



THE GREEKS, THE WEST AND WORLD CULTURE

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Part 2 of 2

I turn now to what the West in succeeding centuries has added to the Greek legacy. In the field of the great ideas, only two are of modern origin and development. The idea of Progress is a wholly modern idea that is uniquely Western. The idea of Evolution is mainly, but not wholly, developed in modern times, and it, too, is uniquely Western.

In the field of politics, there have been two modern developments of the *polis* or *republic*: (a) the *written* constitution; and (b) the principle of political and economic equality—the ideal of the classless society. These are both uniquely Western. In the field of knowledge—or, more specifically, in that part of the scientific enterprise which is empirical science—there are again two modern developments: (a) the systematic development of the experimental method: this underlies (b) the systematic development of technol-

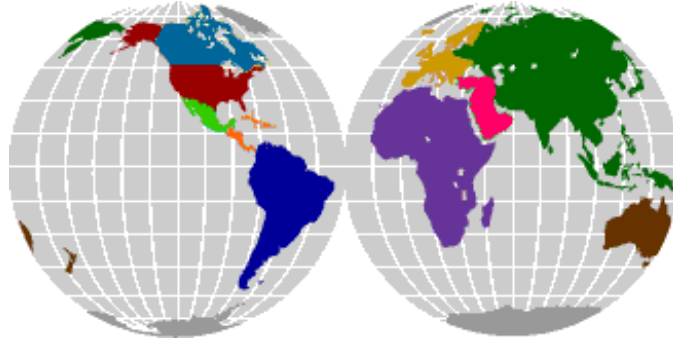
ogy—the derivation of know-how from know-that. This in turn underlies the Industrial Revolution in all its successive phases, which is universally admitted to be an exclusively Western phenomenon.

The fact that the Industrial Revolution is wholly Western plainly indicates not only that advanced technology is exclusively Western in origin and development, but also that its source—experimental science and the cooperative conduct of the scientific enterprise—is a unique achievement of the West.

Let me summarize the argument so far. Positively stated, the unique contributions of the West are three: (1) the political institutions of the state, especially constitutional government, citizenship, and the ideal of the classless society; (2) the scientific enterprise as a whole, distinguished sharply from religion, conducted cooperatively as a set of methodical procedures to construct distinct bodies of knowledge (mathematics, history, philosophy, and empirical science)—with its emphasis on *objectivity* and *objective truth*, with a restricted humanism that *is not man-centered or anthropocentric*, and with its systematic conversion of knowledge into know-how, yielding *all the fruits of technological progress*; and (3) the civilization of the dialogue with its ideal of rational discourse—of discussion and debate—both in the sphere of politics and in the pursuit of truth.

There are, as I have already intimated, a few deviations in the West from the Western norm, which represent something comparable to a predominant feature of all the Eastern cultures—namely, the development of personal wisdom, the exploration of man’s inner life, the kind of thing I have called “a way of life and a way of thought” that is so strikingly different from the science and philosophy of the West.

I am thinking here of the personal wisdom and the way of life that is taught by the traditional religions of the West, best exemplified, perhaps, in Western holy books, such as Thomas a Kempis’ *The Imitation of Christ*; or of the way of life that is a minor aspect of ancient Stoicism; or of such things as existentialism and psychoanalysis in the contemporary Western world that, for some of their devotees at least, take on the character of “a way of life.”



The Problem of a Unified World Culture

We are now prepared to turn our attention to the problem of the unity of mankind and of a single world culture. Here I have three preliminary remarks that I would like to make.

(1) I hope that you agree with me that the problem of the culture of mankind as a whole, though it is remote as compared with the urgent problems of Japanese, Chinese, Indian, European, or American society today, is much more important.

(2) That problem, as I see it, is how to transcend the parochialism of the West and the various parochialisms of the East, taking what is best from each and combining the unique contributions of each.

For example, the three unique contributions of the West should be a part of world culture—and, I venture to predict, they will be. I venture to predict that the world will be Westernized in its political institutions, in its adoption of Western experimental science and technology, and in its recognition of the ideal that is implicit in the civilization of the dialogue.

I cannot speak for the East in the same way, but I would think that the subjectivity of the East is needed to balance the objectivity of the West; the personal wisdom and the understanding of the inner life is needed to supplement the purely intellectual knowledge and the exploration of the outer world that constitute the scientific enterprise in the West; and the know-how that is a way of life is needed to supplement the know-how that is Western technology.

(3) Predictions aside, I am concerned here, in these concluding moments, to express *merely as a hope* my sense of the shape that the world culture of the future should take. And I hasten to acknowledge at once that the hope I express is probably shot through

and through with the Western parochialism that I simply cannot slough off any more than I can get out of my skin.

Let me begin by making a distinction between the lower and the higher elements of human culture.

By *the lower elements of human culture*, I mean those things that are now common to all civilized societies, no matter how they may otherwise differ culturally, because these things are the legacy to civilized man from his prehistoric ancestors who developed them in the 500,000 years that preceded the dawn of civilization: (a) *tool-making*, which is the seed of all later developments in technology; (b) the use of *fire* and the *cooking of food*; (c) *burial rites* and other *ritualistic practices* connected with birth, puberty, and marriage.

In addition to these three, there are four other elements that I would refer to as lower elements of human culture and that are common to all civilized society, but are of more recent origin—going back no farther than, perhaps, the last 20,000 to 30,000 years. They are: (a) *agriculture and the domestication of animals*, as opposed to hunting, as a means of food supply; (b) *settled community life with permanent dwellings*, as opposed to a nomadic existence; (c) *fine art*—that is, art for the sake of enjoyment or for symbolic purposes” as opposed to utilitarian or useful art: decorative designs on clothing and implements, pictorial representations, song and dance, and story-telling; (d) the development of *language* and of the skills or *arts of communication* by means of syntactical speech.

By *the higher elements of human culture*, I mean those things that distinguish the diverse cultures of civilized man—things that are not common to all human cultures, except in some thin analogical sense. For the sake of brevity and simplicity, I will deal only with the main cultures or cultural traditions now in existence: Western culture on the one hand, and the three or four Eastern cultures, on the other. These differ markedly in: (a) *religion*—religious beliefs and practices; (b) *fine art*—painting, poetry, music, dance, etc; and (c) *communal life or social organization*. They differ in their understanding of and evaluation of (d) *philosophy* as a part of the scientific enterprise or as a way of life and a search for personal wisdom; and (e) the employment of reason as the highest instrument available to man or the rejection of reason as unreliable for the purpose of individual life, society, or the pursuit of wisdom.

Now the question with which I would like to close this lecture – the question that I would like to leave you to ponder on—is this: *in respect to which of the higher elements of human culture is diversity compatible with the ultimate unity of mankind and the cultural fusion out of which a single world culture will eventually emerge?*

Let me suggest the answer as I see it—undoubtedly from my Western point of view.

I think the universalization of Western political institutions—the worldwide adoption of constitutional government and of the classless society—is necessary for the unity of mankind.

I also think that such things as mathematics, historical research, experimental science, and the technological fruits of experimental science must be universalized—transcending all cultural divisions. Just as the adjective “Chinese” or “Indian” or “Western” signifies only accidental or historical but no essential differences when applied to mathematics, so these adjectives have no essential significance when they are applied to experimental science, historical research, or technology. Here the objectivity that characterizes all parts of the scientific enterprise as a whole must be universalized, not for the sake of the unity of mankind, but because it is essential to the enterprise itself.

With respect to the fine arts, I think that a diversity of traditions or schools should persist even after mankind is unified and world culture begins; because just as the objectivity and objective truth that are essential to the scientific enterprise require that enterprise to be the same everywhere, so the novelty and variety that are essential to the vitality of the fine arts require that diversity not only to persist but to be actively promoted.

Should the diversity of religions persist and continue to divide men culturally? That is a difficult question. I have only two things to say on this score.

(1) Insofar as a religion involves a way of life and a way of thought that leads to the attainment of wisdom and peace, then, perhaps, diverse religions should persist until the end of time, because basic differences in human temperament may require such diversity.

(2) Let us now consider the diversity of religion in another way: consider a religion as involving a doctrine that includes existential statements, such as: there is no God, there is only one God, there are many Gods; the divine transcends the world; the divine is

wholly immanent in the world; whatever gods there may be, they are the same for all men; different groups of men are entitled each to its own set of gods. Considered this way, the diversity of religions is as repugnant to reason as would be the assertion that plainly contrary scientific theories can both be true as stated.

Finally, I come to philosophy, and what I have to say here closely follows what I have just said about religion. The answer to be given turns on how philosophy is viewed.

If, on the one hand, philosophy is viewed as a way of life, as a search for personal peace and wisdom (and in these respects it would appear to be indistinguishable from religion), then my answer is that a persistent diversity of philosophies is compatible with philosophy as thus conceived; furthermore that diversity is appropriate to deep temperamental differences among men.

But if, on the other hand, philosophy is viewed not at all as a way of life, but exclusively as a part of the scientific enterprise, a specific mode of inquiry directed toward acquiring a specific kind of knowledge, a purely intellectual and cooperative enterprise having nothing to do with personal wisdom or inner peace, then my answer is that the same principles of objectivity and objective truth that apply to other parts of the scientific enterprise—to mathematics, to historical research, and to empirical science—apply in exactly the same way to philosophical thought.

This means, on the one hand, that diverse philosophies viewed as diverse ways of life, as diverse paths to personal wisdom and peace, do not conflict with one another or disagree—and their differences need not be adjudicated in some objective fashion.

But it also means, on the other hand, that when philosophy is viewed as a part of the scientific enterprise, and as a specific mode of inquiry for gaining a specific type of knowledge, then the disagreements of philosophers not only in the West, but in the world—both East and West—must be subject to adjudication and must be judged by exactly the same criteria of objectivity and objective truth.


Some Conclusions

I would now like briefly to say what I think all this comes to. There are four main points I would like to leave with you.

(1) Culturalism, like nationalism, is divisive. Both must give way in favor of the unification of the human race and in favor of the formation of a single world culture. (Culturalism is parochialism as nationalism is chauvinism.)

(2) Cultural differences are like differences in nurture. They are all relatively superficial as compared with the sameness of human nature—the common humanity that inheres in all races of men.

(3) Some cultural differences—such as those that pertain to the fine arts and to religion, or to philosophy conceived as a way of life—arise from and are appropriate to temperamental differences among men that divide them into different types; and to the extent that such temperamental differences persist after differences of race or nationality are annulled by the unification of mankind, the appropriate cultural differences should also persist in world culture.

(4) Insofar as the human mind is the same in all men, and insofar as the world in which man finds himself is the same for all men, *objective truth must be the same for all men*, and the scientific enterprise, including philosophy as a mode of inquiry, not as a way of life, must become the common possession of mankind and the core of world culture, for objective truth transcends all divisions and boundaries among men. 

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