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Multicultural vs. Post-Multicultural World History

A Review Essay on *The Uniqueness of Western Civilization* by Ricardo Duchesne (Brill, 2011)

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Over the last two decades, a trend of multiculturalism in world history has enjoyed a largely uncontested rise to prominence. Its main aim has been to challenge Eurocentrism. Its main achievement is to have issued a corrective in early modern economic history: prior to the industrial revolution, there were numerous economic parallels between Europe and Asia, particularly China. But multicultural world history is now under greater scrutiny and challenge for marginalizing the West and downplaying numerous non-economic divergences of the West. In response, a post-multicultural world history is now emerging. Its most important work so far is Ricardo Duchesne's *The Uniqueness of Western Civilization* (2011). The main achievement of post-multicultural world history is to have established that there were numerous critical non-economic divergences between Europe and other regions. The West was both peculiar and inventive across many domains.

Introduction

Since the 1990s, a powerful movement has brought a multicultural turn in the study of world history. In the name of challenging Eurocentrism, its overall thrust has been to question the West's uniqueness, to doubt the originality and dynamism involved in the rise of the West, and to marginalize the significance of Western civilization. Led by well-known scholars from several disciplines from economics to anthropology to historical sociology to international relations and history, this new multicultural revisionism has sought to bring in the ethos of multiculturalism as the ruling paradigm of world history. So far its voice has been powerful.

A series of highly influential works brought multicultural world history to prominence. André Gunder Frank, the originator of dependency theory, was in the vanguard. Frank argued in *Re-Orient* (1998) that Europe was neither the creator nor the core of the early modern world trading system and that the West's rise was no more than the cyclical obverse of China's fall. Jack Goody, a prolific anthropologist, produced a series of works, including *Capitalism and*

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Modernity (2003) and *The Theft of History* (2006) criticizing Eurocentrism in social and historical theory. His own alternative, set out in *The Eurasian Miracle* (2010) and *Renaissances* (2010), makes a case for Eurasian parallels and commonalities since the Bronze Age, downplaying any ‘European miracle,’ arguing that renaissances were to be found across Eurasia, and denying any significant departures from the ancient parallelism of Eurasian civilizations. Goody’s ideas have had a wide reception, including a special issue of *Theory, Culture and Society* (Featherstone, Burke and Mennell 2009). Kenneth Pomeranz, an economic historian, in a widely-cited work called *The Great Divergence* (2000) marshaled much evidence to demonstrate some basic economic parallels between the Far West and the Far East prior to the industrial revolution. Jack Goldstone, an historical sociologist, developed the similar argument that the one and only distinctive feature of the West was the “happy chance” that an engineering culture arose in England and led to modern growth (Goldstone, 2002). In *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilization* (2004), John Hobson, a scholar of international relations, downgraded the West’s creativity and originality, arguing that borrowing (his term is “appropriation”) from the East caused the West’s rise (Hobson 2009).

Victor Lieberman’s *Strange Parallels* (2003, 2009) gathered much evidence of political as well as economic isomorphisms across premodern Eurasia. In particular he found similarities between Europe and Southeast Asia, both areas of multiple medium-sized states, both located in what Lieberman calls the “protected zone” beyond the striking range of the nomadic horsemen of central Eurasia. One significant parallel was the formation of proto-nations: both in Europe and in Southeast Asia there were trends to cultural integration (via vernacular languages) and ethnic politicization. Another parallel he describes is the expansion of states and their centralization—although this process is as ubiquitous as the state itself. A parallel found widely across Eurasia was commercialization and urbanization. Overall, Lieberman like others successfully established that Europe was not exceptional in some domains, but left open whether it was peculiar in others.

The general outlook of multicultural world history has continued to flourish. It did not take long for several world history textbooks to adopt the themes of the multicultural paradigm (Fernandez-Armesto 2007, Marks 2007, Goldstone 2008). Parthasarathi’s (2011) *Why Europe Grew Rich and Asia Did Not*, a book actually about India, repeats the common theme: there were no substantial economic, political, demographic, or scientific differences between India and Britain, and the economic divergence came late and contingently. Ian Morris, a classical historian and archaeologist, popularizes some of these themes in a widely-reviewed trade book *Why the West Rules—For Now* (2010), which emphasizes the parallels between Europe and Asia (mostly China) but downplays such Western divergences as the scientific revolution (Pomeranz 2011).

One immediate problem with multicultural world history is that its multiculturalism is less than complete. Its thrust has been to de-center or downgrade the West. But it has not managed to re-center or upgrade all non-Western areas equally. China in particular has been the main beneficiary of the 'affirmative action' of this new picture of world history. In multicultural world history, China's place in history grows, but no other region or civilization is so rewarded. Multicultural world history attacks Eurocentrism as the *summum malum*, but it tends to find no problem with Sinocentrism or Eurasia-centrism.

The Rise of Post-Multicultural World History

In response to the limits and failings of multicultural world history, the outlines of a post-multicultural world history are now coming into focus. Where multicultural world history swung the pendulum too far in one direction, post-multicultural world history aims at a corrective. It seeks a broader synthesis. One way to describe the synthesis is that in social evolution there is not just parallel evolution and convergent evolution, but also forms of divergent evolution. Post-multicultural world history aims for a better balance among these.

On the issue of ancient history, Thornton's, *Greek Ways* (2002) aims to refute attempts to marginalize the 'Greek miracle' as either derivative and unoriginal, or as not different from other ancient societies in Eurasia. On the issue of the rise of the West, Joseph Bryant (2006), a sociologist, challenged multicultural world history's claim that Europe exhibited no long-term dynamism, pointing to the fragility of the thesis that such a major episode as the rise of the West could be a fortuitous, abrupt, and unheralded event. On the issue of the political and cultural trajectory of the West, Headley (2008) rejected the idea of Eurasian commonalities, arguing instead for the significance of three unique cultural/political features of the West: respect for intellectual inquiry (the precondition for modern science); the idea of natural rights or human rights; and a culture that accepts self-criticism and tolerates dissent. Also on this issue, Goldstone's paper "The Divergence of Cultures" (2010) signals a rethinking of some of that writer's own earlier theses. He acknowledges that the pendulum had swung too far in asserting parallels across Eurasia. Now, Goldstone argues that "there was one significant difference that separated western and northern Europe from all other parts of Eurasia, and that was an intellectual shift that began around 1500" (2010: 9). The shift in question was the rejection of previous religious orthodoxies.

Other issues too have been addressed by post-multicultural world history. On the question of whether medieval Europe was diverging, Mitterauer in *Why Europe? The Medieval Origins of Its Special Path* (2010) points, among other things, to the looser ties of descent in European families and the norm of

exogamy as distinguishing features. On the question of the economic and technological rise of the West, there has been some push back against the revisionist or multicultural account. Peer Vries (2010) argues that the relative trajectories of Europe and China were quite different. China had reached a plateau in such activities as iron-making, inventiveness, urbanization, shipping, and finance, but Europe was on a path of growth—a point also found in Landes (2006) and O'Brien (2011). On the origins of the scientific revolution, another weak point in multicultural world history, an important recent work in post-multicultural world history is Toby Huff's *Intellectual Curiosity and the Scientific Revolution: A Global Perspective* (2011). This book lays out the comparative tracks of scientific development in Europe, China, Mughal India, and the Ottoman Empire. He cites the example of the telescope. Invented in Holland in 1608, it was soon taken by European travelers to the courts of Asia. But only in Europe was it used to make new discoveries about the heavens. Huff explains that both European institutions as well as Europe's human capital made for such a divergence.

So far, the only work of post-multicultural world history to encompass all these issues, to cover all key periods, to offer an interpretation of the whole arc of Western history in its world context is *The Uniqueness of Western Civilization* by Ricardo Duchesne (2011).

Multicultural world history shares much with the broader phenomenon of multiculturalism. The contemporary intellectual climate is strongly influenced by multiculturalism so it is not surprising that the study of world history would be affected by it. General multiculturalism rose rapidly in recent decades, as did multicultural world history. General multiculturalism made effective appeal to the need for public recognition of diversity, for the equalizing of ethnic inequalities, for reforming the curriculum of schools to inculcate inclusion, and for affirmative action for disadvantaged groups. Multicultural world history has parallel goals: for recognizing the diversity of world cultures; for reforming the curriculum of world history teaching to focus less upon the West and its rise; for recognition of the accomplishments non-Western groups; for the equalization of civilizations by avoiding any suggestion of Western advantage or originality; for a sort of affirmative action that promotes the value of non-Western cultures.

But now, in response, post-multiculturalism is becoming a force. It arises from a sense that multiculturalism has been a failure. Post-multiculturalism charges that multiculturalism, whatever its intentions, has failed to help its supposed beneficiaries; it has failed to openly address the real sources of their situation; it has allowed various forms of illiberalism, religious suprematism, caste, ethnic, and tribal exclusion to flourish without effective censure; it has suppressed free speech and criticism in the name of respecting diversity; and it has encouraged or turned a blind eye towards the denigration and devaluation of the West and its secular, liberal ethos. Now, too, multicultural world history

faces its own post-multicultural critique. Multicultural world history on this account is marginalizing the West and its accomplishments; it is preventing criticism of the deficiencies of non-Western cultures; and it is allowing the value of diversity to trump the equally valid values of liberty, critical reason, and creativity.

Ricardo Duchesne's Theory of Western Uniqueness

The most significant and comprehensive contribution to a post-multicultural world history is to be found in the work of Ricardo Duchesne, particularly his new book *The Uniqueness of Western Civilization* (2011). Like its subject-matter, this book is unique, wide-ranging, and highly contentious. *Uniqueness* begins with a chapter evaluating the evolution of world history scholarship over the past century. It moves to a trio of chapters that together form a comprehensive and detailed critique of multicultural world history. A final group of three chapters offers an alternative post-multicultural approach affirming the peculiarity of the West and formulating a provocative explanation of how it arose.

Chapter one of *Uniqueness* considers the intellectual roots of multicultural world history. The main context was the declining fortune of the idea of progress, the rise and fall of Western civilization courses, and the many critical theory trends since the 1960s. One basic criticism of multicultural world history is that it is unnecessary. Already by the early 1960s, Duchesne relates, Western scholars were quite aware of the problem of ethnocentrism and had produced a vast body of scholarship about all cultures. Fernand Braudel's *History of Civilizations* (1963) and William McNeill's *Rise of the West* (1963) were the culmination of this phase. Today's multicultural world history differs from these works *not* in that they are more inclusive of cultural diversity, but in that they marginalize the progressive, liberal values still to be found in those older works.

But since the 1960s, successive waves of critical intellectual movements washed across conceptions of world history. Duchesne recounts some of the critical enthusiasms of the last four decades: dependency theory; cultural relativism; critical theory or cultural Marxism; world-systems analysis; various forms of materialism, whether Marxian, evolutionary, or geographic; and the idea of world history as interactive webs. The latest wave is multicultural world history. Duchesne is particularly critical of the growing influence of cultural relativism and of scientific materialism. Materialism—in its many forms, Marxist, geographical, ecological—treated people as reactive rather than dynamic agents. Cultural relativism undermined the idea of progress and of cultural accomplishment. Under dual attack, the idea of history as a creative process of achievement, and of cultures as human accomplishments, was fatally wounded.

More broadly, multicultural world history is itself a product of the West. As a Western intellectual innovation itself, it reflects the long Western tendency to self-criticism, one of the unique features of its restlessness. That the West alone would generate critiques of its ethnocentric biases, testifies to an unusual pathway. Ironically, multicultural world history is itself a product and sign of the West's unusual ways, not least the humanitarian and rights revolution of the last several decades.

The sobering implication of Duchesne's analysis is that there has been little or no intellectual progress in the study of world history in half a century. To be sure, Duchesne himself is highly appreciative of many historical works that manage to avoid these ideological trends. The interested student of the subject would be better off reading Braudel or McNeill than many of the more recent works.

In the second and third chapters, Duchesne addresses the strongest claim of multicultural world history: that before 1800 Europe and Asia (or China) were on parallel economic paths and that Europe's economy was no more advanced than China's prior to the industrial revolution.

The most significant parallels include the following. Europe was not uniquely commercial. Asian international trade long predated the European voyages to the East. Asian states did not prohibit commerce, trade, and private property. Europe's demographic regime was not unique. Chinese birth rates may have been on par with those of Europe in the early modern era. Europe's agricultural productivity was not unique until the modern era. The farming techniques of Asia gave higher yields than in Europe. Early modern Europe was not richer and more economically advanced than the most developed parts of Asia. Only after the industrial revolution did a gap open up (72).

Given these parallels, there is a problem for multicultural world history in explaining why the West alone underwent the economic divergence of the industrial revolution and the advent of sustained economic growth. If there was no initial variation, how could a large later variation occur? Duchesne summarizes two kinds of explanation offered. One explanation is that "the boon of colonial profits and resources, as well as the 'fortuitous' presence of cheap coal" (73) allowed England and Europe to escape to an industrial economy. The other explanation—the only creative or original contribution by the West itself—is that Europeans created institutions designed to conquer territory and monopolize trade. "The undertone of these claims," remarks Duchesne, "is that Europe was just 'one culture among others' except for the unadulterated and efficient manner it went about colonizing markets and using efficient methods of coercion to do so" (73).

Chapter two tackles a trio of central issues in multicultural world history. First, was China, as Frank argued in *ReOrient*, the core of the early modern world system? Second, how significant were European colonialism and colonial profits? Third, how similar were Europe's and China's demographic

regimes? Although Duchesne rejects much of the revisionist case, he accepts several key points. Europe's economy was not more advanced than Asian economies already centuries ahead of the industrial revolution. India and China were the two largest economies well into the eighteenth century. As a result, early modern economic history has been overly Eurocentric and requires substantial revision.

Duchesne devotes a lengthy chapter (chap. 3) to a critique of Pomeranz's *The Great Divergence*. This book, probably the most important single work of multicultural world history, had made a strong case for the need to compare Europe's most advanced region (England) with China's (the Yangzi delta). Following that precept, Pomeranz uncovered numerous economic parallels between the two.

Duchesne's critique has three main themes. First, he points out that about two-thirds of *The Great Divergence*, and most of the data, is devoted to demonstrating parallels in life expectancy and levels of commercialization in England and the Yangzi delta. But neither issue has a direct bearing on the central question: the relative technological or economic trends in the two places and whether China had already reached a plateau of inventiveness whereas European innovation was forging ahead.

Second, Duchesne disputes the more significant proposition of *The Great Divergence* that there were parallels in technology between England and the Yangzi region. According to Pomeranz, England was *not* heading for an industrial breakthrough before 1800 because it was still an organic economy facing resource constraints, which it only overcame with New World resources and cheap coal. Duchesne doubts that Europe in the eighteenth century was approaching the Malthusian ceiling. Duchesne's key point is that one needs to compare not a static picture of Europe and China in the eighteenth century, but the relative trajectory of the two. Europe's technological trajectory was advancing, China's was not.

Third, Duchesne contests the claim in Pomeranz's book that Europe was lucky: it was lucky to get the resources of the New World, lucky to have coal deposits, lucky to have watered grasslands and pastures. Duchesne demonstrates how thin and implausible is this emphasis on Europe's good fortune. Firstly, the resources of the Americas or the coalfields were not windfalls. They had to be taken and organized. To emphasize luck is to neglect agency. Second, China was by the same measures just as lucky. It too had conquered huge new lands after 1500. It doubled in size by expanding into central Asia and later into Manchuria. This was China's New World.

Overall it can be said that multicultural world history is on solid ground in claiming that there were early modern economic parallels between Europe and China. But it lacks an effective explanation of why Europe then leapt ahead.

Chapter four addresses the other main claim of multicultural world history (aside from early modern economic parallels)—that the West was not original

or inventive, or not as original and inventive as formerly supposed. This argument is pressed most vigorously in Hobson's *Eastern Origins of Western Civilization*. Hobson attempts to enumerate the many things that Europe borrowed from Asia. Duchesne rejects the general claim by describing some of the key ways that pre-industrial Europe was innovative: medieval Europe's clock-making, the printing revolution, the explorations by the Portuguese and Columbus, the cartographic revolution, the industrial enlightenment (that is, the period between the scientific and industrial revolutions when mechanical and engineering sciences advanced), the mercantile-mercantilist state, and the military revolution. The book's fourth chapter proceeds to discuss some extant theories of the West's peculiarity—such as those positing Europe's geography or its interstate system. Duchesne argues that Western uniqueness is not geographical but political or cultural and manifest in a long-term record of creativity.

Having undermined the key tenets of multicultural world history, the remainder of the book turns to the positive task of describing and explaining Western uniqueness. Chapter five reconsiders two classical views of Western uniqueness. The first is the Weberian idea that the West followed a unique track of rationalization. Duchesne reconstructs in considerable detail Weber's account as well as later elaborations by Habermas and others. If rationalization refers to a continual cognitive upgrading of ideas, institutions, and activities, the Weberian thesis is that in the West there was a greater predisposition to cognitive upgrading than elsewhere. Duchesne finds this to be an incomplete or unsatisfactory answer, wondering why such a predisposition existed in the first place. The other classical view of the West is that it advanced liberty to a unique extent. This chapter includes a superb overview of the development of liberty in ancient citizenship, medieval law, and the Enlightenment. But in the end Duchesne judges that no satisfactory explanation yet exists for the libertarian tendencies of the West.

So, how is the West unique? At this point let us try to pull together Duchesne's contentions on Western divergence.

First, the West is unique not just because it rose to world dominance, or produced the great economic divergence of the industrial revolution, or originated the scientific revolution or the advent of constitutional government. Instead Duchesne proposes that a more general issue needs addressing: why did the West see divergences in almost all domains? "Western history," argues Duchesne, "saw a successive sequence of divergences in all dimensions of life" (236). We can call this the *multiple divergences* thesis.

Second, the West is unique in that its history has been peculiarly revolutionary or transformational. The multiple divergences have arisen from multiple revolutions and transformations. Western civilization "has always been revolutionary" (283). Western culture is "charged with tension, always striving to transcend itself, and thus always engaged in a fight against itself"

(284). Duchesne remarks on the “ceaseless and multifarious intellectual history of Western civilization” (284). Instead of emphasizing a set of traditions, Duchesne has what can be called a revolutionary conception of Western history.

Third, the West is unique in its creativity and innovation. This is the root of its revolutionary or transformative character. Duchesne writes of “the persistent creativity of Europe from ancient to modern times across all fields of human thought and action” (297). We can call this the creative conception of Western history. “The historiography of Western/European civilization is indeed filled with ‘foundations,’ ‘births,’ ‘origins,’ ‘creations,’ and ‘transitions’” (299–300). This has meant a continual searching for “new worlds, new religious visions, and new styles of painting architecture, music, science, philosophy, and literature” (300). The West’s fundamentally divergent feature is its energy, dynamism, and restlessness.

Multiple divergences, successive revolutions, and long-term creativity: these are for Duchesne the basic peculiarities of the West.

Chapter six of *The Uniqueness of Western Civilization* addresses some potential explanations of Western revolutionary restlessness. As is characteristic of the book, we find ideas canvassed from a remarkably wide range of sources including (but not limited to): Charles Murray’s book *Human Accomplishment* (2003), Oswald Spengler’s notion of a ‘Faustian’ West, and especially Hegel’s *Phenomenology of History*. A particular accomplishment of this chapter is to show that Hegel’s philosophy of history can be read as an account of the development of the Western spirit. “The West,” writes Duchesne in Hegelian terms, “is the only civilization in which its most cherished ideals about the self, freedom, and reason, have progressed over the course of history” (302).

Chapter seven inquires into the origins of the West. Duchesne argues that Western culture should be traced back beyond the usual starting point of classical antiquity deep into prehistory to the Indo-Europeans. The Indo-Europeans, a Bronze Age people living about 5000 years ago, must have been unique in some way. Their tongue, the vernacular of a small pastoral tribe probably from the Pontic steppe, spawned offspring spoken from Ireland to Bengal. What lay behind this amazing linguistic expansion? The proximate cause was a combination of conquests and migrations. But why were they so successful for so long in conquest and migration? Duchesne attributes it to horse riding, cattle rearing, a healthy diet of meat and dairy, and a more aggressive, individualistic, aristocratic temperament.

In particular, it was the aristocratic culture of the Indo-Europeans that was the original dynamic of the West, argues Duchesne. By ‘aristocratic’ he means (1) a state in which the ruler is not an autocrat but first among equals in the elite; (2) a culture that is vigorous, free, and joyful; (3) a culture that is individualistic; and (4) an expansive, martial society made up of fraternal war

bands. All these were features of the Indo-Europeans, and all subsequently were transmitted to European culture. The Indo-Europeans who expanded eastwards into Anatolia or India lost these characteristics. They were absorbed into an older social order.

It is noteworthy that Duchesne thinks individualism is not a modern invention. The modernist view has it that individualism arose from the breakup of premodern communal society. But, for Duchesne, individualism is a primordial characteristic of the West. One question mark hanging over this Indo-European thesis is that it is not clear how unusual the Indo-Europeans were. Were they one of the many nomadic arid-zone peoples who, like Turks, or Arabs, or Mongols, managed to conquer adjacent sedentary peoples? Or were they different? In his history of central Eurasia, Beckwith (2009), like Duchesne, maintains that the key institution of the steppe was the war band or *comitatus* bound together by oaths of loyalty and fraternity. But unlike Duchesne, Beckwith holds that there was a common central Eurasian culture, encompassing all the steppe peoples. In effect, Duchesne has given a unique twist to the established and convincing idea that the encounter between steppe and sown, nomad and sedentary, strongly shaped Eurasian history.

One significant piece of evidence for early aristocratic individualism in the West is that Duchesne finds a significant contrast between the heroic narratives of Greece and Northern Europe (the *Iliad*, *Beowulf*) and the Mesopotamian *Epic of Gilgamesh*. Personal heroism is the main theme of the former but not the latter. “Unlike the *Iliad*, which consists of battle scenes constructed largely out of individual encounters designed to enhance the specific deeds of singular heroes, there are no individuals with identifiable biographies in *Gilgamesh*” (413). Gilgamesh himself is an autocrat.

The final chapter (the eighth) attributes the accomplishments of Greece, Rome, and medieval Christendom to what might be called the spirit of agon, that is the restless, competitive, aristocratic ethos. Inspired by Nietzsche, Duchesne seeks to rehabilitate the idea of an aristocratic culture from the condescension of modernity. Beginning with interpretations of Hegel, Fukuyama, and Nietzsche, Duchesne proceeds to tackle the issue of how the violent culture of the Indo-Europeans was transformed into first the Greek then later stages of Western culture. In Greece, the aristocratic ethos was behind the free-for-all competition of philosophers and artists with their driving desire for fame and originality. Likewise the agonistic spirit was ingrained in the Olympic games, the wars, and the competitive politics of the city-states. The aristocratic ethos in Rome found expression in republicanism with its emblem of liberty (*libertas*). European feudalism was an aristocratic form of rule. The principle of sovereignty by consent, a hallmark of feudalism, was an aristocratic principle. Aristocratic privileges were the original inspiration for the idea of bourgeois rights and liberties. The main message is

that “the creativity of the West was rooted in a culture of free aristocrats” (484).

The book closes on a downbeat note. The aristocratic personality which was the root of political liberty and cultural creativity has come to be suppressed in modern liberal democracy. Modern liberalism is “an effort to alter the aristocratic nature of Western man” (487). Modernity no longer cherishes the aristocratic or spirited element of the soul. Accordingly, the source of the West’s creativity risks being undermined.

Achievements and Limitations of Duchesne’s Approach

Duchesne’s work now stands as the most important contribution to post-multicultural world history. In addition to the unusually wide range of history, both temporal and thematic, that it covers, the book contains five main achievements.

One achievement of *The Uniqueness of Western Civilization* is to have initiated inquiry into the origins and intellectual history of the powerful multicultural trend in the contemporary study of world history. To be sure, multiculturalism is not confined to the fields studying world history. So, one avenue of further inquiry would be to consider how multiculturalism in general arose, why it managed to spread across many areas of academic inquiry, and what the intellectual consequences have been.

A second achievement of Duchesne’s book is to have provided by far the most detailed and comprehensive dissection and assessment of multicultural world history. It demonstrates the existence of numerous serious flaws in the main works of anti-Eurocentric world history. The worst error is to have systematically marginalized the West by denying its many instances of divergence and inventiveness.

A third accomplishment of *The Uniqueness of Western Civilization* is that it offers new readings of some classic works, among them Hegel, Weber, and Nietzsche. Duchesne is convinced that these and other works are still pertinent sources of inspiration and comprehension. More such work would be of benefit. A noteworthy absence from the book is Marx. There are some curious tangents between Marxism and Duchesne’s approach. Marx had a revolutionary conception of Western history. So does Duchesne. Marx traced the roots of the West’s revolutionary transformations to fundamental social conflict. So does Duchesne. Marxism avoids idealizing the West, bitterly criticizing its moral failings, but also perceives it to have a progressive quality. Duchesne too is keen to avoid idealizing the West. He eschews presenting ‘Western Civilization’ as only a set of high ideals or great books. Marxism entails a form of class analysis. Duchesne’s theory of Western uniqueness also contains a class analysis, one that focuses on the aristocracy as the source of

European creativity and expansionism. All in all, there is a certain inverted or heterodox strain of Marxism within Duchesne's analysis.

The main difference is that Duchesne eschews a materialist conception of history. But is materialism to be entirely jettisoned even in attempting to explain the West's cultural peculiarities? It is possible, for instance, to develop an argument that agricultural divergence made an impact on the cultural divergence of the West. Wet paddy rice farming encourages communal conformity, a necessity for successful management of the paddies. But mixed farming allows for more individuality and nonconformity, traits that Duchesne regards as key to understanding Western uniqueness. There may be more value in a materialist explanation of Western cultural divergence than Duchesne allows.

An additional notable absence from the book, in addition to Marx, is Arnold Toynbee. He attributed the rise of a civilization to a 'creative minority'—Duchesne also attributes the West's creativity to a striving aristocracy. But, Toynbee also pointed to the ossifying effect of a 'dominant minority.' Another key difference is that Toynbee based his account of history on the idea of a basic parallelism among all civilizations. In his preoccupation with parallels among civilizations, Toynbee may be considered a precursor of today's multicultural world history.

The basic idea of a creative minority (or aristocracy) seems sound. Most creativity and innovation will come from only a fraction of any given population, those on the right hand tail in the distribution of talents and energy. But aristocracies can in practice also be merely dominant, predatory, blocking minorities. For a creative minority to exist there seem to be two preconditions: first a sizeable fraction of the overall population needs to be highly talented and motivated; and second a dominant, blocking elite needs to be prevented.

A fourth accomplishment of *The Uniqueness of Western Civilization* is to have developed a unique conception of how the West was divergent. Instead of stressing individual peculiarities, Duchesne has formulated a conception of its overall long term originality as seen in the many successive transformations and revolutions in Western history. This is Duchesne's revolutionary conception of Western history.

This conception of the West perhaps best applies to the artistic and cultural creativity of the West as well as its pioneering of modernity, with such transformations as growing knowledge, expanding wealth, increasing rights and democracy, declining violence, and declining fertility. The revolutionary or continuously creative conception of the West is a major advance on those who discern the West diverging only with the industrial revolution or the rise of Western global power.

Yet, one criticism of this revolutionary conception of Western uniqueness is that it does not encompass all aspects of Western peculiarity. Two peculiarities

of West are in its marriage and family systems. In marriage, since antiquity, polygamy has been prohibited in the West. In other civilizations, in Asia, Africa, and the Americas, it was allowed. In its family system, the West has been characterized by exogamy (absence of consanguineous marriage) and by compact families (absence of extended lineages such as tribes and clans) since the early middle ages. Neither of these peculiarities is best described as 'revolutionary' or 'creative.' The conclusion is that Western divergence is manifold or protean. It resists even the most comprehensive attempts at characterization.

A fifth accomplishment of *Uniqueness* is to have devised a new explanation for Western divergence and the rise of the West. Duchesne has issued a reminder of something that was in danger of being forgotten: the importance of distinctive personality types in different cultures. What Duchesne calls a Faustian or aristocratic personality could be translated into modern psychological language as one that possesses high levels of willpower, competitiveness, and motivation. By its nature, it is hard to establish solid evidence for the distribution of different personality types in history and across cultures. Although everyone in practice recognizes that different national characters or personality types exist, concrete evidence for them is hard to adduce. Nonetheless, to this reviewer at least, Duchesne's case is convincing.

Now, as Duchesne recognizes, the prevalence of aristocratic personality types is not a sufficient or a complete explanation for the West's numerous divergences. Other factors are involved. Some of the most notable personalities in Western history do not fit the Faustian mould. Newton, for instance, was as much Asperger as aristocrat. Some unique features of the West appear to arise from demotic rather than aristocratic sources. One example is the unusual creativity and accomplishment of the Ashkenazi Jews—with numerous scientific, literary, and other successes over the past two centuries. Since the Ashkenazim had no 'aristocracy' in any usual sense of the term, it is hard to attribute their creativity to an aristocratic ethos. Another example is popular literacy. Following the Reformation, the Protestant lands began to promote universal literacy. In due course, the Reformed countries became the first in world history to contain a substantially literate population. This upgrading of human capital was a unique feature of the West, but it arose from a demotic rather than an aristocratic impetus.

Some unusual features of the West appear to be accidents of timing. That may be the case with the relatively lower incidence of despotic states in the West. Early states across the world were commonly highly despotic: bloody practices such as slavery, human sacrifice, erecting monuments boasting of massacres, and venerating godlike rulers were widespread. But, since Europe was late to develop states, it missed out on much of this early despotic history, except for the bloody rule of Rome. Later on, universalistic, ethical religions arose and proposed some restraints on tyranny. Europe's post-Roman state-

building arose *after* Christianity had been established. The Church was already on the scene to moderate the rapacity and violence of rulers, or at least to prohibit mass sacrifices or king-worship. Although Hindu and Islamic laws also constrained rulers, Fukuyama (2011) argues that Christianity was the source of Europe's relatively strong rule of law (Hewson 2012).

Additionally, one of the peculiarities of the West is the existence of large-scale social cooperation beyond the bounds of kin, clan, or lineage. The terms 'civil society,' or 'corporation,' or 'nationalism,' or 'trust' express some of the manifestations of this trans-kin cooperation. Contemporary international surveys indicate that northern European nations (and their settler offshoots) rank comparatively high in trust of strangers and social capital. If explaining social cooperation is *the* basic problem in the study of social evolution, then explaining the unusually high social cooperation of Western societies should be the key secondary problem in the study of social evolution. If it is true that the West was able to develop particularly high-trust, high-cooperation societies, in which overt striving for prestige is itself considered a low-prestige activity, then it would appear unlikely that its source was the dominance of proud, contentious and cavalier aristocratic personalities. More likely that in this domain, prudent, cautious, bourgeois personalities were also critical to the West's divergence.

So, although a society of Faustian or aristocratic personalities is not likely to be a complete explanation of Western uniqueness, it is nonetheless an important piece of the puzzle. Duchesne's aristocratic personality thesis is a particularly important corrective to impersonal, materialist theories. It is highly useful in understanding such phenomena as the competitive culture of Greek science and politics, or the remarkable exploits of European explorers, or the unparalleled success of Western empire-builders. But not all the peculiarities of the West originate in an aristocratic personality.

This means that the taming of the aristocratic personality by modern liberalism may not be as problematic as Duchesne fears. There is a more positive interpretation of modern liberalism. It does not deny the existence of powerful ambitions among the few for prestige. Instead, it seeks to limit, regulate, and channel these ambitions into peaceful pursuits. In liberal democratic politics there is scope for the ambitious to contend for honors, but they are prevented from translating their ambition into tyranny, violence, conquest, or harem-building.

To sum up, a book that asks great questions and offers bold answers deserves itself to be called great. *The Uniqueness of Western Civilization* is one of those not unflawed but rare books.

Conclusions: The New Post-Multicultural World History

Over the last two decades, a trend of multiculturalism in world history has enjoyed a largely uncontested rise to prominence. Its main aim has been to challenge Eurocentrism. Its main achievement is to have issued a corrective in early modern economic history: prior to the industrial revolution, there were numerous economic parallels between Europe and Asia. But multicultural world history has several flaws. It marginalizes the West. It downplays numerous non-economic divergences of the West.

In response, a post-multicultural world history is now emerging. The main achievement of post-multicultural world history so far is to have established that there were numerous critical non-economic divergences between Europe and other regions. The West was both peculiar and inventive across many domains.

As for the future of this debate, there are several outstanding issues that arise from the clash between multicultural and post-multicultural world history. One is the counterfactual question: what would a Westless world have looked like? Posing this question gets to the heart of what difference the West has made, how central it has been in history, and how 'Eurocentric' world history actually is.

A second issue that arises from the debate concerns what can be called 'the rise of the North.' A major contention of multicultural world history is that China and Europe prior to the industrial revolution were roughly parallel in economic development. If so, what caused the rise of the two northern regions of Eurasia? Why did the rise of the North eclipse the more southerly regions? In the twenty-first century, Northeast Asia (with its offshoots such as Hong Kong and Singapore), is once again alongside the West as the leading region of industrial growth and technical progress. Why have NW Eurasia and NE Eurasia been so prominent for the last millennium or so? This particular great divergence, the rise of the North, has yet to receive sustained attention.

A third issue arising from the multicultural versus post-multicultural debate concerns the history of economic parallels and convergences. Multicultural world history has convincingly cited the existence of several early modern Eurasian economic parallels. But, shifting to a different time-scale and geographic range, evidence from the long-term and considering all regions (not just Eurasia) has found very long run divergences in adoption rates of basic technologies as far back as 1000 BC (Comin, Easterly, and Gong 2010). A review article (Spolaore and Wacziarg 2012) concludes that relative levels of economic development today in different regions are predicted by relative levels a millennium and more ago. Economic conditions appear to be affected by traits that have been transmitted across generations over the very long run. The issue of economic parallels, divergences, and convergences among the world's regions is still alive.

A fourth issue is whether there are other domains of importance that have so far not figured in the debate. As mentioned earlier, one additional area of potential interest concerns marriage and family systems. Was the West unique in this domain? Some evidence suggests it was peculiar in that only in the West was there the prevalence of monogamy (or prohibition of polygyny), the relative absence of consanguineous marriage (i.e. cousin-marriage), and the early decline of extended kin lineages. Monogamy was a feature of the Greek, Roman and Christian legal codes. (But in practice in Rome, as Scheidel (2009) explains, there was widespread *de facto* polygyny among the elite because conquests made available numerous concubines.) Laura Fortunato (2011) argues that the Proto-Indo-Europeans practiced monogamy, which if true lends support to Duchesne's thesis of the Indo-European origins of Western culture. Only in the nineteenth century did many modernizing non-Western states begin prohibiting polygyny. Polygyny remains the practice in several Islamic and African states. The relatively low levels of consanguineous marriage in the West contrast in particular to the Middle Eastern and South Asian practice of widespread cousin-marriage. The Church from an early date had prohibited cousin-marriage. Thanks to exogamy, tribes, clans, and other such extended lineages necessarily decay. Jack Goody, in his capacity as an anthropologist expert in kinship, rather than as a multicultural world historian, recognized one peculiarity of Europe: its kinship system lacked extended lineages (Goody 1998). (The exception was in certain peripheral areas, such as Highland Scotland, where clans continued.)

It is a matter for debate how significant these features have been. The theory of parental investment would predict that monogamous marriage systems elicit higher paternal investment in offspring and hence have significant positive effects on social capacities. A recent review of evidence comparing monogamous and polygynous societies finds significant differences (Henrich, Boyd and Richerson 2012). The theory of kin selection would predict that with exogamy there is not only less inbreeding depression but also lower relatedness within extended lineages so the focus and scope of social cooperation and trust has a chance to move from clan to civil society.

In short, there is much more to be said about the many Western divergences, their causes and consequences, and much more to be debated between multicultural and post-multicultural world histories. But multiculturalism in world history has now met a formidable challenge. Its ascent is no longer uncontested.

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