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Exploring Humanity – Intercultural Perspectives on Humanism

With an Introduction by Mihai I. Spariosu

With 6 figures

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Contents

Mihai I. Spariosu

Introduction

This collection is based, in part, on a series of papers that were presented at an international conference on "Intercultural Humanism: Challenges, Experiences, Visions, Strategies", held at Oxford University between 10 and 12 September, 2010. The conference had the main objective of proposing, exploring, and promoting the principles and practices of intercultural humanism as an inclusive vision for humanity. The essays collected in the present volume share this objective.

One may wonder why intercultural humanism may be a worthwhile intellectual and scholarly pursuit in the present global circumstance. Although the old humanism in the West, rooted in the Greco-Roman, Judeo-Christian and Enlightenment traditions, has played a significant role in the past, the extreme forms of Western modernism (such as communism and fascism) and the more recent, radical forms of postmodernism, such as deconstructionism, have attempted to discredit it, thereby weakening it considerably. The current processes of globalization have, moreover, revealed that the old humanistic model, aiming at universalism, ecumenism, and the globalization of various Western systems of values and beliefs – even when pleading for an ever-wider inclusion of other cultural perspectives and for intercultural dialogue – is no longer adequate in dealing with the current global conditions.

Whereas it would be wise to retain a number of the assumptions and practices of the traditional Western humanistic model – which, incidentally, it shares with other humanistic models outside the Western world, such as the Jainist, Buddhist, Confucian, Daoist, Islamic and Byzantine ones, to give but a few examples – we must now reconsider and remap it in terms of a larger, global reference frame. It is precisely this global remapping of what is collectively known about humanity in its enormous complexity and diversity that ought to constitute one of the main research objectives of the new field of study and practice that the contributors to the present volume have called "intercultural" or "transcultural" or "global" humanism.

The essays included in the present volume represent only a very small step in the direction of constituting this new field. They are largely propaedeutic in nature and do not present a "unified theory" of humanism. Nor do most of the contributors believe that such a theory would be possible, or even desirable. Furthermore, the very nature of an intercultural dialogue requires a wide variety of viewpoints, expressed in various linguistic garbs that might not always follow the rigors of Standard English. We have refrained from over-editing the contributions precisely in order to preserve this linguistic diversity and the freshness and idiosyncrasies of live speech. Nevertheless, the essays do identify and explore a number of the basic principles, concerns, and challenges of intercultural humanism through comparative analysis and dialogue across a number of countries and geographical regions.

The contributors to Part I, 'Reopening the Door on Humanism', explore the theoretical assumptions, as well as the general practices, that ought to inform intercultural humanism in relation to the traditional types of humanism found in their own cultures. Jörn Rüsen, in 'Temporalizing Humanity: Towards a Universal History of Humanism', presents a brief intellectual history of Western humanism, largely from a German viewpoint, from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment to the modern age. For him, this is a history of "humanizing man", that is, conferring historical, natural, and moral-spiritual dimensions on the human being.

Rüsen analyses the main tenets of what he calls "classical" modern humanism (because of its continuous reference to classical antiquity), particularly in Germany. He places the origin of this kind of humanism in the Enlightenment and the early Romantic period, with such illustrious thinkers and men of letters as Lessing, Kant, Herder, Wilhelm von Humboldt, Schiller and Goethe. Among its main tenets Rüsen lists the following: 1) each human being is primarily a purpose in itself, while all human beings, not just some, belong to humanity as a whole; 2) dignity is a fundamental value of being human and ought to be the basis for political rule; 3) man and world are primarily understood in historical dimensions, which also means that modern humanism is principally rooted in secularism, questioning any affirmation of a supernatural order of the human world; and, 4) humanism is individualism, affirming the basic freedom and rights of each individual and rejecting any notion of collectivism that forcibly yokes this individual freedom to social commitments.

In turn, Rüsen discerns several weak points in this "classical" modern humanism: a systematic suppression of human inhumanity; an idealized, distorted view of classical antiquity; a residue of ethnocentricity; a limited concept of reason; and a highly problematic relationship to nature. He explores each point, arguing that only if / when they are properly addressed, can this kind of Western secular humanism become a credible partner in a global, intercultural dialogue.

Roger Griffin, in 'Homo Humanistus', takes up the argument where Rüsen leaves off. He points out that Western humanism, whether in its Renaissance Christian, or in its 18th and 19th century secularized versions (as exemplified in Rüsen's "classical" modern humanism) is a late offshoot of Christian civilization. Given this fact, Griffin proposes a "transcultural humanism" which is neither religious nor secular and which, he believes, would be more suitable for our present global environment. He finds the ancient origins of this transcultural humanism in the "Axial Age" (posited by Karl Jaspers and also mentioned by Rüsen), which flourished roughly between the 7th and 5th century B.C. and during which humans awakened to the realization that they were all part of a larger whole, conceptualized as humanity or humankind.

Griffin then suggests that human history has been marked by a fundamental conflict between ethnocentrism (which often goes hand in hand with xenophobia, resulting in the dehumanization of the alien) and human altruism. On the side of humanism, defined as a human altruistic impulse, he cites numerous examples from cultural anthropology, the history of human migrations, peaceful cultural assimilation, extended periods of religious harmony, non-Western ethical systems that anticipate Western humanism, and the embrace of compassion as a basic principle in a number of major religions.

Griffin also points out the ease with which human beings transcend their culture, when ideological and political restraints are removed or overcome. According to him, there are countless symbolic episodes of "spontaneous transcultural humanism" in the contemporary world, including the activities of international charitable organizations, civil-society intercultural projects, as well as international events that celebrate a common humanity underlying great cultural, ethnic and religious diversity in the realms of sport, dance, music, science. In conclusion, Griffin contends that the very survival of the species may ultimately depend on "transcultural humanism" being universally accepted and practiced.

In 'Lessons from Early Chinese Humanist Impulses', Kirill Thompson examines what he calls "Humanist predilections" in ancient China, particularly in Confucianism and Daoism, suggesting that these predilections may offer solutions to two main problems associated with Western Humanism (as pointed out, but not necessarily resolved in Rüsen's and Griffin's essays): an "individualist predilection" and an "inherent species-centrism".

Thompson starts by discussing the *Analects* of Confucius, who believed that the social chaos and violence of his time were due to people having lost sight of their "inherent relatedness"; this lapse led them to disregard the ties that bound them to others, and the 'concomitant affections and responsibilities'. Accordingly, Confucius' humanistic ethics is founded on the premise of a relational self and a relational being; in turn, the self-cultivation of *ren* (being humane; hu-

maneness) and the allied virtues equally involve the cultivation of others through responsive, interpersonal regard.

According to Thompson, Mozi (fl. 479 – 438 B.C.) further refined Confucius' relational ethics, which he perceived as too hierarchical and top down, because it focused on "first-order" morality (i. e., prioritizing one's nearest levels of relations, from family and community to state). Mozi's solution was to postulate the ideal of impartial regard (*jianai*), which involved treating and dealing with everyone fairly and on an equal footing. He further argued that if humans were to engage all other humans in this way, rather than with hostility as outsiders, humankind as a whole would live in peace and harmony. Mozi thus laid down the guiding principle for a resilient, "second-order" morality that embraced all human beings.

In the second part of his essay, Thompson tackles the question of "species-centrism" which, according to him, is not satisfactorily resolved by the Confucians, because their ideas of relationality are centered mostly on humans and are not inclusive of other species, let alone ecosystems and the environment. For a satisfactory answer to this question, Thompson turns to Daoism, particularly to Laozi and Zhuangzi. For these Daoists, the problems of humankind stem from adopting an exclusively human perspective, which prevents us from seeing the whole picture. So, what humans deem to be in their advantage or their "right" often turns out to be their loss or over-reach.

According to the Daoist sages, "species-centrism" is inherently unsustainable and self-defeating, because it alienates human life from its natural roots, gradually destroying the natural environment on which human life depends. A proper, all-inclusive, human perspective must embrace other, non-human, standpoints as well. Humans should never lose sight of the fact that they are nested within and dependent on the natural world. By developing this insight, Thompson concludes, the Daoists opened the way to an enriched Humanistic ethic that would incorporate natural, environmental and animal concerns.

Sayyed Mohsen Fatemi's essay, on 'Islam, Secular Modernity and Intercultural Humanism', also points to some of the inadequacies of Western humanism in its modern, secular form, particularly when viewed from a global, intercultural perspective. Fatemi identifies three main "obsessions" of Western secular modernity: fragmented multiplicity, absence, and utilitarianism. In his view, these obsessions hamper a productive dialogue among cultures and the emergence of a genuine intercultural humanism. He then shows how an Islamic approach to humanism may help counterbalance such inadequacies. He focuses on both the cognitive and the emotional constituents of the Islamic humanist perspective, describing the ontoepistemological grounds on which intercultural humanism can be founded. Exploring the distinctions between freedom, choice and empowerment, and their implications in a global, intercultural context,

Fatemi argues that the attainment of different levels of human freedom within an Islamic reference frame could lead to flexible approaches towards understanding other cultural frameworks as well.

In conclusion, Fatemi points out that a number of contemporary Western thinkers are equally aware of the three counterproductive "obsessions" of the modern Western mindset that he has described. He considers this self-awareness a good point of departure for conducting extensive intercultural negotiations in order to create common humanist values, which can in turn lead to fruitful intercultural cooperation and a durable global peace.

In the last essay included in Part I, 'Intercultural Humanism and Global Intelligence', I present some of the basic principles and practices that I believe ought to inform intercultural humanism. I also attempt to identify some of the main features that would define this new type of humanism in relation to the Western traditional versions. I suggest that, unlike many such traditional versions, whose project was to build a universal *mathesis* based on universal human nature, intercultural humanism starts from the awareness of the great human diversity and seeks to explore its creative richness. On the other hand, intercultural humanism, albeit it does not pretend to know what human nature is, does not remain immersed in the local, the picturesque, and the quaint, but moves back and forth between smaller and larger cultural reference frames.

At the highest level, intercultural humanism ought to be informed by global or planetary intelligence, which I define, not unlike the ancient Daoists and Buddhists, as intercultural responsive understanding and concerted action toward what is in the best interest of all human communities and the biosphere as a whole. But, what this "best interest" is must in turn be defined through intercultural consensus, resulting from a long and arduous process of dialogue, negotiation and mediation among all of the world communities. In other words, global intelligence is interactive, and no single national or supranational instance or authority can predetermine its outcome.

In turn, intercultural humanism as a manifestation of global intelligence is what contemporary nonlinear science calls an emergent phenomenon, involving lifelong learning processes. For this reason, the last section of my paper proposes concrete projects for promoting the ideals and practices of intercultural humanism, chiefly through a network of intercultural learning centres, placed strategically around the planet.

The five essays that comprise Part II, 'The Treasures of Humankind', are mostly historical and analytical in nature, further identifying important humanistic trends and features in various cultural traditions that could be remapped and reoriented toward intercultural humanism. Hubert Cancik, in 'The Awareness of Cultural Diversity in Ancient Greece and Rome', complements Rüsen's argument by exploring the origins of modern Western humanism in

Greco-Roman antiquity. According to Cancik, it was the awareness of cultural identity and difference that enabled the ancient Greeks and Romans to invent what in the 18th and 19th centuries came to be known as anthropology, ethnology, or ethnography. He builds his thesis chiefly around four case studies: ancient epic poetry, historiography, medical treatises, and the visual arts (sculpture and theatre).

Cancik traces the earliest Hellenic humanist tendencies to *The Odyssey*. According to him, Homer provides an ethnographic framework for the traditional narrative of Odysseus' *nostos* or return home, developing several anthropological categories of investigation that are still operative in modern historiography and ethnography: appearance, character, lifestyle, work habits, attitude toward foreigners, habitat and climate, government, religion, and family. Homer can thus be regarded as the patron of ancient geography and ethnology.

According to Cancik, one of the most original and prominent features of Greco-Roman culture is its perception and representation of foreign cultures. Openness toward the world, curiosity, and an insatiable hunger for knowledge are present not only in the Homeric epic, but also in the huge number of historiographies from Herodotus to Tacitus to Plutarch, and in medical treatises from Hippocrates to Galen. The Greeks and Romans were often driven by commercial and colonizing motives, but they also sought to discover what is common to all humans and what is specific to individuals, or distinct groups.

The medical treatises of Hippocrates and Galen, for example, established a typology of diseases based on environmental and cultural commonalities and differences. Together with the historiographers, they developed general methodological tools such as empirical and critical observation, and conceptual categories such as the common, the universal and the identical (as well as their opposites: the particular, the other, and the different). These tools and categories still shape our understanding of foreign cultures in the social sciences and the humanities today.

Cancik notes that the works of the ancients are ethnocentric, but not racist. They do not condemn colonization and slavery, but neither do they mention "subhuman" or inferior races; nor do they believe that slavery is inherent in nature or is anything more than an accidental misfortune that could befall any human being. For example, Aeschylus, in his tragedy *The Persians*, presents the defeated Persians in a sympathetic and humane way. He neither caricaturizes nor demonizes the Hellenes' most feared enemies. On the contrary, his premise is that Persians and Hellenes come "from the same race" and have more in common than either of them may be aware.

In his conclusion, Cancik mentions what he calls the "lacunae" in his essay, related, on the one hand, to the postmodern views of the Greco-Roman world as a predominantly Eurocentric, colonialist and imperialist culture and, on the

other hand, to the perceptions and representations that other ancient people had of foreign cultures. His implication is that most of these people, judging from the little we know about them, were equally ethnocentric and, when the opportunity presented itself, equally imperialistic. Cancik implicitly pleads for an impartial and balanced scholarly approach to existing historical material, including that related to Humanism.

Rüsen and Cancik approach Humanism largely from a Western European perspective. Robert Evans, on the other hand, looks at it from an Eastern European viewpoint in his essay on 'European Humanism: East and West'. As Evans notes, European and other scholars hardly agree on whether the eastern and the western regions of Europe form a single cultural space, often invoking notions of "periphery", "backwardness", and "cultural imitation" to distinguish between the two geographical areas. (Needless to say, these are the very same notions that certain Western scholars have employed to characterize many non-European cultures as well).

Sketching his own brief history of European Humanism, Evans points out that this movement was Christian and highly cosmopolitan until the late 18th century, when it needed increasingly to interact with modern nation-state formations and to meet their challenges, including divisions along ethnic and geographical lines, such as that between "East" and "West". In this respect, the ascendancy of the Slavic people in the East brought a significant religious and cultural shift, leading, in turn, to disputes and conflicts between the two regions. Consequently, the Humanists in the East took upon themselves the task of mediating between the two increasingly divided worlds. To support his thesis, Evans presents the case studies of two leading Slav humanists: the Croat Josip Juraj Strossmayer (1815 – 1905), and the Slovak Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (1850 – 1937).

According to Evans, Bishop Strossmayer sought to reconcile both the Latin and Orthodox churches, and the South Slav nationalistic drives with the cosmopolitan policies of the Habsburg Empire. Strossmayer attempted to adapt the original humanist enterprise, which was "ecumenical" and "syncretic", to the exigencies of an age of ethnic affirmation. The dedication of the cathedral he had built at Djakovo points to this effort: 'To the honour of God, to the unity of the churches, to the concord and love of my people.'

In turn, Masaryk, who belonged to the next humanist generation after Strossmayer, attempted to reconcile Habsburg federalism with rising Czech and Slovak nationalism. Later, however, he grew disillusioned with the Habsburg monarchy, because it failed, in his eyes, to live up to the principles of *humanita*. This was Masaryk's own version of "classical" modern humanism (Rüsen) inspired by Herder's philosophy and based on "universal" principles that each nation would implement in its own way. In keeping with this national humanist

ideal, he fought for the creation of the democratic nation-state of Czechoslo-vakia, whose first president he became.

In conclusion, Evans points out that the cases of Strossmayer and Masaryk show that "secular" humanism, while it does have 18th century roots, has only recently become the dominant version. Furthermore, nationalistic and ethno-centric versions of humanism have not replaced the Christian or religious ones in general, but often work hand in hand with them. Therefore, any project of intercultural humanism must not underestimate the nationalistic, ethnic, and religious challenges it will face in the current global environment.

Just as Evans' contribution complements those of Rüsen and Griffin, Chen Chao-ying's essay on 'Human Being as Species Being: A Reconsideration of Xunzi's Humanism' further develops one of the themes in Thompson's piece: "species-centrism" in Confucianism. Chen adopts a twofold comparative ap-proach to her subject: on the one hand, she critically assesses the most influential modern Confucian interpretations of Xunxi (an ancient Chinese thinker from the third century B.C.E. who was originally not included in the Confucian canon) and, on the other hand, explores certain conceptual similarities between the humanism of Xunxi and that of the young Karl Marx (as reflected in his Paris manuscripts of 1844). These similarities particularly concern the concept of "species-being". For Marx (in the wake of Feuerbach), as for Xunxi, man is conscious of himself as a member of the human species. Our ability to conceive of ourselves as a "species" is the essence of our humanity, which distinguishes us from animals.

Mindful of the Daoist criticism of Confucianism as "species-centric," Chen points out that Xunxi overcomes this criticism through his triadic representation of the cosmos as a harmonious interplay of heaven, earth and human beings. She suggests that this triadic concept is similar to the Marxian idea of human nature as constituted through an active, reciprocal and transformative relationship to nature. Here, however, her intercultural analogy appears less convincing, since Marx's philosophy is decidedly materialist and historicist, excluding the third element of Xunxi's triad, namely heaven.

In 'Buddhism and Intercultural Humanism: An Exploration in Context', M. Satish Kumar proposes a form of intercultural humanism that draws on the principles of *Saddharmapundarika* or the Lotus Sutra – a fundamental text for Nichiren Buddhism (founded by the Japanese monk Nichiren in the 13th cen-tury), which is, in turn, a form of Mahayana Buddhism. According to Kumar, this Buddhist intercultural humanism would become part of a global ethic, based on the inherent dignity and sacredness of all life forms and the capacity for inner transformation given to all humans through dialogue and empathy. It would cultivate "reciprocal humanism", based on "compassion" by reaffirming that

our happiness cannot be built on the unhappiness of others and calling for "sympathetic action" with the goal of attaining universal peace.

Buddhist intercultural humanism also recognizes that humans and nonhumans are integral part of the same universe and that to destroy the nonhuman will have a catastrophic effect on humanity. Therefore, it demands respect for the Earth, and life in all its diversity, by allowing for the creation of a just, ecologically responsible, and peaceful environment for all communities. It does not see human beings as masters of the planet Earth but, rather, as part of a single living entity or universe, linked by a mutually interdependent web of harmonious relationships.

According to Kumar, Buddhist intercultural humanism would help inculcate a sense of propriety by respecting the existence of self and others and would be instrumental in converting greed into generosity, anger and hatred into compassion, distrust into trust. In other words, it would help humans move away from the concept of selfish individualism to that of selflessness and spirituality. As committed humanists, Kumar suggests, our actions should help us move from benign indifference to responsive communion with fellow members of our planet. At the same time, a true humanist cannot avoid or abandon the struggle against evil. Through decisive humanistic action, reason will eventually prevail over the distorted logic of power. Therefore intercultural humanism, Kumar concludes, is the core of human development, and humankind cannot afford to waste this immensely valuable inner source of energy.

In turn, Ming Xie, in 'Harmony in Difference: Tension and Complementarity', argues for intercultural humanism from the particular Daoist viewpoint of the Chinese humanist tradition, which he contrasts, like other contributors, with modern Western humanism in its secular version. He focuses on the concept of harmony, which, he points out, is a transcultural or universal value and can be approached from a number of directions, including musical, aesthetic, moral, political, religious and cosmological theory.

After examining some of the tensions inherent in the notion of harmony, Ming Xie turns to discussing it in the specific context of Humanism. He joins Rüsen, Thompson, Kumar, and a few other contributors to this volume in calling for a self-critical humanism that should recognize a greater value in our harmony with the environment and with other sentient and non-sentient beings on earth. In his view, planetary harmony is ultimately premised on a thoroughgoing critique of anthropocentrism. We humans may be putting up a superior front, but are hardly the masters of nature that we fancy ourselves to be. We need to become aware of our proper place in the larger scheme of things and harmonize our internal and external tensions accordingly.

The essays in Part III, 'Challenging Humanity: The Multiple Dimensions', while asking the hard questions about the very possibility of intercultural hu-

manism challenge it to develop new avenues of research. Indeed, several of the essays suggest such avenues themselves. For example, Mikhail Epstein's essay on 'Humanology: The Fate of the Human in the "Posthuman" Age' proposes a new field of study at the intersection of information technology and the traditional humanistic disciplines: "humanology". The field of humanology studies what happens with humans after their functions are taken over by thinking machines, and what happens with machines in the process of their intellectualization and humanization.

With the development of artificial intelligence, humans are no longer the sole inhabitants of the "noosphere" (the domain of the intellect or the conscious mind), so the question arises: what does it mean to be human in the age of "humanoids"? According to Epstein, humanoids are an emerging group of beings that display new differential properties, redefining our concepts of both humans and machines. Thus, humanology is both 'the *ecology of humans* and the *anthropology of machines*', that is, a study of the 'mutual redistribution' of their functions.

According to Epstein, humanology evolves as a result of humans making the transition into 'a new historical stage of the species' self-construction'. Humans 'recede into the past as a bio-species and simultaneously step into the future as a techno-species.' Humanology, Epstein argues, is a mirror image of anthropology, because both fields deal with humanness in a 'liminal position' – one with humans evolving from nature, the other with humans evolving into artificial forms of life and intelligence. He rejects, however, the idea of the "posthuman", arguing that humanoids will not replace humans or render them obsolete, but will complement and enrich them.

In the last section of his essay, Epstein deals with what he calls 'the theological paradox of technical advancement'. According to him, as humans create more and more virtual worlds, they will tend more and more to accept the evidence that there is an Engineer or a Designer superior to them and that the laws of existence were created by an 'even more powerful mind'. Although it remains an open question if this religious knowledge will be coupled harmoniously with traditional faith, it is increasingly evident, Epstein contends, that science and technology have an enormous spiritual potential.

Gheorghe Ștefan, in 'Integral Humanism and Its Challenges' complements Epstein's essay by arguing that the evolutionary prospects of humanity would be dim without the development, in parallel, of an 'integral human being', capable of meeting the challenges of living in a complex, technologized and globalized world. Ștefan defines this integral human being as a well-balanced, harmonious interplay of rational, spiritual and imaginative / creative constituents. He points out, however, that for the time being 'integral man' remains a utopian type – an ideal to be striven after.

According to Ștefan, the continuing imbalance between the rational, the spiritual and the imaginative elements in human nature has led to "modern" man, who is smart, skilled and talented, but also greedy, deceitful and violent. Because of spiritual and imaginative deficiencies, the modern human being is unable to master its own self-destructive impulses, dominating a limited natural and social environment in a recklessly selfish, authoritarian, and violent manner.

At the socioeconomic level, Ștefan further argues, modern human societies have evolved into three interrelated global networks: the hierarchical network of states, the concurrent network of corporations, and the cooperative network of civil society. But, the imbalance at the micro level of the individual human being has, in turn, produced an imbalance at the macro social level, where the global network of corporations subordinates and dominates the global networks of states and civil societies, with disastrous consequences for humanity as a whole.

Ștefan concludes that only a restoration of the balance at the micro individual and the macro societal levels can ensure the wellbeing of the planet. Furthermore, a properly balanced, globalized world must primarily be based on civil society networks, because only cooperative civil society can be motivated to mediate between the unlimited individual freedom claimed by the corporate world and the rational constraints imposed by the State. In turn, civil society must be based on integral humanism, because most of its members are, directly or indirectly, involved in reflecting on and transforming the human condition.

Erhard Reckwitz, in 'Otherness? Towards an Intercultural Literary Anthropology', takes up some of the humanist themes present in Rüsen and Cancik and examines them critically, through the lens of literary narratives. Adopting the methodology of postcolonial criticism, Reckwitz selects four different case-studies that he regards as literary contributions to the discipline of 'xenology', which he defines as the cognitive attempt to represent or accommodate the alterity of the colonial other. According to him, these literary texts 'either unwittingly undermine their own anthropological assumptions or deliberately deconstruct claims of European superiority'.

The first case study is that of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, which belongs to the category of literary text undermining its own premises. Although Crusoe claims that he is the carrier of universal human values, his "virtues" are only those of the English middle class, with its Protestant work ethic, its personalized relationship with God, and its ideology of self-reliance. Friday's worth as a human being within the novel resides in his willingness to submit to Crusoe's superior, utilitarian wisdom. By inculcating such utilitarian values into "savages" like Friday, Reckwitz argues, the English brand of colonialism claims to be more benign than that of any of the other colonizing nations.

James Fenimore Cooper's collection of novels entitled *The Leatherstocking*

Tales – the second case study – deal with a different colonial situation. Unlike Crusoe, Natty Bumppo, the main character of the collection, is brought up among the North American Indians, understanding and respecting their culture. He remains an ambiguous figure, however, poised between "wilderness" and civilization. Despite his attempts to mediate between Indians and Whites, he cannot halt the assimilation or extinction of the former. According to Reckwitz, Natty represents the Euro-American frontiersman who turns, however unwillingly, into an agent of destruction or dispossession, fraught with historical guilt.

The third case study Reckwitz presents is A. Bertram Chandler's short story, 'The Cage' (1964). Apparently a science fiction narrative in which humans experience reverse discrimination at the hands of intergalactic aliens, the piece is a sardonic dystopia that denies the possibility of any society on Earth, or on any other planet, which is not based on savagery masquerading as reason. The last case-study, Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves* (1976), concerns a Victorian white female protagonist who is forced to live among Australian cannibal aborigines, goes native all the way, and then returns to "civilization". According to Reckwitz, she regards her relapse into savagery as a discovery of her true self, which leads her to question the blessings of British civilization.

In conclusion, Reckwitz contends that these literary case-studies show that (Western) literature is ideally suited to make a relevant contribution to answering the fundamental question of anthropology: "What is a human being?" Literature can provide an effective self-reflexive and interpretive tool for a new kind of intercultural humanism, by questioning the traditional views of the European self and the colonial other, and by offering us the imaginative experience of other peoples' ways of life.

In 'Ubuntu / Botho: Ideology or Promise?' Michael Onyebuchi Eze complements Reckwitz's and other contributors' critical stance, exploring the shortcomings of *ubuntu / botho* as a theory of modern African humanism. According to Eze, *ubuntu* in the African countries where it is preached has, unfortunately, become a mere ideology. But even as an ideology, it does not live up to its claims. For example, how can one reconcile *ubuntu*, Eze asks, with the genocides in Burundi and Rwanda, or the widespread political corruption in contemporary Africa? But, like most other contributors to the present volume, Eze does not limit himself to a critical, negative stance. While underscoring the limitations and dangers of the ideological use of *ubuntu*, Eze still finds it valuable, suggesting alternative, positive ways in which this notion may be employed as a viable form of African humanism, outside ideology.

According to Eze, the pivotal issue for African humanism revolves around the concept of personhood. He subscribes to the view, prevalent in the Western world, but not in traditional sub-Saharan Africa where communitarian views prevail, that the community or society neither confers nor takes away one's

humanity, even though it affirms it. An individual's subjectivity is not a quality to be acquired or a "being-in-process", but entirely given at birth. It is this self-determination as a human person that is recognized as an enduring gift to the community and through which the community flourishes. By the same token, the good of the community is not prior to that of the individual, but both are equally important and mutually dependent. It is this meaning, Eze contends, that the Bantu notion of *ubuntu / botho* (human being) encapsulates and can therefore constitute a platform for African humanism.

Eze notes that the emergence of *ubuntu* in African public discourse is also related to the perceived crises of modernity afflicting many contemporary sub-Saharan African countries. It is argued that traditional African society, which is oriented towards a communitarian ethos, has become degraded through the onslaught of modernity, which promotes an abstract individualist mode of life. *Ubuntu* recognizes the cogency of this argument and does not condone solipsistic individualism. On the contrary, to be a person involves recognition of the "other" and an affirmation and appreciation of his humanity. The *ubuntu* code of behaviour implies such communal virtues as kindness, forgiveness, generosity, respect, courtesy, friendliness and mutual sharing. These can also be seen as core principles of *ubuntu* humanism.

In his conclusion, Eze suggests that *ubuntu*, irrespective of its past ideological uses, should be a narrative of renaissance and a philosophy of restoration, that is, an attempt to restore a person's subjectivity and recognize him as a human being, regardless of his status in life. To be a 'person through another person', Eze contends, is also an invitation to interculturality. In his view, *ubuntu*, once it is freed from ideology, offers a theory of socio-cultural imagination that can be a valuable tool in reforming African traditional society. It may become a healthy form of humanism and a genuine ethical practice that can help overcome the current crisis of humanity in Africa. In this sense, it could also bring a significant contribution to the theory and practice of intercultural humanism.

In the last essay of the collection, 'Tradition, the Beautiful, and the Uncertainties of Global Humanism', Virgil Nemoianu shows himself sceptical of, but not unsympathetic to, the notion of intercultural humanism. He begins by exploring the ambivalent relation between modernity and humanism. By modernity, Nemoianu understands a widespread socio-historical and cultural phenomenon exhibiting such features as intensive industrialization and urbanization, accelerated physical and temporal movement, huge emphasis on communication, exponential increase in the collection and dissemination of information, the predominance of an analytical mindset, contractual or transactional human relations, social and individual alienation, individualism and self-invention (doubled, ironically, by increasing social conformity, equalization and homogeneity) and a relentless utopian drive toward progress. In turn, he

defines humanism as any worldview that focuses on the human person and its connections with other persons, society, nature and the universe.

Nemoianu notes that modernity and humanism are often seen as incompatible. Indeed, most of the criticisms leveled against modernity stem from a humanist perspective (and the contributions to the present volume amply illustrate this point). Humanism often regards modernity as destructive of morality and spirituality, spawning greed, selfishness, random violence, lack of compassion, neglect of the elderly and abuse of the weak. Modernity also produces a feeling of emptiness or absence, which in turn generates anxiety, mistrust and even violent reactions against the tendency toward uniformity, mechanical repetitiveness, and erasure of local identities.

At the same time, Nemoianu points out, there are many beneficial effects of modernity, most of them material in nature, such as a higher standard of living, an exponential increase in physical and social mobility and existential options, and wider legal rights and freedoms. Despite these advantages, Nemoianu argues, Western modernity, unlike earlier ages, has been incapable of generating its own forms of humanism; even worse, it seems to be in the process of actually destroying, or at least ignoring, the humanisms of other civilizations, in addition to that of its own.

Although Nemoianu is sympathetic to the plight of humanism, he believes that the onward march of modernity is unstoppable. This does not mean, however, that it cannot be slowed down, tempered, made more "humane". In his view, intercultural humanism might assume this role, if only it could be lifted off the ground – a complex launching, involving considerable risks and challenges of its own. Intercultural humanism, as well as any other kind, could adopt the 'lateral solution', that is, not meeting the onslaught of modernity head-on, but around its margins, on the secondary channels and backwaters as it were, where its impetuous flow diminishes in intensity.

One of the most effective lateral actions, Nemoianu argues, is the cultivation of the Beautiful, including the fine arts and the realm of the aesthetic as a whole. According to him, the Beautiful is the meeting place of tradition and innovation; it is 'the preserver of memory and the generator of scenarios for the present and future', as well as 'our most convenient field of exercise in the production of coherence and meaning'. These properties turn the Beautiful into an excellent tool for all forms of humanism, including the global kind. In the latter case, the "lateral solution" would be to seek the early stems and roots of several cultures and find their common elements, because it would be too risky and unsound to begin with 'a grafting or fraternizing at the level of tree crowns'.

The lateral solution for global humanism would also involve 'gleaning' actions, that is, 'efforts to recuperate elements left behind by the turbulence and by the relentlessness of historical advance, things such as forgotten authors and

historical figures, unsuccessful scenarios, discarded intellectual theories.' Above all, Nemoianu concludes, it should be based on the belief that inside (and outside, one might add) any historical configuration there is a great deal of complexity so that the "centrality" of the human being should be expressed by a multitude of dimensions, involving countless relationships with other human beings, society, nature, the transcendent, and the cosmos at large.

The foregoing review of the essays included in this volume shows that the contributors do touch on a number of principles that are essential for the development of the field of intercultural humanism. These principles include: a holistic approach to the universe, inclusive of all sentient and non-sentient beings; the cultivation of dignity and respect for the human person and all other life on earth; the harmonious development of all aspects of the individual through the cultivation of such traditional virtues as altruism, generosity, selflessness, kindness, and compassion extended to all beings on Earth (not just to members of one's own group or of one's own species); the belief that the way forward for humanity is through greater awareness of one's individual, cultural and human self, as well as the selves of the others; and, that this greater awareness is to be achieved not through violent actions, but through extensive and continuous intercultural research, dialogue, mediation, and mutually beneficial cooperation.

Of course, there are also many "lacunae" in the volume, so that Cancik's observation in regard to his own essay applies to the collection as a whole. Here I can list only the one that I consider to be the largest, even if it is, to some extent, unavoidable: our intercultural dialogue is limited, for obvious logistical reasons, to a very small number of scholars who, moreover, represent a small number of the world's cultures (Eastern and Western European, Russian, North American, Chinese, Indian, Middle Eastern, and sub-Saharan African), and a very limited number of viewpoints within those cultures.

Indeed, no one can claim to speak in the name of an entire culture, let alone an entire civilization, and expect to be taken seriously. In this respect, Evans' essay constitutes a useful caveat against the hubris of vacuous generalizations and oversimplifications that intercultural humanism may, all too easily, fall into. It also underlines the fact that Western humanism is not the monolithic behemoth that postcolonial critics often construe it to be. On the contrary, it is very diversified and heterogeneous, illustrating Nemoianu's point that any set of historical circumstances is quite complex and has to be treated in a well-informed and responsible manner. In this last section of my introduction, therefore, I would like to list a few caveats that intercultural humanism as a new field of study would do well to consider.

The first caveat concerns precisely the issue of well-informed and responsible research. Unfortunately, ignorance and irresponsibility have been the norm,

rather than the exception, in intercultural matters, and not only in the main-stream mass media and on the Internet. All too often the "Western" or another culture, say, the "Islamic" one, has been grossly oversimplified or mis-characterized and then turned into a political or ideological football, often fu-eling violent conflicts that serve a very limited number of selfish interest groups and negatively affect everyone else.

European and other humanists who participate in intercultural exchanges across the globe should always keep in mind that what is commonly called the "Western" culture or civilization is a huge conglomerate of smaller cultures that comprise, in turn, a vast number of even smaller ethnic, religious and other groups. Moreover, such groups are far from being internally homogeneous: the individuals within them may often define themselves not only in terms of that specific group, but also in many other, often contradictory, terms. The same heterogeneity and diversity hold true of any other large or small civilization or culture.

Intercultural humanists should further keep in mind that our cultural cate-gories such as ethnicity, religion, nation, race, culture and civilization are not cast in stone, but are shifting realities: they are historical perspectives on the world, i. e., ways of seeing, interpreting, and representing human societies that are subject to change. They should expose the ignorance and / or prejudices of those journalists, policymakers, and researchers who continue to present ethnic, racial and religious groups as monolithic social entities and social agents. This kind of casting has often led to ethnic, racial and religious prejudice on the one hand, and to political correctness on the other.

Political correctness in particular is another pitfall that intercultural hu-manism should guard against, not least because it will often tread the same cognitive grounds as cultural and postcolonial studies. During the last two decades, the various disciplines within the humanities have been dominated, especially in North America but outside it as well, by postcolonial theory or by what one may call, more generally, "third-worldism". In turn, this intellectual trend can be divided into the sincere and the hypocritical, or the politically correct, types. In its sincere versions, thirld-worldism is anti-cosmopolitan, provincial, fragmented and full of social and ideological *ressentiment.* It seems to be a partial return to the nationalist and ethnic fragmentation of late Roman-ticism. Fortunately, it has lately been counter-balanced by cosmopolitan in-tellectual attitudes that come especially from outside the Western world, e. g., from Chinese and Indian local scholars, rather than from their co-nationals who live in the West. Here one might point out the historical irony whereby it is the Chinese, Indian and other local non-Western scholars, and not their exiled compatriots, who enact the liberal, cosmopolitan attitudes toward knowledge

that were displayed by the European scholars who found refuge in the United States during and after World War II.

Third-worldism can also be politically opportunistic and easily co-optable by a capitalist consumerist society. It is this hypocritical type of third-worldism that usually assumes the form of political correctness. In the United States, for example, there are many academic departments of cultural and postcolonial studies where white, often Ivy-League educated, scholars join their exiled colleagues (who belong, in turn, to the privileged groups of their own, so-called "third-world", countries) in churning out endless studies about the "colonial other" outside their historical and intellectual contexts. They have created an entire academic industry that has also spilled into the American mass culture and politics, leading to the so-called "culture wars", as well as to a number of either sincere or cynical (but equally wrong-headed) policies toward "minorities" in academia and outside it.

During the last few decades, the same wrong-headed cultural policies were introduced in the European Union with the same counterproductive results. Although European and other intercultural humanists should stay away from political correctness, they should also make sure that the recent declarations of several prominent European leaders that the multicultural policies of the European liberal democracies have failed should not lead yet again to the opposite pole, i.e., to ethnic prejudice, chauvinism and racism. On the contrary, these declarations should occasion a thorough reexamination of the binary opposition itself: the two symmetrically opposite attitudes of cultural prejudice and political correctness have a common base in ethnic and / or racial stereotyping and unwittingly perpetuate the social conflicts that have been associated with ethnicity and race ever since the advent of the modern nation-state.

In turn, this reexamination, which could well be the task of intercultural humanism, should start from the insight that it is counterproductive to devise and conduct policies based on ethnic and racial stereotyping of any kind, no matter how well intentioned such policies might be. Therefore, our duty as responsible humanists and scientists is to be wary of any ideological or political program, as Eze's essay on *ubuntu* convincingly argues. Avoiding, as much as possible, any ideological bias, we should carry out extensive and thorough research into the basic claims and assumptions of any cultural theory, in order to test and establish its validity, and only then advocate its implementation in the social arena.

Another pitfall for intercultural humanism is the temptation to become a "modern", mainstream scientific discipline. This might eventually involve developing and practicing a new science: the science of being human. In turn, this science would need to be developed in all its aspects, ranging from the theoretical to the empirical, to the normative, to the pragmatic. But, the pitfall in this

case is that intercultural humanism might be tempted to become, in the name of scientific "rigor," a rigidly institutionalized and compartmentalized academic field, be it "humanology" or any other kind. In that situation, intercultural humanism would become nothing more than another "discipline" (in all the senses of the word), competing for cultural authority with other power-oriented disciplines.

Along the same lines, intercultural humanists should not fall into the modernist and postmodernist trap of declaring perpetual "crises" whether in intellectual / scientific discourse or in real life. These declarations are nothing more than rhetorical power strategies to unseat old conceptual orthodoxies and replace them with one's own. Proclaiming the "death of God", the "death of Man", the "death of the author", the "death of literature", the "death of a discipline", or the "death of humanism" has become a ritualistic act of scapegoating, typical of any "modern" disciplinary mentality. Intercultural humanism must avoid this type of agonistic move, if it does not wish to get entangled in disciplinary power-struggles and some scapegoating of its own.

Intercultural humanism should equally avoid the pitfall that is endemic to any project that limits itself to writing. Even if, in the wake of Kenneth Burke and the analytic philosophers, one regards written and spoken words as "symbolic action" or "speech acts", such writing, no matter how generous and lofty, eventually becomes empty without a corresponding practice. To adopt Nemoianu's vocabulary, one must imagine an entire series of lateral moves for intercultural humanism that the practitioners in this field would need to work out in detail. I have listed some of them in my contribution to this volume, but many more will be needed.

Above all – and this is not necessarily the view of every contributor to the collection – intercultural humanists ought to work toward a personal and collective turning away from a mentality of power, which has unfortunately prevailed on our planet for thousands of years, toward a mentality of peace. A good first step toward this goal would be to begin to think, feel and act according to the moral principles and values of the "perennial wisdom", which seems to have come into historical view for the first time during the Axial Age (mentioned or alluded to by a number of the contributors to the present volume), but which is by no means absent in our age, even if it is still outside the main stream. To achieve this cultural paradigm shift is no simple task, however, and would take the sustained, collective will and effort of cultural, political and other elites from all over the world.

The paradigm shift toward an irenic mentality would also involve extensive and continuous learning processes. Intercultural humanism could contribute in a decisive way to these learning processes, especially if it would enlist the help of the most advanced information and communication technologies, perhaps

along the lines suggested by Epstein. To adopt the most effective learning strategies, intercultural humanism should take its cue from literature and function as a liminal form of discourse and action. Literary discourse – "Western" or otherwise – is far from being a mere vehicle for ideology, as postcolonial critics often claim. On the contrary, it can fulfil a large number of functions, including a variety of cognitive and aesthetic ones, depending on the historical period and its specific cultural context. Above all, literature has always situated itself at the intersection of other forms of discourse, or in the space between the actual and the imagined, where new worlds continually emerge into being.[1]

In turn, intercultural humanism should function not as a rigid academic discipline, but as a liminal cognitive space, in the no man's land between other disciplines, thus allowing new forms of knowledge to emerge. Although it does need some form of institutionalization, intercultural humanism should look for those supple and flexible organizational structures that would best help it fulfil its global mission. One such form would be the intercultural learning centres that I discuss in my contribution to this volume. Such centres would be set up not as "command and control" operations, but as creative, liminal nodes in a cooperative worldwide network.

In this respect, intercultural humanism might aspire to become again the "republick of letters" that it was in the Renaissance, but on a global scale. Under the right conditions and premises, this aspiration could be a proper and worthwhile ideal for the world communities of intercultural humanists to pursue. But, this new "republick of letters" ought to be cosmopolitan, universal and irenic, at the same time that it would cherish and nurture the individual and the local. Its capital city would be neither Paris nor Berlin, neither London nor Washington D.C., neither Mexico City nor Buenos Aires, neither New Dehli nor Beijing, neither Moscow nor Melbourne. On the contrary, it would have countless "capitals" or "centres," understood in terms of the creative, liminal nodes in a cooperative global network that I mentioned in the previous paragraph.

In all of these contexts, the intercultural humanist would do well to consider the advice of Lucian of Samosata, cited by Cancik at the end of his essay. In 'How History Should Be Written' (168 A.D.), Lucian – an Assyrian-Greek polyglot and humanist – suggests that the historian should always strive to be 'a foreigner and stateless in his books'. I might add that whereas the intercultural humanists should indeed assume the liminal standpoint of the stateless and the foreigner in

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1 For a fully developed theory of literature as ludic liminality, with a wealth of examples and case studies, see my book, *The Wreath of Wild Olive: Play, Liminality and the Study of Literature* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1997).

their scholarly work, they should, at the same time, strive to feel at home everywhere in our world and beyond. And here, again, the contemporary humanist would do no more (and no less!) than follow in the footsteps of another ancient Greek humanist, Diogenes of Oinoanda (c. 200 A.D.; also mentioned by Roger Griffin). Explaining why he inscribed the wall of an entire public Stoa with his Epicurean teachings, Diogenes noted:

'And not least we did this [inscription] for those who are called "foreigners," though they are not really so. For, while the various segments of the earth give different people a different country, the whole compass of this world gives all people a single country, the entire earth, and a single home, the world.'[2]

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2 Diogenes of Oinoanda, *The Epicurean Inscriptions*, Fr. 30, translated by Martin Ferguson Smith (Napoli: Bibliopolis, 1992).

Part One: Reopening the Door on Humanism

Jörn Rüsen

Temporalizing Humanity: Towards a Universal History of Humanism

> Nur die gesamte Menschheitsgeschichte vermag die Maßstäbe für den Sinn des gegenwärtigen Geschehens zu geben.
>
> Karl Jaspers[1]

Why humanism?

We all know that the process of globalization has posed a challenge of cultural orientation that is of great relevance and importance. The growing density of intercultural communication has led to an urgent need for new rules to guide this communication. These rules are plausible only if they fulfil two conditions: they must be transculturally valid, therefore, they have to cross the boundaries of pre-existing cultural traditions, with all their varieties and differences, into the realm of transcultural argumentation; and, at the same time, these rules have to lead to an affirmation of cultural differences, since these differences are necessary factors and elements in identity formation.

At first glance, these preconditions seem to contradict each other. But, the idea of finding transculturally valid rules for recognizing cultural differences may solve this contradiction in a reasonable manner. It is the main thesis of this paper that humanism may be an answer to the fundamental questions of the new cultural orientation, because it is best positioned to solve the problems surrounding intercultural encounter in the age of globalization.

As a starting point, we can take the, apparently, simple notion that the rules needed in a global environment must refer to the same subjects; namely, to humans who have to come to terms with themselves and with each other. In all cultures and traditions we find this common ground: to be a human being carries a high value in practical life. All humans share the understanding that they are human, while realizing that being human exists in a rich variety of

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1 Only the whole history of mankind may give the parameters for the meaning of what happens today. See Karl Jaspers, *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte* (Munich: Piper, 1963) p. 15. (First edition: Zürich, 1949)

forms. Humanism, therefore, contains the idea of commonness and difference at the same time. It is more than merely an idea considering that it has already been actualized in various cultural traditions.[2]

But we still need to ask if, and how, these traditions can be mediated so that they may lead to a concept of humanity that addresses the reality of humankind, as it manifests itself in the globalizing process. In order to meet the objective of this paper, I would like to present the Western tradition of humanism[3] in such a way that it may provide good arguments for intercultural humanism. By "good arguments" I mean arguments that can be accepted from a non-Western point of view in the context of globalization and its need for a new orientation in inter-cultural communication.[4]

What is humanism? – The Western concept

Western humanism is based on a general and fundamental philosophical pre-supposition, namely, that the basic principles underlying the generation of meaning by humans can only be found and discussed by referring to human culture and nature. This presupposition, first articulated in Europe during the early-Modern period, can easily be demonstrated in the philosophies of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. Immanuel Kant expressed this convergence by ob-serving that there are three main questions humans must always ask in order to understand themselves and their lives: What can I know? What shall I do? What may I hope for? In turn, these questions can be conflated into a single one: What is the human being?[5]

This, however, is not yet humanism. The anthropocentric convergence of interpreting the world and of generating sense for human life only becomes humanistic when the culture and nature of being a human being is bestowed with a certain normative quality. This peculiar qualification of being human is ex-pressed by the term "dignity". The humanistic version of Western modern

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2 To give some examples: Mohammed Arkoun, *Humanisme et Islam: Combat et Proposition.* (Paris: Vrin, 2005); David Lawson, 'Humanism in China', *The Humanist*, (May / June, 1993); M. B. Ramose, *African Philosophy through Ubuntu,* 2nd Ed. (Harare: Mond Books, 2002).
3 Hubert Cancik, 'Humanismus', in *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe*, vol. III, H. Cancik, B. Gladigow, K. Kohl (eds) (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1993), pp. 173 – 185; Tzvetan Todorov, *Imperfect Garden: the Legacy of Humanism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Vito R. Giustiniani, 'Homo, Humanus, and the Message of "Humanism"', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 46:2 (1985), 167 – 195.
4 See: Jörn Rüsen, Henner Laass (eds), *Humanism in Intercultural Perspective – Experiences and Expectations* (Bielefeld: Transcript, & Somerset: Transaction, 2009).
5 Immanuel Kant, *Logic,* trans. by J. Richardson (London: W. Simpkin and R. Marshall, 1819), p. 30.