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### Theodore H. von Laue. *The World Revolution of Westernization: The Twentieth Century in Global Perspective*

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be freed from its curse" (p. 674). In other words, thanks to domination we shall now be better off if we can get rid of it than we would have been had it never happened in the first place. It's nice to know that sins can bless as well as curse. It's also a comfort to know that the force, fraud, and violence of domination were so good so far, but now that they have brought us to where we want to be in the world, we want to abolish them before they can be used against us as we used them against others during the last five centuries in order to get to the position of dominance we have now achieved, so that we can now live the good life without it.

This book is full of historical and sociological facts of great interest and importance. It is also full of hypotheses well worth further research and testing. The author's critique of civilization includes some self-criticism of Western civilization which is commendable as far as it goes. But, it could have gone a lot further, and it probably would have gone a lot further if the author had not been biased by the prevailing ideology of anti-communism, which no longer prevails.

William Eckhardt

#### CIVILIZATIONAL ASCETICISM AND CULTURAL HEGEMONY

Theodore H. von Laue. *The World Revolution of Westernization: The Twentieth Century in Global Perspective*. Oxford University Press, 1987.

Which are the most important factors in the rise and fall of civilizations? This question reminds me of my experience with a broken thermometer when I was a youngster. The shiny bits of mercury from the thermometer had scattered over the table top. Whenever I thought my little fingers were closing in on a globule, it scooted off. The keys to civilizational dynamics are similarly elusive. Marxist structuralists leave me wondering about the roles of individuals and their ideological passions. Sociobiologists slight the insights of politics and economics. Historians and economists usually ignore the natural environment and geographic location, or treat them superficially. Geographers have not concerned themselves with these problems since the days of Ellsworth Huntington. And so it goes.

Theodore von Laue's favored factor is religion and morality. He also wonders about the "collective subconscious" and the ways in which the individual psyche is directed to the accomplishment of societal tasks, a topic which he points out is not yet studied on a global scale. Right off, he eschews terms like "capitalism" and "class struggle," for, he asserts, "Social life is not shaped by the ways in which . . . human beings engage nature through production." (p. xv) I appreciate his strenuous effort to view the world of the twentieth century freshly, but one does not have to be a marxist to see the class-struggle dynamic as a very complex and important phenomenon in the structure of our politico-economic

system, for which a better label than "capitalism" is hard to come by. Discussions of morality and religious symbolism and ritual seem to be to be fatally inconclusive if they are not linked to, among other factors, the way in which human beings have earned their livelihood in all eras.

May I suggest that the economy, moral values, and belief systems are but three of several co-dependent variables, none of which are, in any general sense, sufficient causes, but all are necessary ones. It is not unreasonable to postulate innumerable feedback loops among them. Which factors may appear to be decisive in any given instance depends on the nature of specific conjunctures as well as on the biases or theoretical preferences of the analyst.

However, even if von Laue's position is accepted, I still have cause for disquietude. In any discussion focussing on the importance of moral values and religious symbolism, ideas, and practices, one must clarify one's terms carefully. "Discipline" (a term he uses often) is, nowadays, a buzzword for authoritarians and traditionalists, as is "moral values." The author's emphasis on these terms is in need of greater explicitness. Likewise with his references to the "ascetic." A lay reader is apt to think he wants more monks and hermits. His praise for our Judeo-Christian heritage needs careful specification. There is much in the Christian portion—which is the predominant portion—of our Judeo-Christian heritage which has been downright catastrophic, especially in terms of the social harmony and mutual understanding that von Laue obviously prizes very highly.

The author contrasts The West to the rest as a very successful civilization because its ascetics brought forth more cerebration and less hedonism. It is hard to avoid coming thence to the conclusion that the "Third World" owes its poverty to sensuous indulgence, although I dare say that may not be the conclusion von Laue had in mind. As I read the historical record, I find it hard to believe that merchants in any civilization were really less ascetic or more hedonistic than those of The West. The success of the western merchants (or "bourgeoisie," to widen our concept a bit) was related to the peculiar structure of Western society and to their perceptions of the opportunities it offered, in comparison to the more restrictive nature of other civilizations.

Von Laue's plea for the greater understanding of other cultures, which requires a strenuous effort to free ourselves of our Western preconceptions as to the facts of the matter and the values through which these are perceived and by which they are judged, is one I would prescribe, but we are both academics. The average person, even the "average intelligent reader" (definitely a minority of the general public, although more numerous than the academics) is not going to undertake the comprehensive studies he recommends (p. 377). Yet his plea for a holistic, global, humane, culturally relativistic viewpoint, freeing us from narrow specializations as well as ethnocentrism, is a plea with which I heartily concur.

Definitely on the plus side is his conceptualization of the resentful and

imitative character of the many counterrevolutions (fascism, communism, etc.) to the world-encompassing revolution of The West. I believe we cannot grasp the essence of much of the turbulence in today's world unless we interpret it in this manner. The material achievements of The West are much in demand. The "Revolution of Rising Expectations" is far from being over, yet the pervasive disruption of all other cultures which The West has accomplished is very much resented, hence the acting-out of a great emotional contradiction which is simultaneously both pro- and anti-western.

Von Laue defines The West as, essentially, France and Great Britain, but he does really seem to apply the term more broadly. Within the matrix of ideas alluded to above, considerable attention is given to the U.S.S.R. and Germany, and also to the U.S.A., China and Japan. The rest of the world is treated incidentally. For the purpose of this review I have focussed on his statement of his thesis toward the beginning of the book and his ten-page methodological and conceptual appendix at the end. Within the confines of a brief review one cannot do justice to all of the substance in what is by design a wide-ranging work.

Civilizationists can appropriately concern themselves not only with the past but also with the present, for our civilization seems to be undergoing some sort of fundamental transition . . . to what? . . . in what ways? Attempts at global perspectives aimed at avoiding clichéd thinking and suggesting innovative perspectives—and von Laue's 380-page book is one such—are well worth our scrutiny. He provides much with which to agree or disagree.

Laurence Grambow Wolf

## CULTURAL NORMS OF A NATION AT ITS ZENITH

Simon Schama. *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1988. pp. xiii, 698.

Over seven hundred pages, three hundred and fourteen plates that include reproductions of paintings, prints, maps and photographs, Notes, Index—all there, not so much an embarrassment of riches, as the title goes, but a tantalizing sampling of Dutch culture in the seventeenth century, and thereby an exemplary glimpse of Early Modern European Civilization and a model of how to use one version of history of mentalities to focus on the "problematique" of what is a civilization.

What the book is not should also be noted. It is not a history of ideas and institutions, not a political and social biography of the Dutch people, and not a well-contextualized social history of Dutch Art. Simon Schama takes these and other approaches and mixes them together into something that is more and other than any one lined up with the others in