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A STUDENT'S INTRODUCTION

[from *Nationalism and the Mind: Essays on Modern Culture*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2006]

This is the first book of essays that Liah Greenfeld has published; it brings together a small number of journal articles and lectures written from the mid 1980s to the present. The initiative to publish such a volume was not hers: her students strongly encouraged the collection and publication of the papers that, along with the classic works of Weber, Tocqueville, Durkheim, Marx, and the best writings in the human sciences since these founding figures, have been among the guideposts of our education. It was time, we felt, for some of her most important essays to be assembled in one volume. Moreover, the selected essays were suggested by her students, and those which we felt were most important in our own education (or which those of us who have now completed our graduate studies and are teaching hope to use in our own pedagogical practice) appear here.

Greenfeld is best known, of course, as a theorist of nationalism, and although her early work was on the sociology of art, it was the publication of *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* in 1992 that cemented her international scholarly reputation, one only enhanced by her more recent *The Spirit of Capitalism: Nationalism and Economic Growth*. *Nationalism* represented a major breakthrough in a field of study long stifled within the confines of an old unproductive paradigm, in which the phenomenon was regarded as a product of the “structures” and processes of modernization. Liah Greenfeld proposed, instead, that nationalism was the constitutive element of modernity, basing her view on the recognition of the autonomy of culture and the vision of the human social

reality as fundamentally cultural -- constructed on the basis of symbolic models. Within this different ontological framework it became possible to explore the hypothesis of nationalism as the cultural foundation of modern society, a hypothesis supported by Greenfeld's extensive and meticulous comparative historical research that also led to the definition of nationalism as a secular image of reality the socio-political component of which consisted of sovereign communities of equal members – nations. Reviewing the manuscript for the press, Michael Walzer predicted: “No one will write about nationalism again without starting here”; his prophecy almost immediately came true.

In *The Spirit of Capitalism* Liah Greenfeld extended her analysis into the economic sphere – considered fundamental within the old paradigm – proposing that nationalism was the cultural foundation of the modern economy as well. In this revision of Weber's classic thesis it was the inherent competitiveness of nationalism that spurred the incessant competition between nations in the economic sphere and so led to the economy of sustained growth. John Gray, in a review of *The Spirit of Capitalism* wrote that the argument of the book was strong enough to “bring about a paradigm shift in the understanding of economic growth.”ⁱ

The attention that these monumental and provocative works have received, however, threw into relief the parochial tendencies of the academy and of the contemporary social sciences, and Liah Greenfeld was categorized as a “nationalism expert.” Once placed in this *niche*, several of us have noticed, her work has not been brought fully into the conversations in social philosophy and study of culture, and specifically those in sociological theory and the sociology of culture, despite the important contributions that it makes to discourse in these areas.

Even if Greenfeld no longer considers herself a “sociologist,” her work falls squarely in the tradition, now largely neglected, to which that name was applied by Weber and Durkheim. Before, during, and after the publication of *Nationalism* and *The Spirit of Capitalism*, she was preoccupied with a series of essentially sociological questions at its center: what are the bases of social integration? What is the role of the individual in social life? How do the biological, psychological, and sociological realms interrelate? What accounts for social and historical change over time? How is it that humans construct meaning? What is distinctive about modernity, and where did this modern world that we inhabit come from? Faithful to this Weberian-Durkheimian inspiration, Greenfeld, in her essays, has consistently drawn bridges across insular academic debates, attempting to engage disciplines as diverse as literary studies, political science and international relations, history and philosophy of science, economics and economic history, and, most recently, psychology and even neuroscience. The nature of contemporary academic publishing – and indeed the very growth in scale of academe and the commonly-lamented disciplinary specialization that has ensued in its wake has necessarily limited the audience of essays contained here and previously published in academic journals. The *British Journal of Sociology* or *American Sociologist* are unlikely to attract the attention of philosophers or literary theorists. Essays published in such journals as *Slavic Review* and the *Brown Journal of World Affairs* are certain to be missed by mainstream practitioners of sociology. Some of her work Greenfeld never made any attempt to publish. If the most central of her essays were collected in one volume, we reasoned, they could more easily be brought into each of the many conversations to which they are relevant and which, despite the lip-service now

increasingly paid to interdisciplinary scholarship, remain rather internally focused and preoccupied with the establishment of (the academics' own) occupational niches.

The eleven essays in the present volume are arranged chronologically. While this presentation may seem to give the book's over-arching argument(s) a circuitous feel, these arguments are nevertheless there and this text affords the possibility of tracing the development of Greenfeld's thought over time. It is, therefore, very much worth reading from end to end, though, of course, each essay stands alone. In tracing this development, one encounters two central themes: (a) the question of the distinctiveness of human beings or the nature of humanity; and (b) the tightly-related and notoriously problematic question of the definition of *culture*. Few scholars nowadays, after so many failed attempts, would attempt to develop a novel understanding of culture: that is, to take another stab at providing a satisfactory *definition*, one that actually succeeds at defining the phenomenon in question.ⁱⁱ

Owing to the criteria by which the essays were selected for inclusion, the reader may find some repetition, such as in the analysis of *types* of nationalism, in several essays (it would behoove the reader, however, to read on even if a page or two seems to treat themes familiar from previous chapters). For similar reasons, the reader may find internal inconsistencies, and it is best remembered that these essays span two decades of intellectual development – the reader who judges this a fault of the current text is encouraged to maintain the same views, without any change, for the next twenty years – and that, therefore, certain notions, such as the interpretation of the Weberian conception of meaning, change over time.

The first essay here, “Reflections on Two Charismas,” published in 1985 in the *British Journal of Sociology*, was written during Liah Greenfeld’s stay at the University of Chicago and was, actually, the first essay she both conceived and wrote originally in English. It seems at first glance to be a largely exegetical work, focused on the clarification of Weber’s treatment of “charisma.” But it is more than this. Even at this early stage, one can see in Greenfeld’s thinking nascent ideas about the centrality of order and status in social life. The connections drawn between the receptivity to charismatic authority and *anomie* – here found by way of clarification and critique of scholars such as Blumer, Fromm, and others who attributed a rise in such receptivity to the “mass society” – lead to Greenfeld’s unique formulation of that concept, which, though of course it has roots in Durkheim, Merton, and Parsons, is anything but the dominant formulation. Anomie is, for Greenfeld, “a condition of acute inconsistency between different values, norms, and cognitions, including the perception of reality, which, as a result of this inconsistency, neutralize each other and lose their authority.” Here she touches upon a long tradition, again rooted in Weber and Durkheim, but also notable in more recent thinkers such as Shils, Geertz, and Berger, of treating human beings as essentially “unfinished”: as lacking the sort of biologically pre-programmed models of the world (and *for* life in it) that other animals possess.ⁱⁱⁱ Over time, the centrality of the status-system as a fundamental ordering mechanism (one which constitutes both a model of the social order and a model for how to live in it, to make use of Geertz’s classical distinction) would become clearer in her thinking: not surprisingly, when one thinks of social *structure* in higher animals (in this case genetically-transmitted social *order*) one largely thinks of status hierarchies the structures of which remain constant even as the

individuals that fill certain positions might change. Moreover, the principles of such change in, say, wolf societies remain constant, further evidence of their genetic transmission.

The clarification of the central Weberian concept of charisma – as she puts it, not an exercise in scholasticism but a contribution to *contemporary* thought -- is fundamentally about a much broader question: the delimitation of the biological from the cultural realm, a question which, again, is tightly bound to the issue of anomie, itself a function of human beings' relative genetic deprivation and the need for order. As Greenfeld would herself acknowledge, her treatment of the Weberian conception of “meaning,” is in the earliest essays here under-interpreted: at this stage in her thinking she takes “meaning” to be virtually a synonym of “knowledge,” and doesn't yet see that the realm of the meaningful is indeed the emergent phenomenon of *culture*. In subsequent essays, this is made explicit and further developed. The centrality gradually assumed by Durkheim's concept of anomie alongside Weber's idea of “meaning” in Greenfeld's evolving understanding of the phenomenon of culture later will lead her to articulate the deep affinity between the two great theorists who are usually regarded as proponents of two widely differing and unrelated approaches and to recognize them as founders of her own *mentalist* tradition.

Like “Reflections on Two Charismas,” “Russian Formalist Sociology of Literature: A Sociologist's Perspective,” originally published in *Slavic Review* in 1987, seems, at first glance, to be a primarily exegetical work. Part of its goal is to bring the essentially *sociological* approach to literature developed by the Russian Formalists (a school of literary criticism ordinarily taken by American and British sociologists to be the

quintessential *non*-sociological approach) into dialogue with recent English-language traditions in the sociology of art and literature (particularly British Marxist approaches and the American “production-of-culture” tradition) and, indeed, to show that it is in many ways preferable to the conventional sociology of literature. The Formalists’ approach to literature as a social institution, she argues, specifically, is consistent with the *Weberian* account of the autonomy of institutions, of which contemporary sociologists of culture have largely forgotten. But Greenfeld goes further than simply bringing two conversations together: she begins the development of a more fully articulated Weberian theory of institutions *as such*^{iv}, one that is entirely missing from the so-called “new institutionalism” in contemporary American sociology (not to mention the “old” institutionalism).

A social institution, from her neo-Weberian view, is to be understood as a form of patterned human activity “that possesses an internal logic; although susceptible to influences from the outside and constantly interacting with the rest of social reality, it must be in this sense autonomous.” It is a constantly-changing process, one that is “oriented towards a definite goal, value, or function,” often, though not exclusively, a goal that lies beyond the bounds of culture, such as in the paradigmatic case of a social institution, the family, which has as its central point of orientation biological reproduction.

Literature, like science, is also a social institution. In this case, the central point of orientation is the sensual enjoyment of linguistic form. The notion of “palpability” as the central quality of “literariness” refers to linguistic patterns that are experienced as pleasurable. It is not precisely their novelty that renders them palpable, yet the palpability of a given form – much like in music, interestingly – does recede and the

ongoing sensual appreciation depends upon innovation. A full-blown sociology of literature, of course, would not remain entirely “formalist” in this sense: the sociological analysis of the meanings of literary works is another aspect of the *internal* focus of the sociology of literature that recent works in this sub-field have avoided. While this essay gives little evidence of this, Greenfeld has in her teaching in recent years paid particular attention to less explicitly formalist readings of literary works.

The comparative analysis of these two institutions – literature and science – is the focus of a later chapter, “Science and Literature as Social Institutions,” prepared as a lecture for, and originally delivered at, a Yale conference on science and literature in the wake of the famous Sokal hoax in 1997. This important – and previously unpublished – article is both a development of the theory of institutions noted above and a spirited defense of the institution of science. Starting with the core goals, or propensities served, of each institution, Greenfeld traces, among other things, the characteristic patterns of change within both of them. The distinctive feature of scientific change, contrary to what Kuhn and the many critics of science who have followed him might argue, is its *progressive* character:

Unlike the mechanism of literary evolution, which allows for zig-zagging and cyclical patters of development, including the revival and ascendancy of previously automatized forms... the mechanism of change in science systematically pushes it in the direction of progressive elimination of inconsistencies, or in the direction of increasing “verisimilitude” in the sense Popper attributes to this word, of theories whose “truth content” more and more exceeds their “falsity content,” making every succeeding successful (that is rigorously tested) theory, in terms of its correspondence to facts, a “better approximation to truth,” than the preceding one.

Against those theorists who believe, with Barry Barnes, that science is a part of culture like any other, and therefore is thoroughly permeated by extra-scientific factors: in short, the view that the results of science are to a considerable degree *determined* by

causes external to the institution itself, Greenfeld argues that all social institutions are autonomous in the sense that they are oriented toward the satisfaction of a particular goal or propensity. She readily acknowledges that external factors impact the operations of all institutions (their autonomy is not to be interpreted as independence). Yet the very goal that lies at science's center – the desire to satisfy the passionate curiosity of the scientist, which necessitates the scientific method – provides a bulwark against the imposition of external factors. While from time to time external factors do intrude, so long as science operates normally and without intentional interference specifically from the state this is minimal.

“Science and National Greatness in Seventeenth-Century England,” published in 1987 in *Minerva*, is the first of the essays contained here that deal explicitly with nationalism. Readers of *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* will recognize a portion of the argument contained here. The essay is framed in relation to Robert K. Merton's classic early work on the possibly Puritan origins of English science. There is a common object of explanation: not the emergence of scientific practice, which has existed since antiquity, making sporadic, though occasionally great, progress, but the *institutionalization* of science: *regularized*, patterned activity surrounding the scientific vocation, and a dramatic transformation in the social valuation of this activity: science, Merton and Greenfeld agree, was institutionalized in this sense in late 17th-century England.

The “Puritan origins” thesis was inconsistent with important historical evidence. Could nationalism have been the cause of the institutionalization of science? Such a claim might strike some readers as a stretch. This reaction is particularly likely if one is

inattentive to the definition of nationalism that Greenfeld provides: the claim is not that some form of jingoistic patriotism gave rise to the institutionalization of science (though seventeenth-century English nationalism was not without its jingoistic patriots), but that nationalism, an entirely novel image of the social order (as, in the present volume, is made most clear in “Nationalism and Modernity”), the cultural blueprint for modern societies, played the decisive role. This was so, she argues, first because there was a sort of affinity between the character of English nationalism and scientific reason. As she puts it, according to the self-understanding of 17th-century English nationalists, “the properties of English nationality were asserted to be the independence of thought comprising a critical mind, an ability to arrive at decisions on the basis of the individual’s own – preferably first-hand – knowledge and logical deliberations, a love of practical knowledge, a desire to be appealed to in a rational, not emotional or authoritative manner, a dispassionate nature, and a distaste for enthusiasm.” It is important to note here that despite the surface-level resemblance to such accounts Greenfeld is not making reference here to the characteristics of English “national character”: there is not suggestion, à la Ruth Benedict, that such an approach is likely to provide insight. Instead, she is focusing upon the values *proclaimed* by the social actors in question to be constitutive of their identity. Here, it is not hard to see, many of those same values happened to be those institutionalized in science.

Still, in itself, the affinity between self-identified value orientations among 17th-century Englishmen and the core values of science does not account for science’s institutionalization. The crucial factor was the inherent competitiveness of nationalism – a result of the dignity implied in the national identity and the resulting commitment of the

population as a whole to the prestige of the nation. Given the early English nationalists' sense of their nation's intellectual standing vis-à-vis continental Europe, specifically their feeling that it lagged behind others in classical learning, science, a modern activity, suggested itself as the area of cultural competition in which England had a fair chance of winning.

The discussion of nationalism returns us to anomie, because it is both a response to anomie and because the society it spawns is one in which anomie is endemic. As is discussed in "Nationalism and Modernity" (published in *Social Research* in the Spring of 1996), the very first case of nationalism, the English, was an imaginative solution to the problem of status-inconsistency in England in the early Tudor years: status-inconsistency generated both by the damage inflicted on the nobility during the War of the Roses and by the Tudor tendency to promote commoners and lower gentry to important positions. The concept "nation," which previously had meant an elite, was used to rationalize the otherwise incomprehensible experiences of these upwardly mobile Englishmen: this was tantamount to the ennoblement of the entire population of England. Each of the successive cases Greenfeld has studied show the same pattern: status-inconsistency among the nobility in France preceded and prompted their receptivity to nationalism, which likewise seemed to solve their status-related problems; status-inconsistency among "middle-class" intellectuals of various German lands preceded the formation of German nationalism among them, and so forth (Greenfeld's more recent work on Japanese nationalism, as well as my own on Spanish and Latin American nationalisms, has produced similar findings).

Just as nationalism is a response to anomie (in the form of status-inconsistency), it gives rise to it in a chronic, low-grade form, precisely because of nationalism's egalitarianism: by rendering all social hierarchy illegitimate in principle, the national image of the world is likely to contribute to identity problems at the individual level. Here Greenfeld's argument is somewhat reminiscent of Tocqueville, who, in the second volume of *Democracy in America*, also saw linkages between equality and what would later come to be called anomie: As Tocqueville noted, the "constant strife between the desires inspired by equality and the means it supplies to satisfy them harasses and wearies the mind." Moreover, "the more equal men are, the more insatiable will be their longing for equality," though "democratic peoples...will never get the sort of equality they long for...that is the reason for the strange melancholy often haunting inhabitants of democracies."^v These ideas have been most fully developed in recent years and appear in the last chapters of the present collection, particularly "Nationalism and the Mind."

There is another important argument in "Nationalism and Modernity" that deserves special mention here. In *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* there is an implicit argument about the relationship between nationalism and the state: one that inverts the typically-argued relationship. Conventionally, many scholars have read nationalism as a function of the state. Some scholars see the state merely as the agent of the capitalist system (or of the ruling class): in such cases, nationalism is not really a function of the state, which is just a proxy, but a function of capitalism itself. In either case, it is often argued, by theorists such as Gellner, that industrial modernity requires not just the state but a homogenized, socially-mobile, interchangeable, relatively educated and literate population: nationalism, for Gellner, is essentially the cultural strategy

through which this is accomplished. For others, such as Breiully, the assertion is that the state – independent of its association with capitalist development – is *itself* the cause of the rise of nationalism.

As has already been discussed and as will be known to anyone familiar with her work, Greenfeld proposes an alternative macro-sociological account of the rise of nationalism focused on (usually elite) status-dynamics: one that, while not *ignoring* the state, makes no a priori assumptions about its role. In “Nationalism and Modernity,” she again returns to Weber, this time to his often-misunderstood definition of the state. As she notes, many have thought Weber’s essential definition of the state was as that which exercises a monopoly on the legitimate use of force in a given territory. Yet an attentive reading of *all* of Weber’s writings on the state yields a fuller picture of the state’s distinctive characteristic being its *impersonality* (often the source, and consequence, of its bureaucratic structure). The state, in this sense, is a modern phenomenon, and thus the phrase “the modern state” is redundant. There is no denial, of course, that what we might call “state-like” political institutions preceded nationalism historically, and sometimes they were called “states”: the term *etat* in absolutist France, for example, by the 17th century came to mean a state in the *conventional* sense, but in relation to Greenfeld’s interpretation of Weber’s definition it was in many ways the *inverse* of the idea of the state (and certainly was the inverse of the idea of the state implied by nationalism). According to Greenfeld, just as nationalism radically transformed social life, it radically transformed politics. The fundamental ways in which it did so were intimately bound up with one of its two core principles: the principle of popular sovereignty. It is not hard to see, once this has been pointed out, what the principle of popular sovereignty might have

to do with the impersonal state. Louis XIV was, in every sense of the word, *the* sovereign. By 1789, Louis XVI was nominally the sovereign, but no longer truly regarded as such by important segments of the population. Instead, that population itself was imagined to be the bearer of sovereignty, the true source of all political legitimacy. Given the impossibility of resolving every matter of governance by plebiscite, this implies *representation*. Louis XIV did not “represent” the French people: he *ruled* them. National governments do not rule, they *govern*, and they can only be regarded as doing so legitimately if they can present themselves as representing the national will. Even the most impressive and charismatic personalities of *national* history (think, for example, of just the leaders of the major powers during the Second World War: Stalin, Hitler, as well as FDR, de Gaulle, and Churchill) are, therefore, mere *office-holders*. Such is the state.

“Nationalism: A Modern Religion?” (yet another of the Spring 1996 essays, which appeared in *Critical Review*) takes up the question of the relationship between nationalism and religion, an issue which, however important it may have seemed in the mid-1990s when this essay was published, has only grown in significance given today’s geo-political climate. Greenfeld rejects the common claim that nationalism constitutes a “modern religion,” the supposition usually being that both nationalism and religion are essentially irrational, perhaps likely to lead to violence, certainly likely to lead to self-sacrifice. As she notes, such confusion (like so much confusion in both popular and scholarly versions of social-scientific theories) is the product of a failure to define *either* of the two phenomena under consideration.

Nationalism, as was pointed above, is essentially secular. This is, again, a function of the principle of popular sovereignty. Genuine authority, nationalism

proclaims, is of *this* world that we inhabit: it resides in the earthly national community. There is no higher arbiter. In expropriating divine authority, nationalism endows this world with ultimate meaning. “The perception of the mundane as meaningful in its own right,” Greenfeld writes, “implies its sacralization. With nationalism, the heavens, so to speak, descend to earth; this world becomes the sphere of the sacred.” Religion, whatever its stripe, carries a very different world-image. The authority of any power of this world is essentially limited. Most important, all truly *religious* world-images include a belief in some other world beyond this one: the essence of the religious world-image is the belief in some sort of transcendence of this, corporeal world.

While replacing religion as the main cultural mechanism of social integration, nationalism often uses religion in pursuit of its own, secular – usually political -- ends. It is such use that lies at the basis of the so-called “religious nationalism” or “religious fundamentalism.” Most religious nationalisms are ethnic nationalisms, namely, of the type which tends to reify the community and to sacrifice the wellbeing of individuals (the human rights) to it: “In ‘religious’ nationalism, religion is likely to be the most important distinction, sometimes the only one, differentiating a self-conscious group from others in its vicinity.... religion becomes an ethnic characteristic, an ascriptive, unalterable attribute of a collectivity, and as such a reflection of necessity, rather than personal responsibility and choice... a reflection of race.” To confuse religion with religious nationalism is extremely dangerous: the respect due to the profession of religion as the chief expression of the liberty of conscience/consciousness in this case is given to a secular ideological construction based on the denial of such liberty.

People who consider themselves religious do not like being told – by social scientists, no less – that they are not. Yet according to this definition of the religious, it is very possible that many contemporary “religious” movements are not, in fact, religious at all. One thinks about the more radically Marxist proponents of “liberation theology,” for example, yet one might also pause to wonder whether Al Qaeda is, as both the media and social science tend to depict it, truly *religious*: or are their true motives the product of a violent variety of essentially secular, ethnic nationalism.

The role of political culture – and specifically the role of the various types of *national* political culture – in collective violence is the subject of chapter 7. “The Political Significance of Culture” was written in response to a request to help the readers of the journal in which this first appeared to understand not just the role of culture in politics more generally, but specifically the role of “culture” in the various instances of large-scale political violence that took place in the 1990s (in addition to the role of “culture” in the development of the former Soviet states). As Greenfeld persuasively argues, the very question posed reveals a serious misunderstanding of the nature of culture, treating it as a sort of appendage to social life, rather than as coterminous with human society itself. “All politics,” she notes “are politics of culture.” Indeed, if we understand the concepts of “power” and “political order” in Weberian terms, this is abundantly clear (though, of course, Weber did not even approach the explicit claim that the political is cultural). For Weber, power is defined as “the chance of a man or a number of men to realize their own will in a social action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action.”^{vi} That is, power is seen in a relatively minimal sense, and in one that is largely consonant with the use of the term in everyday

language: power is the ability to do things that one wants to do as well as to get others to do what one wants to do. The “political order” of a society can be understood as the system by which power is distributed. It lies alongside two other orders, the social order (the order by which prestige or honor is allocated or distributed) and the economic order (the order by which material goods and services are allocated or distributed), and societies vary in terms of the precise relationships that obtain between these orders. In certain types of societies, one’s position in the economic order – one’s “class” position – is largely constitutive of one’s position in the political order, or, to put it more directly, power is “economically conditioned.” In some societies, the social and the economic orders are largely isomorphic – this is the case, for example, in most modern societies, wherein educational achievement and wealth, indices drawn principally from the economic order, serve as the basis for the social order. Variation occurs not just between societies, of course, but also between individuals within a given society (that is, some individuals are particularly attracted to power, and enjoy it for its own rewards, as an end in itself, while others, in circumstances where prestige is attached to power, pursue power as a means to that further end). All such “orders,” it is plain to see, are “cultural” in the broadest sense, or rest, anyway, on cultural foundations. The modern culture, according to Greenfeld, as is made clear in “Nationalism and Modernity,” is *national* culture, and so if one wants to understand the series of possible relationships between *modern* culture and *modern* politics (really it would be better to simply say one wants to understand the nature of modern politics, as it is, by definition, redundant to put it in this way) the best available strategy is to focus on the distinctive qualities of types of nationalisms. This

she does here, noting especially the potential relationships between ethnic-collectivistic nationalisms and authoritarianism and political violence.

“Praxis Pietatis” (prepared as a commemorative lecture and originally published in *American Sociologist*) has essentially three purposes: the appreciation of the work of Edward Shils, an interpretation of the place of his work in the tradition of sociological theory, and the development of Greenfeld’s own thinking on the nature of culture. The first of these goals is, for Greenfeld, a very personal one, and it would be inappropriate (and unnecessary, given the clarity of the essay) for it to be discussed in this introduction. The second can only really be understood when Greenfeld’s central claims about the nature of culture are grasped.

This essay most clearly develops her conception of culture as an emergent phenomenon, analogous to *life*, “a complex phenomenon that cannot be reduced to the sum of its elements, a case in which a specific combination of elements, the possibility of which is in no way given in any of the elements, produces a certain emergent, new quality.” Culture, the distinctively human form of society (what should be, she argues, the central subject matter of sociology, though she wouldn’t agree with the conception of “culture” predominant there), is

“irreducible to the matter of which it is composed and which provides boundary conditions for it, but this matter [here matter is understood figuratively, whereas matter is literally the stuff, of course, from which life “emerges] is humanity, living, potentially creative, intelligent beings. Nothing in our constitution as biological or psychological organisms explains it; as biological or psychological organisms, each one of us is as absolutely powerless, insignificant, and uncreative vis-à-vis it as any particular atom of inanimate matter is vis-à-vis a living organism; we become empowered, creative, and significant only as carriers of culture, exposed to its magic touch; it truly transforms us: in it, we acquire a different, social nature. Without us culture would not exist, but neither would we without it, and it is culture which makes us what we are.”

This emergent phenomenon, she argues, developing ideas already apparent in “Reflections on Two Charismas,” is itself a functional equivalent to genes: its *function* is the provision of order, the keeping at bay of anomie. Yet as she notes, a functional explanation is, from a scientific point of view, worth very little, given that, in this case anyway, it is essentially beyond empirical proof.

How can one understand culture? This is one formulation of the age-old question of how humanity might understand itself. The fact that we are immersed in culture, that in attempting to understand it we are using it, that this at least *seems* to point to a sort of circularity, is also well-known. As Greenfeld argues, one reaction to the contemplation of culture, characteristic even of those who believe themselves to be approaching the subject scientifically is something essentially akin to worship. Culture indeed does produce awe. Those scholars who study it yet who feel no such awe may be insensitive, indeed, to their object of study. Yet one cannot, as Durkheim and Shils both ultimately did, allow this awe to override one’s empirical orientation. Weber’s solution to this problem – a focus exclusively on culture’s myriad *forms* without asking questions with regard to its *essence* – seems to be far more productive.

Greenfeld clearly admires Weber’s intellectual restraint, yet she would not similarly restrain herself, instead attempting to get beyond the historical analysis of cultural forms and, if not to ask questions of culture’s essence, to pursue alternative strategies that might shed light on its nature. In “An Invitation to a Dialogue,” written five years after “Praxis Pietatis,” she suggests a new approach to the age old mind-body problem. The invitation is prompted by the book *Memory: From Mind to Molecules* by the eminent neurobiologist Eric Kandel, a winner of the Nobel Prize in medicine, and the

cognitive psychologist Larry Squire; it is extended to the neuroscience community. Beginning with a discussion of the authors' inversion of Descartes' famous *cogito ergo sum* argument, Greenfeld notes that neither Descartes' nor Kandel and Squire's accounts of the relationship between the mind and the body are empirically and logically adequate. Perhaps the understanding of culture as an autonomous emergent phenomenon can provide a way out of this philosophical impasse?

Such an understanding, she argues, would force us to focus on the process of interaction between culture and our neurophysiology, leading to a novel conception of the human mind. The mind, in this new framework, would become "culture in the brain," a process that necessarily relies on both cultural, or symbolic, stimuli from the environment and on the mechanisms of the brain, and we might be able, experimentally, with the help of procedures and technologies available to neuroscience, to work out what specific roles do culture and physiology play in both basic and advanced human cognitive processes, and exactly how they interact. Before this work is done, one may formulate certain hypotheses. It may be reasonably argued, for instance, on the basis of comparative zoology, if nothing more, that culture produces *will (agency)* and *identity*. It "determines the individual's likes and dislikes, programming the brain to will certain things"; culturally produced "identity presents to the individual the possibilities, helping to establish their subjective ranking: because you are what you are, you must will this and not this. It commands the will what to choose and to decide. In terms of the brain systems which support them, the agency and the identity are likely two different processes, but in terms of their expression in behavior, they work in tandem and are parts of the same mental process." It may also be argued that culture creates the mind with the

help of the imaginative capacity of the brain (its capacity, that is, to generate new information), which in turn enables the mind to take part in the creation of culture. Of course, at this point one cannot move beyond speculation with regard to the neurophysiological systems that support and underlie the processes Greenfeld delineates – and here the invitation to a dialogue is meant in all earnestness. But her imaginative sketch does – for the first time in modern philosophy – offer a third possibility of accounting for the human nature, a possibility which lies between dualism and monism, whether materialistic or idealistic, on the one hand, and between materialism and idealism, on the other, and which is both logical and open to empirical investigation.

“Nationalism and the Modern Economy: Communing with the Spirit of Max Weber” was prepared for a conference commemorating the 100th anniversary of the publication of Weber’s *Protestant Ethic* and delivered there in June 2004, to be published in the special anniversary issue of *Max Weber Studies* a year later. A discussion of the role of nationalism in the emergence of the modern economy, it, like most of Greenfeld’s essays, does at least a double duty. It develops ideas first intimated in the “Invitation to a Dialogue,” establishing the mind as a central subject in the study of culture and thereby arriving at a much fuller interpretation of the Weberian conception of “meaning.” Greenfeld thus takes a further step in the construction of the general theory of culture – a step that both makes clear and deepens the philosophical implications of this theory.

Outlining the argument of *The Spirit of Capitalism: Nationalism and Economic Growth* regarding the inherent competitiveness of nationalism (familiar to the readers from “Science and National Greatness in 17th Century England”), which, in the economic sphere, creates an incessant race for supremacy, and therefore leads to sustained growth,

the essay makes clear why Greenfeld's thesis in fact supercedes the one Weber proposed a century ago. But while "laying the great Weber's thesis to rest," Greenfeld hopes to bring his underlying theory of social reality to life and make it productive again. It is the first of Greenfeld's essays to employ the term "mentalist." She uses it here to characterize Weber's (and so her own) position on culture as an empirical reality, symbolic rather than material, whose only active element – and therefore the focus of its study -- is the mind. Most relevant to the themes mentioned in this introduction, as noted above, in this essay is Greenfeld's understanding of the Weberian notion of "rationalization," which leads her to a definition of the nature of the historical process or history more generally. She writes:

"The general meaning of 'rationalization' which emerges out of the discussion of, and allows its application in, such widely differing 'departments of life' as mystical contemplation and economy is that of articulation and organization, primarily cognitive, of an area of experience. The need for rationalization arises from the inherently disorderly nature of reality to which human beings are born... 'Rationalization', in other words, refers to the fundamental process of ordering of reality, or its cultural, i.e., symbolic, i.e., mental, construction."

This implies that the "fundamental thesis" of Weber's mentalist sociology is the notion of history as

"the march (or, rather, ramble) of rationalization, the endless succession of disconnected attempts to introduce order into experience which does not carry it within itself. The process of rationalization is natural, as is humanity; but man-made things are, by definition, artificial, and so are the products of rationalization...there is nothing inevitable about them, they do not occur of themselves, they are not self-evident."

Durkheim's name is not mentioned in this context. But we can see how Durkheim and Weber are yet again brought together in Greenfeld's thought. Rationalization is the core cultural process, a response to anomie; there is a constant anomie-rationalization dynamic that lies at the basis of cultural development and change.

Greenfeld's articulation of the concept of anomie probably receives its fullest expression in this book's closing chapter, "Nationalism and the Mind," which also demonstrates her recent thinking about its role in socio-historical change. "Nationalism and the Mind" was delivered in April 2004 as the Tenth Annual Gellner Lecture of the Association for the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism at the old theatre of the London School of Economics. In the Summer of 2005 it appeared in the ASEN journal, *Nations and Nationalism*. Though written several months earlier than "Nationalism and Modern Economy," it in many ways ties together the various strands of argument in the present collection. Among other things it reviews and offers succinct formulations of the nature of nationalism and its main implications for modern societies. It then focuses on the main social implication – egalitarianism – and the psychological consequences of egalitarianism for members of national societies. In short, as noted above, though a response to anomie designed to resolve it, nationalism nevertheless renders essentially permanent a low-grade form of it. It has a tendency to lead to the emergence of identity-problems among a significant minority of the population:

“the advantages of modernity come with a heavy price-tag. The greater is the choice one is given in forming one's destiny, the heavier is the burden of responsibility for making the right choice. The more opportunities one is offered to 'find oneself', the harder it is to decide where to look. Life has never been so exciting *and* so frustrating; we have never been so empowered *and* so helpless. Modern societies, produced by nationalism, because of their very secularism, openness, and the elevation of the individual, are necessarily *anomic*.”

As Greenfeld puts it here, anomie is “the ultimate cause of cultural change.” Since culture's *function*, if not its *essence*, is to hold anomie at bay, to provide order to a species that has no genetically-transmitted order, it stands to reason that cultural

innovation, the imaginative solution to cultural *problems*, which are, of course, problems of order, is a response to breakdowns, gaps, or inconsistencies in that order. In characteristically provocative fashion, Greenfeld argues that nationalism as a form of culture “inhibits the formation and normal functioning of the human mind.” Critics might take issue with the notion of such “normal functioning,” assuming that such a designation presupposes a “natural” state of culture from which nationalism deviates, a sort of cultural “golden age” in which the need for order was fully satisfied. Moreover, as Greenfeld notes, most human minds function perfectly “normally,” even in this modern world that we inhabit. Yet the essential point, expressed in this way, among other things, for rhetorical impact, stands: modern, national society is *particularly anomic*, meaning that it can be a difficult culture to live in for large numbers of persons with greater than average sensitivity. The essay, therefore, brings within the orbit of Greenfeld’s work psychology and, perhaps, even psychiatry.

The perennial focus of this work, culture itself, is, by 2004, much closer to having received a satisfactory definition. It is not simply an emergent phenomenon (though, of course, it is that), but a *process*, one both “symbolic” and “mental,” by which it is meant that it takes place in the minds of individuals. Like the mind which it creates (and by which it is created) it is also a product of the interaction between human biological constitution and the autonomous logics of symbolic systems. As such it weaves its way between Cartesian dualism, on the one hand, and materialistic or idealistic monism, on the other; and between materialism and idealism. It could not be more real, but its reality is not material, although it exists within material boundary conditions and is supported at every step by material mechanisms.

The eleven essays which the readers have before them were chosen because each makes a particularly valuable contribution to the field (or fields) of study of which it treats. They were pertinent to the interests of Professor Greenfeld's students in many disciplines and, we hoped, would be pertinent to the interests of other students (whether undergraduate or professors) in many disciplines. "Reflections on Two Charismas" and "Praxis Pietatis" should appeal to those interested in sociological theory; "Russian Formalist Sociology of Literature" – to sociological theorists, as well as sociologists of art and literature, and literary theorists; "Science and Literature as Social Institutions" would add to this list of audiences also historians, philosophers, and sociologists of science. "Invitation to a Dialogue" should be of interest to philosophers in general and, who knows, might even draw in an occasional neuroscientist. The set of six articles dealing with aspects and implications of nationalism – "Science and National Greatness in 17th Century England"; "Nationalism and Modernity"; "The Modern Religion?"; "The Political Significance of Culture"; "Nationalism and Modern Economy"; and "Nationalism and the Mind" – in addition to students of nationalism coming from various disciplines, should also interest historians, philosophers, and sociologists of science; political scientists, students of international relations, and, perhaps, even security studies; students of religion, of economic history, and economic growth; psychologists and psychotherapists; and, again, sociological theorists.

But together these essays combine into something greater than the sum of its parts – a perspective which unifies these usually disjointed disciplines into one coherent approach to culture, focused on the mind. This perspective becomes clearer from essay to

essay, gradually building up from “Reflections on Two Charismas” in which it is barely intimated to “Nationalism and the Mind” which makes it explicit. Taken as a whole, the collection turns into a text in philosophical anthropology, a systematic discussion of human nature, and as such addresses anyone interested in humanity.

Of course, the theory is incomplete. In accordance with the view of the mind as a self-proliferating creative process, some of the ideas here have already developed further, and in essays written since the fall of 2004, Liah Greenfeld took additional steps in the analysis of nationalism – the modern culture – and towards the understanding of human society and culture in general. While these new essays await their volume, we have sufficient food for thought in the one before us to last us in the meantime. We’ll do well (to use an appropriate term) to ruminate on it.

ⁱ John Gray, “The Global Mirage,” *TLS*, June 7, 2002.

ⁱⁱ For a survey of historical attempts to define culture see Adam Kuper, *Culture: The Anthropologists’ Account* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

ⁱⁱⁱ On cultural models “of” and “for” see Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System” in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973). On the centrality of order in human social life and in humans relative genetic deprivation in this respect see Shils, “Charisma, Order, and Status,” Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality*, and Geertz, *op cit*.

^{iv} Indeed, Greenfeld believes that the theory of institutions that she develops is *implicit* in Weber, but it remains largely undeveloped. The notion that a social institution has as its core a single human propensity or goal, upon which the very concept of the autonomy of institutions rests, can be seen in his discussion of science in “Science as a Vocation.”

^v Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. George Lawrence (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), pp. 537-538.

^{vi} Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, p. 926.