

Caught in negativism and relativism

Our cultural heritage in a crisis?

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Whittaker Chambers ... died despairing: “ ... it is idle to talk about preventing the wreck of Western civilisation. It is already a wreck from within. This is why we can hope to do little more now than snatch a fingernail of a saint from the rack or a handful of ashes from the fire, and bury them secretly in a flower pot against the day, ages hence, when a few men begin again to dare to believe that there was once something else, that something else is thinkable, and need some evidence of what it was and the fortifying knowledge that there were those who, at the great nightfall, took loving thought to preserve the tokens of hope and truth. ”

[Quoted in Colson Charles, *Against the Night*, Servant Publications, 1999, p. 110.]

Departing from this emotional and extremely pessimistic diagnosis it is my intention to arrive at a more realistic, conclusion through a series of papers, starting with this essay. At the worst, this series could serve as one of those “handfuls of ashes” that Chambers is talking about...

I have to start with an apology for not being able to define explicitly the term “cultural heritage”. The same for “Western heritage”. Suffice it to say that what is meant is the Christian cultural heritage as a whole (i.e. not only its religious component) which has its rational roots in the Greek, Hellenic, world, its moral roots in Judaism and in more recent times it embraces a great variety of world-view orientations or paradigms, beginning with Enlightenment and perhaps ending with post-modernism.

After settling in Germany in 1999, and trying to understand the cultural outlook of contemporary Europe, in particular Germany, a mood of nostalgia overcame me in a way not experienced before. I suddenly began to feel that I belonged to a ‘cultural race’ predestined to extinction, something like those cultures or civilisations that centuries ago had to give way to the more vigorous and powerful Western, Judaeo-Christian, civilisation. This paper is an attempt to express these impressions more rationally. It is to be followed by other papers that hopefully will be more positive and constructive, and not just something that could be dismissed as mere speculations of a pure mathematician.

This attempt will be argued and illustrated from, or referred to, the following three environments:

- (1) The English speaking world¹, as the typical carrier of our Western heritage, the version that is most open and accessible to the rest of the world;
- (2) The German world², as typical for the European, i.e. continental, variety of that heritage;
- (3) The Slovak cultural micro-world³.

The Slovak case will be dealt with only in brackets or as a footnote because it represents a situation too narrow to suggest evaluations and projections that could have a more general validity. For these purposes the English and German settings are much more suitable, but also more involved.

The contemporary crisis of western thinking and of its cultural self-assertion — whether real or just experienced as such — can be traced down to two threats:

- (a) *external*: given by demographic changes, the necessary immigration of carriers of ‘foreign’, i.e. non-Western cultures (this is more apparent in Europe, including Germany, than in Australia or America, where the recent inroads of Islam and others are not felt as a cultural intrusion to such an extent);

¹ where I lived (31 years in Melbourne) and did most of my reading;

² where I live now and through the culture of which — many years ago — my father introduced me to Western values;

³ that I grew up in, and on problems of which I spent some of my time in the past;

- (b) *internal*: given by a negativist attitude to West's own traditions, from an interpretation of its ethnic or national histories up to questioning the most basic pillars of rational thinking, including post-modernist attacks on philosophical foundation of science, the essence and meaning of the scientist's work.

The second threat is more dangerous because it leads to a cultural decay of the Western world rendering it unable to conduct a meaningful dialogue with the external partner. A partner, or partners, whose share of the population is increasing all the time. A partner with a self-assured world-outlook of its political and intellectual leaders. Bassam Tibi ⁴ says it very appropriately.

Dieses Verhalten der Selbstverleugnung bis hin zur Aufgabe der Identität der eigenen Zivilisation wird nicht gewürdigt. Und zwar mit recht! Wer so etwas mit seinen Wurzeln, seinen Normen und seiner Kultur tut, hat dem anderen nichts mehr zu bieten, oder keine Identität. Im Gegenteil, er wird als 'dekadent' empfunden.

[*This attitude of self-denial, up-to giving up the identity of one's own civilisation, will not be appreciated. And rightly so! Somebody who does such things with his roots, his norms and his culture does not have anything to offer to others any more, no identity. Quite to the contrary, he will be perceived as 'decadent'.*]

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As far as the demographic situation is concerned, it can easily be envisaged that Kosovo is just a harbinger of future problems of Germany and the whole of Europe. A couple of centuries ago a few Albanians migrated to that historically important part of Serbia, the details are not important. They kept on multiplying until today they constitute a majority which cannot or will not assimilate, even integrate. There is a real possibility that the same will happen with Turks (and other 'non-Westerns' in Germany). Of course, not in our lives, and probably not even in the lives of our children. The French have Arabs, but they face the same problem: these newcomers do not integrate, not to say assimilate, easily, even after two generations. They belong to a religious, hence cultural, Islam which, so it seems, are showing strong signs of 'un-integrability' into traditional European cultures. Given that *assimilation* is probably not only impossible but also undesirable, even in the long run, this is not so with *integration*, which is a prerequisite for a peaceful coexistence of people with various traditional roots. Or is integration/assimilation indeed only a matter of time? Jews belonged through centuries to an 'unintegrated' religion, hence culture. Only after Enlightenment did they not only become integrated but constitute one of the leading reshapers of Western civilisation.

However, this 'un-integrability' is not caused entirely by religious differences — though the more different the religion the less integrable its carriers ⁵ — but also by their vitality. Both religio-cultural as well as demographic. I think that this twofold vitality confronting the phlegmatic (both culturally and demographically) original population, e.g. German, is going to have a permanent effect on the shape of future (Germany and) Europe: both its demographic composition and cultural make-up.

The demographic composition can be regulated, to a certain extent, by reasonable immigration policies, but the tide cannot be stopped. Nevertheless, a morally and rationally veritable alternative to right-extremist paranoia and racism is not an ostrich-like hiding of the (cultural) head in the (multi-

⁴ Born in Damascus in 1944 he studied sociology, philosophy and history in Frankfurt. Today he is professor of international relations at Göttingen where he lectures in islamology, a discipline he himself founded. In his recent book *Europa ohne Identität, die Krise der multikulturellen Gesellschaft*, [Europe without identity: the crisis of the multi-cultural society] (C. Bertelsmann Verlag 1998/2000) he argues in favour of maintaining a European *Leitkultur* [defining or leading culture], which he sees as the only guarantor for a peaceful co-habitation of various cultures on European soil.

⁵ The percentage of Greeks as a proportion of the population of Melbourne is about the same as that of Turks in Cologne. However, Turks in Cologne are much more 'visible' than Greeks in Melbourne.

cultural) sand but a constructive dialogue with approachable thinkers of the immigrating cultures. Interesting in this context are the ideas about Euro-Islam put forward by the already quoted 'liberal' Muslim Bassam Tibi. Euro-Islam as a competitor or partner of a Christian Europe? The main problem with this is the fact that in Christian culture the process of the separation of 'Church and State', i.e. of religious and secular realms, has already been more or less concluded, whereas in Islam this is not nearly the case. Not even Bassam Tibi seems to appreciate this difference sufficiently.

As far as the *internal* threat to our traditional culture is concerned, the situation is very different. Here, I think, caution is necessary, apprehension justified, and search for a more constructive way out required. Because the danger of self-denial leading to self-hatred, is much more serious than the 'danger' arising from the demographic 'invasion of alien cultures'. What I have here in mind is not only the lacklustre approach to one's own heritage, but also intellectual and cultural trends that although originating in our tradition see their fulfilment, their *raison d'être*, in a negativist, even destructive interpretation of this identity. Not only traditional values of personal or social ethics are being challenged, but too often the meaning of Western history, and even achievements of science, are negatively reinterpreted.

Take Germany as an example. Hans Kohn in *The Mind of Germany*, first published in 1960, and others at that time, strived to present the German cultural heritage mainly in the pre-nationalistic traditions of Goethe and Schiller. Vater Jahn, Richard Wagner and their like were presented as a deviation and, of course, Hitler as a betrayal, of this tradition. Kohn and other authors at that time presented the German cultural identity with an emphasis on its positive features. My father used to introduce me to German culture in the same spirit, though he himself was not a German. Neither were many others, not Germans by birth, who saw the meaning and centre-point of German cultural identity in its positive aspects, not in Hitler! Indeed, one can be a German not only by birth but also by cultural appropriation, sympathies or cultural ties. The same is true for other ethnicities (e.g. Slovak), or supra-ethnic cultural ties (e.g. Western).

This brings us to my thesis: *A cultural heritage — be it our Western heritage as a whole or just a narrow ethnically determined component — which is based on a (demographically) diminishing original population will survive only if it can attract outsiders, external carriers.* There are indeed many examples where a non-German, non-Slovak, non-European, non-Westerner etc. is a better carrier of German, Slovak, European, Western etc. culture than many an inborn one. Of course, one can ask the question, why is it at all worth trying to preserve (in some form to be discussed later) not only our Western culture but also the variety of often miniature cultures that constitute it? The reasons are perhaps the same as when we want to preserve the natural variety of our physical environment. Some time ago I put it thus:

The smallest flower living in the dirtiest soil is aesthetically preferable to the most magnificent plant made of plastic. We have learned that. We still have to learn that the same is true about natural and artificial cultures.

So it is not so much a matter of patriotism but it is becoming more and more everybody's duty towards humanity as a whole, to contribute to the preservation of that part of the 'ethnic ecosystem' which each person is familiar with, either through having been born into, or through contacts. One day our grandchildren will look at all national heritages, Hungarian, Slovak, but also German or Russian, as needing preservation, and if necessary protection, irrespective of their past roles in history. Just as we feel today that every species of our animal world needs to be preserved, and if necessary protected, herbivorous but also carnivorous.

[Slovak-Hungarian Relations, past, present and future, Europa Ethnica 47(1990), 13–22]

And the situation in Germany today? The young generation, brainwashed by the media, are almost ashamed of being German, of being the heirs of this thousand years old culture that until the beginning of the twentieth century occupied in science, music and many other fields one of the leading, if not the leading, position of the cultural West. Of course, when speaking of the young generation I do not have in mind the lunatic fringes, the “Rechtsextremisten” that I do not get into contact with.

I do not know what they were taught at school. However, I know how it was in Australia. Instead of being taught an integrated (Western, European or whatever) history subject, my daughter had to choose from a list of units, each to be taught for six weeks only, and combine them into a history subject according to her own taste. An educational imbecility, so it seems to me, but that is here besides the point. There was only one unit relating to German history. It was called *Hitler's Germany*. Thus Australian youngsters (I hope only those who did not choose history as one of their matriculation subjects), for whom ‘Germany’ was a rather exotic name and place, were expected to learn nothing from German history but Hitler’s atrocities! The situation is obviously not the same in Germany, but the tendency to emphasize mainly negative parts in German history and culture seems to prevail.

What do they teach young Germans about the anti-nationalistic traditions and teachings of people like Goethe and Schiller, through which they came ahead of their time by some two hundred years? As an important part of German cultural tradition that every German can be proud of, and which that ‘rechtsextremist’ hooligan is desecrating with his misdeeds more than the memorials and synagogues that he scribbles on. It seems that the only thing the young German is reminded of by the media (I repeat, I do not know what they teach them at school) is that he should be ashamed of his ancestors which, of course is counter-productive. I am neither a psychologist nor an educator but I know that much more can be achieved with a young person when one reminds him/her of traditions and personalities that he/she can identify with and in the steps of which he/she can continue, albeit in a form appropriate to his/her times. Much more than when he/she is incessantly reminded of negative chapters in his nation’s history, facts from the past which he/she cannot change, cannot feel personal responsibility for, and to which he/she cannot relate any ideals, where he/she cannot find any role models. To put it rather bluntly: a psychological pressure exerted on a person, mainly male, suffering from inferiority complexes, leads to physically violent reactions on his part.

Let me conclude this part on Germany with only some remarks, since the purpose of this sequence of papers is to speculate over a ‘solutions to the problem’ on a more global level. I have been using here the term “German culture” implicitly with the *ethnic* meaning of the adjective “German”. Another possibility is, of course, where “German” refers to the *country* Germany. Many confusions and misunderstandings could be avoided if this distinction was made explicit. In German the terms *deutsche Kultur* or even *Leitkultur* (a term introduced by Bassam Tibi which last year became the trigger of some vigorous public discussions about what constitutes ‘German identity’) are equally ambiguous. An immigrant Turk who obtained his German citizenship yesterday is a German in the political sense but not in the ethnic sense. A person born in Germany of Turkish parents is ethnically more ambiguous. Some time ago I advocated the term *fuzzy ethnicity* to describe the ethnicity of a person like e.g. myself, and wrote:

For a typical Slovak of the future his/her Slovak ethnicity won’t determine the ethnic background of his/her cultural identity *exclusively* any more. It will constitute only its ethnic hub around which there will be sentimentally less intensive ties to other ethnicities, other cultures. This is the situation that seems to unfold in Western Europe, this is how many migrants and refugees have been seeing their ethnic identity for some years now. In order for a Slovak not to lose track of his/her cultural identity it is important that these two things (ethnic and political attributes) be not confused. (*Literárny týždenník*, 8.7.1994)

Of course, one can replace here “Slovak” with “German”. As far as ‘fuzziness’ is concerned, recently I found the term “fuzzy race categories” used in connection with the American census of 2000. [*For 7 Million People in Census, One Category Isn’t Enough*, The New York Times, March 13, 2001.] In this sense the ethnic vs. racial categories, (in Germany or Europe as well as in the US) could be treated similarly although the main difference lies in the fact that multi-racial identities are obtained by ‘inter-marriages’, whereas multi-ethnic identities arise also from much more complex cultural interactions. The main difference between the two countries, USA and Germany, is given by the fact that Germany as a State — “Nation-State” to be more precise — must now be seen as just a transitory political and organisational entity on its way to a politically united Europe, as long and bumpy the road ahead might still be. Naturally, for politicians, and all those looking for solutions workable in the immediate future, it is still important to look for optimal models of the cultural situation in Germany. Nevertheless, I think Germany as a country will sooner or later disappear, politically dissolved in a united Europe, the majority of whose population will not even be direct descendants of what used to be Europeans, say, one hundred years ago. On the other hand — as mentioned before — it is rather important, that Germany as a cultural, ethnic, entity does not get uprooted or transfigured beyond recognition. It is my opinion that it would be a sad outcome if German identity — or any other (European) ethnic entity for that matter — got dissolved in a kind of multicultural brew, where survival chances are measured by cultural and ideological aggressiveness that some exponents of consumer oriented commercialised interests, driven by criteria of political correctness, seem to prefer.

Thus in the long term it is the situation in *Europe as a whole* that one should be concerned with, not just e.g. Germany. This situation, unlike that in the present-day Nation-States, is probably going to resemble more and more the one in the US, although an essential difference will persist for a long time because of Europe’s stronger roots in pre-modern Western traditions. At the end, however, Europe will probably be the most important stage on which the creation-drama of a new, not only post-postmodern but also post-commercial and post-consumer globalising culture will be played out. A drama, or perhaps a boiling pot, in which our Western cultural traditions, and (more importantly) values, should make a positive contribution without losing their face and their historical (and perhaps also religious) roots.

However, one can face this problem only after the West had become openly aware (and proud) of its identity and cultural roots, and also actively interested in the maintenance of this awareness. This task should unite us all: those who recognise and respect our civilisation’s religious foundations as well as those who feel at home only with its secular implications and achievements of the recent centuries. What is namely unique to Christian civilisation (and practically non-existent in other cultures) are not only specific religious symbols modelling the *Ultimate Reality*, or Judaeo-Christian moral principles, but also rational world-view systems, both pre- and post-Enlightenment. Including modern variations based on atheistic or agnostic presumptions. And including much of what today comes under the roof of post-modernism, be it philosophy or derived domains of social sciences, as long as they aspire to extend, refine or complement, rather than completely disavow, and replace, the accumulated knowledge and world views of the past centuries. But what is the reality with many of those who see themselves as the intellectual avant garde of the West? Not only on narrowly ethnic, but also on more general levels, we see a negativism directed towards one’s own roots, a self-rejection and self-denial, attitudes that undercut the very branch we all sit on.

You told my people that your system was best. We have come to accept that. We have come to believe that. The dispossessed, despised adapted to your system.

Now you say that you were wrong and that we were wrong to believe you. Suddenly you are saying that what brought this country together, made it independent, ensured its defence, saw it through peace and war, and saw it through depression and prosperity, must all go. I cannot see the need for change. I cannot see how it will help my people.

Neville Bonner, the first Australian Aboriginal senator

The conceptual template that is post-modernism functions primarily to make really dull people feel better about themselves.

Deconstruction ... is merely a lavish diversion intended to award complexity to all forms of discourse.

Post-structuralism ... is a pernicious fad seized upon by feeble-minded Marxists who are miffed that no one thinks they are sexy or radical anymore.

Helen Razer in THE AUSTRALIAN 16/6/98

Indeed, what I find disturbing more than anything else, goes well beyond the German scene. It is the already mentioned tendency to interpret negatively, even outrightly attack, our Western heritage, not only its German variety. One cannot even compare the stain left on German history by the Nazis with the 'stain' left on Australia (or the US for that matter) by the fact that their ancestors did not settle (or occupy, for those who prefer this expression) Australia (or America) in gloves and according to rules of tolerant conduct (a concept that became common only in the West, and that practically only in the second half of twentieth century). Nevertheless, the same 'politically correct' clichés are used to negatively interpret their history, using almost the same patterns of critiques and condemnations as in the case of Germany. So one is tempted to forget about the horrifying details of Holocaust, where very few things can be explained and nothing excused, and begins to wonder why is almost the same intensity used to denounce other situations from Western history, situations where the times and historical settings can explain, and often also excuse, many things. And one is led to seek a common denominator (no, I am not going to dwell on some conspiracy theories, the situation is much more complicated) for all these tendencies to negatively interpret our history and indirectly the *whole* of our (Christian) heritage.

Also the old theories, that wanted to treat you not according to who you were, but which group you belonged to, are being revived. Of course, this time they do not come from circles preaching racial or cultural superiority. They are sanctioned by the publicly more and more acceptable protagonists of 'political correctness': You are endowed with certain rights or privileges not merely according to your *personal* needs or merits but according to which group you were born into. Previously it was the sadly known membership of a superior race, today it is your membership of one of the so-called minority groups, like Australian aborigines, American blacks, homosexuals etc.⁶ According to this ideology, injustices — real or imagined — suffered by members of the particular minority group are to be rectified by privileges or social benefits administered to present day members irrespective of whether they personally deserve them, or whether they are in a needy situation measured *by criteria equally applicable to the whole population*. This criticism, of course, has nothing to do with a view that would deny help to those who *actually need* that help, be as it may be, that a great part, perhaps the majority, of them belong to a minority group.

However, the problem does not stop here, at a negativist reinterpretation of Western history or a deviation from the Christian emphasis (reinvigorated by Enlightenment) on the value of a person as an individual, rather than the group he does, or is deemed to, belong to. More and more frequent are attacks of certain post-modern theorists not only upon traditionally philosophical positions, where counter-arguments are lost in a labyrinth of various world-views defending 'common sense' from dif-

⁶ Of course, this ideology is reappearing, or rather surviving, also in various racist or nationalistic forms. However, these forms are, thanks God, not considered respectable by the shapers of public opinion.

fering starting points. The attacks are conducted also upon basic (epistemological) principles of how to interpret results — theoretical as well as experimental — of (physical) science. Although here they are opposed by practically all specialists, this time united by common sense underpinned by a proper understanding of the theory and concepts it is built on, as well as by practical experience. The prattlings of a post-modernist author brandishing e.g. mathematical terms that he/she cannot understand, provoke laughter — or consternation — in any specialist irrespective of his/her world-view or philosophy of life.

The intellectual driving force of this negativist phenomenon in our culture is provided by epistemological relativists and nihilists or ‘politically correct’ moralistic opportunists. Though having been brought up in our culture — or perhaps precisely because of that — their behaviour resembles in much respect that of a spoiled adolescent who wants to prove his adulthood by vandalising his/her parents’ ‘living’ environment, criticising them as being morally old fashioned, and ridiculing everything that in their world used to be inviolable. They show very little respect for values and wisdom of their predecessors, a respect that is a prerequisite for a continuous and healthy progress. This is quite unlike the situation among scientists: no contemporary mathematician or computer scientist, engineer or physicist, will mock and ridicule primitive equipment, mechanical calculators or slide rulers used by specialists of a previous generation because he/she knows that without them there would not be all the computers and other contemporary technological achievements. This logic, so it seems, does not apply to social scientists, especially those writing for the general public.

On a more practical level, the present crisis in western thinking can perhaps be seen as the result of a ‘marriage’ between *economic rationalism* and *political correctness*. A marriage that seems to be quite successful as far as media-domination and public opinion-forming are concerned. Before 1989 the ‘rightist’ (economic) thinking used to characterise USA and the ‘free world’, whereas the ‘leftist’ (ideological) thinking was cultivated in the USSR and its satellites. After 1989 both these ways of thinking have found a common platform in the US, and from there is this successful but intellectually rather dubious double-product exported to the whole world, especially its western part.

As far as ‘political correctness’ itself is concerned, it is a phenomenon whose beginnings are usually placed in 1968, the year of student unrests at American and West-European universities. These students are now at the age of Bill Clinton, Joschka Fischer [German Foreign Minister] or Daniel Cohn-Bendit [an influential EU parliamentarian, a greenie] and belong to the political and intellectual leaders of the West. Yesterday’s rebellious students are becoming established representatives of theory and practice, thinkers and politicians. Having rid themselves of their youthful inclination to riots, today they occupy positions of responsibility. From there they continue their rebellion against the generation of their parents, lending a seal of legitimacy to a disrespectful, even ridiculing, attitude towards their parents’ values and traditions. In particular, those explicitly Christian.

Let us leave aside the (probably unanswerable) question of the origins of this negativism in philosophy: Enlightenment, Nietzsche, Heidegger? Its manifestations can be easily traced to their turbulent beginnings at American universities in the late sixtieths. A deep analysis of the rationale and immediate implications of this paradigm change on American (and Western in general) universities is provided by the book *The Closing of American Mind* (Simon & Schuster 1988) written by an ‘eye witness’, Alan Bloom, a philosophy professor at the University of Chicago. His favourite philosophers are Plato and Rousseau and so in the eternal dispute between Descartes’ ‘*coeur*’ and ‘*raison*’,

or C. P. Snow's two cultures *literary intellectuals* and *natural scientists*,⁷ he stands on the grounds of the former. Thus his critique of relativism and negativism is conducted from inside, in distinction to critics like Gross, Levitt, Sokal (see later) whose criticism comes from the outside, from positions of mathematics and natural science. The book became a best-seller. He criticises cultural relativism that would like to see the hitherto privileged position of the West disappear in the "republic of cultures":

Cultural relativism succeeds in destroying the West's universal or intellectually imperialistic claims, leaving it to be just another culture. So there is equality in the republic of cultures. Unfortunately the West is defined by its need for justification of its ways or values, by its need for discovery of nature, by its need for philosophy and science. This is its cultural imperative. ... History and the study of cultures do not teach or prove that values or cultures are relative. All to the contrary, that is a philosophical premise that we now bring to the study of them. This premise is unproven and dogmatically asserted for what are largely political reasons. (p. 39)

Another point he makes is that of the internal contradictions caused by a cohabitation of cultural relativism on one hand and a new ethical fundamentalism on the other hand.

... we live with two contradictory understandings of what counts for man. One tells us that what is important is what all men have in common; the other that what men have in common is low, while what they have from separate cultures gives them their depth and their interest. ... One is cosmopolitan, the other is particularistic. Human rights are connected with one school, respect for cultures with the other. Sometimes the United States is attacked for failing to promote human rights; sometimes for wanting to impose "the American way of life" on all people without respect for their cultures ... When the critics of U.S. in the name of culture, and of the Ayatollah in the name of human rights, are the same person, which they often are, they are persons who want to eat their cake and have it, too. (p. 191-2)

In a certain way the post-modern orientation in philosophy arose from twentieth century existentialism (more precisely, from its extreme versions), where it is often also hard to tell 'what it is all about'. Retrospectively, existentialism contained what turned out to be positive elements (Buber, Jaspers, Marcel etc.) as well as negative ones (Sartre and, now so it seems, also Heidegger himself). The more is this true about post-modern streams which also contain, beside the all-relativising French school (Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, Deleuze etc.), more constructive contributions to Western culture, for instance hermeneutics (Gadamer, Ricoeur). As long as their different and new insights are taken as enriching knowledge, and not as corrupting and destroying everything accumulated over centuries.

We shall not dwell on such philosophical details. Instead, in order to illustrate the crisis by its concrete repercussions, we shall cast a brief look at some projections of this post-modern paradigm into the fields of (a) psychology, (b) philosophy of history, (c) philosophy of science.

(a) *Psychology: psycho-narcissism as 'Ersatz religion'*

Let us start again with a quotations from Bloom's book:

Value relativism can be taken to be a great release from perpetual tyranny of good and evil, with their cargo of shame and guilt, and the endless efforts that the pursuit of the one and the avoidance enjoin. Intractable good and evil cause infinite distress—like war and sexual repression—which is almost instantly relieved when more flexible values are introduced. One need not feel bad about or uncomfortable with oneself when just a little value adjustment is necessary. (p. 142)

The domain now supervised by psychiatrists, as well as other specialists in the deeper understanding of man, is the *self*. ... Modern psychology has this in common with what was always a popular opinion, fathered by Machiavelli—that selfishness is somehow good. ... The great change is that a good man used to be the one who cares for others, as opposed to the man who cares exclusively for himself. Now the

⁷ C. P. Snow, *The Two Cultures*, CUP 1965.

good man is who knows how to care for himself, as to opposed to the man who does not. (pp. 173&178).

This exaltation of selfishness can be illustrated by many fashionable quotes. For instance, the psychologist and counsellor Nathaniel Branden introduces one of his manuals (*Honoring the self: self-esteem and personal transformation*, Bantam Books 1985) with these suggestive words:

Shall I honor or shall I betray the self? ... Do I belong to myself or to others? Is the primary purpose of my self the pursuit of my own happiness and the fulfilment of my own positive potentialities, or is it compliance with the wants and expectations of others? Do I live by my own vision of things or by the vision of others? Is my basic concern with my own approval or with the approval of others? Am I to rely chiefly on my own mind or on the minds of my parents or teachers, leaders or guru? ... (p. xii)

Was it indeed necessary to debase to such an extent the existentialists' honoured teaching about authentic (in distinction to non-authentic) existence? In place of underscoring the need for a (psychologically or morally) balanced attitude — between demands of 'selfishness' and those of 'submission to authority' — classically associated with the concept of conscience, he proposes:

to demonstrate that not selfishness but absence of self is the root of most of our evils, that selflessness is our greatest personal, interpersonal, and social danger and has been throughout most of our history... (p. xiii)

This indeed he tries to illustrate in the book, mainly in the part dealing with ethics. He treats as almost identical the notions of *selfishness* and *self-esteem*, though "traditional religionists" (the name he assigns to those he is arguing with) have always criticised only the first term, whereas they unquestionably value self-esteem as positive. His main target of attack is self-sacrifice, mainly its Christian variety which he does not distinguish very much from the degenerate forms of sacrificing the self to the interests of the nation, the working class etc. in fascist or communist systems. He handles in a similar way altruisms that he sees as an ethical principle which

holds that a human being must make the welfare of others his or her primary moral concern, placing their interests above those of self; it holds that an individual has no right to exist for his or her own sake, that service to others is the moral justification of one's existence, and that self-sacrifice is one's foremost duty and highest virtue. (p.202)

The essence of altruism is the concept of self-surrender and self-sacrifice. It is the self that altruism implicitly regards as evil, since selflessness is its moral ideal; it is an antiself ethics. ... (p.216)

This, of course, is not a definition of altruism only its caricature. After all, the notion is derived from the Christian "love your neighbour (the same) as yourself" (i.e. not more than yourself), where self-sacrifice is seen only as an act of love and subservience to God. Though it is probably true that self-sacrifice does not make much sense if one lets oneself be guided only by physiological or psychological drives. Branden claims further:

The respect and goodwill that persons of high self-esteem tend to level toward other persons is profoundly egoistic; they feel, in effect, "Other people are of value because they are of the same species as myself." This is the psychological basis of any emotion of sympathy ... (p. 216).

Perhaps it is indeed true that this is all that psychology can say about the value of human beings. But in that case there is an even more obvious need for some ethical norms that stand beyond and above the dispositions and moods of the self (or his/her guru). The word 'species' is understood here apparently in its biological meaning, and so Branden's "psychological basis" says in fact only that "the value of a human being is in him being human", not a very deep insight. By the way, if one replaced the word 'species' with the term 'race' or 'nation', the quote would sound very much like a

psychological (or even moral?) justification of racism, nationalism. This the author obviously did not intend.

As we all know, there used to be religious apologists who, standing firmly on religious assumptions as something a priori given and beyond dispute, 'refuted' the arguments of atheists or agnostics. With Branden it is the other way around: standing firmly on atheistic (or at least agnostic) positions, which he regards as a priori given and beyond dispute, he 'demonstrates' the unacceptability of the principles of Judaeo-Christian ethics not only from the point of view of psychology but also of ethics itself. For instance, he wants to act as an adviser to women who have moral problems with the teaching about abortion, or to rich men who are irritated by the parable of the camel and the eye of a needle. Had indeed such people sought his advice, they could have saved their money knowing beforehand how he would advise them. I myself used to go through various stages of stress when unable to prove or disprove some mathematical hypothesis in connection with my research. Had I been as futile as to look for an advise from a psychotherapist or counsellor, he/she would not have decided for me whether the hypothesis holds or not. He/she would probably have advised me to quit mathematics, to change my vocation, if doing such research causes me unbearable stress. The average psychotherapist is namely as much an authority in matters of mathematical research as he/she is in matters of the often uneasy resolution of a believer's conflict between narrow self-interest and dictates of conscience (or even authority). The part on mathematics will be accepted even by Branden, not so the other part.

Paul. C.Vitz, himself a professor of psychology, is a sharp critic of this self-worshipping psychology. He writes on a more abstract level than Branden and is, of course, not as well-known as Branden or Alan Bloom. According to him, the main theoreticians of this direction in psychology are Eric Fromm, Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow and Rollo May. In his book with a suggestive title *Psychology as religion: The cult of self-worship*, (Aslan Lion 1977) he describes the effects of ego-psychology as follows:

Selfist psychology emphasises the human capacity for change to the point of almost totally ignoring the idea that life has limits and that knowledge of them is the basis of wisdom. For selfists there seem to be no acceptable duties, denials, inhibitions, or restraints. Instead, there are only rights and opportunities for change. An overwhelming number of the selfists assume that there are no unvarying moral or interpersonal relationships, no permanent aspects to individuals. All is written in sand by a self in flux. The tendency to give a green light to any self-defined goal is undoubtedly one of the major appeals of selfism, particularly to young people in a culture in which change has long been seen as intrinsically good. (p. 36)

This psychological glorification of egoism has its outcome in moral attitudes and appraisals and so it is not an accident that many advocates and propagators of moral relativism, and subjection of moral norms to the moods and temper of the self, are indeed to be found among psychologists and psychotherapists of Branden's orientation.

Perhaps this is also the proper place to say something about psychological violence. Though not as barbaric and for the outsider as repulsive as physical violence, it is often much more effective in brain-washing or 'breaking somebody's spirit'. Such a psychological and mass-media inspired manipulation of individuals or the public is also much more bearable than the rude violence of communist methods (which in their turn were again 'more endurable' than those of the Nazis). However, it is also true that the less physico-brutal and the more psycho-manipulative is a violence the more long-lasting are its results. This is at least what one can conclude from comparing the long-lasting effects on the population of communism and fascism. Even the Soviets were aware of this to the end

of their reign when they began to ‘cure’ political dissidents in psychiatric institutions. In the West, cultural reeducation is not done so directly, not so drastically and in such an organised manner. It is done more subtly, through media helped by the diligent and persistent work of ideological pawns or ‘missionaries of the new Ersatz religion’. They are to be found mostly among some psycho-counsellors who, for instance, confuse selfishness with self-esteem. These ‘missionaries’, in distinction to medically qualified psychiatrists,⁸ often ‘cure’ the person by cutting off his/her cultural (e.g. religious) roots.

The fight against traditional, mostly Christian, models and values — that once was conducted by rational arguments on the field of world-views — accompanies much of today’s post-modernism. And it is conducted mainly on the battlefield of psychology.

However, one thing has to be emphasised here: Nobody claims that in the past, before the emergence of this self-psychology, there were no egoists or otherwise immoral people. The accent here is on the word “immoral”: they offended against the then widely accepted norms (of conduct). Because whatever was the actual practice, there existed an ideal that people strived towards, either sincerely or hypocritically (in order to be accepted by society). Today’s self-psychologists change — deliberately or not — these commonly accepted *norms* of Judaeo-Christian personal ethics. They deprive people of the ideal of unselfishness based on the command “love thy neighbour”. What remains are only ideologically justified commands of a collectivist nature about the need to defend the rights of exploited classes, of impoverished nations, ethnic and cultural minorities, homosexuals, races wronged in the past etc. Admittedly, personal social commitment, helping the needy, and so on, are still appreciated but rather as something belonging to the aesthetic, emotional sphere. Or in the utilitarian sense, as something advancing the common good and not as the outcome of a *personal* life lived in accordance with explicitly defined moral norms. Instead of these, one preaches now a psychologically justified egoism à la Branden, that is, a fusion of attitudes that were classically kept very much apart, namely selfishness and self-esteem.

It is only seemingly a paradox that this glorification of the individual goes hand in hand with a negative world-view and a cultural self-denial that is one of the topics of this paper. An exaggerated negativism in relation to inherited common cultural traits and values must be compensated by an equally exaggerated emphasis on psychological, sometimes only instinctive, determinants of the self. In this way a social negativism complements a psychological ‘positivism’. A complementarity that is an exact opposite of the situation, where the social context (class, race, nation) is idolised and self-denial is demanded from the individual, a situation we have known in fascism and communism. As it always is the case, the proper solution is somewhere in between, in a balance between a person’s psychological and social determinants or inputs into his/her identity. Neither self-exaltation nor self-denial, neither on the individual nor on the social/cultural level.

This, however, has brought us too far into more abstract questions of ethics so we better stop. Let us only note that another sphere where epistemological and mainly moral relativism is having woeful consequences, and which is also indirectly connected with this paradigm change in psychology, is the crisis in the understanding of Christianity, including Catholicism, as a world-view and ethical

⁸ For instance, Victor Frankl, psychologist and psychiatrist, founder of the “third Viennese school of psychology” (after Freud and Adler), calling his method *logotherapy*, wrote some forty years ago, as if replying to Branden: “... human existence is essentially self-transcendence. By the same token it cannot consist in self-actualization; man’s primary concern does not lie in the actualization of his self, but in the realization of values and in the fulfilment of meaning potentialities which are to be found in the world rather than within himself or within his own psyche as a closed system.”, c.f. Viktor Frankl, *Psychotherapy and Existentialism*, Pelican Books 1973, p. 71.

system, as a cultural establishment. Here too, traditional external ‘enemies’, atheism and agnosticism, are showing themselves often to be less dangerous than various Trojan horses brought into Christianity by this recent paradigm change.

(b) *Philosophy of history: literary critics and social theorists*

Much has already been said about tendencies to interpret negatively parts, even essential ones, of western history. On a theoretical level it is cultural relativism that necessitates this negative interpretation of the Christian West in order to justify views and interpretations claiming to be taken from perspectives of other civilisations or cultures that until recently were dominated by the West and by a western interpretation of the world. Perhaps so far so good. However, there is a second stage of this relativism, when the same weight is given to all points of view, to all interpretations. Not only those rooted in centuries old (western or non-western) traditions, cultures or races but also those artificially exaggerating one particular, ideologically prioritised, aspect of historical reality, represented by all sorts of cultural studies, textual studies, women’s studies, peace studies, media studies etc. From there it is only a small step towards the rejection of any conception of ‘historical truth’. By the way, this runs parallel to an even more absurd epistemological relativism when phenomena studied by science are thus interpreted, as we shall see later.

The Australian historian Keith Windschuttle describes this state of affairs in his book with a suggestive title *The killing of history: How a discipline is being murdered by literary critics and social theorists* (Macleay Press 1994). Before we quote from him, let us try to look at how this all came about.

Gertrude Himmelfarb, a theoretical historian, in her book *The New History and the Old* (Harvard University Press 1987) refers to this new history as *social history*,⁹ whereas the more traditional one she calls *political history*, and characterises them as follows:

... the new history tends to be analytic, rather than narrative, thematic rather than chronological. It relies more upon statistical tables, oral interviews, sociological models and psychoanalytic theories than upon constitutions, treaties, parliamentary debates, political writings or party manifestos. Where the old history typically concerns itself with regimes and administrators, legislation and politics, diplomacy and foreign policy, wars and revolutions, the new history focuses on classes and ethnic groups, social problems and institutions, cities and communities, work and play, family and sex, birth and death, childhood and old age, crime and insanity. Where the old features kings, presidents, politicians, leaders, political theorists, the new takes as its subjects the “anonymous masses”. The old is “history from above”, “elitist history”, as is now said; the new is “history from below”, “populist history.” (p. 14)

For a lay person like myself, this simply means that the two views are two complementary ways of writing history. Himmelfarb too sees it that way, warning only against extremists who want to see in social history the only valid way of writing historical narratives. She says:

... neither the subject nor the methods of social history ... are at issue but their dominance, which itself reflects the assumption, increasingly common in the profession, that these subjects and methods represent a higher form of history, more real and significant, more elemental and essential, than the old history. About this tendency there is no question: one need only look at the programs and the meetings of the American Historical Association, or at the newer historical journals, or at applications for grants, or at the titles of recent and prospective dissertations. (p. 22)

Thus we see here the same pattern as in the case of post-modernist views in philosophy, where not

⁹ Its beginnings are connected with the prestigious French periodical *Annales d’histoire économique et sociale* founded in 1929 which sheltered avant garde historians and historiographers, later also anthropologists, sociologists, demographers, psychologists and linguists.

everything, only its epistemologically relativising and nihilistic forms can be reproached. The same is true about social history as defined by Himmelfarb: it represents a legitimate new approach and reproachable are only its 'totalitarian claims'

The analogy goes further. Just as extreme post-modernism in philosophy arose from a respectable function of existentialism as a complementary partner of analytic philosophy (logical positivism) so also extremist versions of social history (masquarading under various forms of culture studies) arose from its respectable function as the complementary partner of political, or conventional, history. If one keeps to this complementarity, the perspectives of social history give valuable new insights.

I am not sure in what form and to what extent did this excessive importance given to methods and contents of social history lead to its near coincidence with the extreme trends of cultural studies. Apparently this over-ambitious social historicism is not much different from what was called *new historicism* in the US in the eighties. Windschuttle explains:

The revival of historicism aimed at providing a more socially oriented or contextual type of criticism. As such, it fitted fairly readily into the broad framework of the emerging cultural studies movement. New historicism ... produced the first group of literary critics to bring their techniques to the writing of history. (p. 17)

He describes these new techniques or methods as follows:

(They are) not simply arguing that works of literary criticism that focus on the past add an extra dimension to our conventional view of what should be contained within the discipline of history. Rather ... the insistence that culture *defines* history, constitute an attempt to overturn the traditional concept of the discipline and replace it with another. Society is no longer a place in which material events occur but is redefined as a 'cultural system'. Literature is no longer something autonomous, nor is it able to transcend its time by telling us about the universal predicaments of humanity. Instead, it is bound within the ideology of the prevailing cultural system. Works of history are defined as 'texts' and thereby accorded similar status to works of literature. Overall, written history is reduced to a text that is nothing but the ideological expression of the prevailing cultural system. Debates about what happened in the past no longer need to be conducted by one historian discovering 'facts' that counter or contradict the views of another. The belief that there are 'facts' about history is no longer accepted as the starting point for debate, but is itself seen merely as one ideological position among several ... History debate is reduced to conflicts within the ambit of literary and cultural studies, that is, to conflicts between different approaches to the study of texts. (p. 19)

One could argue that supporters of such views would formulate them differently. Nevertheless, Windschuttle's description is at least comprehensible. The same applies to:

The study of history is essentially a search for the truth. Without the claim to be pursuing truth, writing history would be indistinguishable in principle from writing a novel about the past. A work that does not aim at truth may be many things but not a work of history. (p. 185)

Richard J. Evans in his pioneering work *In Defence of History* (W. W. Norton & Co., 1997, 2000) describes in these words (referring to McCullagh) what an objective writing of history is all about :

Objective history in the last analysis is history that is researched and written within the limits placed on the historical imagination by the facts of history and the sources which reveal them, and bound by the historian's desire to produce a true, fair, and adequate account of the subject under consideration. (p.220)

This differs very much — apparently not only in its clarity — from a definition of history “as a narrative discourse, the content of which is as much imagined as found” given by Hayden White, one of the leading representatives of historical studies. Or from the post-modernist Elizabeth Ermath's view that “the distinction between what is invented and what is real is one that for many reasons we can-

not afford”. (Both quotes come from Patrick O’Brien, *An Engagement with Postmodern Foes, Literary Theorists ...*, at the address <http://ihr.sas.ac.uk/ihr/reviews/pob.htm>.)

[For those who know what the term *partially ordered set* means in mathematics¹⁰, may I add a brief (and, of course, oversimplified) model of how I see the truthfulness attribute of historical narratives. Modelling the collection of all existing narratives of a particular historical period, covering a given topic, etc. as a partially ordered set with the relation “is more truthful, more accurate in describing reality, than” then from the very mathematical definition of that term, it does not follow that it is either totally ordered nor that it contains a maximal element. Total orderedness would namely mean that one could decide about any two historical descriptions, narratives, which one is “more truthful” and the existence of a maximal element would assume the existence of a description that is absolutely true, i.e. “more truthful” than any other — both views rather rigid or, may I say, old-fashioned. On the other hand, the position of epistemological relativists would correspond to a model of the collection with no relation whatsoever of the sort “is more truthful, more accurate in describing reality, than”.]

Richard J. Evans, although a critic of post-modernist excursions into history, finds also some conciliatory words for them:

Post-modernism in its more moderate guises has thus helped open up many new subjects and areas for research, while putting back on the agenda many topics which had previously seemed to be exhausted. It has forced historians to interrogate their own methods and procedures as never before, and in the process has made them more self-critical and self-reflexive, which is all to the good. (p. 216)

It is right and proper that post-modernist theorists and critics should force historians to rethink the categories and assumptions with which they work and to justify the manner in which they practice their discipline. (p. 220)

One could probably agree with this. After all, the ‘conservative’ Himmelfarb says more or less the same thing about the mutually complementing functions of what she calls political and social history. However, an equally conciliatory tone cannot be applied to post-modernists’, more exactly epistemological relativists’, excursions into natural science. It is namely not as simple (at least as far as physical science is concerned) as being put by the already quoted Hayden White, that

...insistence that only historians know what historians really do is similar to modern scientists’ objections to being studied by sociologists, ethnographers, philosophers and historians.

Notwithstanding the positive nod this statement obtains from Evans (op cit. p. 10). The difference lies in the fact that physical theories cannot be critically assessed, or even understood, without an adequate understanding of mathematical symbols and concepts that are necessary to formulate them. An understanding that one can gain only through many years of study, not overnight. The only analogue in social sciences would be a situation, which also happens quite often, when outsiders express critical judgments on topics whose proper understanding depends crucially on a familiarity with religious symbols; an understanding that also cannot be acquired without intensive intellectual effort (and perhaps also good will). Otherwise expressed, the borrowing of mathematical concepts and symbols without a proper understanding of what they actually mean, with the aim to explain one’s views, especially on epistemological aspects of science, would correspond to an outsider wanting to pass a critical judgment on a historical text without knowing (or even caring to know), what period the text refers to. This will be the main theme of the next section.

¹⁰ Those who do not know what partially ordered sets are, please skip the paragraph.

(c) *Philosophy of science: post-modernist and post-kuhnian impostures*

Post-modernist philosophers and their advocates often dismiss their critics by saying these do not understand the text they criticise. Indeed, it often looks so as if only the initiated could understand what the post-modernist writer had in mind. I too had this unpleasant feeling when writing on preceding topics, that I was disapproving of something I did not properly understand. I remember marx-leninist philosophers from my Czechoslovak past, who tried to support their dialectical materialism by referring to Einstein's theory of relativity without having the slightest idea about the mathematics through which it was expressed. Nevertheless, when reading some of the post-modernists' texts one cannot escape the feeling that not even the author himself/herself knows what he/she is talking about. But how to prove this?

Thomas Aquinas allegedly used to say, when he could not understand a text at a first reading: "I am stupid." When also after a second reading he could not understand it, he admitted: "Certainly either I or the author is stupid." If even after a third reading he still could not understand the text, he put it aside with the remark: "Definitely, it is the author who is stupid." That is, the author himself does not understand what he is writing about. Who can nowadays be so assured of himself/herself as St. Thomas was? Enter Alan Sokal, a young professor of physics at New York University with his unprecedented hoax.

In spring 1996 a highly respected American cultural-studies journal, *Social Text*, published an article with the strange title *Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity*. Its author, Alan Sokal, supported his ideas by extensive quotations from prominent French and American thinkers. Parallely with the submitting of this article, he had sent in another one to another journal with the request that it be published only after the appearance of the first one. In this second article he revealed that the first article was a parody. His goal was to attack, by means of satire, the widespread misuse of scientific terminology, and the promiscuous extrapolation of ideas from mathematics and the natural sciences to social sciences. More generally, his aim was to denounce post-modern relativism, which holds that truth is a mere social convention. As a by-product, this hoax has demonstrated that the editors of *Social Text* would publish anything, without checking with an expert the parts (from mathematics and physics) they could not be expected to understand, including a manuscript that does not make sense to anybody, as long as it seems to agree with their ideological prejudices. By accepting with all seriousness an intentional caricature of their own doctrines, they demonstrated that they themselves did not understand them. Indirectly, this cast an unfavourable light at the scholarly level of all these cultural- and science-studies excursions into philosophy of science.

Sokal's hoax unleashed an animated debate in intellectual circles around the world, mainly the English speaking part. In order to give weight to his arguments he co-authored with the Belgian physicist Jean Bricmont the book *Impostures Intellectuelles*, the English translation of which appeared under the title *Fashionable Nonsense: Postmodern Intellectuals' Abuse of Science*, (Picador 1998). Here they assemble and analyse a series of texts illustrating the physico-mathematical mystifications perpetrated by post-modernist authors Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Bruno Latour, Jean Baudrillard, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and Paul Virilio.

The Sokal-Bricmont book abounds with quotes from these authors, that make it obvious to anybody with basic undergraduate training in mathematics, that they simply do not make sense, perhaps with-

out a need for such a thorough analysis as offered by the authors of the book. And, of course, those who do not have the appropriate mathematical qualification, should accept the recommendations of specialists not to try to understand such crazy texts. The same as they accept the recommendations of other specialists not to eat meat from a crazy, i.e. mad, cow.

There is, however, one objection that deserves a closer attention. Theo Theocharis in a letter to the *Notices of the American Mathematical Society* (February 1999) writes (similarly M. Beller in *Physics Today*, Sept. 1998)

It is generally believed that post-modernism was originated by culture studies in the revolutionary ambience of 1960's France. But from which prior paradigms might the French post-modernists have derived their (now rightly recognised as) daft ideas? Might they have been influenced by the philosophical utterances of earlier eminent mathematicians and scientists (mostly quantum physicists) ? (p. 190)

This is followed by quotes from prominent physicists, like

- ... two sorts of truths: trivialities, where opposites are obviously absurd, and profound truths, recognised by the fact that opposite is also a profound truth. (Niels Bohr)
- The universe is not only queerer than we suppose, but queerer than we can suppose. (J. B. S. Haldane)
- Mathematics may be defined as the subject in which we never know what we are talking about, nor whether what we are saying is true. (Bertrand Russell)
- It is more important to have beauty in one equation than to have them fit experiment. (Paul Dirac)
- Imagination is more important than knowledge. (Albert Einstein)

Indeed, these quotes would sound ambiguous, even confused, if they were part of a philosophical essay or argument. They make sense only to those (usually fellow specialists) who already know what the author had in mind and might just like the way it is expressed.¹¹ Such statements do not intend to convince anybody, they are not meant as an argument (perhaps with the exception of Bohr) in a philosophical debate. This is quite different from the situation, criticised by Sokal et al., where our post-modernists write abstract philosophical discourses building their argument on concepts and terms borrowed from mathematics or physics which in that context do not make sense.

There are *three points* to be made about the difference between writing mathematics (or physics etc.) and writing essays dealing with topics from social sciences. The *first point* is about *logical clarity*, i.e. about 'not writing non-sense': I used to advise my students (of pure mathematics) when preparing them for exams that the next best thing to giving the right answer is to leave the question (that they did not know the answer to) unanswered. Even to give a wrong answer is preferable to giving an answer that does not make sense. The good student differed from the bad one not by being always able to reproduce the theory or solve the problems, but by the fact that his/her answers made sense, even when occasionally wrong. In principle, this rule should apply to any scholarly essay or argument. However, in social sciences, where concepts are not always clearly defined (c.f. below) it is indeed sometimes hard to keep the argument clear. This is very different from the situation in mathe-

As far as the laws of mathematics refer to reality, they are not certain; and as far as they are certain, they do not refer to reality.

Albert Einstein

¹¹ R.M. Bauer (Notices AMS, June/July 1999) in his answer to Theocharis characterises these quotes similarly as "... tongue-in-cheek aphorisms meant for an in-house audience and are anything but post-modernist impostures — they are candid declarations in varying degrees of irony and discouragement."

matics and natural sciences where the need for an unequivocal clarity is an elementary requirement. This is one of the reasons why excursions of epistemological relativists into philosophy of science leave their obscure arguments so exposed when they operate with mathematical terms in a context that does not make sense. But if such authors keep to the realms of social sciences, and use only those concepts from mathematics and physics they properly understand, it is much more difficult to decide whether — to borrow from St Thomas — ‘stupid’ is the author or the reader. Because, as already mentioned, many a post-modernist approach to classical topics can yield valuable new insights even if not immediately understandable to the average reader.

The *second point* to be made about this difference concerns the way terms are *defined*. In a proper mathematical exposition all the terms used are clearly defined (with the exception of a few basic concepts, like point, set, element etc.) either in the text itself or in its prerequisites. And in the very rare cases, when a term has acquired more than one meaning in literature, it is mandatory to say explicitly which of the definitions is being used. In mathematics there are no, or should not be, terms or concepts that are ambiguous, whose proper definition does not exist or lacks clarity. The situation is different in philosophy, or social sciences in general, where many words have either explicitly more meanings, more ‘definitions’ and/or their meaning is given only by a more or less agreed upon, and commonly accepted, usage. Here a strong emphasis is on that “more or less”: in order that a discourse or argument be at all comprehensible there must exist a ‘gentlemen’s agreement’ between the author and the reader that when referring to a particular term they both have the same in mind. One of my hobbies is to browse through dictionaries looking for ‘definitions’ of some abstract words (like civilisation, philosophy, truth, etc.). The difference between such a dictionary — my favourite is *Merriam-Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language* — and an Encyclopaedia lies in the fact that the former has to ‘define’ the term in one sentence, whereas the latter will describe it, often circumstantially, in many paragraphs, even pages. As stated above, the difference between such a ‘definition’ and a proper definition, as used e.g. in mathematics, is expressed by the need of a ‘gentlemen’s agreement’ to understand the former, whereas a proper definition is ‘self-explanatory’ (to anybody who is already acquainted with the terms used and defined before). This should also explain the difference between the usage of specialist expressions in natural and social sciences, a difference that caught our epistemological relativists with their pants down. A good example of a term that does not have a definition, only many ‘definitions’ needing such a ‘gentlemen’s agreement’ to be understandable, is “culture” used repeatedly throughout these pages. (See also Appendix.)

The *third point* refers to honest misunderstandings caused by the fact that some words have both a clear definition in mathematics, as well as an established usage in social sciences, a usage that often does not resemble the mathematical definition at all. Such words are for instance *linear*, *dimension*, etc. Of course, mathematics does not have a monopoly on the usage of these word. It is only the ‘illegal border-crossings’ (between mathematics and social sciences) that should be avoided. For instance, often the concept *linear* is understood first in its ambiguous meaning (in expressions like “linear thought” referring probably to logical and rational thinking of Enlightenment and so-called classical science) and immediately afterwards one refers to non-linear systems of post-Newtonian physics (as opposed to linear ones in Newtonian physics), when every undergraduate students of physics knows that many differential equations of Newtonian physics are non-linear (in the precise mathematical meaning of the word) whereas basic equations of post-Newtonian physics are linear. Another example is the word *complementarity* borrowed from quantum physics that we have also referred to here quite often in the sense of mutually complementing properties, views etc. The post-

modernist Arkady Plotnitsky devoted this word a whole book (*Complementarity: Anti-Epistemology after Bohr and Derrida*, Duke Univ. Press 1994) where he assigns to it a much deeper but also much more obscure meaning. One has to admit here that his ‘illegal border-crossing’ is being helped by quotes from the philosophising physicist Niels Bohr, who naturally knew what he was talking about when referring to quantum physics but statements of both of them relating to abstract epistemological questions are completely mystifying. At least to me. A third example is the word *model* used in mathematical logic, and the following is a clear example of warning the reader about its duplicate meaning:

...The use of the word “model” in model theory is somewhat different from (and even opposed to) usage in ordinary language. In the latter, a model is a copy or ideal representation of some real object or phenomena. A model in the sense of model theory, on the other hand, is supposed to be the real thing. It is a mathematical structure, and that which it is a model of (a set of axioms, say) plays the role of the idealisation.

A. Pillay, *Model Theory* in *Notices of the AMS* 47/December 2000.

Unfortunately, such an honesty when ‘crossing borders’ is very rare in post-modernist writings. Examples abound.

So much on Sokal’s hoax and its ramifications. Before his and Bricmont’s book was published there appeared another book, *Higher Superstition: The Academic Left and Its Quarrels with Science*, by Paul R. Gross and Norman Levitt (John Hopkins UP 1994) which caused a similar uproar. Its acceptance by natural scientists was, however, not as univocal as that of Sokal in spite of the fact that it criticised and exposed similar post-modernist travesties. The reason for this is, in my opinion, that Gross and Levitt see these escapades as a direct consequence of leftist views prevalent in social science departments at American universities, whereas Sokal and Bricmont argue along lines acceptable also to those mathematicians and physicists whose political and world-view orientations are more to the left. Here it might be added, that if one rebukes Gross and Levitt for their ideological bias, so can one rebuke Sokal and Bricmont for their one-sidedness and oversimplification bordering on dilettantism, when treating some fields in philosophy or social sciences. For instance, one gets the impression that their understanding of religious symbols and concepts is as naive and confused as the understanding of mathematical symbols and concepts of those post-modern writers they rightfully expose.

Notwithstanding this, Sokal and Bricmont as well as Gross and Levitt analyse and denounce the same state of affairs. So the question remains, how could it come to such an absurd situation. We were used to uncompromising infights between ideological left and right, progressives and conservatives, political East and West. But *Science Wars*, as they call it, that is a battle over the meaning of natural sciences and their modelling language, mathematics? A battle where on one side of the barricades stand those who have a working knowledge of mathematics and physics (although they do not claim to have definite solutions to all philosophical problems connected with the subject of their work) and on the other side are those who think they have the right answers to philosophical questions arising in e. g. physics but have a very distorted idea of how mathematics and mathematical models of physics work.

There were times when it was unthinkable to enjoy the ‘gifts of nature’ without feeling awe and gratitude towards the Creator. Come Enlightenment, more exactly the atheism that sprang from it, and this became thinkable. • Until recently it was unthinkable to enjoy the ‘gifts of scientific and technological progress’ without respecting the rational developments that led to these achievements, and which came to fruition through Enlightenment. Now come our cultural and epistemological relativists and suddenly such a disrespect becomes thinkable. Although this situation is more serious, because what is put in jeopardy are basic certitudes of world-views of us all, be they built on theist, agnostic or atheist assumptions.

It began with the historian Thomas S. Kuhn who in his ground breaking dissertation *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* (U. of Chicago Press, 1962, 1970 with a postscript) introduced the terms *paradigm* and *paradigm shift* to describe the way research and discoveries in science are being done. Since then Kuhn's explanations have become widely accepted by those who view science from the standpoint of humanities. But Kuhn had also his critics, and among the most outspoken was the recently deceased Australian philosopher David Stove, who in his book *Anything goes: origins of the cult of scientific irrationalism* (Macleay 1998) wrote that Kuhn "mixes the history with the logic of science" and is willing to "dissolve even the strongest logical expressions into sociology about what scientists regard as decisive argument" (p. 72). The already quoted historian K. Windschuttle in his Foreword to Stove's book summarises Kuhn's teachings as follows:

Kuhn offered a sociological explanation of how dramatic changes in scientific opinion and methods come about. According to Kuhn the range of techniques, assumptions and theories used by the members of a particular scientific field can be termed a "paradigm". Within a paradigm scientists practice "normal science", which is characterised by periods of calm and steady development dominated by one accepted set of concepts. However, normal science is often disrupted by scientific revolutions, such as the overthrow of Ptolemaic astronomy by that of Copernicus, or the replacement of Newton's mechanics by Einstein's theory of relativity. These 'paradigm shifts' occur because anomalies or observations inconsistent with the dominant perspective produce a crisis that eventually leads the scientific community to loose faith in the existing paradigm. The door is then opened for a scientific revolution to occur to establish a new paradigm Kuhn also argued or what he called the incommensurability of scientific theories. (p. 2-3)

Stove actually criticises also Karl Popper, Kuhn's main opponent (as well as their respective pupils Lakatos and Feyerabend) whom he regards rather as Kuhn's precursor, because instead of the traditionally accepted thesis that a theory is verifiable by experiment, Popper maintained that only such theory is scientific which is falsifiable. This, according to Stove, undermines the belief in inductions that are a basic rational (though not logical) criterion of epistemological preferability of one theory over another. However, Stove agrees entirely with Popper when he reprimands Kuhn for his "steady refusal to distinguish the history or sociology of science from the logic or philosophy of science" (op. cit. p. 22). We shall not be concerned here with Stove's criticism of Popper because it is more than likely that it is Kuhn, and not Popper, who is the, albeit unwilling, initiator of all that non-sense that so much outraged Sokal. And not only him!

It is rather an irony that these new concepts and views by means of which Kuhn wanted to explain changes in the way science, in particular physics, sees the world, much better characterise dramatic changes in the development of social sciences: terms like paradigm, paradigm change became household items exactly in works treating topics from humanities. In physics, namely, even the most dramatic changes are 'quantifiable', the passage from Newton to Einstein or Planck happened with the not very much changing mathematics in the background. Mathematics could explain, or at least manipulate, both the old and new models. On the other hand, approaches and views of Marx or Freud, and after all Kuhn himself, represent more basic upheavals, more basic changes of quality, i. e. world-outlooks including associated values. These new models of reality cannot be explained, compared, even handled in the background with some a priori given symbolism as is the case in physics, where this symbolic background is provided by mathematics. Albeit, one could argue that humanities too have this a priori, symbolic background, namely the world of (theology and) religious symbols depicting *Ultimate Reality* but this is not nearly as universally accepted as is mathematics in case of physics and quantifiable science in general. Einstein can communicate with Newton in the language of mathematics but such a common, paradigms-bridging language does not exist in humanities any more. Especially if one takes into account the latest paradigm, epistemological relativism and nihilism.

Kuhn has also something else in common with Marx and Freud. The tendency and readiness to generalise their new and interesting insights as ‘all-explaining’. Including applications to areas different from where they made their original observations, and, may I add, different from their own field of expertise. Thus Kuhn, as a science historian, offers interesting new insights as far as social and psychological aspects of scientists’ work are concerned, but not so when he expands these insights to epistemology, to a theory about the actual process of knowing and managing physical reality. A process that has to be taken as independent of the dispositions or moods of the scientist and his/her social surroundings in order to give any purposeful meaning to scientific research and activity. Naturally, from the point of view of the extreme post-modernists criticised by Sokal, such a difference does not exist in principle. So it is not surprising that they appropriated Kuhn’s theories and extrapolated them *ad absurdum*.

Of course, Kuhn cannot be accused of epistemological absurdities. His camouflaging of the rational essence of the scientist’s search for the “best description of physical reality” with his/her social conditioning and circumstances is much more subtle. The scientists calls this somewhat cumbersome expression “best description of physical reality” simply “truth”. It is for him/her indispensable because it gives meaning to his/her exploratory endeavour. Although different philosophers give the term “truth” different meanings, and our relativists apparently consider it completely redundant. Kuhn, too, sees this concept as more or less irrelevant for his view, but says it more cautiously:

A scientific theory is usually felt to be better than its predecessors not only in the sense that it is a better instrument for discovering and solving puzzles but also because it somehow a better presentation of what nature is really like. One often hears that successive theories grow ever closer to, or approximate more and more closely to, the truth. ... Perhaps there is some other way of salvaging the notion of ‘truth’ for application to whole theories, but this one will not do. There is, I think, no theory-independent way to reconstruct phrases like ‘really there’... I do not doubt, for example, Newton’s mechanics improves on Aristotle’s and that Einstein’s improves on Newton’s as instruments for puzzle-solving. But I can see in their succession no coherent direction of ontological development. On the contrary, in some important respects, though by no means in all, Einstein’s general theory of relativity is closer to Aristotle’s than either of them is to Newton’s. ... (op. cit. p. 206)

Indeed, the concept of (ontological) truth is not necessary for the internal consistency of a physical theory, and perhaps also for its applicability¹². However, no theory hangs in the air. A physical theory is only a ‘software’ which cannot be realised without a ‘hardware’, a human being, the scientist who puts it together, verifies or just utilises it for the creation of other such software, other theories. An advocate of the social and cultural aspects of scientific research should not have to be reminded of this. And this ‘hardware’ cannot function without the concept of truth, as vague as his/her understanding of its philosophical content might be. Kuhn’s semi-ironical expression “puzzle solving” apparently refers to the agreement of theory with experiment, to its ability to predict phenomena, degrading thus the scientist’s professional activity to the pursuit of some personal hobby. As far as the last sentence of the quote is concerned, decades ago a neo-thomist observed that Thomas Aquinas would have better understood Einstein than Newton. The point here is not the unverifiable utterances but their difference: the last statement refers to the frame of mind of the thinker (Thomas), influenced by his time and environment, whereas Kuhn makes a statement about the theories themselves, where

¹² In mathematics one knows that a sequence can converge to an element which does not belong to the space where those elements live (only to an, often artificially constructed, completion of that space): for instance $\{1/n\}$ where the space is the set of all positive numbers. So one can imagine some physical theories ‘converging’ to something, call it ‘truth’ that lies outside the perceptible (by scientific means) world. Compare this with the model of a partially ordered set of all historical narratives on a given theme suggested earlier, though in case of models of the physical world the existence of a *unique* truth existing outside the measurable world seems to be more indispensable, at least as a working hypothesis.

proximity can be, to a certain extent, measured by their mathematical presentation.

Kuhn devotes quite a lot of space to the topic Newton-Einstein, but somehow neglects to pay enough attention to mathematical models which can best handle this relation. For instance:

... if Newtonian theory is to provide a good approximate solution, the relative velocities of the bodies considered must be small compared with the velocity of light. Subject to this condition and a few others, Newtonian theory seems to be derivable from Einsteinian, of which it is therefore a special case. (p. 99)

One can principally agree with the first sentence, however, the second one is more ambiguous because the relation is not that simple. In reality, the mathematical model of Newtonian theory can be obtained from the mathematical model of Einstein's special relativity by a precisely defined (limiting) procedure ($v/c \rightarrow 0$). A similar situation arises with Einstein's model of gravitation (general theory of relativity) or quantum physics. Thus Newton's theory is not so much a special case of Einstein's but rather can be produced from it: its model is obtained as a limit of Einstein's model in a *mathematically unambiguously defined* manner. Only then can one deduce from the *mathematical properties of limit* that in practical situations, namely where v/c is very small, the predictions of the two models differ so little that it is impossible to tell them apart by measurement. The Newton model is then preferable for practical purposes because of its relative simplicity. In case of quantum physics one would have to formulate this somewhat differently, but the essence remains.

There are many other examples where mathematics allows us to obtain one model by a limiting procedure from another one, although the theory they describe look conceptually rather different. For instance, in classical physics the equations of the behaviour of a particle (defined as a finite mass concentrated in a geometric point) can be obtained from the much more complicated equations describing the motion of a finite body of mass. Another example is the modelling of the surface of Earth as a flat plane (rather than a rotational ellipsoid) which, for practical purposes when mapping small portions of the surface, is quite adequate, and mathematically can be seen as the process of replacing the ellipsoid by its tangent plane.

Am I not splitting hairs with this emphasis on what must seem to be just a slight difference in formulating the relation Newton-Einstein (and other ones of the kind classical vs. new physics)? The answer can be seen in the rather strange conclusion to which Kuhn arrives, apparently as a consequence of not making the mathematical background of the problem sufficiently explicit. These lines follow immediately after the bid we quoted above¹³:

But, the objection continues, no theory can possibly conflict with one of its special cases. If Einsteinian science seems to make Newtonian dynamics wrong, that is only because some Newtonians were so incautious as to claim that Newtonian theory yielded entirely precise results or that it was valid at very high relative velocities. ... Purged of these merely human extravagances, Newtonian theory has never been challenged and cannot be.

Some variant of this argument is quite sufficient to make any theory ever used by a significant group of competent scientists immune to attack. The much-maligned phlogiston theory, for example, gave order to a large number of physical and chemical phenomena....If these were the only phenomena that the phlogiston theorists had claimed for their theory, that theory could never have been challenged. A similar argument will suffice for any theory that has ever been successfully applied to any range of phenomena at all.

¹³ One is reminded of philosophical somersaults, up to our times, concerning Zenon's aphorism about Achilles who will not catch up with a tortoise. The simple solution, of course, lies in the fact, that the old Greeks did not have the concept of a convergent infinite series.

The difference between the superseded phlogiston theory and the ‘superseded’ Newton’s model lies, of course, in the fact that in the first case there is no unifying symbolism by means of which one could express the relation between the old, phlogiston, and the new, Lavoisier’s, theories, whereas in the second case, as we have seen, this mediator is mathematics. I am quite aware that I assign mathematics and its mediating service to the epistemological function of science, a privileged position. This should not be that restricting, since we are here concerned mainly with physics, where the mathematical expressibility of a theory, its ability to formulate its assumptions and conclusion in mathematical form, is taken as the norm of its rationality and scholarly acceptability, if nothing else. This is not so obvious in biological sciences, although recent advancements of mathematical models in genetics, and elsewhere in biology, bear witness to an increasing importance of mathematical models in biological sciences as well, and thus also in associated philosophical problems.

[Between the publication of the two editions of Kuhn’s book I proposed the term *adequacy measure of a mathematical model* as a contribution towards the problem of truthfulness of physical theories.¹⁴ Leaving aside the mathematical symbolism by means of which I tried to express what I had in mind, let me recall that I actually distinguished two adequacy measures (of a mathematical model of a given complex of physical phenomena): *practical* and *theoretical*. In the first case it is the requirements of simplicity that prevail, in the second one that of universality, the first one ‘measures’ practical usefulness, the second ‘closeness to reality’. This duality also reflects the two parallel objectives of physics: to give a simple as well as unified picture of physical reality. For instance, for phenomena covered by the everyday engineering practice, the Newtonian model is the most adequate, its high practical adequacy outstrips its not so high theoretical adequacy. The situation changes when phenomena enter into consideration for which the theoretical inadequacy of the classical model cannot be neglected (because the numerical predictions of the classical model differ substantially from those of a theoretically more adequate one): then the classical model has to give way to e. g. a quantum theory model. A similar situation arises in the example mention before, when depicting an area on Earth as either part of a plane or that of a rotational ellipsoid: for local mapping purposes the practical adequacy of the first one prevails over its theoretical inadequacy.]

Another example showing how close to the extreme relativism of his followers can Kuhn come by ignoring the mediating function of mathematics:

Like the choice between competing political institutions, that between competing paradigms proves to be a choice between incompatible modes of community life. ... When paradigms enter, as they must, into debate about paradigm choice, their role is necessarily circular. Each group uses its own paradigm to argue in that paradigm’s defence.

The resulting circularity does not, of course, make the arguments wrong or even ineffectual. ... Yet, whatever its force, the status of the circular argument is only that of persuasion. It cannot be made logically, or even probabilistically compelling for those who refuse to step into the circle. ... As in political revolutions, so in paradigm choice — there is no standard higher than the assent of the relevant community. (p. 94)

I devoted to Kuhn’s obliteration of the difference between the epistemological and social aspects of scientific research so much space because in a certain sense it is precisely Kuhn who is at the root of this paradigm change to epistemological relativism. Not only in the reassessment of science but with repercussions leading also to the philosophical outlook of the French school of Derrida et al. And this, I have been trying to argue, can be seen, as constituting the intellectual background of the pre-

¹⁴ O gnoze obgikom význame matematických modelov, [On the epistemological meaning of mathematical models], FILOZOFIA XXI, Bratislava 1966, pp. 281-294.

sent crisis of our Western civilisation.

It is time to end here the critical part of this exposition and proceed slowly towards an attempt to evaluate the possibilities ahead, and to sketch something more constructive on the problem of how to preserve the preservable from our heritage, from the world that until recently was called the Christian West; including the question of whether such an effort is it worth at all. Can it survive as an important and respected progenitor of the new non-trivial globalised culture, as a core of something capable of further development, and at the same time critical of post-modern irrationalism and other latter-day delusions? Certainly not as the norm to which other cultures should be subjected which would correspond to the aims of a fossilised conservatism trying to clench desperately to things from the past. Thus neither a rigid conservation of our historical identity, nor a loss of historical continuity. Because, borrowing from botany, neither a fossilised nor an uprooted plant is considered as having survived; though in the latter case the actual decay might take some time to make the plant completely rot away. If that still means conservatism, so be it. Such a constructive conservatism was recently aptly described by the German politician M. Schipanski “Konservativ sein heisst nicht, den Wertewandel zu beklagen, sondern den Wandel zu werten.” [To be conservative does not mean to complain about the change of values, but to assess the change.] (FOCUS 13/2000).

Thus our goal will consist of two interdependent parts:

- (A) To try to investigate to what extent and in what form can one perpetuate viable elements from our Hellenic-Judeo-Christian-Enlightenment heritage. In other words, how to reformulate our cultural identity without a prevalence of negative elements that we have criticised here, and which make it unattractive for potential external carriers and/or partners. But at the same time, one has to add, without it admitting, and being compatible, with only one world-view, only one interpretation of this heritage. This, of course, does not necessary mean that in our exposition we shall not prefer one particular approach: the point is only in not making this preference incompatible with other (reasonable?) interpretations.
- (B) Assuming that one has in some way arrived at this revitalised Western identity awareness, to try to suggest in what form it can be integrated into — or, rather, become a crucial co-creator of — a non-trivial (i.e. non-commercial, non-consumerist, non-ideologised) global culture, that is, a ‘meta-culture’ serving as the ‘common denominator’ of particular (ethnic?, religious?) cultures and uniting the whole of humanity. Can West resume its traditional role of a leader (though not in an absolutist way any more) and pathfinder for other cultures?

I have to haste to assure the reader that I do not intend to claim to know the solution (or even a possible solution) to these two rather complex problems. The purpose of the present essay was an attempt to formulate these problems as coherently as possible, and to indicate the need, even urgency, to do something about it. If anything, I tried to argue against a *laissez faire* attitude leading to a ‘jungle of cultures’ where the stronger eats the weaker, vulgar pop-culture versions asphyxiate cultures with traditional roots, where commercial interests hand-in-hand with ‘political correctness’ dictate moral values, where money-driven media decide which view is legitimate, and deserves support, where refined psychological methods of coercion mould the conformist and discourage the non-conformist.

In what will follow, I shall ‘gaze into conceivable futures’, and look at some aspects of possible solu-

tions. Mathematics, whose function as the symbolic background to view advancements in physics I defended here so strongly, will again play an important role. Of course, not as a symbolic background, only as a thought-catalyst when trying to organise social science data. For the role of a symbolic background, against which the various paradigm possibilities could be compared and ‘measured’, something else would have to be found. What I would like to aim at, is a kind of an undertaking reciprocating Kuhn’s approach: Kuhn provided valuable insights into philosophy of science, and was criticised only as far as he wanted to use his insights to replace findings (about the logic of discovery), that from his point of view he could not see. What I shall attempt at will be, departing from a mathematician’s way of thinking, to offer insights into some aspects of social science related to the concept of global culture, however without any claim at replacing other insights and findings that do not need to be inspired by mathematical thinking.

APPENDIX

Webster’s Third New International Dictionary of the English Language (Encyclopaedia Britannica 1966) cites a few definitions of *culture* which are relevant for our purposes:

- (a) the total pattern of human behaviour and its products embodied in thought, speech, action and artifacts and dependent upon man’s capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations through the use of tools, language and systems of abstract thought;
- (b) the body of customary beliefs, social forms and material traits constituting a distinct complex of tradition of a racial, religious or social group <a nation with many cultures>;
- (c) complex of typical behaviour or standardized social characteristics peculiar to a specific group, occupation or profession, sex, age, grade or social class <youth culture>.

For instance *Western culture* would correspond to the case (a) whereas a typical example of culture sub (b) is *ethnic culture*. We were not concerned here with culture in the sense of (c). Bassam Tibi states also that “Der Islam ist eine Zivilisation die sich aus zahlreichen Kulturen zusammensetzt.” [Islam is a civilisation consisting of numerous cultures] And further even more explicitly “Kulturen sind immer lokal und beziehen sich auf eine sozial bedingte Sinnstiftung, die sich stet in einem lokalen Rahmen vollzieht. Ähnlich gelagerte Kulturen können sich jedoch zu einer einheitlichen Zivilisation überregional groupieren.” [Cultures are always local, given by a socially conditioned local character. However, similarly positioned cultures can nevertheless be grouped into a super-regional civilisation] (Europa ohne Identität, p. 249). Thus Tibi’s civilisation corresponds to culture sub (a) and what he calls cultures correspond to (b). On the other hand the word civilisation is defined by Webster only as derived from the term civility, verbatim

an ideal state of human culture characterised by complete absence of barbarism and non-rational behaviour, optimum utilisation of physical, cultural, spiritual and human resources and perfect adjustment of an individual within the social framework; a particular state or stage of human advance toward civilisation; the culture characteristic of a particular time or place (as in <medieval civilization>).

Thus civilisation is always understood as an ideal model, which Tibi clearly did not have in mind. Not only Tibi’s but also Toynbee’s and Huntington’s “civilisations” correspond more to Webster’s culture sub (a).