Anthropology as a moral discipline: social justice, ethics and human rights

Pat Caplan, Department of Anthropology
Goldsmiths College, University of London

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Pat Caplan, Department of Anthropology, Goldsmiths College, London

1. Introduction
I would like to begin this lecture by thanking the organisers for their kind invitation to address this Conference on ‘Social Justice, Culture and Power’. It is indeed a great honour. It has also given me an opportunity to reflect further on a number of issues which have been pre-occupying me of late.

The theme of this conference could not be more timely. We live in a world in which social justice is currently a rarely-used concept in popular thought and discourse, while ‘culture’ has become a buzzword. Furthermore, we live in dangerous times. Our post September 11th world threatens not only war and conflict, but also civil liberties, human rights, even academic freedom. What role can anthropologists play in such a situation? I have been heartened to see the kind of papers on offer at this conference; they suggest that many anthropologists here are determined to do work which confronts these important issues and I look forward to learning more as the conference proceeds.

In this lecture, I propose to utilise a variety of sources to explore my themes; these include witnessing and ethnography, anthropological texts, web material, and newspapers. I begin with a short ethnography which sets the scene and raises some of the issues. Next I move on to the relationship between anthropology and morality and consider three concepts which relate anthropology to this issue. The first of these is anthropological ethics, and here I draw particularly on a forthcoming book (Caplan 2003) which has been in part inspired by the Tierney case. I also use as a case study the collapse of Enron. Secondly, I consider the theme of the conference: the question of what we might mean by social justice and injustice. Thirdly, I turn to the question of human rights, drawing upon both some recent work by anthropologists and a personal visit to the United Nations War Crimes Tribunal on Rwanda in Arusha, Tanzania. In the concluding section I discuss some anthropological
responses to September 11th and its aftermath and in the process re-examine what we might mean by anthropology as a moral discipline1.

2. A journey and a short ethnography

In March 2002, I travelled with a group of other anthropologists to Arusha in northern Tanzania, where the annual conference of the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth was being held2. I first visited that country in 1962 and have worked there as an anthropologist regularly since 1965. Arusha in the early 1960s was a somewhat sleepy small town. Today it has not only expanded in size, as one might expect, but it is crowded, over-crowded with people and vehicles. The economic contrasts are stark: poverty is visible, squalid, dirty, alongside the SUVs, mobile phones and tourist hotels.

We visit a local market and I speak to a small boy selling soap. He cannot speak the national language, Swahili, properly, because, as I learn from his older friend who translates our conversation, he does not go to school. I remember that Tanzania instituted a system of Universal Primary Education back in the 1980s, and that in my visit in 1985, all of the children in the coastal village where I do most of my work were in school. No longer, it seems.

I quiz a taxi-driver during a half hour journey: what is the cost of living here? What is the minimum wage? His answers are clear: the minimum wage cannot support a single individual, let alone a family. ‘That is why so many people become thieves, they just can’t make ends meet’. He quotes some prices: a rented room, food: ‘if anyone gets sick, you are sunk’. So what do people do? ‘Ah, the young people want short cuts! They try the tourist business, or get involved in crime - there is a lot of violent crime here, many people have guns. I never work at night. And people drink – they drink very heavily’. I ask about schooling ‘They’ve just made it free again, but there are

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1 This lecture was written very much for a particular time. So much has happened since then that to bring it ‘up to date’ would require another article, if not a whole book. I have edited it slightly to include a number of important and relevant subsequent texts, including some in my own volume which was in press at the time, but otherwise this is more or less the way it was delivered.

2 This followed a precedent set in 1997, when the conference was held for the first time outside the UK, in Harare, Zimbabwe.
books, uniforms and so on.’ ‘What about medical care?’ ‘That you must pay for’.

I ask him why there are so many police road-blocks. ‘What are they looking for?’ He laughs ‘Many things’, and I soon realise that he means bribes. I ask what is the current term for a bribe: ‘I haven’t had a drink yet today’, ‘I need some help with x’. So any task you require of someone who is paid to perform it, is only likely to be performed with the help of a bribe, which is also a top-up to abysmally low wages on which it is impossible for most workers to live.

When the conference is over, I spend an afternoon with a Chagga family farming on the lower slopes of Mt Meru – formerly one of the most prosperous areas of Tanzania because of its small-holder coffee farming. ‘We are letting the coffee bushes go, because there is no market for coffee any more. The prices are rock-bottom.

By the end of a few days, my head is reeling. Of course, none of this is unexpected, I’ve read the reports, know the statistics. Why, I wonder, are things getting worse for the majority of people so quickly? On the plane on the way home, I happen to find myself sitting next to a priest from the Maryknoll order. We begin to talk, and I tell him of my observations. He too knows Tanzania well, but he tells me things are much worse in Kenya, describing the conditions in Nairobi slums as totally inhuman: ‘Kids with glue sniffers attached to them permanently’.

None of this will be surprising to you, nor should it be to me – and yet we should be surprised, we should be shocked, even outraged. Perhaps travelling for one week and then returning home prevented me from becoming quickly accustomed to what I saw and heard, from it becoming part of the habitus. Here then are plenty of examples of social injustice in one African country which can be repeated ad nauseam for elsewhere: decreasing development for the majority, poorer quality of life, withdrawal of free social services such as education and health, insufficient food, alongside

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3 Chabol and Daloz point out that in Africa, the dominant form of bribery and corruption is vertical, and may be an acknowledged way of distributing resources. In Western countries, it tends mainly to be horizontal, collusion between politicians, businesspeople (1999)
conspicuous consumption for the few. In the case of Tanzania, the replacement of idealism and *ujamaa* (Nyerere’s African socialism) with Structural Adjustment Programmes.

What can anthropologists do about this? What should we do?

**Anthropology as a moral discipline:**

The late Raymond Firth, who died in 2002 recently at the age of one hundred, gave an interview in 1993, when he was aged 92. In it he expounded his view of what anthropology is for:

‘[T]he ultimate aim, which can never be achieved, is to try and get as clear an understanding as we possibly can of the intricacies, complexities of human behaviour, human thinking. That's the aim...For two purposes: intellectual and moral. I think we must operate on some principles of morality for social living… There are two values which for me are prime: one is the value of knowledge; the other is the value of human personality. In my view, one is not entitled to degrade a human personality, one is not entitled to obfuscate about knowledge. Neither of these is provable in any sense. These are values which I think assist human living' (Quigley 1993: 210-11).

Firth also saw anthropology as a committed yet ‘uncomfortable’, discipline because it can challenge the assumptions of those with institutional power and it can also render anthropologists themselves uncomfortable when they are (as seems inevitable) drawn into issues of policy and state institutions⁴.

Talk of morality, unless of course it is that of the subjects being studied, also makes many anthropologists uncomfortable. It smacks of moralizing, of missionizing and mention is relatively rare. Rather, anthropologists prefer to talk about (professional) ethics. Is there a difference? Many would argue not, but others see morality as both wider and deeper while ethics is particular to

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⁴ Wright argues that recognition of this situation ‘changes the nature of the discomfort for anthropologists themselves, enabling them to resituate themselves in the field of study and to take a standpoint in Harding’s term, engage in dialogic research in Shrivjvers’ terms, or be committed in Firth’s terms’ (Wright 1995: 35).
contexts. In the next section, I consider first the wider context of ‘ethics-talk’, and then anthropological ethics.

**Part 1: Ethics**

In recent years, there has been a veritable explosion of discourse around ethics. When it came to power in 1997 in the UK, the (New) Labour government of Tony Blair promised an ‘ethical foreign policy’ a term which was to be repeated on numerous occasions by the Foreign Secretary during this period, Robin Cook. It soon became clear, however, that any such policy would be undermined by the necessity to boost British exports, especially in the arms trade (see *Guardian* 4/10/98, p. 11) and the British Arms Fairs continued as before. Campaigners began not only to mount protests at such events, but also sought to persuade shareholders to dis-invest in companies such as British Aerospace. Charities and NGOs such as Amnesty International have also sought to raise awareness, and persuade both companies and consumers that ‘Human rights are their business’. In other areas too, consumers have begun to flex their muscles, businesses have had to respond.

In many instances they have done so by seizing the opportunity, and not only integrating ethics into their mission statements, but also creating a large niche market in ‘ethical investment’, recognising that ‘ethical behaviour is good for business – and can lead to new markets’ (Ford Report Fall 1999). Many companies which otherwise do business as usual also have a ‘ethical fund’ which avoids investment in a predictable range of industries such as the arms trade, the tobacco industry or animal testing. Consumers are told that they can ‘shop till they drop’ and not feel guilty, provided they are consuming ethically, by buying, for example, Fair Trade goods (see *Big Issue* Dec. 4-10\(^{th}\), 2000, pp. 23-6).

Academics too have been part of this discursive explosion. In Britain, a vociferous campaign called ‘Ethics for USS’ (Universities’ Superannuation

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\(^3\) They regularly issue questionnaires to their investors. One such example in my possession lists a dozen ‘positive issues’ which an ethical fund should favour, including environmental initiatives and pollution control, working terms/conditions and equal opportunities, pollution. Potential issues to be avoided focus largely on animal testing, genetic engineering, and
Scheme) has called for ethical investment of the universities pension fund. After two years of hard lobbying from 1997-9, USS agreed that it would move to a ‘socially responsible investment policy’, resulting in such headlines as ‘Professors’ pensions are cleaned up’ and ‘USS strengthens its commitment to SRI (socially-responsible investment)’ (Ethics for USS Newsletter, Dec. 2001).

Academics have also been part of angry debates around the ethics of current academic practices, as universities have been urged by governments and forced by lack of state funding to look for income from a variety of sources. Indeed, ‘Support from business and industry is regarded by others as not only necessary in the current funding climate, but as a positive good, obliging academics to engage with ‘the real world’ (Guardian Weekly, 24/5/98, p. 13).

The universities as institutions have behaved in a similar manner, with numerous examples of money accepted from such sources as Wellcome, Shell, and British American Tobacco (BAT), leading to discussions about the need for ‘guidelines’. Yet it is the case, of course, that as an editorial in the Times Higher Educational Supplement put it, ‘For many centuries, universities have provided a good way of laundering grubby money. Suppression of the monasteries, piracy, slavery, American robber barons’ ruthless exploitation’ (23/10/98:14). The difference now is that such matters are perhaps more hotly debated than previously.

Yet even as British universities (and those elsewhere) have found themselves embroiled in debates around the ethics of funding, they have set up ethics committees and demanded of their scholars that they produce ethics statements about their research and demonstrate that they have obtained alcohol production. Another focuses on avoidance of animal testing, pollution, baby milk codes, pesticides, and excessive use of energy (SAS Mandate Form).

They pointed out that in 1997, the largest single investment (£300m) was in Shell, notorious for its involvement in the Ogoni affair in Nigeria during which the activist Ken Saro-Wiwa was hanged, and that the two next largest were in British American Tobacco, and British Aerospace.

‘Scandals of scientists who take money for papers’ (Guardian Weekly Feb. 14-20th, 2002); ‘Raw material, tainted cash’ (Times Higher Education Supplement 17/7/98); ‘Cash beats conscience (Times Higher Education Supplement 19/6/98, p. 7.)

The Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP) and the Cancer Research Campaign joined together to issue protocols on accepting funding from tobacco companies.
‘informed consent’ when working with human subjects. Undoubtedly, universities see this strategy as part of risk reduction – after all, someone who has signed a consent form is less likely to be able to sue successfully! In some universities, such strictures have been applied to students at all levels, resulting in complaints by anthropologists that the research process has been rendered impossible (Amit 2001). In a recent volume on anthropological ethics (Caplan 2003), David Mills contributes a chapter on the comparative history of ethics in British and American anthropology, noting that debates around the subject have tended to be marginalised. Indeed, on the side of the water from which I come, relatively little has been published on anthropological ethics in recent years. But some of what has appeared criticises the writing and adoption of ethical codes.

In an article published in *Current Anthropology* in 1999, the Dutch anthropologist Peter Pels argues that while a history of such codes gives us insight into the mentalities of different periods, they are actually a form of ‘inert knowledge’ which lacks the problematic of a decision-making context, and should now be discarded in favour of ‘negotiation’. He develops this view in an article published a year later arguing that

The anthropologist is situated in a duplex position, like a trickster, between different moralities and epistemes and discovers some of the impossibilities of maintaining the liberal desire for individual autonomy of choice and opinion at a distance from political struggle over existing inequalities in the world (2000:136).

Pels’ views are shared by Marilyn Strathern who notes that in recent years there has been a spreading concern with the use of public codes as a mark of

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(CVCP News, Spring 1999, p. 5 – see also ‘Charities fume over tobacco funding’ *Times Higher Education Supplement* 8/12/2000). The ASA UK was asked by some of its members at one British university whether anything could be done to ameliorate this situation, to which our reply was to refer them to the ASA Ethical Guidelines and suggest that they quote it to their authorities. Partly as a result of such pressures, the ASA felt it necessary recently to revise its Ethical Guidelines, the first such revision since their adoption in the 1980s although the AAA has revised its Principles of Professional Practice several times (see Mills 2003, Fluehr-Lobban 2003).
professionalism. Furthermore there is a new category of research practices, namely those which entail 'research with human subjects', for which universities and funding bodies demand very specific protocols. Side by side with 'ethical codes' go ethical committees and thus, according to Strathern, 'Codes and committee may come to co-define each other' (2000: 293) while 'Audit and ethics ricochet off one another' (291). Strathern notes the double-edged quality of ethics, commenting that 'Ethics is a social actor frequently enrolled to justify auditing practices, yet as frequently seen as betrayed by or in resistance to them' (2000:5).

So do we need ethical codes? Pels has argued that we do not, and that their existence is a form of governmentality which is one of the 'technologies of the self' employed by anthropologists. Yet most of the people who commented on his article in Current Anthropology article disagreed with him, while in the afore-mentioned volume on anthropology and ethics, most of the contributors recognise that the existence of some sort of ethical guidelines can be useful. One contributor, Marilyn Silverman, considers the relationship between the 'statement of ethics' which she had to produce for a funding application, and her subsequent ethical stance in the field in Ireland. She argues that there is actually a profound difference between ethics and audit: the former is about is about the identity of the anthropologist in the field, and the way in which he or she crafts a persona. It is also about the everyday interactions between anthropologists and the people whom they are studying. Thus for her, 'anthropology, every day and in every decision, is a moral discipline' (2003:132).

Recently, we have witnessed a great deal of debate around the book by Patrick Tierney entitled Darkness in El Dorado (2000). I am sure there is not a single anthropologist here who did not receive a plethora of emails in the autumn of 2000. Indeed, an ethnography of anthropological reactions might constitute by far the most interesting aspect of the whole affair. Steve Nugent (2002, 2003) examines the development of 'the affair' as its significance was appraised from different quarters of the anthropological community and in a

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10 In the same volume, Veronica Strang (2003) anthropologist who works with Australian Aboriginal peoples, suggests that another basis for ethics is the commonality of human experience; ethics draws upon human rights, which in turn is founded up ideas of equality.
various non-specialist publications. He draws attention to differences between anthropological posturing, on the one hand, and anthropological knowledge, on the other, and queries the basis upon which professional anthropological associations (the ASA and the AAA) presume to monitor ethical behaviour.

In spite of the apparent disagreement between some of these scholars, what most do accept is that ethics cannot be divorced from issues of politics and power. In an impassioned article entitled ‘The primacy of the ethical: proposals for a militant anthropology’, Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1995) argues that cultural relativism, which she reads as moral relativism, is no longer appropriate to the world in which we live, and anthropology, if it is to be worth anything at all, must be morally grounded.

She lists a veritable catalogue of complaints against current tendencies in anthropology:
- Adhering to a belief in cultural and moral relativism
- ‘Suspending the ethical’ in dealings with ‘the other’
- Distancing itself from political engagement
- Being obsessed with metaphors, signs and symbols to the extent that it is blind to the ‘banal materiality of human suffering’ especially in medical anthropology
- Creating an ‘aesthetic’ of misery
- Engaging in a ‘flight from the local’ in hot pursuit of a transnational, borderless anthropology which ignores the very real borders that confront and oppress ‘our’ anthropological subjects

She suggests that anthropologists should rather engage in what she terms a ‘barefoot anthropology’ which she defines as follows:
- to be active, politically committed and morally engaged, identifying ills in a spirit of solidarity
- to observe with sympathy and compassion, achieving recognition of the other through looking, listening and touching
- to communicate with both the polis and the public, including writing in such a way that our work is accessible to the people we represent
- to act as witness, rather than spectator, a difference she defines as follows:
‘If ‘observation’ links anthropology to the natural sciences, ‘witnessing’ links anthropology to moral philosophy. Observation… is a passive act… Witnessing… is in the active voice… The fearless spectator is accountable to ‘science’; the witness is accountable to history. Anthropologists as witnesses are accountable for what they see and what they fail to see, how they act and how they fail to act in critical situations (ibid: 119)’.

This is passionate anthropology, but for me, one of the most telling criticisms11 of her article comes from Laura Nader, who asks ‘How come, if you are interested in misery, you don’t study up more, go to the source rather than the victims?’ (1995: 426)12. Acting upon this advice, I give a short example which will be familiar to all of you: the downfall of Enron.

(Un)ethical Practice: the case of Enron13
As most of you will be aware, Enron was a Texas-based company which started its life as a small gas trading and supplying concern, and grew to be one of the biggest energy suppliers in the world. It was a darling of the New York Stock Exchange, and was regularly praised for its entrepreneurial skills and innovative methods. The Enron website (motto ‘Together we can make a difference’), with plenty of rhetoric on equal opportunities, affirmative action, and community service, stressed the extent to which it was taking advantage of deregulating markets world-wide14:

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11 Of the ten or so people who commented on her paper, many were critical, but for a diversity of reasons: Crapanzano states that we can never become companheiros/as – we are always outsiders; Friedman that we cannot talk in terms of good guys and bad guys, because it is more complex than that; Marvin Harris that to claim the political-moral high ground one must have reliable knowledge, and she does not present enough objective evidence for others to decide who or what is responsible for these atrocities; Kuper that, whatever its moral justification, activism does not generally go hand-in-hand with good research.
12 Nader first made this call back in 1974.
13 Since this lecture was written in April 2002, there has been a flood of books dealing with the subject. I have not attempted to incorporate them here.
14 The privatization and regulation of energy markets are daily opening the world’s access to energy resources. Barriers to private investment are being eliminated in many parts of the world... crossing country borders with pipelines, gas and power is becoming more commonplace’ (Enron website 2001).
One such project highlighted on the website was the Dabhol power plant in Maharashtra in India. According to Enron ‘The result will be an environmentally friendly, efficient and cost-effective means of helping meet the vast energy needs of Maharashtra.’ But an article in the British newspaper *The Observer* in June 1999, told a somewhat different story about Dabhol ‘The world largest energy generating plant’. Here in response to demonstrations against seizure of land and water supplies, there were beatings and denial of water to villagers, local police turned into a private army paid by the company, corruption of politicians\(^\text{15}\), persecution of dissenters’. As a result, Enron has the dubious distinction of being the only company to be the subject of an Amnesty International Report.

I will not rehearse in any detail the events of autumn through winter 2001-2, with which you will already be familiar:

- questions about related party and off-balance sheet transactions,
- the need to re-state its earnings for the period 1997-2001.
- The probe by the Securities and Exchange Commission
- The unsuccessful attempt at a merger with a smaller energy company, Dynegy.
- the fall in share prices from a high of over $90 to less than a dollar
- the so-called ‘Texas connection’, links with the US government, and Britain’s ruling Labour party (see Palast 2002).

The *Guardian* newspaper talked of a ‘corporate culture of ambition, arrogance and rapid money-making’, and a ‘chilling catalogue of human rights abuses from India to Latin America’ (30\(^{\text{th}}\) Nov 2001), while the *New York Times* reported on insider trading, and the fact that members of the Board also acted as consultants (Jan. 15\(^{\text{th}}\) 2002). By the end of November, Enron was heading for ‘the biggest ever US bankruptcy’ and by December, as the NYT put it ‘many dominoes were trembling while the winners were the lawyers’ (Dec. 2\(^{\text{nd}}\) 2001).

\(^{15}\) Although the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) had protested about the plans when it was in opposition, when it later came to government, it was bought off and allowed the plant to be built. Enron promised to invest $3 billion and expected to be repaid with a tariff set so high that it would get $26bn in return, to be paid in dollars, not rupees.
In December, many of the Texas-based employees were sacked: ‘sent home and told to sit by the phone’. To add insult to injury, most of them held their savings, and virtually all of their pensions, in Enron funds. Their redundancy money was a mere $4,500 each. There was outrage when it was discovered that, just before it declared bankruptcy, Enron had paid out generous ‘retention’ bonuses to about 500 employers, amounting to $55m (Guardian 16/2/02). At the beginning of 2002, the administrators of the by-now bankrupt company paid out a further £24m to 100 staff in bonuses in order, it was said, to get them to help unwind the trading books.

The Houston Chronicle ran pages of letters from Enron employees which make for interesting reading of vox populi. I quote from just two:

• ‘[T]o me, the downfall of Enron can be summed up in one word: Greed! Upper management of Enron was filled with very young …men and women who were promoted faster than they could move to their new offices. As their incomes grew, so did their heads and their selfishness. Once money, which meant Enron Stock Price, became the most important things, ethics, moral and the financial safety of the company went out of the window’ (Dec. 4th 2001).

• When I read about how $55 million was paid prior to the bankruptcy filing to 500 employees, I was in a state of disbelief. $55 million went to the people who HAD jobs and NOTHING so far has gone to those of us who need it most… My wife and I are now faced with selling the house, the car and the dog just to survive (Dec. 7th 2001).

The story as we all know, continues, indeed, it will undoubtedly run and run. The sacked employees not only filed class actions in the courts, but also set up websites, such as Laydoff.com, and printed tee-shirts with logos such as ‘My boss got a retention bonus, all I got was this tee-shirt’.

So was Enron a bad apple in the barrel? Or was the problem the barrel itself? Here we might utilise Bourdieu’s concept of habitus and unpick some of the taken-for-granted assumptions about a particular sub-culture, referred to by more than one media report as ‘the bonus culture’. Bonuses are paid to top executives who perform well in their jobs. Top executives seek to perform well in their jobs so as to obtain bonuses. Bonus – from the Latin word for
‘good’, which should thus be the antithesis of corruption – from the Latin verb *corrumpere*: to break, destroy, falsify, weaken, deteriorate.

Can we use a little anthropological cross-cultural comparison here? How does this stand beside the situation in Tanzania and other countries where ‘corruption’ is said to be rife? MacIntyre’s definition of virtue and practice provides an apt commentary. He argues that virtue is an acquired quality which enables us to achieve goods internal to practices. He clarifies his meaning with the example of a child who is taught to play chess by being offered a reward as an incentive. As long as the child’s only motive is to win a game of chess in order to receive this reward - which is a good *external* to the practice of chess playing - it will cheat when it can. Only when the child develops the desire to play the game by its proper rules will it reap the goods *internal* to the practice. Thus, for any practice, its goods can be achieved only by subordinating ourselves within it, including taking risks and criticism and recognizing what is due to other practitioners.

How may such recognition of what is due to others be achieved? There must first of all be a language in which it can be expressed, and this language is not the one of the bonus culture. What about social justice, the theme of this conference?

**Part 2. Social justice**

When I started work on this lecture, I began to wonder exactly what we mean by this term. I thought that it would include some notion of fair shares for all, some approximation of social equality, and that it would incorporate public service, state welfare systems and conceptions of social responsibility. But when I looked up the terms ‘justice’ and ‘social justice’ in a number of anthropology reference books, I found no mention in the indexes. So I turned to the work of other scholars, particularly philosophers.

For Michael Walzer the aim should be to achieve pluralism and a closer approximation to equality. He suggests that this may be done through what he terms ‘distributive justice’ (2001: 113):

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16 I am indebted to Josephides 2003 for drawing my attention to this aspect of MacIntyre’s work.
‘Distributive justice is a large idea. It draws the entire world of goods within the reach of philosophical reflection. Nothing can be omitted: no feature of our common life can escape scrutiny... My place in the economy, my standing in the political order, my reputation among my fellows, my material holdings; all these come to me from other men and women.’

Walzer recognises that distribution is what social conflict is all about, and that claims to a monopoly of goods constitutes an ideology. He goes on to point out that ‘The idea of distributive justice has as much to do with being and doing as with having, as much to do with production as consumption, as much to do with identity and status as with land, capital, or personal possession’ (113). Further, he contends, ‘People conceive and create goods, which they then distribute among themselves. In other words, they come into their minds before they come into their hands’ (114). As an anthropologist I find this approach useful because it enables us to think both about material facts and about meanings.

Marion Young (2001) considers the relationship between justice and the politics of difference, nothing that periodically in American history some groups have rejected a path to belonging through an idea of universal humanity, and have sought the assertion of positive group identity. For her, a politics that asserts the positivity of group difference is liberating and empowering since it reclaims identity, affirms it as positive, relativises dominant culture and punctures universalist claims. At the same time it promotes a notion of group solidarity against the individualism of liberal humanism and provides a standpoint from which to criticise prevailing institutions and norms.

Yet there is a very real danger that the politics of difference can easily slide into the politics of ethnicity and nationalist conflict, as we have witnessed on all too many occasions in recent years. This is because it is not only about identity, but also about material resources such as land, and other social benefits, or at least the perception that ‘others’, such as immigrants and
asylum seekers, are gaining benefits to which ‘we’ are entitled. These are factors which have played powerfully in recent European elections and the rise of the right, for example in France.

Alasdair MacIntyre too is concerned with ideas of justice. He notes (2001) that while there are many theories of justice in ‘our’ society (by which presumably he means Western, and particularly American society), there is a very real danger of presupposing that there exists only one particular partisan type of justice, that of liberal individualism. He asks what standards of justice would be acceptable if our standards were those of rationality, yet goes on to admit that even the standards of rational justification themselves emerge from and are part of a history in which they are vindicated. This is the relativist challenge. Yet what the relativist challenge has failed to envisage is that any tradition can be rationally discredited by and in the light of appeal to its very own standards of rationality. For this reason, as he puts it:

‘[T]he readership of the New York Times, or at least … that part of it which shares the presuppositions of those who write that parish magazine of affluent and self-congratulatory liberal enlightenment… fail to recognise themselves for what they are’ (p. 133).

It is this phrase – recognising themselves/ourselves - that I want us to think about, both now and later. Is this a role for anthropologists, to enable ‘us’ to recognise ourselves?

Yet philosophers for the most part write very much in the abstract, and, while anthropologists may enjoy theory, they also like it well backed up with ethnography, case studies, and other forms of empirical data. I found one such example in a composite work by a group of sociologists (Bellah et al. 2001) on ‘Individualism and Commitment in American Life’, based upon the analysis of numerous open-ended conversations with US citizens about such issues as success, freedom and justice. These authors note that freedom is perhaps the most resonant, deeply-held American value, defining the good in both personal and political life. The most important freedom is that to be left alone by others, free of arbitrary authority in family, work and political life. It is a freedom from. Yet such a discourse provides no vocabulary with which to
share a vision of a good life or society with others, or to co-ordinate co-opera-  

tive action.

Similarly American ideas about justice are considered to be a matter of  
equal opportunities for every individual to pursue happiness. But this way of  
thinking about justice does not in itself contain a vision of what the distribution  
of goods in a society would end up looking like if individuals had an equal  
chance to pursue their interests. Instead, there is an emphasis on procedural  
rather than distributive justice.

Finally, the authors consider the sense of self which comes out of their  
conversations. Here people assert the right to choose their own values, yet  
give little indication of the grounds for their choice:

One’s idiosyncratic preferences are their own justification, because  
they define the true self…The right act is simply the one that yields the  
agent the most exciting challenge or the most good feeling about  
oneself. Now if selves are defined by their preferences, but those  
preferences are arbitrary, then each self constitutes its own moral  
universe, and there is finally no way to reconcile conflicting claims  
about what is good in itself … In the absence of any objectifiable  
criteria of right and wrong, good or evil, the self and its feelings become  
the only moral guide (310-1).

They go on to distinguish between ‘being good’ and ‘feeling good’:

‘Being good’ becomes ‘feeling good’ and acts are not right or wrong in  
themselves but only because of the results they produce, the good  
feelings they engender or express.

And yet this ‘feeling good’ rests ultimately in terms of the evaluations of  
others, so

the touchstone of individualistic self-knowledge turns out to be shaky in  
the end and its guide to action proves elusive…In the face of these  
questions, the predominant ethos of American individualism seems
more than ever determined to press ahead with the task of letting go of all criteria other than radical private validation’ (312-3)\textsuperscript{17}.

In short, then, there is little space here for concepts of social justice. In the next section, I consider a relatively new discourse which lays claim to providing a universal way for us to recognise the dues of others and provides for greater justice – that of human rights.

**Part 3: Human Rights**

In 1948, the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNHDR). Since then, numerous Conventions, Treaties and Protocols have added to this and built up a comprehensive and still growing set of international law. Many analysts now talk of human rights culture as a core aspect of a new global transnational culture, a *sui generis* phenomenon of modernity. Yet the history of human rights over the last half century is a curious one. Careful consideration of the original declaration reveals that many rights mentioned – including those to adequate shelter, food, and education – tend to be ignored, while those dealing with civil liberties have received the most attention. As a result of many struggles the original emphasis of the UNHDR upon individuals has been modified by an acceptance of collective rights in certain contexts. Nonetheless, human rights discourse is dominated by law and lawyers.

There are very real problems which anthropologists experience in working with this discourse but there is nonetheless a growing literature on the anthropology of human rights, which I will not pretend to summarise here. In order to raise a number of issues, I draw largely upon two recent books, both written by a group of young anthropologists at the University of Sussex. They are *Human Rights, Culture and Context* edited by Richard Wilson (1997) and *Culture and Rights* edited by Jane Cowan, Marie-Benedicte Dembour and Richard Wilson (2001)\textsuperscript{18}. In the first of these, Wilson argues that anthropology has only just begun to respond to the expansion of the legal discourse around

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\textsuperscript{17} ‘Ideas of the self’s inner expansion reveal nothing of the shape moral character should take, the limits it should respect, and the community it should serve. Ideas of potentiality (for what?) tell us nothing of which tasks and purposes are worth pursuing and are blind, for example, to the differences between a job, career and calling.’ (313)
human rights. One reason for this is that the discipline is handicapped both by its emphasis on localism and its theoretical concern with culture. Both of these have positioned it in opposition to universal values and processes such as human rights. Anthropology’s major critique of the universalism of human rights is that the discussion is lifted out of any particular context and this leads to a number of theoretical problems in the relationship between anthropology and human rights, and the uses which each may make of the other.

a) **Universalism vs relativism**

Many forms of anthropological relativism begin with a critique of the universalists’ conceptions of ‘human nature’, since anthropologists reject the notion of a unified subject with a knowable essence. Thus if ‘human nature’ presupposes a conception of ‘human being’, there is an immediate difficulty for anthropologists in that some cultures may not have such a concept at all. Logically, too, the anthropological critique, which is based on the notion of socially constructed ‘persons’, rejects the category of ‘individual’ which is so fundamental to human rights law (see Morris 1971, 1994).

Conversely, some human rights theorists have lambasted anthropology as the bastion of cultural absolutism – arrogant and romantic. Yet cultural relativism also has its own delusions, since, as Rapport notes, it can easily have ‘morally nihilist, politically conservative and quietist consequences’ (2000:166). Furthermore, relativism is an important weapon in the hands of those governments which actively oppose the application of international human rights to their states, since, as Wilson notes, it is ‘the most useful available ideology which facilitates international acquiescence in state repression’ (1997: 9).18

Yet Wilson maintains that the universalist/relativist debate is too totalising in its conception, suggesting instead that ‘What is needed are more detailed studies of human rights according to the actions and intentions of social actors, within wider historical constraints of institutionalised power.’ (ibid: 4) In short, more ethnography.

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18 Since this lecture was written, another important volume has been edited by Richard Wilson and Jon Mitchell (2003).
The governments of China and Malaysia and so-called ‘Asian values’ are often quoted in this regard.

19
b) Human rights, power and historical change

As already mentioned, human rights discourse is dominated by lawyers. Yet, law is, of course, a form of power and in order to understand how it works, we need to look at how power inhabits meaning. Yet rights are only one of many aspects of power, which in turn cannot simply be reduced to a right or a possession. Human rights both depend on power relations in a given context, and at the same time alter forms of governance and the exercise of power. This is another argument in favour of developing an ethnography of human rights in order to understand how they operate in a given context.

Human rights are also historically contingent being themselves the product of the rise of nation states with their attendant history of nationalism, colonialism and postcolonialism. Further, rights are the result of historical political struggles between individuals and interest groups. Today, the culturally relativist arguments cited above have also been undermined by the processes of globalisation. There are new and global networks, of which human rights organisations form an important one, while the web has allowed human rights abuses to be rapidly known (e.g. Chiapas rebellion – the first in cyber-space). In this way human rights itself gets reworked and transformed in different contexts with the vernacularisation of the global and the projection of local political discourses and practices into the global language of rights.

c) Human rights and culture

Several conventions and articles which have been adopted since the UNHDR embody rights to culture, which is understood as another ‘thing’ which the actor is entitled to ‘have’ and ‘enjoy’, even though such a view does not acknowledge its own role in constituting persons (Cowan et al 2001: 8). But attention to minority rights and cultural diversity has received a renewed emphasis in the last two decades with an increasing number of supra-national institutions encouraging nation-states to encourage diversity. In this way, group rights have been put on the agenda and indigenous people have mobilised in search of their rights. As a part of this process rights claims have become a familiar rhetorical element, since are likely to carry weight in court.

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20 It should be noted that the right to culture is not a new idea – it arises out of the Romantic movement.
and justify other kinds of claims and exemptions. For this reason claimants may be compelled to use the language of rights and portray themselves as certain kinds of persons – a situation which both, as Cowan et al note, is both ‘enabling and constraining’ (2001: 11).

Furthermore, such claims are is not ethically neutral and indeed be those of ethno-nationalism or strategic essentialism. Rights are not only entitlements which result in justice and utilise the language of resistance; they can as easily be used to justify reactionary as progressive projects e.g. the claims of Protestant Orange men in Northern Ireland to march through Catholic areas.

In these identity politics, then, culture holds a central place. Paradoxically, even as anthropologists themselves have begun to question concepts of culture, they have witnessed it increasingly being used by others, and often in a highly essentialised way. The critique of liberal and legalistic conceptions of human rights by anthropologists also involves the recognition that human rights are involved in social classification, the creation of legitimacy and the formal expression of power. Rights discourses have also spawned new domains of political struggle such as reproductive rights, animal rights, ecological rights (Cowan et al 2001). As a result they are the focus of acute social struggles between interest groups in which the individualism of liberalism may confront collective visions, thereby setting up opposing conceptions of the ‘common good’.

In recent anthropological debates about law and culture, law is seen as a discourse which shapes how the world is understood:

‘Facts’ are not simply lying around waiting to be discovered; they are socially constructed through rules of evidence, legal conventions, and the rhetoric of legal actors... In many societies, legal reasoning becomes one of the most important ways in which people try to make sense of their world (Cowan et al. 12).

Enforcing human rights and punishing perpetrators has also become a way in which the international community may seek to right past wrongs, notably

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21 See for example, the articles by Eriksen, Gledhill, Schjir and Wilson in Wilson’s 1997 volume.
through the setting up of War Crimes Tribunals. I consider briefly that set up for Rwanda, which I visited during my time in Arusha in the spring of 2002.

**Implementing Human Rights? A case study of The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR)**

I attend the ICTR along with a group of other people attending the 2001 ASA conference in Arusha. Because we have a well-placed contact, we have been able to negotiate not only observation of one of the trials, but also a set of briefings. One of those who briefs us asks about the group’s background, commenting: ‘This case is of interest to anthropologists because it is about the co-existence of ethnic groups. It is about a struggle for power in which people decided to use ethnicity as a weapon. As far as this Court is concerned, the genocide was a monstrous criminal conspiracy’.

It is explained to us that the court was set up to bring to justice the high-ranking people responsible for planning the genocide, most of whom had escaped from Rwanda, not the small fry, who were being tried in Rwanda itself.

The reason for this policy is that one of the biggest problems in Africa has been the culture of impunity – this Tribunal is seeking to stop that. Extremism can no longer be accepted in Rwanda – it has to be banished and the perpetrators brought to justice. The court is therefore looking at the acts, and the intention, which was to destroy a people. In this process, establishing individual guilt is very important in order for Rwanda to move forward since not all members of a group are genocidaires. The premise is that victims are better able to co-exist when justice is done leading to reconciliation, but it will be a long process, because this culture (of impunity) has been in place for many decades.

We are told about the court’s achievements:

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22 The court sits in open session and members of the public may attend, provided that they produce identification and undergo security checks.

23 I am extremely grateful to the Court’s Protocol Officer, Ms. Else Efange-Mbella, for all her assistance in making the visit possible, and to her colleagues for their briefings.
• the first court to convict a head of government, the former Rwandan PM Kambanda, for genocide
• the first court to convict someone of rape as a form of genocide, thereby establishing an important principle
• it has arrested 59 people\textsuperscript{25}, and holds 51 in custody awaiting trial
• it has brought 450 witnesses from 70 different countries
• it has set up a witness protection scheme, and conducts comprehensive risk assessments for their witnesses, even relocating them after they have given evidence if necessary

The evident commitment, enthusiasm and professionalism of the four people who brief us, several of them lawyers working on cases, is extremely impressive.

We are to attend the Mtaki Rutimana hearing, on which we receive written and oral briefings first. This trial concerns a case which took place at Mugenero, near Kibye Town close to Lake Kivu, where there was a 7\textsuperscript{th} Day Adventist Church, school and hospital\textsuperscript{26}.

The accused is Eliza Mtaki Rutimana, the senior pastor, and his son Gerard, a doctor, both Hutus. The latter is alleged to have sent home from the hospital all the Hutu patients before the killings began. Meanwhile, the junior pastors, many of them Tutsis, apprised of what was about to happen, wrote to Mtaki Rutimana: ‘We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families’ a phrase which some of you may recognise as it was later used as the title of a book on the Rwandan genocide by Gourevitch (1998). Pastor Rutimana replied to the pastors that he could do nothing and they should prepare to die. Witnesses say that not only did the pair not try to stop the killings, but that they actively encouraged them. In this place 6-700 people were killed.

We file into the Public Gallery situated behind the court, and separated from it by bullet-proof glass. The three judges in their red robes – from

\textsuperscript{24} There is a huge literature on the Rwandan genocide. A highly perceptive book by a social anthropologist is Taylor’s \textit{Sacrifice as Terror}, 1999. See also Eltringham 2003.
\textsuperscript{25} On April 15\textsuperscript{th} Father Hormisdas Nsengimana, a Roman Catholic priest, was also arrested and sent to await trial (press release, African Rights)
Norway, South Africa and Senegal - sit directly opposite us on a raised podium, surrounded by legal clerks. To our left is the chief Defence Counsel, Ramsey Clark, former US Attorney General, and his team. To our right is the seat of the chief Prosecutor, Carla Del Ponte, which is empty as she is not in court today perhaps because she is also Chief Prosecutor for the Milosevic trial in the Hague. The two accused sit with their guards behind their defence team. As we gaze at these two very ordinary-looking men, I am reminded of Hannah Arendt’s account of the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem, where she talks of the ‘banality of evil’ (Arendt 1994). In front of us, with her back towards us, is the witness who is testifying today, the pastor’s wife, who is an open, not a protected witness, and whose face we can see on video screens.

She is a middle-aged, well-dressed woman, who speaks in Kinyarwanda while we listen through headphones to the simultaneous translations into English and French. The presiding Norwegian judge speaks in English, as does Ramsey Clark. The latter fires a barrage of questions, many of them repeated endlessly, about her own, her husband’s and her son’s movements during a two-month period in 1994. I wonder how she can possibly remember such details after so many years, and why her defence counsel appears so hostile to her. It is difficult to see why he is asking these questions although later we are told that this is a standard defence counsel tactic to improve the credibility of someone who, as a spouse, is otherwise not a very credible witness. Nonetheless, the Conradian notion of the ‘fascination of the abomination’ also comes to mind. The whole procedure is completely gripping, even mesmerising.

Yet there are nagging doubts. Is all of this, set up at great expense, merely a way for the international community to expiate its gross and criminal neglect of Rwanda and failure to prevent the genocide (Gourevitch 1998)? Wouldn’t it have been better to have given the Canadian general the few thousand troops he said he needed to stop it happening at all?

I wonder too about the appropriateness of this set-up for Africa and what Rwandan peasants, brought as witnesses from their far-away villages, make of what is going on, even after they have been counselled and briefed.

26 Many Tutsis gathered in such places when news of the killings got around, thinking that there was safety in numbers, but it proved easier to slaughter them there.
am also reminded of a paper by Judith Ennew, an anthropologist and human rights activist who works with and for children. She notes that much of the work of western agencies, and the African governments they influence, make use of highly ethnocentric notions, mainly drawn from psychiatry, in dealing with children subjected to violent conflict. Only one kind of ‘cure’ is thought appropriate – ‘talking cures’ and ‘releasing the pain’ through counselling. She suggests that in the African context, healing is a more appropriate model to use. This is a coherent theoretical model which includes the idea that all humans have a capacity for healing, and that it is a process that involves an individual with the help of and in the context of his/her own society/community. Wholeness can be restored to the social fabric through cleansing rituals that leave the past behind.

On the same day that we visited the court, the British newspaper the Guardian published an article by its Africa correspondent Chris McGreal under the heading 'Second Class Justice' (Guardian 10/4/02). In spite of conceding that the court has some achievements to its credit, he is highly critical. The ICTR is accused of ‘delay, incompetence and a perception that it is soft on the accused’, as well as mismanagement, under-funding, corruption, internal politics and racial tensions between western prosecutors and African tribunal managers. There is resentment that those in the Tribunal’s detention centre live more comfortably than most of the survivors, and that whereas the International court can only impose life sentences, the smaller fish on trial in Rwanda are facing the death penalty. There are some comparisons with the trial of Milosevic, who was brought to The Hague within months of his arrest, whereas Bagasora, the military master-mind behind the genocide, has been in custody for six years and recently his trial was postponed yet again.

27 Far from needing to be induced individually and in isolation from their social context to ‘release’ their feelings about the past in a talking cure, children are cleansed of and make a break with the past through cleansing and distancing rituals in the presence of and with the support of their relatives and neighbours’ (Ennew 2000).
28 The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission was set up in part to make use of such ideas.
29 The following year, one member of our party, Richard Vokes, also published a critical article about the ICTR (2002)
The comparison with the Hague trial is a telling one but McGreal does not tell the whole story. Milosevic was not arrested shortly after the crimes he is alleged to have committed were perpetrated – instead he was arrested several years later, when the political conditions in Serbia had changed\textsuperscript{30}. The Hague court, so we were told at the ITCR, has not only a much larger budget than the Tribunal in Arusha; it also has 27 judges for its much small number of accused, whereas the ICTR itself has only nine allowing for a maximum of three cases to be heard at any one time. Furthermore, the Hague trial is covered by hundreds of journalists, and has been broadcast on many TV and radio stations, whereas very few journalists attend the ICTR (there were none in the public gallery the day we attended). Thus although twice as many people died in Rwanda as in the former Yugoslavia, the fact that the former is in Africa, and the latter in Europe, has made a great deal of difference. In short, then, there is a politics of justice, and a politics of human rights.

As Wilson suggests, human rights are not founded in the eternal moral categories of philosophy, but are result of concrete social struggles. Rights are embedded in local normative orders, yet caught within webs of power and meaning which extend far beyond the local. This means that they are difficult to apply in all contexts. Yet, as Wilson has shown for Guatemala (1997), the culture of human rights dictates that certain ways (and certain ways only) of representing violations, motives, and the subjectivity of victims should be adopted by both claimants and their advocates if they are to have any chance of being heard\textsuperscript{31}. He suggests this is because human rights is saturated with what Habermas terms ‘technocratic consciousness’ which entails ‘a repression of ethics as a category of life’ (1971:112-3).

If Wilson/Habermas are right that human rights represses ethics, and Pels is right in suggesting ethics is merely a part of audit, one of the technologies of the self of the professional subject, what are we left with in our search for anthropology as a moral discipline? In fact, of course, none of these two concepts can be so easily dismissed, as I hope I have made clear, and anthropologists can well work with them all. We can work with them in

\textsuperscript{30} There have been as many criticisms of the Hague Tribunal, which has been referred to by many commentators as a ‘show trial’ – see for example Samary 2002.
terms of ethnography, we can work with them in terms of activism, and we can also work with them in terms of critique. If, as has already been suggested, one of the most powerful modes of criticism of any discourse is in terms of itself, then one of our roles can be to puncture the habitus. By this I mean to ask what is really meant by an often-glib rhetoric, whether it is about ethical investment, ethical fieldwork, social justice or commitment to human rights. We may in the process be ‘recognizing ourselves’, a *sine qua non* of recognizing the other. In conclusion, I want to push this argument further with the use of a final case study of some anthropological responses to September 11th.

**Part 4. Some Anthropological Responses to September 11th:**

People used to say that they always remembered where they were and what they were doing during the Cuban missile crisis. Later, it was when they heard the news of Kennedy’s death. Today it is when we heard about the four planes flying into the twin towers, the Pentagon and the ground. As one journalist put it: ‘Which of us has not been there in our heads?’ (Blake Morrison, *Guardian* 14th September 2001) – whether in a shortly-to-be-crashed plane, or in a burning and collapsing office building. Yet who is this ‘us’? Everyone in the world or only people who are familiar with flying in planes, or working in multi-storey buildings?

September 11th has frequently been termed ‘the day that changed the world’; it is seen as a watershed, an apocalyptic moment in time after which nothing can be the same again. Here I want primarily to consider the response of social scientists and particularly anthropologists to these events in the form of petitions, statements and publications.

**Some US responses:**

*a) The Chicago petition*

As early as September 17th, an email petition was circulated from the University of Chicago. It was headed ‘Petition for a thoughtful US response’ and was in the form of a letter addressed to the President and Vice-President.

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31 Stanley Cohen too makes a similar point in his exploration of the way in which governments respond to allegations of human rights violations (Cohen 1996)
of the USA, asking them to adopt a ‘calm and non-retaliatory stance’. I received this petition through many sources, virtually all of them anthropological, and reflected once again how interesting it is to follow the trail of names – who knows whom. I myself sent it out to many people, again most of them anthropologists.\(^\text{32}\)

Petitions are often derided as a liberal response, but they are in their way an activist route, and with the passing of new legislation such as the Patriot Act, one not without its potential consequences.

\(b\) \textit{The American Anthropological Association’s (AAA) response}

The AAA’s Committee for human rights issued a statement ‘Concerning the tragedy and aftermath of September 11, 2001’. The statement falls into two parts, the first of which is clearly addressed to the US government. Its main points are:

\begin{itemize}
\item condemnation of the attack and of terrorism and bigotry everywhere
\item plea for respect for civil liberties and urging government to increase its commitment to HR
\item urging government and scholars to ‘make every effort to learn the motives behind these terrorist attacks in order to prevent future terrorism
\item Urging government to seek solutions within the International Court of Justice and to support the creation of the International Criminal Court\(^\text{33}\)
\end{itemize}

The second part of the statement is directed to the anthropological community and is headed ‘Terrorism: how can anthropologists respond?’ It speaks of

- our duty as intellectuals to articulate the complexities of the situation
- the special role anthropologists have to play ‘in educating and challenging our leaders to consider the complex factors that structure belief systems, generate oppressive conditions, and give rise to violent actions’
- a plea for changing the conditions that give rise to terrorism, and for the West to learn to listen better

\(^{32}\) A few weeks later, I checked the website at the University of Chicago, to find, to my surprise, no mention of the petition, which appeared to have been removed.
The Committee also notes anthropologists’ role in arguing against ethnocentric perspectives, and encouraging analysis ‘of the human conditions that may lead people to be vulnerable to the appeals of terrorist organisations, to find means to promote tolerance, and to voice concerns and advocacy for the preservation of human rights’.  

The Middle Eastern Section of the AAA expanded its website with a section entitled ‘The September 11th Tragedy’ with the following caption:

‘As anthropologists who study Middle Eastern cultures, including the religion of Islam, we aim to provide accurate and appropriate information for our colleagues, educators, students, journalists and the public at large. This page provides links to anthropological perspectives on the tragedy of September 11th, its background, players, and aftermath. We share this information in the hope that it will contribute to a better understanding of America’s relationship with societies in the Middle East and the current crisis.’

The site contains an impressive and ever-growing set of articles, links, web addresses and other material. Most of this material provides information and analysis of Islam, countries in the Middle East, including Afghanistan and Pakistan.

A number of commentators have noted the importance of the web in obtaining and disseminating information about September 11th and its aftermath, including the war in Afghanistan. Several anthropologists who are Middle Eastern specialists have suggested that it provides an important tool for conducting ethnography – ‘participant webervation’ and e-ethnography as Varisco (2000) calls it, or ‘internethography’ as Tapper (2002) terms it. In the
global village, anthropologists can listen in to, even join in with email discussion groups, such as Tapper's daily tuning in to the Afghaniyat list server. Suddenly, Geertz's phrase about ‘webs of meaning’ assumes a whole new significance.

In both of these responses – of the CfHR and the MES - the anthropological role envisaged is primarily one of mediation and interpretation of the other – providing greater understanding to the West of Islam and Muslims, jihad, martyrdom and terrorism\textsuperscript{35}.

\textbf{Some British Responses: a) Publishing an Ethnography of September 11\textsuperscript{th}}

Two months after the events of September 11\textsuperscript{th}, Heonik Kwon, an anthropologist at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland put out a call for papers with a view to publishing a book:

The aim of the project is to collect and share diverse, and possibly contradictory, popular reactions to Sept 11 and their responses to subsequent developments... It is hoped that this project will provide a dynamic, multi-sited picture of Sept 11 that is global in scale but locally specific'.

Here the anthropological role is one of \textit{witnessing and testimony}.

\textbf{b) Anthropology Today (AT)}

The British anthropology journal \textit{Anthropology Today} which comes out bi-monthly, has published some half dozen articles on September 11\textsuperscript{th}. In the December 2001 edition, it invited William Beeman to contribute a guest editorial on ‘Writing for the crisis’. It also carried an article by Richard Tapper, a Middle Eastern specialist who worked in Afghanistan some years ago. Tapper considers firstly why he decided not to accept media invitations to comment, and secondly the use of the net as a method of conducting ethnography, or as he terms it, nethnography.

\textsuperscript{35} There is also some advice for US and other world leaders, and even condemnation of past policies which have spawned ‘blowback’. See especially the articles by Beeman: ‘The Mess in East Africa and Afghanistan is partly the fault of the US government’, ‘Why Bush’s line in the sand won’t hold’, ‘Why Middle Eastern Terrorists hate the United States’, ‘Why a military response won’t work – historic roots of Mideast Grievances’
A second article in the same issue by Glenn Bowman, an American anthropologist teaching at a British university, whose current research is with Palestinians. Significantly, his article ‘Thinking the Unthinkable’ comes with an unparalleled ‘health warning’ from the AT editor:

Publication in AT should not in any way be interpreted as endorsement or support of authors’ views, either by the Editor or the RAI. Please note that the following submission deals with a particularly sensitive topic. (p. 17)

Bowman begins by reflecting upon his own varied responses to the events of September 11th, and goes on to make the point that as anthropologists we are not only ‘professional strangers’ in other cultures, but that our training also ‘makes strange’ our own culture. This can be basis for not only for a kind of splitting which ‘others the self’, and which may also enable anthropologists to ‘open the eyes’ of their (lay) audiences to other perspectives (Bowman 2001). His article provoked diametrically opposed responses: the former Director of the RAI wrote a very angry criticism while a student (from Goldsmiths as it happens) wrote to congratulate and applaud the whole issue of the journal:

I found it reassuring to see attitudes which have been marginalized in public discourse to firmly articulated in your journal’... This issue of AT makes a very important statement… the future success of the discipline depends on its connection to events in the real world... asking sometimes painful questions of our own culture as well as understanding [that of] others.’ (p. 23)

Other articles published in the journal have pursued both of these aims. Alison Shaw and Tariq Modood have both discussed why young British Muslims might support the Taliban (Shaw 2002, Modood 2002), while two articles by American anthropologists consider terrorism and the responsibility of the anthropologist (Price 2001, Sluka 2002). Price argues that in the past, anthropologists have responded to patriotic calls in times of war and used their expertise to play roles which some of them (e.g. Bateson) came to regret. He is concerned that if the ‘war on terror’ continues, anthropologists may again be called upon, and argues that our prime ethical responsibility...
must remain to our subjects, seeing a particular danger for ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples. At the end of his article, he also suggests that we can ‘study up’ and research state terrorism, a point which is taken up in some detail in Sluka’s article: ‘What anthropologists should know about the concept of ‘terrorism’ (2002). Here Sluka argues that it is the duty of anthropologists to apply a critical perspective to such concepts which is emerging as humankind’s most dangerous contemporary political myth.

Here then, there is a mixture of responses:
- once again, explaining and interpreting the other to the West
- protecting our subjects, and acting as their advocates if necessary
- ‘studying up’ by discussing the hegemonic discourses of western societies and ruling powers, which currently includes the use of the term ‘terrorism’.

An International Response: The SSRC website

The Social Science Research Council of the United States set up a special section of its website entitled ‘After Sept. 11: perspectives from the social sciences’. Authors were asked to write against two-week deadlines. A international galaxy of well known names wrote articles many of which are outstanding for their insights and comments. But hardly any are by anthropologists.36

Yet one of the most perceptive articles, in my view, is by an anthropologist: Veena Das contributes an article entitled ‘Violence and Translation’.

Allow me to take the pronouncements on events of Sept. 11th that the attack on the WTC was an attack on civilisation or on values of freedom… What these statement conjure is the idea of the US… as embodying these values … and that a teleology has particularly privileged it to embody these values…[hence]… political language slides into the idea of America as the privileged site of universal values… [and] …while some forms of terrorism elsewhere were against forms of particularism, the attack on America is seen as an attack on humanity itself.

36 In a recent article, William Beeman notes that anthropologists’ views on 11/9 are conspicuous by their absence (2002).
Das notes that there is a curious mirroring of Taliban and US discourses since each claims universalism, each claims the clash of civilisations (perhaps rather the denial of civilisation to the other). Each also claims the figure of the innocent, a powerful deployment, in spite of the fact that, as she notes ‘there are no innocents in this war’. She also points to the deep need to show the tattered body of the ‘enemy’ as a rational response to September 11th. This leads to punishment as spectacle (not only Afghanistan but also Guantanamo Bay) – justice is to be theatrically displayed.

Das also suggests that responses 9/11 are ‘forged by our relation to death’ and our view that ‘the other’ is not part of human society because s/he has a totally different relation to death. Where language is deployed to render some forms of dying as fanatical (e.g. by terrorists) and others as representing the supreme value of sacrificing oneself (e.g. as in the values of patriotism) this blocks any road to understanding when and under what circumstances individual life ceases to hold value. ‘It is not accidental that … war has become transformed into a hunt, thereby using the rhetorical strategy of animalizing the other. Hence there is the preponderance of such verbs as “smoking them out” or “getting them out of their holes”’.

Here then is an anthropologist using anthropological language to analyse a highly complex and global situation to devastating effect. She is not simply explaining concepts such as Islam, jihad, or terrorism to a western public; rather she is considering the latter as part of her field of observation and analysis. By largely focusing upon one issue – in this case the relationship to death and pain – she elucidates discourse and actions on both sides. She might have chosen other concepts – sacrifice, spectacle, identity are a few which spring to mind. It is this kind of analysis which I suggest anthropologists could, and perhaps should be doing more frequently.

I read the article by Das alongside a magazine produced for public consumption in the US and distributed also in the UK. It is entitled Final Commemorative Issue: War on Terror: Secret Government Files revealed. A

37 Or, as one journalist in the New York Post wrote: ‘The response to this unimaginable 21st century Pearl Harbor should be simple as it is swift – kill the bastards... A gunshot between the eyes, blow them to smithereens, poison them if you have to... As for cities and countries that host these worms, bomb them into basketball courts.’ (Steve Dunleavy quoted by Norman Solaman, Free Press Sept/Oct 200: 21).
special report from the editors of ‘The Day that Changed America’\textsuperscript{38}. It is lavishly illustrated with photos and an interesting set of captions:

- ‘Band of brothers’, ‘America’s finest’,
- ‘Hunt for one eyed bandits, faces of evil’
- ‘A hero in the making: All American and all business’
- ‘The Price of Freedom: they made the ultimate sacrifice: slain CIA agent leaves three children behind’ \textsuperscript{39}.

This text contains a number of key concepts: the positive ones are freedom and sacrifice, while the negative are fear, evil, tragedy, and terror.

It can be profitably juxtaposed with the document entitled ‘The last night’ found in the luggage of Mohammed Atta which has as its key concepts death, martyrdom, obedience to orders, victory, the will of God. His text even animalizes the enemy, in the way Das suggests, by stating that ‘You must make your knife sharp and must not discomfort your animal during slaughter’ (Observer, 30/12/01, on Guardian Unlimited website ‘Last words of a terrorist’).

Such texts are as powerful for their silences as for what is said. In the US magazine, like many others produced in the West on the same subject, pictures which include Afghans do not give their names, unlike those of westerners such as American servicemen who are almost always identified by name. In the War on Terror magazine a dead Afghan is just that, whereas a dead American soldier or CIA agent is someone who has ‘made the ultimate sacrifice’ and details given about their childhood and families. We may juxtapose this with the front cover of the British journal Red Pepper which

\textsuperscript{38} vol. III no. 1. American Media Specials. Boca Raton, Florida.
\textsuperscript{39} Others include ‘Terror on the run: the FBI’s Most Wanted (with photos and biogs interspersed with colour photos of bombings, first victory of the campaign, Old Glory’s incredible journey: freedom’s symbol, Christmas Eve with the fighting leathernicks: long live the United States and success to the Marines, Upclose and personal, Bloody battle for Mazar e Sharif, Captured! American Traitor, Al Qaeda in the bag, Escape from Fear: joyful nation throws off its chains and burqas (picture of smiling Afghan woman with burqa lifted), Energy caves in: mopping up Tora Bora, (photos of wife, funeral), Green Beret: first GI killed in action (ditto), Tragedy of Black Hawk down – and the humiliation of a superpower, Saddam’s Gotta Go, The outlaw states – and the states where outlaws roam, Welcome to Guatanamo Bay, Captured and Awaiting Justice, Hooray for Hollywood: stars take up the fight.
opposes the war and which used a list of names on its front cover under the headline ‘Collateral damage’ (December 2001 issue).

There is no embarrassment at showing pictures of Taliban prisoners hooded, manacled and kneeling, an issue which caused outrage in Europe, as it did of course in the Arab world. Rather there is a certainty that such people - outlaws, terrorists, faces of evil, and one-eyed bandits - deserve the ‘justice’ that awaits them in Guantanamo Bay. Yet there is also a curious ‘mirroring’ between the hooding of the prisoners, and the frequent emphasis on the ‘freeing’ from the *burqa* of Afghan women, just as there is a ‘mirroring’ of fundamentalisms – a factor often picked up by the cartoonists (some of whom are very good ethnographers).

Here then are different anthropological responses to September 11th:

- Playing an activist role, which may range from organising or signing a petition, promoting analysis and discussion in a variety of fora
- Observation, including netography, witnessing, testimony
- Translation and mediation – helping the western public understand ‘the other’, being willing to share via the media, being a public intellectual
- Providing analysis and commentary not just upon ‘the other’ and his or her motives, but also upon the self, so that we might recognise ourselves.

I would suggest that all of these are ways of contributing to anthropology as a moral discipline. They involve concepts of ethical behaviour, of social justice, and of human rights – theirs as well as ours.

One email I received a month after the terrible events of September 11th seemed to capture perfectly what I have been trying to say about empathy and recognizing ourselves. Its subject line was *just a minute… juste une petite minute… solo un minuto di silenzio*. The introductory paragraph explains that it was written by a schoolteacher in the French city of Nantes in response to those people who thought that it was unworthy (*indigne*) of him not to respect the three minutes of silence for the victims of September 11th and thereby identify with the USA:
6 aout, 1945: les Etas-Unis bombardent Hiroshima. En quelques secondes, 84,000 morts, 150,000 milles blesses. Pas une seconde de silence. (6th August 1945. The United States bombs Hiroshima. In a few seconds, 4,000 people are dead, 150,000 wounded. Not a second of silence)

The email continues with reference to the victims of Vietnam, Chile, Iraq, the IMF, World Bank and the G8, and to the millions of Americans who live below the poverty line, for none of whom is there 'une seconde de silence'. It ends as follows:

Je me sentirai americain et ferai silence dans ma classe, lorsque l'emotion sera la meme a l'egard de toutes les victimes de tous les terrorismes. Je me sentirai americain et ferai silence dans ma classe, lorsque la communauta internationale condamanera sans complaisance selective tous les crimes contre l'humanite, ceux commis par les pays riches comme ceux commis au nom des pauvres.

En attendant ce jour, je ne ferai pas silence dans ma classe, je continuerai a parler aux enfants afin de leur donner, conformement a la page soixante-onze des Programes de L'Ecole Primaire, 'le sens de la responsibilite personnelle et collective face aux problemes lies au droits de l'homme et aux atteintes qu'ils subissent'.

**English translation**

I will feel myself American and maintain silence in my class, when emotions are the same for all victims of all forms of terrorism. I will feel myself American and maintain silence in my class, when the international community condemns all crimes against humanity, those committed by rich countries as well as those committed in the name of the poor.

While awaiting this day, I will not maintain silence in my class, I will continue to talk to the children in order to give them, in according with page 71 of the Curriculum for Primary Schools, the sense of their personal and collective responsibility in the face of all problems relating to human rights and the attacks which they undergo
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