INTRODUCTION: THE RETURN OF THE REPRESSED

When I graduated from college in the American bicentennial year of 1976 preparing to vote for Jimmy Carter, the most important geopolitical distinction on Earth was clear to everyone. It was the opposition between the democratic, capitalist West (plus Japan) and the Soviet Union (with China and other communist allies). Of course there was a "third world" and there were "nonaligned" countries. From today's standpoint those very terms were a Eurocentric conceit expressing the priority that the developed North granted itself over the concerns of the developing-and-undeveloped South (or to be more precise, the Not-So-North, populations living entirely below thirty-eight degrees north). But whatever its indigenous issues, the South had always to be conscious of the third rail of international relations, that bipolar Northern line, where every step toward/away from the "West" meant a step away from/toward the "East." The complexities of the Soviet-China relationship and Richard Nixon's deft manipulations had rendered "monolithic" communism a fantasy, but had done nothing to defang the conflict of two globe-straddling political economies sporting globe-annihilating nuclear overkill. As long as it dominated, this geopolitical paradigm gave credence to the modern European philosophy of Economic Man, common to the capitalist West and the communist East, for which secular prosperity, privately held or publicly owned, unequally accumulated or equally distributed, is the great determinant of social reality. After all, nationalistic and racist mysticism, the assumed remnants of a premodern world of superstition and jingoism, had been defeated on the battlefield in 1945. And if the greatest domestic struggle of postwar America was an analogous fight against a "primitive" racism, its resolution was understood by black activists, white liberals, and even its white opponents to be the transcendence of race by political-economic equality. Power and prosperity were the shared languages of the Cold War era, internationally and domestically; any problem was caused by their absence, any solution by their provision.

For progressives and economic conservatives, welfare state liberals and minimal state libertarians, John Rawls and Robert Nozick, money, jobs, taxes, and economic opportunity were the coin of the political realm. On these grounds, in 1976 Carter, who hedged toward the former, defeated Gerald Ford, who hedged toward the latter.

But not so four years later, when Carter ran against Ronald Reagan, but was defeated by the Ayatollah Khomeini. Ronald Reagan won the election, of course, but it was arguably the Khomeini-led Iranian revolution, whose Islamists painted America as "the Great Satan" and held American embassy hostages in Teheran for more than a year that finished Carter's chances. It was the first major shock to the triumphant liberal paradigm. Suddenly it appeared that some people were willing to trade economic development for religious identity, to—in the paradigm's terms—go backward. Still, the modern economic framework's greatest success was yet to come, for after an intensification of the Cold War in the next decade, 1989 brought the fall of the Berlin Wall, inspiring Francis Fukuyama's famous essay, "The End of History." His argument that liberal democratic capitalism was the final and universal form of world history captured the mood, and seemed confirmed by the end of communism in Central Europe, the collapse of the USSR, and China's experiments with the free market. After the first war in the Persian Gulf reshuffled the deck in the Middle East, setting the stage for the Oslo Accords, and a possible Israeli-Palestinian settlement, it seemed that without the prospect of Soviet backing a number of apparently intransigent international and sectarian conflicts might simply burn out. Peace seemed to be breaking out all over.

But the Pax Fukuyama didn't last long. By the mid-1990s a general renewal of nationalism and ethnic politics became apparent, most notably in the Balkans, but most horribly in Rwanda. All over the world there seemed to be a rebirth of tribal, ethnonationalist aspirations and intolerance. Religious fundamentalism, or as Giles Keppel put it, "the revenge of God," was in full swing: Christian fundamentalism in domestic American politics; Jewish, Buddhist, and Hindu fundamentalisms in Israel and south Asia; and of course the ever widening hit-and-run conflict with Islamic militancy (Keppel 1994). Samuel Huntington's announcement of the coming "clash of civilizations" in a 1993 essay gave a name to this dawning reality. But in America under the Clinton administration the rising din of ethnic and religious revivalism was drowned out by the louder sounds of happy cash registers and less-than-happy presidential depositions. Meanwhile, officials

and pundits seemed almost nostalgically to reimpose a bipolar world in their concern over the fate of Russian missiles and the likelihood of China as the threat of the new century, the latter encouraged by the Chinese holding of an American military jet and crew, a "crisis" now barely remembered. Roughly, this is how things stood at eight in the morning, EDT, on September 11, 2001.

But not an hour later. The events of that morning did not "change everything." Islamic fundamentalism, American terror casualties, even the attempted destruction of the World Trade Center were already old hat. But September 11 did complete the shift in our priorities, putting the final nail in the coffin of the economistic paradigm. It was now apparent that globalization meant not the end of Old World politics but their magnification, ancient rickety joints now greased by an open, technological, mass media environment. The irony is deep. Precisely when the most advanced societies were rushing to trade in the Grand Narratives of history, and perhaps even the nation-state, for an exploding network of information markets in a borderless space of free trade—globalization meets the postmodern condition—they came face to face with an apparently premodern fundamentalism as their main enemy, the thin edge of a world environment suddenly brimming with fights over blood, soil, and God. Who would have thought as Bill Gates and other computer cowboys rode their bulls down Wall Street in the mid-1990s into the Brave New World of nonideological capital circulating the world as electronic data, that in half a decade we would be discussing the *Crusades* as a significant predisposing event for international relations! Or that the most devastating military attack on American soil in history, a security undented by two World Wars and a forty-year nuclear stand-off, never breached by German planes, Japanese *kamikazes,* or Soviet missiles, would be accomplished by nineteen religious zealots with plastic box-cutters during "peacetime."

For, as a recent book title has it, we have now to admit that *culture matters.* From our concern for toleration and diversity in an increasingly multicultural America to the global rise in ethnic-cultural violence, from the creation of new fields like "cultural studies" to the cultural-religious clash of Islam with the West, the things labeled "cultural" seem to be at the forefront of our time. As Huntington argued, after being driven by political and economic ideology for seventy years, international conflict now is re-forming along civilizational or cultural axes. Not that economics has left center stage; it is one of the perennial house players. But we no longer imagine

that all human motivation, all conflict, all serious debates, are ultimately about money, or money-and-power. Man does not kill for bread alone. Our world's most deadly struggles are about blood and soil and language and who your grandparents were. Along a series of political issues, *identity* has trumped *class.* Today the furors of domestic politics are more likely to concern the complaints of disenfranchised ethnic, sexual, and gender groups than the poor. Cultures themselves are being rewritten because of the new recognition of culture, long-standing historical narratives revised by the incorporation of indigenous and non-Western viewpoints: it is now a canonical piece of grade school learning that Columbus did *not* discover America. The left attacks cultural imperialism, the right attacks cultural relativism. Clashing cultures, recognizing cultures, fearing cultures: these now take up a large part of our attention.

The sea change goes beyond the task of dealing with the legacy of racism or colonialism, beyond the issue of "inclusiveness." It reveals a new notion of self and equality. A half-century ago the equality sought by most disenfranchised Americans was moral, civic, and economic, an equality that was supposed to ignore ethnic or cultural differences in favor of the common humanity beneath. The figure of the "melting pot" that Israel Zangwill used to title his 1908 play was pleasantly warm, not oppressively hot, as long as sameness meant educational, economic, and political opportunity. Minority Americans wanted to be recognized as equals *despite* their ethnicity. Lyndon Johnson, champion of the welfare state, who did more for the civil rights of African-Americans than any president since Lincoln, understood himself to be voicing the ultimate respect for Martin Luther King Jr. by saying that King "is a credit to his race—the *human* race." In 1965 that saying was progressive and liberal; now it is viewed as an unattractive compromise. Minorities today want to be recognized as equals *not despite* but *through* their distinctive identities, as fully encultured agents. They want admittance to the forum and the market in their own skins and traditional clothing. During a speech Colin Powell noted the tendency of some people to cease identifying him as black once he became successful, to grant him a kind of ethnic-racial neutrality. To which Powell rhetorically objected, "Don't stop now!"

All this troubles the very heart of our understanding of the modern age and its direction. From the 1950s through the early 1970s, despite the widespread prejudices of the day, the "enlightened" or official progressive view held that culture and religion are private matters, that public policy, domestic and international, should focus on the pragmatic issues of economic

development. The future would be one of mutually respectful individuals pursuing the benefits of culture-neutral technology and science within a framework of universally recognized political rights. If not now, then soon, the world's peoples would stop worrying about silly things like ethnic conflicts and religious wars and recognize that deep down they are all modern liberal materialists at heart, primarily interested in education, economic security, modern health care, and Colonel Sanders. This was not a bad or amoral vision. Conflicts over money, taxes and welfare, unions and big business, however troublesome and even bloody, do seem more tractable for rational argument than questions over identity. If primordial issues of religion and ethnicity could be taken off the agenda, then, however rancorously, we could at least *do business* with each other.

A marvelous sample of our old thinking comes, again, from that Texan who bestrode the 1960s like, well, a Texan. In April 1965 Johnson, who had made his early political career fighting for rural electrification, tried to entice the North Vietnamese to the bargaining table with a promise of American help in building a hydroelectric grid for the Mekong Delta, modeled on the Tennessee Valley Authority. LBJ wanted to build a TVA for the NLF. We can almost hear him now: "If Ho Chi Minh wants to do some bargaining, we'll God damn well show him some bargaining!" As Bill Moyers later commented, "If Ho had been [then AFL-CIO president] George Meaney, Johnson would have had a deal." But Ho wasn't a jowly, clean-shaven union leader, he was a thin Vietnamese nationalist and communist with a long beard and a longer memory of grievances against the West. Whatever we may think of him, he could not be bought off with light bulbs.

Today Johnson's proposal may seem more lovable than loathsome, but in either case, laughable. The list of sobering experiences we have graduated from is long: Ho's introductory course in Third World nationalism and ideological tenacity heads the list, of course, followed by the intermediate course in Teheran, advanced study in the Persian Gulf, the never-ending Israeli-Palestinian seminar, and finally our graduation exercises on September 11. But even if we are less naive today, I suspect that deep down we contemporary Americans still find it no easier than did LBJ to understand people who are willing to sacrifice their children's lives to avenge their parents, or to ensure that their rulers pray in the right language or with the right book. But many *are* willing. "It's the economy, stupid" may work in some U.S. presidential elections, but it most emphatically has not worked in Bosnia or Jerusalem or Rwanda or Afghanistan. Or lower Manhattan.

Philosophy and political theory have not ignored the new salience of culture. Many writers have come to question the "classical" liberal theorists of the 1970s—John Rawls, Robert Nozick, Thomas Nagel, Ronald Dworkin, Bruce Ackerman, and others—for imagining systems of political rights that hold universally regardless of cultural differences and which, although concerned with social justice, allow no role whatsoever for cultural identity. In response, a new generation of political theorists has sought to find a place for "group" identity and a "right to culture" within liberal democracy, even if this requires that such will sometimes trump strict legal equality or individual liberty. While echoing the critique of rights-based liberalism developed by the communitarians in the 1980s and early 1990s, most of these "new culturalists" follow the progressive-liberal tradition—famously expressed by historian Richard Hofstadter—in fearing local community as a source of jingoistic antipathy to minorities. Nor was this new cultural turn limited to political theory. Recent ethicists have reacted against the rationalist-theoretical project of establishing universal moral principles on the basis of an individually accessed Reason. Stuart Hampshire, Alasdair MacIntyre, Bernard Williams, and Martha Nussbaum have all argued that the complexity of moral life, dependent as it is on the ethical significance of manners, social customs, moral "luck," and inherited cultural narratives, cannot be reduced to a few abstract and universal principles.

A cultural turn can be identified in even the more abstruse areas of philosophical thought. Recent attacks on realism, the claim that our knowledge is made true by its relation to objective facts, have invoked the cognitive role of culture, proposing "solidarity" rather than "objectivity" as the court of last resort for the legitimation of belief (Rorty 1991b). The retreat from transcendental and foundationalist theories of meaning, common to both Anglo-American and European philosophy in the middle of the last century, has in effect *opened epistemology to culture.* In Anglo-American philosophy the early twentieth-century dominance of logical positivism had been eclipsed in midcentury by Wittgenstein's ordinary-language philosophy, which made meaning emergent from social practice. "Social constructivism" became a major contributor to, and problem in, the philosophy of science after the ground-breaking work of Thomas Kuhn. Eventually Richard Rorty declared that the commitment to rights and reason, lacking any noncircular justification, should simply be accepted as the "frankly ethnocentric" orientation of the West. Meanwhile, in European thought a parallel development took place. The early and mid-twentieth-century "philosophies of the subject"—

phenomenology, psychoanalysis, existentialism, and "Western" Marxism—had shared the view that an inner self, alienated by the social forces of capitalism, religion, science, and mass culture, was the real source of meaning, truth, and society. These philosophies were eclipsed in the century's second half by hermeneutics, structuralism, and eventually poststructuralism, for which historicized networks of signs form the background from which meaning and self emerge. On both sides of the North Atlantic, language, understood now as social, contingent, and practical, became the dominant topic of twentieth-century philosophy and, through a remarkable inversion, came to be understood as the *source of* logic, truth, and the self, rather than their product.

Unfortunately, all this attention to the trees failed to reveal the forest. While ethics, epistemology, metaphilosophy, and political philosophy embraced intersubjectivity, dialogue, and signs, their authors rarely achieved the revelation of Monsieur Jourdain in Molière's *The Bourgeois Gentleman,* who discovers that he has been speaking prose all his life. They failed to recognize that the collective name for the diverse phenomena they were examining is "culture." So while social and political philosophy, philosophy of language, philosophy of art, philosophy of religion, and philosophy of history sailed happily along, the philosophy of that domain of human existence that overlaps all of them, *culture,* remained a kind of backwater. Its greatest twentieth-century practitioner, Ernst Cassirer, is a largely neglected figure. When philosophers do speak of "culture," they typically use it as a synonym for "high culture," that is to say, artistic and intellectual history. And where they employ the adjective "cultural" to refer to something more basic and distinctive, it mainly functions as a prefix to that feared but widely courted term "relativism."

Arguably this neglect of culture is an Enlightenment legacy, culture being a casualty of the rising power of an ideal of knowledge that viewed contingent, historical, socially specific ways of practice and thought as mere tradition, the repository of myth and superstition, hence an obstacle to progress. What after all was the antonym of the Enlightenment ideal of *Reason?* Not *Nature,* certainly. It was *Culture,* inherited social beliefs about God, nature, authority, and inequality. For early twentieth-century philosophy, if society was a superstructure covering up the infrastructure of authentic subjectivity or objective reality or sense data, then, as Plato held of art's imitation of mere sensory appearances, culture seemed *twice* removed from the real, a collection of self-deceptions promoted by a mendacious super-

structure. Even today, among thinkers who make the cultural turn away from transcendentalism, foundationalism, and universalism, culture still tends to appear as a background *surd,* the name of a dimension of reality in terms of which any topic under discussion will be explained, but which itself goes largely unexamined. Exotic cultural practices are cited to make a point, a paragraph or page gives an uncritical definition of culture on the way to hunt for bigger game. One searches in vain for a fundamental philosophical exploration of what culture is.

But let's not be too hard on contemporary philosophers, or on the Enlightenment for that matter. Both have had good reason to fear or dismiss culture. For once we decide to remedy their deficit, we discover the real problem: *culture is trouble.* Defining it is first of all a complex and controversial chore. Even once, or if, we can tentatively say what culture is, we are faced with the even more daunting task of saying what *a* culture is, where one ends and another begins. Then comes a succession of troubling terms often attached to the social groups that have cultures: peoples, ethnicities, nations, and races. What are they? In each case we struggle under the burden of recognizing that their shifting meanings threaten to make historiographical hash of the whole business. All of this comes *before we even begin* to confront the philosophical problems that led us to investigate culture in the first place: what is culture's social and cognitive role? Are human living-together and human knowing inherently cultural? If so, what happens to our view of knowledge and political life, what happens to truth, knowledge, reason, equality, universal rights, and freedom? Wouldn't relativism and historicism be unavoidable, and truth and right reduced to true and right *for* some particular culture? The stakes are high. For if the Enlightenment attempted to forge norms that transcend culture precisely in order to defend science and rights and equality, then will the return to culture undermine our Enlightenment heritage? Dig far enough into the "postmodern condition," into contemporary worries about the meaning and legitimacy of the intellectual scaffolding of the modern world, and there, in its now fractured foundations, you find two old snakes, Reason and Culture, lying coiled together in a hostile embrace. How did they get there, what are they doing, and what should *we* do about *them?*

The theme of this book's approach to these conundrums will be, *not around but through.* I will argue that there is nothing we do or say that is beyond or outside culture, including reason itself. Knowing, moral action, and all human norms operate through culture. But the cultural embedded-

ness of cognition does *not* imply a troubling relativism. Cultural differences there are, but the complexity both of the cultures involved, and the cultural relations among them, make the identification of incommensurable cultures impossible. Reason can learn to live with culture. It had better, since it has no choice in the matter. It is, after all, culture's creation.

Modernity is in part *about* culture. For that collection of beliefs, practices, and institutions which set contemporary life apart from the rest of human history defined itself by a new relation to culture. Not a new culture—although that is also true—but a new relation to culture *per se.* The very idea of culture, as we understand it, is a product of the Enlightenment. It had to be. We could only conceive culture at the point that we imagined we could see beyond it, which is precisely what Western modernity claimed to do. *Modernity is the first age to constitute "culture" as a problem.* Indeed, the current problems of modern society that we call postmodern—here understood as the advanced course in modernity, where modernity's implications are more completely revealed—largely hang on the role of culture in social and cognitive life. Just as a new relation of reason and culture defined the break of the modern from the premodern, so our postmodern present is defined by a further change in the status of culture. Culture ain't what it used to be, for better and for worse. How we understand *that* is central to how we understand ourselves.

At the same time, the seemingly antimodern character of the various revivals of fundamentalism, ethnocentrism, and nationalism, conflicts among and with which define global politics at the outset of our new century, is an artifact of our vision, not fact. For these revivals are characteristically *modernist,* not reversions to a primordial, premodern past. Their conflicts *with* modernity are fought with weapons *from* modernity—and not only weapons made of steel and silicon, but of ideas and practices too. This does not gainsay the fact that we are entering an era of renewed cultural conflict (which is true). Nor does it imply that we have reached the "end of history" where all ways are the West's ways (which is false). It means rather that we are forced to recognize that there are many ways to be modern.

Inevitably this discussion provokes the question: where is this train we call modernization going? In a marvelous series of essays, each the basis for a subsequent book, Huntington, Fukuyama, and Benjamin Barber set out three hypotheses for our global future. As we saw, Fukuyama's 1989 "The End of History?" argued that liberal capitalist democracy is the final form of political maturity, the only legitimate answer to the universal human

desire for recognition and freedom. Barber's 1992 "Jihad vs. McWorld" saw the Cold War bipolarity of capitalism and communism being replaced by a new global dualism between a superficial postmodern consumer culture and a reactionary primordial authoritarianism. And Huntington's 1993 "The Clash of Civilizations" predicted a multipolar conflict of cultural families whose modernization pushes them further apart, not closer together. Fukuyama's thesis may seem dated by the rise of cultural and nationalist conflicts of the last decade, but it remains the case today that the most technically and economically advanced countries on Earth are liberal capitalist democracies. So which of these numerical hypotheses about the postmodern era is right: will the world of our new century be One, Two, or Many?

There is no possibility of a systematic world tour of these issues. We must be content with a tourist package of brief encounters with key locales. Fortunately, we will not be completely alone on our journey. Some few thinkers of the last century have shined their light into culture and its place in knowledge and social life, most prominently Ernst Cassirer, but also Edward Shils and Hans-Georg Gadamer. More recently, Elizabeth Baeten, Samuel Fleischacker, Alasdair MacIntyre, Bhikhu Parekh, Lorenzo Simpson, and the late Ernest Gellner have separately probed these depths, trying to give an adequate account of the cultural nature of human thought while at the same time avoiding relativism. The following chapters attempt merely to push their frontier of exploration forward by a few kilometers. We will not reach the pole. Culture is a realm that can be explored, but never exhausted. We will lug our interrogative baggage through the following inquiry, to be reorganized and repacked as we go, but never ditched. Our present aim is not to reach a destination, so we can stop traveling, but to become better travelers, to see more, experience more, and discriminate better than your average tourist. We hope to develop a finer appreciation for culture's role, to get some sense of the vast terrain it implicates, by the time our strength and money are used up. But as for completing our journey, that is out of the question. For culture is not only endlessly complex, each whole exhibiting parts that are themselves equally complex wholes, it is always changing and growing. If not in the olden days, at least in our contemporary world, we cannot step into the same culture twice. For the volcanic depths spew ever more and expanding terrain as we walk.