



UNIVERSITY
OF WOLLONGONG
AUSTRALIA

University of Wollongong
Research Online

Faculty of Arts - Papers (Archive)

Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts

2007

How do we get the place of Europe in world history right?

Gregory C. Melleuish

University of Wollongong, gmelleui@uow.edu.au

Publication Details

Melleuish, G, How do we get the place of Europe in world history right?, in Mees, B and Koehne, S, eds, *Terror War Tradition*, Australian Humanities Press, Unley, 2007, 379-394.

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library:
research-pubs@uow.edu.au

How Do We Get the Place of Europe in World History Right?

Gregory Melleuish (*University of Wollongong*)

One of the great insults of the contemporary historical world is the term 'Eurocentric'. It is invariably combined with notions of European imperialism and the supposed desire of Europe to dominate the world. In fact the term 'Eurocentric' can have a fairly innocuous meaning, denoting no more than the simple observation that the terminology and periodisation that we use to describe European history may not have any relevance when we are dealing with non-European civilisations. For example what does 'pre-modern' mean in a Chinese context where many of the features of European modernity have been present for over a thousand years?¹

It is important to get the place of Europe in world history right. To use terms derived from the Australian experience, neither the 'black arm band' nor the 'three cheers' views of European history provide any real insight into its nature. One should neither belittle the European achievement nor attempt to exaggerate its significance. Only when Europe is placed in a proper world context will this be possible.

As a means of achieving some balance in this matter I should like to consider two recent attempts to provide a picture of Europe's relationship to the rest of the world. The first is John Hobson's *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation*, a book by a man with a mission to expose the arrogance of Europe and the West. The second is Richard Bulliet's *Islamo-Christian Civilization*.² Both of these works want to establish the proper historical context for understanding Europe. That is a fine purpose but unfortunately both of these books are driven as much by contemporary political agendas as by scholarly historical ones. They both pursue specific and explicit

¹ See R. Bin Wong, *China Transformed* (Ithaca, 1997), especially chapter 4.

² John M. Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation* (Cambridge, 2004), Richard W. Bulliet, *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization* (New York, 1984).

380 *The Place of Europe*

political agendas that do not do anything to enhance their arguments. Rather they make any reader suspicious of what they have to say. Hobson and Bulliet have somewhat different agendas. Hobson wants to establish the importance of the East, and China in particular, as the source of much of the technological innovation usually ascribed to Europe, while Bulliet wants to establish what Western Europe and the Islamic world have in common. But both are seeking to perform a similar task to that of Dipesh Chakrabarty's when he sought to 'provincialize' Europe. The irony in Chakrabarty's case was that he had to use the intellectual armoury of Europe, in the shape of Marx and Heidegger, to undertake his project.³

Hobson, in particular, has a very strong tendency to overstate his case. He seems to be obsessed with demonstrating that the West has an enormous hubris when it comes to its own achievements, most of which he argues came from elsewhere, and that it is a moral inferior in comparison with other civilisations.

His major target appears to be the nineteenth-century view that Europe was dynamic and progressive while the East was sunk in 'oriental despotism' and therefore stagnant and lacking in creativity. He spends much of his time demonstrating that many of the inventions claimed by Europeans as their own in fact had eastern, especially Chinese, origins. Some of this has been known for a long time, for example that both paper and printing came originally from China, but Hobson takes it much further. In any case, who was the original creator of any invention is often not all that important because, as Gordon Childe pointed out over 50 years ago, what really matters is how that technology is developed and adapted over a long period of time.⁴

Hobson works with a diffusionist model of culture. According to this model inventions are made only once and then spread elsewhere throughout the world. He has a strange view that it was the pastoral Avars who somehow transmitted the agricultural plough to the Slavs.⁵ His history is strained at times as he is determined always to make Europe into the villain and to demonstrate the superiority of other civilisations, especially China.

³ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe* (Princeton, 2000), especially the introduction.

⁴ V.G. Childe, *History* (London, 1947).

⁵ Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation*, p. 102.

Melleuish 381

Were Europeans in the nineteenth century as dismissive of the 'East' as Hobson would seem to believe? Consider the following passage from Tocqueville in *Democracy in America* about China: When Europeans first arrived in China, three hundred years ago, they found that almost all the arts had reached a certain degree of perfection there, and they were surprised that a people which had attained this point should not have gone beyond it. At a later period they discovered traces of some higher branches of science that had been lost. The nation was absorbed in productive industry; the greater part of its scientific processes had been preserved, but science itself no longer existed there. This served to explain the strange immobility in which they found the minds of this people. The Chinese, in following the track of their forefathers, had forgotten the reasons by which the latter had been guided. They still used the formula without asking for its meaning; they retained the instrument, but they no longer possessed the art of altering or renewing it. The Chinese, then, had lost the power of change; for them improvement was impossible. They were compelled at all times and in all points to imitate their predecessors lest they should stray into utter darkness by deviating for an instant from the path already laid down for them. The source of human knowledge was all but dry; and though the stream still ran on, it could neither swell its waters nor alter its course. Notwithstanding this, China had existed peaceably for centuries. The invaders who had conquered the country assumed the manners of the inhabitants, and order prevailed there. A sort of physical prosperity was everywhere discernible; revolutions were rare, and war was, so to speak, unknown. It is then a fallacy to flatter ourselves with the reflection that the barbarians are still far from us; for if there are some nations that allow civilization to be torn from their grasp, there are others who themselves trample it underfoot.⁶

⁶ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (London, 2003), p. 536.

382 *The Place of Europe*

A number of points derive from this passage:

1. Tocqueville is saying that the fate of China is by no means unique to the Chinese and can be suffered by other civilisations.
2. He is hardly critical of peaceful China, its prosperity and social stability.
3. The 'stagnation' of China may not be entirely wrong. Adshead argues that China was at its most dynamic under the T'ang when it looked outwards.⁷

Nevertheless there is much in Tocqueville's description of China that can be described as Orientalist. But then there is a real issue as to whether the 'Orient' is meant to describe an actual reality or is just an imagined landscape. After all where does the East begin and what part of the world is it meant to describe? The idea of the 'East' is very much a moveable feast. Were not the Germans 'eastern' in the eyes of the French? The name of Alexis de Tocqueville should alert us to the central issue in this matter. The Orientalism that Hobson so deprecates only makes sense when it is considered as the inverse of attitudes to America. On the one hand we have orientalism, on the other anti-Americanism. European writers have often tried to locate themselves between the two poles of the East and America. But just as the America of their imagination bears no relationship to the actual real America so the East is not an actual place but a creation of their imagination.⁸

Hobson argues that 'European identity' was constructed in opposition to Islam. This is an odd view. It is generally believed that European identity defined itself in relation to the Byzantine Empire and was consummated by the crowning of Charlemagne at a time when a Empress Irene occupied the imperial throne.⁹ Hobson says nothing about Byzantium and how Europe defined itself in relation to Byzantium. He also fails to recognise that there would have been no Crusades without the massive Byzantine defeat at the Battle of Manzikert and the crisis that it engendered in the Byzantine Empire

⁷ S.A.M. Adshead, *China in World History* (London, 1988).

⁸ On anti-Americanism as a discourse see Philippe Roger, *The American Enemy*, trans. Sharon Bowman (Chicago, 2005).

⁹ See especially Judith Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom* (London, 1987).

Melleuish 383

with the loss of its Anatolian provinces, for so long the core of the empire.

Hobson also has a very strange argument about the relationship between Christianity and Islam. He seems genuinely astonished that Christianity and Islam as Abrahamic religions could not settle their differences.¹⁰ He does not seem to appreciate the fundamental issue that while Islam could accommodate Christianity as an earlier, and inferior, revelation, there was no way that Christians could accept Islam. He makes the claim that Christians initially saw Muslims as pagans. This is not true. Christians most easily comprehended Islam as a Christian heresy as is demonstrated by its inclusion as a heresy by John of Damascus.¹¹

The sorts of mistakes mentioned above are fairly typical of Hobson's historical approach that is driven by a desire to paint Europeans as evil as possible and their role in world history as disastrous. There are few nuances or subtleties in his approach. For example his discussion of the Spanish in America does not mention that there were Black conquistadors, that black slaves were first suggested as a means of saving the Indians or the pivotal role of Blacks in keeping the Spanish Empire functioning in the Americas.¹² Nor, in his discussion of slavery does he mention Barbary slaving and the fact that a very large number of Europeans were enslaved until the Americans and the English rid the world of this evil.¹³

Equally while arguing that China may have been advanced technologically he does not point out that this did not prevent China from falling prey to nomadic barbarians, including the Mongols and later the Manchus. It was only after Qing imperialist advances into central Asia in the eighteenth century that this problem was resolved and China finally freed from nomadic incursions.¹⁴ Hobson also does

¹⁰ Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation*, pp. 108-9.

¹¹ Robert G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* (Princeton, 1997), pp. 484-89.

¹² See Henry Kamen, *Empire: How Spain became a World Power 1492-1763* (New York, 2003), Matthew Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest* (New York, 2003).

¹³ Robert C. Davis, 'Counting European slaves on the Barbary Coast', *Past and Present* 172 (2001), 87-124.

¹⁴ Peter C. Perdue, *China Marches West* (Cambridge, Mass., 2005).

384 *The Place of Europe*

not reveal that China suffered considerable environmental degradation as a consequence of her economic development.¹⁵

Nor does Hobson really discuss the population differentials between individual European countries and China and India. The European imperial powers were tiny compared to India or China. It is amazing, given their resources, that they achieved as much as they did in the Indian Ocean. Portugal, for example, did not have the people or resources, to dominate the Indian Ocean. The Chinese were only overtaken as iron producers by the English in 1800 but then China had a population about twenty times that of England.

One can accept many of Hobson's arguments about the opulence of China and India compared to Europe, but the fact remains that these societies could not protect themselves from invasion by pastoral nomads.

Hence Mote describes the situation of China at the time of the Southern Sung:

There is no doubt that China had the most advanced economy in the entire world during this period when its military power vis-à-vis its neighbours was at its lowest ebb ... military weakness did not have a stultifying effect on Chinese civilization, and in certain ways it generated constructive stimuli.¹⁶

Wealth did not translate into real military power. The country with the most advanced economy in the world succumbed to barbarian nomads.

Hobson is also so blinkered by an obsession with technological determinism coupled by his fixation on diffusionism. He fails to appreciate that technology is significant not as an end in itself but because of the way in which it is appropriated and used by particular cultures and civilisations. Printing was invented by the Chinese, but it became important in Europe because it was linked to literacy and a culture of conflicting ideas. By way of contrast the Muslims in the Ottoman Empire did not develop printing in the sixteenth and

¹⁵ Mark Elvin, *The Retreat of the Elephants* (New Haven, Conn., 2004).

¹⁶ F.W. Mote, *Imperial China* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999), p. 393.

Melleuish 385

seventeenth century but the Jews and the Christians in the empire did.¹⁷

To give another example, it may be true that the Chinese initially developed gunpowder weapons.¹⁸ That does not equal a military revolution. The military revolution was not just about weapons, it is about how those weapons were used about forms of military organisation and the cultural and social implications of those changes.

In other words, Hobson is not very sensitive to the relationship between technological change and culture. He is blinded by what he sees as the primacy of technology as the central factor driving human history. This lack of sensitivity to culture is reflected in his statement that Lancashire was the supposed place where 'the first blinding rays of modernity were supposedly emitted.'¹⁹ In fact it was north of the border in Scotland that it has been argued that modernity was invented in the writings of the philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment.²⁰

For Hobson technology and its diffusion from an 'original' inventor is central for any understanding of historical processes. Hence we find him determined to trace the seed drill from China to Britain despite any real evidence regarding this diffusion.²¹ In this case, but also in others, his method can be described as the 'Da Vinci Code' method of history. One looks for links and then creates a causal framework to connect them into a single causal chain. On the surface the causal chain seems plausible but collapses on any close inspection.

Although Europe was apparently defective in developing much of its own technology it was extremely capable of inventing its own racism with the Orient as its 'other'. He notes the importance for the Enlightenment of the link between climate and race as the foundation of Europe's racism. But he then he gives the game away when he states that Islamic figures Sa'id al-Andalusi and Ibn Khaldun had argued that Europeans 'were ignorant, lacked scientific curiosity and

¹⁷ Philip Mansell, *Constantinople* (London, 1997), pp. 45-46.

¹⁸ Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation*, pp. 58-59.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

²⁰ See Arthur Herman, *The Scottish Enlightenment* (London, 2003).

²¹ Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation*, pp. 203-5.

386 *The Place of Europe*

would remain backward' because they lived in a cold temperate climate.'²²

In fact there are quite a few pages in Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddimah* devoted to the whole issue of race and climate. For example he states that 'We have seen that Negroes are in general characterized by levity, excitability, and great emotionalism ... They are everywhere described as stupid.'²³ As Europeans 'stole' much of their technology from China, could it not also be the case that they 'stole' their racist ideas from other civilisations?

Part of the problem is that while Hobson decries stereotypes, when it comes to 'oriental despotism' he is happy to use them when it comes to Europeans. Hence he makes the claim that 'Europeans ... imagine themselves as liberal and democratic.'²⁴ Well, some

Europeans perhaps; the problem here is that he is confusing the 'West' with Europe. Russell Berman argues 'anti-Americanism is, fundamentally, an expression of hostility to societies of democratic capitalism.'²⁵ Many Europeans in the past have imagined themselves as being anti-liberal and anti-democratic. To be a European has often meant claiming the middle ground between oriental despotism and Anglo-Saxon liberalism, or as it is better known, America.

Hobson continually confuses Europe and the West. For example, he speaks of the 're-imagining of Greece' as central to European identity.²⁶ One assumes here that he means Athens. But this ignores the continuing influence of Rome, which as David Gress has argued, is far more important for Europe than Athens.²⁷ Hobson also forgets how important the model of Sparta has been for Europe. Both Rome and Sparta appealed because they were not democratic, possessing mixed constitutions and traditions of unrelenting militarism. Americans are the ones obsessed with democratic Athens.

On this score it is worth noting, as Patricia Crone has demonstrated, that the Islamic world had no real understanding of the Greek polis, as the one work of Aristotle they lacked was his *Politics*,

²² Ibid., pp. 220 and 297.

²³ Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqassimah*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton, 1967), p. 63.

²⁴ Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation*, p. 226.

²⁵ Russell A. Berman, *Anti-Americanism in Europe* (Stanford, 2004), p. 52.

²⁶ Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation*, p. 227.

²⁷ See David Gress, *From Plato to NATO* (New York, 1998), p. 97.

Melleuish 387

and hence viewed democracy through the prism of Plato.²⁸ The political heritage of ancient Greece, as well as that of Republican Rome, is claimed uniquely by Europeans.

Hobson makes the extraordinary claim that 'had racism never existed and had the West viewed the Eastern peoples as equal human beings, imperialism might never have occurred.'²⁹ I'm really not too sure what this means, except that Europeans were exceptional only in their racism and that because they were exceptionally racist they were also uniquely imperialist. Hence they were not any good at inventing things or creating the industrial revolution; European exceptionalism can only be defined by European racism and imperialism.

Europeans, he claims, were unique in carrying out 'ethnocide', the destruction of other cultures through imperial expansion.³⁰ Given that empires have been the staple of human political organisation since the establishment of what, for better or worse, we call 'civilisation' this is an extraordinary claim. Surely, most empires have committed 'ethnocide' at some point or other. The Romans committed this crime, as have the Chinese, the Ethiopians and the Muslims, to name but a few.

He argues further that because the Chinese under the Ming withdrew their maritime fleets this equalled them being good enough to 'forgo imperialism'. No John, the Chinese understood the need to concentrate on their land borders. In the eighteenth century they conquered large parts of central Asia. That was hardly 'forgoing imperialism'. Hasn't Hobson heard of Tibet?

Hobson compounds his problems by referring to European attempts to eradicate 'Eastern identity and culture'.³¹ What exactly is 'Eastern identity'? Is it just another version of that strange entity invented by politicians and known as 'Asian values'? Surely this sort of statement is about as useful as the term 'oriental despotism'.

There is a real problem in Hobson's use of language, his often superficial knowledge of history and his tendency to take arguments further than the evidence allows him to go. What Hobson says about

²⁸ Patricia Crone, *God's Rule Government and Islam* (New York, 2004), pp. 166 and 279.

²⁹ Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation*, p. 241.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 241 and 258-59.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

388 *The Place of Europe*

British economic development illustrates part of his problem.³² He correctly argues that war and state intervention played a highly significant role in the development of British capitalism. But he is not satisfied with this sensible argument; he wants to take it a step further and claim that Britain in the eighteenth century was a despotic state. A modest argument is always far more effective than hyperbole; an anti-European rant that not only irritates but which makes the reader question the many sane and sensible points that he does make. Hobson grants a lot to contingency in explaining the rise to power of Europe. The only agency that he is willing to grant to Europeans is that they were driven by an 'irrational racism'. Now there certainly is a lot of sense in the contingency argument. Europe's remoteness was important because it meant that Europe did not suffer the Mongol invasions that so afflicted the Islamic world; but it could not escape the Black Death. Europe's remoteness encouraged Europeans to take risks to get to the rest of the world. Certainly it can be said that had England not had good coal deposits it is difficult to see the industrial revolution starting there.

But there was European agency as well. There are things peculiar to Europe such as its family structure, the nature of the European state and the brutal competition between European states in what was for a long time the bloodiest and most militarised part of the planet. There can be no doubt that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it would have been far preferable to live in the Ottoman Empire or China than in Europe. Hobson seems to confuse agency and moral superiority. He wants to demonstrate that European success was not the product of Europeans possessing superior values. This is why he overdoes the racism and imperialism in European history. But agency does not necessarily imply moral superiority. There is what Hegel called the 'cunning of history'; civilisations can succeed because of factors that their members do not fully understand even as they are driven to act by those factors.

In the final analysis Hobson cannot explain why China failed to escape the Malthusian trap while Europe did. Certainly he is correct to point out that the European surge was relatively late; it is now generally accepted that even in the eighteenth century European and Chinese standards of living were roughly equivalent.³³ In his

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 248-57.

³³ Bin Wong, *China Transformed*, pp. 22-27.

Melleuish 389

obsession with the evils of European imperialism he fails to consider the other side of the equation, i.e. what went wrong for a large part of Eurasia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Qing China in 1750 was an extremely powerful state that could easily have resisted British advances; 90 years later it could not mount a unified response to the British in the Opium Wars. Christopher Bayly has argued that an 'industrious revolution' affected not only Europe but large parts of Asia during the course of the eighteenth century leading to commercialisation and prosperity in certain regions.³⁴ Peter Perdue has also argued that by the nineteenth century China was no longer an 'agrarian empire' but a commercialised society based on agriculture.³⁵ If the 'rest' was already commercialised before the advent of nineteenth-century European expansion, and really not far behind Europe in living standards, it raises the issue as to why they were unable to build on the foundations that they had already constructed. Bayley comments that the political systems of Asia and Africa had problems coping with this economic growth.³⁶

The real pity is that Hobson spoils an argument that contains many sensible elements by simply going too far in his desire to blacken Europe's reputation. He is seeking to break down stereotypes that he sees are Eurocentric. But in their place he just creates another set of negative stereotypes that do little to advance the historical argument regarding Europe's place in world history.

Richard Bulliet's *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization* has quite a different goal. Bulliet is concerned to demonstrate that the West and Islam are not engaged in a 'clash of civilisations' but are in fact complementary, sharing a common history such that it is possible to refer to an Islamo-Christian civilisation. He refers to this civilisation as a consequence of a 'prolonged and fateful intertwining of sibling societies enjoying sovereignty in neighbouring geographical regions and following parallel historical trajectories.'³⁷

He raises a number of possible objections to this idea.

However, he misses the major objection which is that Islamic civilisation is much wider than the Arab world and Christianity is

³⁴ C.A. Bayley, *The Birth of the Modern World 1780-1914* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 55-57.

³⁵ Perdue, *China Marches West*, p. 561.

³⁶ Bayley, *The Birth of the Modern World 1780-1914*, p. 58.

³⁷ Bulliet, *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization*, p. 10.

390 *The Place of Europe*

broader than the West. Islam was meant originally as the form of monotheism appropriate for Arabs. Only Arabs were forced to convert to Islam. In the longer term Islam became greater than just the Arab world as it absorbed Persian civilisation and outgrew the Greek world that it had conquered.

Christianity was always universal in intent; Paul's missions to the gentiles ensured that. Even today Christians can argue that they have more in common with Christians in other civilisations than with non-Christians in their own civilisation.³⁸ In any case what exactly is Christian civilisation? Huntington divides the Christian world into three civilisations. Where do the Orthodox fit into Bulliet's scheme? Or the three surviving Monophysite churches? We could combine the terms 'Arab-Islamic' and 'Latin Christian' to talk of an Arabo-Islamic-Latin-Christian civilisation if we wished to be precise, but surely that would be a very clumsy term.

The other objection is that closeness does not mean identity or even similarity. In the fifth and fourth centuries BCE the Greeks and the Persians were intertwined very closely. Does this mean that we should refer to a Hellenic-Persian civilisation?

Bulliet is specific as to which partnership he wants to specify when he writes that 'Western Christendom and Islam parallel each other so closely that the two faith communities can but best be thought of as two versions of a common socio-religious system.'

Writing with regard to Constantinople he says that 'these communities played negligible roles in the growth of Latin Christendom.'³⁹ Taken together these statements provide a truly bizarre historical picture. Islam was close to Latin Christendom but Greek Christianity was not. Was a Muslim ever Archbishop of Canterbury such as Theodore of Tarsus?⁴⁰

Bulliet then proceeds to compare Christian monks with the Islamic *ulama*.⁴¹ But surely Christian monks had more in common with Buddhist monks than with the legal scholars of the *ulama*. Religious knowledge and practice in Islam resolved itself into an issue

³⁸ Christopher Catherwood, *Christians, Muslims, and Islamic Rage* (Grand Rapids, 2003), p. 199.

³⁹ Bulliet, *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization*, pp. 15 and 17.

⁴⁰ On the links of the Greek Church with Western Europe in the early Middle Ages see Michael Angold, *Byzantium* (London, 2001), chapter 6.

⁴¹ Bulliet, *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization*, pp. 24-25.

Melleuish 391

of law and culminated in the four schools of Islamic Law. The Islamic legal scholar was much closer to a Jewish Talmudic scholar than to a monk devoted to asceticism. Lawyers in Europe generally were secular as was much of the law. The development of law in Europe, with its roots in Roman law and customary law was quite different to the Islamic case. It is worth remembering that the Sharia needed supplementing in the Ottoman Empire, especially in the areas of criminal law and property law, by Sultan law.⁴² This was because Sharia law was in some ways more like Jewish law than to what is understood as law in the West in that it spelt out the rules necessary to live a holy life. Hence Bernard Lewis comments that there were aspects of the Sharia that were 'more like a system of ideals towards which both individuals and the community were to aspire.'⁴³

Hence when Bulliet comes to compare the Islamic *madrasa* with the European university he does not appreciate the distinctiveness of the two civilisations. He assumes that both civilisations were moulded by their religious traditions.⁴⁴ This does not allow for the importance of the secular classical tradition in Europe. Islam's inheritance from the Classical world was quite different from that of Europe. Just as Islam did not owe anything to the Latin world, so Europe was not an heir to the Persian tradition. The linkage between Latin Europe and the Islamic world only works because he cuts the Orthodox Christian tradition, and hence Byzantium, out of the picture. As with Hobson, Bulliet manages to discuss the Crusades without mentioning Manzikert, the parlous state of the Byzantine Empire or the Fourth Crusade. He then continues by making the following statement:

Muslims today lament the fact that so few people in the West appreciate the massive transfer of culture, science, and technology that began during this period; that transfer, they maintain, paved the way for Europe's later scientific discoveries and intellectual sophistication.⁴⁵

⁴² Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 319.

⁴³ Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East* (London, 2000), p. 224.

⁴⁴ Bulliet, *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization*, p. 26.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

392 *The Place of Europe*

But, it could well be asked, how much of this came from Islam, how much from the Greeks and how much from Europe's own Classical inheritance?

The truth is that many of Bulliet's linkages and comparisons between Latin Europe and Islam are strained and lacking in real conviction. For example he tries to compare the 'popular religious' movements in late medieval Europe, including the Waldensians, Wyclif and the Hussites, with the Sufis.⁴⁶ This is difficult as the Sufis were mystics and are usually linked to non-urban popular religion that had a special place for saints. The comparison of Sufi brotherhoods with Protestant sects seems to me somewhat far fetched. Calvinists, who were protected by Muslims in Hungary, would seem to have more in common with the Wahibis than with the mystical Sufis who often had a special fondness for Jesus.

Bulliet comments that the break between church and state that occurred in the Western world did not happen in Islam.⁴⁷ Bulliet would have us believe that this divergence was purely the result of contingent factors. I think that there are much deeper cultural factors at work and that these are the result of significant differences between Latin Christianity and Islam. 'Render unto Caesar' simply never occurred in Islam because it never had a clear distinction between church and state. Islam and the Islamic polity were created together; Christianity was born in a state hostile to it; it had been in existence for almost 400 years before it became a state religion.

Islamo-Christian civilisation is clearly designed as an ideological concept to replace the idea of Judeo-Christian civilisation. The argument is that Islam has been portrayed as the 'other' of Christianity. Putting them together in a single civilisation is a strategy for overcoming that 'otherness'. But Latin Europe has had many 'others'. Sometimes Judaism was seen as the 'other', sometimes 'Eastern Orthodoxy' and more recently, sometimes America. The 'other' is a moveable feast depending on the issue under consideration. The one mixture that might make sense is that of a Byzantine/ Arab civilisation as the two danced around each other for centuries and often interacted. Both shared a Greek heritage while Western Europe had a predominately Latin heritage. But as we noticed earlier

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 34-38.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 38.

Melleuish 393

in the case of the ancient Greeks and the Persians proximity does not necessarily imply commonality.

In fact the idea that civilisations are built monolithically on a single religion is a highly questionable proposition. In the case of Latin Christendom the secular traditions of ancient Rome as well as the traditions of the Germanic invaders have to be included while Persian culture was extremely important in the making of Arabic-Islamic civilisation. And what would modern European culture consist of if one were to remove the Jews?

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the problem with both Hobson and Bulliet is that they are writing with a political purpose in mind, a purpose that often disfigures their arguments. For example, Hobson makes many sensible points and arguments, but he does so in such a way as to alienate readers and make them hostile to what seems to me to be a quite unexceptionable argument for a non-Eurocentric approach to the study of history. Similarly Bulliet has some interesting points but he takes them too far to support what is in the final analysis a tenuous argument. What is fascinating is the way in which both books cut Eastern and Orthodox Europe out of the equation as a means of strengthening their case. Both Hobson and Bulliet want to make direct connections between Latin or Western Europe and the Islamic world and to excise the 'other' Europe from history.

A good contrast, in this respect, is the work of Southeast Asian historian Victor Lieberman. Lieberman shares many of Hobson's anti-Eurocentric views but he is more moderate in his expression of them. He wants to develop 'a more generous, less adversarial calculus of Eurasian difference.'⁴⁸ Hence he is drawn to comment on Andre Gunder Frank's *Re-Orient* that 'in his enthusiasm to debunk the European Miracle, Frank made everything east of the Urals superior to everything to the West,'⁴⁹ A similar comment could be made with regard to Hobson.

Lieberman's theory is that north-western Europe, north-eastern Europe, Japan and mainland Southeast Asia are all parts of a Eurasian subcategory he calls 'protected rimlands'. In his two-volume history of Southeast Asia Lieberman is seeking to test this thesis and, in

⁴⁸ Victor Lieberman, *Strange Parallels* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 73.

⁴⁹ Lieberman, *Strange Parallels*, p. 74.

394 *The Place of Europe*

particular to look at comparisons between Europe and Southeast Asia, a sensible and useful way of proceeding.

In drawing together European and Asian history and getting a sense of how they relate to each other it is projects like that of Lieberman that hold out the best prospect of increasing our knowledge and ensuring a more balanced approach. The works of both Hobson and Bulliet should be a reminder that overtly ideological approaches to history are more likely to harm the cause being advocated than to aid it.