nichols 1994, Nimoy 1995, Takei 1994). Finally, several compendiums of episode synopses and miscellania have been

helpful (Asherman 1986, Nemecek 1992, Okuda and Okuda 1993). Taken in total, these sources provide relevant information about the historical development of Star Trek as well as detailed materials exhibiting the extent to which the production processes of television illuminate its status as a culture industry.

Popular publications also exhibit the extent to which television is structured by what John Fiske has referred to as *vertical intertextuality* (1989:117). According to Fiske a television text cannot be appreciated in isolation but must be contextualized in terms of its "relations with other texts that refer specifically to it". These texts include both secondary sources, constituted of such work as publicity and criticism, and tertiary "texts that the viewers make themselves out of their responses" (1989:124). The popular materials outlined above provide examples of secondary texts, while examples of tertiary texts can be identified in the work of several authors (Jenkins 1992, Jenkins and Tulloch 1995, Jindra 1994, Penley 1997, Zapolsky-Anijar 1994).

Scholarship on Star Trek has been equally prolific. Whether presented in book-length studies or appearing in a variety of academic journals (such as *Science Fiction Studies, Extrapolations* or the *Journal of Popular Culture*), the academic literature on Star Trek is impressive in its breadth of topics and theoretical orientations. According to Wagner and Lundeen (1998:18), "critical views of Star Trek run the gamut—some praising Trek as deep psychic insight and others denouncing it as oppressive propaganda". In particular, the "often spiky academic debates about Star Trek" (Barrett and Barrett 2001:9) have appeared to proliferate throughout the previous decade. These approaches have continued the critical analyses of Star Trek that appeared during the 1980's (Wagner and Lundeen 1998:12-8). Unlike earlier studies that adopted a Freudian or Jungian

psychological approach to Star Trek, recent studies have utilized "increasingly complex theoretical language [to] take Trek to task for its purported sexism, racism, neocolonialism, [and] homophobia" (1998:17). In order to underscore their proposition about the academic literature on Star Trek, the remainder of the present section will briefly address some of the critical literature on gender, race, neo-colonialism, and religion in the Trek text.

A considerable body of research has addressed gender and racial issues as they have been presented in the various Star Trek series and films. As is the case with research focussed on instances of neo-colonialism and religion in Trek, a significant portion of the work on gender and race has centered on the variance exhibited between the *Original Star Trek* (1967-9) and its later spin-off series and films. Whereas the Original series is deemed the most overtly masculinist in orientation, the successive series are acknowledged for their more subtle presentation of a phallocentric, rational scientific worldview that is characteristic of the Star Trek corpus (Deegan 1983, Horrocks 1997, Korzeniowska 1996, Wagner and Lundeen 1998). Recently, several writers have pointed to the contradictory nature of the Star Trek text and have focussed on the manner in which racial and gender categories are problematised on the show (Barrett and Barrett 2001, De Gaia 1998, Junker and Duffy 2002, Roberts 1999, Wagner and Lundeen 1998, Wertheim 2002).

As noted above, the *Original Star Trek* is often identified for its troubling portrayal of gender. Its "reflection of America's unexamined gender assumptions" (Wagner and Lundeen 1998:81-2) can be seen in a number of ways. At a basic level, the *Original series* exhibits essentialized notions of gender distinction. Beyond the more obvious absence of women from command roles (Andreadis 1998:54-5), the Enterprise

often discovered that "cosmic femininity applied not just to Terrans or even humanoids but to all intelligent life-forms" (Wagner and Lundeen 1998:85). The feminine is deprived of agency and is often frustrated in its attempts to appease its masculine counterpart. For instance, romantic and sexual intimacy is largely absent from the Original series, while women are often portrayed as either potential transient love interests or dangerous usurpers of male authority (Deegan 1983:183). Furthermore, recurrent female characters in *TNG* continue this pattern (such as Deanna Troi, Beverley Crusher, and Guinan), often occupying traditionally feminine roles and exhibiting relevant qualities of nurturance and compassion (Kornzeniowska 1996:20). Summarizing the status of women in the *Original series*, Deegan raises an interesting parallel to an ambivalent portrayal of the *femme fatale* in *film noir* of classic Hollywood cinema:

> In every romantic episode, women are eliminated. They are tempting, evil, and illusionary. Or they are culturally and morally superior, but unavailable. They are simply temptresses (1983:184).

This aspect is particularly revealing of the gendered logic of the *Original Star Trek* and its immediate spin-off series. Duty is paramount on the Enterprise, and its overriding discourse is enforced both through verbal cues identifying the starship as a feminine entity and in the embellished relationship between the primary characters of Kirk, Spock, and McCoy (Deegan 1983:184). Their relations, according to April Selley, are indicative of "the quintessential American romance" (1986). The brotherhood that develops in the series can only be threatened by female incursions, and represents a "sacred marriage of males" divorced from the constraints of family and society (Wagner and Lundeen 1998:105). The overriding duty to ship and crew invariably resulted in a curtailment of any heterosexual relationship that may have developed during the course

of an episode (Andreadis 1998:229-30). Moreover, male characters have often found surrogate female partners in the form of "androids, genetic manipulations, and holographic people [...] conjured up artificial women who embody male fantasies" (Wagner and Lundeen 1998:101). The domestic unit is equally problematic in the Star Trek universe, adhering to what Athena Andreadis refers to as the "Hollywood penchant for dead or weak mothers [and] men who are obsessed with their fathers (Andreadis 1998:255-6; see also Wagner and Lundeen 1998). When marriage is offered in Star Trek, it often qualifies as an "escape, digression, or punishment" (Wagner and Lundeen 1998:98).

Several writers have focussed on the functional confluence of racial and colonialist structures in the various Star Trek series and films. Jay Goulding's analysis of the *Original Star Trek's* inscription of America's colonial aspirations is an early example of this type of critique. Star Trek is "anticipatory memory", he maintains, emphasizing that it is instrumental in fictionally expressing the desires and requirements of American capitalist democracy and its expansionary goals during the 1960's (1985:12-22). This can be seen in the Federation's cultural and political domination of member planets, in the meritocractic hierarchical structure of Starfleet and the Enterprise, and in the overriding valorization of science and instrumental reason (1985:18-9, 58). "In both Star Wars and Star Trek," he concludes, "we see legitimation and reinforcement of numerous liberal-democratic foundational stones: the value of perseverance, the pride of dying for the cause (even suicidal), the importance of family heritage, the authoritative–deferential axis of the father-son relationship, the supremacy of the male image, [and] the necessity to fulfill one's destiny" (1985:70).

These suggestions are clarified in the work of several other writers. Daniel Bernardi (1998), for instance, has addressed the racial and colonialist assumptions that structure the *Original Star Trek* and *The Next Generation.* He considers the manner in which the Trek narrative reconstructs a liberal-humanist project that is fraught with contradiction. The *Original series*, according to Bernardi (1998:50), exhibited a "diegetic logic" that "perpetuated a contradictory racial project-in-the-text that ultimately advocates the evolutionary hegemony of whiteness" (1998:50). This was made evident in a number of ways, including the Federation's similarity to a NATO model of political and military alliance and a notion of `parallel evolution' that privileged a "humanocentric universe" (1998:50-68). Moreover, *The Next Generation* recapitulated many of these features in performing a neo-conservative project that prioritized assimilation of differences and the danger of miscegenation (1998:112-36).

Similar assessments of *The Next Generation's* complicated inscription of a liberal-humanist ethos have been included in the collection *Enterprise Zones: Critical Positions on Star Trek* (Harrison et al. 1996, see also Boyd 1996:95-113, Collins 1996:137-56, Ono 1996:157-85). According to Boyd (1996:111), *TNG*'s utopian imagination is founded on a fundamental rejection of difference and recuperation of "nineteenth-century notions of progress and infinite human potential". In doing so, the series privileges a model of progress that situates human and alien difference in an over-riding meta-narrative of human nature and an "essentialist definition of the self" (1996:104). In an comparable manner, Collins emphasizes the incongruity between *TNG*'s specific liberal utopian vision of "self-actualization, individual egalitarianism, self-determination, and democracy" and its adherence to a conservative philosophy of

'Trilateralism' (1996:138). Advocating limitations on individual liberty and dissent in support of an integrated global economic and political order, this political philosophy is expressed in *TNG*'s contradictory subordination of its liberal utopianism for the sake of political and military hierarchies of expansion and consolidation.

Significantly, several authors have made alternative appraisals of Star Trek's presentation of gender and its relationship to race and neo-colonialism (Barrett and Barrett 2001, Junker and Duffy 2002, Vande Berg 1996, Wilcox 1996). Although in partial agreement with the critical assessments of the series already considered, these commentators provide a discussion more akin to the analytical tack adopted in the present thesis research. Robin Roberts, for instance, has suggested that the depiction of femininity in *The Next Generation* has functioned in the same manner as representations of the Racial Other (1999:18). The feminine is mobilized, according to Roberts, in order to disrupt the pervasive male gaze, and acts as "both phobia and fetish". Often depicted in the form of an ephemeral Alien, the feminine exhibits a "changeability and performativity [that] belies stereotypes of feminine passivity and stresses [its] multiplicity" (1999:19).

An important aspect of her discussion can be identified in her consideration of science fiction's dual attributes of defamiliarization and extrapolation. Providing a narrative device that attempts to produce a sense of cognitive estrangement in its audience, these generic conventions of sf are often manifested in allegorical stories that project contemporary issues into a fictional diegesis. This is important in two respects. First, science fiction performs a didactic function. Roberts notes that extrapolation, for example, "keeps science fiction located in issues and ethics that are a part of

contemporary human culture" (1999:3). Her book, consequently, explores *TNG*'s negotiation of sexual orientation, race, reproductive politics, rape and romance. Equally, the series "uses a post-colonial sensibility [...] to associate geographic colonization with the colonization of women, gay men and lesbians, and people of color" (1999:7).

Extrapolation and defamiliarization, according to Roberts, are also significant in that they represent a means whereby alternative traditions of thought can be given voice in the popular genre of science fiction. In particular, she suggests that the social milieu of the mid-1980s witnessed both the debut of the first spin-off series of Star Trek and a growing influence of French feminist theory (1999:7, 9-10). Both "reflect[ing] and confront[ing] a post-modern concern for subjectivity, gender, and political power" (1999:7), the series also drew on a tradition of feminist writing in literary science fiction (1999:2). The series, as a result, "depicts female aliens who embody the visions of French feminist theory" (1999:18), and "uses science fiction's unique qualities to explore gender and science, women and language, and the definition of difference" (1999:13).

Roberts's discussion is significant in another regard. Her identification of a convergence of interests between a particular theoretical tradition and popular fiction parallels the basis on which the present thesis research has been launched. As will be discussed in a moment, Star Trek 's "definition of difference" will be examined for possible similarities with anthropological discussions of cultural integrity, incommensurable nature of cultural traits, and tolerance in the wake of cultural relativism.

In a similar vein, a number of commentators have pointed to an evolution in the portrayal of religious belief in the later Trek series and films (Kraemer, Cassidy, and

Schwartz 2001, Pilkington 1996, Porter and McLaren 1999, Roth 1981, Tyrrell 1979). Although "there is no question as to the suspicion of organized, didactic forms of religion" in the entire series (Kraemer, Cassidy, and Schwartz 2001:7), *Deep Space Nine* and *Voyager* "began to offer richer and more complex representation of religious practices, beliefs, and worldviews" (2001:11). These series have suggested that "a religious worldview and beliefs can [...] provide an individual with a legitimate source of guidance and strength which may not be necessarily incompatible with rationality and science" (Pearson in Porter and McLaren 1999:29). Indicating a "need for moral and spiritual guidance", this shift has arisen just as "this culture's confidence in the power of humanity on its own to provide guidance, cohesion, and meaning is much less assured than it was in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s" (Pearson in Porter and McLaren 1999:25).

In general, a consensus exists with respect to Star Trek's ideological and mythical functions in American culture. According to Wagner and Lundeen, the series "serves as a secular American mythology [providing] narratives that structure their worldview and give form and meaning to the disconnected data of everyday life" (1998:3). As we have seen, the mythic composite presented by Trek includes a registration of gender, racial, and colonialist representations that have been deemed problematical by critics.

Due to its historical longevity, however, Star Trek has undergone a process of change since its inception in the late 1960's. This feature is not only apparent in terms of its presentation of race and gender, but can also be seen in its greater sophistication in dealing with issues of inter-species contact. In this regard, we can acknowledge several synchronicities between the Trek discourse and the field of anthropology. As noted at the

outset, this apparent resonance of certain features of anthropological theory in the series has inspired the formulation of the present research.

The Scope of the Present Thesis

In many ways a watershed in American history, the 1960's were a decade of unprecedented challenge and change. During this period, the fabric of American life was disturbed by a growing surge of popular dissent that manifested itself in a variety of social movements. A civil rights movement that had its origins in the previous decade began to come to the fore of public discourse, challenging the moral and political establishment for recognition. Sexual issues came to the fore, providing the groundwork for further dissension during the 1970's that revolved around the judicious treatment of women in the workplace, legal system, and general society. Youth disenfranchisement, evident in the appearance of the 1960's counterculture, further alienated mainstream American society from an earlier conservative idyll that was typical of the 1950's. Finally, the conflagration arising out of the quagmire of the Vietnam War encouraged a widespread reconsideration of American foreign policy and its commitment to maintaining a bulwark against the perceived incursions of Communism around the world.

In a sense, we can identify these social movements of the 1960's as a harbinger of recent debates in America. Their outcome cannot be discerned in the immediate aftermath of the decade nor did they find resolution in the years following the conclusion of the decade. The resurgence of American conservatism in the 1980's and 1990's under the Reagan and Bush administrations wrought a heightened awareness of social and cultural discrepancies underwriting American society. Many of the tensions that had unsettled the United States during the 1960's returned in a more pervasive and subtle

form. As a result, public discourse in the United States has been characterized by ongoing discussions that have considered the extent to which American value systems have undergone profound change. Referring to the existence of an American 'culture war', a number of commentators have used the term in order to address a variety of social issues that have placed the political and social implications of American culture in direct relief.

One area of concern that has surfaced can be found in the attempts to incorporate a more inclusive curriculum on American campuses. At the centre of this debate is the appropriateness of what has been traditionally deemed the canon of higher learning for a demographically distinctive population in the United States. In order to provide a balanced representation of American ethnic diversity and its unique cultural contributions, liberal arts curriculum has been altered to include non-Western works of literature and the cultural legacy of American minority cultures. As a result, equal billing has been accorded to the works of Black and Hispanic writers or to the literary products of women and gay/lesbian authors. At stake in this debate is a definition of the very essence of education and a broadened realization of the extent to which educational institutions are involved in the dissemination of prevailing norms and cultural capital.

Another indication of the culture war can be discerned in the context of the traditional separation of Church and State. Whereas this distinction has been a cornerstone of the American Constitution and republic, there have been periodic disagreements that reveal tensions between civil rights groups and their religious counterparts. One repeated point of contention has revolved around the issue of abortion, while further conflict has emerged about the appropriateness of school prayer in publicly funded institutions. Although this traditional separation has been an ongoing bone of

contention since its inception, current discussions have been framed in terms of a culture war that has erupted into public discourse.

While the following thesis is not devoted to an extensive discussion of these rather complex issues, their prevalence in the United States can be seen as an indication of the tactical sites of a culture war. They represent a forum in which opposing definitions of American values and cultural traditions are situated in direct contact, producing an impassioned struggle for preeminence in the public consciousness. Often occurring in a political and judicial setting, culture war polemics are fundamentally discursive in nature. A discourse that has been framed in terms of civil and social rights, these debates have revealed profound contradictions in American culture and society that do not appear to be easily reconcilable in the near future.

In order to arrive at a better understanding of the American culture war, we will consider the contribution of American anthropology to its expression. More specifically, we will address the doctrine of cultural relativism and its advocacy of an ethic of tolerance in the face of culturally established differences. According to anthropologist Elvin Hatch, the appearance of cultural relativism in the mid-twentieth century and its public expression by American anthropologists produced a revolution in the way cultural and ethical differences were conceived by Americans. No mean feat, Hatch believes that its diffusion into American culture was akin to a Copernican revolution in moral theory and ethical conduct. According to Hatch, cultural relativism "was parallel and nearly as momentous" as the Copernican Revolution, providing a "fundamental redefinition of where we stand in the world" (1983:59).

If Hatch's assertion is correct, we could safely assume that evidence of cultural relativism should be in an identifiable form in American culture. Most significantly, we might train our analytical gaze on mass media products in order to attempt to determine the extent to which the doctrine has come to pervade popular culture. Mindful of this suggestion, we will address the resonance of cultural relativism and its ethic of tolerance in Star Trek. In order to do so, we will adopt the theoretical insights of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci for the purposes of analysis. Although his contribution is considerable, we will focus on his particular conception of ideological systems and their social functions. We will adopt Gramsci's notion of common sense, folklore and hegemony to consider the ideological operations of complex societies and the manner in which various groups in civil society can both absorb and counteract these dominant processes. In sum, these concepts will provide a theoretical system on which an appraisal of the doctrine's diffusion into American popular culture can be produced.

An Overview of Chapter Contents

Beginning our discussion with an overview of the Star Trek phenomenon, the second chapter will consider the development of the Star Trek franchise from its inception in the mid-1960's to its current incarnation in the series *Star Trek: Enterprise*. In part, allowing for an overview of Star Trek's historical evolution, this biographical sketch will also identify the institutional complexities involved in the production of a television series. According to Hertenstein (1998), the production of Star Trek has always been a collective enterprise. It has involved a "multiplicity of input from a constantly shifting retinue of writers, directors, and actors, as well as the role of studio politics, corporate economics, production logistics, the vagaries of ratings and

demographics, and plain serendipity" (1998:13, see also 42-62). Having considered the history of its development, we will address some of the salient features of the show. Entailing an overview of each series and film, this section of the chapter will be definitional in nature in order to derive an understanding of several key concepts in the Star Trek lexicon.

Our third chapter will consider the conceptual contributions of American anthropology to American culture and the recent culture war debates. The chapter will begin with some preliminary comments on cultural relativism and its relationship to other types of relativist thought. Having clarified the doctrine's complexity, we will proceed with a discussion of the theoretical tradition of historical particularism in order to explicate the specific concept of culture contained within the doctrine of cultural relativism. Addressing its expression in the work of anthropologists Franz Boas, Ruth Benedict, and Melville Herskovits, we will consider how this particular understanding of culture played an integral role in the doctrine's expression and the advocacy of tolerance that became a rallying-cry for its proponents. We will conclude the chapter by considering objections that have been lodged against the doctrine and the theoretical suppositions that underlie it.

The fourth chapter will introduce the methodology adopted in the present research. Two general criteria were considered in the selection of a methodology. The first consideration arose in response to the requirements of social scientific research that stipulates the need for methodological transparency and potential for replication. A second consideration relates to the chosen subject of inquiry and the inherent challenges it has posed in a social scientific research agenda. In response to these criteria, we will

utilize a semiotic method elicited from the work of Roland Barthes and Vlada Petric. Their suggestions have provided a procedure by which particular episodes of the series can be analyzed for symbolic content.

The fifth chapter will be devoted to a discussion of Star Trek's anthropological sensibility. Having considered some of the salient features of the show in the second chapter, we will apply conceptual insights derived from the work of Antonio Gramsci in order to consider both the significance of cultural relativism in contemporary America and its specific manifestation in Star Trek.

The final chapter will conclude our discussion by considering television's capacity as a cultural forum. We will consider how the medium can be identified in terms of its liminal qualities, adopting Victor Turner's concept of liminoid phenomena to determine the extent to which its characteristic technological and semiotic features allow negotiation of cultural practices and common sense. As we will see, research on Star Trek fans has provided evidence of this feature of the medium.

Chapter Two: A History of Star Trek and Its Universe

> Space: The final frontier. These are the voyages of the starship Enterprise. Her continuing mission: to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations. To boldly go where no one has gone before...
> Gene Roddenberry—Writer/Director's Guide 1987

> We tried to say that humanity will reach maturity on that day when we learn not merely to tolerate, but to look with actual delight on differences in ideas. If we cannot learn to take a positive delight in differences between our own kind on our own planet, then we do not deserve to go into space and meet the variety that is almost certainly there—Gene Roddenberry 1977 (in Irwin and Love 1978:152)

Star Trek represents a unique instance of the extent to which a television series can transcend the medium in which it originated. Rarely has a single series that had a network run of a mere three seasons in the late 1960's reached such a stature as a popular cultural icon. Never before has a series spawned four spin-off series fifteen years after its initial cancellation, nor has any other television show been able to maintain the critical fan base to allow for the successful release of ten feature-length films over a span of twenty years. Its importance is also made evident by its proliferation in other media industries', including the publication of innumerable novels, magazines, biographical works, and technical manuals. Fans can also purchase audio recordings of the series soundtracks, and immerse themselves in games that have been developed for various computer platforms and in the format of more traditional board games. The profitability of Star Trek memorabilia is another indication of the acquisitive nature of Trek fans and the perennial commercial viability of the franchise and its audience's insatiable desire to consume the fictional universe of Star Trek.

Although its success is undeniable, Star Trek provides a fascinating example of the difficulties involved in producing a series in the constraints of network television. While we may marvel at its longevity and enduring appeal for its diverse audience, the chronological development of the Trek franchise is suggestive of the intricacies of television production and its precarious dependency on the economic realities of corporate decision-making and its derivation of profit. In the case of Star Trek, much has been made of the Herculean efforts of its creator Gene Roddenberry to bring the series to television in the 1960's. The story only continues following its eventual cancellation in 1969, meandering through several attempted reincarnations during the 1970's and its eventual reappearance in movie theatres in 1979. As we will see, the debut of its first spin-off series in the fall of 1987 was not a foregone conclusion, but was accompanied by further struggles and anxiety. Similarly, Star Trek's cinematic journey was equally problematic, exposing the franchise to the Byzantine conventions of the film industry and a heightening pressure to capture an immediate share of the film-going public.

We will begin the present chapter with an overview of the development of the Star Trek franchise from its inception in the mid-1960's to the present. In addition to providing a necessary discussion of the history of the franchise, the first section will serve to underscore the collaborative process involved in producing a television series and the difficulties experienced by those involved in its continued success. As we will consider in a later chapter, the study of television should not be limited to the analysis of the specific products of the medium, but should also incorporate an awareness of the economic and political context of production and distribution. While Star Trek provides a fascinating example of the extent to which television provides a folkloric function in our

society, it can also be appreciated for its ability to illuminate certain aspects of the institutional features of the television industry.

The second section of our discussion will consider some of the principal attributes of the fictional Star Trek universe. Beginning with the Original Star Trek, we will address the principal characters in each series, as well as several alien species that have been featured in the franchise. We will conclude our discussion with a consideration of the political and ethical precepts that have been an ongoing aspect of the Trek universe.

A History of Star Trek on Television and Film[1]

The origin of Star Trek and its transformation into a popular culture icon reveals much about the process of television production and its precariousness in an industry that is structured for the sake of profit. Finding its wellspring in the mind of Gene Roddenberry, an itinerant writer and producer who worked on several other television series before Star Trek, the series was an unlikely candidate for success in the formulaic world of television. As we shall see below, its relatively brief three-season run on NBC in the late 1960's can be attributed to several factors, including its science fiction format, network uneasiness about its multi-racial crew, and relatively weak Nielsen ratings. Moreover, Roddenberry's desire for creative autonomy and often overbearing demeanour did not endear him to his superiors at NBC during Star Trek's initial run nor in his later involvement with Paramount Studios during the production of the Trek feature-length films. As such, Star Trek's longevity is all the more intriguing, especially when we consider its relatively inauspicious conclusion in 1969.

The origin of Star Trek and creative impetus behind its development can be found in the work of its creator, Gene Roddenberry. Although crafted by innumerable hands

throughout its duration, Star Trek has remained indelibly defined by the persona of the 'Great Bird of the Galaxy'[2]. He has been acknowledged as the fountainhead from which the series concept initially emerged, writing *OST*'s production guide and serving in the capacity of executive producer during its first and second seasons. He would also play a pivotal role in the development of Star Trek fandom, often appearing at science fiction conventions throughout the 1970's. He would also be involved in the creation of the first spin-off series, *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, while maintaining a tenuous involvement in the process of launching the cinematic voyages of the original cast.

Gene Roddenberry began his involvement in the television industry while still employed by the Los Angeles Police Department[3]. While working as a staff sergeant and scriptwriter for then Chief of Police William Parker, he was able to sell a number of television scripts that were locally syndicated by Ziv Productions during the 1950's. Finding that his writing was providing an adequate level of income, he left the LAPD and began his writing career in earnest. Throughout the remainder of the 1950's and early 1960's, he was able to sell a number of scripts to such network series as *The West Point Story* (CBS and ABC 1957-1958), *Have Gun Will Travel* (1957-1963), and *The Lieutenant* (NBC 1963-1964). Prior to *The Lieutenant*, a series he created and worked on as producer, Roddenberry had "become a steady television writer with dozens of credits, although [...] most were for undistinguished episodic series" (1994:17). Winner of a Writer's Guild Award in the Best Western Category for a *Have Gun Will Travel* script in 1957, he "was making a satisfactory living" as a writer, but still without the stability of an established network series. The cancellation of *The Lieutenant* only served to further underscore the precariousness of series television.

It was at this point that Roddenberry began to formulate an idea for a weekly hour-long adventure series that would be based on the dramatic exploration of interstellar space by a multi-ethnic human crew. Although his initial concept was set in the 19th century and entailed the earth-bound adventures of an ethnically diverse crew of a giant dirigible (Alexander 1994:185, Engel 1994:38-9), his concept would eventually be reconfigured as a science-fiction vehicle described by Roddenberry as a "wagon train to the stars". Unable to find a studio willing to invest the required amount of funding to develop his dirigible concept, he focussed his energies on developing a science fiction series that emphasized the dramatic situations of his cast[4]. Representing a departure from the technological and scientific focus that was characteristic of earlier science fiction television and film, Star Trek's success would, by his own admission, become "attributable to the fact that it was not a 'star' and 'costar' series but a family ensemble" (Fern 1994:206). The series would also merge several features of the science fiction and Western genres, blurring their distinctions in an effort to acquire a larger market share in the competitive environment of network television.

Although his decision to develop a science fiction series that dealt with social and moral issues of the period may appear shrewd in hindsight, Star Trek's format did not guarantee any likelihood of success in the television schedule of its day. During the 1950's and early 1960's, science fiction television was dominated by the space opera or science fiction anthology series (Alexander 1994:119-21, Pounds 1999:39-40). The former variant of television sf, according to James van Hise (1993:2-3), were "clearly children's adventure shows" that included *Captain Video and His Video Rangers* (syndicated 1949-1955), *Buck Rogers* (1950-1951), *Tom Corbett, Space Cadet* (1950-

1952), *Space Patrol* (ABC 1951-1955), *Captain Midnight* (1953-1955), *Rocky Jones, Space Ranger* (1954-1955), and *Superman* (1952-1957). These series were joined by several other examples during the 1960's, including the Irwin Allen production *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* (1964-1968), *Lost in Space* (1965-1967), *The Time Tunnel* (1966), and *Land of the Giants* (1969). The sf anthology series, on the other hand, were concerted attempts to create "idea stories [rather than] space opera or adventure stories", often adapting material from the popular science fiction literature of their day (van Hise 1993:6). Several examples of this form of SF television appeared during the 1950's, including *Out There* (CBS 1951-1952), *Tales of Tomorrow* (ABC 1951-1953), and *Science Fiction Theater* (1955-1957). The most enduring instances of this type, however, are to be found in *The Twilight Zone* (CBS 1959-1964; van Hise 1993:15-33) and *The Outer Limits* (ABC 1963-1965; van Hise 1993:34-55). Presenting science fiction in a dramatically different light, they served notice that television audiences were willing to accept something other than the light-heartedness of the space opera or adventure series.

In a sense, Star Trek would become a combination of these two types of science fiction television. Although the show's recurring cast and healthy measure of adventure did not coincide with the anthologies structure nor its more thoughtful presentation of social themes, it nevertheless strove to present Roddenberry's utopian vision through the vehicle of intelligent stories. In "combining the most varied in drama-action-adventure with complete production practicality" (Roddenberry and Whitfield 1974:22), the series represented "a new kind of television science fiction with all the advantages of an anthology, but none of its limitations" (1974:22-3).

His willingness to craft a new kind of science fiction program was made evident during his attempts to sell the series concept. In order to avoid the pitfalls of previous science fiction series, he solicited scripts from a number of prominent science fiction writers after Star Trek had been ordered by NBC in 1966. Appearing before a boardroom of Writer's Guild members in the same year, he delivered a pitch for his new series that resulted in an enthusiastic response from those assembled. Speaking "passionately" about his series concept, Roddenberry revealed to his audience an intention to develop a show based on "strong themes and intelligent writing" that nevertheless remained firmly established on an "adventure-drama-action basis" (Engel 1994:74). In order to capture a television audience that "will sit out there, as ever, with a hand poised over the control knob", he impressed on those in attendance the need to produce entertaining stories by not "violating proven entertainment techniques". "Our category of science fiction," Roddenberry continued, "may need even more than average attention to a story which starts fast, poses growing peril to highly identifiable people with identifiable problems, and with more than the average number of hooks at act breaks" (1994:74). Presenting thoughtful science fiction in the guise of space opera, Star Trek would eventually elicit interest from such notable sf writers as Ernest Kinoy, Theodore Sturgeon, Harlan Ellison, John W. Campbell, Shimon Wincelberg, A.E. van Vogt, Barry Trivers, George Clayton Johnson, and Richard Matheson (1994:74-5; see also Alexander 1994:239). As Michael Pounds has observed, Star Trek promised "established science fiction writers a forum where they could tell full-fledged science fiction tales with no apologies" (1999:40).

Star Trek's original conception underwent various changes prior to NBC's eventual purchase of the series. The first series outline, written by Roddenberry in 1964,

and provides only an initial draft of what Star Trek would later become, nevertheless contained a few indications of its eventual shape. Developed to showcase the principal features of the prospective series for interested network executives, it included character profiles, descriptions of the ship and its technology, and a general outline of its space-faring mission. According to the outline, the Enterprise's original mission entailed three principal aims:

> (a) Earth security, via exploration of intelligence and social systems capable of a galaxial threat, and
> (b) Scientific investigation to add to the Earth's body of knowledge of alien life forms and social systems, and
> (c) Any required assistance to the several Earth colonies in this quadrant, and the enforcement of appropriate statutes affecting such Federated commerce vessels and traders as you may contact during your mission (Roddenberry and Whitfield 1974:25)[5].

These mission parameters were established with an awareness of their dramatic appeal for an audience grown accustomed to more action-oriented science fiction. Another integral element of the Star Trek prospectus was the presence of alien life both onboard the ship and awaiting the Enterprise in its voyages. As we will note below, the Vulcan character Spock would remain the only recurring alien officer on the ship, but this feature of Star Trek would be broadened to include a number of alien characters in the later series. In fact, *Star Trek: Voyager*, the fourth spin-off series, would showcase a greater number of alien characters than human in its voyages.

Much has been made of the decision to feature a multi-racial cast on Star Trek. Popular mythology has applauded this feature of the show as an indication of the progressiveness of its production team, although recent critical analyses have considered the problematic intersection of race and gender in the series. Nevertheless, this decision should be placed squarely in the racialized context of the television industry of the

period. Michael Pounds, for example, has illustrated the long-standing discriminatory practices of Hollywood at the time that systematically excluded non-White members from its professional guilds. Black, Hispanic, and Asian actors were given extremely limited roles in the film and television programs of the era, resulting in a prolonged conflict between the industry and civil rights organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). This discriminatory reality extended into the technical unions and created a prohibitive atmosphere for writers who wished to provide scripts for production that did not abide by the racial barriers still active in the industry. In their case, writers were faced with a situation in which they found themselves "part of a production system that regarded creative talent as interchangeable commodities and reduced writing to a technical skill that did not require any special experiences or outlook" (1999:18). Involved in an industry that expected them to follow "established dramatic conventions to meet the tastes and expectations of the largest possible audience" (1999:19), writers who were interested in "weaving more varied and less stereotypical parts for African Americans into their scripts" found their ideas falling on deaf ears. Faced by the fact that "producers and studios control the screenplay and teleplay development process", they were forced to accustom themselves to a "writing process [...] defined by the studio executives, television executives, and independent producers" (1999:19)[6].

In the end, the limitations of series television dictate that certain characters are given emphasis in stories, which, in final accounts, occurs at the expense of other regular characters. This is due to a need for dramatic clarity in a program that is constrained by

its hour-long format. Economic factors also affected the development of characters on the show. The widespread popularity of Captain James T. Kirk and Spock amongst fans provided greater leverage to actors William Shatner and Leonard Nimoy and to the studio to showcase their characters, although often at the expense of other characters on the show. This factor would also be compounded by network fears of backlash in markets located in the American South had the series spent a greater amount of time featuring ethnic characters in its stories.

A partial explanation for the discrepancy between Star Trek's celebrated ethnic diversity and its less than admirable development of ethnic characters can be found in Roddenberry's pragmatic approach to his role as creator and executive producer. In an interview published in the Humanist magazine, he confessed to a certain amount of 'functional hypocrisy' and 'ethical expediency' while working on the show (Alexander 1991:7-8, 12). Admitting that he "had to make a lot of compromises [and] strategic retreats in order to do [his] job", he emphasized that there nevertheless remained "certain principles" that he would not excise from the show. The ship's designation, for example, reflected his concern for universal representation. "I thought that the Earth's first spaceship should have a generic Earth name" he remarked in 1977, "not that it should be specifically *United States*, and certainly not a military name" (Irwin and Love 1978:152). Concessions were made, therefore, but with an eye for the overall integrity of the show's original vision:

> I mean to get Star Trek on the air I would not have made it an all-WASP crew, with the ship probably the flagship of the United States of America in the twenty-third century. You have to have a certain position you won't back up beyond, but you then have in front of that a lot of slight retreats (in Lichtenberg *et al.* 1975:166).

Star Trek's journey into television immortality was anything but inevitable. Having successfully acquired funding for the development of a pilot from NBC, Roddenberry and his team underwent the difficult process of bringing their concept to reality (Solow and Justman 1996:43-69). After its completion and subsequent rejection as "too cerebral" by a network executive brain trust, the production staff developed three alternative scripts to replace the original pilot entitled "The Cage". Eventually, a second pilot entitiled "Where No Man Has Gone Before" was accepted, but only after considerable changes were made to the cast and characters of the show. Finally, following "three years of anxiety and frustration" (Solow and Justman 1996:20), Star Trek would debut on Monday September 8th, 1966.

Its 79 episode, three-season run on NBC would see less than stellar Nielsen ratings, two well-publicized campaigns to stave off cancellation, and the departure of Gene Roddenberry, Gene Coon (writer and line producer) and Robert Justman (Associate Producer) from the show's production team. The first letter-writing campaign to salvage Star Trek occurred in December 1966 when NBC suggested its failure to draw favourable ratings might lead to its demise. Responding to a proposal by Roddenberry, a group of prominent sf writers that included such luminaries as Harlan Ellison, Pohl Anderson, and Richard Matheson formed 'The Committee' to mobilize support for the flagging show. Their open letter to the membership of the Science Fiction Writers of America warned of the network's intentions and implored concerned fans to send letters of support for the show directly to the studio (Alexander 1994:262-65, Engel 1994:126-7, Solow and Justman 1996:299-304). Whether their involvement ultimately saved Star Trek from early cancellation is debatable, but it nevertheless served notice to the network that a

sizable fan base could be mobilized in its support. This was only reconfirmed a year later, when fans Bjo and John Trimble inaugurated a second letter writing campaign in December 1967 (Alexander 1994:308-14, Engel 1994:127-29, Gerrold 1973:162-9, Solow and Justman 1996:377-84). Orchestrated by Roddenberry, the campaign resulted in several demonstrations outside NBC offices in California and New York and the inundation by thousands of letters sent by fans of the series.

The Nielsen ratings would eventually prevail, leading to Star Trek's cancellation following its third and final season. Although its ratings indicated a small, loyal following of largely young college age viewers, there was little to motivate NBC to prolong the series. According to Solow and Justman (1996:296), the A. C. Nielsen ratings were "the basis of the price structures [networks] charged advertising agencies [and] the basis on which companies spent their hard-earned advertising dollars". At the time, little was said about the particular demographic features of Star Trek's typical audience. Rather, its ratings and share of the audience progressively weakened, ultimately resulting in a scheduling move out of its Thursday evening slot to Friday evening for its final season (Pounds 1999:40-50). Its fate effectively sealed, Star Trek's final first-run episode aired on June 3rd, 1969.

Star Trek's disappearance from television would be relatively short-lived. The purchase of its 79 episodes by the Kaiser Broadcasting Company, owner of five major-market UHF stations in the U.S., resulted in a guarantee of renewed life in syndication. In an attempt to capture a young audience, Kaiser's stations aired the series daily at 6:00 p.m. against the nightly newscasts of its competitors. They were also shown in their original order and were rerun in their entirety every sixteen weeks. Attempting to

replicate its success, a growing number of independent stations began broadcasting reruns of Star Trek in a variety of time-slots (Solow and Justman 1996:417-18).

This renaissance would rejuvenate interest in Star Trek in two fundamental ways. First, renewed life in syndication meant renewed interest from Paramount Pictures, who owned the series. In time this interest was translated into a Saturday morning animated Star Trek series that appeared on NBC in 1973 (Alexander 1994:405-8, Asherman 1986:142-49, Irwin and Love 1978:96-113, Solow and Justman 1996:422). It would also set into motion a "long and convoluted" process focussed on returning the series to television, whether involving the original or new cast (Alexander 1994:413).

Second, Star Trek's success in syndication was made nowhere more apparent than in the steady mobilization of fan organizations during the 1970's. This was especially made evident in the emergence of Star Trek conventions and publication of 'fanzines' produced by and for the show's fans (Gerrold 1973:159-60). While sf conventions had predated their Trek variants, the latter rapidly gained in popularity and frequency around the country (Irwin and Love 1978:68-71). According to Janet Smith-Bozarth (in Irwin and Love 1978:156-60), the first major Trek 'con' took place in January of 1972 in New York City (Alexander 1994:392-4, Asherman 1986:141, Engel 1994:140-2). Many more would follow, spurred onward by guest appearances of former cast members and crew. The significance of these occurrences was not lost on Roddenberry, but served as a reminder of the monetary profiteering that could undermine attempts to maintain Star Trek's legitimacy and integrity (Alexander 1994:421-2).

The significance of this renewed interest in Star Trek and fervour of its fans was not lost on Paramount Studios, either, and culminated in a decision to develop a new Trek

series. Although a number of different proposals were suggested during the 1970's (Nichols 1994, Takei 1994), the studio eventually settled on a plan to inaugurate their proposed foray into network television with 'Star Trek: Phase II' at the helm. While considerable effort was expended in this direction, the proposed new series would eventually be scuttled along with the fledgling network (Alexander 1994:421-2, Reeves-Stevens 1997). It would survive, though, in a modified form, reaching theatres as *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* in 1979. Recognizing sf's renewed popularity in the success of George Lucas' *Star Wars* and Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, as well as a reinvigorated NASA Shuttle program, Paramount's release of the film would end up grossing $80 million (U.S.). Its continued viability confirmed, the Original cast remained a fixture in theatres, appearing in five other films over the next twelve years.

The twentieth anniversary of Star Trek's first appearance on television in 1986 provided an ideal setting for the emergence of its first spin-off series. Having struggled to bring a version of the franchise back to the medium since the 1970's, Paramount Studios re-enlisted Gene Roddenberry in an attempt to capture lightening in a bottle one more time. Network circumstances had changed since the 1960's, in part due to the birth of Fox Broadcasting and instability in the economy that resulted in the networks refusal to shoulder a new Trek series. As a result, Paramount opted to release their new series via syndication to independent stations, thereby exploiting the burgeoning success of cable systems (Pounds 1999:70). Facing a projected cost of $1.3 million per episode, the studio was encouraged in its attempt to bring *TNG* to television screens by the lucrative syndication licensing deal that had been worked out for *The Cosby Show* (1999:72). The success of the *OST* in syndication and its established presence in the theatres made a new

Trek series less of a gamble than the situation would have been had it been an unproven commodity (1999:73).

As a result, *TNG* debuted in the fall of 1987 to relatively strong ratings. While a slight decline was noted by the end of the first season, the series' overall performance in its next few seasons was characteristically strong. Most noteworthy were several other indicators of its viability. Unlike its predecessor, *TNG*'s success was measured in more ways than gross ratings of households watching the show, but included such indices as the number of women viewers between the ages of eighteen and forty-nine years of age. As Pungente (1999:37) has noted with regards to the success of such recent series as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Felicity*, corporate awareness of audience's demographic composition carries considerable weight in determining success or failure. *TNG* had managed to capture a significant portion of the audience in addition to its general success in drawing viewers. It had also managed to perform well in a number of different time slots and days of the week throughout the country. As such, Paramount was able to derive considerable advantage in licensing the series in syndication and drew favourable barter agreements from participating stations.

This success translated into Paramount's ambitious decision to release *DS9* in January of 1993. Debuting during the sixth season of *TNG*, the series would become successful in its own right, a feat made all the more remarkable by the fact that it ran alongside its robust predecessor for two seasons. The eventual conclusion of *TNG* at the close of its seventh season did not diminish the lucrative Trek franchise, made evident by the debut of *Voyager* in January of 1995 and *DS9*'s continued success. Moreover, the end of *TNG*'s life on television was brought about to facilitate its transition to feature-length

film. To date, there have been four *TNG* films, beginning with the transitional *Generations* in 1994. *DS9* and *Voyager* would both continue for seven seasons, replicating much of the success achieved by its two predecessors. The Trek mantle has since been taken up by *Enterprise*, the fifth series in the cycle that continues in its first-run existence on the United-Paramount Network and in syndication. Ironically, *Voyager* and *Enterprise* would fulfill Paramount's desire to establish itself on television nearly twenty years after *Star Trek: Phase II* had been aborted in the late 1970's. In hindsight, this decision and subsequent release of *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* resulted in the establishment of the longest running television franchise in the history of the medium.

The Star Trek Universe

Remarkably, five series and ten feature-length films have appeared over the duration of thirty-five years, sharing certain characteristics that have come to define the Star Trek universe. With the exception of the space station featured in *DS9*, each series has taken place aboard a Federation starship involved in deep space exploration. They have featured a group of regular and recurring characters who provide the basis for dramatic action and the exploration of various social, moral and technological issues. The theme of exploration and discovery that has been an ongoing ingredient of science fiction in general has been one of the abiding features of Star Trek. Research conducted with fans of the individual series, for instance, has indicated the importance of these aspects of the Star Trek narrative stream both for its sheer entertainment value as well as its role in presenting the particular aspects of Trek mythology and philosophy.

The *Original Star Trek*, *The Next Generation*, *Voyager*, and *Enterprise* have centred on the exploits of crewmembers aboard their respective starships. The first and

second series followed the crew of the Federation starships Enterprise NCC-1701 and NCC-1701-D. Whereas the original Enterprise was primarily outfitted as an exploratory and military cruiser, the Enterprise D was additionally conceived in terms of its role in diplomacy. As a result, the starship was considerably larger in size and contained a much more diverse crew complement that included the families of Star Fleet personnel serving aboard the ship. By enlarging the ship's role and specifications, *TNG*'s producers were presented with a greater breadth of character and plot development that could include non-Star Fleet personnel[7]. Approximating the 'lost in space' theme of other science fiction works, *Voyager* recounts the attempts of the eponymous starship to find a means back to Federation space following an encounter with an alien intelligence that transported them into an unknown portion of the galaxy.

In general, the starships in Star Trek have served a much greater function than their mere utility in transporting their crews around the galaxy. In a sense, the starships can be seen as characters in their own right. This was especially made evident during the filming of The Search for Spock, which called for the destruction of the Enterprise near the end of the film. As Nichelle Nicols emphasized in her biography, the "vessel of our voyages [and] our home" represented the "single enduring constant in the Trek universe" occupying "a special place in our hearts" (1994:258). Its "fiery destruction" was a "dramatic and controversial move [...] that Gene opposed vehemently" (1994:258, see also Engel 1994:210-11). Roddenberry's ire was matched only by Trek fans who, still stung by the death of their beloved Spock in the previous film, mounted a protest against Paramount Studios after information about the upcoming destruction of the Enterprise was leaked (Nimoy 1995:238).

The success of Star Trek can be attributed in part to its presentation of science fiction through the dramatic lens of its characters. Ascribing to the conventions of traditional drama, the series have always conveyed a sense of the humanity of its principal characters and their difficulties in finding a resolution to the particular tasks facing them in their voyages. A significant aspect of this style of dramatic presentation can be identified in the representational purity of their characterizations. Although this quality can be best seen in the *Original Star Trek*, it remains an underlying aspect of characterization in the later series as well. As we will consider later in chapter four, Star Trek provides a distillation of qualities essential to its definition of principal characters and alien species. Yvonne Fern, for instance, has noted that the *Original Star Trek* worked so well because of its similarity to Classical Greek drama:

> The Original series was more representational—more like classic mythology—with an idealism expressed in a representative way. Kirk, hero, period. Spock, logic, period. Like Superman or Flash Gordon or Roy Rogers. You look at them—I look at them—more as figures of qualities, courage, compassion, et cetera. Personifications of the ideal" (Fern 1996:186).

Writer Athena Andreadis has also provided comparable observations about Star Trek's reliance on characters who are determined by essential personality traits when she refers to its use of 'one-instrument orchestras' (1998:240). In a decidedly more negative tone than Fern, she notes that in "aspiring to universality and mythic status [Star Trek] has made each of its main characters a carefully chosen collection of few traits" (1998:240). While her discussion is characterized by a hodge-podge of observations based on a number of rather distinct theoretical traditions to critique Star Trek, she is correct in noting its prevalent use of essential qualities to develop its characters and alien species.

The *Original Star Trek* provides a format from which the later series are derived. Set in the 23rd century, the show followed the adventures of the Enterprise NC 1701 crew while involved on their five-year mission of exploration. Although particular emphasis was placed on the relationship between the ship's Captain (James T. Kirk—William Shatner), Chief Science Officer (Mr. Spock—Leonard Nimoy), and Chief Medical Officer (Leonard McCoy—DeForrest Kelley), the Enterprise crew featured several other characters (Whitfield and Roddenberry 1974). Characterized by a variety of ethnic and racial origins, they included an African Communications officer (Lieutenant Uhuru—Nichelle Nichols), Japanese-American Helmsman (Lieutenant Sulu—George Takei), Scottish Chief of Engineering (Montgomery Scott—James Doohan), and Russian Navigator (Ensign Pavel Chekov—Walter Koenig).

The format established in the Original series was repeated in each Trek series. The *Next Generation* featured a multi-ethnic cast portraying a variety of human and non-human characters. Led by the urbane Captain Jean-Luc Picard (Patrick Stewart), a Frenchman fond of archaeology and literature, the ship complement included several variations on the Original Enterprise crew. The Bridge personnel have included female Security Chief Lieutenant Tasha Yar (Denise Crosby), Mr. Worf, a Klingon male raised by human parents, Data (Brent Spiner), an android officer forever intrigued by his human counterparts, and Counselor Troi (Marina Sirtis), a female officer of mixed Betazed-human parentage. The crew would also feature Commander William Riker (Jonathan Frakes), a male Executive first officer, Doctor Beverly Crusher (Gates McFadden) and her child prodigy son Wesley Crusher (Wil Wheaton), and Geordi La Forge (LeVar Burton), a black Chief of Engineering. Several other characters would appear during the

course of its seven-season run, including the enigmatic bartender Guinan (Whoopi Goldberg).

Once again, *Deep Space Nine* and *Voyager* would repeat the ensemble format typical of the Star Trek enterprise. *DS9*, for instance, featured a black station Commander (Benjamin Sisko—Avery Brooks), his son Jake (Cirroc Lofton), and a motley crew of human and non-human personnel. Among these characters were a shape-shifting alien Chief of Security named Odo (Rene Auberjonois), a Bajoran female First Officer (Major Kira—Nana Visitor), a female Trill Science Officer (Jadzia Dax—Terry Farrell), a Middle Eastern Chief of Medicine (Dr. Julien Bashir—Siddig El Fadil), and an Irish male Head of Engineering (Miles O'Brien—Colm Meaney). They would be joined by the Ferengi bar owner Quark (Armin Shimerman) and Garak (Andrew Robinson), a former member of the Cardassian secret police serving as Station tailor.

Similarly, *Voyager* featured a mixed crew that was commanded by female Captain Kathryn Janeway (Kate Mulgrew) and a male Native American First Officer (Chakotay—Robert Beltran). It would also incorporate a diverse crew, including a Vulcan Chief of Security (Tuvok—Tim Russ), a holographic Doctor (Robert Picardo), and an Asian Officer (Garrett Wang). Three other alien characters, unique to the Delta Quadrant of the galaxy, were featured during the course of the series: Neelix (Ethan Phillips), Kes (Jennifer Lien), and Seven of Nine (Jeri Ryan).

Amongst the numerous alien species introduced in particular episodes of Star Trek are several featured in greater depth throughout successive films and series. The *Original series* introduced the Klingon and Romulan Empires as the premier threat to the Federation. In time, the Klingons would enter an uneasy alliance with the Federation,

while the Romulans would be presented in a much more varied light on *TNG* and *DS9*. The Vulcans, on the other hand, remained a prominent ally of the Federation and have been portrayed in a number of episodes as well as through the *OST*'s Mr. Spock and *Voyager*'s Tuvok. Further nemeses were introduced in *TNG*, including the acquisitive Ferengi, the militaristic Cardassian Union, and the bio-technological Borg Collective. This pattern continued in *DS9* and *Voyager*, introducing several new species to the Trek universe. These included the Dominion, a civilization located beyond a wormhole in the Gamma Quadrant, and their genetically modified Jem'Hadar storm-troopers. Moreover, the Bajorans and Maquis, two groups that appeared in *TNG*, were featured in *DS9* and *Voyager*. In general, each successive Star Trek featured new alien threats to the Federation in addition to those already established in previous Trek story arc.

Generally, alien species follow a standard developmental pattern that begins with a less than ideal contact situation between the Federation and the new species. In time, this relationship is progressively elaborated through a sequence of episodes and/or characters, eventually reaching a point at which we can identify human qualities and capacities in their motivations. The human-like qualities of these species are more than merely coincidental or contrived in order to lessen the production costs of the show, but are important in two respects. First, they are particularly invaluable narrative devices, allowing a standard story-arc that is motivated by a conflict that reaches an eventual resolution of sorts at the conclusion of an episode. Second, the humanization of alien species provides a specifically anthropological treble to the series. As we will consider in the final chapter of the present thesis, Star Trek's alien species are presented in a manner that is indicative of a specific understanding of cultural patterning that was characteristic

of anthropological theory in the first half of the twentieth century. Finally, this specific definition of culture became an integral component of the anthropological doctrine of cultural relativism and its espousal of an ethic of tolerance toward cultural difference. Its uneven application, based on a realization of the ethical quandaries it engendered for anthropologists engaged in fieldwork settings, is reproduced in Star Trek's uneven application of the Prime Directive.

Conclusion

The foregoing discussion outlined the development of Star Trek from its inception in the 1960's to its present success in syndication. The series is an invaluable illustration of the various network, industry and technological constraints that television programming has to navigate in order to achieve success. These limitations in the structure of the television medium place considerable pressure on the eventual form and content of individual series. Star Trek's ongoing viability is attributable to various causes, including the skill of its production team, changing audience expectations, and a recurring interest in the genre of science fiction.

As we will consider later in the present thesis, Star Trek's success is equally attributable to its content. Accordingly, we will consider the extent to which the series can be seen as a cultural forum in which the pressing issues of the day have been expressed. More specifically, we will identify Star Trek's representation of cultural difference and its replication of a doctrine of cultural relativism. This fictional rendition of the anthropological concept of culture is particularly important when understood in the context of recent public debates about changing American values that have been contained in the concept of a culture war. As such, chapter three will introduce the

doctrine of cultural relativism and its particular definition of culture. We will consider the specific attributes of the doctrine and its underlying notion of cultural patterns in order to better understand the extent to which Star Trek reproduces these ideas.

Chapter Three: Anthropology, Cultural Relativism, and Tolerance

> The possible human institutions and motives are legion, on every plane of cultural simplicity and complexity, and [...] wisdom consists in a greatly increased tolerance toward their divergences. No man can thoroughly participate in any culture unless he has been brought up and has lived according to its forms, but he can grant to other cultures the same significance to their participants which he recognizes in his own—Ruth Benedict (1946:33).

> Let us [...] look round a special view or assemblage of views which has been built on the site of moral disagreements between societies. This is *relativism*, the anthropologists' heresy, possibly the most absurd view to have been advanced even in moral philosophy. In its vulgar and unregenerate form [...] it consists of three propositions: that 'right' means [...] 'right for a given society'; that 'right for a given society' is to be understood in a functionalist sense; and that (therefore) it is wrong for people in one society to condemn, interfere with, etc., the values of another society—Bernard Williams (1972:20)

> What has been, that will be; what has been done, that will be done. Nothing is new under the sun. Even the thing of which we say, "See. This is new!" has already existed in the ages that preceded us. There is no remembrance of the men of old; nor of those to come will there be any remembrance among those who come after them—Ecclesiastes 1:9-11.

If we are to avoid the dim fate foretold in the Book of Ecclesiastes, then we must consider ongoing debates about an American culture war in the light of historical antecedents. A number of commentators have suggested that these debates, which have included a wide variety of issues ranging from abortion to inclusive curriculum, are motivated by a fundamental revaluation of American culture. Irrespective of the variety of specific issues subsumed under the rubric of a culture war, a consistent point of contention has rested on the underlying presence of relativist thought in American culture. Assumed to be a pervasive force in contemporary America, relativism has become a rallying cry for commentators of various political persuasions who have attempted to identify its dire consequences in American society.

There appears to be nothing new under the sun when the subject of relativism is raised. It has been a perennial issue in Western philosophy since its earliest articulations in the writings of the Greek sophists of the fifth century B.C. (Brandt 1967, Ladd 1973:1, 271, Renteln 1988). Various authors have pinpointed its historical trajectory from these seminal moments in ancient Greece through the more than two millennia of Western thought, and have included the work of, amongst others, David Hume (Hartung 1954:119, Schmidt 1955:782), Blaise Pascal (Hanson 1975:24), and Edward Westermarck (1924,1932). Seen in its totality, relativism has taken a variety of forms and been applied to a number of philosophical issues that have ranged across different fields of inquiry.

Cultural relativism provides a special case in this particular tradition of thought. The "anthropologists' heresy" (B. Williams 1972:20), this particular brand of relativism remains one of the discipline's most influential and contentious legacies to American culture. Its sensitivity to cultural diversity and advocacy of tolerance is a direct assault on ethnocentrism and absolutist definitions of cultural normalcy. Moreover, the doctrine has often been phrased in terms of its impact on ethical theory and, ultimately, on ethical conduct. "Today", according to John Ladd (1973:1), "the challenge of ethical relativism takes on an urgent practical dimension". He emphasizes that "one of the obvious results of modern technology is that now, for the first time, people from varied cultural, religious, and social backgrounds must deal with each other on an extensive and continuous basis" (1973:1). Although written thirty years ago, his evaluation is especially relevant in an age of globalization and heightening conflict that is rooted at least in part on cultural misunderstanding. The unprecedented expansion of global capital has brought

with it an extensive penetration of mass media technologies into the world's hinterlands. Emerging computer technologies provide further evidence of the increasingly diminished social and cultural distance between peoples of our world. In this setting, Marshall McCluhan's estimate of the 'global village' appears far less an anachronism of an American post-war idealism than a prophetic harbinger of things to come.

The common features of the doctrine of cultural relativism and its significance in the culture war debates cannot be fully appreciated unless it is placed in the context of the discipline of anthropology. Given its widest expression in American anthropology, the doctrine was inextricably linked to the vagaries of disciplinary formation, including the ascendancy of certain theoretical and methodological directions in anthropology. These approaches to the social and cultural phenomena to which anthropologists devoted attention exerted a considerable pressure on the eventual form of cultural relativism assumed by mid-century. This heritage is not only significant in terms of the doctrine's initial definition, but also provided the basis on which criticisms of the doctrine have been established as well as its more recent formulations in debates about an American culture war.

As a result, we will begin our discussion with some initial definitions of cultural relativism. These definitions are useful in providing an indication of the doctrine's breadth, and its distinctiveness, vis-à-vis other types of relativism. We will then consider the expression of cultural relativism in early American anthropology with specific emphasis on its articulation in the paradigm of historical particularism. Embedded in this anthropological tradition, cultural relativism received justification from several

theoretical and methodological principles of this paradigm, including the articulation of a culture concept that was an integral aspect of the doctrine's formulation.

Having formulated the general features of the doctrine in the context of this paradigm, we will address some of the criticisms that have been lodged against it. Beginning with the American Anthropological Association's response to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1947, an initial foray into the international human rights arena, these criticisms were provided from anthropologists and from philosophical quarters. This period also witnessed increasing attempts by anthropologists to determine the extent of universally shared social and cultural traits. Several anthropologists, such as Clyde Kluckhohn, Robert Redfield, and George Murdock, were particularly important in providing a critique of the doctrine and in renewing interest in the prevalence of universal values across a variety of societies. Other writers have focussed their criticisms on the ethical and practical ramifications of the doctrine, underscoring the extent to which cultural relativism is profoundly implicated in the discipline's colonial heritage. It has also been identified as a serious barrier to the progressive recognition and application of universal human rights around the world.

Although faced with these objections, anthropologists have continued to include the doctrine amongst the discipline's central tenets (Barrett 1984). This can be seen, for instance, in the ongoing relevance of cultural relativism in the work of anthropologists involved in applied research and in the context of the American Anthropological Association's publications on ethics (see Cassell and Jacobs 1996). The doctrine has also been a factor in the development of international human rights legislation and, as noted earlier, has surfaced in the ongoing debates about contemporary American culture.

While our discussion will remain limited to a consideration of the doctrine's roots in the tradition of historical particularism, we should not lose sight of its relevance to current debates about cultural difference and public policy. As we will briefly consider in this chapter, cultural relativism has appeared in contemporary discussions regarding the legality of cultural or social rights in relation to international human rights mechanisms defined on the basis of the sovereignty of inalienable individual rights. This issue, while occurring in the framework of United Nation's declarations and conventions, has had relevance to the applicability of these documents to domestic legal and political systems. As such, we will address the role of multiculturalism in the American culture war and its expression of cultural relativism.

Preliminary Definitions of Relativism

We will begin our discussion of cultural relativism by considering a few preliminary definitions of the doctrine. While not exhaustive, these definitions are helpful in several ways. As will be illustrated throughout the present chapter, the doctrine has been variously defined and applied to a number of different issues. If we accept the assertion of American anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1984:273) that cultural relativism has become an "anti-hero with a thousand faces", representing all that ails social thought and behaviour, then we can be assisted at the outset by hazarding a few initial definitions of the doctrine. His playful use of Joseph Campbell's definition of myth points to the doctrine's negative associations in the work of a number of authors across the spectrum of social thought. Straightforward evaluations of cultural relativism are hampered, however, by the doctrine's distinctiveness from other types of relativism. Although these various manifestations of relativism are similar on first glance, they are different in terms

of theoretical substance, historical development, and application. Accordingly, the following section will clarify some of the distinctive features of the doctrine and its relationship to other types of relativism.

Preliminary definitions are also useful in providing clarification of the constituent terms of the doctrine. While the term cultural relativism may seem disarmingly obvious to define, it is inextricably connected to the development of anthropological theory. As a result, we cannot understand the unique features of the doctrine, nor its more recent application in other regions of social discourse, without considering its relationship to anthropological thought in the twentieth century. We will begin, therefore, by determining the parameters of cultural relativism through a consideration of its difference from other types of relativism. This will allow a point of entry into a discussion of the doctrine's origin in the early twentieth century anthropology of Franz Boas and the historical particularists and its integral relationship to this paradigm's concept of culture.

To begin, there are several types of relativism. Cultural relativism, although containing allusions to these other types, is distinctive in a historical and conceptual sense: historically, as noted earlier, in the development of anthropological theory, and conceptually as an integral part of the kit bag of analytical tools deployed by anthropologists for much of the discipline's history. These issues will be addressed in the following section, yet it is important to note their importance in the formulation of the doctrine of cultural relativism at the outset.

In its broadest sense, relativism can be defined as the "doctrine which, although not denying human knowledge or ability to know the truth, still denies it the ability to know the unconditioned and all-valid truth" (Grooten and Steenbergan 1972:369). "If

true belief is defined as belief which matches an independent reality," according to Hollis (1993:554), "relativism denies that beliefs can be, or can be known to be, true in this sense". Affirming the "not-absolute condition", relativism "negates that in every human judgement a relation exists to the existence of the being as such" (1972:369). In positing that "the relativity of the disposition, situation and point of view of the one who knows is determining his insight and conviction", the relativist evaluates the substance of belief and its validity in relation to its genesis in a specific social setting. These may vary and can include cognizance of the "regularities which explain the origin of knowing as a subjective occurrence (psychologism), in the effectiveness of the knowledge, in the experience (pragmatism), [or] in the sensual experience (sensualism)" (Grooten and Steenbergan 1972:369).

Epistemological relativism, which asserts the "relativity of all cognition" (Hollis 1993:554), can be divided into three general variants. Broadly speaking, this "relativity of the human knowledge" suggests that "knowledge can only occur from a specific point of view and in a varying situation" (Grooten and Steenbergan 1972:369). Distinguishing between epistemological and ethical skepticism, John Ladd maintains that the former is based on a skepticism that "typically argues that the immediate data (e.g. sense) are inadequate to prove certain further propositions, e.g. about the external world, about the future, or about other minds"(1973:112). He cites A.J. Ayer for further clarification:

> What is respectively put in question is our right to make the transition from sense-experience to physical objects, from the world of common sense to the entities of science, from the overt behavior of other people to their inner thoughts and feelings, from present to past. These are distinct problems, but the pattern of the sceptic's argument is the same in every case (Ayer 1956, cited in Ladd 1973:112).

This basic premise can first take the form of *conceptual relativism* (Hollis 1993:554), which begins with the supposition that classificatory and explanatory schemes used by humans to order reality are established on fundamental categorial concepts, such as those of time, deity, causation and agency (1993:554). According to this position, these mental schemes are based on the cultural logic of a specific society. Acknowledging this diversity, conceptual relativism then asserts the "subversive thought that categorial concepts are essentially contestible within their own conceptual scheme and that conceptual schemes are incommensurable" (1993:554). The stability of categorial concepts is rejected, therefore, both within particular cultural systems that are subject to change and in relation to the human species in general. Just as the conceptual schemes characteristic of particular cultures are incommensurable, so to the categorial fundamentals that underlie these systems.

Perceptual relativism further damages claims of cognitive lucidity. According to this variant of epistemological relativism, an individual's ability to perceive reality is determined by an elaborate conceptual apparatus that is cultural in nature. Language occupies a central role in this regard, providing the conceptual markers that are used whenever we perceive reality. It also plays a pivotal part in the articulation of human systems of understanding, whether referring to definitions of nature proffered by Western science or Hopi cosmology (see Sapir in Bohannon and Glazer 1988).

Finally, epistemological relativism culminates in what Hollis have described as *epistemic relativism*. Denying "even the criteria of truth and logic" (1993:554), this type of relativism rejects any notion of a universal standard of rationality and discourse and replaces it with a myriad of "fundamentally alternative logics" (1993:554-5).

This cognitive branch of relativism is not alone, but is accompanied by other variations on the theme. Aesthetic relativism, for instance, rejects notions of universal aesthetic norms in favour of a myriad of locally relevant aesthetic standards (see Herskovits 1972:187-214, Graburn 1986). Even within specific geographical regions, a number of distinctive aesthetic traditions can be discerned. Moreover, the passage of time has resulted in profound change both in the predominant styles and motivations underlying the production of art. "The question of the universality of aesthetic principles," Graburn has noted, "generally has long vexed anthropologists" (1986:273). Their perplexity is matched only by the reassurance of "art historians and aestheticians who have claimed that aesthetic principles are universal". Graburn's evaluation is in part correct, although he could have used the word 'absolute' in place of the term 'universal'. This seemingly minor difference actually reveals a profound distinction: as we shall see below, 'universal' has been adopted to convey the fact that aesthetic conventions and norms are present in every society. Conversely, the proposition of absolute aesthetic norms implies a single evaluative framework on the basis of which we can discern the value of a work of art irrespective of its place in a specific cultural tradition. The common distinction, for instance, between high and folk art is derived from an aesthetic theory that is absolutist in nature.

A final variant of relativism has focussed on the rejection of moral and ethical absolutism as independent of time and space (Grooten and Steenburgen 1972:369). Ethical relativism is the "doctrine that the moral rightness and wrongness of actions varies from society to society and that there are no absolute universal moral standards binding on all men at all times" (Ladd 1973:1). As Grooten has clearly stated, the

doctrine presents the fundamental question as to whether we can "conclude to the complete relativity of ethics, so that the distinction between good and evil disappears" (1972:369). An issue of obvious importance, ethical relativity has provided the greatest challenge to the derivation or postulation of moral absolutes common to humankind.

As with the other types of relativism outlined above, moral and ethical relativism begins with a descriptive observation of social and cultural variation referred to as "descriptive relativism" (Brandt 1967:75, Frankena 1973:109). This first step toward moral relativism is established on the question as to whether their exists "fundamental disagreement" between two individuals expressing divergent moral opinions. "To say that a disagreement is 'fundamental' means," according to Brandt (1967:75), "that it would not be removed even if there were perfect agreement about the properties of the thing being evaluated". Or, as he asks elsewhere, does the determination of "ultimate disagreements about ethical principles" reveal that differences are attributable to "applications of identical basic principles in the light of different assumptions about the facts" (1959:93) This can be seen in the case of two individuals who initially appear to arrive at radically divergent opinions on a specific issue, only to discover that both parties do not share the same information on which to base their judgements. "It is theoretically quite important," Brandt continues, "whether there is ultimate disagreement about ethical principles":

> It is important for critical ethics because, if there is no ultimate disagreement, then all ethical disputes are in principle capable of solution by the methods of science; for all we should have to do, to resolve a dispute, is first to find the ethical principles common to both parties, and then to use observation to determine how these principles apply to the case at hand (Brandt 1959:101).

As we shall consider with regards to cultural relativism, the determination of fundamental disagreement is a difficult task requiring a considerable understanding of the basis on which judgements are produced. The situation is only compounded when we consider the role of cultural differences in the arrival at ethical decisions. Once again, if we are able to discount disagreement as a matter of "different factual assumptions" rather than "as a consequence of [differing] ethical premises" (1959:103), then potential agreement could be reached. Or, stated in a different manner, "there is fundamental ethical disagreement only if ethical appraisals or valuations are incompatible, even when there is mutual agreement between the relevant parties concerning the nature of the act that is being appraised" (Brandt 1967:75). Brandt proposes as an example of fundamental disagreement in attitudes toward animal cruelty found amongst human societies. In this case, we can find universal agreement that animals suffer when pain is inflicted on them, but this does not result in uniform agreement about their proper treatment nor in notions of inhumane treatment (1959:102).

Having established fundamental disagreement as a principal criterion of the first thesis of ethical relativism, Brandt suggests that a further component of the doctrine resides in what he refers to as metaethical relativism. Denying that "there is always one correct moral evaluation" in matters of dispute, the metaethical relativist rejects any methods of ethical reasoning that "can be justified with force comparable to that with which scientific method (inductive logic) can be justified" (1967:76). Moreover, if they admit at least a limited applicability of such a method, they nevertheless maintain that its narrow utility largely preempts its usefulness in most cases of ethical disagreement.

Normative relativism, a final version of ethical relativism, is based on the assertion that "something is wrong or blameworthy if some person or group—variously defined—thinks it is wrong or blameworthy" (1967:76). A normative relativist, for example, might propose "if someone thinks it is right (wrong) to do *A*, then it is right (wrong) for him to do *A*". Similarly, he might also suggest that "if the moral principles recognized in the society of which *X* is a member imply that it is wrong to do *A* in certain circumstances *C*, then it *is* wrong for *X* to do *A* in *C*" (1967:76). These propositions establish the priority accorded to the ethical (or cultural) system on the basis of which an individual's ethical judgements and behaviour is established. As we shall see, cultural relativism is most often critiqued as a bearer of ethical relativism, most specifically of the descriptive form outlined above, although the manner in which it has often been phrased by its proponents includes a statement akin to the propositions contained in normative relativism.

Cultural relativism exhibits certain features that are independent of the types of relativism already discussed. Definitions of cultural relativism are relatively abundant in the literature, belying the difficulties entailed in more thorough analyses of the doctrine. *The Dictionary of Social Sciences*, for instance, defines the doctrine as "the idea that any item of behaviour must be judged first in relation to its place in the unique structure of the culture in which it occurs and in terms of the particular value system of that culture" (1964:161). Richard Barrett's introductory excursion in anthropology defines the doctrine as "the belief that any particular set of customs, values, and moral precepts are relative to a specific cultural tradition, and that they can only be understood and evaluated within that particular milieu" (1984:7). The *Encyclopedia of Anthropology* provides a definition

of cultural relativism in two parts, underscoring its methodological importance for ethnographic fieldwork: "an ideological affirmation of the existential uniqueness of every culture and a pragmatic rule of anthropological research, both theoretical and applied" (1976:102).

Several authors have provided extensive discussions of the assumptions, premises, and propositions of the doctrine (Brandt 1959, Frankena 1973, Hanson 1975, Hartung 1954, Hatch 1983, Ladd 1973, Schmidt 1955, Spiro 1992). While utilizing a range of different terms, they have nevertheless provided a composite structure that is characteristic of cultural relativism. To begin, the doctrine has found its widest expression amongst anthropologists, although it has "found expression in many, if not all, the sciences in varying form" (Hartung 1954:119). In fact, "it can be regarded, from a sociological viewpoint, as part of a wider revolt against reason, some manifestations of which can be seen in certain (but not all) aspects of romanticism, racialism, the instinct doctrine, and psychoanalysis" (1954:119).

As Melford Spiro emphasizes, it has come to be equated with three separable variants in contemporary anthropology (1992:124). The doctrine's first component, established on the bulk fact of cultural variability, is identified by the term descriptive relativism and is based on assumptions about cultural diversity and the determinative role played by culture (Ladd 1973:108). Descriptive relativism posits that the diversity of moral and cultural systems exhibited by the human species underscores the fact that "social and psychological characteristics across human groups is relative to—depends on—cultural variability" (Spiro 1992:124). Founded on a "scientific and empirical" basis, cultural relativism is "itself a descriptive theory and in this sense neutral as far as

evaluations are concerned" (Ladd 1973:109). According to Schmidt (1955:782), this preliminary assertion is the "fact of cultural relativism", holding that "persons or cultures manifest diverse value judgements, which seem to be an empirical fact unrelated to their justification".

The doctrine has greater ramifications for anthropologists, however, encapsulating a far more profound meaning than the mere observation of cultural diversity. According to Spiro (1992:125), a second aspect of the doctrine can be discerned in what he has called normative relativism. It consists of two propositions: the first, building on the dependency thesis, posits that there are "no available *tran*scultural standards by which different cultures might be judged on a scale of merit or worth" (1992:125). Equally, "there are no universally acceptable *pan*cultural standards by which they might be judged on such a scale". Furthermore, normative relativism is often expressed with regards to what was referred to above as cognitive and moral relativism. This is particularly evident on noting the second proposition of normative relativism stipulating that, "any judgment regarding the behavior patterns, cognitions, emotions and the like of different social groups—judgments such as good or bad, right or wrong, normal or abnormal, and the like—must be relative to the variable standards of the cultures that produce them" (Spiro 1992:126). Once again, Schmidt refers to this second proposition as the "thesis of cultural relativism", signifying that "there are or there can be no value judgements that are true, that is, objectively justifiable, independent of different cultures" (1955:782).

The third variant of cultural relativism, according to Spiro, is established on a strong form of descriptive relativism and carries the diversity and dependency theses to their extreme. Epistemological relativism, presented in two propositions, adheres to a

radical version of the argument suggesting that the human mind is a blank slate or *tabula rasa* on which a cultural tradition is inscribed. The first suggests that "panhuman generalizations regarding culture, human nature, and the human mind are likely to be either false or vacuous [while] any general theory that purports to explain culture, human nature, and the human mind is likely to be either invalid or trivial" (1992:127). The second proposition entails a radical revision of the role of anthropology as an intellectual pursuit. Rather than understanding it as a scientific discipline bent on the derivation of law-like generalizations, epistemological relativism argues that anthropology can only hope to produce an empathic understanding of the symbolic worlds of our human species. Anthropology, therefore, is an interpretive science, an ethnoscience that is directed toward "empathy, *Verstehn*, insight, imagination, understanding, and the like" (1992:128).

As we shall see in the following section, these particular variants of cultural relativism are indicative of specific moments in the development of anthropology. Generally speaking, descriptive and normative relativism were espoused by anthropologists who ascribed to the paradigm of historical particularism, while epistemological relativism would be developed by their intellectual descendents engaged in what came to be known as symbolic anthropology. Their relativist project was made nowhere more evident than in their virulent debates with anthropologists adhering to a model of anthropological science. Moreover, these conflicts were not only a matter of concern in cultural anthropology, but could be seen in debates between archeologists adhering to the paradigms of processual and post-processual archeology.

In concluding the present section, we will review the various propositions contained in cultural relativism and their significance to the other types of relativism outlined above. Hanson, for example, has discerned five propositions in the doctrine's expression that not only serve to illustrate its importance to ethical relativism, but also illuminates its relevance for epistemological and aesthetic relativism:

> 1.All evaluations or judgments that men make are made according to standards.
> 2. Such standards, and hence their derivative judgments, may vary in different cultures.
> 3. Therefore there exist no standards (of truth, beauty, goodness, humor, and so on) which are valid for all men at all times and all places.
> 4. Therefore we should refrain from judging the truth, beauty, goodness, humor, etc. of acts and artifacts in other cultures according to our standards.
> 5a. We should refrain from judging what happens in other cultures.
> 5b. We should judge what happens in another culture according to the standards of that culture (Hanson 1975:28).

The first two propositions, Hansen maintains, are factual assertions that form a "background" to cultural relativism. They are established on the observation of actual social differences between human groups (proposition 2) and the recognition of the significance of cultural standards in the derivation of judgement (proposition 1). The third proposition ushers in a relativist perspective, suggesting that cultural diversity, once verified through observation, is an indication of the absence of absolute standards of judgement or evaluation. The descriptive variant of relativism may then lead into the fourth proposition, a "caution against ethnocentrism", and two alternative conclusions. Evaluative neutralism, the first possible conclusion, suggests a neutral stance or hesitance when confronted by foreign ways of life. We are admonished to "make no judgements at all about other cultures" (Hanson 1975:28). A second alternative conclusion is

prescriptive relativism which invites us to adopt the standards of a foreign culture in order to evaluate "other cultures by native standards" (1975:28). It "entails that we should somehow agree with the Nuer that cattle are arresting, with the Polynesians that fat maidens are winsome, with the Lugbara that murdering strangers is virtuous, and so on" (1975:28). In other words, the final two propositions suggest that foreign values and behaviour should not only be accepted in a tolerant attitude, but should encourage us to adopt their attitudes in order to better understand the system to which they belong. The doctrine, as a result, establishes a "prescriptive value hypothesis" on the basis of observable cultural diversity and an assertion that pluralism is indicative of fundamental difference (Schmidt 1955:786).

The cultural relativist, therefore, accepts cultural diversity as a radical challenge to any attempt to determine normative statements that are objectively justified beyond the confines of specific cultural traditions. Although distinguishable from other types of relativism, the doctrine has at least a measure of affinity to epistemological, aesthetic, and ethical relativism and posits a series of propositions that vary in degree from other forms of relativism outlined above. As we shall consider in the next section, the development of cultural relativism is integrally anthropological in orientation, relying on a series of theoretical and methodological suppositions that originated in the work of Franz Boas, Ruth Benedict, and Melville Herskovits. Its origin in the intellectual milieu of early twentieth century American anthropology is exceedingly significant. As Elvin Hatch has emphasized, the advent of "Boasian relativism was a crucial matter", representing a "fundamental re-definition of where we stand in the world" (1983:59). Carrying the "implication that modern civilization does not have the importance that it thought it had",

the doctrine was "parallel and nearly as momentous [...] as the Copernican Revolution" (1983:59). Our remaining discussion will clarify his contention by elaborating the culture concept envisioned by Franz Boas and his students and its eventual inclusion in Melville Herskovits' formulation of cultural relativism.

Cultural Relativism and Historical Particularism

The inception and subsequent development of the doctrine of cultural relativism is inseparably linked to the establishment of the discipline of American cultural anthropology. A product of an era of disciplinary formation and institutional expansion, the various expressions and elaboration of cultural relativism discernable in the early decades of the twentieth century are founded upon the principal features of the fledgling anthropological discipline. While philosophical critiques produced by a number of authors are of considerable importance for an appraisal of the doctrine, these discussions have exhibited a haunting disregard for the disciplinary context of cultural relativism (cf. Brandt 1959, Edel 1955, Herskovits 1972, B. Williams 1972).

As a result, the following section will characterize the intellectual context in which the doctrine was conceived and formulated. As an integral aspect of the historical development of American anthropology, cultural relativism is helpful in capturing various theoretical, methodological, and applied features of the discipline in salient relief. In this regard, the doctrine's formulation was based on a specific conception of culture and understanding of its function in society. Moreover, the historical particularist definition of culture had definite effects on the manner in which ethnographic fieldwork was conducted (Harris 1968, Hatch 1973, Spier 1959, and Stocking 1974). According to Marvin Harris (1968:260-1), anthropological attempts to apprehend the intricacies of

cultural systems found their corollary in an empiricism that bordered on "methodological puritanism". These features of Boasian historical particularism would also have an effect on the conception of anthropology as an applied science. In this regard, the discipline's importance was seen in a proactive manner. Beginning with Franz Boas' sustained critique of racial theory, American anthropology was provided a wider mandate that ultimately resulted in the popularization of a number of its core concepts. In fact, this dissemination would be effected by the publication of a number of books written for a general audience, including Boas' *Anthropology and Modern Life* (1928), Benedict's *Patterns of Culture* (1934), *Race: Science and Politics* (1940), and *The Races of Mankind* (with Weltfish 1943). In fact, the latter, a pamphlet produced by the Columbia University's *Association of Scientific Workers*, was reproduced in 1946 complete with comic illustrations.

Prior to the emergence of historical particularism as a dominant disciplinary paradigm, anthropological discourse was characterized by the Victorian paradigm of unilineal evolutionism. Guided by several underlying assumptions about humanity and its place in the natural order, unilineal evolutionism was a product of the geopolitical realities of the nineteenth century. George Stocking has identified a series of "interrelated assumptions" characteristic of the 'classical evolutionism' that would eventually serve as a point of departure for the Boasian anthropologists (1987:170). Foremost among these assumptions was a belief that scientific inquiry could discover laws of natural and sociocultural evolution. Evolution was seen to proceed from simple to complex forms, and subsequent scholarship of the period attempted to formulate hierarchical typologies through which societies were understood to have evolved. Invariably, the culmination of

this evolutionary process was European civilization and its scientific enterprise, in part rationalized on the basis of technological and scientific achievement. Evolutionary progress was equally a matter of racial intelligence, affecting the ability of non-Western groups to acquire and maintain a level of cultural sophistication achieved by European societies (Hatch 1983:20-3). Although environmental constraints were acknowledged as a determining factor in differential evolution, progress was greatly affected by the mental inadequacies of non-Western peoples. While "strong in logic" (Herskovits 1953:51), the paradigm was particularly "weak in method" and amounted in the end to an "article of faith" in the products of reasoned speculation (1953:51). It was, according to Marvin Harris, "an age in which the license to generalize on the basis of fragmentary evidence was claimed by second and third-rate people" (1968:254).

In general, therefore, unilineal evolutionism sought to substantiate the claim that "industrialized countries were the most intelligent in the world, that they therefore had progressed the farthest, and that their institutions were manifestly superior to those of other peoples" (Hatch 1983:26). Similarly, Stocking has noted that "Euro-American anthropology throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for the most part took for granted a belief in the hereditary or cumulative environmental, physical and cultural inferiority of non-European others" (2001:288). The practical outcome of these views was obvious, providing an "intellectual justification for that presumed inferiority, and by extension for the exploitation it could be used to justify" (2001:288).

Historical particularism provided a contrasting approach to the study of sociocultural phenomena. First, Boas was to dispute a number of the assumptions that formed the basis of unilineal evolutionism (cf. Boas 1932, 1938, Hatch 1973, Herskovits

1953, Hyatt 1990, Spier 1959, and Stocking 1960, 1968, 1974, 1987, 1989, 1992, 1996, and 2001). A German émigré, Boas drew on his educational foundation in the German pedagogical tradition in order to bring about a deliberate redefinition of anthropological science. Stocking has noted that his "scientific orientation has to be understood in terms of his peculiar position within and between two traditions in German thought that were themselves undergoing reformulation in this period" (1974:8). His approach to the study of cultural phenomena, in effect, contained a tension between a "historicist spirit of romantic idealism" and "the hairy philosophy of monistic materialism" (1974:8-9). This tension would affect his involvement in the period's "revolution in social thought", according to Hatch (1973:38), that "can be regarded—within limits and in very rough terms—as the infusion of certain elements of idealist thought into the mainstream of positivism". Bruno Bettleheim, for one, provides an illustrative characterization of these approaches:

> In the German culture [...] there existed and still exists a definite and important division between two approaches to knowledge. Both disciplines are called *Wissenschaften* (sciences), and they are accepted as equally legitimate in their appropriate fields.These two are the *Naturwissenschaften* (natural sciences)and the *Gesteswissenshaften* (the sciences of the spirit). In such a division of knowledge, a hermeneutic-spiritual knowing and a positivistic-pragmatic knowing are opposed to each other (Bettleheim in Sperber 1984:264).

Abandoning a positivist concern for the derivation of evolutionary laws and grand schemes of evolutionary types, Boas emphasized historical factors and the necessity of analyzing social and cultural traits in their ethnographic context. This initial distinction was essential both in the formation of American anthropology into its various sub-fields and also in the ascension of cultural concerns in ethnography. Moreover, this distinction would be the intellectual basis of ongoing disputes in American anthropology between

proponents of idealist and materialist approaches to sociocultural phenomena (Harris 1968). In fact, Marvin Harris has emphasized that "those who aver that Boas retarded the progress of anthropology as a science make improper allowance for the cultural forces that lay behind the historical particularist reform" (1968:251). Rather than seeing the aim of social science as the "formulation of general explanatory systems", the goal of ethnography was the "organization and presentation of the data in such a way as to make them intelligible through a process of individual understanding, empathy, or *verstehn*" (Kaplan and Manners 1972:27).

Rejecting "the image of man as rational and calculating", Boas ascribed to an "anti-intellectualism" that underscored the effects of cultural patterns on the individual's thought and behaviour:

> Basically, the anti-intellectual, in the sense we here use the term, does not regard the instrument of thought as bad, but among most men most of the time as weak. [...] The anti-intellectual notes merely that thought seems often at the mercy of appetites, passions, prejudices, habits, conditioned reflexes, and a good deal else in human life that is not thinking (Hatch 1973:39).

Human behaviour, as such, was seen to be the outcome of unconscious motivations rather than a matter of deliberative calculation and reasoning. Similar explanations of human motivation were developed in the work of such luminaries as Ivan Pavlov, Sigmund Freud, and Victor Pareto (Hatch 1973:39-40). In contrast to nineteenth-century positivist explanations that emphasized rational motivations of custom and behaviour, these authors emphasized the emotional constraints of the human animal that exerted considerable influence on human behaviour (Hatch 1973:38-9, 1983:52-4). In contrast, positivism, adhering to the ideals of the Enlightenment, maintained an optimistic belief in the evaluative efficacy of the faculty of Reason (Bernard 1995:4-13). The intellectual

divergence represented by these writers, however, denied global and foundational claims of positivist rationalism and thereby retained certain aspects of idealism. Boas' adherence to this tradition of thought led him to radically particularize the historical analysis of social forms, emphasizing each culture's inherent uniqueness "in terms of itself and not in terms of a universal standard" (1973:39).

Placing emphasis on the "subjective idea" (Hatch 1973:38), German historicist idealism conceived of history as the expression of certain dominant ideas:

> The *Geist* or 'spirit' became the organizing principle for the historian's data, and this *Geist* was a subjectively perceived whole. Each cultural tradition and each period was thought to have its own unique 'spirit' which was qualitatively different from any other (1973:38).

Expounding a relativistic basis (1973:39), historicist accounts "either focussed on the philosophy of history, or they took as their goal meticulously detailed historical accounts aimed at providing the fullest possible knowledge or understanding of a given period or event" (1973:38).

Concerned with the detailed apprehension of a respective group's *Volksgeist* (genius of the people; Stocking 1996), Boas emphasized the "intangible aspects of life" (1938) in his desire to understand the relationship between specific sociocultural traits and the integrated "spiritual totality" of a social body (Stocking 1974:5-6). In making a concerted effort to detail the features of the "subjectively perceived whole" (Hatch 1973:38), he maintained that "experience [...] was not objective, but was structured and in that sense determined by the cultural tradition in which the individual was raised" (Hatch 1973:51).

The intellectual antecedents of Boasian anthropology in the German idealist tradition outlined above had direct bearing on the conception of culture espoused by the

particularists. It entailed the "elaboration of a concept of culture as a relativistic, pluralistic, holistic, integrated, and historically conditioned framework for the study of the determination of human behaviour" (Stocking 1974:19). Redirecting anthropological study of cultural phenomena, the particularist concept of culture would no longer adhere to a humanistic definition of Culture in the singular, but emphasized the plurality of cultures. Influenced by the vagaries of historical change, cultural systems were seen to be unique agglomerations of integrated traits. Their integration was effected by the omniscience of a dominant pattern that increased the prevalence of certain trait formations over others.

Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture*[8] is invaluable as an intensive application of the conception of culture espoused by the historical particularists to an analysis of three specific societies in the ethnographic literature: the Kwakiutl of the Northwest Coast, the Pueblo of the American Southwest, and the Dobu of Melanesia. Following Boas, she attributed a determining role to culture, emphasizing the profound effects of a cultural system on its adherents:

> No man ever looks at the world with pristine eyes. He sees it edited by a definite set of customs and institutions and ways of thinking. Even in his philosophical probings, he cannot go behind these stereotypes; his very concepts of the true and the false will still have reference to his particular traditional customs (18; see also 23-24, 218).

Boas provided comparable statements regarding the force of enculturation on the individual, noting that "the varying reactions of the organism do not create a culture but react to a culture" (Boas 1911:255). Culture is determinative, "man learns [culture] rather than creates it; his behaviour and beliefs reflect, not his native intelligence, but the cultural tradition in which he was raised" (1973:49).

Recalling our earlier discussion of the doctrine's main propositions, we can identify the importance of this definition of cultural supremacy on notions of value and truth. Benedict's concept of culture extends beyond innocuous definitions of the term to implicate, amongst other things, cherished assumptions of scientific and philosophical objectivity. Similarly, Herskovits extended the force of enculturation to include its profound effects on perception and cognition (1972:52-5, 91-3, Simpson 1973:97). In fact, he deplored his detractors overemphasis on the ethical implications of cultural relativism, arguing that the doctrine had important "nonethical dimensions" often overlooked in appraisals of cultural relativism. Enculturation, as such, "applied to judgements of time and space and volume as well as conduct" (1972:52). Moreover, he proposed that "the reality of the world in which we live is the enculturated reality" (1972:85):

> In actuality, the 'natural' world is natural because we define it as such; because most of us, immersed in our own culture, have never experienced any other definition of reality than the one to which we have been accustomed all our lives (1972:201).

Rejecting the existence of an "absolutely valid mode of perceiving the natural world" (1972:101), he reemphasized the all-pervasiveness of the enculturative experience:

> It is well enough to speak [...] of the importance of the Platonic concept of 'ideal truth', and to make the 'metaphysical, or metacultural' postulate of `objective reality, independent of the observer'. This may exist, but in terms of the framework of our knowledge of the psycho-cultural processes of enculturation, the relativist can only once again pose his basic query: 'Whose objective reality'? (1972:58).

Herskovits' repeated insistence on the implications of cultural learning for perception and cognition is indicative of the epistemological variant of relativism, revealing an underlying cultural determinism that was expressed in the doctrine's global

claims. In an illuminating passage, Herskovits clarifies his mentor's scientific optimism by pointing to its origin in Western intellectual preoccupations with universalizing claims of objectivity:

> Boas, like all men, was conditioned to the patterns of thought of his own culture. It was impossible for him, as a scientist, to look on science and not find it good—not only good for his society, but for mankind as a whole. The vision of the results to be obtained for humanity from the application of reason to the problems that beset man [...] moved him deeply. He was thus loath to follow through the implications of his position, which would force the admission that science is only one of a number of techniques of adjusting to the natural world, and that other techniques, in theory at least, are to be accepted as of equal worth (1953:99).

In dealing with the observable diversity of cultures, the particularist notion of culture emphasized the variety of alternative traits available for integration and elaboration in specific cultural systems. In order to achieve a functional equilibrium, cultural systems are based on a process of selection from the available alternatives. This process, at times haphazard, nevertheless coincided with the dominant pattern operant in each culture. "It is in culture as it is in speech," Ruth Benedict remarked, "selection is the prime necessity" (1959:34):

> In culture we must imagine 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 [...] The great arc along which all the possible human behaviours are distributed is far too immense and too full of contradictions for any one culture to utilize even any considerable portion of it. Selection is the first requirement. Without selection no culture could even achieve intelligibility, and the intentions it selects and makes its own are a much more important matter than the particular detail of technology or the marriage formality that it also selects in similar fashion (1959:35, 207).

Observable variations in the ethnographic record, therefore, are due to the fact that the "identity [of a] culture depends upon the selection of [just] some segments of this

arc" (1959:35). Cultural diversity, Benedict continues, is "due even more to a complex interweaving of cultural traits [and] strands which are braided in many combinations" (1959:45,49).

Integration was another central component of the Boasian concept of culture. While "adequate social orders can be built indiscriminately upon a great variety of these foundations" (1959:51), the process of cultural elaboration that comprised integration was seen as the "result of a unique arrangement and interrelation of parts" that heralded the emergence of a "new entity" (1959:53). Advocating the "study of cultures as articulated wholes" (1959:54), Benedict underscored the holistic interrelationship of a culture and its specific traits. This equation placed primary emphasis on the discretionary exclusivity of the cultural tradition, in that the "whole determines its parts not only in their relation but their very nature" (1959:57). In other words, the cultural whole exacted a measure of uniformity from its composite traits "in terms of 'meaning', of 'theme', of 'focus', and of 'pattern'" (Stocking 1974:8). According to Stocking, Boas' views on the integration of elements and wholes rested on two aspects of integration. The first manner of integration was psychological, "based on unconsciously internalized categories, on the processes of imitation and socialization, and on deceptively self-conscious secondary explanations" (1974:8). The second integrating force was exerted by historical factors, including "accidental accretions of culture contact, the constant manipulation of elements, and the retrospective systematization of secondary explanation" (1974:8). Taken in total, these influences resulted in a "kind of dynamic, moving, or processual integration which [...] was never fully stable" (1974:8).

There were grounds, however, for characterizing this understanding of integration in terms of a unitary vision. Although Benedict cautioned that "it would be absurd to cut every culture down to a Procrustean bed of some catchword characterization" (1959:200-1,208), she nevertheless maintained that "a culture, like an individual, is a more or less consistent pattern of thought and action":

> Within each culture there come into being characteristic purposes not necessarily shared by other types of society. In obedience to these purposes, each people further and further consolidates its experience, and in proportion to the urgency of these drives the heterogenous items of behaviour take more and more congruous shape. All the miscellaneous behaviour [...] is made over into consistent patterns in accordance with unconscious canons of choice that develop within the culture (1959:53-4).

Moreover, the difference "between two [cultural] wholes" was seen to be "a discontinuity in kind", requiring an account of "their different natures, over and above a recognition of the similar elements that have entered into the two" (1959:57). Integration, as a result, contained an inherent motivational principle or teleological imperative that provoked a pluralistic view of "cultures headed in many different directions and travelling by different roads to different places" (De Laguna 1941:143):

> [Cultures] have certain goals toward which their behaviour is directed and which their institutions further. They differ from one another not only because one trait is present here and absent there, and because another trait is found in two regions in two different forms. They differ still more because they are oriented as wholes in different directions. They are travelling along different roads in pursuit of different ends, and these ends and these means in one society cannot be judged in terms of those of another society, because essentially they are incommensurable (Benedict 1959:196).

The doctrine of cultural relativism would be established on the basis of this particular conception of culture. Although receiving its most explicit treatment from Melville Herskovits, Ruth Benedict provided several classic renditions of the theme of

tolerance that was purported to be a logical outcome of the doctrine. Concluding her discussion of the relativity of mental disorder, she maintained that "it is as it is in ethics: all our local conventions of moral behavior and of immoral are without absolute validity" (1934:79):

> We do not any longer make the mistake of deriving the morality of our own locality and decade directly from the inevitable constitution of human nature. We do not elevate it to the dignity of a first principle. We recognize that morality differs in every society, and is a convenient term for socially approved habits. Mankind has always preferred to say, "It is a morally good,"rather than "It is habitual," and the fact of this preference is matter enough for a critical science of ethics. But historically the two phrases are synonymous (1934:73).

Similarly, the fact of cultural diversity and the explanatory efficacy of the historical particularist culture concept were recognized as vital ingredients in the application of anthropological knowledge to social issues. As noted earlier, anthropologists were actively involved in dispelling racial theories that conflated race, language, and culture. In a similar fashion, cultural relativism was conceived in terms of its potentially beneficial role in various projects of "true social engineering" (Benedict 1934:76). "Just as we have been handicapped in dealing with ethical problems so long as we held to an absolute definition of morality," Benedict contended, "so too in dealing with the problems of abnormality we are handicapped so long as we identify our local normalities with the universal sanities" (1934:76). The "therapeutic" value of this recognition rested on the suggestion that the "inculcation of tolerance and appreciation in any society toward its less usual types is fundamentally important in successful mental hygiene" (1934:75). Benedict's concluding remarks, in *Patterns of Culture*, leave nothing to the imagination when considering the significance of cultural relativism for an anthropologist of the era. "Social thinking at the present time," she notes, "has no more

important task before it than that of taking adequate account of cultural relativity" (1959:239). In "both sociology and psychology the implications are fundamental", while the "sophisticated modern temper" recognized "social relativity [as] a doctrine of despair". Opening a breach in the bulwark of "orthodox dreams of permanence and ideality" and illusions of individual autonomy, cultural relativity was eschewed for leaving "the nutshell of existence empty" in its wake. Countering these claims, she argued that the "recognition of cultural relativity carries with it its own values":

> It challenges customary opinions and causes those who have been bred to them acute discomfort. It rouses pessimism because it throws old formulae into confusion, not because it contains anything intrinsically difficult. As soon as the new opinion is embraced as customary belief, it will be another trusted bulwark of the good life. We shall arrive then at a more realistic social faith, accepting as grounds of hope and as new bases for tolerance the coexisting and equally valid patterns of life which mankind has created for itself from the raw materials of existence (1959:240).

The foregoing underscores the multiple levels on which cultural relativism resides. In order to flesh out these levels and respond to detractors, Herskovits acknowledged "three aspects of cultural relativism [...] representing a logical sequence which, in a broad sense, the historical development of the idea has also followed" (1972:38-9, 90-4). The first level is methodological, encouraging "scientific objectivity in cross-cultural research" and restraint when dealing with subjects in the field. According to Herskovits, "one does not judge the modes of behavior one is describing, or seek to change them" (1972:38). Furthermore, "one seeks to understand the sanctions of behavior in terms of the established relationships within the culture itself, and refrains from making interpretations that arise from a preconceived frame of reference [and] *a priori* cultural judgements" (1972:38,91).

A second aspect of the doctrine was identified as philosophical, providing a challenge to epistemological and ethical theories of universal applicability (1972:38-9, 91). Herskovits' understanding of this facet of cultural relativism brings the doctrine closest to its epistemological variant, underscoring the role of enculturation in the determination of perception and cognition.

The doctrine's third component is practical, according to Herskovits, and "involves the application—the practice—of the philosophical principles derived from the method, to the wider, cross-cultural world scene" (1972:38). Addressing the practical implications of this application and the oft-repeated claim that the doctrine's avowed tolerance is futile when faced with "man's inhumanity to man", he emphasized that "the scientific findings of cross-cultural study does not imply unilateral tolerance of ideas other than one's own". In fact, he states "if one must respect, one must also be respected" (1972:94).

Moreover, Herskovits distinguished between intra-cultural and cross-cultural relativism (1972:55-6). Simply stated, cultural relativism only posits the latter, rejecting any suggestions that the doctrine implies "behavioral anarchy" (1972:55,64). This is a vital distinction in several respects. First, the doctrine's cross-cultural relativism meant that the restraint exercised by anthropologists with regards to their subject communities did not pertain to their own cultures. As a result, Boas' "devotion to a liberal creed [and] commitment to scientific accuracy and purity" could be reconciled with the cross-cultural relativism advocated by Herskovits (Hyatt 1990:x). It also allowed for the criticism of practices in Western societies that were deemed asocial or antithetical to human well-being. Accordingly, Benedict devoted a considerable portion of her book to the criticism

of such American cultural traits as Middletown conformity, excessive ego-gratification, and conspicuous consumption (1959:235-39). "We need to realize that they are compulsive," she concluded, "not in proportion as they are basic and essential in human behavior, but rather in the degree to which they are local and overgrown in our own culture" (1959:219). Remarking that *Patterns of Culture* contains "hints of a reemergent social engineering impulse" (Stocking 1992:163), Stocking has noted that Benedict's doctrine is "a double-edged sword [that] could be wielded both in the cause of cultural tolerance and in the cause of cultural criticism" (1992:163).

Second, intra-cultural relativism points to the suggestion that traits can be asocial and counterproductive to a cultural whole. "It is possible," Benedict advises, "to scrutinize different institutions and cast up their costs in terms of social capital, in terms of the less desirable behavioral traits they stimulate, and in terms of human suffering and frustration" (1959:216). These might include, for instance, endemic warfare, incest, racism, and hostility to members of an out-group. Ultimately, asocial traits are determined by a "test of consequences" for a culture's adherents (E. Williams 1947:88).

Finally, the recognition of asocial traits revealed a qualified acknowledgment of sociocultural progress. Although he maintained reservations regarding its evaluation (see Boas 1938:676), Boas nevertheless remained a vociferous champion of objective science and its contribution to the alleviation of social problems (see Boas 1932:202-46, 1938:676-8). As Stocking has maintained, he "never abandoned entirely a nineteenth-century liberal belief in a singular human progress in 'civilization' that was based ultimately on the accumulation of rational knowledge" (1992:110). For example, he remarked that the "rapid development of science and of the technical application of

scientific knowledge are the impressive indications of the progress of modern civilization" (1932:216). These instances of progress were essentially matters of techno-scientific enhancement, an ethnographic verification of the beneficial outcome of rational thought:

> In the recognition of earlier errors our standard is truth; but at the same time the recognition of error implies more rational, often useful conclusions. In all these acquisitions a process of reasoning is involved. The achievements are a result of intellectual work extending over ever-widening fields and increasing in thoroughness (1932:216).

He also considered progress in the domain of ethical conduct (1932:220-8, 1938:677-78). Ever vigilant to express his conclusions on a scientific basis, he claimed that an "historical interpretation of classifications of social forms as expressing progress can be achieved to a very limited extent" (1938:678). Presumably due to the greater technical effectiveness of Western culture, he acknowledged "an advance in ethical behaviour when we compare primitive society with our own" (1932:220). Provisionally, "we can speak of progress in certain directions, hardly absolute progress, except in so far as it is dependent upon knowledge which contributes to the safety of human life, health, and comfort" (1932:228). Moreover, "generally valid progress in social forms is intimately associated with advance in knowledge", based "fundamentally on the recognition of a wider concept of humanity and with it a weakening of the conflict between individual societies" (1932:228):

> It may safely be said that the code, so far as relations between members of a group are concerned, does not differ from ours. It is the duty of every person to respect life, well-being, and property of his fellows, and to refrain from any action that may harm the group as a whole (1932:225).

Furthermore, he remarked that the "languages of people all over the world prove that the vices that we know, such as murder, theft, lying, rape, are recognized and in most cases discountenanced within the social group in which mutual duties are recognized" (1938:677):

> The difference consists largely in the increasing recognition of rights of those outside of one's own group [...] While in early times the outsider was an enemy just as much as a wild beast, his human rights were slowly understood, a process that is not yet completed, since to us the rights of the alien are still considered on a level different from the rights of the citizen (1938:677).

He also suggested the importance of a supra-national political structure for the recognition of common interests that would predate the formation of the United Nations. Contending that the "federation of nations is the next necessary step in the evolution of mankind" (1932:97), he emphasized that the gradual recognition of common interest could bring about a cessation of conflict between groups:

> The progress in the direction of recognition of common interests in larger groups, and consequent political federation has been so regular and so marked that we must needs conclude that the tendencies which have swayed this development in the past will govern our history in the future (1932:101).

In fact, the "enlargement of circles of association, and equalization of rights of distinct local communities have been so consistently the *general* tendency of human development that we may look forward confidently to their consummation" (italics in original; 1932:102).

These tentative statements regarding ethical universals, progress and human commonalities are significant departures from the prescriptive statements ascribed to the doctrine of cultural relativism noted above. Boas' measured assertions regarding cultural relativity were taken up by his students in different ways. His concern for social

relevance, made apparent in his opposition to racial theories and his recognition of the scientist's responsibilities as a citizen, were carried forward by Ruth Benedict and Melville Herskovits. Moreover, his Germanic intellectual heritage even influenced the eventual form of the culture concept advocated by his students, which identified the emerging discipline of anthropology with a specific understanding of cultural processes. This would be equally significant in the expression of cultural relativism, although Boas' and Benedict's evaluative tendencies were distinguishable from Herskovits' hesitancy.

Nevertheless, the doctrine reached its zenith in the publication of the Statement on Human Rights in 1947. Submitted to the Commission on Human Rights of the United Nations, it served as an anthropological rebuttal to what eventually became the *Declaration of Human Rights*. The Statement recapitulated the primary tenets of cultural relativism as it was conceived at the time, emphasizing the individual's determination in a cultural system and advocating "respect for the cultures of differing human groups" and a "recognition of the fact that the personality of the individual can develop only in terms of the culture of his society" (1947:540). Moreover, in maintaining that the "rights of Man in the Twentieth Century cannot be circumscribed by the standards of a single group" (1947:543), the Statement questioned how the "proposed Declaration be applicable to all human beings and not be a statement of rights conceived only in terms of the values prevalent in the countries of Western Europe and America" (1947:539). In response, the Statement provided three propositions intended to guide the drafting of the Declaration (1947:541-43). Underscoring the enculturative process, the first proposition stated that "the individual realizes his personality through his culture, hence respect for individual differences entails a respect for cultural differences" (1947:541). Second,

"respect for differences between cultures is validated by the scientific fact that no technique of qualitatively evaluating cultures has been discovered" (1947:542). Finally, "standards and values are relative to the culture from which they derive so that any attempt to formulate postulates that grow out of the beliefs or moral codes of one culture must to that extent detract from the applicability of any Declaration of Human Rights to mankind as a whole" (1947:542). In order to gain "world-wide applicability" (1947:542), the Document "must embrace and recognize the validity of many different ways of life" (1947:542-3).

Although representing the culminating expression of cultural relativism and its underlying assumptions about culture, the Statement's themes were not adopted in the UN Declaration of Human Rights and have remained an ongoing challenge to the derivation of human rights legislation. A number of authors have indicated the Statement's continued relevancy in human rights discourse, especially with regards to the development of legislation and during deliberations of its applicability to evolving notions of group and cultural rights (cf. Cowan et al. 2001, Garkawe 1995, Howard-Hossmann 2000, Ibhowak 2001, Oloka-Onyango 1995, van der Merwe 1999). Taken in concert, these nagging issues serve as further evidence that the doctrine of cultural relativism has gained currency in public discourse.

Criticisms of Cultural Relativism

Cultural relativism has received criticism from a number of different sources. Largely beginning with the publication of the *Statement on Human Rights* by the American Anthropological Association in 1947, these critiques have been based on certain philosophical reservations about particular propositions contained in the doctrine

as well as an evolving sophistication in anthropological theory and method. In combination, these criticisms have underscored some of the difficulties entailed by the doctrine's underlying culture concept, its attendant methodological principles, and its rejection of absolute ethical values in favour of a tolerant attitude toward cultural differences.

One avenue of criticism has focussed on the assumption that cultural diversity represents a denial of absolute moral principles. As noted earlier, this assumption rests squarely on the argument about fundamental differences between the parties to an ethical disagreement. In anthropological terms, such disputes can be appreciated as an indication of what Ruth Benedict referred to as the incommensurable nature of cultural systems. In response to this suggestion, a number of anthropologists embarked on research that attempted to discover the extent of universal values in human societies (cf. Keesing 1960, Kluckhohn 1953,1964,1973, Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1971, Redfield 1953 and 1973). This search for "cultural invariants" (Schmidt 1955:783), representing a departure from theories of cultural and moral absolutes, was instrumental in producing "empirical data that suggest[ed] the existence of trans-cultural values in opposition to the fact of diversity" (1955:788). They are established on an observation that there exist certain basic requirements for the survival of individuals and the groups to which they belong, or what Robert Redfield has identified as the "conditions which bring about the societies and cultures of men" (1973:139). Functional guarantees on which social stability is based, these universal values are responses to the fact that "certain stresses and needs [...] are invariant with respect to different cultures", while their avoidance is an equally universal value (1955:789). They include, for instance, the avoidance of "threats to life

and health, discomfort from pain, heat, cold, and fatigue, loss of means of subsistence, deprivation of sexual satisfaction, isolation, [and] threats to children" (Schmidt 1955:789). Moreover, a number of "functional prerequisites of society" were discerned by Aberle et al. (1949), including sexual recruitment, shared cognitive orientations and values, and effective control of disruptive forms of behaviour (in Schmidt 1955:789). These approaches to cultural universals also incorporated research on social systems in disarray, including the work of anthropologist Anthony Wallace on revitalization movements.

Another series of criticisms focussed on the philosophical irregularities of the doctrine (see Brandt 1959,1967, Grooten and Steenburgen 1972, Hanson 1975, Hartung 1954, Ladd 1973, Meiland 1980, Outhwaite and Bottomore 1993, Schmidt 1955, B. Williams 1972). To begin, the doctrine's reliance on a concept of enculturation has been seen as a serious challenge to objective anthropological science. Herskovits' global definition of this process, incorporating not only an ethical component but an epistemological one as well, ultimately discredits the entire anthropological enterprise as yet another culturally 'local' activity (Schmidt 1955:781). Moreover, Schmidt emphasizes the ambiguity of a number of the terms utilized in the doctrine, including 'is relative to' and 'cultural background' (1955:781). Such difficulties only serve to obfuscate the doctrine and damage its applicability. Taken to its logical extreme, cultural relativism could also be construed as a blanket denial of any form of progress.

Another difficulty has been identified with regards to the evaluative dimension of cultural relativism. This problem is based on the logically fallacious proposition maintaining that tolerance is an appropriate and desirable value on which social relations

can be improved. According to Bernard Williams (italics in original, 1972:21), a tolerant attitude is not a logical outcome of the empirical fact of cultural diversity, but rather "uses a *nonrelative* sense of 'right' not allowed for in the first proposition" of cultural variability. In doing so, the doctrine fails to distinguish between 'ought' and 'is' statements, thereby confusing "prescriptive as against descriptive information" (Schmidt 1955:783-4,788, see also Bidney 1953:424-5). Or, as Hartung has remarked, "let me state the problem explicitly: the factual description of cultural variation is no basis for either tolerance or condemnation unless the moral relevance of this variation has been referred to as a standard which applies to all" (1954:124).

There have been other issues of dispute with regards to the practical utility of cultural relativism and its call for tolerance. One such objection has focussed on the political ramifications of the doctrine and its reliance on a concept of culture that has lent itself to conservative tendencies in anthropology (Murdock 1965:146). As Washburn has noted, this awareness came as "anthropology moved from optimism to pessimism", bringing with a shift from "naïve faith in cultural relativism to an embarrassed and skeptical unease concerning the doctrine" (1998:38). According to Stanley Diamond (1972), the destabilization of cultural relativism was carried out during a period of arduous anthropological speculation about its colonial heritage. The doctrine's formulation occurred at a time of disciplinary formation that heralded the beginning of professional anthropology and its claims to objectivity. It retains the potential to engender a "purely intellectual attitude" that obscures the effects of anthropological fieldwork on subject communities. Often celebrating the ennoblement of ethnographic practice and the experience of 'culture shock', the doctrine serves to "detach the anthropologist from all

particular cultures" and "converts him into a shadowy figure prone to newsworthy and shallow pronouncements about the cosmic condition of the human race" (1972:421-2). In "putting the soul of the anthropologist in jeopardy", Diamond writes, the doctrine fails to provide "a moral center" and inaugurates a situation in which "self-knowledge, engagement, the involvement of the anthropologist in any activity other than his profession" are deemed "potential contamination" of objective anthropological practice. In a more general sense, "relativism proves popular" because "it is in accord with the spirit of the time" (1972:421). A "perspective congenial in an imperial civilization convinced of its power", cultural relativism amounts to the "bad faith of the conqueror who has become secure enough to become a tourist" (1972:421, see also Caulfield 1972).

Finally, the cultural relativist's unwillingness to evaluate foreign value orientations and behaviour is problematic in another sense. As Marvin Harris has correctly remarked, "merely to refrain from opinion is not therefore to avoid the expression of opinion" (1968:163). In this regard, the relativist's failure to acknowledge that "contributions to the political expression of particular value positions consists of both action and inaction" and produces a "state of moral and ethical confusion characterized by contradictory, weak, unconscious, or disguised value judgements" (1968:163).

Conclusion

The doctrine of cultural relativism has remained a uniquely anthropological contribution. A specific variant of relativist thought, the doctrine owes much to a particular conception of culture that gained currency in the discipline during the first half of the twentieth century. Propounded first by Franz Boas, this concept would be an integral component in an intellectual program designed to usurp prevailing ideas of

cultural evolution common in Victorian social thought. Emphasizing a model of culture that underscored its integration and dominant patterning, anthropologists of this era put forward the doctrine in order to combat ethnocentrism and social injustice. They did so with recourse to an ethic of tolerance, yet they also understood their function as cultural critics of Western culture. These ideas culminated in the preparation of the Statement on Human Rights in 1947.

The significance of cultural relativism cannot be overemphasized. As we will see in the remainder of the present work, the doctrine and its ethic of tolerance have become part of the American vernacular. Its diffusion into American culture is made evident in three different ways. We have already made note of its inclusion in human rights discourse. Moreover, the doctrine can be recognized in current debates about an American culture war. For the purposes of this thesis we will focus on cultural relativism as a problematic aspect of Star Trek. As a result, the following chapters will be devoted to an explication of the doctrine's appearance in this television series and, in general, a discussion of that might be drawn from its ongoing relevance in American culture.

Chapter Four: Semiotics, Genre, and the Analysis of Star Trek

Addressing the proliferation of critical approaches to myth, Wagner and Lundeen adopt the Greek myth of Procrustes the innkeeper to caution readers about the hazards of interpretive single-mindedness. According to the authors, an analyst can be "so driven toward a preconceived goal that one may select only the material that fits the chosen approach or stretch and whittle it until it does fit" (1998:17). Their suggestion is in part evidenced by some of the academic material on Star Trek, in which episodes of the series are utilized in a descriptive sense in order to elucidate a theoretical postulate. Their discussion is often impressionistic in tone, whereby particular aspects of an episode are revealed to be indicative of a larger pattern. Furthermore, there remains a troubling absence of discussion in regarding methodological issues on which analyses are based. This presents a considerable difficulty in addressing the manner by which the conclusions of these authors are reached. Moreover, their analyses pose particular difficulties when placed in the context of the present work, which demands certain specificity regarding the methodological tools deemed applicable for the execution of my research objectives. In this regard, the utilization of semiotics and genre analysis as a methodology has been guided by a spirit of eclecticism that has been equally determinative in my selection of a theoretical framework.

The Trek text is voluminous, and must be apprehended in its institutional context in addition to its particular renditions in the format of episodic television[9]. To say the least, it presents a daunting and formidable task to grasp in all its semantic lushness and breadth. Moreover, the entire Star Trek corpus is not an isolated cultural construct, but

exemplifies a number of concerns that are characteristic of a larger tradition of science fiction on television and film. As a result, we will consider Star Trek from the unique insight provided by semiotic theory and as well as incorporate the lessons to be learned from the more traditional avenue of genre analysis. By doing so, we will achieve a broader understanding of the series recapitulation of prevalent themes in science fiction film and television and Trek's more general articulation of American popular culture.

In response to Wagner and Lundeen's warnings, two levels of methodological analysis have been utilized in order to buttress this work from an over-emphasis on impressionistic appraisals of Star Trek's themes and narrative features. We will begin our discussion of methodological issues with the textual base, addressing the contributions of a semiotic approach to an analysis of Star Trek's ideological content. We will then consider genre analysis as a second level of abstraction in order to provide a broader context to our appreciation of Star Trek's location in a tradition of science fiction television and film. These points of abstraction are arbitrary; they cannot be unduly isolated from each other, but are mutually reinforcing methodological avenues into the omnibus Star Trek product.

Semiotics, Genre and the Analysis of Television

Semiotics, according to Ellen Seiter, "makes it possible [...] to identify and describe what makes television distinctive as a communication medium, as well as how it relies on other sign systems to communicate" (1988:24). Providing a "descriptive method" on which "other approaches—feminist, psychoanalytic, ideological—can [...] ask larger questions of the television text" (1987:38), semiotics is "extremely useful in its attempt to describe precisely how television produces meaning" (1987:29). This

precision, however, is derived from an analytical vocabulary that is "one of its most trying aspects" (1987:24). Seiter includes a quote from the late Paddy Whannel in this regard: "Semiotics tells us things we already know in a language we will never understand". Seiter, moreover, emphasizes that in "stubbornly restricting itself to the text", semiotics "remains silent on the question of how to change the sign system [nor can it] explain television economics, production, history, or the audience" (1987:29).

An initial difficulty in analyzing any textual product revolves around a need to determine minimal units for analysis. Television provides a unique set of problems when attempting to isolate a primary point to begin study (Seiter 1987:24). Unlike linguistic phenomena that are manifested in tangible written or verbal forms, televisual material does not present itself in a manner that allows for a transposition of its constituent elements into a structure akin to the grammatical and syntactical diction of standard linguistic analysis. In this regard, the pioneering film theorist Christian Metz has addressed the problematical "notion of cinematographic language" in a number of his works (1974, 1994; see also Westlake 1988:38-40).

In order to underscore the distinctiveness of the cinematographic product, Metz identified "an original combination of five physical types of signifiers" or "channels of communication" (Seiter 187:24) operant in cinema. These signifiers represent the material means through which an analyst may determine the denotative and connotative functions of the cinematographic and televisual product. As Metz emphasizes, "when one studies [the structures of the film], one must confine oneself to classifying as part of the cinematographic language those structures (and they alone) whose very existence is linked to one or another of these materials, or even to their combinations" (1974:586).

They include the "moving image placed in sequence", recorded phonic sound, musical sound, recorded noise, and "graphic tracing of written matter" (or referred to as "graphics" by Ellen Seiter 1987:25).

Metz's identification of the shot as a minimal point of reference for an analysis of cinematographic language is clarified in the work of Vlada Petric (Petric1982; see also Taylor and Willis 1999). Noting that the "filmmaker's major concern is to establish a revealing relationship between *mise-en-scene* and the specific properties of shooting technique" (182:263), she introduces the concepts of *mise-en-frame* and *mise-en-shot*. Whereas both are established on a determinable *mise-en-scene* arrangement, the former "implies a predominantly graphic execution of a static shot" (1982:264). *Mise-en-shot*, on the other hand, involves camera movement, "a complex interaction of *mise-en-scene* and the moving camera which increases perspective in depth and gives to the viewer a sense of mobility in space" (1982:264). These concepts, according to Petric, are organized in relation to a number of other cinematographic elements, such as the total number of shots in the chosen sequence, their duration, correspondence of dialogue and shot composition, lighting and decorative arrangements, and the use of montage and editing (1982:273-7). Pointing to the complexity entailed in a single sequence of the film, Petric notes that "the sequence under examination exemplifies a successful integration of mise-en-scene, dialogue, and the interpreters' facial expressions with the shot composition, the shooting angles, and the camera movement" (1982:273).

Roland Barthes's five semiotic codes, in addition to suggesting a methodological avenue for research, have also served notice of the extent to which a textual product cannot be understood in an isolated sense. Rather, they are persistently intertextual in

orientation, whether referring to their semiotic arrangements or to their reception by historically situated subjects. The concept of intertexuality, according to Casey et al. (2002:128), demonstrates that "reading of texts takes place in an intertextual landscape [that] is made possible by a wide range of cultural codes, social practices, discourses and expectations which facilitate the production, circulation, and consumption of texts". Intertextuality operates, therefore, across the range of cultural production, from the initial emergence of a program in a production process (such as the studio industry) through its "interaction with one of its many audiences [that] activates some of the meanings/pleasures that it is capable of provoking" (Fiske 1987:14; see also Feuer 1987, Taylor and Willis 1999:80-90).

Maintaining that "intertextual knowledges pre-orient the reader to exploit television's polysemy by activating the text in certain ways", Fiske has suggested that intertextuality can be understood along two dimensions (1987:108; see also Naficy 1989 for a discussion of syntagmatic and paradigmatic intertextuality). Horizontal intertextuality, the "most influential and widely discussed form" of which is genre, are relations "between primary texts that are more or less explicitly linked" (1987:108). This dimension will be the primary focus of the remainder of the present section. Vertical intertextuality refers to the explicit articulation of "texts of a different type" and a primary text in question (1987:108,176). According to Fiske, these other texts can be identified as either secondary texts, such as "studio publicity, journalistic features, or criticism", or tertiary texts "produced by the viewers themselves in the form of letters to the press or, more importantly, of gossip and conversation" (1987:108). As noted above, the popular literature utilized in the present discussion are examples of the former, while

the slash fiction produced by Star Trek fans is an exemplary instance of tertiary texts (Jenkins 1991, 1992, Jenkins and Tulloch 1995, Penley 1997). Bernardi's discussion of fan list-servers on the Internet is further confirmation of the abundance of tertiary texts related to Star Trek (Bernardi 1998:155-77).

Genre analysis represents a second level of abstraction by which we may determine Star Trek's features. It allows for the expansion of our range of analysis to incorporate an awareness of the context of science fiction television and film within which the series is situated. For a full appreciation of the extra-textual ramifications of the Trek text in contemporary American popular culture, we need to consider its replication of prevalent themes that can be found in science fiction.

Addressing the difficulties entailed by a discussion of science fiction as a genre, Annette Kuhn notes that although "science fiction cinema has certainly not entirely bypassed critical attention [...] such work is a long way from constituting a coherent body of genre criticism" (1990:5). Furthermore, "attempts at more broadly based cultural commentary on science fiction cinema have been few and far between" (1990:5). Several general trends, however, have appeared in the critical literature, including considerations of narrative characteristics, iconography, and ideological effects shared by these films (1990:17).

The problems associated with determining the parameters of the genre of science fiction have troubled genre analysis in general. A principal aspect of this difficulty involves the uneasy relationship between general criticism of genre, on the one hand, and criticism of specific genres (Kuhn 1990:2). Whereas criticism of the former type focussed attention on the mediating role of genre in the relationship of film industry and audience,

the latter was "dogged by problems of methodology, notably by *apriorism*, an 'empiricist dilemma' facing every attempt to define and delimit specific film genres" (1990:3). According to Andrew Tudor, "we are caught in a circle which first requires that the films are isolated, for which purpose a criterion is necessary, but the criterion is, in turn, meant to emerge from the empirically established common characteristics of the films" (quoted in Kuhn 1990:3).

The application of a genre analysis to television provides a set of unique problems (Casey et al. 2002:110, Cawelti 1985, Waller 1988). To begin, the medium can be recognized for its conventionality and formulaic repetition (Fiske 1987:109-10). Commercial television requires coherence between the expectations of its audience and the programs provided in its daily schedule (Casey et al. 2002:110). This is in part established through the transformation of certain shared conventions that embody the "crucial ideological concerns of the time in which they are popular" (Fiske 1987:110). This transformation results in an "industrial and economic translation of conventions" into television programs that are formulaic versions of popular genres:

> Shows are conventionally marketed to networks and advertisers, and presented to reviewers and the public, as new inflections of a popular genre. Genre serves the dual needs of a commodity: on the one hand standardization and familiarity, and on the other, product differentiation. But the work of genre is more than economic, it is cultural as well [...] Genre spells out to the audience the range of pleasures it might expect and thus regulates and activates memory of similar texts and the expectations of this one (1987:114).

Raymond Williams' notion of flow suggests a partial challenge to the applicability of genre analysis to television (R. Williams 1975). As we may recall, television is remarkably fluid in its presentation, a quality that has a direct bearing on the manner in which an individual will view it. This has a double significance. The first

relates to instances in which programs share definite features from different genres, or are deliberately produced to parody and transgress genre boundaries (Casey et al. 2002:110, 208, Waller 1988:9). A second objection to a genre analysis of television can be lodged on the basis of the audience's viewing behaviour. Viewing subjects are potentially as likely to leap from one segment in a daily television schedule to another, disregarding the generic distinctiveness of the specific programs they settle into watching (2002:110). Their ability as "skilled readers of media texts allows them to operate with an understanding that transcends and cuts across genres" (2002:110). This appraisal leads Casey et al. to conclude that "given the proliferation of television forms and channels, classification into recognizable genres is becoming increasingly difficult [and] may be finally losing its relevance" (2002:111).

Although the reservations to the use of genre noted above are important to consider, there are nevertheless definite affinities between Star Trek and other examples of science fiction from television and the cinema. Following Fiske, we can accept a definition of genre in which it is seen as "a shifting provisional set of characteristics which is modified as each new example is produced" (1987:111). A genre, therefore, "claims to be an abstract of the most significant characteristics or family resemblances among many texts" (Cawelti 1985:56).

For the purposes of this thesis, four episodes have been elicited from *The Next Generation*, while single episodes have been selected from *The Original Star Trek* and *Deep Space Nine*. Owing in part to the rigorousness of semiotic analysis, we will limit our discussion to episodes that explicitly address the Prime Directive. Other episodes could have been selected, but I have deemed it necessary to limit the number of programs

to a manageable number (see Pounds 1999 for a similar rationale). Moreover, the particular episodes that have been selected are significant in two regards. The first relates to their placement in the developing Trek corpus. 'The Apple' (#38; 10/13/67), a second season episode of *The Original series*, provides a point of comparison between the 1960's incarnation and its later descendents. Not only does the episode entail violation of the Prime Directive, but it also illustrates the disdainful appraisal of religious belief characteristic of *the Original series*. In a similar vein, the *DS9* episode 'Captive Pursuit' will provide a consideration of the expression of the Prime Directive in the second spin-off series. The four *TNG* episodes have been selected from the first three seasons ['Justice' (#8; 11/07/87), 'Pen Pals' (#41; 4/29/89), 'Who Watches the Watchers' (#52; 10/14/89)] and the final season ['Preemptive Strike' (#176; 5/14/94)]. Once again, they are illustrative of the various ways in which the Prime Directive has been presented and the changing significance of the Directive in Trek and what this may suggest about each series' relationship to sociocultural features beyond the text in question.

A second rationale for limiting intensive analysis to the first and second series relates to their cultural context. In this regard, we can consider the extent to which they articulate certain primary concerns prevalent in America at the time of their production and broadcast. Produced in the late 1960's, the *OST* contains identifiable qualities that speak to changing American values. Equally, *TNG* provides an avenue by which we can gauge the social and cultural landscape of the United States in the 1980's and 1990's.

Analysis of Episodes

Roland Barthes' semiotic method utilized in his analysis of Henri Balzac's short story "Sarrasine" has been particularly important for the present thesis (Barthes 1974).

Providing a case study of its use, his discussion is also revealing in the context of Antonio Gramsci's concept of common sense and its influence on cultural production and interpretation (Gramsci 1971,1995). According to John Fiske (1987:143), Barthes' understanding of textual reception destabilizes the "notion of text and reader so that neither is seen as an entity or essence, but rather as interdependent processes by which meanings are constructed and circulated". Textual structure is complicated by an "interweaving of voices which are shared by reader and writer and which cross the boundaries of the text itself to link it to other texts and to culture in general" (1987:142; also 115-17). This process of intertextuality is based on the operations of five semiotic codes that "create a kind of network [...] through which the entire text passes" (1974:17-21):

> The units which have resulted from it (those we inventory) are themselves, always, ventures out of the text, the mark, the sign of a virtual digression toward the remainder of a catalogue [...] they are so many fragments of something that has always been *already* read, seen, done, experienced; the code is the wake of that *already*. Referring to what has been written, i.e. to the Book (of culture, of life, of life as culture), it makes the text into a prospectus of this Book (Barthes 1974:20-1).

Textual products, regardless of their status as either high or mass culture, are conditioned by these codes (Barthes 1973). They form a "network" of connotations that actualize common sense in specific cultural productions:

> Alongside each utterance, one might say that off-stage voices can be heard: they are the codes: in their interweaving, these voices (whose origin is "lost" in the vast perspective of the *already-written*) de-originate the utterance: the convergence of the voices (of the codes) becomes *writing*, a stereographic space where the five codes, the five voices, intersect: the Voice of Empirics (the proairetisms), the Voice of the Person (the semes), the Voice of Science (the cultural codes), the Voice of Truth (the hermeneutisms), and the Voice of Symbol. (1974:21).

As we will consider in the remainder of our discussion, Star Trek's articulation of an anthropological sensibility is made significant when we understand the show's function as a manifest receptacle of American common sense. While the Trek text is voluminous, we can nevertheless identify a distinctive narrative structure that has been characteristic of each successive series. As such, Star Trek replicates the medium's standard conventions by encoding common sense in a realist narrative that is established on a series of technical practices (Fiske 1987:4-13). Its location in the sf genre should not dissuade our recognition of its readily identifiable narrative and visual structure. In fact, these standardized practices provide audiences with an available point of entry into episodes and a recognizable aesthetic form on which its ideological content can be transmitted. As such, we can address the extent to which Star Trek is conditioned by the semiotic codes identified by Barthes through recourse to several episodes that have dealt with the Prime Directive.

According to Barthes' analysis, the hermeneutic, semic, and proairetic codes provide a stabilizing function in Star Trek's progressively unfolding narrative structure. They collectively represent conventional textual practices that establish a realist foundation on which ideological connotations are made manifest. To begin, the hermeneutic code is the "motor of the narrative" (Fiske 1987:143), providing "various (formal) terms by which an enigma can be distinguished, suggested, formulated, held in suspense, and finally disclosed" (Barthes 1974:19). Fiske notes that this code "controls the pace and style of the narrative by controlling the flow of information that is desired by the reader to solve the enigma or make good a lack" (1987:143). Irrespective of the

series under analysis, Star Trek exhibits a classical dramatic structure that follows a basic tripartite pattern. "All stories begin with a certain status quo," Hertenstein suggests, "which is somehow breached, and finally end with some kind of restoration of changed status quo"(1998:11). Often, the 'enigmas' motivating particular episodes are "literal breaches and restorations":

> The crisis often revolves around a temporal *rift*, a *rupture* in the space-time continuum, a *breach* of the hull or warp core, a *violation* of the Prime Directive (which is an interference in the integrity of a culture), [or] an intruder *alert* (italics in the original,1998:11).

In this respect, Jackson has discerned thirteen semiotic functions utilized in the *Original Star Trek* and *The Next Generation* during his analysis of the social semiotics of gender in the two series (1990:29-30). Each series begins with the Enterprise's arrival at its destination and contact with an alien society. Their similarities end at this point, however, and reveal a fundamental difference in the manner in which the Prime Directive is applied. In *the Original series*, the crew discovers something unnatural about the society that is caused by a "villain" (1990:29). After attempting an intervention on behalf of the alien society, they are rejected and conflict ensues. The Enterprise's technological sophistication destroys the villain and regains the trust of their hosts. Having removed the cause of the unnatural order, the Enterprise departs on its next mission. The alien society is left to restore a natural order or, in some episodes, is given some guidance to expedite recovery.

The interventionist strategy of *the Original series* is modified by *The Next Generation*. Their arrival is followed by a request for assistance either by the alien society or the Enterprise crew. After agreement is reached between the two parties, an

unanticipated conflict arises between factions of the alien society. The Enterprise, unwilling to support either side in the dispute, offers to mediate the dispute in a neutral manner. If their mediation in the dispute is successful, the Enterprise offers assistance to the society in order to restore order. Grateful for the assistance, the alien society is then left to settle differences and the Enterprise departs on its next mission.

Our selected episodes exemplify this pattern. In 'Justice' and 'Who Watches the Watchers', for instance, a representative of the Federation (Wesley Crusher in the former and an anthropological team in the latter) inadvertently violates the Prime Directive. In each episode, Captain Picard appears before members of the offended society and negotiates a settlement and resolution to the episode. Similarly, 'Pen Pals' involves a transgression when Commander Data begins communicating with a young girl destined to die along with her rapidly deteriorating planet. The episode ostensibly begins with impending environmental breach (the destruction of Drema IV), only to be paralleled by a violation of the non-interference dictum. Again, closure is achieved when a solution is discovered for the environmental disaster and Data's young friend is spared. In each of these episodes, a negotiated settlement is reached following the intervention of Captain Picard. Interestingly, Ensign Ro Laren's breach of orders in 'Preemptive Strike' does not reach eventual closure. This episode is an indication of a shift in the presentation of the Prime Directive that occurred in later seasons of *TNG* and in *DS9* and *Voyager*.

This shift is particularly noteworthy in contrast to the typical depiction of the Prime Directive's violation in the *Original Star Trek*. As such, the representative episode from the *Original Star Trek*, although repeating aspects of the basic structure present in TNG, nevertheless reaches a significantly different resolution. In 'The Apple', for

example, the Prime Directive is deliberately violated by Captain Kirk in order to release a planet's inhabitants from a machine intelligence they mistakenly consider divine. In this case, the episode abides by the hermeneutic code common in Star Trek, but the resolution of the 'enigma' is destruction of a society. This episode is rather characteristic of *OST*'s cavalier attitude toward the Directive.

'Captive Pursuit' exhibits yet another variation on the hermeneutic structure characteristic of Star Trek. The episode begins when an alien of an unknown species appears on the station and is befriended by Engineering Chief Miles O'Brien. We soon learn that he is the intended prey in an elaborate hunt, and, after a hunting party arrives on the station, O'Brien attempts to persuade the alien to seek asylum on Deep Space Nine. After denying the request, the alien escapes with O'Brien's assistance and resumes the hunt. Once again, resolution is achieved, but the enigma is left somewhat in flux on learning of the alien's willing participation in a hunt that will surely end in his death.

The *semic code*, underscoring the connotative properties of the semiotic process, affixes a network of qualities to the characters in a narrative (Fiske 1987:142). Barthes, acknowledging that the "proper name acts as a magnetic field for the semes", has emphasized that "character is a product of combinations [of] identical semes [that] traverse the same proper name several times and appear to settle upon it" (1974:67). In a sense, this code structures a narrative by establishing an adjectival constellation for a text's principal characters. Furthermore, the code's significatory function can also be understood in a visual and auditory sense (see Sobchak 1980). These representational codes of television, therefore, include the "moving image placed in sequence", recorded

phonic sound, musical sound, recorded noise, and "graphic tracing of written matter" (Metz 1974:586, see also Seiter 1987:25).

Star Trek exhibits this code in a number of ways, including certain visual and auditory signifiers that connote authority and technical sophistication. The Bridge layout is one such example, displaying a technological efficiency and systematic regulation of crew around particular stations. The ship's design also conveys a sense of regimentation and bureaucratic deliberateness, strictly differentiating the crew's private quarters from the public areas of the Enterprise (Hardy and Kukla 1999). Moreover, the uniforms worn by crewmembers also encode authority and technical efficiency. Star Trek's soundtrack also provides semic elaboration, beginning with Alexander Courage's soaring orchestral music and continuing with musical accompaniments of the dramatic action occurring on screen.

In fact, the importance of music in the functional semiotic network of the series can be seen when characters have been featured in musical performance. More specifically, classical music has been given pride of place in several episodes. Spock, for instance, is skilled on the Vulcan harp, while Data and Picard are accomplished members of a string quartet. Moreover, *TNG*'s Commander Riker is an avid saxophonist often seen performing jazz while not on duty. The significance of these musical genres can be identified in terms of their connotative functions and their relationship to other components of the constellation of semic elements used in character elaboration. Classical music connotes a sense of dignity, cultural refinement and technical discipline that augments our appreciation of the intellectual capacities of Spock, Data, and Picard. Picard's refinement is encoded further through his love of archaeology, classical

literature, and Earl Grey tea. Riker, on the other hand, is encoded in a more characteristically masculine manner. As a result, he is a friend of the hyper-masculine Klingon Mr. Worf, an avid poker player, and enjoys martial arts. Their composition as a cluster of semic equivalencies has also been featured in episodes that have dealt with their strained familial relationships (cf. 'Family', *TNG* #178, aired 10/01/90 and 'The Icarus Factor', *TNG* #140, aired 4/24/889).

Another indication of a semic code in Star Trek can be gleaned in the characters' names. Pounds, for instance, has shown the extent to which the Captain's names in the *OST* and *TNG* encode different motivations in their respective series. The name 'James Tiberius Kirk', according to Pounds (1999:94-5), "carries meanings that imbue this character with personality traits, historical dimension, and cultural resonances that relate him to some of the deepest conceptual levels of Roddenberry's series". He argues that their combination connote a dynamic relationship between secular and religious authority, based on their semantic provenience in the historical figures of King James I of England and the Roman Emperor Tiberius and in the Scottish word for 'church'. Similarly, Captain Jean-Luc Picard connotes associations with Biblical personages, while his surname incorporates the names of three prominent European scientists of astronomy, mathematics, and astrophysics (1999:102-3). Taken in total, these names underwrite a semic code which motivates the ethos of each series. Kirk's name, as such, connotes the *OST*'s benevolent imperialism and its sanctification of duty, while *TNG*'s ethos of scientific exploration and diplomatic efficiency is encoded in the name of its captain.

The *proairetic code*, or "code of actions" (Fiske 1987:143), indicates "a logic in human behavior [...] more empirical than rational" (Barthes 1974:18,19). In the

"Aristotelian terms [of praxis and proairesis]" (1974:18), this code is established on the "ability rationally to determine the result of an action". "It suggests," according to Fiske (1987:143), 'that we understand any action in a narrative by our experience of similar actions in other narratives". This aspect of the proairetic code points to the intertextual nature of narrative production and its reception, based on a series of "generic categories of actions" prevalent in any given culture. These might include such common narrative devices as "murder, rendezvous, theft, perilous mission, [and] falling in love" (1987:143).

Star Trek adheres to the proairetic code in a number of ways. In the case of our chosen episodes, the violation of the Prime Directive is predicated on a series of actions that motivate the eventual resolution of the hermeneutic code. Several generic codes of this type are operative in Star Trek. Some are shared with the genre of science fiction, such as 'first contact' or 'possession by an alien force', while others are found in the romance, action-adventure, and comedy genres.

The remaining codes are more justifiably appreciated for their extra-textual significance. The *symbolic* code registers the "fundamental binary oppositions that are important in any culture" (1987:142). Establishing the "antitheses upon which the narrative is founded", these oppositions include such basic distinctions as "masculine:feminine, good:evil, nature:culture, and so on" (1987:142). Binary oppositions abound in Star Trek, although we can identify dissimilarities between the various series. In the *Original Star Trek*, a number of episodes have dealt with internal oppositions in the psychology of particular characters. Hertenstein has maintained that the "most characteristic Trek conflict is internal: a single character at war with his or her self" (1998:7). In 'The Naked Time' (*OST* #7, aired 29/9/66), for example, the Enterprise

crew is infected by a virus that causes them to lose their personal inhibitions. 'The Enemy Within' (*OST* #5, aired 6/10/66), 'The Alternative Factor' (*OST* #20, aired 30/3/67), and 'Mirror, Mirror' (*OST* #39, 6/10/67) have dealt with the division of personality into the rational and the irrational. The series has also exhibited the symbolic code in external terms. The most obvious distinction is between humanity and its alien Other, but we can easily recognize several other significant oppositions. The series has often presented a basic distinction between science and religion, democracy and autocracy, as well as freedom and slavery.

The most significant of Barthes' semiotic codes for the purposes of our present discussion is the *cultural code*. This "referential code" functions by making "references to a science or body of knowledge" (Barthes 1974:18-20, Fiske 1987:143). It is "the code through which a text refers out beyond itself" to the "common stock of a culture as it is expressed in the 'already written' knowledges of morality, politics, art, history, psychology, and so on" (1987:143). Its significance resides in its recognition of the textual manifestations of what Antonio Gramsci has referred to as common sense. The cultural code is an amalgamation of numerous and oftentimes contradictory cultural traces that are active in any textual production. Although Barthes has focussed his analytical gaze on a specific literary genre, his approach has greater significance when understood in the broader field of semiotics. In fact, *Mythologies*, a fascinating collection of essays, ranges across a number of other examples of human semiosis (1973, see also 1972). In the final analysis, the cultural code, in concert with the four other codes, is operative whenever cultural production and reception occur.

Conclusion

The remainder of our discussion will consider the extent to which an anthropological sensibility pervades Star Trek. This can be identified in several ways, including the depiction of alien societies, the prevalence of hybrid characters, and in the Prime Directive's application. As we will see in the next chapter, the academic literature on Star Trek has underscored the ideological parameters of what Bernardi has referred to as the "project-within-the-text" (1996). Star Trek has been constructed from a diverse range of social practices and cultural categories that include racial, gender, and colonialist assumptions. Moreover, the present thesis has been formulated to address the apparent similarities between Star Trek and anthropology. These ideas are an integral component of Star trek's representation of difference and its negotiation of its implications for cultural contact. These issues are interwoven into the text on multiple levels and resonate with other cultural practices and texts.

Chapter Five: Star Trek and Cultural Difference: Negotiating a Multicultural America

Introduction

The following chapter will be devoted to an explication of a theoretical basis on which we can consider the cultural and social importance of Star Trek. The series has often received accolades for its utopian vision of a future in which racial and gender stereotypes have been replaced by a tolerance of diversity. This preferential option for social and cultural multiplicity has been expressed, whether involving differences based on physical traits (such as race or sexuality) or characteristics established on a cultural basis, alongside what can be cautiously identified as a quintessentially American ideology of democratic liberalism and scientific exploration. The various series have been involved in the exploration of a frontier that hearkens to a spirit of discovery significant for its inscription of particular ideological dimensions of American culture. The goal of the present chapter is to provide a final exploration of sorts, addressing the extent to which Star Trek contains a particular vision of cultural difference based on the anthropological conception of culture outlined in chapter two. In this regard, we will also consider the show's particular expression of cultural relativism and its ethical implications in contact situations.

We will begin the chapter with a brief discussion of the ongoing relevance of cultural relativism in contemporary America. The post-WWII era brought a series of dramatic changes in the United States, beginning with a shift in government foreign policies to counteract the threat of the Cold War and an increasing awareness of America's changing role in the international forum. Moreover, the American domestic situation changed as well, inaugurating a period of social and cultural instability that

would culminate in the civil rights movement of the 1950's and 1960's. This instability was further compounded by widespread discord about American involvement in Vietnam, in turn providing the necessary social mobilization that would contribute to the movement toward the recognition of women's and minority rights in the United States. These changes have contributed to contemporary debates about an American culture war with origins in the 1950's civil rights movement and continuing to the present day. As we will see, the culture war can be seen as further evidence that cultural relativism has gained wider currency in the United States.

Having addressed the persistence of cultural relativism in contemporary debates about American culture, we will utilize the theoretical insights of Antonio Gramsci to address the doctrine's expression in Star Trek (Gramsci 1971, 1978, 1985, 1995; see also Hall 1988). Gramsci has provided a number of concepts that are especially useful in considering Star Trek's capacity for mythmaking, its status as a cultural forum, and the ideological parameters of the Trek textual corpus. Along with their importance to Marxist cultural theory, these conceptual contributions can also be acknowledged for their explanatory reach and usefulness in an analysis of television. More particularly, we will consider three specific issues in the light of his contribution. First, his concept of hegemony will be used in order to address the implications of cultural relativism in recent debates about an American culture war. Second, Gramsci's concept of common sense will be adopted to analyze the problematic intersection of race, gender, and culture in Star Trek. We will consider Star Trek's function as a forum of cultural discourse, underscoring the medium's mediation of ideological codes and its status as a liminoid technology. It reveals the depth to which we may discern cultural features of American

society and the disparities between competing interpretations of changing American values. Third, we will address the anthropological ideas that have become endearing qualities of the series, including the doctrine of cultural relativism, the historical particularist concept of culture, and the problematic application of these anthropological ideas to situations of culture contact.

Cultural Relativism and a Contemporary American Culture War

Although critical responses to the doctrine revealed a number of its problematic implications, they did not expunge cultural relativism from anthropological or public discourse. Rather, the doctrine has outlasted its detractors to some degree, lending credence to Hatch's assertion that it represents a Copernican revolution in social thought. Its significance has only increased with a concomitant dissatisfaction with Enlightenment ideals that has become generalized during the experience of the 20th century. In fact, Puchala has suggested that "relativism is the prevailing philosophical standpoint of our century" (Puchala 1995):

> There have been the onslaughts of modernism, which besmirched the model of man as a rational being, and postmodernism, which has eliminated the notion of truth and deconstructed the Enlightenment into an ideological campaign to institutionalize bourgeois values. Enlightenment affirmations have also been assaulted by Nietzschean claims that morality is but a hypocritical covering over of a will-to-power that is really at the basis of human motivation. Meanwhile, the Frankfurt School, in its pre- as well as post-World War II incarnation, weighed in with the observation that applications of reason in 20th century human affairs have as often perpetrated evil as they have promoted good. Meanwhile, the immutable Newtonian universe was confused by Einstein's relativity and then replaced by Heisenberg's indeterminate and infinitely mutable quantum cosmos. Cultural anthropology during the early decades of our century also served up much to show that truths were anything but self-evident to non-Westerners (Puchala 1995).

Seen in this wider context of intellectual shift, we can concur with Hatch's assertion that cultural relativism's significance is profound and equally widespread and identify the doctrine's continued relevancy in contemporary America in several respects. First, ongoing debates about changing American values and the persistence of a culture war have often made reference to the doctrine and its impact on cultural stability. Second, these issues have emerged in the human rights arena, whether in terms of domestic policies embracing multiculturalism and pluralism or at the international level represented by the United Nations. Third, the matter is made all the more interesting by the fact that anthropologists themselves have retained a loose affiliation with the doctrine, including it as standard fare in introductory courses and textbooks on the subject of anthropology. This casualness belies the perennial difficulties raised by cultural relativism for anthropologists engaged in various types of ethnographic research. In fact, the doctrine's uneven currency in the discipline is especially curious on considering its renewed life beyond the academy. "Once argued confidently and aggressively by anthropologists," Washburn notes, "cultural relativism is now dealt with ambiguously and humorously, even by the few willing to grapple with the subject" (1998:35-6). This is not merely a question for specialists of anthropological science, but has additional prescience in discussions of cultural diversity and its policy implications. Most significantly, the continued relevance of cultural relativism raises several issues of political importance relating to its implicit justification of conservative impulses in society. Conversely, the doctrine's practical inadequacies also raise the issue of its didactic function in underscoring the ethical difficulties arising from cultural differences.

We can adopt several concepts from the work of Antonio Gramsci in order to understand the underlying mechanisms of a culture war. To begin, Marcia Landy has emphasized the extent to which his "dialectical analysis proceeds from the assumption that everything in life is in constant motion" (1994:24):

> Everything is interrelated rather than rigidly schematic and systemic. In his analysis of institutions, the church, schools, corporations, trade unions, and forms of 'entertainment', social structures are conceived of as sources of lived social relations as well as sources of constant conflict, though the tensions may not be directed toward the transformation of social conditions but toward the legitimation of prevailing conditions (Landy 1994:24; see also Holub 1992:73).

His analysis is premised on a basic distinction between two "major superstructural levels" in complex capitalist democracies:

> The one that can be called 'civil society', that is the ensemble of organisms commonly called 'private', and that of 'political society' or the 'State'. These two levels correspond on the one hand to the function of 'hegemony' which the dominant group exercises throughout society and on the other hand to that of 'direct domination' or command exercised through the State and 'juridical' government (1971:12).

Accordingly, the "supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as 'domination' and as 'intellectual and moral leadership'" (1971:57-8). State control is based on overt coercion, generally relying on punitive measures to squelch dissent. It "legally enforces discipline on those groups who do not 'consent' either actively or passively" and is "constituted for the whole of society in anticipation of moments of crisis of command and direction when spontaneous consent has failed" (Gramsci 1971:12, see also 275-6).

In the latter, however, influence and persuasion are fundamental values and are integrally related to the successful acquisition of 'legitimacy' and 'consent' (Carroll 1989:391-4, Joll 1977:99). Successful leadership, as a result, relies on the cultivation of

an environment in which "spontaneous consent" is "given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group" (Gramsci 1971:12). State institutions retain a proactive role in the production of 'spontaneous consent':

> In my opinion, the most reasonable and concrete thing that can be said about the ethical State, the cultural State, is this: every State is ethical in as much as one of its most important functions is to raise the great mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level, a level (or type) which corresponds to the needs of the productive forces of development, and hence to the interests of the ruling classes. The school as a positive educative function, and the courts as a repressive and negative educative function, are the most important State activities in this sense: but, in reality, a multitude of other so-called private initiatives and activities tend to the same end—initiatives and activities which form the apparatus of the political and cultural hegemony of the ruling classes (1971:258).

Although analytically separable, the pragmatic integration of political and civil society is achieved by a functional hegemonic formation. According to Raymond Williams, hegemony is a "realized complex of experiences, relationships, and activities [which] has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified" (Williams 1977:112):

> For hegemony supposes the existence of something which is truly total, which is not merely secondary or superstructural [...] but which is lived at such a depth, which saturates society to such an extent, and which, as Gramsci put it, even constitutes the substance and limit of common sense for most people under its sway, that it corresponds to the reality of social experiences very much more clearly than any notions derived from the formula of base and superstructure (Williams 1977:37).

"Living resolutions [...] of specific economic realities", they are "always a more or less adequate organization and interconnection of otherwise separated and even disparate meanings, values, and practices" (1977:115). Their synthetic nature is brought about through a selective process of incorporation, often drawing on residual and

emergent traditions in order to fabricate a greater breadth and effectiveness (1977:121-27). Sociocultural practices once deemed superstructural and, therefore, epiphenomenal emanations of a determining base are reclaimed as essential to the consolidation of a hegemonic formation and the historical bloc on which it is founded. In this regard, cultural production is seen as "the basic processes of the formation itself":

> People seeing themselves and each other in directly personal relationships; people seeing the natural world and themselves in it; people using their physical and material resources for what one kind of society specializes to 'leisure' and 'entertainment' and 'art': all these active experiences and practices, which make up so much of the reality of a culture and its cultural production can be seen as they are, without reduction to other categories of content, and without the characteristic straining to fit them [...] to other and determining manifest economic and political relationships (Williams 1977:111).

The concept of hegemony is a principle of diffuse power, therefore, making allowance for forms of influence and legitimacy that operate beyond traditional State and economic institutions. Rather, the concept underscores the maneuverability of competing interests in civil society. By adopting 'consent' and 'legitimacy' to convey a sense of hegemonic operations, Gramsci underscored the extent to which the process is ideational in character. As such, this process does not halt at the physical boundaries of the Subject, but denotes a saturation of individual and collective consciousness to such an extent that the hegemonic order is naturalized. This suggestion has particular ramifications for our understanding of ideological processes and their relationship to the economic and political structures of a given society. Ideology, according to Gramsci, is a dynamic phenomenon that cannot be divorced from the underlying structural constraints of a specific historical moment. Emphasizing the "purely didactic value" of the distinction between "material forces are the content and ideologies are the form", he asserted that the

"material forces would be inconceivable historically without form and the ideologies would be individual fancies without the material forces" (1971:377). Moreover, traditional definitions of ideological phenomena were hindered by a strict separation of superstructure and base:

> 1. Ideology is identified as distinct from the structure, and it is asserted that it is not ideology that changes the structures but vice versa; 2. It is asserted that a given political solution is `ideological'—i.e. that it is not sufficient to change the structure, although it thinks that it can do so; it is asserted that it is useless, stupid, etc.; 3. one then passes to the assertion that every ideology is 'pure' appearance, useless, stupid, etc. (1971:376; see also 461).

The notion of a culture war has its basis in the 19th century German policy of *Kulturkampf* (Rabkin 1996,1999, Stocking 1992:94-6). Inaugurated by the Bismarck administration to curb the authority of the Roman Catholic Church in Germany, this policy of state intervention in civil society was repeated during the 19th century in France and Italy (Rabkin 1996). According to Rabkin, the "broadly similar trajectories of these original culture wars should not be surprising":

> The compromises and ambiguities—and the underlying combination of liberating rhetoric with statist impulses—reflect the basic character of these culture wars in their classic forms [...] The dynamics of culture war reflect conflicting impulses in liberal states, the desire to maintain liberty and free public debate and the need (or perceived need) to disable enemies from within. There is a logic in rallying the supporters of liberal state authority, even in demonizing the perceived enemies of liberal authority. But, in the end, there is an all but inevitable logic in reaching a negotiated solution with these perceived enemies (Rabkin 1996, see also 1999).

The trajectory of an American culture war can be traced in a number of ways. In fact, the subject has been an abiding concern of various authors across the political spectrum[10]. In a general sense, their analyses have focussed on two primary domains of struggle that roughly coincide with Gramsci's distinction between political and civil

society. As we will consider below, indications of a culture war in the United States reveal social fissures in American society that have been increasingly based on a rhetoric of cultural pluralism and traditional political distinctions. We can understand these debates in terms of Gramsci's notion of hegemony and its operations in civil society. Although evidence of a culture war can be elicited from various legislative and judicial settings, it has been most fiercely contested between parties located in civil society.

The first domain can be identified in legislative, judicial, and political terms. John Fonte, for instance, has suggested that an "intense ideological struggle between two competing worldviews" has defined "cultural, legal and moral arguments about the most important questions facing the nation" (2001:15). Forming the "assumptions and presuppositions at the center of today's politics", he specifically identifies Gramsci's notion of class struggle and the mobilization of civil society as a radical departure from the nation's traditional basis in "Judeo-Christian precepts [and] Kantian-Enlightenment ethics" (2001:15). Several authors have considered expressions of a culture war in American political society, addressing the role of the Supreme Court and federal government in discussing a range of issues that have included pro-choice, euthanasia, school prayer, and same-sex rights (di Leonardo 1996, Laxer 2000, Rabkin 1996,1999, Swomley 1996).

A second domain of struggle can be identified in American civil society. The currency of Gramscian ideas has not only been acknowledged in the organs of the State, but have appeared in "three other sectors of American civil society: foundations, universities, and corporations" (Fonte 2001). American campuses, for instance, have been the focus of considerable debate about the legitimacy of a traditional literary and

historical canon (Fonte 2001, Mack 1996, Malcolmson et al. 1996). In attempting to integrate a much more diversified curriculum that embraces greater substantive, methodological and theoretical breadth, proponents of multicultural education have raised the ire of colleagues intent on salvaging the Western canon. The benign exterior of multiculturalism, according to the conservative writer Eric Mack (1996:18), is an ingenuous attempt to inject a "deeply corrosive rejection of all general norms, rules, and truths" into American curriculum. A "dressed-up politicized version of cultural relativism", multicultural educational programs are designed to "instill in students—and increasingly in employees and the population at large—the demonology that the apparently benign, tolerant, liberal order of Western Civilization is actually the most profoundly oppressive order ever to have existed" (1996:18).

Interestingly, polemical tracts about inclusive school curriculum, multiculturalism, and cultural relativism have not only emerged from the Right, but are equally noticeable from critics located on the ideological Left. Their insistence that a culture war is being waged for the national soul only differs in detail from their conservative counterparts, while they share an apocalyptic acknowledgement of its vital importance. Moreover, liberal commentators have equaled the Right's urgent calls for renewed vigilance and have assured the American public that they have not gained preeminence in the debate.

Echoing alarmist calls from the Right, a number of liberal writers have suggested that conservative interests are a well-engrained feature of American civil society and have been gradually extending their entrenched positions beyond their traditional economic base. For example, Henson and Philpott maintain that a "well-financed

network of conservative groups" has been engaged in an effort to "push the intellectual mainstream farther and farther right". Pointing to the activities of the *National Association of Scholars* and the *Madison Center for Educational Affairs*, they suggest that these organizations have pressed a neo-conservative agenda onto American campuses. Ostensibly devoted to the maintenance of a de-politicized educational environment, these organizations have been involved in a systematic campaign that has included funding right-wing college newspapers, providing internships in government and private industry to prospective students, and the publication of a campus review for parents. These efforts recapitulate the emergence of the "Third Generation" of conservative thinkers begun during the Reagan era. Representing a shift of focus from a concern for "abstract theory to practical politics" (1992:15), the "Third Generation" signaled a reinvestment of finances and personnel through the creation of "technocratic specialists". As neo-conservative Benjamin Hart has explained, this project infused political activity with an abiding concern for a "structure to circumvent the liberal media" (in Henson and Philpott 1992:15):

> It designed political strategies, trained candidates, set up political action committees, perfected direct-mail fundraising, brought together a coherent body of politically powerful ideas, and established think tanks to produce books, studies, and reports on public policy".

Other writers have leveled similar charges about a coalescence of conservative interests in government, education, and the media. *The Heritage Foundation*, founded in 1973, has grown into one of the leading conservative organizations in the country, claiming "over 200,000 donors" and an annual income in 1993 of $22.9 million (Swomley 1996:35). Along with other like-minded organizations such as the *American*

Enterprise Institute, *The Heritage Foundation* has been a formidable source of conservative ideology for both public and private interests:

> Heritage has produced a vast collection of materials on behalf of business interests in areas of deregulation, environment, taxation, anti-trust law, and the trade and industrial unions...Its proposals go out to over 7,000 Congressional and Administration officials and staff, journalists, and major donors (in Swomley 1996:35).

These organizations are also founded on a proactive approach toward the media industries. Foundation grants have been given to conservative print media, such as the *American Spectator*, the *National Interest*, the *Public Interest*, and the *New Criterion*, while other media have been targeted by foundation sponsored groups that have included the *Committee for Media Integrity*, the *Media Research Center*, and the *Media Institute.* A network of organizations with vested interests in controlling the dissemination of information in the United States, the "funding of right-wing ideology has been so successful that it largely determines the political agenda in Washington, shapes many news reports, and has created a significant right-wing following on university campuses" (1996:34). Public libraries have also come under fire from *Family Friendly Libraries*, an organization following a mandate to pressure the *American Libraries Association* to restrict materials deemed inappropriate for children (Elton 1997).

Significantly, the struggle over multiculturalism, educational pluralism, and diversity programs has made reference to the widespread effects of cultural relativism. According to anthropologist Micaela di Leonardo (1996), the doctrine has become an aspect of an elaborate "shell-game" designed to obfuscate the American public's recognition of the growing disparity in wealth and prosperity brought about by government inaction. Her argument repeats much of Clifford Geertz's clarion call

admonishing the doctrine's critics for their insincere equation of cultural relativism with the decadence and decay of modern society (see Geertz 1984). As he noted in 1984, the doctrine has been identified with widespread "subjectivism, nihilism, incoherence, Machiavellianism, ethical idiocy, esthetic blindness, and so on" (1984:263). It has become a "political Rorschach inkblot" (di Leonardo 1996:28), rarely acknowledged as a "descendant of our own precious Western belletristic heritage" so zealously defended by conservative writers.

In concluding our second chapter, we considered some criticisms of cultural relativism and its concept of culture. In addition to certain reservations about its logical accuracy and inability to deal adequately with universals in human societies, the doctrine's espousal of tolerance has been identified as harboring a latent conservatism. "Classic 'cultural relativism' is a fascinating oxymoron," di Leonardo states, "an exercise in powerful powerlessness":

> In its heyday it was a toothless liberalism that spoke judiciously and tolerantly of the varying 'ways of mankind'—while remaining largely silent on both the role of Western power in the political-economic settings of these shifting practices and on the comfortable evaluative position of the Western (or non-Western) ethnographer viewing them (1996:29).

In his analysis of multiculturalism and race relations in America, Downey (1999) has suggested that the significance of cultural diversity has undergone a transformation in response to economic change brought about by globalization. Unlike its earlier political manifestations, multiculturalism has become associated in an 'elective affinity' with market competitiveness. By the 1980's, "diversity emerged as a means not to social equity but to economic competitiveness", resulting in a "relatively rapid dissipation of its generative force" and "denouement as a vehicle of social dissent" (1999:259).

Russell Jacoby (1994) has made similar remarks regarding the diminishing practical implications of multiculturalism and its underlying assumption of cultural diversity. "Multiculturalism and the kindred terms of cultural diversity and cultural pluralism," he maintains, "signify anything and everything". They have come to be an integral component of a "new ideology" that, while often thought to signify an "ethereal and elevating" embrace of "ethnic and racial parity", has in reality served to promote "the culture of business, work, and consuming" (1994:125,122).

This denuded version of cultural relativism has profound implications when we consider its status as common sense in the American cultural and political environment. In fact, the doctrine's transmission from anthropology to public discourse has brought about a revision of its aims. As we noted in concluding chapter three, the doctrine has taken on conservative connotations in recent human rights work, pointing to the politicized nature of its invocation by non-Western elites in favour of maintaining a status quo in their respective polities. Furthermore, the doctrine's progressive origins have been effaced in the United States. Bloom's appraisal of the radically altered American cultural landscape in *The Closing of the American Mind* suggests that the doctrine's ethic of tolerance has been divested of its critical function, only to be replaced by a relatively benign indifference to ethnic and racial diversity (Bloom 1987). As such, cultural relativism has become a matter of mere posture in Middle America, making claims of tolerance a convenient tactic in diverting attention away from issues of cultural politics and economic reform.

Cultural Relativism and American Common Sense

The preceding section introduced evidence of an American culture war and the extent to which the doctrine of cultural relativism has been identified as a key feature of changing American values and culture. If we are to accept the premise that cultural relativism has taken on renewed life beyond the academy, the doctrine's transformation from a cornerstone of anthropology into a prevailing assumption of the average American is quite significant and encourages further consideration. As such, we can proceed on the supposition that the doctrine's diffusion into the American vernacular would register in a number of different social and cultural phenomena, such as the appearance of cultural relativism in human rights discourse. The present section will attempt to clarify the extent to which the doctrine and its underlying assumptions have been given voice in Star Trek.

More specifically, the doctrine's currency points to its absorption into the hegemonic formation of American public discourse. Although its origin in anthropological practice was meant to inaugurate a progressive revolution in social thought, the doctrine has since taken on a conservative tone. Invoked during discussions of cultural sovereignty, cultural relativism has been used to justify the maintenance of traditional social relations and practices that are less than desirable from the standpoint of human rights. Understood in a Gramscian sense, we can identify the doctrine as an example of an emergent practice that was selectively incorporated into an overriding American hegemony.

The doctrine has remained, nevertheless, an integral component of American common sense. As we shall see in the present section, cultural relativism has been absorbed into the polyglot ideational complex of American public thought. While its

vitality has been made evident in debates about an American culture war, the doctrine has also been filtered through the fictional lens of Star Trek.

Once again, Antonio Gramsci's conceptual contributions to the analysis of hegemonic formations is particularly useful in considering the currency of cultural relativism in contemporary America. More specifically, his thoughts on the operation of common sense and its relationship to the overarching structural requirements of a capitalist mode of production are especially relevant to our discussion. It provides a conceptual frame by which we can better approximate the intrusion of hegemony into an individual's consciousness of reality. In this sense, common sense provides a conceptual parallel to the notion of intertextuality, in that the latter refers to the semiotic transferability of ideological codes between different genres and domains of experience.

Common sense is defined by several primary characteristics. As an integral mechanism in the perpetuation of hegemony and state legitimacy, common sense is an "uncritical and largely unconscious way of perceiving and understanding the world that has become 'common' in any given epoch" (Hoare and Nowell Smith in Gramsci 1971:321-2). According to Gramsci, the concept denotes "a given social stratum's 'popular science'—its 'common sense' or traditional conceptions of the world" (1971:197). A definitive feature of social existence, this 'spontaneous philosophy' is manifested in language, popular religion, and folklore. Unconscious and synthetic, the concept serves to emphasize that "all men are 'philosophers' by defining the limits and characteristics of the 'spontaneous philosophy' which is proper to everybody" (1971:323). "Ptolemaic, anthropomorphic, and anthropocentric" (1971:420), it is a "chaotic aggregate of disparate conceptions [which are] crudely neophobic and

conservative" (1971:422-3). Its incongruity is a result of its variegated historical development, in that "every philosophical current leaves behind a sedimentation of 'common sense'" (1971:326,n.5):

> 'Common sense' is not something rigid and immobile, but is continually transforming itself, enriching itself with scientific ideas and with philosophical opinions which have entered ordinary life. 'Common sense' is the folklore of philosophy, and is always half-way between folklore properly speaking and the philosophy, science, and economics of the specialists. Common sense creates the folklore of the future, that is as a relatively rigid phase of popular knowledge at a given time and place" (1971:326,n.5; 420).

In contrast to "studies of folklore as ethnography that focus on the timeless and ahistorical character of narratives" (Landy 1994:87), Gramsci places common sense and folklore squarely in the flow of history. A "product of history and a part of [...] historical becoming" (1971:325-6), it is characterized by a relative diversity in content which may be measured temporally, regionally, and individually. Noting that "in acquiring one's conception of the world one always belongs to a particular grouping which is that of all the social elements which share the same mode of thinking and acting" (1971:324), he defines it as highly variable:

> [It is a] conception of the world which is uncritically absorbed by the various social and cultural environments in which the moral individuality of the average man is developed. *Common sense is not a single unique conception, identical in time and space*. It is the 'folklore' of philosophy, and, like folklore, *it takes countless different forms. Its most fundamental characteristic* is that it is a conception which, even in the brain of one individual, is *fragmentary, incoherent and inconsequential*, in conformity with the social and cultural position of those masses whose philosophy it is (emphasis added; 1971:420).

As with a number of his other conceptual contributions, Gramsci adopted the term in part to convey its conservatism as well as its subversive potential. Although "he remained suspicious" of the liberating function of common sense, whether as an inherent

quality or as manifested in mass culture (e.g. radio and cinema; Landy 1994:92), he nevertheless alluded to its dualistic qualities by underscoring its "polysemic" nature:

> Gramsci does not interpret common sense as monolithic, mired in false judgment—a totally inaccurate and constraining conception of the world. For him, common sense is polysemic, formed of various strata from philosophy, religion, institutional practices, and individual experience. In short, common sense is a multifaceted representation of social life under determinate conditions, and in Gramsci's terms cannot be separated from notions of conformity and collectivity or from notions of resistance (1994:78).

Common sense, therefore, does not denote a "mere voluntary assent to the status quo or mere mechanistic assimilation of attitudes" (Landy 1994:80). Rather, his notion incorporates a dynamic understanding of cultural 'borrowing' with an understanding of subjective experience that remains cognizant of the multiple locations of the self in society (e.g. gender, class, and regional identities; 1994:81). Similarly, individual personality is equally synthetic and a "strangely composite" commingling of "Stone Age elements and principles of a more advanced science" (1971:324). Each person, as such, is an "historical bloc of purely individual and subjective elements and of mass and objective or material elements with which the individual is in an active relationship" (1971:360). The "historical process" inscribes each personality with "an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory" (1971:324).

Unlike static views of ideological dissemination, his notion of common sense allows for a more "subtle system [of ideological formation] involving survival, exchange of services, and uncritical adherence to tradition on the part of the subaltern expressed through the various representations of the family, work, leisure, gender, and sexuality" (Landy 1994:80):

> Through his notion of the contradictoriness of common sense, he asserts that popular conceptions of the world held by subaltern groups are not simple reproductions of prevailing conditions. The philosophy of common sense is not represented in folklore, popular culture, and mass media as simply false consciousness but as a *means of negotiating* lived, if distorted and counterproductive, conditions endemic to one's social group. These conditions are inherited from the past, and an examination of common sense exposes disjunctions between 'thought and action' (emphasis added; Landy 1994:79, see Gramsci 1971:157).

Gramsci's cultural writings, according to Marcia Landy (1994:75), were "directed toward an investigation of the various forms of cultural expression for what they may reveal about social forms" (1994:75). In fact, his "most significant contribution [...] to contemporary critical thinking in the arena of cultural study lies in his provocative notes on the nature of mass and popular culture in tandem with his notion of common sense and folklore" (Landy 1994:30). Through the study of an extensive variety of cultural works, which included the popular press as well as such examples of popular literature as the detective and serial novel, he advocated a "rational cultural enterprise" which would proceed through three phases:

> The plan follows a tripartite order: first, Gramsci looks at the molecular processes of hegemonic cultural practices, in particular the reading practices, of many social strata, which allows him to research the differences of cultural production; he then asks what these reading practices reveals in terms of inner drives and needs, what the cultural production responds to or satisfies; and finally he draws up a balance sheet as to what needs to be done for a counter-hegemonic culture (Williams 1980:104, see also Holub 1992:80).

Holub has emphasized that his method of analysis proceeded on a premise that "texts, authors and audiences function in relation to one another":

> What Gramsci seems to see are not first and foremost autonomous poets or writers, pieces of literature or texts independent of a context, but texts that are written by someone and for someone. Authors and audiences are seen here as related in the production and reception of social texts [...] Gramsci views texts as processes of production that

> involve producers and consumers within a social context (Holub 1992:74; see also Dombroski 1988:15).

According to Marcia Landy, the concept is "especially appropriate for identifying the hybrid and political nature of mass cultural texts as they negotiate issues of family, nation, gender, race, and property, both through consensus and through exposing the contradictory nature of that consensus" (1994:96). This can be seen, for instance, in the genre of science fiction as it has appeared in popular literature, cinema, radio, and television (Bernardi 1998, Kuhn 1990, Landy 1994:185-210). Providing an illustration of the extent to which cultural productions are tangible intersections of "morality, sociality, and politicality" (Holub 1992:80), the genre can be apprehended for its embodiment of contradictory elements of common sense that have retained currency in American culture and society.

Marcia Landy, for instance, has provided an interesting discussion about the extent to which contemporary science fiction cinema has navigated a turn toward postmodernity. Emphasizing that it remains a "multidimensional genre requiring a multidimensional analysis" (1994:189), the genre presents an evolving discourse on the relationship between science and technology, the ethical ramifications of scientific research, and, most recently, the increasing likelihood of cybernetic augmentation of the human body. While the genre of science fiction has witnessed considerable change since its earliest cinematic expressions at the turn of the 20th century, Landy takes exception to postmodernist interpretations that identify this "continuous nature of innovation" as an indication of a "postmodernist condition" (1994:208; cf. Kuhn et al 1990). Based on a "monolithic assessment of 'the masses' which ascribes to them passive submission to power", these commentators have considered contemporary science fiction films as

"expressions of a new, drastic, and unitary permutation of mass culture" (1994:209). In contrast, Landy dismisses these claims by emphasizing that the genre's "protean quality, its eclecticism, and its acute sensitivity to audience reception" does not signify a "decisive moment of rupture marking a radical break in ideological formations", but instead continues to "address an array of cultural antagonisms" (1994:208). In particular, approaches that betray a "distaste for mass culture" are in "direct contrast to Gramscian notions of the complexity of consensus that stress the importance of steering clear of univalent notions of coercion" (1994:208). Moreover, the analysis of common sense demonstrates the extent to which science fiction films "address contradictions and antagonisms that cannot be easily read and determined but that are desperately in need of less totalizing and deterministic forms of analysis". Aside from the inclusion of "time-honored motifs", these films are characterized as "sites for the intersection of generic modes" and "portray, in various ways, both the residual and the changing faces of gender, sexual, race, familial, economic, and class relations" (1994:209). As with other instances of popular culture, sf is an embodiment of American common sense, a subtly disruptive form of discourse about the inherently subversive semantic potentialities residing in cultural production.

Antonio Gramsci's recognition of the indeterminacy of common sense and its contradictory nature is of considerable value in the present analysis of Star Trek and its anthropological sensibility. Its status as a composite and synthetic popular philosophy allows for an understanding of the diffusion of cultural relativism into American culture and an apprehension of its manifestation in social practices and mass cultural products. We have considered the American culture war as both an indication of cultural

relativism's currency in American culture and its problematic relationship to a conservative hegemonic formation in the United States. Although this is certainly troublesome from the standpoint of the doctrine's origins in anthropology, its status as common sense may equally represent an alternative to its conservative tendencies. As noted above, the presence of residual and emergent cultural forms and practices in common sense may allow for a more complicated understanding of cultural relativism's meaning in the American popular consciousness.

The doctrine's manifestation can also be documented in mass cultural products. As we will consider in the remainder of the present chapter, the articulation of common sense and cultural relativism can be identified in Star Trek. We will utilize insights derived from Roland Barthes' semiotic approach to textual production and reception for the purpose of explicating Star Trek's anthropological sensibility. His ideas provide an understanding of cultural texts that is comparable to Gramsci's recognition of the fluidity of common sense and its implicit tension between conservative and liberalizing tendencies. Barthes' notion of textual reception emphasizes intertextuality and the fluid flow of semiotic codes irrespective of genre or origin, suggesting a parallel between semiotic processes and the acquisition of common sense through the products of mass culture. As a result, Barthes' notion of semiotics is particularly significant in underscoring how textual products draw on common sense and, equally, the extent to which mass culture can convey contradictory ideological content. Moreover, by emphasizing the active creativity of the process of reception, his approach approximates a Gramscian analysis of the potentially oppositional and counter-hegemonic interpretations of mass cultural texts by audiences.

Star Trek's Anthropological Sensibility

In general, the academic literature on Star Trek exhibits a consensus with respect to the show's ideological significance and mythological function. "Star Trek's many promises," Harrison notes (1996:1), "have deeply and profoundly influenced its audiences". Repeatedly, the critical literature has emphasized the quintessentially American scope and direction of the Trek corpus. Accordingly, scholarship on Star Trek has provided evidence of the extent to which Star Trek exhibits profound intersections of race, gender, ethnicity, and colonialism. Their analyses of the series validation of hegemonic categories is commendable, revealing the profusion of common sense in the Trek text and its diffuse nature in mass culture (cf. Bernardi 1998, Deegan 1983, Harrison et al 1996, Horrocks 1997, Korzeniowska 1996, Selley 1986, Wagner and Lundeen 1998). Moreover, the academic literature has underscored the importance of an historical perspective during an analysis of the various Star Trek productions, allowing recognition of the changes that have occurred in successive series as well as their relationship to a changing American context.

The *Original Star Trek* has often been seen as the most concerned with a liberal humanist ethos. As noted above, its interventionism was an indication of the exigencies of Cold War American-Soviet relations (Franklin 1990b, Goulding 1985). The repeated violation of the Prime Directive, as a result, was often justified in these episodes as a necessary evil and counter-balance to the incursions of the Federation's enemies. Furthermore, Star Trek's secularism was made evident in episodes that featured the subjugation of alien societies by either another superior alien group or super-computer mistakenly ascribed supernatural power.

The Next Generation, on the other hand, departed from some of these features of its predecessor. It maintained a faith in secular humanism and the value of scientific and technological sophistication, although episodes were far less straightforward in their application of these principles. As noted above, the interventionism of the *Original Star Trek* was replaced by a greater adherence to the Federation's non-interference Prime Directive. Jackson has suggested that this shift in emphasis can be interpreted as a rejection of the `political realism' of the *Original Star Trek.* Advocating a 'moral realism', *TNG* "appears to reject the ongoing American foreign policy of 'intervention when necessary'" (Jackson 1990:39-40). "Instead," he continues, "it expresses greater interest in the more prominent, yet less frequently exercised, ideological schema of cooperation". As a result, the series "offers peaceful, as opposed to violent, solutions to contemporary conflicts".

Deep Space Nine represented a further departure from the original vision of Star Trek. In particular, the series has certain dystopic overtones. The assurance of secular humanism is largely gone from the show, while the political and moral naivete of the *Original Star Trek* is implicitly deconstructed in a number of ways. The station is forever beset by technical and political problems, owed in part to its tenuous location on the edge of a wormhole. The series is also characterized by a much more sympathetic consideration of religious belief and its implications for questions of national and cultural identity. In this regard, the intersection of political history, imperialism, religion, and nationalism are nowhere more apparent than in the characterization of the Bajoran people.

Finally, *Voyager* maintained a distance from its predecessors. In fact, several authors have suggested that the series is decidedly postmodern in its orientation (Barrett and Barrett 2001, Junker and Duffy 2002). Once again, it follows *DS9*'s political and moral ambiguity, unsettling the modernist preoccupation with a unitary Self and equally integrated social polity (Barrett and Barrett 2001). Moreover, *Voyager* "began to offer richer and more complex representation of religious practices, beliefs, and worldviews" (Kraemer 2001:11, see also Pilkington 1996, Porter and McLaren 1999).

Star Trek has articulated an anthropological sensibility that can be followed in at least three general aspects of Roddenberry's original vision: alien societies as integrated cultural wholes, hybridity as an indication of the force of enculturation, and a principle of non-interference to buttress cultural integrity. We can acknowledge the significance of this apparent synchronicity between the Boasian anthropological tradition and Star Trek in two respects. As the foregoing discussion indicates, the diffusion of cultural relativism into American culture during the first half of the twentieth century and its absorption into common sense would provide the basis on which we can understand the appearance of an anthropological sensibility in Star Trek. Moreover, the variability with which these anthropological ideas have been used in the different Star Trek series could be interpreted as an indication of changes in the popular conception of cultural relativism and its attendant notion of culture. As such, changes in the portrayal of alien species, and more significantly, in the application of the Prime Directive register the shifting importance of the doctrine in contemporary America.

To begin, we can consider Roddenberry's ideas as they pertain to the philosophical outlook presented in the Original Star Trek. Dorothy Atkins has identified

"seven basic premises in Roddenberry's Star Trek philosophy" (1983:95-8). At least four of his premises bear direct resemblance with much of what we considered earlier to be distinctive about the Boasian anthropological paradigm. First, he suggests that "humans are not flawed because of any actual or metaphysical fall", but are rather bound to progress under the guidance of "tolerance and understanding" (1983:96). His second premise stipulates that humans have recognized the destructive power of technology, evidenced in the Original Star Trek in episodes such as 'Space Seed' (*OST* #24, aired 16/2/24) and 'Let That Be Your Last Battlefield' (*OST* #70, aired 10/1/69). Expressed through the Vulcan principle of Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations, Roddenberry's third premise suggests "that different races, religions, and cultures are not to be feared but valued". It is followed by a fourth premise which emphasizes that "no one has the right to interfere in the development of others" (1983:97). His final premises, stating that "humans belong in space" and "humans will survive", are peripheral to our discussion.

These premises formed the basis of the *Original Star Trek* and, in a more tangential sense, influenced the later series. By this, we can understand their importance in *The Next Generation*, *Deep Space Nine*, and *Voyager* in a refractory sense. As a number of authors have recently suggested, the more recent Trek series have undergone a revision of sorts, modifying the original conception of Star Trek in order to register contemporary concerns and ideas (Barrett and Barrett 2001, de Gaia 1998, Junker and Duffy 2002, Roberts 1999). Trek's anthropological sensibility has similarly undergone somewhat of a transformation. Whereas the Original series had a far more literal

translation of the anthropological concept of culture, the spin-off series have altered this conception to a certain degree.

Star Trek's ideology of techno-scientific progress has drawn on a number of sources. It has always been a well-entrenched trope in the genre of science fiction, especially in the tradition of hard science fiction (Bainbridge 1986). This has been made evident in numerous examples of the genre, and, interestingly, has often been an integral ingredient in both utopian and dystopian science fiction (cf. Kuhn 1990, Sobchak 1980, Telotte 1995). In Star Trek's utopian future, technological and scientific progress is allied with secular, liberal humanism in a grand narrative of exploration and expansion.

The significance of Star Trek's evolutionary paradigm can be gauged with respect to the articulation of Trek's doctrine of cultural relativism: the Prime Directive. Before addressing this central tenet of the series, however, we must come to terms with Star Trek's distinctively Boasian concept of culture. This can be gleaned from the show in at least two respects. The first aspect relates to the construction of alien species in a manner reminiscent of Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture*. The second aspect relates to the presence of Hybrid Others in Star Trek. Often criticized for their ideologically repressive function, especially when actualized in the form of the literary device of the 'Tragic Mulatto', these characters can be understood rather as indications of cultural bifurcation.

In one sense, Star Trek has often characterized alien societies in relatively sparse terms. According to Andreadis (1998:243), each series has repeatedly revealed a penchant for "monochromatic societies". "Almost invariably," she has suggested, "entire planets on Star Trek are presented as a single social and cultural block, although their groupings almost always conform to the clan pattern". This "emphasis on and display of

the unique attributes of each race/culture," Boyd maintains, "simultaneously works to reinforce the self-contained identity of each group and the existence of a universal nature" (Boyd 1996:104). Moreover, these textual practices are aligned with a "nineteenth-century model of progress exemplified by Auguste Comte" (1996:105). This evolutionary edifice is "marked by the necessary conjunction of practical, theoretical, and moral progress", evidencing an alignment of liberal humanism, democracy, scientific instrumentality, and military proficiency.

Star Trek's representation of the Alien Other, therefore, has inscribed an array of cultural preoccupations that are at the center of a functional expansive hegemonic formation in American society. In this regard, Bernardi has suggested that racially motivated representations of alien species signal the conflation of biological determinism with historical circumstances (1998:163-75). The Cardassians, for instance, have drawn comparisons to Arab societies on the basis of their militarism and penchant to use torture and repression whenever politically expedient. Likewise, the Klingons have been interpreted as allegorical representations of the Soviet Union during the Original series and, more recently, as characteristically African-American in *TNG* (Bernardi 1998:63, Franklin1994, Goulding 1985).

Star Trek's representation of alien societies has tended toward a definition of dominant cultural traits that largely determine the motivations and behaviour of specific characters. While this may lend itself to an interpretation of its essentialist racial categories, we can equally understand these representational practices in an anthropological sense. Rather than racist in origin, the emphasis placed in Star Trek on alien conformity to a basic pattern of behavior can be recognized as cultural in origin.

Star Trek presents a view of alien behaviour as largely determined by the necessities of an overriding cultural logic that is often justified in terms of historical, social, and cultural necessities.

Moreover, Star Trek has often premised its allegorical stories on the maladaptive elaboration of specific traits in a particular alien society. These episodes have also implicated the Prime Directive in their resolution, in that they have focussed on cultural beliefs or social practices likely troublesome for audiences. A cycle of episodes from TNG can be identified that tended to identify a specific problem which disrupts the Prime Directive's straightforward application. Two consecutive episodes, for instance, dealt with the ambiguous nature of terrorism ('The Hunted' #159 and 'The High Ground' #160). Several other episodes have centered their commentary on the excesses of scientific research, the tenuous status of genius, and the danger of scientific hubris ('When the Bough Breaks' #118, 'The Schizoid Man' #131, 'Up the Long Ladder' #144, 'Evolution' #150, 'Silicon Avatar' #204, and 'Ethics' #216).

Although most apparent in the *Original Star Trek*, this notion of cultural determinism has remained a feature of later series. Each alien society, as a result, is identifiable by a certain set of adjectival traits based on an overarching pattern. Moreover, the positioning of a number of recurrent species has always been premised on their general resistance to change. Several alien species lend themselves to characterization along the lines of Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture*. The longest-standing aliens in Trek are particularly indicative of this strategy in Star Trek, although elaboration has occurred in the later series. Unlike the straight forward characterizations of the *Original Star Trek*, the spin-off series have endeavored to detail the historical and

social origins of these species often through specific regular characters. The Romulan and Klingon societies, for instance, were regular foils in the first Trek, but have since been given depth in *TNG*, *DS9*, and *VOY*. Nonetheless, their dominant traits have persisted. As such, Klingons have remained bound by filial piety and duty to clan, while the Romulans continue to be characterized as devious. Equally, the regular Vulcan characters on *OST* and *VOY* (Spock and Tuvok) continually extol the virtues of logic. The Ferengi character Quark on *DS9* is an exemplar of his species acquisitiveness, while Major Kira Nerys and Gul Ducat respectively embody of Bajoran spirituality and Cardassian paranoia.

Further elaboration of this narrative feature in Trek can be discerned in the recurrent introduction of hybridized characters throughout Star Trek. While a number of hybrid Others have populated Trek's universe, we can nevertheless distinguish two principal variants (see Barrett and Barrett 2001:84-7, Bernardi 1998, Hurd 1997, Wilcox 1996). First, there have been characters of mixed racial parentage (Spock on *OST*, Deanna Troi on *TNG*, and B'Elanna Torres on *VOY*). A second group can be identified by an alienation from their place of origin (Worf and Data on *TNG,* Odo on *DS9*, and the Holographic Doctor on *VOY*). The first hybrid category contains products of miscegenation; the second are either displaced due to their parent's death or are manufactured organisms. According to Denise Hurd (1997:27), miscegenation in Trek reproduces a number of characteristic narrative elements that were common in "nineteenth century psychology and anthropology in the United States". In positing that "racial composition determines personality", Star Trek relies on the trope of the "Tragic Mulatto":

> A Hybrid character lives with a personal angst that stems from the difficulty it has in living with the 'pull' of its different blood. These

> characters' lifestyles are based upon the race they have chosen to 'play'. They remain celibate (or at least do not procreate), adhering to the theatrical tradition wherein the mulatto character only becomes a real threat society when it has children. If they do have children, either the child or the parent dies (1997:23).

Alternatively, we can understand these characters in a culturalist manner. Taken together, these characters function as signifiers of *cultural bifurcation* and constitute a dramatic device that emphasizes both the radical integrity of particular alien cultural systems and the difficulties entailed in negotiating alternate cultural systems. Repeatedly, these characters are portrayed in a perpetual state of flux, leading Leah Vande Berg to interpret the character of Worf as a metonymic signifier of racial, cultural, and national differences (1996:51-68). His liminal characteristics are to be found equally in the android Data who, according to Wilcox (1996:88), is a "complex and multiply signifying creation" (1996:88). These appraisals are intriguing, but they do not acknowledge the overall processual intention to which the term directs our attention. In the case of these characters, their cultural hybridity is rarely resolved. Data and Odo, for instance, are never able to fully integrate themselves into their source of origin. Similarly, Torres and Troi maintain an uneasy relationship to their dual cultural origins. Straddling cultural traditions, they are repeatedly presented in a process of becoming, as opposed to the stable integrity of other characters in the series. Worf's attempts at achieving a unified Klingon identity are repeatedly placed in doubt. When he finally appears to reach a sense of closure, the arrival of his son Alexander reinstates his quest for cultural integration.

These issues are the bedrock on which the doctrine of cultural relativism has been presented in Star Trek. Recalling our earlier discussion of the doctrine, we can identify a definite synchronicity between Herskovits' formulation and Star Trek's espousal of the

Prime Directive. Enculturation is paramount in Trek, made evident in the manner in which alien species are characterized around a specifiable set of attributes. Moreover, these attributes function as a curb on the range of thought and behaviour of its adherents. We can identify this in the ongoing drama surrounding several prominent Star Trek characters identified as culturally bifurcated. The primacy of cultural identity in Star Trek is also made evident in the expression of the Prime Directive. For the purpose of clarity, we may define the Prime Directive as a principle of non-interference whereby Starfleet personnel are prohibited from contacting species that do not have space-faring abilities. Based on an evolutionary model that equates technological enhancement with cultural evolution, the Directive stipulates that technological contamination adversely effects the social and cultural integrity of an alien society.

Critical evaluations have been almost uniform in their critique of the Prime Directive and its uneven application in the various Star Trek series. Goulding, for instance, notes that the Directive in "Star Trek is akin to the U.S.'s non-interference policy in the Third World or its laissez-faire philosophy for the national state":

> Both are shams. The Trekkers, like their American mentors share the same methods of imperialism. 'Liberation' and 'development' for underprivileged nations means hyper-exploitation and direct military intervention in order to sustain profits for those 'liberators'. We will make you free if we have to kill you, seems to be the dictum of democratic imperialists (1985:36-7).

The Directive, according to Boyd (1996:102-3), implies "not only non-interference but also confirms the law of progress". Moreover, it reveals a tension between Star Trek's liberal ethos of self-determination and its underlying evolutionary model of progress (1996:102). More specifically, the political conservatism engendered by this collusion of progressive evolution and violation of the Prime Directive "is often

used to counteract the negative connotations associated with interference in 'underdeveloped' areas: forced economic change and cultural imperialism" (1996:102). As a result, the Directive is situated in Star Trek's internal logic for the purpose of differentiating between the Federation's technological and organizational sophistication and inferior alien Others:

> As a result, ideal viewers of the colonialist *TNG* signifying system also understand that when the Enterprise crew encounters Others, either those Others will have to submit to the logic, rationality, and culture of the Federation, or they will die. Difference must fit neatly into the structure of Federation authority. Enterprise crewmembers let Others know that they are inherently inferior and that they should act more like Enterprise crewmembers, who embody ideal human potential (Ono 1996:159).

Hertenstein has noted the extent to which the Directive has been established on an unstable foundation (1998:113-37). "In practice," he remarks, "the PD is problematic [because] it is based on the unexamined assumption that there exists such a thing as the 'normal development' of a culture". Moreover, the Directive is often "somewhat vague, depending on episode needs, just what constitutes interference" (1998:116). He has also emphasized the changing use of the Directive in each series. Ultimately, "Trek claims to celebrate cultural relativism, but as a vision of a 'better, more humane' future, it presents regular moral oughts" (Hertenstein 1998:133).

Allied with a promotion of tolerance, the Prime Directive has often featured in episodes during which cast members either inadvertently or deliberately violate the dictate. In our respective episodes, the Directive was inadvertently violated in only one *TNG* episode: 'Who Watches the Watchers?'. In the other cases, the Directive is deliberately violated, although for significantly different reasons.

The *OST* often featured deliberate violations of the Directive. Justification for its abandonment characteristically rested on the maladaptive elaboration of a specific technology or belief. As noted above, the violation of the Prime Directive in 'The Apple' was rationalized on the basis of the planet's maladaptive religious superstition. This was a typical rationale for the oft-broken Directive in the *Original series* (see also 'The Return of the Archons' #22, 'And the Children Shall Lead' #60, 'The Way to Eden' #75).

Moreover, the Directive's violation was also justified through recourse to political expediency. In a number of allegorical episodes, the Directive is set aside in order to allow the Enterprise maneuverability in its interactions with its enemies. 'A Private Little War', for example, deals with a Cold War allegory about American and Soviet aggression in the Third World. The Enterprise crew is dispatched to the primitive planet Neural to monitor Klingon activities on the planet. Recognizing that their enemies have supplied weaponry to the formerly peaceful inhabitants, Kirk decides to counteract Klingon influence and provide more sophisticated arms to the planet. This violation is justified on the basis of Cold War rhetoric, emphasizing the practical weaknesses of the Directive when placed in a political setting. Similar violations occurred in 'Errand of Mercy' (#27) and 'Friday's Child' (#32). Conversely, 'Patterns of Force' (#52), 'A Piece of the Action' (#49), and 'The Omega Glory' (#54) deal with the adverse effects of cultural contamination when a Star Fleet member violates the Prime Directive whether through carelessness or deliberate machination. Invariably, the contamination results in the emulation of a less than desirable Earth model (respectively, Nazi Germany, the 1920's Chicago gangland era, and the American Revolution). Significantly, in the first and second of these episodes, the violation is strongly criticized as unnecessary and

dangerous. Breaches are presented as the result of renegade Federation or Star Fleet personnel motivated by self-interest.

The other episodes in which the Directive is violated suggest an important transformation in Star Trek's application of cultural relativism. In 'Pen Pals' and 'Justice' the violation is perpetrated to spare the life of a child, while in 'Who Watches the Watchers?' the violation is inadvertent. On the other hand, 'Preemptive Strike' is particularly revealing in its justification for abandoning the Directive. Here, Ensign Ro Laren is dispatched to infiltrate a group of Federation insurgents called the Maquis who oppose the conditions of a treaty between the Federation and Cardassia. Sympathetic to their cause, Laren soon rejects the Federation and joins the Maquis. A similar depiction of the Directive appears on other occasions, including the *TNG* episodes 'Journey's End' (#272, aired on 28//94), 'Homeward' (#265, aired 17/1/94), and the film *Insurrection*. Moreover, the *DS9* episode 'Captive Pursuit' involves a willful violation of Directive when O'Brien offers sanctuary to his alien friend.

In general, we can identify two justifications for the Prime Directive's violation in *TNG*, *DS9* and *VOY*. Unlike the *Original Star Trek*'s straightforward justifications on the basis of progress and political factors, these instances collectively suggest that the moral efficacy of the Prime Directive (and indirectly of the Federation) is suspect when placed in the muddied waters of practical experience. A cycle of episodes have suggested suspension of the Directive in cases where its application could result in undue harm ('Symbiosis' #123, 'Pen Pals' #141, 'The Outcast' #217). There have also been variant episodes in this cycle that have acknowledged the overriding influence of culture on the individual and the ('The Host' #197, 'Half a Life' #196, 'The Inner Light' #225).

More significantly, we can consider several episodes that have underscored the political ramifications of the Directive. In these episodes, either the Federation invokes the Prime Directive to divert attention away from the political realities in a specific setting or, conversely, it is displaced by a planet's membership status in the Federation. In this respect, the political implications of Federation and Star Fleet activity or inactivity is not understood in terms of a planet's integrity, but is rather given an interpretation that places emphasis on the needs of the entire polity at the expense of its members. 'Journey's End' (#272), for example, begins when the Enterprise is ordered to remove a Federation planet's inhabitants to allow for its transfer to Cardassia. Wesley Crusher, befriending the inhabitants, soon opposes the forced relocation and eventually resigns from Star Fleet. The troubled logic represented by the Prime Directive is placed in relief when this episode is compared with 'Homeward' (#265). Unlike the forced removal of a planet's inhabitants in 'Journey's End' and the film *Insurrection*, the endangered inhabitants of Boraal II are not regarded in the same manner. Their planet's ecological system collapsing, the Directive is only superceded by the actions of a 'cultural observer' living amidst the Boraalians.

As we will consider in the final chapter, these depictions underscore the political and moral implications of tolerance to its audience. The political expediency of the Directive counterbalances any claims of neutralism or impartiality. In this sense, Star Trek's uneven use of the Directive, made the more suspect when placed in concert with the show's platitudes about the worth of diversity and non-interference, is seen in a different light. These episodes reveal unsettling ethical implications of the doctrine when applied to pragmatic relational contexts. Moreover, they expose the limitations of the

methodological component of cultural relativism, providing a parallel to the ethical dilemmas that have often complicated the ethnographic context. Increasingly, the three spin-off series complicated the Directive's worth by emphasizing both the difficult ethical decisions it engendered when applied in a contact setting as well as the politically charged context in which it often operated.

Chapter Five: The Liminoid Characteristics of Television

Television, according to Newcomb and Hirsch (1983:45-55), can be appreciated for its symbolic and ritual functions in American society. Operating on the basic premise that the medium performs a central function in modern society, they have emphasized its involvement in a process of "collective [...] social construction and negotiation of reality" (1983:47). Having largely replaced other types of mass media that once served this function, television and its specialists are "cultural *bricoleurs*" who perform, in the words of Fiske and Hartley, a "bardic function" (see Fiske and Hartley 1987:600-5). To some extent synonymous with the functional attributes of ritual processes in other societies, Newcomb and Hirsch utilize the concept of *liminality* in order to describe television's role as a cultural forum.

Their use of the term is interesting in two respects. First, we can consider the manner in which television productions display certain dominant values or norms that are prevalent in contemporary American society. This aspect of its status as cultural forum does not necessarily remain limited to representations of a hegemonic formation but, as we noted with respect to the contradictory nature of common sense, can also include alternative or subversive presentations of these primary cultural norms. Equally important, their use of Victor Turner's concept of liminality focuses attention on the effects that have been wrought by technological innovations in the television industry. These have included profound changes in the manner in which programs are now delivered to viewers as well as the increasing obsolescence of our standard notions of scheduling that have been brought about by the accessibility of home entertainment systems and, by extension, emerging computer technologies.

Although we may quibble with Newcomb and Hirsh's application of Turner's concept of *liminality* to the medium, their point is adequate in pointing out the symbolic and ritualistic function of television (1983:47). More specifically, their suggestion acquires greater precision from a more extensive application of Victor Turner's analysis of social dramas and his extension of the term to industrial societies. His concern with liminality is most often expressed with reference to the classic rites of passage found in abundance throughout the anthropological literature. Although their study has been an invaluable component in the analysis of non-Western peoples, their comparative distribution appears to be largely limited to pre-industrial societies. As Turner has surmised, an apparent threshold was reached with "rapid advances in the scale and complexity of society" that followed industrialization and its radical reconfiguration of social relations (1986:42). Passing "this unified liminal configuration through the prism of the division of labor", occupational specialization and professional accreditation has resulted in the reduction of "these sensory domains to a set of entertainment genres flourishing in the leisure time of society" (1986:42).

Leisure is the domain within which the free play so characteristic of liminality is exercised in an industrial or post-industrial setting. In contrast to the conflation of work and ritual activity that is characteristic of non-industrial societies (Turner 1982:51-5), contemporary societies are structured by a strict regimen of work (or labour) and leisure. In the former, work and play are intimately bound, leading him to maintain that "the ritual round in tribal societies is embedded in the total round of activities and is part of the work of the people" (1982:52). This distinction, though seemingly foreign to our contemporary instrumentalist thinking, is nevertheless still operative in at least a

linguistic sense. The etymological root of the English word *liturgy*, for instance, is the Greek *leos* or *laos* ('the people') and *ergon* ('work'; 1982:51). This *ludic* function of tribal ritual, established on a fundamentally experimental spirit, is evidenced by the fact that "in many tribal rites there is built into the liturgical structure a good deal of what we and they would think of as amusement, recreation, fun, and joking" (1982:52). It is in this sense that ritual behaviour is more than simply a matter of rote learning or passive adherence to conventionalized activity. On the contrary, ritual processes "should not be regarded as monolithic":

> A tribal ritual of any length and complexity is in fact an orchestration of many genres, styles, moods, atmospheres, tempi, and so on, ranging from prescribed, formal, stereotyped action to a free 'play' of inventiveness, and including symbols in all the sensory codes mentioned by Levi-Strauss: visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, kinesthetic, and so on. It has free and formulaic behavior, and bodily acts of many kinds. This essence of ritual is its multidimensionality; of its symbols, their multivocality" (1982:52).

According to Turner, the profound changes wrought by industrialization resulted in an equally profound reconfiguration of ritual practices. Whereas previously integral to the social fabric, ritual processes were resituated into the domain of leisure-time and play. In a basic sense, leisure has "aspects both of 'freedom from' and 'freedom to':

> Leisure is freedom from a whole slew of institutional obligations prescribed by the basic forms of technological and bureaucratic organization in the work domain. It is also freedom from the forced, chronologically regulated rhythms of factory and office, and a chance to recuperate and enjoy natural, biological rhythms again, on the beaches and in the mountains, and in the parks and in the game reserves provided as liminoid retreats (1982:54).

Resonating with the timbre of liminality, leisure is a "betwixt-and-between, neither-this-nor-that domain between two lodgements in the work domain" (1982:55).

His concept of liminoid phenomena can also be applied to certain technological features of the medium. We may begin by considering its utility in relation to Raymond Williams's thoughts on television. His seminal work *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* introduced the highly influential concept of television flow (1975:78-118). Although published thirty years ago, his observations of broadcast television's "planned flow" remain foundational in television studies (see, for instance, Gripsrud 1998, O'Sullivan 1998, Waller 1988). As "a technology and as a cultural form" (1975:86), television flow represents "a significant shift from the concept of sequence as programming to the concept of sequence as flow" (1975:89). This shift, "in which the true series is not the published sequence of programme items but this sequence transformed by the inclusion of another kind of sequence [...] compos[ing] the real flow" (1975:90), included the insertion of trailers and promotional items for other moments in the planned flow of programming. This broadcasting policy amounts, in Williams's words, to the "replacement of a programme series of timed sequential units by a flow series of differently related units in which the timing, though real, is undeclared, and in which the real internal organization is something other than the declared organization" (1975:93). Flow can be analysed along three related dimensions, incorporating the actual sequence of programmes on a variety of networks over a given period (eg. a single evening of programming) and detailed analysis of the sequence in a given programme (1975:96-118). During this sort of analysis, attention is not only focussed on the television series included in a given schedule, but would also involve the interstitial material as well, such as promotional segments and advertisements.

As noted above, we may make some provisional comments about Williams's notion of flow through recourse to Victor Turner's concept of liminoid phenomena. Technological changes in television since the publication of his book have provided an astounding array of options to the viewing public. Satellite technologies have resulted in what may called be narrowcasting, or the creation of specialty channels devoted to niche programming. Coupled with the accessibility of related Internet sites, these channels are a far cry from the broadcasting appeal of network television. Moreover, the ascendancy of syndication has meant that specific television series, originally aired on particular networks, can now be seen multiple times during any given day on a number of different stations and specialty channels. Star Trek is one such series that has thrived in the format of the syndicated rerun (see Nelson 1990 and P. Williams 1994). Finally, televisual flow has been disrupted with the advent of the video cassette recorder, and the recent introduction of DVD technology, allowing for greater selectivity in viewing habits. These technologies permit viewers to 'lift' their desired programs from the scheduled flow, thereby disturbing the pervasiveness of this feature of the medium. These technological innovations, most particularly the VHS machine, are also a basis on which group viewing can be accommodated.

Newcomb and Hirsch's definition of television's role as a cultural forum is significant in another respect. Noting that "almost any version of the television text functions as a forum in which important cultural topics may be considered" (1983:48), they emphasize "that in popular culture generally [and] in television specifically the raising of questions is as important as answering them" (1983:49). Without denying the industrial constraints imposed on the production of television programs, they stress that

"television does not present firm ideological conclusions—despite its *formal* conclusions—so much as it *comments* on ideological problems" (italics original; 1983:49). This has been made empirically evident in reception studies of particular audience groups, such as the dedicated viewers of soap operas (Fiske 1987:199-24). Their suppositions are the subject of a number of other essays addressing various issues in audience receptivity (Allen 1987, Deming 1985, Giles 1985, Stadler 1990, Staiger 2002, Tomasulo 1988, 1990).

More germane to the present thesis research, their insistence on television's ideological slippage has been abundantly documented in the interpretive activities of Star Trek fans (Bernardi 1998, Chansanchai 1997, Coombe 1992, Jenkins 1992,1995,1996, Jindra 1995, Penley 1997, Wegerer 1995). We can address variable responses of its fans in at least three respects. One issue revolves about the diversity of Star Trek audiences (Jenkins 1992,1996a,1996b, Jenkins and Tulloch 1995). Jenkins, for example, has emphasized that its audience is not a unitary phenomenon, but can only be understood in a plural sense. In fact, fans of the series approach their participation in Star Trek fandom from multiple perspectives and locations in society:

> There are neither simply opposed readings nor are there interconnected readings, but there are a range of possible identities or subject positions vis-à-vis Star Trek. To use academic language, people can float between and choose to move within those groups. And they may maintain separate and discrete identities in relation to these multiple fan communities (Jenkins 1996b:261).

Second, this process of interpretive flexibility underscores Star Trek's liminal characteristics in both a textual sense and as a fan practice. The latter, in particular, has been elaborately documented by a number of writers (Greenwald 1998, Jindra 1994,1999, Zapolsky-Anijar 1994). Jenkins' has referred to this complex process of interpretation

and practice as poaching. According to Michael Jindra (1994:34-40 and 1992), Star Trek fandom's secular religiosity has been manifested in fan organizations, computer networks and billboards, conventions, and tourist pilgrimages (Porter 1999, Zapolsky-Anijar 1994:121-83). These disparate activities provide an avenue through which communication between fans can take place, creating a social practice on the basis of which further articulation of the Star Trek world-view can be elaborated. These practices have also included what Jenkins calls 'textual poaching' which often taken the form of 'fanzines' (magazines produced by fans themselves) or 'slash fiction' (Jenkins 1991, 1992, 1996).

Finally, Star Trek's fan communities and their practices have now been extended onto the Internet (Jindra 1994:37). This is particularly significant as a forum of cultural discourse, creating a virtual space for dialogue and dissension. Bernardi (1998:155-77), for instance, has documented the Internet's utility for fan discussions of racial issues in Trek. Their poaching of Star Trek's racial subtext has included a range of issues, including the relevancy of its philosophy to world events, use of racial stereotypes, and casting decisions.

In a fundamental sense, therefore, Star Trek fans have exhibited an earnest playfulness in their various practices that recall Turner's notion of liminoid phenomena and its intrinsic freedom and flux. Textual poaching is a significant concept because it suggests that audiences are active interpreters of televisual texts rather than simply passive recipients of ideologically conservative messages. Fan's poaching activities are equally significant with respect to the liberating potential of mass cultural products.

These activities point to the playfulness of the television medium, both in terms of its production process as well as in the reception practices of its various audiences.

Endnotes

[1] References to the various Star Trek series and films will follow designations commonly used in the literature on Trek. The five television series will be identified by the following abbreviations: The Original Star Trek (OST), The Next Generation (TNG), Deep Space Nine (DS9), Voyager (VOY), and Enterprise (ENT). The feature-length films in the Star Trek cycle have included The Motion Picture (released in 1979), The Wrath of Khan (1982), The Search for Spock (1984), The Voyage Home (1986), The Final Frontier (1989), The Undiscovered Country (1991), Generations (1994), First Contact (1996), Insurrection (1998), and Nemesis (2002).

[2] Gene Roddenberry's almost mythical stature amongst fans can in part be seen in their determination to maintain Trek's presence on television and the cinema. Their persistence was made evident on a number of occasions, including their letter writing campaign to save the Original series from cancellation following its second season, as well as their continuous support to bring the series back to television in the 1970's. Their devotion to the show's ideal likely influenced his eventual honour as the first writer to be given a Star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 1985 (Nimoy 1995:112).

[3] The following biographical information was obtained from several sources. Two book-length biographies by David Alexander and Joel Engel were published in 1994. Given Roddenberry's *imprimatur*, Alexander's book is more faithful to its subject matter than Engel's. The latter's biography primarily focuses on Roddenberry's work on Star Trek, and attempts to divest Roddenberry of his mythic stature in order to expose his human weaknesses. Yvonne Fern has published an edited version of a series of personal interviews she conducted with Roddenberry just prior to his death in 1991.

[4] Roddenberry's decision to base the series on dramatic storylines rather than technological gadgetry should not be misconstrued as an indication of his disregard for scientific plausibility. In fact, he utilized scientific advisors for technical assistance in order to enhance series plausibility. Reflecting the genre's use of extrapolation to predict the outcome of technological innovations, Roddenberry paid attention to scientific detail in creating the technological features of Star Trek. Although extrapolation has been a primary characteristic of the tradition of hard science fiction, we can also appreciate the extent to which the series has extrapolated the social and cultural outcomes of its premises.

[5] Another likely influence on the formation of Star Trek's concept can be found in the work of science fiction writer Robert Heinlein. Yvonne Fern has noted the extent to which Roddenberry's conception for Star Trek paralleled Heinlein's 1948 novel *Space Cadets*. Exemplified by a notion of fellowship that united an Enterprise crew of diverse backgrounds into a "band of brothers", Star Trek managed to convey the books emphasis on duty and devotion to the starship's mission in space.

[6] Popular accounts of Trek's development are replete with examples of Roddenberry's difficulties with network censorship. By his own admission, "censorship traveled a wide path" in television "because of the fact that writers and producers are more or less

expected [...] to perpetuate all of the modern myths" (Alexander 1991:10-1). Censorship continued to be an issue during the production of the later spin-off series. Unlike earlier disagreements about the role of women and non-White actors on the show, contemporary forms of censorship have revolved around such issues as sexual attitudes, political ideas, the military industrial complex, and advertising (Alexander 1991:11-3).

[7] The specifications of the Enterprise D included separation of the saucer section from the engineering section of the starship. The debut episode, *Encounter at Farpoint*, amply demonstrated this feature of the ship when the Enterprise detached in order to protect the non-essential personnel and families from an impending confrontation with the Borg (a cybernetic species devoted to an incessant assimilation of other species).

[8] The significance of *Patterns of Culture* can be seen by the fact that Mentor's sixteenth edition of the classic text includes a foreword by Margaret Mead and an introduction by Franz Boas. Published in fourteen languages and reaching eight hundred thousand copies in print at the time of publication, the book is vital in several respects for its exposition of the principle features of historical particularism and cultural relativism to a non-academic audience. George Stocking has referred to the book as "the single most influential anthropological work of the interwar period" (1992:162).

[9] One of the first difficulties encountered in the present thesis research involved the determination of its parameters. Although the Trek text incorporates a wide array of different textual products and their use by an equally wide range of audiences, the constraints of the current research required greater clarity and precision than an attempt to reference a lion's share of Star Trek products. As such, we will limit our analysis to only several episodes of the first three series. As noted at the outset of our discussion, this decision did not entail a disregard of the institutional context of Star Trek's production. The first chapter, therefore, was provided for this purpose. The present chapter should not be misconstrued as an omission of an institutional approach, but rather appreciated for its detailed analysis of specific episodes in three series of the Star Trek cycle.

[10] The following discussion is meant as a brief indication of the extent of an American culture war. By no means exhaustive, it has been provided in order to clarify some of the key sites of contention. Since the 1960's, there has been an extensive body of literature published on various aspects of a culture war. Moreover, a range of political ideologies have been presented, although traditional distinctions between conservative, liberal and social progressive perspectives are abundantly represented in the literature. The following sources have been elicited from several conservative and liberal publications, including the conservative *Human Events*, *Policy Review*, *Public Interest*, and *National Review* and the liberal *New Republic*, *Humanist*, and *Nation.*

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