In this article I discuss the relevance for anthropologists of three thinkers. First, I present, for those unfamiliar with Kant's epistemology, a brief summary of his theory of knowledge. Since my main interests are those of an anthropologist looking for a possible base on which to construct a viable, and if possible a scientific epistemology (in the Kantian sense of this term), my emphasis may appear to be idiosyncratic.

Secondly, I examine the work of the neo-Kantian, Ernst Cassirer, whose interests often bordered on the anthropological and whose study of symbolism and myth is often neglected by anthropologists interested in this field.

Finally, I present some of the criticisms levelled against a Kantian epistemology by Adam Schaff, a noted Marxist philosopher whose interests also touch upon anthropology.

My purpose is to suggest a philosophical stance for those of us in anthropology who are interested in the nature of knowledge, its limits and modes of articulation, but who are not satisfied with either a naive theory of empirical realism or any form of cognitive idealism.

The Kantian heritage in anthropology, while often unacknowledged, has nevertheless been considerable. In Britain, the influence of the Durkheimian school meant that the problem of social order was interpreted to include not only questions of structural solidarity and conflict but also the nature of classification and anomaly. This latter concern has been a major interest of anthropologists such as Evans-Pritchard, Leach, Douglas and Needham. While much of this concern resulted from Durkheim’s influence and more recently Levi-Strauss’, the underlying theme can be traced back to Kant. In America, the concept of culture from Boas to Geertz has a pronounced Kantian element, of which one extreme manifestation is found in the works of Sapir and Whorf.

In this article I discuss the development of a Kantian problematic in the works of Cassirer and Schaff, philosophers whose interests are very similar to those found in conventional anthropology. My purpose is to show both how much anthropological discourse stems from largely unexamined philosophical notions and the ways in which philosophical questions may be anthropologically rephrased such that they may be more profitably pursued.

In his *Critique of Pure Reason* [1], Kant sets out to investigate the role of reason in developing our knowledge, not of spatio-temporal reality, but of what he calls transcendental reality. In other words, Kant sees our knowledge as consisting not only of objects existing in a spatio-temporal order, but also of “objects” such as those provided by mathematicians, knowledge of which is not gained empirically; and, finally, know-
knowledge of certain principles of pure reason. Kant's critique is aimed at this third kind of knowledge, which is his main concern. He argues that our knowledge of empirical reality limits us to appearance and prevents us from knowing "things-in-themselves." He does not deny the existence of objects existing apart from a perceiving subject, but insists that our knowledge of empirical reality is as much a function of the organizing structure of the mind as it is a function of the direct experience of the object. In fact, Kant denies the possibility of any such direct experiences and points out that all our experiences occur within the manifolds of space and time: categories which Kant regards as properties of the mind and not of "things-in-themselves." Furthermore, Kant maintains that there are certain principles of understanding that make possible the kind of empirical knowledge that we possess. Hence, for Kant, such things as the law of causality, the permanence of substance and the law of induction are not abstractions gained from experience, but are principles of the human understanding making experiences from which such laws are derived possible in the first place.

A crucial distinction Kant makes early in his *Critique of Pure Reason* is that between *a priori* and *a posteriori* knowledge. Kant asks "whether there is any knowledge that is thus independent of experience and even of all impression of the senses. Such knowledge is entitled *a priori*, and distinguished from the empirical, which has its sources *a posteriori*, that is, in experience" [2]. We should note, however, that Kant accepts the possibility of *a priori* judgements which have their origin initially in experience. Thus, the assertion that "Every alteration has its cause," while it is held *a priori*, nevertheless has its origin in experience. In this example Kant distinguishes between a concept such as alteration, which is derived from experience, and the validity attributed to the judgement itself, which is not in itself dependent upon its being empirically verified, but on principles of the understanding. Kant uses mathematics as a good example of *a priori* knowledge.

Another useful distinction introduced by Kant is that between analytic and synthetic judgements. By analytic judgements Kant means judgements such that the predicate adds nothing to the concept of the subject. An example he gives is, "All bodies are extended," arguing that the concept "body" implies extension. Perhaps a simpler example would be, "All husbands are married." By synthetic judgements Kant refers to judgements such that the predicate is not contained within the subject. A simple example would be, "Some husbands are fat." Kant points out that all empirical judgements are synthetic.

The following four combinations are possible:

1. Analytical *a priori* - All bodies are extended.
2. Analytical *a posteriori* - not possible in Kant's view.
3. Synthetic *a priori* - \(2 + 2 = 4\).
4. Synthetic *a posteriori* - All bodies are heavy.

In support of the view that no analytic *a posteriori* judgements are possible, Kant once again uses the judgement, "All bodies are extended," and argues that its contradiction, "Some bodies are not extended," is unacceptable, but not on the grounds of experience. This statement is unacceptable simply on the grounds that whilst we may, in imagination, remove all the empirical properties of a body, we are left with the space that it exists in, and this, Kant says, we cannot remove. In other words, spatial extension is a necessary feature of our concept of a body. For Kant, analytic and synthetic refer to relations of inclusion or extension (i.e., logical relations) between concepts related in a judgement, whereas *a priori* and *a posteriori* have to do with sources of modes of knowledge. Kant accepts both modes as equally valid, although differently