

## MODES OF CROSS-CULTURAL ENCOUNTER

### Reflections on 1492

Just a short while ago, the Western world celebrated the quincentennial of the discovery of America. In many places, public ceremonies were conducted to commemorate a remarkable feat in Western history: the fact that (as the saying goes) in 1492 “Columbus sailed the ocean blue.” Irrespective of the manifest intent of public celebrations, the latter event is properly momentous because it signals a turning point in the history of the West: a turning from an age of relative containment or self-confinement to an era of expansion, outreach, and unlimited exploration. The “Old World” at this point gave birth and extended itself into the “New World,” which is only a stand-in for a series of new worlds and an infinite horizon of new frontiers. As a contemporary of Copernicus, Columbus exemplifies the Renaissance spirit of his time: the spirit of inquiry, of human self-reliance and critical defiance of customs. But his exploits also foreshadow a longer-range trajectory: by emphasizing inquiry and human autonomy, the “age of discovery” paves the way to the Reformation and the age of the Enlightenment and, still later, to the industrial and technological revolutions of modernity. As members of modern Western civilization, we all are heirs and beneficiaries of this historical trajectory and ultimately of Columbus’s voyage. How can we fail to appreciate and be impressed by his journey—its daring, its sense of inquisitiveness, its technical know-how, and its sheer bravado?

Yet, as we realize, this is only part of the story. Columbus’s voyage is not only historically momentous but also thought provoking—in the sense of being troubling or giving us pause to think. The story of human progress and rational emancipation is offset or counter-balanced by a radically different narrative: a narrative of domination, exploitation, and extermination, and the two stories (we vaguely sense) are not accidentally correlated. In the midst of commemorating Columbus’s voyage, we are haunted by a dark sense of guilt and complicity: complicity in one of the most horrendous episodes of genocide in human history. We know today—historical evidence is overwhelming—that the expansion of Europe into the New World or rather the “conquest” of the Americas by European powers resulted in the course

of less than a century in the deaths by killing, starvation, and disease of some 70 million native inhabitants.<sup>1</sup> In the face of these staggering figures, our celebration of 1492 is prone to be muted; likewise, our self-congratulatory exuberance as members of advanced Western civilization is liable to be debunked or at least seriously deflated. What gives us pause is not only remorse over past atrocities, but the thought of another complicity: the complicity (perhaps dialectical in character) of Western progress and domination, of rational liberation and subjugation. We are bound to wonder if there is a linkage between Western outreach or exploration and colonial and imperialist ventures. More troubling still, are scientific and technological advances intimately tied to a project of mastery over nature, including mastery over “natural” or backward people (in the sense of native, indigenous populations)? Put more generally, is progress in rational autonomy inevitably purchased at the price of a truncation of “inner nature” (as Freud surmised in *Civilization and Its Discontents*)? Seen from this angle, the year 1492 gathers in itself all the ambivalence of Western culture. Grandeur and tragedy of that culture are epitomized in Columbus’s voyage.

These comments are not merely retrospective historical ruminations; as always, the past is active or sedimented in the present. Indications are that we are again in the midst of an age of Western outreach and exploration—this time of genuinely global dimensions. While during the Renaissance Europe was extending herself to the New World, our age witnesses Western extension to the world at large, through a process commonly labeled “modernization” or Westernization. Despite obvious differences of scale, the historical parallels can hardly be overlooked. Just as in the time of Columbus, Western outreach today is animated by a sense of mission, although this mission is expressed no longer in religious terms but in the secular idiom of progress and development. Again, as in 1492, exploratory outreach is accompanied or backed up by military and economic power or a structure of hegemony, with the Renaissance supremacy of Spain having been replaced by the world-wide hegemony of North America and its Atlantic partners.

In light of these historical parallels, Columbus’s voyage surely must give us pause today. What—we need to ask—are the goals and likely consequences of Western expansion in our time? Is Western outreach necessarily and inextricably linked with a policy of conquest and domination, entailing the subjugation and even extermination of alien life-forms and cultures? Are there alternatives to the Spanish and European legacies of colonialism? These questions are at the heart of this chapter. The endeavor here is to offer an overview of different possibilities

or modes of cross-cultural encounter, ranging from outright domination over a number of intermediary stages to benign or empowering forms of self-other relations. Although relying (wherever feasible) on historical examples, the accent is not so much on historical scholarship as on theoretical-philosophical understanding. One further aspect should be noted: while proceeding in a classificatory vein, the presentation exceeds pure description by clinging to a normative standard, specifically the standard of mutual recognition. In Heideggerian language, the standard demands “emancipatory care” and a policy of “letting be,” a “letting” that allows the other to gain freedom and identity while making room for cultural difference and diversity.<sup>2</sup>

### Conquest

Incorporation of alien territories and populations through conquest is a long-standing practice in human history. Historical accounts of ancient and medieval politics are replete with stories of invasion, forceful occupation, and subjugation, from the Persian wars to the sacking of Rome and the later Norman Conquest. These stories are reflected in traditional political and legal theory which habitually distinguishes between government by conquest and regimes based on consent or inveterate custom. Still, not all forms of incorporation are alike. In earlier times—apart from the Islamic expansion during the Middle Ages—conquest was chiefly the outgrowth of brute aggression guided by passion or the sheer lust for power and spoliation; by comparison, modern forms of take-over tend to be more deliberate, planned, and systematic. When bent on territorial expansion, modern civilization in the West engages in what one may call a “studied” or calculated type of conquest, a type animated by general or universal ideas and geared toward the dissemination of rational principles (including rationalizations of religious beliefs). To this extent, the Spanish conquistadors—despite amazing displays of wanton brutality—were pioneers of colonial administration and early forerunners of later “development” strategies.

In his study *Culture and Conquest: America's Spanish Heritage*, G. M. Foster uses the label *conquest culture* to characterize the cultural mold imposed by the conquering power. As Foster points out, a conquest culture can be thought of as “artificial, standardized, simplified, or ideal” in that it is “at least partially consciously created and designed to cope with recognized problems.” This standardized character was plainly evident in Hispanic America, given that Spanish policy was marked by “a consistent and logical philosophy of purposeful guided change that extended over a period of three centuries.” The

conquest culture in the Americas, according to Foster, must be clearly distinguished from the Spanish culture prevailing in the European homeland, a homeland which traditionally exhibited a high degree of diversity and of regional and local autonomy. To counteract this diversity, the conquistadors imposed on the Americas a streamlined version of Spanish politics and religion:

A conquest culture is the result of processes that screen the more dynamic, expanding culture, winnowing out and discarding a high percentage of all traits, complexes, and configurations found in it. . . . [Thus] by administrative decision many elements of culture were withheld and new elements were devised to take their place. Formal processes, for example, produced standardized municipal organizations, as contrasted to the variety of local Iberian forms, and the grid-plan town in place of the loosely planned or completely unplanned Spanish community of the sixteenth century. Formal processes likewise congregated Indians in villages, governed commerce and trade, and introduced an ideal or theologically purified Catholic dogma and ritual to America.<sup>3</sup>

The systematic and standardizing outlook of the Spanish invaders was a major factor in the swift execution of the conquest and in the efficient expansion of administrative control over American territories; the same outlook also shaped decisively the encounter of the conquest culture with the native Indian populations. By all standards, the pace of the take-over itself was staggering. Barely thirty years after Columbus's voyage, Hernando Cortés had overrun and subdued the Aztec empire of Mexico, by capturing its traditional leaders (including Montezuma); a mere two decades later, Francisco Pizarro had conquered in a similar fashion the Inca kingdom centered in Peru. Placed under the aegis of the Spanish crown, these exploits became the cornerstones of the administrative vicerealties of Mexico City and Lima, which, in turn, were only the launching pads for Spanish expansion throughout Central and South America. These exploits were greatly facilitated by the "studied" or calculating character of the conquest, that is, by the sense of rational-spiritual mission propelling the Spanish invaders—a mission which could in no way be obstructed or derailed by the distinctiveness of native Indian cultures and customs.

In his study *The Conquest of America*, Tzvetan Todorov offers a thumbnail sketch of the colonial mentality in its encounter with native cultures, a sketch focused mainly on general Cortés. As Todorov shows, Spanish colonizers were not unfamiliar with or callously disinterested in indigenous life-forms; on the contrary, they (at least the more far-sighted among them) made it a point to study and compre-

hend Indian culture, though with the aim of subjugating it more efficiently, not of appreciating its intrinsic worth. Emulating Bacon's dictum, the Spaniards keenly perceived the linkage of knowledge and power. In his entire behavior, Todorov notes, Cortés affords us "a splendid example" of this outlook:

Schematically this behavior is organized into two phases. The first is that of interest in the other, at the cost of a certain empathy or temporary identification. Cortés slips into the other's skin. . . . Thereby he ensures himself an understanding of the other's language and a knowledge of the other's political organization. . . . But in so doing he has never abandoned his feeling of superiority; it is even his very capacity to understand the other that confirms him in that feeling. Then comes the second phase, during which he is not content to reassert his own identity (which he has never really abandoned), but proceeds to assimilate the Indians to his own world.

Todorov at this point offers some general observations on the (tentative) relation of European or Western culture to the rest of the world: "The Europeans exhibit remarkable qualities of flexibility and improvisation which permit them all the better to impose their own way of life."<sup>4</sup>

The colonizers' attitude—though on a more inchoate or unsophisticated level—was evident already in the case of Columbus and his dealings with the natives. In Todorov's portrayal, Columbus was entirely unable or unwilling to acknowledge the distinctive difference of the Indians. True to his mission and his Western-universalizing bent, he admitted only two options: either the Indians were as human beings equal to or identical with the Spaniards—in which case they were known (or knowable) and did not require a special effort of comprehension; or else they were radically different, in which case they were reduced to savages and on the same level as animate or inanimate objects of nature. This dualism was reflected in his failure to recognize linguistic diversity. When confronted with a native tongue, Todorov notes, Columbus had available only two reactions: either "to acknowledge it as a language but to refuse to believe it is different"; or "to acknowledge its difference but to refuse to admit it is a language."

The second reaction was elicited by his first encounter with Indians in October of 1492, when he wrote in a note addressed to the Spanish crown: "If it please Our Lord, at the moment of my departure I shall take from this place six of them to Your Highnesses, so that they may learn to speak." The refusal of linguistic diversity was

indicative of a deeper schism in the Spanish-Indian encounter and more generally of a basic fissure in self-other relations. According to Todorov, the Spanish-Indian confrontation was a failed encounter from the start, because it was predicated on two alternative strategies: either complete assimilation or complete rejection and subjugation. These two alternatives, he muses, are not confined to the Spanish conquest but are prototypical of the behavior of "every colonist in his relations to the colonized" down "to our own day." Returning to Columbus, his study sharply delineates the main options:

Either he conceives the Indians . . . as human beings altogether, having the same rights as himself; but then he sees them not only as equals but also as identical, and this behavior leads to assimilationism, the projection of his own values on the others. Or else he starts from the difference, but the latter is immediately translated into terms of superiority and inferiority. . . . What is denied is the existence of a human substance truly other, something capable of being not merely an imperfect state of oneself.

Drawing out broader philosophical implications, Todorov finds that the two modes of "experience of alterity" are both equally grounded in "egocentrism," that is, in the "identification of our own values with values in general, of our I with the universe—in the conviction that the world is one."<sup>5</sup>

By comparison with Columbus, Cortés was a more farsighted colonizer and a more efficient administrator, although his home country in the end disowned his accomplishments. As previously indicated, Cortés studiously connected knowledge and power, buttressing the latter by the former. Although falling far short of an ethnographer's talents, his policies and letters reflect a subtle grasp of the Indians' customs and beliefs, to the point of enabling him to exploit their religion to his advantage. Yet, as noted before, knowledge here does not entail mutual engagement, but is placed entirely in the service of the pursuit of economic wealth, of subjugation, and ultimately of physical destruction. In his study Todorov ponders the "dreadful concatenation" that prevails in this case between understanding and destruction. Should not understanding, he asks, "go hand in hand with sympathy?" And should not even the desire for plunder imply a desire "to preserve the other as a potential source of wealth and profit?" The attempt to unravel the concatenation is complicated by repeated expressions of admiration for the Indians on the part of Cortés and his followers; far from simply dismissing them as contemptible, the Spaniards often praise the Aztecs for their cultural accomplishments. As Todorov is

quick to observe, however, such expressions of praise are striking for one feature: "with very few exceptions, they all concern *objects*: the architecture of houses, merchandise, fabrics, jewelry." Thus, Cortés and his followers behave like "today's tourists" who admire the quality of exotic craftsmanship but remain untouched by the notion "of sharing the life of the craftsmen who produce such objects." While going "into ecstasies" about Aztec products, Cortés refuses to acknowledge their makers "as human individualities to be set on the same level as himself." This leads Todorov to another philosophical observation of broader import:

To formulate matters differently: in the best of cases, the Spanish authors speak well *of* the Indians, but with very few exceptions they do not speak *to* the Indians. Now, it is only by speaking to the other (not giving orders but engaging in a dialogue) that I can acknowledge *him/her* as subject, comparable to what I am myself. . . . Unless understanding is accompanied by a full acknowledgment of the other as subject, it risks being used for purposes of exploitation, of "taking"; knowledge will be subordinated to power.

This linkage of knowledge and power still leaves obscure one outstanding feature of the Spanish conquest: its resort to wonton brutality and physical destruction. Faced with staggering accounts of massacres, Todorov's study can find clues only in geographical distance, in the uprooting of the conquistadors from customary constraints: "What the Spaniards discover is the contrast between the metropolitan country and the colony, for radically different moral laws regulate conduct in each: massacre requires an appropriate context."<sup>6</sup>

The story of the Spanish conquest (recounted here largely through Todorov's lenses) is instructive beyond its immediate historical setting for the future of European or Western colonialism. To be sure, none of the subsequent colonial ventures can match the original Spanish exploit in the boldness and novelty of discovery, in the starkness of cultural contrasts, and (perhaps) in the extent of physical brutality. Subsequent colonizers absorbed indeed the lessons of the Spanish precedent; but on the whole they sought to emulate Cortés more in his calculating foresight than in his fits of anger. In the felicitous phrase coined in *The Conquest of America: A "new trinity"* replaces or supplements "the old-style soldier-*conquistador*: it consists of the scholar, the priest, and the merchant"; among the three, the first collects information about the country, the second promotes its "spiritual annexation," and the third "makes certain of the profits."<sup>7</sup>

Actually, during ensuing centuries, this trinity was further modified by additional shifts of accent; progressively, the linkage of knowledge and power was rendered more subtle and circuitous, without ever losing its cutting edge. As it happened, despite its standardizing and rationalizing bent, Spanish colonialism was never quite congruent with the demands of modern rationality; as a Catholic power, Spain was never fully in tune with the central guideposts of modernity: individual freedom (of conscience and belief), capitalist free enterprise, and political liberalism. Apart from historical contingency, this incongruence was one of the main reasons for the decline of Spanish hegemony (after 1588) and for the progressive shift of hegemonic leadership to northern European powers and ultimately to North America. Like Spain before them, these new hegemonic powers were guided in their colonizing efforts by standardizing-universal principles or ideas, but these principles were couched not in the language of church dogma but in a more secular-progressive idiom (sometimes the idiom of linear progressivism); as a corollary, Christian faith steadily gave way to, or was fused with, overarching ideologies or "world views." To this extent, the trinity of scholar-priest-merchant was gradually transformed into the triad of missionaries, entrepreneurs, and intellectuals.

To round out this discussion of conquest, we turn briefly to another Spanish colonial exploit, one that happened barely half a century after the conquest of Mexico: the Spanish take-over of the Philippines. Tellingly, the old-style reliance on the soldier-conquistador was already greatly muted in this case in favor of (Todorov's) new trinity. Apart from this shift, the Philippine take-over is noteworthy both for giving evidence of Spanish "universalism" and for demonstrating in the long run the transfer of hegemonic rule from Spain to North America. The Philippine story has been recounted in some detail by John L. Phelan (in his *The Hispanization of the Philippines*). As Phelan points out, the conquering troops this time were under strict instructions from the Spanish crown (and also from the Vatican) to replace the sword with the gospel, or at least to foreground the gospel over the sword; somewhat euphemistically, the colonial policy was now termed "pacification" or "peaceful occupation."

Regarding the objectives of the take-over, Phelan lists three main purposes, in an ascending order of universality: the first was the economic goal of gaining a share in the spice trade; the second was the mission to Christianize the inhabitants of the archipelago; and the third (astonishingly) was the aim "to establish direct contacts with China and Japan" in the hope of converting them to Catholicism. The latter aim was predicated on what Phelan calls an "almost unlimited faith" among Spaniards in their nation's power and prestige:



The Spanish race appeared to them as God's new chosen people, destined to execute the plans of providence. Spain's mission was to forge the spiritual unity of all mankind by crushing the Protestants in the Old World, defending Christendom against the onslaughts of the Turks, and spreading the gospel among the infidels of America and Asia. . . . With the conversion of the peoples of Asia all the races of mankind would be brought into the fold of Christianity, an event which some interpreted as foreshadowing the approaching end of the world.

As we know, the Spanish dream of world dominion did not materialize, despite remarkable strides in that direction and a stubborn display of persistence. According to Phelan, the Spanish take-over of the Philippines began in 1565 and reached its completion only in 1898. The entire process can be grouped into three major phases. The first was marked by the successful occupation of the northern and central portions of the archipelago; the second brought sustained offensives against two pockets of resistance in Mindanao and northwestern Luzon. Curiously, in the third phase the entire process reached both its final culmination and its demise in the latter part of the nineteenth century. By 1898 the backbone of resistance had been broken, but this happened "on the eve of the overthrow of the Spanish colonial regime by the combined efforts of a Filipino nationalist revolt and the more decisive intervention of the United States."<sup>8</sup>

### Conversion

In its typical form, conquest entails the physical subjugation of alien populations and sometimes also their forced cultural assimilation; where the latter feature predominates, conquest gives way to conversion. Although often closely linked, conquest and conversion are not always or necessarily connected. History teaches that there have been conquests without any overt efforts of assimilation, although modern-style take-overs usually involve also the dissemination of general ideas (religious or ideological); conversely, there have been conversions in the absence of conquest or forced subjugation (and sometimes even as counter-moves to political and cultural domination). Although distinguishable, the two modes of outreach share one prominent feature: the denial of meaningful human difference. In the case of conquest, difference is actually affirmed but in a radical-hierarchical way which sacrifices mutuality in favor of the rigid schism of mind and matter, culture and nature, civilized people and savages. In the case of conversion, difference is denied through the insistence on a common or

identical human nature—an identity which predestines native populations to be willing targets of proselytizing missions.

As one should note, conversion is not an inextricable ingredient of religious faith. Several of the leading world religions have been strongly averse to missionary practices. This is true among Western religions of Judaism and among Eastern religions (or quasireligions) of Hinduism, Taoism, and Confucianism. In the latter category, only Buddhism has engaged in large-scale missionary outreach, but in a manner typically shunning conquest in favor of teaching and practical example. This leaves as missionary world religions of a militant type only Islam and Christianity. Among the two, Christianity has been historically more successful, mainly because of its closer kinship with the modern spirit of individualism and progress (enshrined in the "Protestant Ethic"). While the heyday of Islamic expansion occurred during the Middle Ages and before 1492, Christian expansion started with the voyage of Columbus and later merged with the secular aspirations of Western modernity.<sup>9</sup>

The story of the initial growth and dissemination of Islam in the Near East and along the Mediterranean has often been told in considerable detail, sometimes with close attention to its encounters with pre-Islamic, animistic forms of belief.<sup>10</sup> The same cannot be said of the early growth and dissemination of Christianity throughout Europe. We have accounts of the missionary "acts" of the apostles and we also have accounts of Christian martyrdom at the hands of nonbelievers (Jews and gentiles); but we lack detailed narratives shedding light on the triumphant expansion of Christianity after the conversion of Emperor Constantine. What is obvious is that the expansion occurred at an amazing speed and that in the end hardly a trace was left of earlier modes of worship or "pagan" beliefs (despite instances of local accommodation). Given the scope of the process and the long duration of pre-Christian beliefs, one cannot assume that the transformation happened without conflict or resistance and without recourse to deliberate strategies of subjugation—strategies which (perhaps) foreshadowed later policies of "pacification."

On the whole, the attitude of the early church alternated between outright rejection of pagan beliefs and selective "utilization" (*chresis*) of pagan traditions and teachings, that is, their modified incorporation into Christian doctrine. Although practiced by some eminent theologians, utilization always remained suspect in the eyes of the church hierarchy; in case of doubt, or where necessary for the defense of orthodox faith, incorporation always had to cede to condemnation. The writings of many of the church fathers still reflect the intensity of the struggle—at least on the intellectual (though rarely the political) level.

Tertullian and Origen have left us lengthy treatises directed against (*contra*) the pagans or gentiles—treatises which are exercises in apologetics and hardly based on mutuality or dialogue (the term *pagan* is itself part of Christian nomenclature). In his *City of God*, St. Augustine goes to great length to defend Christianity against the charge of having contributed to the downfall of Rome. His strategy is simple: he blandly pits Christian virtue against Roman vice, divine salvation against mundane-pagan corruption. While successful in combating a Caligula, this argument notably runs into difficulties when dealing with an upright Roman like Varro who, in his writings and life, upholds traditional Roman virtues and religious beliefs (without being proto-Christian). At this point, St. Augustine—in a curiously modernist move—appeals to the more enlightened rationality of Christian faith in comparison with pagan ignorance and superstition. In the words of the Spanish missionary Bernardino de Sahagún:

Saint Augustine did not believe it would be a vain or superfluous affair to treat of the fabulous theology of the gentiles, in the sixth book of the *City of God*; because, as he himself says, the fables and vain fictions of which the gentiles made use on the subject of their false gods, once being known, it would become easier to make them understand that these were no gods at all and that, from their essence, nothing useful should proceed for beings endowed with reason.<sup>11</sup>

Sahagún was a Franciscan missionary who arrived in Mexico a decade after its conquest by Cortés. By this time, conversion of the indigenous populations was well under way and had already reached its more subdued or “pacifying” stage. Actually, conversion was an intrinsic feature of the Spanish invasion from the beginning and—next to the desire for plunder—served as its chief justifying rationale. This rationale was already embraced by Columbus himself, albeit in a somewhat intuitive and unsystematic fashion. On his first return to Spain he decided to take some native Indians with him so that, through their exposure to Spanish ways of life, they “might adopt our customs and our faith.” In a journal entry of December 1492, he recommends these Indians to the attention of the Spanish crown, saying: “Your Highnesses may have great joy of them, for soon you will have made them into Christians and will have instructed them in the good manners of your kingdoms”—these good manners including the profession of (Catholic) Christian faith and the habit to “wear clothes.” As indicated before, missionary efforts—once deliberately undertaken—were generally predicated on the assumption of a shared human nature and hence on

the belief that native populations were basically predisposed to Christian faith and thus ready and eager to accept the opportunity of salvation offered to them. As it happened, this expectation was occasionally rudely disappointed. Todorov recounts an episode which sheds light on the difficulties of the conversion process and also on some hazards of Christian charitableness:

In the course of the second expedition, the priests accompanying Columbus begin converting the Indians; but it is far from the truth that all of them submit and consent to venerate the holy images. "After having left the chapel, these men flung the images to the ground, covered them with a heap of earth, and pissed upon it"; seeing which, Bartholomé, Columbus's brother, decides to punish them in quite Christian fashion. "As lieutenant of the Viceroy and governor of the islands, he brought these wretched men to justice and, their crimes being duly attested to, he caused them to be burned alive in public."<sup>12</sup>

As it seems, incidents of this kind were not rare but recurrent, which may account in part for the extreme savagery characterizing the colonization or Hispanization of America well into the period of pacification. This savagery was uppermost in the mind of one of the most perceptive and affable Christian missionaries of that era: the Dominican Bartolomé de Las Casas. For Las Casas—as later for Sahagún—the atrocities committed by the Spanish were an indictment of the military method of colonization and a compelling motive for replacing that method with missionary endeavors more in tune with the teachings of the gospel. In his *Brevissima Relación (The Tears of the Indians)*, Las Casas offers a gripping account of Spanish cruelties: hangings, mutilations, burnings—which was meant as an appeal to the Spanish crown for a change of policy (and which later provided welcome ammunition to the Protestant enemies of Spain in northern Europe). In a truly historic encounter, Las Casas entered into an intense and remarkable debate with the historian Ginés de Sepúlveda at Valladolid (in 1550). Relying in part on Aristotelian teachings, Sepúlveda justified the subjugation of the Indians on the basis of their natural inferiority, thereby submitting conversion to the logic of conquest. Politics as well as religious salvation in his view were governed by the same principle: the dominion "of perfection over imperfection, of force over weakness, of eminent virtue over vice"; seen in this light, the Indians were related to the Spaniards in the same way as "children are to adults" or "women to men" or savages and "wild beasts" to civilized people.

On all these counts, Las Casas opted for a radically opposite outlook, namely, for a strictly egalitarian conception according to which all humans are equally endowed with a soul and hence equally called to salvation through Christian faith. As he expostulated in his rejoinder to Sepúlveda (published under the title *Apologia or In Defense of the Indians*): "Aristotle, farewell! From Christ, the eternal truth, we have the commandment 'You must love your neighbor as yourself.' . . . Christ seeks souls, not property." Animated by this spirit, Las Casas advocated a complete shift of strategy: specifically the abandonment of military conquest, of forced land acquisition (*encomienda*), and of Indian slavery. Still, despite these humanitarian pleas, Todorov is probably on safe ground when he charges Las Casas with spiritual colonialism, that is, with continued support for Hispanization or the "annexation of the Indians," provided the latter was "effected by priests rather than by soldiers." Todorov also casts doubt on neighborly love if accompanied by missionary conversion: "Can we really love someone if we know little or nothing of his identity; if we see, in place of that identity, a projection of ourselves or of our ideals? . . . Does not one culture risk trying to transform the other in its own name, and therefore risk subjugating it as well? How much is such love worth?"<sup>13</sup>

Las Casas was not successful in transforming colonial practices, although he did manage to instill in colonial administrators the need for greater subtlety, circumspection, and (perhaps) subterfuge. Following the Reformation and as a corollary of the rise of capitalist markets, colonial hegemony tended to shift from Spain (and Portugal) to northern European powers, especially to England and the Netherlands. As in the case of Spain, colonial expansion by these powers was accompanied or closely followed by missionary endeavors intent on spreading religious beliefs as well as cultural and ideological preferences. Seen as the "white man's burden," the civilizing mission of the West came to affect increasingly the entire fabric of life (from worship to politics and economics) of non-Western populations in a manner foreshadowing later strategies of development and modernization. In the field of religious conversion, Christian missionaries working in tandem with colonizers concentrated their efforts on Africa, India, and the Far East, often pursuing a path which navigated ambiguously between Cortés and Las Casas.

To resume a point made earlier, conversion does not always serve the purposes of colonizers or colonial rule, but may occasionally have oppositional and even subversive connotations. This has to do with a central feature of religious faith: the ability of such faith to transcend prevailing social and political conditions and hence to become a

resource for liberation rather than domination. Thus, in the case of India, Mahatma Gandhi was able to invoke the Hindu notions of 'swaraj,' 'satyagraha,' and 'ramaraja' as guideposts in his struggle against British colonial oppression. On the other hand, especially after the accomplishment of independence, various groups in Indian society disenfranchised by the prevailing caste system became willing targets of conversion to Islam and Buddhism (occasionally to Christianity), sometimes on a large scale. As Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph have reported, in 1956 at least 3 million and perhaps as many as 20 million untouchables were converted to Buddhism in the state of Maharashtra alone. Again, during more recent decades, entire villages of untouchables have reportedly been converted to Islam, especially in the state of Tamil Nadu. Although in all these cases the role of political and financial manipulation cannot be entirely ignored, the deeper reason for these events was surely the desire of disadvantaged people for greater freedom and respect (however elusive this goal may be under the circumstances).<sup>14</sup>

### Assimilation and Acculturation

As we have noted, conversion is not always a corollary of conquest, nor is it necessarily restricted to the dissemination of religious beliefs. Apart from colonial expansion in foreign lands, cultural hegemony may also be exercised in a "domestic" (that is, politically more or less settled) context and, in this case, may involve the spreading of diffuse cultural patterns or ways of life (of religious and/or secular vintage); the targets of such hegemonic outreach are typically marginalized ethnic, national, or linguistic groups (sometimes composed of immigrant populations). In contradistinction from external colonialism, domestic colonization of this kind tends to be discussed by social scientists and anthropologists under the headings of "assimilation" or acculturation. Some broad definitions may be in order here. According to Robert Park and Ernest Burgess, assimilation may be seen as "a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons and groups and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated by them in a common cultural life." While assimilation is usually applied to policies in some Western or Westernizing nations, the term *acculturation* tends to have a broader and more indefinite application, extending from domestic contacts to global interactions between the hegemonic Western culture and developing non-Western societies.

In our century, assimilation and, to some extent, acculturation have been greatly abetted and intensified by nationalism and the idea of the nation-state. In the well-known words of Rupert Emerson:

In the contemporary world, the nation is for greater portions of mankind the community with which men most intensely and most unconditionally identify themselves. . . . The nation is today the largest community which, when the chips are down, effectively commands men's loyalty, overriding the claims both of the lesser communities within it and those which cut across it. . . . In this sense the nation can be called a "terminal community."

The hegemonic influence of nationalism and the nation-state, one should note, is not confined to advanced Western countries but extends to non-Western, postcolonial societies. While initially opposing the "state" as an alien, colonial apparatus, independence movements quickly adopted a nationalist rhetoric geared toward the acquisition of state power. "In seeking the mandate," Crawford Young writes, "the anticolonial leadership began the process of transforming the often-arbitrary colonial state into a nation."<sup>15</sup>

In the Western orbit, the most frequently discussed and conspicuous examples of cultural assimilation are the United States and Israel. In both cases, large numbers of immigrants from many parts of the world were progressively integrated or incorporated into the dominant social and political fabric. For over a century now, the United States has been celebrated as a successful instance of "melting-pot" policies in practice. Wave after wave of immigrants were steadily socialized or assimilated into the prevailing "American way of life" with its accent on individual initiative and the profit motive. Even where major cracks or fissures appeared in the melting-pot model, remedy was typically sought not through a revision of that model but through closer incorporation or "integration" of marginalized groups—as was evident in the early phases of the civil rights movement. During subsequent years, the cracks continued to widen steadily, giving rise to intense ethnic rivalries, "black power" movements, and inner-city riots in many parts of the country. In their study *Beyond the Melting Pot*, which was written during these developments, Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan assessed the situation in these terms: "The notion that the intense and unprecedented mixture of ethnic and religious groups in American life was soon to blend into a homogeneous end product has outlived its usefulness, and also its credibility."

Their comments were seconded by numerous other observers, including Milton Gordon, who pointed to the persistence of "structurally separate subsocieties" in American culture, and Michael Novak, with his emphasis on "unmeltable" ethnic groups. In the wake of these challenges and experiences, melting-pot rhetoric was increasingly supplemented if not replaced by alternative theoretical formulas, such

as the notions of 'cultural pluralism' or of a confederated 'rainbow coalition' of cultures sustaining a broader social synthesis. In the case of Israel, the assimilation model was simplified from the beginning by the fact that immigrants—although they came from different countries—all shared the same (or similar) religious background. Where such cultural commonality is lacking, melting-pot consensus quickly tends to give way to conflict, as is evident in Israeli-Palestinian relations during recent decades.<sup>16</sup>

Returning to the story of Hispanic America, assimilation became a dominant policy in the newly independent countries which emerged in the early part of the last century. By that time, Latin American societies were already strongly shaped by the cultural patterns of the Spanish (and Portuguese) homeland, patterns carried forward chiefly by "creoles" (European stock born overseas). This hegemonic patterning was intensified during the postindependence period. In the words of Crawford Young:

During the unstable and tumultuous years of the nineteenth century, the creole elite indelibly stamped its cultural imprint on the new states. The key culture-forming groups—lawyer, *caudillo*, intellectual, or priest—were firmly Hispanic. The nodal points of urban culture—the towns and cities—were a generalized model of the Iberian community, remarkably uniform in spatial configuration and cultural pattern from the Rio Grande to the Straits of Magellan.

During the course of the last century, the hegemonic culture shaped by colonizers and creoles was progressively disseminated through the rest of society, especially to the mestizo, mulatto, and native Indian populations, in a manner approximating the melting-pot syndrome. Usually termed "mestization," this process of assimilation extended even to areas, such as Peru and Bolivia, where Indians formed a large majority at the time of independence. Only in recent times have cracks in the cultural fabric been noted by social scientists and anthropologists; as in the case of North America, analytical models based on assimilation and mestization are challenged today by accounts stressing cultural diversity and ethnic rivalry. The situation in the Philippines was more complicated. Despite the extensive impact of Hispanization and Christian conversion, the relatively small number of Spanish settlers allowed the emergence of a native (or mestizo) Filipino elite which became the backbone of the nationalist movement during the late nineteenth century. This diverse cultural background was compounded subsequently by the American colonial influence with its stress on modern industry and democracy. In its general fabric, Filipino society



thus can be said to straddle the models of "integration and cultural pluralism."<sup>17</sup>

These comments on cultural fusion require further amplification. As one should note, assimilation is not only or exclusively a policy imposed from above, that is, a process whereby a hegemonic culture is disseminated by an elite to subordinate segments of the population. Sometimes (perhaps quite frequently), the hegemonic culture holds a powerful attraction for subordinate groups eager to gain social acceptance or recognition and thus to terminate discrimination. Where such acceptance is pursued deliberately and with some promise of success, we are in the presence of acculturation through upward mobility. This phenomenon is well-known in Western societies where members of underprivileged or marginalized groups may be engaged in a struggle for higher social status (sometimes termed "*embourgeoisement*"). In the context of Indian society, the process of upward mobility on the part of lower castes or subcastes has been analyzed perceptively and in detail by M. N. Srinivas under the label "Sanskritization." As Srinivas points out, by means of caste associations lower status groups have often been able to break through established caste barriers by adopting elite cultural patterns, for example, by performing ritual practices associated with the higher (or "twice-born") castes.

Following Srinivas and the Rudolphs, Crawford Young discusses the case of the Nadars in Tamil Nadu in southern India. According to the traditional caste structure, the Nadars were placed below the Sudra category (though not quite at the bottom of the pyramid) and thus were subjected to various ritual disabilities (such as exclusion from certain temples and physical distance from Brahmans). During the colonial period, the Nadars managed to escape the yoke of stark poverty by becoming commercially active; this change in economic well-being was soon followed by the adoption of upper-class cultural patterns (a move at first fiercely resisted by elite groups): women began to wear higher caste clothes, marriage ceremonies copied aspects of Brahmanic ritual, and some members insisted on wearing the sacred thread. Summarizing the metamorphosis, Young observes: "Today, the Nadars are recognized as an 'advanced' community—a status reversal accomplished over the past century through horizontal mobilization of group solidarity, challenge to servile traditional ascription through ritual transformation, effective utilization of modern opportunity through education and commerce, and skillful communal exploitation of the political arena." Young also points to other cases of upward group mobility in non-Western societies outside India. A telling example is the Fur tribe of western Sudan which, over an extended period of time, came into growing contact with Arab groups who were seen as the

carriers of the "superior" Arabic or Islamic culture. From these groups, the Fur acquired the religion of Islam, trading practices, a school system, and especially access to the Arabic language. In Young's account, Arabic is associated with "superior force, a religion of great prestige" as well as "social and economic modernization opportunities through school or urban migration." He adds that command of Arabic is "a fair measure of the internal distribution of social mobility opportunity among the Fur."<sup>18</sup>

### **Partial Assimilation: Cultural Borrowing**

Cultural encounter does not always entail merger or fusion, but may lead to partial adaptation or assimilation, through a process of cultural borrowing (and lending). For such adaptation to happen, the respective cultures must face each other on a more nearly equal or roughly comparable basis, in contradistinction to the starkly hegemonic or hierarchical relation characterizing the previously discussed cases. Partial adaptation, in any case, involves a greater subtlety in self-other relations. In opposition to the self-imposition (through dissemination) or self-surrender (through upward mobility) marking hegemonic situations, selective borrowing requires a willingness to recognize the distinctiveness of the other culture, coupled with a desire to maintain at least some indigenous preferences. The outcome of such partial accommodation can be greatly varied. In some instances—which are less interesting because of their affinity to the melting-pot syndrome—the result may be the complete absorption of foreign ingredients in the prevailing cultural matrix, in a process which may be termed partial "incorporation." In other cases, encounter may facilitate a pattern of mutual adjustment or reciprocal give-and-take which, in turn, can engender either an ambivalent form of syncretism or a precarious type of cultural juxtaposition or coexistence. In some instances, finally, exposure to alien cultural strands may initiate a movement of genuine self-transformation, that is, a reassessment of prevailing patterns in the light of newly experienced insights or modes of life. Here as elsewhere, of course, theoretical distinctions need to be applied cautiously: concrete historical examples tend to resist neat labeling and to range frequently across a whole spectrum of possibilities.

Partial assimilation and selective borrowing are familiar to Western culture. Throughout the course of Western history we find many episodes of partial adjustment and incorporation, sometimes to the point of calling into question the very notion of indigenous traditions. Through recent historical scholarship we are acquainted with the extent to which early Greece borrowed from North African and Myce-

nean cultures. Within the confines of the Greek peninsula, we are also familiar with the intense process of cultural exchange among the various city states, although a sharp cultural barrier was erected by all of them against the “barbarians” in the East. During the period of the Roman Republic, Greek intellectual influence was steadily on the rise: several of the famous philosophical schools, including the Epicureans and the Stoics, were originally founded in Greece before being transplanted to Roman soil. With the expansion of imperial power, Rome came increasingly into contact with alien—especially Near Eastern—cultures and belief systems; despite an official policy of conquest and colonization, the repercussions of these peripheral cultures on the Roman metropolis can hardly be ignored or underestimated. To this extent, the Hellenistic and the imperial periods were times of rampant syncretism.

Accommodation and the practice of cultural borrowing continued into the Middle Ages. The practice of “utilization” (*chresis*), that is, the partial absorption of pagan teachings by Christianity, has been mentioned before. At a later point, the rise of Islamic culture around the Mediterranean led to the wide dissemination of Muslim philosophical and scientific scholarship, which provided an enormous boost to Western learning and Christian scholasticism during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Still a few centuries later, the fall of Constantinople triggered a large-scale exodus of Greek scholars from the territories of “eastern Rome,” a migration that provided a strong impulse to the European Renaissance. Without question, one of the most significant episodes of cultural borrowing during the later Middle Ages was the “reception” of classical Roman law, especially of the legacy of the *ius civile*, a legacy that subsequently became the cornerstone of jurisprudence in Continental European countries (and their colonies). In this case, borrowing took the form of a complex process of adaptation and partial incorporation, with classical Roman principles being uneasily balanced against historically grown legal customs and local statutory provisions. In the account of one competent observer, whose comments refer specifically to the German situation, the reception of Roman law was “affected with much less strife and opposition than might have been expected from the radical nature of the experiment”; progressively German jurists trained in indigenous common law also became learned “judges in civil law.”<sup>19</sup>

Cultural borrowing during the Middle Ages was not restricted to the Continent and Near East, but sometimes extended far afield. In view of the broad acclaim accorded to 1492 and the voyages of Columbus, it may be appropriate to call attention to another explorer and voyager whose travels took him precisely in the opposite direction: the

Italian Marco Polo. About two centuries before Columbus's expedition, Marco Polo set out to visit far-off China which at that time was under the dominion of the Mongol ruler Kublai Khan. Contrary to some Western prejudices, the Mongol dynasty was seriously interested in advanced forms of culture. At the conclusion of an earlier visit by Marco's father, Kublai Khan had sent the traveler back to his homeland furnished with letters to the pope requesting the dispatch of a group of educated scholars to instruct his people in Christian doctrine and the liberal arts. In 1271, Marco and his companions embarked on their long sojourn in the Far East which came to an end only twenty-five years later.

Departing from Venice, the travelers went first to Hormuz at the Persian Gulf with the intent of reaching China by sea; abandoning this plan, however, they turned northward through Persia, following basically the fabled "silk road." Traversing Khurasan they ascended the upper Oxus to reach the plateau of Pamir from where they proceeded to cross the Gobi desert (which Polo called the "desert of Lop") until they finally reached the court of Kublai Khan at Shangtu. On arrival Marco immediately embarked on studying local languages and soon entered the public service where he quickly rose to high administrative positions. Repeatedly he was sent by the Khan to distant provinces or outposts from where he returned with intriguing firsthand reports. On their way back, Marco and his companions voyaged from China to Persia by sea and from there by land to Venice, carrying with them again friendly messages from the Khan to the pope and several kings in Europe. The travelers had not actually recorded their experiences during their visit abroad; it was only several years after his return that Marco dictated his story to a fellow Italian (while he was a prisoner in Genoa). The written account of Marco's travels sparked considerable European interest in the Far East, while also lending impulse to advances in "scientific" cartography. During the Renaissance and Reformation this interest subsided somewhat, being overshadowed by revived concern with classical and biblical antiquity and by fascination with the New World (America). A renewed upsurge of attentiveness to China occurred during the Enlightenment or "age of reason" when enlightened forms of absolutism emulated the bureaucratic practices of the Asian kingdom, while at the same time cultivating a taste for Chinese modes of dress, coiffure (wigs), and courtly behavior.<sup>20</sup>

Explorations and distant voyages are sometimes considered a European or a Western monopoly, but this is far from true. A case in point is the extension of Buddhism to China, Japan, and other parts of the Far East, an extension that constitutes one of the most remarkable instances of cultural borrowing in human history. Borrowing and lend-

ing here were closely tied to exploratory voyages. In a well-known study, Erik Zürcher speaks of “the Buddhist conquest of China,” but this is surely a misnomer. Buddhism was brought from India to China by traveling monks who faced great hardship, and sometimes even persecution, on their long journeys; they definitely were not accompanied by well-armed troops of *conquistadors* under the command of a Cortés or a Pizarro. The first Buddhist monks arrived in China in the first century (C.E.), bringing with them many sacred texts as well as the Buddhist practices of meditation (*dhyana*) and concentration (*samadhi*). On their arrival they encountered an alien culture, which in some ways was quite congenial to their own, but in other ways was radically different. One of the principal tasks faced by these itinerant monks was the translation of sacred texts from Sanskrit or Pali into the Chinese idiom, a task which required enormous skills of interpretation, as well as a good dose of cultural flexibility and mutual adjustment. As a result of these exegetic labors, Buddhism was infused or supplemented with prevailing Taoist ideas—especially the wisdom teachings of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu—while Taoism in turn was amplified and transformed through the integration of Buddhist ontology and metaphysics. In the words of Heinrich Dumoulin, whose study of Buddhism in India and China carefully traces the complex interaction between elements of Indian and Chinese culture:

The transplanting of Buddhism from its native soil in India into the culture and life of China may be counted among the most significant events in the history of religions. It meant the introduction of a higher religion—complete with scriptural canon, doctrines, morality, and cult—into a land with an ancient culture of its own. . . . The use of Taoist terms for Buddhist beliefs and practices not only helped in the difficult task of translation but also brought Buddhist scriptures closer to the Chinese people. . . . The “Taoist guise” that Buddhism donned did not remain external but worked deep-reaching changes on Buddhist thought. This encounter with the spiritual heritage of ancient China became a fountainhead that was to nourish the various schools of Chinese Buddhism, all of which were intimately related to one another despite doctrinal differences.<sup>21</sup>

As indicated, cultural outreach here was initiated and carried forward not by generals and merchants desirous of power and wealth, but by learned monks willing to cross or transgress traditional cultural boundaries. One of the earliest itinerant scholars to arrive in China was An Shih-Kao, often described as the “first important known Buddhist translator in China”; among his primary endeavors was the

translation of some classical sutras as well as the teaching of Buddhist meditational techniques, which were curiously blended with Taoist practices. Probably the most well known and celebrated Indian Buddhists traveling to China were Kumarajiva and Bodhidharma—the former being a historically well-attested scholar of the late fourth century, the second a somewhat more legendary figure of the early sixth century. A native of northern India, Kumarajiva as a young man entered a Buddhist monastery where he studied both Hinayana and Mahayana literature, developing progressively a decided preference for Mahayana teachings. Having gained great scholarly prestige in his homeland, he traveled in his later years to China where he established a translation institute in Ch'ang-an (the later Xian). Among the most impressive accomplishments of Kumarajiva is the translation into Chinese, in one hundred volumes, of a commentary on the *Mahaprajñāparamita Sutra* (Sutra of Perfect Wisdom) traditionally ascribed to Nagarjuna. It was largely due to Kumarajiva's efforts that Mahayana Buddhism, in its Madhyamika version, gained conclusive ascendancy in China over alternative Buddhist schools.

According to more elusive historical records, Bodhidharma was born into a Brahman family in southern India, but in his youth joined a Buddhist order and then set out on a long and difficult journey to southern Asia. On arriving he is said to have encountered and engaged in verbal sparring with Emperor Wu, founder of the Liang dynasty. Legend recounts that Bodhidharma next crossed the Yangtze River on a reed and for nine years remained seated in meditation before the wall of a monastery until his legs withered away. Less renowned as a translator, Bodhidharma is remembered chiefly for his unconventional teaching and meditational techniques, some of which aroused much opposition at the time. Foremost among these methods was his resort to sharp, paradoxical verbal exchanges (*koans*) geared toward triggering enlightenment. Due to these methods and other accomplishments, Bodhidharma is revered as the founder of Ch'an or Zen Buddhism; actually, Zen practitioners regard him as the first Chinese patriarch (and the twenty-eighth Indian patriarch after the Buddha Sakyamuni). In this capacity he established a long line of descent and an intellectual tradition which eventually leaped beyond the boundaries of China. In the words of a poem ascribed to Bodhidharma himself:

I came to this land originally to transmit the Dharma  
 And to bring deliverance from error.  
 A flower opens five petals.  
 The fruit ripens of itself.<sup>22</sup>

From China Buddhism spread quickly to Japan, Korea, and adjacent lands in the Far East; again, cultural borrowing and lending were mainly the work of traveling monks and scholars disseminating Buddha's teachings by land and by sea. By the time of Bodhidharma, Buddhism was already beginning to infiltrate Japan; publicly accepted during the following century, it soon flourished in different branches or schools of thought. Still, despite broad acceptance, knowledge and availability of sacred texts tended to be limited; to remedy this defect, Japanese monks set out in the other direction to gain deeper training and insight. Easily the most impressive of these travelers was the monk Ennin, also known in Japan as Jikaku Daishi. Some three hundred years after Bodhidharma and four centuries before Marco Polo, Ennin crossed the sea to China where he spent about a decade, keeping a detailed record or diary of his extensive travels through the vast country (then under the T'ang dynasty); significantly, the diary was titled "Record of a Pilgrimage to China in Search of the Law" (or *dharma*). While Marco Polo was mainly a trader looking for commercial contacts, Ennin was a learned scholar enjoying considerable prestige in his homeland. Comparing the two travelers, Edwin Reischauer—who has translated Ennin's diary into English and also provided an extensive commentary—writes:

Marco Polo, coming from a radically different culture, was ill-prepared to understand or appreciate what he saw of higher civilization in China. He was virtually unaware of the great literary traditions of the country and, living in a China which was still in large part Buddhist, comprehended little of this religion other than that it was "idolatrous." Ennin, coming from China's cultural offshoot—Japan—was at least a stepson of Chinese civilization, educated in the complicated writing system of the Chinese and himself a learned Buddhist scholar. Marco Polo came to China as an associate of the hated Mongol conquerors; Ennin, as a fellow believer, entered easily into the heart of Chinese life.

In his commentary, Reischauer accompanies Ennin on his manifold adventures, from his early association with the Japanese embassy in China to his religious pilgrimage through the country to his later tribulations during one of the high points of Buddhist persecution in China. Along the way, the reader learns innumerable details about the culture, economy, and political structure of T'ang China. In introducing his own scholarly work, Reischauer offers a general observation that still deserves pondering today. "In the present age," he notes, "in which we are experiencing the painful process of amalgamation into one

world, a great historical document of this sort, although medieval in time and Far Eastern in place, is part of our common human heritage, with significance beyond these limits of time and space."<sup>23</sup>

### **Liberalism and Minimal Engagement**

In the cases just mentioned, cultural borrowing involved a prolonged, sometimes arduous process of engagement in alien life-forms, a process yielding at least a partial transformation of native habits due to a sustained learning experience. However, cultural contacts do not always or necessarily entail such engagement. Sometimes cultures are content to live or co-exist side by side in a mode of relative indifference; this is true mainly of contacts occurring under the aegis of modern liberalism, particularly its "procedural" variant. Faithful to its motto of *laissez-faire* (let it be, do not meddle), modern liberalism has promoted a tolerant juxtaposition of cultures and life-forms predicated on relative mutual disinterest and aloofness. While acknowledging the need for an overall framework (to prevent chaos), liberal spokesmen typically support only a limited procedural rule system or a government that "governs least," while relegating concrete life-forms to the status of privatized folklore. Self-other relations, in this case, are curiously split or dichotomized: while sameness or identity is presumed to persist on the level of general principle (stylized as "reason" or "human nature"), historical cultures and beliefs are abandoned to rampant heterogeneity (tending toward segregation or ghettoization).

Most advanced Western societies are imbued in some fashion with this liberal "ethos." Curiously, the United States is often analyzed in terms of two radically opposed models: those of the "melting pot" and those of liberal proceduralism; while the former model postulates the progressive assimilation of all strands into *one* uniform culture, the latter extols the neutrality or indifference of procedures toward any and all cultures. Although serving as an antidote to melting-pot assumptions, the second model is not necessarily more accurate as an analytical tool or more enticing as a blueprint for cultural encounter. Despite its appealing "open-mindedness," liberal tolerance tends to be purchased at a price: the price of a schism between form and substance, between public and private domains of life. To this extent, the noted move "beyond the melting pot" can (and needs to) be supplemented in our time by a striving beyond proceduralism.

The model of procedural liberalism is sufficiently well known to permit brief summary in the present context. Among American spokesmen of the model, John Rawls, Ronald Dworkin, and Bruce Ackerman are the writers most frequently and appropriately singled out for at-



tion. In his *A Theory of Justice* and other writings, Rawls seeks to develop a conception of procedural fairness (not substantive “goodness”) which would transcend, or be impartial with respect to, individual or group-based cultural traditions and religious beliefs. Focusing on prevailing conditions in modern Western society, Rawls notes certain basic cultural features (which he labels “subjective circumstances”), chiefly the fact that “persons and associations have contrary conceptions of the good as well as of how to realize them” and that these differences “set them at odds, and lead them to make conflicting claims on their institutions.” In order to mitigate (without in any way trying to eliminate) prevailing contrasts among ways of life, Rawls’s study postulates as the chief task of political theory the formulation of abstractly universal principles which could be endorsed by all members of society in a spirit of impartiality; as is well known, the central principles announced in the study are those of “equal liberty” (guaranteeing the free pursuit of life projects) and of “difference” (providing protection against structural disadvantages).

The axiom of equal liberty has been further elaborated by Dworkin under the heading of “equality principle” or “liberal conception of equality.” According to Dworkin, modern government in the pursuit of equal justice must be rigorously “neutral on what might be called the question of the good life”; likewise, public policies must be “independent of any conception of the good life or of what gives value to life,” whether the conception is held by single individuals or by members of a cultural, ethnic, or religious community. Taking some cues from Dworkin, Ackerman has erected neutrality into the central cornerstone of liberal constitutional theory and legal adjudication. In Ackerman’s view, the principle of neutrality would be violated if a ruling or adjudication would privilege one cultural tradition or way of life over another and—more strictly still—if it even acknowledged as legally relevant prevailing differences or contrasts among traditions or cultural beliefs. In this construal, liberal proceduralism—seen as the embodiment of “formal” reason—triumphs completely over historically grown life-forms (which are reduced to contingent accidents or “subjective” preferences); far from being the outgrowth of concrete cultural interaction, liberal justice appears predicated on a cultural *tabula rasa*.<sup>24</sup>

The shortcomings of liberal proceduralism have been frequently discussed—which again permits brevity at this point. On a logical-theoretical plane, the dilemma of proceduralism can be stated succinctly as follows: either justice is truly neutral and universal, in which case it is abstract, devoid of content, and collapses into tautology; or else it is endowed with some content, in which case it is imbued with

cultural distinctness (where culture denotes a way of life and not merely a "subjective circumstance"). This dilemma has been frankly acknowledged by Rawls, whose candor in this respect might set an example to liberal proceduralists. As Rawls has noted in some recent writings, his theory of justice is not designed for all times and places, but is tailored to the cultural climate of modern, liberal-constitutional societies, a climate that implies distinct assumptions about human behavior, intersubjective (contractual) relations, and secular life styles. However, the problems of proceduralism are not only logical in character; more important are its effects on cultural interaction. Under liberal-procedural auspices, differences of life-forms are either completely bracketed or else they are (more candidly) subordinated to the prevailing or hegemonic liberal culture; in either case, concrete cross-cultural engagement tends to be stifled or circumvented.

This stifling impact is at the heart of a complaint that has been eloquently stated by William Connolly in his *Identity/Difference*. While opposing advocates of assimilation or "collective identity," Connolly also finds fault with "liberal neutralism" or proceduralism. As he points out, liberal neutralism recognizes the "volatility" of competing life styles or identity claims, but would like to "exclude such conflicts from public arenas." In doing so, neutralists bracket those considerations that "move people to present, defend, and reconfigure their identities" in the first place, thus ostricizing "the most intimate areas of life and identity." Opting for a stronger mode of social exchange, Connolly holds that "issues of identity and the good" cannot and should not be banished from public discourse. Shifting the accents to ethical and legal concerns, Michael Perry has launched a blistering critique of liberal proceduralism. Reviewing the arguments of its leading spokesmen (mentioned above), Perry finds that the liberal-procedural project is "spent" and that it is "past time to take a different path," a path which, in his account, is that of a "deliberative, transformative politics." Drawing attention to global-political implications, he writes in a stirring passage:

The position that a deliberative, transformative politics is beyond the capacity of us Americans is all the more frightening when we realize that although the moral culture of the United States is pluralistic, it is certainly no more pluralistic, almost certainly less so, than the moral culture of the human species. . . . In thinking about problems concerning the relation of morality and religion to politics and law as they arise in a particular pluralistic country like the United States, perhaps we can achieve insights that will help us meet the challenge of conducting productive moral discourse not merely in our own country, but in our pluralistic world as well.<sup>25</sup>