

J.F. Cooper, East European and African-American Intellectuals: Relativising Cultural Relativism

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Summary

The bulk of the article examines three cases of literary, intellectual, and cultural debate: the inter-racial implications of the "Leatherstocking" pentalogy (1823-1841) of J. Fenimore Cooper, the discussion inside the community of African-American intellectuals (late 19th to late 20th century) as to the best positioning of their ethnic community inside the surrounding ethno-cultural majority, and the debates (primarily on finding a "third way", a kind of mediation) of a small Eastern European society regarding its rapport to the dynamically evolving West.

These three examples (deliberately chosen so as to be totally different from one another in their sources and shapes) have much in common. They indicate that the differences between cultures and races are not absolute, but rather relative. They show convincingly that there are common human reactions to the process of "modernization" (rationalism, alienation, industrial urbanization, break-up of traditional bonds of kinship and community, etc.). Such reactions are not reduced to either recalcitrance and adversity, nor to mere enthusiastic approval. Most often they search for negotiated solutions of compromise: among the chief mediating forces are particularly those of aesthetic production and of religious faith.

Diversity and cultural relativism, the author concludes, can be beneficial energies, but only on the condition that they understand dialectically their own limitations and relativity. In this way we can hope for the gradual emergence of a new, more democratic, and broader kind of humanism. The careful study of past historical responses can be helpful in our grasp of current incertitudes and aporias.

Opsomming

Die artikel ondersoek hoofsaaklik drie voorbeelde van literêre, intellektuele en kulturele debat: die interrassige implikasies van die *Leatherstocking* pentalogie (1823-1841) van J. Fenimore Cooper, die bespreking in die binnekringe van die African-American intellektueles (laat 19e tot laat 20e eeu) oor die beste posisionering van hulle etniese gemeenskap binne die omringende etnies-kulturele meerderheid, en die debatte (primêr ingestel op die verkryging van 'n derde wyse as 'n soort bemiddeling) van 'n klein Oos-Europese gemeenskap rakende hulle rapport met die dinamies evoluerende weste.

Bogemelde drie voorbeelde (opsetlik gekies vir die feit dat hulle radikaal van mekaar verskil met betrekking tot herkoms sowel as formaat) het in werklikheid veel gemeen. Hulle dui aan dat verskille tussen kulture en rasse nie absoluut is nie, maar eerder as

relatief beskou moet word. Hulle bewys oteenseglik dat daar algemene menslike response is op die proses van modernisasie (rasionalisme, vervreemding, industriële verstedeliking, disintegrasie van tradisionele en gemeenskapsbande). Hierdie reaksies kan nie sondermeer afgemaak word as onwilligheid om verandering te aanvaar, of as vyandigheid nie. Nog minder kan dit gereduseer word tot geesdriftige goedkeuring. Merendeels konstitueer dergelike reaksies 'n soeke na onderhandelde kompromisoplossings waarvan die hoof versoeningsmagte uit estetiese produksie en godsdienstige geloof bestaan.

Die skrywer kom tot die slotsom dat diversiteit en kulturele relativisme as wedersyds voordelige energie beskou moet word, mits hulle beperkinge en relativisme dialekties verstaan word. Sodoende kan ons hoop op die geleidelike totstandkoming van 'n nuwe, meer demokratiese en omvangryker humanisme. 'n Deeglike studie van geskiedkundige response kan grootliks bydra tot ons eie insig in huidige onsekerhede en aporias.

I

In the following paper I will deal with two different, but related issues. First, I will argue that we cannot turn into a dogma the perception of separation between races and cultures. While differences are real enough, there are also large areas of commonality, which turn words such as "mankind" and "human nature" into reasonably operative tools, epistemologically weak, but by no means weaker than many others that we use all the time without compunction, such as "power", "gender", "society", "compassion", "environment", "peace", and many others. The second thing I will try to do is to point, albeit briefly, to a few of these commonalities that shrink cultural distances and tend to encourage a more positive view of a universal humanity. Among these are: (a) religious-ethical dimensions of human functioning; (b) the fact that and the way in which "modernization" created suffering and resentment among very different kinds of cultures; and (c) similarities in the dynamics of mediation in very different societies and cultures. I chose the novels of J.F. Cooper as an embodiment of wrestling with the issue of multiculturalism, the struggle of the Romanian intellectual community in the 19th and 20th centuries with the issue of modernization, as well as the dilemmas of the Afro-American intellectual community when faced with the matter of its most desirable positioning toward the Euro-American and North Atlantic culture surrounding and outnumbering it.

I realize that in a way I am writing against the grain. In North American cultural life a powerful system of cultural relativism has taken root, grounded in some local pragmatic traditions, but also drawing from more recent Western European theories of "deconstruction" and of left-oriented interpretations of the Nietzsche-Heidegger philosophical tradition. Separately taken, these ingredients are far from being as dogmatic and unilateral as their combined outcome is. Thus, American pragmatism, as expounded by

Peirce (and perhaps by Dewey also) seems fairly confident in its ability to predict results and provide guidelines for our functioning in the world, even if it eschews the metaphysical issues of ultimate realities. In turn, Heidegger, no less than Nietzsche or Schopenhauer, supported in no uncertain terms a number of values, both epistemological and axiological. Heidegger's relativism was accompanied by anxiety, not by exultance, Schopenhauer's by deep pessimism, and Nietzsche's explosions of joy are triggered, not by discoveries of relativity, but by the confidence in the affirmative force of subjective vitalism. Derrida and his followers never reach out toward extra-European categories and modes of thinking¹ and always remain squarely rooted inside Western horizons, as do, of course, the Nietzscheans or the pragmatists, up to and including Richard Rorty.

However, in their combination as understood and provided by its (mostly American) followers in literary criticism and in "cultural studies", the new cultural relativism seems unyielding, and mostly bent on undercutting Western certitudes, affirmations, modes of behaviour. (This is due, I am convinced, largely to a contamination with Marxist purposes and the substitution of epistemological intentions by socio-political aims and games.) Dogmatic nihilism in Europe and the United States thus inscribes itself in the family of levelling Utopianisms. It is the heir or ally of doctrines that have produced and justified totalitarian and destructive regimes in the 20th century. Nihilism, therefore, tends to diminish constructive productivity, as well as human difference, despite its claims to the contrary.

II

First a reminder about Eurocentrism. This is a phenomenon much more limited in time and scope than is generally believed. Western society unfolded a confidence in its prophetic mission on the planet and its inherent superiority to all other races and societies, past and present, chiefly in the 18th and 19th centuries. Up to the ages of Renaissance, exploration and discovery, Europeans were relatively modest. Gapes of admiration saluted the narratives of wealth, power, and achievement of Eastern empires, even when their possessions were impotently coveted. To take one example among many, any reader of the *Chanson de Roland* understands that compared with the sophisticated, cosmopolitan, world-wide Arabic civilization of the 8th and 9th centuries A.D., European Christendom was not more than a local peasant culture, tenaciously clinging to its own identity. Additionally, the Byzantine Empire of the same age was recognized as a more legitimate offspring of Graeco-Roman civilization than the West.

Likewise, after 1950, and despite the imperial might of the United States, it was increasingly clear that, shorn of their erstwhile colonial empires, humbled by the disastrous outcome of the "European Civil Wars" (as the two World Wars were sometimes called), subject to the vigorous competition of the alternative civilizations of Russia, and soon Eastern Asia, alert to the demographical imbalance (and gradually, also the economic surge) of the Southern hemisphere, the Europeans at least, could no longer offer themselves as the guiding light of the world.

However, in the centuries in-between and, as I have said, particularly in the 18th and 19th centuries, such doubts and reservations were exceedingly rare. Hegel's philosophy of history, in which Eastern and non-European cultures are described as just a prologue to the real history (that of the West), is one single example of what was generally taken for granted by authors ideologically as different as Bossuet and Gibbon, Dr Johnson and Voltaire, or scores of others. The comic, but deeply sincere exclamation of Montesquieu's Parisian gentlemen - "Comment peut-on être Persan?" - neatly summarizes a whole state of mind, for which even Eastern and Southern Europe, even the confines of Scotland and Ireland, were areas of questionable reality.

In the 18th and 19th centuries the issue was joined (on an ideological level) between a conservative position and a liberal-progressive one. The former proposed as a basic attitude toward the "outside world", a position of ironic indifference mixed with (occasional) careless brutality, a cruelly selfish, but not programmatically colonialist policy. The Left, by contrast, proposed conquest as the framework of systematic modification: a benign reformation through educational means, and an adaptation of the rest of the world to the modes of life and behaviour of Western culture. It cannot be repeated often enough that, contrary to the views of Edward Said (1978), Mary Louise Pratt (1992), Marianna Torgovnick (1990) and others, some of the worst forms of mental and physical oppression invented by the West, were but a consequence of high-minded progressive and Utopian purposes. By contrast, zoologists, linguists, pioneers in the discipline of comparative myths and religions, geographical travellers were not instruments of some evil master-plan, but, usually, sincere multiculturalists who tried to counteract universalist frameworks and local truths.

It is interesting to note this even in some cases when the ostensible purpose is the opposite. At one point, in his *Genië du christianisme* (1978), Chateaubriand offers a long list with the tables of commandments of some main religions. His intention is to show that the Ten Commandments received by Moses on Mount Sinai have considerably more emotional depth and subtlety than their equivalents in other religions. Ironically, Chateau-

briand manages to prove the opposite. The reader of today and, most likely, some of Chateaubriand's own contemporaries, must have been struck by the close *similarity* between the tables of moral laws of Islam, Hinduism, Zoroastrism, Ancient Greece and Rome, and others with those of Christianity and Judaism. As a matter of fact, by the middle of the next century, an unabashed apologist of Christianity such as C.S. Lewis (1947) was using similar comparisons in order to emphasize the common religious fund of humanity.

This example is not an isolated one. In fact, despite appearances and voluble arguments to the contrary, religious discourses proved their value as mediations between cultures. When Sir James Frazer (or others in the school of "Cambridge ritualists") painstakingly unearthed thematic similarities between Christian narratives and the body of extra-European myths and archetypes they did not so much undercut the former (though *this* may have been their purpose) as legitimize the latter, by pointing to ties with common experiences of mankind.²

Moreover, a centuries-old theological line inside Christianity (much favoured in the Renaissance, and no less in the 17th and even 18th centuries) held that we must account for two forms (or waves) of Divine Revelation. Only the second of these found its expression through the Scriptures. The first was natural creation, and simultaneously, the establishment of "natural" religions. The latter, the more liberal theologians insisted, should not be regarded as enemies, but rather as imperfect sketches of truths that the Scriptures could offer in a more complete and reliable version. Very often throughout the 16th-18th centuries missionary activities were accompanied by detailed studies of local cultures, and sometimes by attempts to devise genuine combinations between local traditions and the message of Christianity (North American and East Asian examples were often adduced). The most ambitious project of this kind ever designed must remain that of the Jesuit Matteo Ricci shortly before 1600,³ but there were other experiments of longer or shorter duration and scope.

Such initiatives did not really go against the innermost tendencies of Christianity, although historically, these had found themselves, as often as not, blocked by rigid and intolerant impulses. Part of the geohistorical success of Christianity over twenty centuries, was undoubtedly its willingness to engage in enculturation, in multiple hybrid combinations with local cultures, in a word, in its willingness to change and adapt. Examples are numerous, from Coptic Christianity to the Chaldean and Armenian variants, from Mormons and Quakers to the Starobryadtsy.

In an even broader sense the same expansion was based on metamorphosis, co-option and adaptation. Within two centuries or so of its founda-

tion, Christianity had changed from a small and somewhat cohesive branch of Judaism into a major, Mediterranean-wide and open kind of religion by absorbing, and adapting to, the prevalent Graeco-Roman religious and ideological idioms, as well as by other accretions. Again, beginning with A.D. 800-900, Christianity began to seek tenaciously a symbiosis with the barbarian Germanic and Slavic tribes, and not only changed accordingly, but responded by generating new branches of itself, usually referred to as "Eastern Orthodoxy" and "Protestantism". There are reasons to believe that, despite a certain sluggishness, something similar, establishing rapport with a new global situation, began around A.D. 1500-1600.

III

I will now move to my second argument: to the way in which a great variety of communities, and of individuals, responded to the global process of modernization. Despite bouts of ostensible enthusiasm, this response habitually included hostility. In the best cases we notice attempts to *mediate*, to find idioms, images, cognitive and social tools that would help people to effect the movement from a traditional, and, as most thought, natural or biological, system to the rationally controlled, transactive and negotiative one, which was expressed by "alienation" (i.e. a weakening or vanishing of community ties), to industrial urbanization, quantified and abstract values, intense self-consciousness, and scientific, technological, and economic achievement.⁴

True, this process began in North-western Europe and from there spread throughout the world. It is not correct, however, to describe it exclusively as a process of Western pressure *on* the rest of the world, as is usually done. The reason is that for many centuries "modernization" (to use the habitual short-hand term) was challenged, critiqued and even actively opposed in many parts of Europe, including the "core area" of Britain, France, the German-speaking lands, and Northern Italy. We know that for several centuries Scotland violently opposed its colonial inclusion in the capitalist system (what are Walter Scott's novels, but a belated dramatization of this recalcitrance?) Likewise, Ireland was an area that in some ways, even to this day, tried to oppose the very same modernization. Many of the vagaries and convulsions of French politics from the 17th to the 19th centuries, as well as part of the history of Northern France and of Germany as a whole, can be read in the same fashion. In Bavaria and Austria the growth of streamlining was encountered by sullen and persistent disagreement (Gottfried 1979). Bitter resentment confronted the modernizing process in

Provence, Bretagne, Sicily, let alone Eastern Europe. In fact, in the rural societies of Southern and Eastern Europe modernization had to take place primarily through imposition from above, by political-administrative means, rather than from "below" through economic growth (Gerschenkron 1966). The Southern states of the newly formed United States had to be subdued at the end of a bitterly fought and protracted war, with much bloodshed.

Only after the defeat of these oppositions can we begin to speak in earnest of massive shaping actions directed toward non-European areas. For what was often claimed and believed to be their own good, India, Mexico, Egypt, Japan, and scores of other nations with a proud past found themselves involved in an accelerated, truly global, evolution that was gaining a momentum of its own, beyond the intentions of its agents. This happened also because in European, as well as in non-European, areas there were social and intellectual forces at work that were persuaded of the superior merits and beneficial attractiveness of the new "progressive" order of things, and which actually encouraged and promoted it. While admittedly there was usually little choice, we are not wrong to speak about an "invited colonialism" in Eastern Europe, South America and other parts of the world.

What all these examples, and many others besides, indicate, is that in discussing these matters we tend to stumble upon a recurrent error. The process of modernization is all too often attributed to some kind of clever contraption by the "white" Northern societies and races to control the people of the Southern or Eastern hemispheres. In actuality, the same anxieties and animosities arose on all continents as soon as groups and individuals were obliged to face the reality of massive change.

Where does the erroneous explanation stem from? I think that we lay too many intentions and rational motivations at the door of, what seems to be, on the basis of solid and repeated evidence, mere evolution. No conspiratorial plan with clear aims has ever been unveiled behind what we conventionally call "invention" and "construction" of history. Mechanical applications of cause-effect relations lead us nowhere.⁵

On the other hand, these developments were modulated and qualified on an intellectual level. True, there also, many stark oppositions and approvals can be found, but these were accompanied by extremely detailed discussions in philosophical and literary, or openly political form, on the meaning of modernization and of our responses to it. We may wonder whether the abundant tradition of pastoral and later idyllic works from the Renaissance on, and all the way to the late 18th century, was not also fuelled by the resentment of agricultural societies that saw their mode of existence endangered. Be that as it may, there can be little doubt that much of the Romantic and modernist literature expressed the bewilderment and the

doubts of the authors, and certainly of their audience also, when faced with the implications of the modernizing process upon the human person.

Clearly, a good part of the Romantic debate indicated a conservative bent, and deep sorrow and anguish over the way rationalization was progressing. On the other hand, many other models, such as those devised by Goethe, Walter Scott, or Germaine de Staël were clearly intended to be experiments in moderation and taming for Europe itself and, by implication, for imagining complex bonds with the rest of the planet. Ultimately the whole modern theory of multiculturalism cannot be conceived without the impulses originating in the Romantic era.

Herder should be named here as a great turning point. While he did not deal specifically with extra-European matters, Herder enunciated the principles that *enable* us to discard rigidly unifying standard classical measurements and replace them with "Stimmen der Völker" - principles of individual and group identity, ethnic and cultural empowerments. While this was seen by some as a step toward relativity and a justification for fierce nationalism, Herder, in fact, cleared the road toward a new, more flexible, kind of accord between local and universal principles, one based on multiple bonds. We can be convinced that the Herderian revolution was helped along by audience acquaintance with Kant's epistemological principle of the *Ding-an-sich*: the postulate that an absolute reality could well survive even without a full cognitive grasp or a restless reduction to our theoretical categories.

In the light of this great double initiative, it becomes increasingly difficult to attribute imperialistic ulterior motives to Novalis's and Hölderlin's veneration of Indian Antiquity, to Schopenhauer's privileging of Buddhist religion as the one closest to the most convincing brand of philosophy, or to Goethe's choice of Persian poetry as paradigmatic for the most delicate balance between the spiritual and the earthy. Coleridge's selection of a Mongolian symbol for the human creativity, Shelley's resort to Islam, Byron's proposal of Middle Eastern culture as the realm of strongly profiled human energies, are equally telling.

I do not want to confine these mediating forces to literary humanism. In fact, it is interesting to note that in the emerging field of "political science" statal modalities were often discussed in terms of the *dialectics* of cultural relativity and cultural typology. Thus in the 17th and 18th centuries early practitioners such as Montesquieu (1748) and Volney (1791) engaged, albeit gingerly, in extra-European comparisons.⁶

Post-Herderian scholars of quite different orientations developed such comparatist positions in various ways. Oswald Spengler (whose work has been justly criticized for many ideological as well as professional reasons)

has the merit of having produced an imaginative system that discredits Eurocentrism. Spengler's system found ingenious ways to accord autonomous dignity to a great many non-European cultural systems, from Egyptian and Babylonian to Meso-American, and denied the Hegelian-Marxist monopoly of Europeanism in world history; it also provided significant parallels between various cultures and praised their achievements (Spengler 1980).

Looking at the other end of the ideological spectrum we can notice somebody like Andre Malraux whose general idea of the "imaginary museum", was that aesthetic principles and an enlightened taste can survive and overcome the frontiers of time and socio-cultural space. According to Malraux, a level can be established on which artistic works calling from vastly different backgrounds can coexist and even illuminate each other. Although this approach never enjoyed, to my knowledge, a systematic theoretical underpinning, it proved remarkably tenacious, from Goethe's *Weltliteratur* seen as a kind of Olympian gathering of all that is best in each society and tribe to the contemporary practices, unreflective perhaps, of the Nobel Prize Committees.⁷

We can conclude that, far from exercising a divisive and restrictive influence, the forces of literary aesthetics, as well as those of intellectual discussion, generally served more often than not as areas of experimentation and provided occasions for fruitful dialogue, for overcoming misreadings and for paving the way toward socio-political solutions in history. They helped to soothe the asperities of historical emancipation, and it is not their fault that they were not used more often or more efficiently.

IV

To summarize: In the previous section I have argued that the unfolding of modernization was, and remains, agonizing in the Northern, not less than in the Southern hemisphere, in communities of the most different cultural and racial origins. Let me now turn to some specific similarities encountered in literary and intellectual crystallizations of the dilemmas raised by modernizing pressures. A look at these examples shows that "cultural relativism" falls far short of the absolute explanatory power it claims for itself: we find deep and unintended analogies at work in the dynamics of this process. Common patterns in the management of suffering and doubt are readily discovered, in spite of the vast differences of external codification. Moreover, I hope to show convincingly, that the movement of relativity itself is the best countervailing force to the anguish of relativity.

The first example I chose is that of a small East-Central European culture,

the Romanian one, which underwent a revival and metamorphosis in the early 19th century precisely because of its contact with the rapidly modernizing West and with the debates raging there. The hot relevance of these debates and changes was doubly and triply acute for a community placed at the margins of this zone, a community that felt internal and external pressures to keep in pace with the more central areas that it both desired and feared to join. The ambivalence of the West itself, is another comprehensive subject that cannot be properly addressed here.

At the beginning of the 19th century, Romanian society, barely post-colonial, was only to some extent feudal, and more largely traditional/tribal/patriarchal. The preference for a modernizing evolution was confined to thin layers of informed and educated elites, who were persuaded that it was in the best interest of the community as a whole to adjust itself to changes that were deemed inevitable and unstoppable. In the 19th century, "conservatives" and "liberals" differed merely as to the *degree* and the *methods* to be used in order to attain the desirable goal of Westernization. Thus, whereas the revolutionaries of 1848, the historian Nicolae Bălcescu, the radicals Ion Brătianu and C.A. Rosetti, the essayist Mihail Kogălniceanu and others sought an accelerated and vigorously steered revamping of society, the moderate "Junimea" group, particularly its mentors Titu Maiorescu and Petre Carp from the 1860s on, argued that measures of change should be calibrated to local possibilities and resources. The former advocated wholesale importation of the West's legal patterns, intellectual values, and economic structures. The latter, equally cosmopolitan, wanted adaptation, rather than replication.

By the end of the 19th century, the situation was changed. As the country was actually caught up in the network of modernizing changes (urbanization and alienation being the expression of a contractual-type society), an increasingly large section of the intellectual and political elite rebelled against this process, and clamoured for the maintenance of, or return to, indigenous values and modes of life. Here too, the conflict between "Slavophiles" and "Westernizers", as launched in the Russia of the 1860s, was reproduced; it was the type of conflict that in just a few decades would shake Islamic, Hindu and other societies around the world. The indigenous nationalists, inspired by the political essays of the Romantic poet Mihai Eminescu (1850-1889) and energized by the historian and critic Nicolae Iorga (1871-1940), the poet Octavian Goga (1881-1938) and their "semanatorist" literary movement, argued that Romania's natural vocation was that of an agrarian society, imbued and directed by the rhythms of nature, inward-looking, religious, traditional, and satisfied with a subsistence economy. Calm wisdom, rather than curious inquiry, ethnic purity, rather

than cosmopolitan mixture, ought to be encouraged. Gradually, their lines of conflict became sharper, and the conflict became acrimonious. A native variant of fascism emerged after World War I, based on a kind of revolutionary mysticism. Meanwhile, thinkers such as Eugen Lovinescu (1881-1943), C.D. Zeletin (1882-1934) and others extolled the merits of a society aligned to Western progress.⁸

What is however truly interesting is that, between these two camps, we find a surprisingly large body of thinkers who tried to devise a "third way" and reflected on the inevitable negotiation involved in the transfer of values: what is lost and what is gained in the process of displacement from one order of human existence to the other (Hitchins 1994). They proposed solutions and compromises that they thought were acceptable, even when these could be appropriated for self-interested, and therefore distortive reasons by one of the extreme sides.

Thus, Lucian Blaga (1895-1961), primarily a poet and playwright, also developed a complex philosophical system, in which notes of relativity are clearly audible. Part of his system was a theory of culture in which he struggled to define some specific features of Romanian cultural identity starting from values embedded in folk poetry, e.g. the ballad "Miorița". According to Blaga, a characteristic "cultural matrix" for Romanian folk production is provided by a space feeling that is "undulating" in successions of ups and downs, corresponding to the natural landscape of hills and valleys from which it actually emerged. However, Blaga's essay on "Miori-tic space" (1944) was inscribed in a much more elaborate general theory of the stylistics of culture and religion, in which the specific identity of Romanians becomes merely a modest case among a whole generic multitude (Blaga 1944: 16).

Older than Blaga, C. Rădulescu-Motru (1868-1957) learned much from the 19th century moderate conservatives, the "Junimists". He composed a socio-psychology of the peasant world, which would not necessarily clash with the prescriptions of an urban or even cosmopolitan society.⁹ In an even more specific way, theories of this kind were articulated and transferred into practical blueprints by Virgil Madgearu (1887-1940), who was not only a professor of economics and sociology, but also, throughout the 1930s, the secretary-general of one of Romania's two most influential democratic parties, "the national-peasant" party. Madgearu proposed that capitalism be introduced sparingly in Romania, and combined with an encouragement of peasant co-operatives that would help preserve traditional households, modes of property, and values.

The greatest Romanian sociologist, Dimitrie Gusti (1880-1955) sought to devise his own formula for the combination of Western and local values. He

set up the creation of sociological teams, consisting of students, that would descend upon villages in different parts of the country and spend longer periods of time there, trying to gather exhaustive data on the anthropology, linguistic dialects, economic situation and standards of living, local politics, folklore and dress codes in the respective area. Gusti also co-ordinated and supervised a very comprehensive encyclopedia of Romanian geography, history, and culture. At the same time, Gusti was careful to keep his work in line with international methodologies and to position himself inside the international sociological community on a theoretical level.¹⁰

On a more purely literary level, examples of such "give-and-take" were more frequent and more obvious. The poetry of the above-mentioned Lucian Blaga is a good example: it is placed squarely in the formal and lyrical tradition of Expressionism, even though many of its motifs and topics are taken from the world of the Romanian village. Numerous contemporaries of his followed the same pattern, for instance, the poet Adrian Maniu (1891-1968). Tudor Vianu (1897-1964), one of the leading critics of his generation, wrote often and ably about Romanian literature, in fact, he was also the co-author of a history of Romanian literature, but he wrote deeply imbued with German and French philosophy and literary theory.¹¹

All the examples listed above have something in common. They represent the work of individuals who, no matter how different they were in their media of expression or in their ideological premises, were intensely aware of the recalcitrance to change of the socio-historical environment in which they were functioning. Nor were they ready to dismiss such a recalcitrance as simple reactionary inertia. They agreed that processes of emancipation and modernization could be very painful, brutal, and unattractive. They realized that, almost exactly as in ecological interventions, the dangers of losing something are as powerful and substantial as the chances of gaining something. The authors mentioned (and others in the area between the Oder and the Dnjester) were trying to establish a space of negotiation and profit analysis between the values of a rich and still viable past and the pressures and needs of advance. The Romanian case abounds in valuable intellectual suggestions of all kinds, even though it is not encouraging in practical results; management of ideas could very well go hand in hand with the mishandling of actual socio-economic affairs.

V

Let me now briefly survey the debates inside the African-American intellectual community during the last hundred years or so. Earlier debates had

used as primary medium a *religious* idiom. It would be fascinating to engage in the arduous process of retrieving and decoding these debates and the results would be, I believe, extremely rewarding. However, this is not the place for it. My point of departure is, that from the very beginning the intellectual voices of this ethnic and social community did not constitute a monolithic block, nor did they simply follow lines traced out by the liberal Left, as is sometimes believed.

For evidence, it is enough to look contrastively at two of the founding figures of modern African-American self-searching, namely Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois, who both enjoyed prominence and respect in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, beyond the boundaries of their community.¹²

On the surface, the polemic between these two great figures circles around practical matters: the type of education most suitable for the full emancipation and assertion of the African-Americans in a predominantly Euro-American society. Booker T. Washington militantly promoted a practical-utilitarian education for his community, while W.E.B. DuBois eloquently proclaimed the need for a general *college* education that would provide leadership, and for organization at all levels (Harris 1991).¹³

The palimpsest inscribed in their texts offers an additional (and fundamental) difference: B.T. Washington argued for a thorough *integration* of African-Americans in Western society, while W.E.B. DuBois was more emphatic on the identity and self-reliance of their community.¹⁴ This distinction is as crucial as it is simplifying. W.E.B. DuBois's increasing inclination toward socialism and communism as he was ageing can well be read as the gesture of one reaching out toward bonds that transcend racial lines; the distinction between himself and his influential contemporary, the radical nationalist Marcus Garvey, is obvious. By the same token, there are enough passages in Booker T. Washington's work that indicate that he tried not to ignore distinctions between racial modes of existence. Nevertheless, it is not absurd to detect here analogies to the "Slavophile" versus "Westernizing" distinction in Eastern Europe.

The game was played out more fully a generation later (W.E.B. DuBois was still living) during what still remains the high point of African-American cultural achievement: the Harlem Renaissance. The abundance and diversity of figures in music, the arts, and literature *expresses*, I am sure, a struggle for inventing an acceptable and original mode of positioning in which identity could be preserved without loss of dignity, but also without losing the benefits of adherence to the modernization process.

The writings of the most prominent representatives of the Harlem Renaissance are a testimony to this. Wallace Thurman consistently used an ironic

mode when recording the atmosphere and figures of the time and place, particularly in his 1932 novel, *Infants of the Spring*. Langston Hughes and Claude McKay zigzagged ideologically from right to left and back; both were basically Expressionists who could write in ways close to a "national" Afro-American mode, as well as step outside ethnic status. Even more characteristically, Jean Toomer (perhaps the most talented of the group) cultivated a deep-seated ambiguity as to his own definition, somewhere between "white" and "black"; he, as well as Nella Larsen, extended this all the way to their own physical definition, on the basis of either skin complexion or ancestry.¹⁵

The echoes of the fascinating and passionate experiments of the Harlem Renaissance are still heard and are still enhanced and diversified. A major contemporary novelist like Charles Johnson describes himself as an American writer who happens to be of African ancestry. Most contemporary intellectuals (whether Afrocentric or not) could be seen as descendants of W.E.B. DuBois (Henry Gates, Houston Baker, Cornel West and others), but the other side (Thomas Sowell, Glenn Loury, Walter Williams, Shelby Steele etc.) is also rich in representatives. One might debate interestingly whether some of the great musicians of "big band" jazz, or even "rock" and "rap", did not engage in a kind of "reverse colonization" by stamping indelibly upon Euro-American musical styles, and popular imagination, the sounds and forms of an African tradition.

Perhaps many of the possible similarities above can be seen as mere broad analogies. Additionally, more specific cross-references can be pointed out sometimes. One of these must be the work of Houston Baker, whose most original theoretical contribution has to do with the specific ways in which African-American literature manifested itself. According to Baker (1984), early on in African-American history a "matrix" was formed which thereafter constrained, guided, and informed any representative writing by African-Americans. He regards this matrix as "semantic" ("symbolically anthropological") rather than material, even though an ultimate socio-economic determination is acknowledged.

The blues are a synthesis Combining work songs, group seculars, field hollers, sacred harmonies, proverbial wisdom, folk philosophy, political commentary, ribald humor, elegiac lament ... they constitute an amalgam ... always ... shaping, transforming, displacing the peculiar experiences of Africans in the New World.
(Baker 1984: 1-14)

This matrix ("a vibrant network", "fossil" or "trace") is later recognizable, as Baker demonstrates, in writings by Frederick Douglass, Paul Dunbar, Zora Neale Hurston, Richard Wright, Amiri Baraka, Toni Morrison (Baker

1984). This fascinating attempt to define the creative cultural identity of a group resembles many similar Eastern European attempts, and most specifically the above-mentioned one by Blaga (1944). Despite differences in sources (Foucault versus Spengler) and concepts, both authors postulate a kind of structured socio-cultural subconscious that channels in specific ways the values of cultural producers functioning *much later* than the time the guiding paradigm is born. Both insist that there is something "irreducible" and recognizable in the cultural output of African-American, or, respectively Romanian writers.

VI

My third and last example is taken from the early 19th century: I will refer to the masterpiece of James Fenimore Cooper, the five-volume sequence of the *Leatherstocking* narratives. Let me say right away that, far from dismissing Cooper as a mere author of childish adventure, I place him among the most serious thinkers of the period, in the same category with Chateaubriand, Sir Walter Scott, Germaine de Staël, even Goethe - for the extent to which he, like these, detected early on, and confronted with gravity and responsibility, the oncoming changes. Cooper, even more than the enumerated contemporaries, reflected on the issue of what we nowadays call multiculturalism and the place of relativity in human culture, at the level of the individual no less than at that of the group. He had serious doubts about a centralized course of human history culminating in an unquestioning or absolutely general adoption of Western models. Like other leading minds of his age, Cooper succeeded in escaping the passive and frightened contemplation of alienation. Instead, he tried to dramatize and to test out in his novels acceptable models of dialectic interpenetration of cultures.¹⁶

Although in the 20th century racial-cultural polarizations in North America are seen in the binary system of European versus African modes, it should not be forgotten that for two or even three centuries earlier the polarization was entirely different: newcomer versus original inhabitants, or European versus Amerindian. The enormous mass of anthropological and religious explanations and disagreements aired and published around this issue, particularly in Spanish and in English cannot be touched upon here; suffice it to say that it proves, once again, that positions were not monolithic, but rather covered a broad spectrum, from justification to utter blame. After gaining independence, the newly constituted "United States" were faced with the hard and delicate decision of whether they represented the past (and continuity), or whether they opted for a radically different future.

As we know, the American choice went in favour of the future, but this was not always the case. The philosophical musings incorporated in the work of Thomas Cole, perhaps the greatest Romantic artist in early America, show us a pessimistic spirit deeply preoccupied with the origin, the further course, the inevitable decline of any civilization.¹⁷ Cooper falls within the same category: one that is solidary with a state of mind in which American optimism, confidence, and sense of mission were not yet indisputable dogmas.

VII

At the same time, there is another curious aspect that ties Cooper to the preceding considerations. I refer to the extraordinary and enduring success of James Fenimore Cooper's novels (specifically the *Leatherstocking* pentalogy) in Central and Eastern Europe. True, Cooper enjoyed much success in America itself and throughout Europe, and a great part of it can be easily explained: it was due to the subject matter itself, the suspense and the adventure (commodities much sought after in the later 18th and early 19th centuries on the European market), and it had much to do with the "exotic" material, the descriptions of unknown faces of nature, and of alien races and customs.

Exotic and alien? I would argue exactly the opposite. Whoever has read the prose of Sergey Aksakov in his trilogy of memories, and above all its first volume, cannot but have remarked the similarities of experience and of conflictual framework between the Bashkir and Chuvash natives and the Russian settlers, as parallel to experiences in the forests and on the prairies of America as evoked by Fenimore Cooper. Similar encounters have been suggested between Russian expansion and the Caucasian ethnic groups by Lermontov and Pushkin.¹⁸ A certain narrative tradition with its typologies (sometimes clichés) had been formed in the wake of Walter Scott and Chateaubriand and it proved serviceable to a vast range of ethnic/social dichotomies. Therefore, in an important sense, Cooper was addressing not the exotic and the alien, but the familiar and the predictable. However, we can look for even deeper ties of kinship.

The dilemma facing the incoming population when confronted with the aboriginal nomads of North America was, in the "ideological" subconscious of the East Europeans bound to their own by a rich web of oppositions and of homologies. Cooper's Amerindians, no less than his Euro-Americans, hover uncertainly between extreme youth and old age. The "redskins" are clearly "old" by virtue of their longstanding possession of the land, no less

than by their preservation of uninterrupted tradition and by their organic connection with nature. They have remained "young" through their lack of sophistication, or, better said, through their avoidance of civilizational complication, and through their refusal of intellectual self-consciousness. In turn, the incoming "whites" are "old" insofar as they carry in their baggage the commands and habits of many hundreds of years of cultural history, and insofar as a deep divide separates their intellect from natural apprehension.¹⁹ They are, nevertheless, "young" in their willingness to renew themselves, to start all over again, to strip themselves bare and begin to build new homesteads for their families.

A second dilemma faces the characters in Cooper's *Leatherstocking* novels. How do the encountering races respond to each other on a practical and, no less important, on an emotional level? Should the main tone of their affect, the *basso continuo* be one of adversity, resentment, and hatred? Should it be one of admiration and mutual learning? Should (or could!) it be one of neutral, if possible, respectful coexistence, one possible in a vast land? These are questions that, as we will see in the novels, continuously preoccupy the members of both ethnic groups.

In my opinion, many East-Central Europeans believed that these novels were mirror-images of their own situation. Like the Amerindians, they could argue that they were the original owners of ancestral lands that had become the prey of invading and uninvited newcomers. Like the Amerindians, albeit with more self-consciousness, they claimed special bonds with the land on which they lived, and with nature in general. Again, like Cooper's Amerindians, they could point to age-old customs, songs, habits, and to a tribal, even "savage", structure and mode of life. On the other hand, like the incoming colonizers, many of these ethnic groups (Czech, Hungarian, Polish, Romanian, South Slavic and others) were convinced that theirs was now a "second chance," a moment of rebirth or of awakening after a long winter sleep imposed by evil enchanters. Like the settlers, these populations looked towards a shedding of cultural baggage and a new beginning, in pristine freshness. To add another layer of complicating irony to these readerly contradictions, it seemed for many in the striving political-intellectual elites that the "national renaissance" to which they aspired, would be nothing more nor less than a kind of catching up with the Western models and evolutions. However, these very Western patterns served as a contrastive referential level to the self-definition of the local identities that were supposed to be preserved and revived. In this way, too, an interface was discovered that resembled the Amerindian/settler dilemmas. Attraction to, and emancipation from each other, is how Cooper constructs the relationship between the two races and cultures - and that is exactly the relation-

ship forged by the local elites of East-Central Europe and their authoritative Western models.²⁰

VIII

In *The Pioneers, or The Sources of the Susquehanna* (Cooper 1980)²¹ - the fourth volume of the *Leatherstocking* saga (the action is placed in 1793), but the first penned by Cooper, in 1823 - Cooper (1980) shows himself already fully obsessed with the theme of the mutual critique of cultural entities and of their coexistence in the same framework of time and space. The whole novel is a quest and battle for true and moral property, for legitimacy, and cultural identity. Oliver Edwards, the grandson of Major Effingham, acts until the very few last pages of the novel as a Native Amerindian, with the proud resentment and chivalrous sensitivity of one hostile to an imported modern civilization that supersedes a natural and organic way of life that had grown for many centuries on the soil of America.

The young man has taken on the appearance of Native Americans both physically and in his life-style, an issue touched upon, among others, by Mr Grant, the pastor (Cooper 1980: 135-136). His ambiguous words, expressing, as the reader finds out in the end, muted anger against the dispossession of his still living grandfather, seem to suggest a rebellion against the order of things installed by the European and Christian "pioneers". (Major Effingham had been adopted as an honorary member of the Delaware tribe (p. 421).)

Moreover, Oliver Edwards is reinforced in the social role of spokesman for the oldest and most basic cultural stratum of the continent, by his association with the two old men who represent the second oldest historical phase being the one subtly recommended and morally preferred by the author, at least at the level of nostalgia; a phase of merger and interpenetration of races and cultures. The men are Natty Bumpo and John Mohegan who can both stand as examples of the possibility of such a peaceful coupling of cultural systems.

John Mohegan is actually Chingachgook, an enormously powerful and celebrated leader of his tribe several decades before, who now lives in a marginal and poverty-stricken position in a European society that barely tolerates him. He has converted to Christianity and has relinquished the traditional dress of his ancestors. He seems basically resigned, but Cooper emphasizes a continuing pride and dignity that endows him with the aura, and perhaps the values, of a European aristocracy so conspicuously absent among the settlers.

His forehead, when it could be seen, appeared lofty, broad, and noble. His nose was high, and of the kind called Roman, with nostrils that expanded, in his seventieth year, with the freedom that had distinguished them in youth. His mouth ... (d)iscovered a set of short, strong, and regular teeth The eyes were not large, but their black orbs glittered ... like two balls of fire As he walked slowly down the long hall, the dignified and deliberate tread of the Indian surprised the spectators.

(Cooper 1980: 81-82)

Elsewhere we are told of "ordinary composure", "fierce and determined looks" and (again) "dignity" (p. 132).

Natty Bumppo in turn, though a white European, is seen as one who has grown up and lived his whole life among the legitimate owners of the continent. Without completely denying his own descent, Natty has adapted to the way of life and thinking (even to the way of dressing and of gaining his livelihood) of the Amerindians. The "deerskin moccasins" and "leathern pouch" and "foxskin cap" (1980: 20-21), were to become commonplaces of universally adopted iconography, but, more significantly, we are told that "his face was skinny and thin almost to emaciation The cold and exposure had, together given it a color of uniform red" (pp. 20-21). He does not hesitate to speak up for rights alternative to the levelling laws increasingly being imposed by the new order, even to stand up and suffer for his faith in such an alternative that he considers closer to natural and divine law.

Cooper repeatedly resorts to a kind of symbolic ecology in order to reinforce the alternative validity of this "remnant":

Although poplars had been brought from Europe to ornament the grounds, and willows and other trees were gradually springing up nigh the dwelling, yet many a pile of snow betrayed the presence of the stump of a pine; and even in one or two instances, unsightly remnants of trees that had been partly destroyed by fire were seen rearing their black, glistening columns twenty or thirty feet (t)he ruin of a pine or a hemlock that had been stripped of its bark ... waved in melancholy grandeur its naked limbs to the blast, a skeleton of its former glory.

(Cooper 1980: 42)

The society of the settlers is not being demonized. It is in its turn organic and cosy (as seen in the description of the colonial Christmas banquet in chapter IX, pp. 102-104), engaged in peaceful and productive work. Its leaders, in particular Judge Marmaduke Temple, are fair and benevolent. Its foibles are laughed at benignantly: the clumsy attempts at institution-building are described in humorous detail, as well as the comic lack of professionalism of early medicine (chapter VI on "Dr." Elnathan Todd), of academic life (pp. 94-97), of a judiciary system (chapter 33, pp. 341-355)

and especially of architecture (pp. 95-96, 39-41).

In fact, the incongruous artificiality and the ridiculous pretensions of the latter, are particularly highlighted. This ties in neatly with the character of Richard Jones, the squire-judge's cousin, the most aggressive modernizer, a man filled with racial hatred (1980: 106), one whose attitudes toward the environment highly irritate even his cousin (pp. 100-101), and one who is most cruel and relentless in his pursuit of Leatherstocking whose arrest and trial he instigated.

The malicious character of the architect is exceptional for Cooper. The overwhelming majority of the other settlers are depicted as laid-back, bumbling, and good-natured. They also suggest the beginnings of the melting pot, insofar as they include French, German, Welsh and other individuals, depicted with kindly emphasis on their peculiarities and imperfections. Their conflict with the surviving interracial and multicultural society of the "intermediate age" is, according to Cooper, one objectively, though tragically, driven by the forces of property and the clash of alternative civilizational models.

In two separate novels *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826; the action is placed in c. 1758), and *The Pathfinder* (1840; the action is placed in c. 1760), Cooper builds up the character of Leatherstocking by explaining his assumptions and by examining his actual interaction with Native Americans in a place and at a time when the latter and their way of life had not yet been routed or liquidated. The angles are multiple, and they include gender and sexual issues, although just delicately and allusively. Thus, in the *Pathfinder* (1980) two determined and resourceful women of different races, develop a close alliance and help each other in ways that clearly transcend the usual racial oppositions. The characters are Mabel and June, the wife of Arrowhead, chief of the Tuscaroras (chapters 22, 23 and elsewhere).

Even more strikingly, the central theme of *The Last of the Mohicans* (Cooper 1989) is that of Uncas and Cora's sexual love cutting across racial-cultural lines. Significantly in both novels these relations end in failure. Thus Uncas perishes in battle, the friendship of Mabel/Agnes and June will be interrupted. Moreover, the actual attraction of Mabel to Nathaniel, then at the height of his professional, sexual and one might say, ideological powers, leads to nothing: she will marry Jasper and return to New York to lead a life of contented affluence. Already the very young Deerslayer can be heard saying: "As for me, I have no offspring, and I want no wife" (1989: 458) when the young widow Sumach proposes marriage to save him from torture and death at the hand of his Huron captors. Deerslayer similarly declines Judith's advances in the same novel. In the *Last of the Mohicans* Bumpo's mulish sterility is further affirmed and deepened.

This is one of the key signals Cooper sends to the reader. The pairing of races and cultures as attempted by Chingachgook and Leatherstocking is hybrid and must remain without issue. No fertility is attached to it. To Cooper this is clearly neither a matter for rejoicing, nor of cold pragmatic observation. On the contrary, the whole tragic aura attached to the figure of Natty Bumppo is, there can be no doubt about it, derived from his loneliness and infertility, from the failure of his intercultural and interracial project.

Is Cooper able to suggest any solution? Actually, there is much openness in the cycle, since it can be said to be endowed with two different conclusions. One is expressed in the chronologically final piece, *The Prairie* (1980) (1827; action placed c. 1805) when the venerably old Bumppo becomes one with the landscape, identifies with the land itself, in a sense *melts* in or with it. Character, no less than author, thereby turns a defeat into victory: actual/concrete children would have had less power of generalization and less symbolic universality than a Wordsworthian metamorphosis: "Rolled round in earth's diurnal course, //With rocks, and stones, and trees".

Still, as if sensing that this process might be interpreted as something of an escape into abstraction, Cooper also provided us with an alternative ending, at the very end of his life. Indeed that is when *The Deerslayer, or the First Warpath* appeared (1841; action placed c. 1746), but the novel's topic is the very formation of Leatherstocking and his earliest options. Cooper examines minutely, insistently the concept of "gifts". The term recurs incessantly, almost morbidly, throughout the novel, i.e. the features and habits inherent to the different races and cultures trying to find, not only respect for their differences, but also common denominators. Deerslayer (young in age, but old-fashioned in word and deed) explains to Judith the distinction between "nature" and "gifts" in the following fashion:

A natur' is the creatur' itself; its wishes, wants, ideas, and feelin's, as all are born in him. This natur' never can be changed in the main, though it may undergo some increase or lessening. Now, gifts come of circumstances. Thus, if you put a man in a town, he gets town gifts; in a settlement, settlement gifts; in a forest, gifts of the woods All these increase and strengthen until they get to fortify natur' as it might be, and excuse a thousand acts and idees. Still, the creatur' is the same at the bottom Herein lies the apology for gifts; seein' that you expect different conduct from one in silks and satins than from one in homespun; though the Lord, who didn't make the dresses, but who made the creatur's themselves, looks only at his own work.

(Cooper 1981: 403-4)

The important thing is to realize that this theory is but an extended gloss on a short previous statement of his: "You find different colors on 'arth, as one may see, but you don't find different natur's. Different gifts, but only one natur'" (p. 403). Translated in contemporary terminology, racial distinctions are socio-historical constructs of coercive determinative force; they guide and limit human behaviour; nevertheless they are not, according to Feni-more Cooper and his main character, truly ultimates. Rather this ultimate is attributed to the relationship between creative Divine Providence and the individual human person, which in turn is part of a common fund of human substance.

The theory is, needless to say, not original with Cooper; we are less interested here in its sources, or in what might be considered at the end of the 20th century its share of truth. What is important is Cooper's obvious compelling need to articulate some kind of dialectic between stable continuity and relativity, between the claims of the specifically local and those of universal common bonds. Deerslayer's long speech comes in the midst of highly dangerous circumstances in which he might be excused for a hardening of his feelings toward Amerindians. On the contrary, he takes a clear position against the views of characters such as "Hurry" March or Tom Hutter who are much closer to the coming phase of racist negation of otherness. Nathaniel repeatedly emphasizes the varying "gifts" of the different Indian nations. In turn Cooper peppers the text with affirmations such as: "a woman is a woman, let her color be white or red; and your chiefs know little of a woman's heart" (1981: 359), as well as with gestures of moral rectitude and integrity distributed across cultural lines (as are gestures of aggression and ruthlessness).

IX

The double conclusion of the *Leatherstocking* saga expresses early on the polar dialectic that was soon to beset not only any theory of multiculturalism, but in fact also many socio-political actions aimed at solutioning multiracial issues. I refer to the polar opposition between the need for integration and the need for distinction (or specificity). These issues are undoubtedly part of the (as yet unhealed) agony of modernization. As may have been noticed, I have treated in the previous sections of this essay ethnic/racial tensions as a kind of expression (phenomenal) or mediation of the movement toward streamlined and rationalized modernity. The topics of Cooper's novels provide, I am convinced, an appropriate parallel to the debates inside the Eastern European and African-American communities.

What else do the examples above have in common and what do they prove in terms of relativity? In all of them we recognize a recognition of *difficulty*. Far from being a primarily joyful process of long-awaited liberation, progress (any progress), is a tough and tortured experience of advance, sometimes triggered from the outside, always controversial, accompanied by doubt, hesitation, and backsliding. The categories of power and control, as promoted by Foucault and the post-Marxists, explain little and obscure much of what was (and is) going on in reality. The most common effect encountered on all continents and in all cultures is, in the face of modernizing progress, neither enthusiastic approval, nor gloomy reaction, but rather the feeling of *reluctance*, the instinct of reflective delay.

The best thinkers of different communities have engaged in a complicated dialectic of cost-benefit analysis once they tackled the issue of historical evolution. They tried to weigh suffering against need and hope. Circumstances perceived as inevitable (or overwhelmingly powerful) were turned into challenges to a given community for which adequate responses had to be sought. Discourses, concepts and images for adaptation and assimilation were devised. The impulse to insert kinds of preservation (of tradition and identity) into an ongoing process proved to be irresistible. These efforts resulted in something: newly available and incessantly emerging resources, e.g. modes of "complexification", a deepening of the territory of moderation, more subtle engagements with reality. (Whether and how such resources are being used remains an entirely separate problem.)

X

My conclusions are as follows. Multicultural theories and practices as expanded after the 18th century are a response to the objective process of modernization. They try to counteract it by erecting their own kind of dogmatism: that of absolute separation of cultures and communities, often on racial/ethnic bases. Often this becomes a kind of oppressive relativism. Can this oppressiveness be eliminated while at the same time answering the valid concerns for identity and locality which gave rise to it? My own answers as presented above resemble, let us say, the shape of a double helix.

I recognize an evolutionary process of streamlining and global unification, and acknowledge at the same time the impetuous growth of a theory of cultural relativism that opposes it, but is not without a globalist and coercive potential of its own. I argue at the same time that the best way in which some kind of grotesque alliance between the two can be avoided is by deep-

ening the foundations of both. By looking at the very process of *response* to the pressures of modernization and globalization, we discover a commonality of reactive dynamics. Since these are clearly not an imitation of one another we deduce that they correspond to dimensions of human nature.

We thus begin to outline the bare sketches of a new kind of humanism, based on the admission that while cultural relativism has true validity, it is itself no less relative than other realities relativized by it. Precisely the idioms of literature and of religion are among the best instruments that can be adopted when we sketch out the kind of universalist approximations that emerge (almost by default) as we concede the shortcomings of cultural relativism.²²

Notes

1. To bring an *ad hominem* argument: in the 1980s Derrida led the unionized professorial struggle against cuts in the budget for philosophy departments, that were considered redundant or irrelevant by administrative authorities. Governmental justification had been drawn not last from Derrida's own deconstruction of philosophy.
2. James Frazer (1890), (*The Golden Bough*, London: Macmillan, 1911-1915, 12 vols.), as well as the whole group of "Cambridge ritualists" contemporary with him in the first half of the century. It is worth noting that this attitude was widespread in a discipline where major figures such as Joseph Campbell, Karl Kerényi, or Mircea Eliade did not adhere to Christianity with any firmness. It is also intriguing to note that even the most zealous of Christian militants (in the Middle Ages and later) were less incensed against religions that had *preceded* the Gospels than against deviances posterior to Jesus' ministry (or to the way it was interpreted by His institutionalized successors).
3. The Jesuit Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) developed a theory of Confucianism as a system related to Christianity, and, in practical terms exerted much influence among Chinese elites by his skilful invention of rites adapted to local traditions. Simultaneously attempts were made (less in the theoretical field, more in that of ritual change) for approaches to Hindu and Shinto religions. Finally the Jesuit experiment in Paraguay deserves renewed full consideration. These are just a few examples.
4. Karl Polanyi (1944) and Ernst Gellner (1988) all derived, directly or indirectly from Max Weber's *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus* (1904-5) and a follow-up essay on Protestant sects (1905-6).
5. Cf. the essay on unanticipated consequences in Robert Merton (1976).

6. Montesquieu (*L'Esprit des Lois* [1748] 1949) & Volney (*Les ruines, ou meditations sur les revolutions des empires* 1791) definitely has a comparatist orientation also and was very influential for many decades.
7. Andre Malraux (1952-1954). Goethe used the term *Weltliteratur* first, to our knowledge, in his conversations with Eckermann (January 1827 and, again, in more detail, July 15, 1827). As to the choices of the Nobel Prize Committee in the last 20-30 years, they included Japanese and Nigerian, Bosnian and Czech, Egyptian and African-American authors, along with the more habitual English, Spanish, Italian or Russian names.
8. It is not easy in these circumstances to apply the usual categories of "right" and "left". The nationalist "Iron Guard" or "Legion" often used leftist egalitarian rhetoric; the establishment and pro-Western Liberal Party (between the two World Wars) was supportive of vested interests and property rights. In Central and Latin America "charismatic" features were attached to leftist groups such as the "Sandinistas" or the Castro/Guevara faction - yet their programmes and modes of operation were surprisingly close to those of the extreme right in Romania or Hungary. Both groups wanted to block by sheer force and Utopian idealism the advance of what they dubbed "capitalism" and what was in fact simply the progress of history. See also Weber (1965) and Hitchins (1994).
9. As I wrote above, it is interesting to note how, in these circumstances, certain themes and social choices run athwart the conventional left/right divisions. Even though Rădulescu-Motru was a moderate conservative himself, his theory of peasant society and psychology overlaps to a good extent with that of some of his contemporaries who were of decidedly centre-left orientation (e.g. Garabet Ibrăileanu and Constantin Stere, in fact the whole *Viața Românească* group, which started before World War I and continued in different ways until the late 1930s).
10. Gusti and his followers organized "Muzeul Satului", a very complex reconstitution (at the outskirts of the capital city of Romania) of a "village" formed out of dozens of specific traditional houses from all parts of the country with their wealth of differences: household objects, artistic forms etc.
11. Tudor Vianu, *Influenta lui Hegel in cultura romana* (1933); *Idealul clasic al omului* (1934); *Estetica* (1934-1936); *Arta prozatorilor romani* (1941).
12. It would be even more interesting to thicken the complexity of the analysis by drawing in authors of the Euro-American South of the same period (1850-1950). Eugene Genovese (1994) showed how the negativity of the modern advance (usually called "capitalism") produced in that part of North America a respectable body of conservative thought which aimed for a defence of "Southern way of life" as a kind of viable alternative organicism against capitalist and industrial

modernity. Earnestly thoughtful and subtly nuanced responses were offered by the Southern intellectuals known as the "Fugitives" or the "New Critics", as well as by an impressive number of major novelists, including William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, and Walker Percy. Despite absolutely major differences, their kind of *problematization* outlines a common ground between them and the debaters of the African-American intellectual world.

13. For usually less than sympathetic, but thorough treatments of the subject cf. Mathews (1948) or Thornbrough (1969).
14. This general description is very widely accepted (barring slight qualifications from one commentator to the other). Supporting materials in Paschal (1971), Aptheker (1982, 1986). See also Andrews (1985); Rudwick (1969) and particularly the admirable Arnold Rampersad (1990). As to the marginal but real contribution of W.E.B. DuBois to Afrocentrism, see the masterful assessment of Gerald Early (1995).
15. I do not agree with the position of Robert Coles and Diane Isaacs that the Harlem Renaissance was a kind of "therapeutic effort": cf. Singh, Shiver & Brodwin (1989). See rather Wintz (1988) or De Jongh (1990); or, as a kind of introduction, Andrews (1994).
16. Perhaps it is not futile to remind the reader that J.F. Cooper (1838) actually wrote a rather large number of meritorious small political essays, moderately conservative in tone, though critical of (Jacksonian) democracy.
17. I refer specifically to the four-painting cycle "The Course of Empire" (1836), but the actual painting entitled *The Last of the Mohicans* is also significant. Both topics (similarity with Cooper, and scepticism toward human growth as mere "vanity") have been often visited. See for instance Ringe (1958), Wallach (1968). A short general assessment in Baigell (1981).
18. Sergei Aksakov, *Years of Childhood* (1858; Oxford: Oxford U.P. World Classics, 1983), transl. J.D. Duff, pp. 21-25, 40-44, 76-7, 92-3, 97-8, 107, 119, 143-4. The action is placed in the 1790s in the district of Orenburg and is unapologetic in its embrace of the Russian settlers' point of view. In the same sense Peter Scotto. The issue of the specific Russo-Asian colonial interaction was signalled in literary writing early in the 19th century, for instance by the best-selling Sophie Cottin (*Elisabeth, ou les exiles de Sibirie*, in 1806) or Xavier de Maistre (in *La jeune siberienne*, 1815 or *Les prisonniers du Caucase*, also 1815).
19. All sides may be said to beholden to the first of Wordsworth's two modes of vision, the pre-lapsarian one: "Whither is fled the visionary gleam? //Where is it now, the glory and the dream?" (ll. 56-57 of the Ode "Intimations of Immortality").

20. Incidentally, it may be worth mentioning that this inherent original contradiction was to have later results of a dangerous and destructive nature, in the 20th century, continued to this day by the theorizing of interethnic conflict, recurrent revivals of right-wing extremism, and of de-Westernizing attempts.
21. For quotation purposes I will use the handy paperback editions, as follows: *Deerslayer* (Bantam 1981); *The Last of the Mohicans* (Bantam 1989); *The Pathfinder* (Signet 1980); *The Pioneers* (Signet 1980); *The Prairie* (Signet 1980).
22. Approximately 60% of this article coincides with Virgil Nemoianu, "The Dialectics of Diversity from eastern Europe to J.F. Cooper" being published in *Arcadia* (Tubingen). The latter essay is shorter, it omits detailed references to the experience of African-American intellectuals, as well as a number of theoretical comments; on the other hand it goes into more detail on the works of James F. Cooper. The difference in the title also indicates clearly a certain difference in critical emphasis.

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