Is the West special?
World History and Western Civilisation

Greg Melleuish

Foundations of Western Civilisation Program

MONOGRAPHS ON WESTERN CIVILISATION NO. 3

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http://westerncivilisation.ipa.org.au/

Institute of Public Affairs
Mannkal Economic Education Foundation

First published 2012

Institute of Public Affairs

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ISBN: 978-0-909536-73-2

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Foreword

Our understanding of history shapes the contemporary world more than we care to admit. At its core, much political debate is a contest of views about how the past relates to the future.

Take the description 'progressive' for left-wing political thought. Social democrats see the rise of the state and state power as a historical trajectory heading towards a more 'socially just' world.

Conservatism, too, is a political philosophy with a deeply embedded philosophy of history. Conservatives claim that the evolution of institutions over time instils them with hidden virtues.

The most famous and influential approach to the writing of history is Whig history—another framework which emphasises human progress and draws deep political implications from that progress. The Whig historians (Lord Macaulay being the most prominent) depicted English history as progressing towards liberty and parliamentary democracy.

Karl Marx and his followers also adopted a 'whiggish' history, suggesting that societies moved in stages towards an inevitable, utopian end. Post-Marxist historians now talk of our age as 'late-capitalism'.

Not all grand narratives are those of progress. Environmentalists imagine the world to be slipping down a slope to its own destruction. This process started with the industrial revolution, which ended an idyl-

lic, rural, agricultural past, and replaced it with the destructive, urbane, industrial present. For environmentalists, the local, community-based production economy which has dominated the majority of human history is sustainable, and the modern world's globalised, hyper-networked production is unsustainable. Few environmentalists fully idealise the past—no one wants to bring back cholera—but they do romanticise it, and suggest it has many virtues which the twenty-first century lacks.

Each of these philosophies of history are deployed to teach something about the contemporary world. They provide a framework to understand the present, and they also offer a guide for future action.

So we must not imagine that the growth of 'world history' as a discrete historical endeavour has no political implications. Certainly, as Greg Melleuish writes in this important monograph, the premise of world history is in many ways a worthy one. The study of Europe has dominated historical discussion since Herodotus. Yet if we are telling the history of the world then no civilisation, no region, no continent, no nation should be unreasonably prioritised above another. The noble purpose of world history is to try balance the study of Europe with a study of the rest of the world. Geographically, Europe is, after all, one region of many.

Yet some historians have used world history less as an attempt at balance and more as retribution. They argue that not only Europe is one region among many, but it is a minor one at that. Europe, for some world historians, is little more than a backwater province. Europe's dominance of the globe from the early modern period onwards is seen as an accident, or as merely a result of helpful geography, or favourable climate, or, as one historian implies, the theft of technologies invented elsewhere. And, if the rise of Europe is simply an accident of history, or just a quirky response to the stimuli of material factors, then its moral leadership of the modern world is not assured.

But Europe is not merely a region, or a political configuration.

World history has replaced not only the study of Europe, but the study of Western Civilisation. This is deeply regrettable. The study of Western Civilisation is, above all, a study of ideas. It is the study of how Western concepts like the rule of law, religious freedom and pluralism, economic and individual liberty, and representative democracy developed—and came to dominate the world.

Many world historians seem to believe that while Europe dominated the recent past, it will not dominate the future. And its ideas need not dominate the present. If the West's dominance is a temporary quirk of history, then the philosophy of the West is of little consequence; it can make no claim to moral or intellectual superiority.

But as Melleuish writes, there is an irony here. Those historians who argue there is nothing special about the West frequently rely on Western theories while they do so, and on uniquely Western ideas about progress or decline. No surprise: self-loathing has a long tradition in European intellectual history.

There is a way out of this morass. Melleuish concludes that world history and Western Civilisation need not be in conflict. But to do so, world historians will need to integrate what their predecessors recognised—the importance of ideas in history and how those ideas have shaped society. Europe's intellectual output is absolutely unique. The success of the West is found in the way it has embraced the insights of that intellectual output.

Greg Melleuish's monograph is the third monograph produced by the Foundations of Western Civilisation Program. It is a timely and important reminder that how we understand history matters.

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About the author

Greg Melleuish is currently an associate professor in the School of History and Politics at the University of Wollongong. In former lives he was an Administrative Trainee in the Commonwealth Public Service and an employee of the Australian Gaslight Company. He also taught in the Department of History, University of Melbourne at the time of the Blainey Affair, and at the now defunct Australian Studies Centre at the University of Queensland. He writes primarily on Australian intellectual history and political ideas and has published *Cultural Liberalism in Australia* (Cambridge University Press 1995) and *The Power of Ideas* (Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2009). He is currently completing a book on Australian democracy. He has also written a number of articles on world history and has a keen interest in the teaching of history. He teaches a unit entitled 'Europe in World History'. He wrote one of the two papers that formed the basis for discussion at the Australian History Summit in 2006. He is an Honorary Fellow of Campion College and a Member of the Advisory Council, Foundations of Western Civilisation Program of the IPA.

1 Introduction

One of the most puzzling and irritating aspects of the contemporary study of history is the antipathy that those who call themselves 'world historians' have towards European history and the study of Western Civilisation. 'Euro-centrism' is one of the great insults that can now be thrown at a historian. The insult implies that they support imperialism, oppression and the subjugation of the rest of the world by the West, as well as a desire to over-inflate the value of Western Civilisation and denigrate other civilisations.

For such critics, the West is seen as the source of all that is rotten about the modern world. The West came, saw, conquered, and left behind ruin and devastation. That is the story that too many world historians want to tell.

The old story was that science, democracy and prosperity were created in the West and then given as gifts to the world. If it had not been for the West, we would not have the economically and scientifically advanced world that we have.

Within the West there have always been those who disputed its accomplishments. The new proponents of world history who want to belittle the West are just part of a new wave of haters of the West. Only now the battleground has changed from the realm of practical politics to that

of history. Having failed to destroy the West militarily and politically the attempt is now being made to destroy its sense of self confidence through attacking its history.

For all his faults, Karl Marx had a very high opinion of the history of the West. He extolled the achievements of modern capitalism and looked back nostalgically to the Greeks. He wanted, in his own strange way, to perfect the West. Modern critics do not have the same love for Western Civilisation. They come to tear down its edifices, to put it back in its place as just another minor province of the world. At best, for them, the dominance of the West was but a passing phase that deserves to be, and ultimately will be, forgotten.

So, for all its achievements, and all that it has given to the world, the West must face yet another attack, one that again comes from inside, one that threatens to steal not just its present but also its past. If the values of the West are to be preserved, it is absolutely necessary that the history of the West not be reduced in this way. Certainly, we must recognise the importance of the history of the rest of the world, but we should also not denigrate that of the West. There must be a balance in our appreciation of the history of the West and the history of the rest of the world. That is the foundation on which this study has been built. As we shall see ultimately world history and Western history have similar objectives, world history expresses values that are fundamentally Western in origin. They should not be at war. They should be working together to give the truest possible picture of the history of humanity.

This desire to reduce the significance of Europe and the West in world history is best summed up in the title of Dipesh Chakrabarty's book *Provincializing Europe*: Europe is to be banished from the core to the periphery, to be made a province of a far larger and more important world both in material and intellectual terms. Others, such as Martin Lewis and Karen Wigen, have attacked what they see as the Eurocentric nature of map making and challenge the notion that Europe can be said

to constitute a continent.[1] Europe is not allowed to be a continent; it must be put back in its place and relegated to the minor league where it belongs. In his *Millennium: A History of our Last One Thousand Years* Felipe Fernández-Armesto refers to the Europe of the late Middle Ages as 'A Small Promontory of Asia'.[2] Europe is a small place—certainly small when compared to Asia—which has got too uppity about its role in the world.

Europe and the West are not just to be reduced in spatial terms but also in terms of time and history. Fernández-Armesto is happy to concede that the West was dominant for a time in world history, but like many of his kind, he believes that the history of the last one thousand years began with Asian dominance and has now reverted back to Asian dominance. The period when the world centred on the Atlantic was but a century or so and things have now gone back to the way that they are meant to be. Andre Gunder Frank is another who delights in pointing out that the period of Western dominance only really began in about 1800 and did not last very long. Before that time Asia, especially China, ruled; Europe was simply an unsophisticated part of the world periphery which became adventurous and developed its maritime superiority because it wished to share in the superior civilisation that China had created.[3] In a similar fashion other economic historians, including Kenneth Pomeranz and R Bin Wong have gone to great lengths to assert that in fact Europe was not further advanced than China in 1800.[4]

So the West is to have its importance diminished both in time and space. But that is not all. There is also the question of its reputation for innovation and discovery. It claims to be dynamic and energetic but according to some writers it has only achieved what it has because it 'stole' most of its inventions from elsewhere, in particular China. If one reads Jack Goody's *The Theft of History* one will discover that most of the institutions of the West, ranging from civilisation to capitalism were 'stolen'.[5] As we shall see at a later stage in this work, John Hobson argues

that almost anything of any worth that the West claims to have invented, with the exception of its racism, came from elsewhere.[6] Moving to the realm of fantasy, Gavin Menzies claims that many Western inventions are the result of the visit of a Chinese fleet to Italy in 1434.[7]

If we are to believe these various accounts, the West is composed of little more than a collection of scavengers and thieves living in some hillbilly backwoods part of the world, and only achieved its dominance in the world because of its unsavoury and immoral practices. Now it is deservedly being relegated to the dustbin of history where it belongs.

But we may ask: didn't the West transform the world over the past few hundred years? Didn't the West create modern science, modern democracy, and the modern financial systems that have allowed us to enjoy a standard of living never known before? Would that have been possible if Europe and the West had been merely a den of thieves? And is it not the case that the West has prospered because it believes so strongly in the rule of law, an institution that allows for commercial enterprise to enjoy both freedom and security?

Many of these authors believe that they are agents of 'justice', restoring to the rest of the world the rightful place that the West has taken from it. But such work often seems to be motivated more by a hatred of the West than by any desire to achieve a more balanced view of history. Why should the 'justice' involved in creating a more balanced global approach to history mean attacking and denigrating the West and Western Civilisation? Surely if one wants balance and 'justice' that is not the road down which one should go.

Yes, it is good to have justice in history, but that does not mean denigrating one particular part of the world. It does not mean belittling the very real achievements of Western Civilisation. These historians need to understand that even if there was a certain comparability between China and the West in 1800, it was still the West and not China that created the modern world, including the rule of law, science, the modern state,

democracy as well as great artistic and literary achievements.

Nevertheless, the idea that one must support either 'world history' or Western Civilisation is a silly one. This study will argue that, intellectually, a global approach to history is an outgrowth of Western Civilisation and the values that it espouses. The two are, and should be, in harmony. The real issue facing world historians is to understand and explain the relationship between Western Civilisation and world history, especially given the enormous impact that the West has had on the world during the past two centuries. That task cannot be conducted if the objective is to denigrate the West and to belittle the role that Europe has played in the history of the world. The sources of this attempt to downgrade the West are many. One is the attitude of self-flagellation that many Western intellectuals now have towards the traditions of which they are the heirs. Another is the apparent decline of the West and the rise of new powers such as China.

It is true that terrible things have happened in Europe, especially during the twentieth century. But it is also true that the West has given the world some extremely important gifts, ranging from democracy to the rule of law to modern science. In any case the horrors of twentieth century Europe were inflicted by those who hated the West. The complaints of world historians only make sense when they are placed within the framework of Western Civilisation. They are complaints generated by the belief that the West has failed to live up to the high ideals that its civilisation has espoused.

World history is an ideal that only really makes sense in the Western context. We all are the children of the West. Western Civilisation should also not be confused with Europe. As we shall discuss, Western Civilisation is essentially about ideals; one of its main features is that it recognises the debt that it owes to traditions that come from elsewhere, be it ancient Israel or Greece. It is not tied to any single location.

Both Western Civilisation and world history have as their focus hu-

manity. They should not be at war. They should cooperate in allowing us to understand the extraordinary story of humanity. That is the theme of this study. It does not seek to make the West look good by denigrating other civilisations. It recognises the value and worth of the whole of humanity. It simply argues that if we are to have a true account of the history of humanity, the role of the West must be understood and given its proper place. To do anything else would be unjust.

2 The Purpose of the Past

World history has as its premise a very noble sentiment: we should try to understand the history of humanity as a whole and in a balanced way that does not give special privileges to one particular civilisation or people from one part of the world. As we all know everyone tends to see the world from the place where he or she is standing, and the view from any vantage point will always be partial. We all tend to emphasise that which we know. World history has an imperative that we should, as far as possible, try to put such partiality behind us. In so doing we gain a more accurate and truthful view of the world, one that, as far as possible, provides us with an accurate picture of the history of humanity. World historians should be able to write as if they were aliens visiting earth with no attachments to any civilisation or culture.

This is a laudable goal. It is also one that was not possible to contemplate until relatively recent times because it requires that we have a large amount of historical knowledge about the various areas of the earth. There has been an explosion in the amount of historical knowledge available in the past fifty years, which is to say knowledge available to Western scholars. In the nineteenth century Western historians knew very little about non-Western history simply because the records of that history were not available. When Britain went to war with the Ottoman

Empire during World War I it discovered that there was very little published in the West about the Ottomans and the Ottoman Empire. And the Ottoman Empire was on Europe's doorstep!

Part of the issue here relates to the preservation of historical records. Europeans are, and were, great collectors of records on all sorts of things, but particularly the records of the state and the records of the Church. It is such records that enable historians to do such things as calculate the death rate during the Black Death in the fourteenth century using records of the movement of clergy.[1] Other records include those of a legal nature that can be used for a range of purposes. For example probate records are used by economic historians to plot changes in consumption patterns during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[2]

Not all civilisations place as much emphasis on writing things down or on preserving what they have written down. In her study of seventeenth century Crete, Molly Greene describes the large number of written records created by the Venetians, particularly records of a commercial nature. However, there are fewer records once the Muslim Ottomans took over the island. Part of the reason for this is that contracts were often verbal under Ottoman rule; although Kadi court records survive, the Ottomans simply did things differently.[3]

It is also true that one needs a certain level of civilisational development for the capacity to produce, and then preserve, records. One requires a high level of organisational and political competence. It is only those sort of entities where we have relatively good knowledge. This means that even within a civilisation that produces a good number of records there are large areas of human existence about which our knowledge is very limited. For example, our knowledge about Roman women is limited but some women of the elite make an appearance in the records. What we know about lower class Roman women is much, much smaller. This issue relates to another problem: people in the past often had quite different ideas regarding the things that were worth writ-

ing about. For example, we have an account of the eruption of Vesuvius in a letter by Pliny the Younger, but he apologises profusely to his correspondent Tacitus for writing about such matters.

Then there is the issue of the survival of records. Perishable forms of record, such as paper and papyri, are preserved in the dry climates of Egypt but do not last long in moist climates. Studying the administration of the ancient Roman Empire essentially means studying how the Romans ruled Egypt, because Egypt is the source of the majority of the records. Non-perishable records survive much longer. We now know so much about ancient Mesopotamia because we have baked clay tablets that preserved texts from this region. The famous *Res Gestae* of the Emperor Augustus survives because it was inscribed in stone.

The important thing is that what we can know about the past is highly dependent on what sorts of records have survived. Of course there are also non-written survivals but what they can tell us is limited. The same is true of written records. History will always be incomplete because our records are massively incomplete. In fact, for ninety-five per cent of human history, and in many areas of the earth, we will never know very much because virtually no records have survived. This part of history attracts all sorts of wild speculation because the absence of evidence is generally an invitation to invent speculative theories to cover the gaps. From such absences come notions such as the 'noble savage', an invention that cannot be proved or disproved by empirical evidence.

The history of the West is attractive for historians to study because there are so many records available. In a profession in which written records are highly valued it is natural to gravitate to areas where those records are plentiful. Considered in this way, it is to be expected that the history of Europe will have more written about it than the history of other parts of the world. Moreover, given that Europeans were generally more likely to visit and describe places outside Europe than for the reverse to occur, it is also the case that much of the history of the world

outside Europe, including those parts of the world that once formed part of European empires, will also be seen through European eyes.

The various arguments made above illustrate why, even with the best will in the world, the study of history, especially when conducted by Westerners, will tend to gravitate towards the study of the West, and of the non-West as seen by Westerners. Molly Greene's study of Crete required her to master three languages in three different scripts: Turkish, Greek and Italian.[4] This tendency is not the result of some Western conspiracy designed to keep former imperial subjects in their place. Historical enquiry can only proceed where there is evidence, and historians will tend to generalise on the basis of the evidence that they have. If there is no evidence there can be no history, or at least any history grounded in fact.

This is not to say that history which seeks to be informed by a global perspective is not desirable. In fact, given that history strives for the fullest possible picture of the human past, it is highly desirable. We will just always never be able to achieve that goal fully. However we now know more about human history than ever before. Unlike our nineteenth century predecessors our knowledge is not largely limited to the Western world, the classical world and the Middle East as described in the Bible. There has been an exponential increase in our historical knowledge, especially of non-Western societies ranging from India to China to South East Asia and Africa. In fact, the amount of knowledge available is so vast that it is impossible for any single person to read all the literature and be aware of developments in every possible field.

At the same time, history has undergone a degree of specialisation along with most other academic disciplines. Even within relatively limited fields, such as Australian history, there are many areas of specialisation. There are many historians who rarely venture outside their field of specific expertise. In the new university of the twenty first century academics are encouraged to do as much research as possible so that they

can publish articles and apply for grants. This generally means working the same plot over and over again until everything it has to offer has been extracted. There has been an extraordinary fragmentation in the historical enterprise over the past thirty years; most members of the academic history community pursue only their particular field of interest. They are generally incapable of teaching in an area outside of that field and they would regard a request to do so as a terrible imposition that took them away from their beloved research. Hence an average group of historians working together in a university department may very well share little in terms of knowledge. They are a collection of specialists rather than co-workers in a common enterprise. Often the only thing that links them together is an interest in the latest historical fad or intellectual fashion.

This is the strange world that those engaged in the study of history have come to inhabit in the twenty first century. There is excessive specialisation combined with the loss of any real sense of engagement in a common enterprise. This is reflected, especially in Australian universities, by the creation of curricula that are little better than a collection of discrete units that may or may not have a connection with each other. With the demise of the God Professor there is no one who has the authority to say what should and should not be taught. In this void the particular interests of academic historians dominate. In a very practical sense we live in a post-modern world when it comes to the study of history in Australian universities. There is no wider overarching narrative; there is just a series of disconnected studies of the past.

It is important to capture the paradox in all of this. In days gone by, when we knew much less about the history of humanity in general, there was a very definite sense of narrative and of the origins of the contemporary world. Students, and those with an interest in history, had a strong sense regarding from where they had come, and in general that narrative was a story about the rise of the West. It took different forms in different places. In America it found expression in courses taught and

books written about Western Civilisation, and in such things as the great books courses taught in many colleges. In Australia it took the form of the history of Britain and the growth of the British Empire, often with an emphasis on Tudor and Stuart England, including the English Revolution.

That wonderful, almost innocent, age is now well behind us. The age of studying British history is effectively over and is unlikely to be with us again. What has succeeded it is an age of chaos, an age of anything goes, of excessive specialisation combined with an approach that glories in fragmentation. Its ideology is one of skills; it does not matter what someone actually learns so long as they are taught the appropriate skills which provide them with the capacity to search and find the knowledge that they seek.

I must admit that I find these developments more than a little puzzling. I can recall the sheer joy as a high school student reading A J P Taylor's *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe* and its dazzling portrayal of the struggles leading up to the conflagration of the twentieth century. Does anyone read Taylor these days? Then as an undergraduate student my first essay was on the topic of the growth of feudalism that required me to read Marc Bloch's *Feudal Society.* History explained why things happened, not just small and relatively unimportant matters, but big things such as the implosion of Europe and the creation of a type of society known as feudal society. These are the sorts of things that are worth knowing.

I have heard it argued that history lost its explanatory power sometime in the second half of the twentieth century. Considering origins and examining how things had come to be, some have contended, no long satisfies those seeking to explain and understand the world. In many ways history is essentially an empirical exercise, providing the facts without which any real analysis is not possible. It is worth remembering that the great empiricist philosopher David Hume also wrote a major history

of England. For him, as for us, one needs history to explain why we have arrived at where we are now.

So, in an age of specialisation, history looks like a vast collection of disconnected burrows into which scholars lead their students on occasional hunting expeditions. And yet the issue of connecting the burrows, of finding some sort of overall narrative which can provide a picture of the development of humanity, still remains. Let us go back and consider again the situation not all that long ago. In the West, including places such as Australia, there were general narratives within which those engaged in the teaching and writing of history operated. These narratives dealt with what I have elsewhere described as the 'significant past', the past that mattered for that particular society. In Australia, as an Anglophone society, this meant the history of ancient Rome and Greece, the history of ancient Israel, and the history of Europe in general and of Britain in particular.

The objective was to tell the story of the important elements that shaped the history of Europe and Britain and to provide an understanding, through narrative, of how that shaping occurred. As well, history was meant to provide a moral and political education for those students who would in time constitute the political elite. To read Livy, Sallust and Tacitus was to undergo a moral education about the need for independence, the dangers of luxury and the horror of despotism. The Greek historian Thucydides provided a warning against the temptation of hubris while the Old Testament described what happened when men strayed from the ways of righteousness.

British history focused on the story of liberty -a story today often derided as 'Whig' history. This was to be expected, given that the defining moments in English history were the English Revolution of the 1640s and the Glorious Revolution of 1688, both of which saw the confirmation of the traditions of English freedom. Then, of course, there was the industrial revolution and the enormous British economic take-off. In

the nineteenth century, Britain was renowned for its freedom, its power and its prosperity. Surely this was something that needed to be explained and celebrated.

Such an approach gelled well with the study of Roman history. Roman historians discussed the rise of Rome to dominance and the sorts of things that threatened the traditional values of Rome. Unlike Britain, Roman success had endangered, and then largely destroyed, Roman liberty. It provided a warning for the modern world. Newly independent America in the 1780s possessed an elite grounded in classical Latin texts and the Bible and they put the ideas that they found in those texts to good use. The history within the Old Testament told the story of what happened when the people of Israel strayed from the ways of righteousness.

There is much to be said for an historical education that is strongly thematic and requires reading a specific set of texts (what might be referred to as a canon) that are essentially moral in nature. Such an education is so much more than just historical; it provides an insight into human character, why men and women behave as they do, and it helps to provide a moral framework for human action. One might complain that this is a very old fashioned idea of history. But that was because society looked to history as a guide which explained where its members had come from, and which provided rules and examples which would enable them to act in the future. This understanding of history helped to instil self-confidence into those who would one day be at the helm.

Those were the days of innocence. They were also the days when history had not become so scientific and so concerned with portraying the past as it really was. There is a modern sensibility that wishes to strip back what is considered to be the illusion that history has created so that the past can be seen in its raw, unadorned nakedness. We must see the past warts and all; we must resist the temptation to paint a picture that might just make things look better than they were. We must dissolve the myths.

The problem here is that men and women create their world as much through their imaginations as through their actions. The desire to create a plain and unadorned picture of the past involves exerting the imagination as much as one that is more florid and colourful. Realism in literature in the nineteenth century began with figures such as Gustav Flaubert who wished to strip the varnish off the bourgeois way of life and took great delight in providing unhappy endings, as in *Madame Bovary*. In the modern approach to history, as in the approach to art, there is a desire to play up the grim, the sordid and the unattractive. This is not so much 'seeing the world as it actually is' as applying the imagination to reveal the world in a particular way. Historians project their own vision of the depravity of humanity onto history. It might also be asked what drives this desire to play up what is unpleasant and distasteful about the past. When Tacitus gave an account of the evils of imperial Rome, or Seutonius wrote his entertaining accounts of the vices of the emperors, the motivation was to depict what happened when despotism destroyed liberty and free men were forced to become servile courtiers.

What, then, of the historians of the modern age? Could it be that, living in the shadow of decline, they have sought to cast aspersions on a past full of glories that they did not experience? Or is it guilt created by the material benefits that that past has bequeathed to them? Roman historians did not seek to disown the republican past and its traditions of liberty but the more recent despotic past when emperors did as they pleased and behaved badly. Our historians are seemingly inspired by the spirit of prophecy. Like Old Testament prophets, they want to condemn the past so that we are forced back onto the road to righteousness. This outlook is part of our Western inheritance.

If we are to appreciate what is at stake when we come to discuss Western Civilisation and world history it is necessary to understand something of the way in which we arrived at our current destination.

Where then does this leave the debate regarding world history

and Western Civilisation? These can be seen as competing narratives in an age of specialisation. They differ not only in their general approach but in their orientation towards the past. Whereas a focus on Western Civilisation generally has a positive view of the past, especially the Western past, world history tends to be more negative, especially towards the Western past.

Before discussing where they differ, it is worthwhile examining what they have in common. For one thing, they are generally not regarded in the academic world as areas of research. Historians usually do not identify themselves as world historians or historians of Western Civilisation when it comes to their areas of specialisation. They would generally identify with a much smaller geographical unit such as France or China or America or perhaps a theme such as military history. In the scheme of things Western Civilisation and world history are considered to be teaching areas and, as teaching areas they are taught at first year as a general introduction to history. It would be rare for someone to write a doctoral thesis on a topic relating to them, and in those cases it would generally be in a field such as historiography or even political theory.

Contemporary historians are specialists not generalists. General history is often left to the media performers such as Niall Ferguson. The books most commonly written on both world history and the history of Western Civilisation are textbooks, especially those for the vast American college market. Then there are a small, but not insignificant, group of historians who do write specifically on world history or Western Civilisation. In certain cases such works are written not so much by professional historians as by individuals coming from a related field of study seeking to use history to prove a certain line of argument about the nature of the present or who understand that they need a general historical approach if their thesis is to make sense.

World historians and historians of Western Civilisation are often on the periphery of what professional historians understand as 'real history'.

They construct general arguments that raise suspicions in the eyes of those who go digging amongst the archives and who wish never to leave their particular realm of expertise.

In this sense arguments about world history and Western Civilisation are not all that relevant to the professional activities of historians considered as researchers and scholars. Where these arguments matter has more to do with what is taught, how curricula are constructed and the way that students are led through the study of history. This might be termed the public face of history, the way in which history is understood and then constructed and presented to the world. The public face of history matters because it is in general works and in studying general subjects at university that many people are introduced to what is best described as the shape of history. In turn this public face affects the way in which school curricula are put together, and the sorts of values that underpin such curricula. It also affects the general way in which history is understood in a community. History is both a public activity and something that is carried out by professionals.

In terms of the public face of history, in some ways it does not matter what professional scholars are researching and writing. Much of what they do has little public impact because to most people it is of little more than antiquarian interest. But the public face of history does matter because it informs how people see the past, and it helps to shape their attitude to the present and their vision of the future. This was the case with the Greeks; it was the case with the Romans and with every society since then which has encouraged the study and writing of history. It is important that people have as true and correct picture of the past as possible but this does not mean a picture that goes out of its way to paint the past in the blackest of terms.

Given that the past is potentially infinite and that what can be known and taught about it is quite limited, and there is much else to engage the minds of people, this also means that it is necessary to consider what

constitutes the significant past for any given community. As discussed earlier, there was a time when such choices were quite easy. The past chose itself in the shape of Greece, Rome, Israel, Britain and Europe. With the breakdown of that earlier culture and the exponential growth of historical knowledge, it is not so easy today. There are things about which people want to know. Unfortunately, for example, there remains an almost insatiable appetite for books and documentaries about Hitler and his minions.

Most historians rarely think about the significant past and the general shape of the past. For most of them all that matters is their particular patch of turf where they research and teach. It appears that virtually no-one these days has either the authority or the desire to shape the significant past in the wider public arena. This can be seen clearly in the curricula of both schools and universities. Generally the history curriculum of a History Department in an Australian university consists of general introductory units in first year followed by specialist units at both second and third year. There is often some attempt to provide a broad general introduction in the first year with units covering modern world history or, sometimes introductions to modern European history or Australian history. At upper levels, however, chaos reigns supreme. There is generally very little connection between what has been introduced in first year and what is studied subsequently. There is a smorgasbord of offerings to which there is generally little rhyme or reason. These offerings represent the various research interests of the staff. There is virtually no consideration of what a student completing an undergraduate major in History should know, or have studied, to be considered worthy of being called a History major. Possibly the only exception to this rule in Australia is to be found at Campion College, a small liberal arts college in Western Sydney. At Campion, the curriculum is defined in terms of the Western tradition. Units cover the history of the West from ancient Greece to the present day, including a unit of Australian history.

This lack of coherence also extends to the study of history at school. This can be seen clearly in the new national history curriculum. It has advertised itself as being informed by the ideal of world history. However, when one looks at its structure more closely it tends to dissolve into a collection of particular studies. The same is true of the New South Wales senior high school history curriculum. Under the general description of Ancient and Modern history is grouped what are essentially collections of specialist studies, and it is difficult often to see how they cohere.

In an age in which the ideal of diversity is celebrated to such an extent that it is turned into a fetish, what is lost is coherence and any idea of order. For some people, at least, the loss of such coherence is not something to be mourned. It is the new paradigm. Chaos in content is good because that is just how things are. Order can be provided by having a set of historical techniques that one learns as one pursues a collection of disconnected studies.

This emphasis on technique has a superficial appeal but, as we have noticed, history is eminently an empirical field of study. When Herodotus made his enquiry into the roots of the conflict between the Persians and the Hellenes, he did not begin by creating the set of techniques that he would use. He began by seeking out the origins of the conflict. It is often the case that one can only recognise the significance of a particular event or development when one can see similar events or developments in other historical contexts. Historians often build up their knowledge and expertise slowly over time. The capacity to use a set of techniques is no substitute for knowing about something.

Clearly in any society it is not possible to focus attention on every aspect of the past when engaging in the study of history. There has to be a significant past, a generally agreed upon set of historical topics, periods and geographical areas, on which attention can be focused and which constitutes the public face of history. Advocating a significant

past is simply a matter of pragmatism. The alternative in practice is chaos and an inability to set priorities regarding what is relevant and what is not.

The logic is, I believe, compelling. There needs to be some structure within which one approaches the study of the past. There is no other way. There are only a limited number of models available that can provide such a structure in a Western country such as Australia. These would seem to be:

- A variety of world history which can take a number of forms including the history of civilisations, environmental history, or the history of the growth of growing connections amongst the members of the human race.
- A history that emphasises the growth and development of Western Civilisation from its origins in the ancient world to the current day.
- A history that is based around nations and their development over time.

It is not necessary to stick to just a single model and obviously there are elements of each model that have positive features. What is crucial is that each of the models not be treated in a 'black armband' fashion, as a list of crimes and dark episodes. Historians are not investigative journalists who should devote their time to uncovering sleaze and corruption. Unfortunately, as we have already discussed, this desire to reveal the past in all its awfulness is a strong feature of our age. It reflects, perhaps, a loss of faith by some historians with their own civilisation or even a feeling of loss regarding their own importance.

If our aim is just to de-bunk and be negative then the model we favour will be somewhat irrelevant. Perhaps the most important thing to sort out is the relationship between the study of world history, Western Civilisation and the nation, in our case Australia. It is wrong to think

that the study of history is an either/or scenario, that we must study in one way to the exclusion of another. What matters are both our attitude and our willingness to recognise that we must be selective in what we choose to study.

3 Western Civilisation

The idea of the West and of Western Civilisation has a long and interesting history. David Gress, in his study of Western Civilisation, says that according to linguists the word 'West' was linked to evening. For the Egyptians to go West was to die, 'for beyond the sunset lay the kingdom of the dead.' The idea of the West then came to be associated with youth and vigour. Avalon, where Arthur goes to be healed after being killed by Mordred, is in the West.[1]

For Hegel, in his *Philosophy of History*, history has moved from East to West as part of the dialectic of the movement of the Spirit. Africa 'is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit.'[2] America is the land of the future where 'the burden of the World's History shall reveal itself.' There was a similar version of this argument in ancient Rome, as the dominant power moved westward from Persia to Greece to Rome. Day moves from sunrise to sunset, from East to West. It moves to the next vigorous civilisation. The idea of the West as a source of the good, the noble and the strong is embedded in our culture. In what was possibly the most popular series of books of the twentieth century in Western countries, *The Lord of the Rings*, the heroes are all defenders of the West.

The European world and its offshoots have come to understand themselves as the West. There are those who might argue that the use

of such terms as the West and Western Civilisation are no more than a creation of the imagination and hence a fantasy. This would be entirely wrong. The West is a living reality in the minds of those who inhabit it. It not a fantasy; it means something to those who articulate its meaning. Most general concepts of this kind are very difficult to pin down to a precise well defined meaning. This is not the same thing as saying that they do not exist.

The idea of Western Civilisation is not the same thing as Europe because it is defined less by geography than by adherence to a set of ideals and values. Historically it has had its geographical location in Europe, and subsequently in such places as Australasia and North America, but it cannot be limited in this way. A good way of understanding the West is to see it as a commonwealth or what was once called the 'republic of letters', a network of people who adhere to a common intellectual, and (dare one say it) spiritual project. As an intellectual project it looks back to the traditions that inspired it and forward to preserving and extending those traditions. In this sense it can be understood in the same terms as Burke described society as a 'partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born.'[3]

There is sometimes a tendency to argue for Western Civilisation on the basis of the material benefits that it has provided. While understandable, this approach strikes me as misguided. Yes, people in the West generally live a prosperous lifestyle but it is possible to be prosperous and live in a despotic political order, to enjoy material benefits and be bereft of all that really matters in this world. The West offers more, much more, than some sort of 'prosperity gospel'. It offers a way to approach and understand the world. To my mind one of the greatest glories of the West is its musical tradition, and one of its greatest inventions the piano. In the works of the great composers are to be found much that is the true expression of Western Civilisation.

Rémi Brague confirms the idea that the West, or European civilisation, is a thing of the mind rather than the expression of a particular people or geographical entity. He emphasizes that the West was created largely out of traditions that came from elsewhere, combining the cultural and philosophical heritage of Hellas with a religion that had its roots deep in the Semitic world.[4] Like Rome, he argues, Europe absorbed traditions from elsewhere and made them its own. Europe and the West are therefore not the expression of some 'European essence', but have become the way that they are through absorbing ideas from elsewhere. Having soaked up so much from elsewhere, the West is best understood as the continuing story of traditions that it has taken in, transmuted and matured over time.

Western Civilisation is thus unique in the history of the world because it is formed largely out of elements other than itself. Unlike China or India, its civilisation it is not a large tree that has been forever rooted in the soil. Rather it is a series of transplants that have been carefully nourished over the centuries and that for a long time have required new cuttings from outside to re-vitalize them. Western Civilisation thus has qualities that mark it out as unique. As it is not particular in origin it has an impulse to be universal and to see the world in a disinterested fashion. Brague also argues that the West also wants to measure itself against the other, against civilisations that are not Western. It created a form of literature that other civilisations simply do not possess; these are the accounts of imagined descriptions of the West by non-Westerners, as for example in Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*. As Western Civilisation is not an expression of place but of a state of mind, it can be transported and set up in other places. It can, and does, survive easily away from Europe.

Western critics of Western Civilisation have also noted its unique qualities. For example the Perennialist school of religious thought, as exemplified by René Guénon, argued that it was impossible to find true spirituality in the West; it alone among world civilisations no longer has

access to the deep spiritual traditions of humanity.[5] After years of considering such arguments James McAuley concurred: the West was unique because of the way that it separated sacred and secular. For him this was a positive feature of Western Civilisation because it meant that the West had, perhaps alone in the world, achieved a balance between the two.[6]

It should also be appreciated that the West, and Western Civilisation, can be understood, in a variety of ways. It is best pictured as a Venn diagram composed of a number of overlapping ideas. There is no core set of beliefs to which every member must adhere as if they were signing up to a club. As Western Civilisation is spiritual in nature, it advances and develops as those who have possession of it for a time use it, accentuate certain themes and elaborate on them, before they pass it on to the next generation.

Western Civilisation looks forward, and it looks back. It looks back to those traditions that are understood to have come together, like a series of tributaries, to form a river flowing ever onwards to the sea. Those traditions only really come to form the West after the fact. They are appropriated because the carriers of the Western tradition are always simultaneously looking forwards and looking backwards. Generally the key traditions that constitute the foundations of the West are understood to be those of ancient Greece, ancient Rome and ancient Mesopotamia, with particular emphasis on Israel. For some it begins with what is the oldest work of human literature, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. In terms of ancient Hellas it is seen as beginning with Homer and then flowing through Greek literature to the great Attic dramatists of the fifth century and beyond, and of course, the philosophers Plato and Aristotle. With Rome we have the great historians such as Livy and Tacitus, the works of Cicero and the most important text of all: the *Aeneid*.

How all these elements come together is complicated, and there are many, many elements that I have not mentioned. For a long time, Aristotle was not particularly important in the West, but after the twelfth

century, he became crucial to its development. St Augustine of Hippo shaped the West as no other single figure did, especially in the Middle Ages and at the time of the Reformation. There is also the issue of the importance of post classical elements and other subsequent developments such as the Scientific Revolution and the emergence of modern democratic politics. Gress has argued that the Germanic contribution to the West, in such things as the development of representative institutions, has been largely ignored.

The main thing to recognize is the protean nature of the West. It changes, and mutates, as those who are given the task of looking after it also change. It shares elements in common with other civilisations. Islamic civilisation also inherited aspects of the traditions of ancient Mesopotamia and Greece but took them in quite a different direction. The Byzantine Empire was a direct continuation of the Roman Empire but it also took quite a different road to that taken in the West. It is the particular mix of traditions that has created Western Civilisation. For example, while Augustine stands as a giant on the subsequent evolution of the West, his influence in Eastern Christianity is negligible.

It is also the case that Western Civilisation has many facets to it. John W. O'Malley identifies four of those facets in his book *Four Cultures of the West*, shedding a great deal of light on the forces that have helped to give Western Civilisation its overall shape. O'Malley uses culture to mean a style or particular approach to the world. The four styles that he identifies are prophecy and reform; the academy and the professions; poetry, rhetoric and the common good; and art and performance. They represent different styles of approaching the world and coming to grips with it.[7]

The reform imperative is largely a style inherited from Europe's Judeo-Christian heritage. It comes out of awareness that the world has been corrupted and is in need of returning to its true roots or to a more pure form of existence. For O'Malley its representatives include Pope

Gregory VII and Martin Luther, both of whom sought to rid the church of their day of its abuses. They were the spiritual descendants of the Old Testament prophets who wished to purge their world of corruption and false gods, thereby returning Christianity to the True Way.

The culture of the academy and the professions has been more focused and restricted in its endeavour. O'Malley emphasises the place of rigorous logical exposition as it found its place in the scholasticism of the late medieval university. The university came to be its home and the degree the indication that one had mastered it. At its best the ruthless intellectualism of this culture produces a mind that is sharp, clear and able to cut through the 'spin' that all too often pervades the life of the modern world. It is also clear that without the rigour that this culture encourages in its products we would not be able to maintain our advanced civilisation with its reliance on engineers, scientists, doctors and other professionals.

Erasmus, like many Humanists of his time, reacted against what he saw as the sterility and barbarity of scholasticism. He is a prime representative of the third culture of the West, that of the Humanist scholar whose primary focus is in the reading and understanding of literary texts. Erasmus sought to restore corrupt texts, including the Bible, to their pristine state so as to improve our understanding of those texts. This was a rigorous intellectual enterprise but the literary scholar has always expected that the outcome of such work will be an enlarged understanding of humanity.

There is a fourth European culture and it is the culture of beauty. There is an element in Christianity (as in Islam) that wants to ignore or condemn the sensual beauty of the world, but it has never been suppressed. Hence European culture has produced great works of art and architecture that not only delight the eye but also are capable of inspiring spiritual contemplation.

The prophet is driven by religious/political imperatives, the academic

by a quest for logical truth, the humanist by a desire to establish the purity and beauty of language while the artist, including the musician, seeks non-verbal ways of relating to the world. All of these styles have validity, and a role to play in fashioning human culture. They have all shaped the West. Nevertheless I also think that it is true to say that it is uncommon to find these cultures existing unmixed in the world. That is to say that it is rare to find someone who is just a Humanist or an Academic. Rather it is more common to find someone who combines elements of the four cultural styles. As an example an individual may combine a passion for reform with an appreciation of beauty while at the same time recognising the importance of logic and having their views softened by the humanist impulse.

Western Civilisation has developed these distinctive, though overlapping, modes of culture as it has emerged over the centuries. Just as the West combines a variety of traditions from Rome, Greece and the ancient Middle East, so it expresses itself in a variety of ways—all of which are valid aspects of Western Civilisation considered in its totality.

It is simply the case that the West is *sui generis*, just as the Islamic world is *sui generis*, and the same is true of China. The world historian Marshall Hodgson, who devoted much of his professional life to the study of Islam, summed up the differences between civilisations in the term 'cultural patterning'. The different mixes that go into different civilisations produce different ways of thinking and doing things. What this means is that if we are to appreciate the distinctive qualities of the West it is necessary to have some understanding of other civilisations; in other words, a proper understanding of Western Civilisation necessarily involves an excursion into world history.

Hodgson argues that the characteristic feature of Islamic civilisation is what he calls egalitarian contractual responsibilities:

> legitimate authority was ascribed to actions that followed from responsibilities personally undertaken in such roles as that of amir in a town or

> iman in the salat or ghazi on the frontier or husband in a family…This personal, contractual, principal was extreme in the opposite direction from the corresponding Occidental principle of public, corporate offices.[8]

In other words, because Islam did not have a church or a concept of society composed of corporations, its civilisation encouraged a far more radical form of individualism than was to be found in the West. That individualism, however, remained bound up with personal obligations. It did not allow for a concept of public office and public responsibility. The basis of loyalty to a leader was personal, not because that person held a particular office. The bond is therefore broken on the death of that individual. Moreover, Islamic civilisation did not view corporate entities as individuals for the purpose of legal transactions. This is a Western development that is derived from the working out of concepts emanating from Roman Law.

Islamic radical individualism was combined with traditional tribalism and a subordination of the secular to the sacred that led to politics being understood as being religious in nature. Patricia Crone has observed that the basis of Islamic political order was revelation as 'God was the only source of legal/moral obligations'.[9] The *sharī'a*, according to Crone, could be viewed as a constitution, but as Islam justified absolute rule by one man it did not create a form of government that was constitutional. There were no means through which subjects could 'compel their ruler to observe the law in the exercise of government.'[10] This suspicion and mistrust of politics meant that the only political model available in the Islamic world was that of a despotic ruler who, for all practical purposes was unconstrained by law. It helped lead to what looks to an outsider as a somewhat bizarre outcome: the development of slave armies that came to rule societies by virtue of their status as outsiders.[11]

Western Civilisation can be considered unique because of the role that it has given to politics in its cultural patterning. Following Augustine's conception of the two cities, it permitted the development

of a secular understanding of politics that was beyond the control of the sacred. In both Byzantium and the Islamic world the religious and the political remained in close embrace. In fact it has been contended that the cultural patterning that developed in the West is 'deviant' in relation to the rest of Eurasia, including China, India and the Islamic world. Deepak Lal argues that Europe deviated from the Eurasian norm on a range of matters. These include the development of the nuclear family, the fostering of both a 'this-worldly' individualism and guilt as a means of controlling that individualism, and the creation of a legal framework by the church that allowed for the growth of both the state and commercial enterprise. According to Lal the 'cunning of history … gave rise to the West'; the development of the West did not follow its particular path because that is where it actively sought to go. Its direction was less the product of will than of certain factors working together that enabled it to break out of the constraints that all other agrarian civilisations had imposed on them.[12]

The West evolved peculiar institutions and then was left free to develop them. Insulation from the devastation caused by the Mongol invasions in the rest of Eurasia may have been crucial. Nevertheless there is another key to understanding European civilisation that Lal ignores but which has been identified by Hodgson. This was its corporatism. European individualism did not occur within the framework of a radical egalitarianism but in an environment in which both law and the idea of public office had a significant place. In contemporary usage Western Civilisation is marked by both the concept of the individual and by that of civil society.[13]

On this basis Martin van Creveld has argued that the term 'state' can only be applied to European polities because the state is essentially a form of corporation possessing a legal persona that acts as if it were 'a real, flesh-and-blood, living individual.' The polities produced by other civilisations, claims van Creveld, can be called governments but not states.[14] There is

more than just a debate about terminology involved in this issue. There are similarities between European political organisation and that of the Islamic and Chinese worlds. But only in the West did corporate structures based on a concept of legal personality emerge. Only in the West was the balance between membership of associations in the form of corporations and individualism struck so that the idea emerged that governments require the consent of the governed and must be accountable to them. The fact that Western Civilisation allowed the development of a form of political organization that was founded on legal concepts such as those of the corporation matters because it means that it could escape what western thinkers have often described as 'oriental despotism'. Under the constitutional regimes of the West the members of a polity are not just 'population' waiting to be herded about and used for the benefit of the ruling elite. They are citizens whose views and opinions have to be considered by those in power. They are citizens who live within a legal order that limits and constrains what the state can and cannot do. It places limits on state power.

In his recent book Francis Fukuyama glorifies the original Chinese state established by the Qin dynasty as the first expression of the modern state.[15] He is wrong. Certainly that Chinese state was efficient and well organized. It was also brutal, ruthless and showed little concern for the welfare of its members except when they could be useful to it. It was the 'first modern state' if by that we mean a state that ruthlessly uses it members for its own benefit. If, however, we are interested in government as an expression of principles of accountability and as a manifestation of legal principles that limit its actions, then it was simply just another form of despotism.

Western Civilisation then is more than just 'being modern.' One can be 'modern' in a whole variety of ways ranging from fascism to communism. In this regard it is important that we understand that fascism was not 'Western' but rather 'anti-Western' in its nature. It looked back not

to the constitutional traditions of the West but to alternate traditions of the absolute state and the 'police' state that used its population for the benefit of the state. It was far closer to Qin China than to the traditions of the West. It is important to understand that not everything that appears in Europe or America can be called an expression of Western Civilisation. This follows from Brague's characterization of European civilization. Western Civilisation is not the expression of Europe considered as a place. It is the manifestation of a particular set of intellectual traditions and 'cultural patterns'. Those traditions underwent their gestation in Europe and have since moved out into the world. It may be the case in the future that the West, as with Christianity, has its home well away from Europe.

In its desire to re-create some sort of organic unity in which everyone and everything is absorbed into the state and embodied in the leader, Fascism denied many of the central features of Western Civilisation. The same is true of communism. Both are closer to the Perennialist dream of absorbing the whole of society into an organic whole that is simultaneously religious and non-religious than to the West, where religion and the secular sit side by side, each possessing its own realm of competence. This is why it is appropriate to refer to Fascism, including German National Socialism, and Communism as political religions because, although they deny transcendence, they sought to express an undifferentiated world in which everything is subordinated to the ruling order. In such a political order, there can be no individual freedom, no independence of associations, no accountability and no idea that the state is limited in what it can and cannot do.

The great conflict between communism and fascism almost destroyed Western Civilisation in Europe. America saved the West. In saving the West, America resuscitated Western Civilisation; it gave it new life. It was fascism that was strangled and communism that then withered on the vine. On the margins both fascism and communism remain tempta-

tions for those who find themselves having problems with the traditions of Western Civilization. Unfortunately those tempted are often found in the universities and among the well educated. That is all the more reason why the traditions of Western Civilisation need their defenders.

Western Civilisation is not simply a collection of all the intellectual and cultural traditions that are to be found in the countries of the West. It is a spiritual and intellectual project that seeks to express all those ideas and practices that sum up the ideal West. In this sense it may perhaps never find full expression in this world, but it does provide a stimulus towards creating such a world. The project of the West currently finds its home in Europe, America and various other countries of European derivation such as Australia, but that is not to say that in future it will be found in these places alone, or that it will continue to be found in these places. That is why it is important to appreciate the meaning of the West, to protect it, nourish it and ensure that it continues as a tradition that can be used by those who come after us. It is a duty that we owe to both those who came before us and those who will follow us.

4 World History

The desire to write an all encompassing or universal history is as old as history itself. When Herodotus set out to enquire into the background to the Greek and Persian wars he found himself ranging across the whole of the world known to him, ranging from Scythia to Babylonia to Egypt and beyond. Writing at a time when the Romans finally triumphed in the Mediterranean, Diodorus Siculus created what he saw as a universal history combining the history of Rome with that of the Greek world. Christian writers have always aspired to presenting a universal history of humanity, commencing with Adam and then moving through to Jesus and the consequences of His life and death.

Modern secular universal history can be traced back to the Enlightenment and its desire to create a science of man that would explain how human beings came to be the way they were through natural processes. The Enlightenment produced less empirical history than what has been termed philosophical history. Its big innovation was the argument that human beings had passed through a series of stages on their route to the present. Human beings had begun their lives as hunters and gatherers before moving to a pastoral state, thence to agriculture and finally to commercial society. These were stages of human history through which all human beings had passed. In his *Outlines of an historical view*

of the progress of the human mind, Condorcet linked this progression of human society to the intellectual advancement of humanity. Written in the shadow of the guillotine this work looked forward to 'the destruction of inequality between different nations; the progress of equality in one and the same nation; and lastly, the real improvement of man.'[1]

This desire to write a universal history along these lines coincided with the growing power of Europe and the discovery of the whole range of peoples inhabiting the earth. This style of history continued into the nineteenth century with writers such as Auguste Comte and Henry Thomas Buckle. National history arose in tandem with the development of universal history. The two forms of history represented two distinct approaches to understanding how best to look at and consider human development. They were not necessarily in conflict with each other, even if, with the advent of nationalist passion, national history became increasingly popular.

With the universal approaches of the twentieth century the study of history continued to flourish. Perhaps the most famous was Arnold J Toynbee's *A Study of History* that analysed the rise and fall of civilisations in twelve volumes.[2] There were famous Australian historians who devoted themselves to the study of 'big history' including V Gordon Childe and the anatomist Grafton Elliot Smith.[3] G V Portus taught World History at the University of Adelaide during the 1940s. All of these writers were inspired by a vision of the universality of history and those things that linked humanity together.

In the contemporary world, 'World History' generally refers to the development of an approach to the study of history that developed in America from the 1980s. It developed self-consciously to correct what it saw as the deficiencies of the attachment of American historians to the study of Western Civilisation and America. It initially tended to emphasise such things as the peaceful economic and cultural interactions between different civilisations such as in the work of Jerry Bentley. It has

replaced the study of Western Civilisation in many American colleges and has become an important element of history education in American schools. Over time it has developed tendencies that are opposed to what it sees as 'Euro-centrism'. This makes world history much more attractive to those who study the history of such parts of the world as Asia and Africa and not particularly attractive to historians of Europe. It is also very much an American enterprise; historians from Europe and England are often suspicious of 'World History' and may use terms such as 'global history'.

It is important to see that in pursuing an approach to history in which the global perspective is central, world historians are following a program that was established for them by the tradition of Western Civilisation. As we have seen the ideal of Western Civilisation is driven by an intellectual undertaking that is universalist in its intention; it seeks to be more than just the expression of the beliefs and practices of a particular region of the earth. In its original innocence or naivety the proponents of Western Civilisation simply assumed that the West was the universal expression of the development of humanity. This was because they did not know much about other civilisations, not out of any spite or malice. In fact, as discussed earlier, the West can be characterized by the interest that it has always shown in other civilisations. As knowledge of the world outside the West expanded so did interest; Western scholars have always been interested in studying and understanding the rest of the world. The same has not necessarily been true of other civilisations which have been far more obsessed with themselves and the rightness of what they do and believe. This attitude towards the wider world follows naturally from a culture that has come into being by taking over and absorbing ideas from other cultures; that is, an intrinsically open culture. (Consider for example that the English vocabulary owes words to so many different languages.)

Western scholars moved naturally into those wider global spaces as

they opened up because they wanted to pursue a program with universal dimensions. There will be those who see such interests as dark and malevolent in intention, but that would be wrong. The desire was not to dominate but to know, to look at ways in which humanity could be granted a common history. The desire was to include not oppress. This universal impulse is a central aspect of Western Civilisation; it is part of its character.

World history should be seen as an extension of Western Civilisation, and an attempt to fulfil its best intentions. This new area of study could only really occur once there was sufficient knowledge about the world to make it possible, and when awareness had developed of the relationship that different parts of the world had to each other. It can be argued that World War II was the crucial defining event that changed forever the way that we think about history. It brought the whole world together in a way that had never happened before. The global nature of the struggle meant that there was now an imperative to think globally.

As the imperatives behind the study of Western Civilisation and that of world history are the same there should be no conflict between the two. Both are driven by a universal impulse and neither are restricted by a belief that a 'spirit of place' limits the capacity of ideas and cultures to move beyond their place of origin and have beneficial effects in many parts of the world. In this regard it is worth recalling that one of the major themes of world history has been the interchange of ideas between civilisations, focusing on things such as the development of the Silk Road across Eurasia.

The reality, however, is that World History has often been marked less by the desire to emulate the study of Western Civilization and enlarge the human spirit and more by a desire to undermine Western Civilization and its ideals by demeaning and belittling it. The West is too often portrayed as promoting a 'Euro-centrism' that seeks to impose its values on the rest of the world; the source of imperialist evil that

wants only to exploit the rest of the world. The irony here is that this attitude to Western Civilization has invariably been developed by either Westerners or people from outside the West using the ideas and concepts of the West. In *Provincializing Europe* Dipesh Chakrabarty complains about the way in which European historical thinking dominates how his field of enquiry, India, is understood through the use of intellectual tools derived from the European experience. But then he attempts to fight this Eurocentric bias by using two thinkers whose thoughts could be considered to have been shaped by the West: Karl Marx and Martin Heidegger. Europe is to be banished from the core to the periphery, to be made a province both in material and intellectual terms, but in attempting to do so Chakrabarty merely emphasizes the importance of the West!

Some of the attacks on Western Civilisation as Eurocentric are not all that different from those made by the advocates of fascism and communism in the first part of the twentieth century. Chakrabarty appeals to Marx the founder of communism, and Heidegger, a sometime apologist for National Socialism. Why any intellectual would want to appeal to thinkers who are renowned for having connections with two ideologies that wreaked so much havoc and misery may seem puzzling to those outside of the confines of the claustrophobic world of academia, but it says something about the world in which universities now live.

How are we to explain the mindset of those who would turn on Western Civilisation in the name of the rest of the world and world history? The explanation relates to the situation that the West has been in since the Second World War, especially in Europe. There is a sense that the European part of Western Civilisation blew out its brains in the years leading up to 1945. It has never really recovered from that trauma and has sought refuge within the womb of an extended welfare state. Despite the continuing strength of America and the very real achievements of the West in science and commerce the events of the twentieth century appear

to have led to an underlying awareness of decline, especially amongst the intellectual classes. This has led to the following:

- A sort of self-loathing and self-hatred in large sections of the Western intelligentsia. They want to blame themselves for all that they see as wrong with the world.
- A commensurate loss of faith in the ideals of Western Civilisation and its values, although it must be observed that this has long been a feature of the West. Ever since the Enlightenment there has been the counter-Enlightenment. Western Civilisation has always had to face up to those who did not agree with what it was doing. As discussed previously such forces were huge during the early twentieth century when they took the form of fascism and communism, and they remain powerful in the twenty first century.
- Postmodernism, which of course owed a considerable amount to thinkers who were opposed to Western Civilisation such as Heidegger, gained ground during the latter part of the twentieth century and into the early twenty first century. Postmodernism is very much opposed to universalism and emphasizes the importance of particularity in the study of the humanities. According to Postmodernism large scale narratives are simply not permissible; we are reduced to studying the particular and the local.

One can also understand this desire to lacerate the West as the product of an over-emphasis on the Prophetic culture of the West to the detriment of its other elements, especially Humanist culture, that could soften the desire to indulge in excessive denunciation.

In the normal run of things one would expect that there should be no conflict between an appreciation of Western Civilisation and the study of world history. The two were driven at the onset by the same motives and principles. However, for the reasons mentioned above, it has too often become a case of either Western Civilisation *or* world history. World history has come to be seen as a legitimate approach to the study

of history while the study of Western Civilisation has been branded as Eurocentric and hence ideologically driven.

Another reason for this conflict between the two is that it is a form of turf war. World history is not very popular amongst those who study European history while it is quite attractive to those who study Asia. It is an opportunity for Asian historians to challenge those who study Europe. In America it was the case that World History emerged to contest the teaching of Western Civilisation. It was a direct challenge for the hearts and minds of students. These sorts of dispute within universities are quite common and unfortunately create conflict where there should be cooperation.

There is another reason why world history is ill at ease with the study of Western Civilisation. The values of Western Civilisation emphasize the value of humanism, the individual and culture. Central to the Western tradition has been exploring what it means to be human through literature, historical writing and biography. Individuals matter in the West, and traditional narrative history as it developed from Thucydides to Tacitus in the ancient world and in the modern world with such historians as T B Macaulay dealt with the actions of individuals in public life. Moreover the practice of biography, seen in the ancient world in the lives of Plutarch, has become a mark of the humanism of the Modern West. We are all hungry to explore the lives of the famous and the powerful, to see what motivated them to act as they did, and to explore in this way the human condition.

Of course, humanist history has its appeal because it emphasises individuals. To world historians individual human beings, or at least the study of human beings as individuals, generally have no place. They deal with large geographical areas and long periods of time. World history, almost by definition, favours a form of history that is highly abstract in nature. It cannot help moving into modes of explanation in which highly abstract 'forces' feature prominently. This is not necessarily a bad thing.

Grasping history as the history of humanity requires having an understanding and appreciation of the wider environment within which human beings act. The problem with a narrative historian such as Tacitus, who couches everything in moral terms, is that he excludes the context within which his characters act. Human history unfolds as real people respond to, and attempt to mould, their wider world.

World history is the heir to that style of philosophical history or speculative history that began during the Enlightenment and was continued by sociologists such as Comte and Marx. The types of things that world history emphasizes should not be disregarded. Some of them are as follows:

- Climate: to understand what is going on in history it is generally very useful to know what the general climate at any given point of time was like. After all, human civilisations only became possible because of the great warming that occurred at the end of the last Ice Age. Warmth allowed agriculture to develop and civilisations cannot exist without a stable food source. It helps to know that late republic-early imperial Rome was a relatively warm period and that the weather deteriorated up until what used to be called the Dark Ages. The High Middle Ages were warm and the climate deteriorated after about 1300 for several centuries.
- Food, crops and animals: without crops that can be grown on a regular basis and animals that can be domesticated there would be no civilisation. The type of crop matters. In Europe and the Middle East the key crop was wheat. In southern China and warmer climes it was rice. Rice does not require fallow or additional fertilizer and it can be cropped two, or in excellent conditions such as exist on Java, three times a year. It is not surprising that China has always supported many more people than Europe; it can produce much more food. Domesticated animals are also important because they provide sources of protein as well as milk and fibre. Most importantly there

developed two different types of civilisation across Eurasia, one based on the growing of crops and the other on the raising of livestock, agriculture and pastoralism. In the Bible, Cain is described as an agriculturalist and Abel as dependent on livestock. For almost the whole of the history of civilised humanity until the middle of the eighteenth century Eurasia was characterized by this antipathy and struggle between agricultural empires and pastoral empires. That struggle finished only when the Qing Empire wiped out the last of the Mongol pastoralists, the Zunghars, in 1758.[5] In fact the whole of human history from about 10,000 BC to the late nineteenth century can be viewed as the continuous expansion of agricultural peoples, largely at the expense of hunter gatherers.

- Disease: disease plays a crucial role in human history. Epidemics have often been linked to climate change. For example the Black Death followed the general cooling that occurred in the early fourteenth century. It spread across Eurasia from China to Western Europe. The famous Justinian plague of the 540s had enormous ramifications for world history; its effects included the events that led to the Roman-Persian War of the early seventh century which provided the context for the emergence of Islam. Equally it was disease that weakened the Native Americans that led to the success of the Spanish conquistadors in the first half of the sixteenth century.
- Economics: without wealth there could be no civilisation because it is the production of a surplus that allows for the creation of a developed division of labour. Wealth enables the training and provisioning of the armed forces required both to defend against invading forces and to become an invader. One classic example of the effect that wealth can have on the course of history was the discovery of a silver deposit in Attica just prior to the Persian wars. Convinced by Themistocles that they should use the money to build a navy, the Athenians, almost by good luck, possessed the means to defeat the

> Persians at Salamis. When economic resources decline so too does the capacity of an empire or state to defend itself. Roman decline in the third century was accompanied by a debasement of their coinage. Recovery meant reversing that situation. China was so powerful for so long because it was rich, far richer than any empire or city state in Europe but it ultimately failed to capitalize on its wealth because it could not control its population growth.

All of these material factors in human history are extremely important. One must appreciate their role in history if one is to explain why human beings acted and behaved as they did. It makes a difference if the people that one is studying lived in a warm, wealthy environment free from major diseases or whether they lived in a cold, miserable place that was ravaged by a major epidemic. It is simply the case that historians need to be aware of the material conditions under which the people who they are studying lived their lives.

The real issue is how adequate forms of historical explanation are that simply concentrate on these types of factors. I would suggest that, just as a moralizing type of history concentrating on the actions of individuals leaves out a lot, so the same is true of a history that limits itself to abstract forces of a materialist kind. Human beings are more, much, much more, than just programmable machines that react to the stimulus of natural forces. They are individuals who hold ideas, who believe in ideals and practice moral precepts. Moreover, given the different paths that different groups of human beings take when faced by challenges of a material kind it equally cannot be said that there are simple patterns of history that can be traced back to material factors.

The humanist tradition cannot just be dumped, pushed out as an irrelevant and useless means of understanding history. Human beings are not made by history; they make history because they are active agents who think and make choices. We know that the ideas of human beings vary from place to place and from time to time. Human beings are re-

markable creatures in the way that they develop, change and mutate their ideas and beliefs, creating what we usually call culture. Given choices, they sometimes go in one direction, sometimes in a completely different one. Consider the way in which the various languages of human beings have grown and changed over the millennia. Consider even how English has changed in the past five hundred years as individual speakers and writers have moved in a variety of directions. Even within a smallish country such as Australia there are sometimes different words for the same object in different parts of the country. Human beings can never be reduced to 'mere machines'.

The same observation can be made about religions, philosophies, ideas about politics and literary expression. They vary around the globe. The argument was first developed by Karl Jaspers that there was an Axial Age that ran from about 800 to 200 BC during which the major philosophies and religions of the world developed.[6] There were comparable, but quite different, paths that were taken. In Greece we see the development of rational philosophy, science and logic as exemplified in the Socratic dialogues of Plato and the works of Aristotle. In China there are the ethics of Confucius and his followers, the brutal realism of legalism and the nuanced holistic religion of Daoism. In India Hindu philosophy develops in its attempts to go beyond the suffering of existence, and these attempts are in turn extended by Buddhism. Finally in Mesopotamia the idea of a single transcendental God emerges and with it a rigorous system of ethics which has inspired three world religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

This is not to say that there are not linkages between one area and another. Monotheism made its way to Europe, while Buddhism eventually left India for South East Asia and China while disappearing in India itself. Greek ideas moved both west and east, as Aristotle influenced the development of philosophy in both the Roman and the Islamic worlds. But there were crucial differences between the various civilisations. This

is why Marshall Hodgson was correct to speak about cultural patterning: as different civilisations pursued different intellectual and spiritual goals so they went down different paths and developed different approaches to the world. Each of the major world civilisations sought the ethical but sought it in different ways.

Certain cultural patterns only emerged in the West, including ideas that political authority could emanate from below as well as above. When we compare Athens and Rome with China we can see the consequences of such differences. The Qin Empire provides the Chinese with uniformity and security. But it had been created in a most brutal fashion and was a centralized political entity in which there was no place for the views of anyone except the emperor and the ruling elite. Athens and Rome both had a place for the views of a range of their citizens. Even when Rome became an empire, it did not squash its dependents and make them totally subordinate. Rather it sought to include local leaders as junior partners in the running of the empire, encouraging them to accept the benefits of Roman civilisation.

This tradition of consultation and involvement has marked the Western world from that time down to present times. It is an expression of the cultural patterning of the West. Considering the history of any civilisation means more than just looking at the material factors that have made that civilization. Ideas, values and ethical beliefs and practices all matter. This type of historical method goes back to the Father of History himself, Herodotus. Herodotus loved recounting the variety of customs that he found across his world from temple prostitution in Babylonia to the strange religious practices of the Egyptians, to some bizarre burial customs. When one considers the extraordinary range of customs that human beings have developed across the globe it is not difficult to see why there can be no single path along which all human societies move. It also means that explanations of historical change that simply rely on materialist factors will always be inadequate.

There is one final factor in human history that is deeply unfashionable at the present time but which is clearly important. This is the impact of individuals. Take two examples. If there had not been an Alexander the Great it is clear that Hellenism would never have spread out over the Middle East and its influence would never have reached as far as India. Alexander changed the shape of his world. If he had been killed at the battle of Granicus, where Cleitus saved his life, the world today would look entirely different. The second example is Muhammad. Certainly the circumstances were right for an eruption of Arabs out of the Arabian Peninsula in the early seventh century in the wake of the Byzantine-Persian war, but it would not have happened if there had not been a leader to bring the various Arab tribes together.

Neither Alexander nor Muhammad can be understood if we rely on materialist explanations of history. They changed their worlds in ways that continue to have ramifications down to the present day. And that is the whole point about world history. Yes, it is important that we see the history of the world from a global perspective. Yes, it is important that we consider general factors if we are to explain how history changes in a 'broad brush' fashion. But if we are to understand history we must be able to comprehend how individuals acted. World history is generally not very good at doing that. It tends to ignore both individuals and the values and ideals that give the lives of those individuals meaning. Whereas humanist narrative history provides us with an insight into the character and behaviour of historical actors and invites us to reflect on their actions, world history reduces the actions of individuals to no more than a unit of a larger statistical whole.

World history provides us with facts and details and background. But because it is so general it cannot provide us with the insight into human nature that other forms of history can. At the end of the day history is about people, and more specifically individuals. In terms of its public face that is its contribution to our public life. World history is important

but by its very nature has a tendency to de-humanise the study of history. It requires other forms of history to correct its deficiencies.

5 National History

One cannot compare world history and Western Civilisation without some discussion of national history. Of all the varieties of history it has been the most popular over the past two hundred years. For national historians, a nation is the natural unit for historical enquiry, as it is defined usually by a common language and culture. Moreover, since the French Revolution, nationalism has been a powerful ideology that has motivated peoples to think and behave in certain ways. In many ways it was nationalism that created nations rather than the other way around.

Traditionally national history has revolved around a celebration of the actions of one's ancestors in anticipation of what is possible in the future. As Ernest Renan's famously defined nationalism:

> A heroic past, great men, glory … this is the social capital upon which one bases a national idea. To have common glories in the past and to have a common will in the present; to have performed great deeds together, to wish to perform still more—these are the essential conditions for being a people.[1]

National history arose in tandem with the creation of national education systems which brought the ordinary citizens of western countries into contact with the national life of their countries. It helped to establish a common basis for citizenship by making all citizens feel that they were

part of a common enterprise in which they had a stake. Love of country was a means whereby citizens would look beyond kith and kin and consider the good of the nation as a whole.

For a long time Australians had two countries: Britain and Australia. George Reid, for example, was at one time Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Australia and later in life a member of the British House of Commons. There was no contradiction involved. In the 1920s and 1930s Australia boasted that it was ninety-eight percent British. This also meant that the fundamental institutions of Australia, Parliament and the Law, and many of its customs, were derived from Britain and ultimately Western Civilisation. This is not to say that Australia was just or only British. Like all members of the larger Anglophone commonwealth Australia developed its own particular versions of traditions derived from Britain, just as Britain developed its own distinctive variety of Western Civilisation.

Loyalty to empire did not prevent Australians from also creating a national identity in which the actions of Australian troops during World War I, and Gallipoli in particular, were the foundation. Australia had performed great deeds in the past; they would perform great deeds in the future. They had achieved that spiritual principle that Renan believed was essential for any nation.

For many people it is still national history that counts. This can be seen in Australia with the so-called history wars over the past couple of decades. There has been a considerable intellectual, and often quite emotional, conflict between those who have been dubbed the 'black armband' school of historians and those termed the 'two or three cheers' school. The battle has been about the nature of the Australian past. The black arm band school paint Australian history in rather dark colours, as a place where genocide was practiced against the original indigenous inhabitants, where women and the lower orders were oppressed and 'whiteness' was the measure of all that was good. The two or three cheers

school rightly points to the successes that have occurred in Australia, in particular the establishment of a working liberal democratic system of government and an economic system which has delivered a high standard of living to Australians.

There have been other battles as well—such as those over Australia's military past as summed up in the ANZAC tradition. What was once lauded as the great moment when the Australian nation was born, is now viewed by some as an expression of Australia's militarism and propensity for violence. This has not prevented many young Australians from making the pilgrimage to Gallipoli or to the Western Front to pay homage to those who gave their lives for their country. But generally national history, especially in Australia, has suffered from the same problems that Western Civilisation has encountered and which are part of the malaise of the age. Too many historians want to paint the past of their country in dark and sombre colours, as a stain on the nation. Generally this blackening of the past has its counterpoint in an expectation of a glorious future in which the stains of racism, sexism, ethnocentrism and other assorted evils will be washed away. Utopia is just around the corner and these historians want to be the prophets who will usher it in.

The warriors of the generation of the Australian history wars have come, or are about to come, to the end of their careers. There does not appear to be a new generation of warriors coming up. This may be the consequence of the almost total victory of the black arm brigade within Australian academe. By and large Australian historians now largely agree with each other. The victory, however, may turn out to be pyrrhic. One of the major developments of the past ten years has been the decline of interest in things Australian, not only in history but also in literature and politics.

Australian studies centres, which only came into being in the 1970s have been slowly closing down. Students no longer display the enthusiasm for studying Australian history that they once did. There would

appear to be too many Australian history academics in the system at a time when universities are looking at cutting their offerings to students in the name of efficiency. Australian history struggles to attract students to study it at senior levels of high school.

Why has there been this decline in the study of Australian history at a time when Australian nationalism has become, in many ways, more popular than ever? Young people will happily wrap themselves in Australian flag beach towels or even have Australian flag or Southern Cross tattoos on their skin. The obvious answer is that students who love their country do not want to study its history if that history is simply a catalogue of its crimes and bad deeds. How can anyone bear to study something if their teacher hates the thing that they are studying?

Some twelve thousand students study ancient history at the New South Wales Higher School Certificate. Why do they study something that appears to be so irrelevant to the modern world? One part of the answer is that ancient history teachers have an unbounded enthusiasm for the study of the ancient world and they do not have a political agenda. They simply love ancient history. One consequence of this situation is that ancient history also flourishes in nearly every university in New South Wales; there are one hundred post graduate students enrolled in the Macquarie University Ancient History Department.

What this means is that the culture of New South Wales contains a significant number of people who have not just knowledge but also a love of the ancient world, one of the foundations of Western Civilisation. All you need is love, enthusiasm and an area of study that has lasting appeal. In the case of Australian history it is difficult to have enthusiasm if the love is missing and the whole point of studying the Australian story is to make one feel guilty.

The study of things Australian is in big trouble in Australian universities. National history, almost by design, is on the nose. Something new is flourishing, international studies, including international relations.

This represents more than just a rejection of the study of Australian history, politics and literature. A new younger generation, living in a global age, is much more interested in studying the wider world than were their predecessors. This may be because the old perennial question 'what does it mean to be an Australian?' is no longer so important: they are comfortable about being Australian. It was this question of identity that led to the creation of the many Australian studies centres.

This change in emphasis can be seen in the way that the issue of a national history curriculum has changed in quite a short period of time. For John Howard in 2006 the central issue was the teaching of Australian history in Australian schools. For the Labor government that came into power in 2007 the focus switched to a much more global approach. Sure, Australian history was still important, but it was to be placed within the context of world history.

What matters about the curriculum that this process produced is that it attempted to put together world and Australian national history but it left out a proper recognition of European history and of the enduring significance of the tradition of Western Civilization. This was a clear statement of its ideological agenda. Asia was important but Europe was not; even America was pushed largely to one side. The real worry is that the poison that has helped to cripple the study of Australian history will spread and infect other branches of history.

There is nothing wrong with attempting to combine the study of national history with that of world history. To understand how one's nation has developed will be illuminated by an appreciation of what was happening in the rest of the world. Rather there are two issues involved in this matter:

- The need to ensure that the 'criticism' on which historical study depends does not simply turn into criticism for its own sake, for destroying the past and its achievements, for turning history into a study of humanity's black deeds.

- The need to get the balance right between the study of national history, world history *and* Western Civilisation. This is a crucial issue. What we choose to study and teach must be selective and we must have good grounds for our choice. In terms of curricula the choice must always be made keeping in mind the interests of the students. To choose a topic for study for ideological reasons or because some group has lobbied on behalf of a particular topic or for political reasons is simply wrong. The only thing that matters is a consideration of what students should learn.

World history and Western Civilisation are not meant to replace national history but to complement it. What needs to be appreciated is that in Australia, national history is in real trouble, partly because of the way in which it is taught, partly because of changing student interests. It is in need of re-invigoration if it is to remain an important part of our national life.

5 The Opponents of the West

There is a false opposition created between world history and the study of Western Civilization. In fact, the two should complement each other because they are driven by a similar impulse to look beyond the local and the parochial and to discover what is universal about the human story. World history is only really conceivable within an intellectual framework created by Western Civilisation because only within Western Civilisation has there been an attempt to understand the world in this way. Nevertheless hostility has grown between those who advocate Western Civilisation and those who are true believers in world history.

A primary source of the hostility revolves around the issue of Eurocentrism. Many supporters of world history argue that the West has claimed too much. The West did not become dominant and powerful because it had superior values, attitudes or practices, it is claimed, but because they exploited the rest of the world, stole their inventions without acknowledgement, and were simply more brutal and violent than any other civilization. In terms of the development of industry and commercial civilisation, they were just 'lucky'. Britain just happened to have coal deposits.[1] This view of the comparative history of the West and, in particular, China, has been recently criticised heavily by Ricardo

Duchesne who argues that the arguments put forward by historians such as Pomeranz and Frank are too economically reductionist and ignore the important issue of culture.[2]

The key aspect of the attack on the West is to downplay what might be described as the singular qualities of Western civilization. For many of these world historians the West is not in any way special, it does not possess a culture or values that have given it any sort of advantage over the rest of the world. There are a number of world historians for whom the whole point of the exercise is to destroy the case for can be described as Western 'exceptionalism'. These are driven by:

- A desire to demonstrate that those things which are often considered to be uniquely Western were not created by the West and can be traced back to other civilizations. (But then, as Brague argues, that the West is defined by what it took from elsewhere is hardly a negative characteristic.)
- A desire to demonstrate that many of the things that the West believes that it invented were invented elsewhere and that the West not only appropriated these inventions but also took credit when it was not entitled to it. There are many examples of which gunpowder and printing are the best known. In particular it has been argued, with some justification, that the West adopted a large number of Chinese inventions and that China was for a long time the major source of innovation in Eurasia.

Following on from the above the logic, the West was more like a parasite than a creative force, and that its reputation as a centre of innovation is highly overrated. For Jack Goody the West 'stole' its history from the rest of the world.[3]

The length of Western dominance is continually shortened and the backwardness of Europe prior to this period is given great prominence. The economic development of the rest of the world, especially China, is made to seem as if it were comparable to that of Europe right down to

the late eighteenth century. Parts of China, it is argued, were comparable economically to those parts of Britain where industrialization first occurred while large parts of Europe are characterized as being backward when compared to the economically advanced parts of China. In all of this the emphasis is placed purely on materialist and economic factors as if they alone explain history. The role of culture, ideas and individuals is played down. History is to be explained entirely in terms of physical and economic forces; individuals and their beliefs are of little import.

It is an odd historical approach that attempts to deny the particular qualities of a civilisation and its distinctive cultural patterning. In many ways it does not seem to make a lot of sense because, as we have seen, historians since the time of Herodotus have recognized that there is a great deal of cultural variety in the world. And they have recognised that beliefs, practices and ideals matter. Athens only became great when it threw off tyranny and became a polis composed of free men. This approach to history reduces human beings to being the tools of material forces which shapes them rather than the other way around. It has a strong smell of Marxism about it.

It is important to see that an anti-European bias and a materialist approach to history go together because the target is Western 'exceptionalism' or the idea that the West developed distinctive cultural traditions and ways of acting which gave it an edge over the rest of the world. Hence historians such as Pomeranz and Bin Wong base much of their argument on such matters as the level of iron production in Europe and China and comparing the standard of living between certain parts of China and parts of Europe. Cultural distinctiveness has no place in their arguments.

Another major part of the argument is to belittle Western cultural development and its achievements. This is done in two ways. One is to assert that the West never really invented anything much of note before 1800, but rather stole the ideas of others and passed them off as its own.

The second is to assert that the West has been singularly malevolent in its impact on the rest of the world; its gifts have been oppression, war, slavery, disease and unhappiness. The West is simply a 'bad apple'. One cannot deny that the impact of one civilisation on another brings both benefits and things that are sometimes harmful, but then that is true of Islam, Chinese civilisation and Indian civilisation. However, these historians often want to make out that the West is uniquely harmful.

One of the most forceful, and extreme, examples of this approach is John Hobson's *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation*, a book by a man with a mission to expose the arrogance of Europe and the West. Hobson has a very strong tendency to overstate his case. He is obsessed with demonstrating that the West has an enormous hubris when it comes to its own achievements, most of which he argues came from elsewhere, and that it is morally inferior in comparison with other civilisations.[4]

His major target appears to be the nineteenth century view that while Europe was dynamic and progressive the East was sunk in 'oriental despotism', stagnant and lacking in creativity. He spends much of his time demonstrating that many of the inventions claimed by Europeans as their own in fact had eastern, especially Chinese, origins. Some of this has been known for a long time, for example that both paper and printing came originally from China, but Hobson takes it much further. In any case the idea of an 'original creator' of any invention is often not all that important because, as Gordon Childe pointed out over fifty years ago, what matters is the way in which technology is developed over a long period of time.[5]

Hobson has a diffusionist model of culture. According to this model inventions are made only once and then spread elsewhere throughout the world. For him who first developed an invention really matters. He is determined always to make Europe into the villain and to demonstrate the superiority of other civilisations, especially China.

Hobson argues that 'European identity' was constructed in opposi-

tion to Islam. This strikes me as an odd view. An equally strong argument can be made that European, and hence Western, identity defined itself in relation to the Byzantine Empire, an identity which was consummated by the crowning of Charlemagne as Roman emperor at a time when Empress Irene occupied the imperial throne.[6] Hobson says nothing about Byzantium and how the West, and Latin Christianity, defined itself in relation to the Eastern Church. This tendency to cut Byzantium out of history can also be found in Richard Bulliet's argument in favour of an 'Islamo-Christian Civilization'.[7]

Hobson also has some strange ideas about the relationship between Christianity and Islam. He seems genuinely astonished that Christianity and Islam as Abrahamic religions could not settle their differences.[8] He does not seem to appreciate that while Islam could accommodate Christianity as an earlier, and inferior, revelation, there was no way that Christians could accept Islam. He makes the claim that Christians initially saw Muslims as pagans. This is not true. Christians most easily comprehended Islam as a Christian heresy as is demonstrated by its inclusion as a heresy by John of Damascus.[9]

These sorts of mistakes are fairly typical of Hobson's historical approach that is driven by a desire to paint Europeans as evil as possible and their role in world history as disastrous. There are few nuances or subtleties in his method. For example, while he wants to castigate the way in which Europeans enslaved Africans, nowhere does he mention Barbary slaving conducted by Muslims, and the fact that a very large number of Europeans were enslaved until the Americans and the English rid the world of this evil in the early nineteenth century.[10]

Equally while arguing that China may have been advanced technologically he does not point out that this did not prevent China from falling prey to invasion by nomadic barbarians, including the Mongols and later the Manchus. One can accept many of Hobson's arguments about the opulence of China and India compared to Europe, but the fact

remains that these civilisations were incapable of protecting themselves from invasion by pastoral nomads. Hence Mote describes the situation of China at the time of the Southern Sung:

> There is no doubt that China had the most advanced economy in the entire world during this period when its military power vis-à-vis its neighbours was at its lowest ebb … military weakness did not have a stultifying effect on Chinese civilization, and in certain ways it generated constructive stimuli.[11]

Wealth did not translate into the capacity for China to defend itself. The country with the most advanced economy in the world succumbed to barbarian nomads. It was only after Qing imperialist advances into central Asia in the eighteenth century that this problem was resolved, largely by a genocide carried out against the Zunghars and China finally freed from nomadic incursions.[12] Hobson also does not reveal that Chinese opulence came at a price. China suffered considerable environmental degradation as a consequence of her economic development even without industrial development.[13]

Nor does Hobson really discuss the significance of the population differentials between individual European countries and China and India. The European imperial powers were tiny compared to India or China. It is amazing, given their resources, that they achieved as much as they did in such places as the Indian Ocean. Portugal, for example, with very limited people or resources, exercised a dominance that needs to be explained, not belittled. In the economic realm, the Chinese were only overtaken as iron producers by the English in 1800 but then China had a population about twenty times that of England.

Hobson is blinkered by an obsession with technological determinism coupled with a fixation on diffusionism. He fails to appreciate that technology is significant not as an end in itself but because of the way in which it is appropriated and used by particular cultures and civilisa-

tions. For Hobson technology and its diffusion from an 'original' inventor is central to history. Hence we find him determined to trace the seed drill from China to Britain despite any real evidence regarding this diffusion.[14] Printing was invented by the Chinese, but it became important in Europe because it was linked to literacy and Western intellectual development. By way of contrast the Muslims in the Ottoman Empire, although they had access to the technology, did not develop printing in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. However, the Jews and the Christians who lived in the empire did.[15] To give another example, it may be true that the Chinese initially developed gunpowder weapons.[16] That does not equal a military revolution. The military revolution, as it developed in the West, was not just about weapons. It was about how those weapons were used, it was about forms of military organization and the cultural and social implications of those changes.

In other words, Hobson is not very sensitive to the relationship between technological change and culture. He is blinded by what he sees as the primacy of technology as the central factor driving human history. This lack of sensitivity to culture is reflected in his statement that Lancashire was the place where 'the first blinding rays of modernity were supposedly emitted.'[17] In fact it was north of the border in Scotland that it could be argued that modernity was invented in the writings of the philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment.[18] It was ideas, not material objects, which created modernity. It was working out what to do with new inventions that gave the West the edge. All Hobson seems to prove is that the West had the capacity to take ideas and technological developments, make good use of them, and create something new. That has always been the Western way.

Although Europe was apparently defective in developing much of its own technology it was, according to Hobson, extremely capable of inventing its own racism with the Orient as its 'other'. He notes the importance for the Enlightenment of the link between climate and race

as the foundation of Europe's racism. But he then gives the game away when he states that Islamic figures Sa'id al-Andalusi and Ibn Khaldun had argued that Europeans 'were ignorant, lacked scientific curiosity and would remain backward' because they lived in a cold temperate climate.'[19] In fact there are quite a few pages in Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddimah* devoted to the whole issue of race and climate. For example he states that 'We have seen that Negroes are in general characterized by levity, excitability, and great emotionalism … They are everywhere described as stupid.'[20] As the West 'stole' much of their technology from China could it not also be the case that they 'stole' their racist ideas from other civilisations?

Hobson makes the extraordinary claim that 'had racism never existed and had the West viewed the Eastern peoples as equal human beings, imperialism might never have occurred'.[21] I'm not too sure what this means, except that Europeans were exceptional only in their racism, and that their exceptional racism made them uniquely imperialist. They were not any good at inventing things, they fluked the industrial revolution but they were excellent when it came to racism and imperialism. Europeans, he claims, were unique in carrying out 'ethnocide', the destruction of other cultures through imperial expansion.[22] As empires have been the staple of human political organization since the establishment of what we call 'civilisation' this is an extraordinary claim. Most empires have committed 'ethnocide' at some point or other. The Romans committed this crime, as have the Assyrians, Chinese, the Ethiopians and the Muslims, to name but a few. He argues further that, because the Chinese under the Ming withdrew their maritime fleets that this equalled them being good enough to 'forgo imperialism'. No, the Chinese understood the need to concentrate on their land borders. In the eighteenth century they conquered large parts of central Asia, including, as we have seen, the genocide of the Zunghars. That was hardly 'forgoing imperialism'.

Hobson compounds his problems by referring to European attempts

to eradicate 'Eastern identity and culture'.[23] What exactly is 'Eastern identity'? Is it just another version of that strange entity invented by politicians known as 'Asian values'? Surely this sort of statement is about as useful as the term 'oriental despotism'. The real problem is that Hobson takes arguments further than the evidence allows him to go. What Hobson says about British economic development illustrates part of his problem.[24] He correctly argues that war and state intervention played a highly significant role in the development of British capitalism. But he is not satisfied with this sensible observation; he wants to take it a step too far and claim that Britain in the eighteenth century was a despotic state. In reality what Hobson is doing is almost an exact inversion of the nineteenth century Western view of history that he wants to correct. 'West bad, East good'.

Hobson grants a lot to contingency in explaining the rise to power of Europe. The only agency that he is willing to grant to Europeans is that they were driven by an 'irrational racism'. Of course there was an element of contingency in the rise of the West. Europe's remoteness was important because it meant that Europe did not suffer the Mongol invasions that so afflicted the Islamic world. Europe's remoteness encouraged Europeans to take risks to get to the rest of the world. It is probably true that if England had not had good coal deposits it would have been difficult for the industrial revolution to start there.

But there was European agency as well. There are things peculiar to the West such as its family structure, its intellectual inheritance, the nature of the European state and the competition between European states, and its desire and capacity to absorb what the rest of the world had to offer. Hobson seems to confuse agency and moral superiority. He wants to demonstrate that European success had nothing to do with Western values. This is why he overdoes the racism and imperialism in European history. But agency does not necessarily imply moral superiority. This is what Hegel called the 'cunning of history'; civilizations can

succeed because of factors that their members do not fully understand even as they are driven to act by those factors.

In the final analysis Hobson cannot explain why China failed to escape the Malthusian trap while Europe did. As productivity in China increased, so did the size of its population. In his obsession with the evils of European imperialism he fails to consider the other side of the equation, which is to say what went wrong for a large part of Eurasia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Qing China in 1750 was an extremely powerful state that could easily have resisted British advances; ninety years later it could not mount a unified response to the British in the Opium Wars. Christopher Bayly has argued that an 'industrious revolution' affected not only Europe but large parts of Asia during the course of the eighteenth century leading to commercialisation and prosperity in certain regions.[25] Peter Perdue has also argued that by the nineteenth century China was no longer an 'agrarian empire' but a commercialized society based on agriculture.[26] If the 'rest' was already commercialised before the advent of nineteenth century European expansion, and really not far behind Europe in living standards, it raises the issue as to why they were unable to build on the foundations that they had already constructed. Bayley comments that the political systems of Asia and Africa had problems coping with this economic growth.[27]

Hobson's book illustrates a number of issues. The first is that it is silly getting into arguments about where something was invented. The second is that it is equally silly to attempt to blacken a civilisation as if it were the source of all the evil in the world. Yes, Europeans have done some terrible things in the past but then so have most civilisations. That is the human condition. The third is that, following Brague, maybe it has been the genius of the West to absorb ideas from other civilisations and then to adapt and improve them. Originality isn't everything. The West can be proud that it has taken elements of other civilisations and re-made them to suit its own purposes. In any case, as we have argued,

Western Civilisation is more than just the actions of Europeans. It is a set of ideals that define how one should act.

The fact that Hobson can be so critical of the European past is, in a way, a vindication of Western Civilisation; he is critical because Europe has, in his eyes, failed to live up to the values of the West. The problem is that Hobson, in seeking to assume the mantle of prophet, imperfectly understands Western values and so cannot make a balanced judgement about the civilisation of which he is the heir. This is the more general problem with the current world history approach. It brings together two of the cultures of the West: the prophetic and the academic. Its approach is both very general and motivated by a desire to reform. What it lacks is that more gentle humanist perspective which is more understanding of the human condition because it seeks to look more closely into the souls of men and women, appreciating both the goodness that is there and the weakness to which people too often succumb.

The crucial thing is that there are quite significant cultural differences between civilisations. This can be seen in Molly Greene's study on seventeenth century Crete.[28] In the first half of the seventeenth century Crete was ruled, as it had been for centuries, by the Venetians, an archetypical Western commercial power. In the middle of the seventeenth century it was conquered by the Ottomans. As we have seen, there are two quite different and distinct set of records for Crete; one from a Western power and the other from a traditional Islamic power. Venetians and Ottomans quite simply behaved differently in a number of ways.

The Venetians kept quite complex and detailed commercial records relating to such matters as maritime insurance. There are written contracts. This was a society that was founded on a complex legal culture that required keeping records. There are far fewer records for the Ottoman period. The records that survive are largely from the Kadi court. This reflects a culture in which many matters were carried out on the basis of oral contracts, of agreements between individuals.

Venetian commerce was carried out differently to Ottoman commerce. In the Venetian case a backer or backers would lend money to a merchant who would then employ crews to man ships to carry out the commercial enterprise. Amongst the Ottomans the practice was for groups of people to band together, finance an enterprise and then share the profits or losses. This latter practice is in line with an economic system that forbids usury. It should be noted that Greeks also favoured this form of commercial enterprise.

What can be seen in the case of Venetian Crete in the seventeenth century is the growing 'modernity', based on innovation and the implementation of forms of rational forms of organization as opposed to the more traditional ways of doing things used by the Ottomans. Just as the innovatory use of firepower on galleasses had helped to win the Battle of Lepanto in 1571, so the development of new forms of commercial instruments gave the West an increasing advantage over the Islamic world. Over time Muslim merchants lost much of their control over commerce within the Ottoman Empire.

The other crucial point is that even if many material inventions did not originally arise from the West this does not mean that there were ways in which the West was highly innovatory—in matters that are essentially cultural. These include the development of a number of commercial innovations and, most particularly, the invention of the modern state based on the legal concept of the corporation. As many writers, such as John Hall, have emphasized, the development of the state based on law which protected the individual provided those individuals with a degree of certainty that they lacked in other civilisations.[29] Individual freedom and the rule of law are very much the creation of the West and they have helped the West to become a dynamic culture in which innovation played a crucial role. It is a gift that it has offered back to the rest of the world.

There is an interesting issue relating to the history of Ancient

Greece: why did Athens, which had previously been a minor player in the Hellenic world, suddenly become such a dynamic force in the fifth century? Herodotus answers that question as follows:

> Thus Athens went from strength to strength, and proved, if proof were needed, how noble a thing equality before the law is, not in one respect only, but in all; for while they were oppressed under tyrants, they had no better success in war than any of their neighbours, yet, once the yoke was flung off, they proved to be the finest fighters in the world. This clearly shows that so long as they were held back by authority, they deliberately shirked their duty in the field, as slaves shirk working for their masters; but when freedom was won, then every man amongst them was interested in his own cause.[30]

Democracy was good for Athens because it unleashed the energies of its citizens, energies that allowed them to defeat the Persians and then become the dominant power in the Aegean. Despotic forms of government are unable to inspire their subjects to do things for the common good. They rely, instead, on coercion. Despite the growth of absolutism in early modern Europe the citizens of the West, especially those who were able to enjoy the liberties of the Anglophone world, could display an energy and vitality that was unknown in the despotic empires of the Ottomans, the Mughals and Chinese. This was the reality of the cultural patterning of the West.

Ideas matter and they can, and do, form the basis of action because they form the cultural pattern of a civilisation. The ideas of the West encourage individuals to take an active role in their society rather than just being passive and servile subjects of the state. The West provides those ideals that impel a way of life that is active. Whatever some of our world historians might think, it is not a matter of reducing everything to a crude materialism. The West is an intellectual and spiritual project that stimulates individuals to take control of their lives.

A far more sensible and subtle case is made by Deepak Lal when he argues that it was essentially the cultural patterning of the West that provided it with the impetus to become an economic powerhouse. Lal argues that it was the unique 'guilt culture' of the West, coupled with its peculiar form of marriage based on consent, a Christian principle, that led to the development of a form of individualism that appealed to conscience and a form of family that allowed for that individualism.[31]

Lal goes on to argue that the factors that gave Europe its head start over the rest of the world may turn out to be its Achilles' heel. He points to such factors as the problems created by secularisation in the search for meaning, and the disadvantages entailed in the European nuclear family in such matters as welfare. He makes the quite reasonable point that once the modern world has been created, those who seek to adopt it do not need to take on board the peculiar cultural package in which it was initially wrapped. In fact that wrapping may have real disadvantages contained in it and a society may be able to get an improved version of modernity by not taking it.

As an outsider Lal points legitimately to some of the weaknesses of the West, not in a spirit of hatred, but in a genuine attempt to understand why the West became so rich and dominant. His argument, that what were once strengths may one day turn out to be weaknesses, certainly has some foundation. History has shown us that no civilisation lasts forever. Nevertheless, even when the West is but a memory one can hope that what comes after it has absorbed what was best of it, just as the West absorbed the best from the Greeks and the Romans.

6 The case for fusion

In this final section I should like to do two things. The first is to argue that the dichotomy created between a positive appreciation of Western Civilisation and the study of world history is a false one, and that it prevents us from having a proper appreciation of the history of humanity. The second is to address the issue mentioned earlier in this study of how to get a balance between the various levels of human history in terms of the public face of history, the way in which history is understood in the public sphere and how it is presented in history curricula at both school and university.

Throughout this study it has been argued that world history is essentially an extension of the ideals of Western Civilisation in that they both express a desire for universality. Both have an interest in the world outside of the West. The traditions of Western Civilisation have always included an interest in the rest of the world, and how the West and the Rest relate to each other. For a variety of reasons, some good and some bad, world historians have a fixation on Euro-centrism and the way it supposedly distorts the study of history. World historians tend to emphasise materialist explanations of human history derived from economics. They often fail to appreciate the human dimension of history. They also have a tendency to want to belittle the many good qualities of Western Civilisation.

There is a lot to be said for a global understanding of human history. However, this should not also involve throwing away either the humanist approach to history or appreciation of the importance of Western Civilisation in the development of the world. We must get the place of the West in world history right. This means neither praising it to excess nor denigrating it. No matter what world historians who are opposed to giving a prominent place to Europe in the history of the modern world might think, there are certain matters that cannot be denied:

- The Industrial Revolution began in Europe, and more specifically Britain. The Industrial Revolution unleashed humanity's productive power and has slowly but surely raised the standard of living in many parts of the world.
- The Scientific Revolution began in Europe and this led to the development of many modern technologies. In saying this one does not deny that many important inventions of an earlier era, ranging from paper to printing, came from China. However, it was in the West that science and technology, or theory and practice, were fused in a particular way. The consequence has been both an increased knowledge of the world and an enormous addition to our capacity to deal with the many infirmities and diseases that have long been the bane of life.
- Modern political structures, ranging from the state to democracy to the rule of law all developed within the West. These are institutions that have both provided individuals with a more secure existence and with greater dignity and independence.
- In developing the twin concepts of sacred and secular the West developed a path that respected both the mundane world and the sacred, while ensuring that our everyday experience is not swallowed up in some vast totalitarian ideology.

These four things are all of great value, and they are all the products of Western Civilisation. Of course we can point to the failures of the West

and its inability at times to live up to its ideals. We can shudder at the thought of Hitler and Stalin. The West, at times, has had to deal with great evil, and has, from time to time, succumbed to ideas that are the antithesis of Western Civilisation. But, for all that, the idea of Western Civilisation as a set of beliefs and as a spiritual principle has survived.

We could also ask: what exactly would its world historical critics wish to replace it with? A fairer and more just view of history would be their answer, even if it means being unfair to the achievements of the West. There are two comments that can be made about much of this criticism:

- The critics of the West base their critique on the failure of the West to live up to its ideals. The West has promised a universal and disinterested account of human history, but what it delivers is a partial and biased account that gives undue prominence to itself. In other words, world historians believe that they can deliver what Western Civilisation promised. They can only do so because they are themselves the children of the West.
- When such critics come to develop their alternative model of history one of two things take place. Firstly some critics are so driven by dislike of the West, of the civilisation which nourished them that they attempt to denigrate it and to build up other civilisations so that they appear to be better than they are. Secondly, they give prominence to features of other civilisations that may not be worthy of such praise. In his attempt to demonstrate how the first state was developed in China, Francis Fukuyama gives approbation to what was essentially an attempt at totalitarianism.

What I am suggesting is that in their attempts to be 'fair', world historians often end up by being quite unfair. They are the heirs of the universal values of the West, but cannot see the debt they owe to their own civilisation. They are too blinded by their own moral indignation to see the contradiction in what they are doing.

In effect, there is no real conflict between the study of Western Civilisation and that of world history. Both are inspired by the same impulse, a desire to create a universal history of humanity. This is an impulse that is in the best traditions of Western Civilisation. There is no reason why it should be either the West or the World. It should be the West and the World.

The real issue is explaining how the history of the West fits into the history of the world in a fair and unbiased fashion. This is not an easy task and it needs to be done in such a way that nobody is denigrated. But it can be done in a spirit of goodwill and a desire that the story told be as true and fair as possible. Such an approach is in the best traditions of the West. Equally there is no reason why the history of any particular nation, including Australia, should be seen in opposition to the history of either Western Civilisation or the world. In fact, national stories really only make sense when they are placed in their broader setting. Australian history is inexplicable without an appreciation of the cultural traditions out of which the Australian nation emerged or an understanding of the broader currents that were dragging the world along in the past few hundred years. It is really a matter of bringing all these levels of history together, not seeing them as somehow in conflict or competition with each other. Such conflict owes more to petty academic politics than to the quest for the truth.

All of what I have said is all very well in theory but, it may be asked, what is its practical implication? Academics, being what they are, will continue to fight turf wars and to pursue their particular research interests. What has been lost in recent times amongst historians is any sense of exactly what they are trying to achieve. Especially at universities where the emphasis is so clearly on publishing and winning grants, academic historians focus very much on that which benefits them individually and advances their careers. The consequences are curricula that make no attempt to do anything other than provide a collection of offerings that

reflect the research interests of the staff. In the pursuit of self advancement there is no reason why they should even think about what shape history should have.

But it is an important question. The way in which history is understood shapes not just how the past is viewed but also the future. The whole point about the 'black armband' approach to history is not so much its view of the past as its desire for radical change in the future. However, if the view of the past is that of a collage of disconnected pictures then it is difficult to know what sort of future that indicates.

This is why it is so important to have a balanced view of history, one that does justice both to the traditions that have given rise to one's own society and to humanity as a whole. This is the public face of history, the sort of history that should be provided, not for the specialist but for the average citizen of a democratic society like Australia. In practical terms this means enunciating the sorts of principles that should underpin such important public matters as the construction of school history curricula. The crucial issue is not so much the specific content that is taught as the guiding principles that give that content its shape and its structure.

The first guiding principle is that there has to be an appreciation that world history, the history of Western Civilisation and the national history of Australia are not competitors but complement each other. All of them need to be included in any picture of the human past that is to be presented to citizens and future citizens.

The second guiding principle is that each level does different, but important, things. World history provides the 'big picture' of human development. It paints history in very broad brush strokes. It provides a picture of how human beings moved from being members of small groups engaged in hunting and gathering to agriculturalists to members of commercial societies that eventually interacted with each other across the globe. It introduces students to such matters as the spread of disease, the material foundations of our existence, economic development, as well as humanity's religious diversity.

The history of Western Civilisation introduces students to those important traditions that Australia has inherited from its Western, and more specifically, British heritage. These include its system of government, the rule of law and its traditions of liberty and fairness. It should not be a hagiography of the West but it should point out just how much the world of today has been built by the values and institutions of the West.

The history of Australia introduces students to the history of Australia over the past sixty thousand years. Of course, the majority of its focus will be on the period when Australia joined the modern world after 1788 thereby bringing it into contact with the main currents of both Western Civilisation and world history. The distinctive nature of Australian history should be emphasised (ranging from indigenous history to its convict origins to the role of mineral exploitation in its development) but also its inherited Western traditions and its connections with the rest of the world.

The next guiding principle relates to getting the balance right between history, understood as the playing out of general forces, and humanist history that gives a primary focus to individual action. This is not an easy issue. There can be no doubt that the impetus to study history, as with literature, comes from an impulse to understand better the human condition. We develop a better appreciation of ourselves, and of other human beings, as we consider how people in history have responded to the challenges that they have faced. History is the ideal medium in which to undertake such study because its actors are somewhat removed from us, we feel no direct personal involvement and so can develop a certain detachment.

This is the advantage of reading a historian such as Tacitus who provides such insight into the consequences of despotism, both in terms of the actions of those exercising power and those who must submit to that power. History must provide the opportunity for the student to enquire

into the actions and behaviour of individuals and to try to explain and understand why those individuals acted as they did. But it can also be argued that if we remain within a purely humanist framework there are going to be many actions that are difficult to understand.

At this stage it is perhaps worth returning to O'Malley's idea of the four cultures of the West. Humanism is one of those cultures. It needs to be complemented by the others, in particular that of the scholastic or academic tradition. By placing the behaviour of individuals into a more 'scientific' setting it is possible to gain greater insight into their actions. To understand individuals it helps to know about the sort of life that they led and the material conditions that they enjoyed or even endured.

On the other hand, the prophetic culture of the West must not be allowed to overpower and subordinate other cultures. Often one is driven to 'enquire' because of some powerful moral impulse. The problem arises when the moral impulse takes over and directs the enquiry towards some sort of prophetic conclusion. When this happens there is no real enquiry, just a desire to prove what one wants to believe. It is this sort of motive that often drives the anti-Western variety of world history, just as it drives the black armband approach to Australian history.

The public face of history must encompass both the general and the particular. But it must never lose sight of the fact that history is about people. I think that this has a number of implications:

- Any discussion of general factors in history needs to be complemented by the stories of particular individuals, who need to come alive as real people. Excessive abstraction is anti-historical.
- In the spirit of humanist culture the treatment of historical figures needs to be sympathetic and have the goal of understanding those figures. One cannot be empathetic to historical actors if one demonises them and reduces them to being less than human.

- When history is introduced to young students it should be done so through the medium of studying the lives of particular individuals. Students need to appreciate that the people who they are studying are essentially just like them.
- The public face of history is better handled by putting individuals in the foreground and the conditions in which they lived in the background.

The preceding discussion demonstrates the essential argument of this study: the West matters. The emphasis is on individuals, on humanism, on a rigorous intellectual approach informed by what are essentially the principles of science, on objectivity, on fairness. These are all principles that we have inherited from the West. These are all principles that inform the study of world history. They are part of the bedrock of our civilisation.

It is foolish to attempt to put those principles into practice while at the same time attempting to deny their source. One cannot take the moral high ground and, at the same time, attempt to portray the source of those morals as some sort of sewer. That is hypocrisy.

The lesson of his study is that it is not possible both to praise world history while denigrating the West. World history exists because of the West. It is a natural product of the values of the West, its universality and its recognition of the common nature of humanity. The West has given the world science, democracy and the tools for economic prosperity. It has created the modern world. That reality needs to be recognised.

One can both praise the West and recognise that history is about the whole of humanity. The public face of history, the history that informs the citizens of this country, must be balanced and positive. It must include national history, the history of Western Civilisation and world history. It must recognise the importance of both general forces and the role that individuals play in history. That may sound like a lot but really it is no more than justice demands.

That we can strive for such a vision of history is our Western heritage. If we are to move forward we must protect that heritage and ensure that the history of Western Civilisation is not presented in a distorted fashion. We must not forget that the West has been challenged from time to time by those who wish to destroy all that it has created. Its strength lies in its adherence to truth and its desire for justice. By ensuring a true, just picture of Western history we ensure that its values will continue into the future.

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