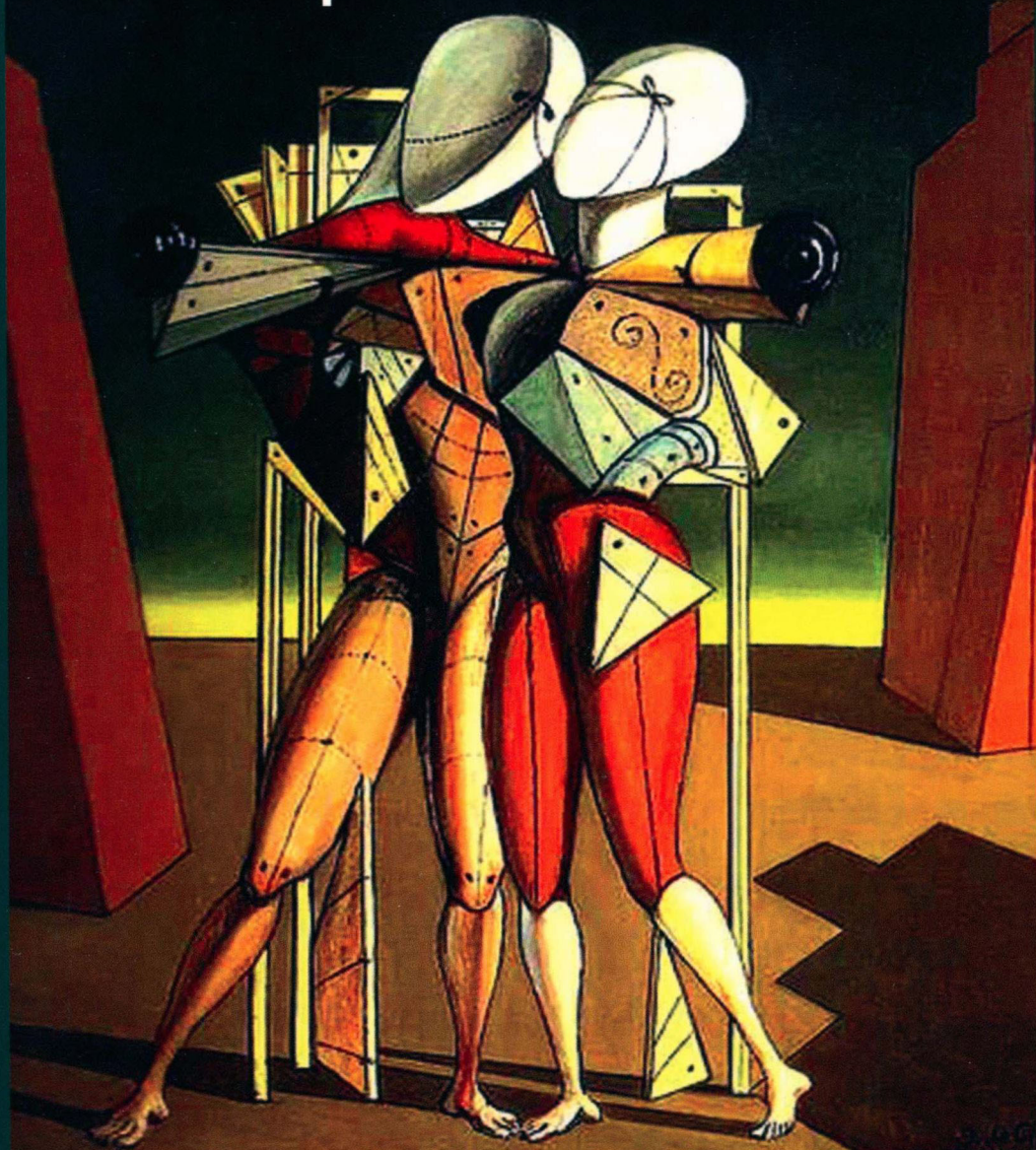


Culture & Civilization

Volume 2: Beyond Positivism and Historicism



Irving Louis Horowitz, editor

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VOLUME TWO:

BEYOND POSITIVISM AND HISTORICISM



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Introduction

THIS SECOND VOLUME IN this new series is to anchor the twenty-first century in the tradition of the new, to raise methodology into historiography, and to link qualitative to quantitative styles of work. The fragments of persons, nations, and ideas are woven into a coherent whole. As the new millennium develops it is becoming evident that science and society are critical pivots in the formation of a larger mosaic of culture and civilization. A serious cross-disciplinary tradition of large-scale studies has developed, and refuses to dissolve under the withering aspect of microanalysis. Whether flying under the banner of Arthur O. Lovejoy, George F. Kennan, Pitirim Sorokin, Arnold Toynbee, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, T. S. Eliot, Thorstein Veblen, Leszek Kolakowski, Isaiah Berlin, and countless others, it has become clear that making sense of the whole and not resting easy with bits and pieces of the human condition has become the mission of *Culture & Civilization*.

This second volume expands upon the initial efforts to deepen the sense of tradition offered by outstanding contributions ranging from Charles Murray, "The Happiness of the People"; Peter Watson, "Ideas: A History of Thought from Fire to Freud"; Evan Selinger, "Ethics and Poverty Tours"; Walter A. McDougall, "Are U.S. Foreign Policy Traditions Relevant to the Middle East?"; Raymond Ibrahim, "Violence in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam"; Michael Curtis, "Israel and Apartheid"; Marian L. Tupy, "Misguided Priorities and Persistent Poverty in Africa"; David Ronfeldt and Danielle

Varda, "Cyberocracy Revisited"; a retrospective by Leo Alexander on "Medical Science under Dictatorship"; and a series of brilliant new essays on Wyndham Lewis, Jonathan Swift, Max Scheler, and Thurman Arnold.

Culture and Civilization does not embrace idiosyncratic visions of the apocalypse or the end of empires—East or West. It does attempt to bring together immediate issues and ideas that are substantial and challenging. The essential polarity between democracy and autocracy is part of history and has now taken on larger, deeper dimensions in different political, economic, and ecological terrains of our day; civilization versus barbarism. The debate has sharpened, and requires solid tools of analysis and synthesis. The character of democratic culture is central to the global equation and closer knit systemic challenge. This volume is a sober, deeper response to such a challenge.

The twentieth century witnessed an explosion of science, but also of scientism, an emphasis on exact analysis, but also of positivism. The entire process seemed to betoken liberation from dogma and cloudy metaphysics. Positivism in philosophy and linguistic analysis in literature became the order of the century—at least the first half of it. And indeed, to the credit of such developments, precision gained in prestige as an end no less than a means. The analytic trumped the synthetic in one field of learning after another. It might well be argued that the moral tone of discourse changed dramatically from the nineteenth-century "romanticism" to the twentieth-century "realism." The will and the spirit were replaced by action and matter of fact. Metaphysics became less an ancient field than a matter of public derision.

However, in the process of shedding the dross of tradition, the unexpected took place, a hardening and toughening of the cultural arteries. As long as one stayed within the rigorous box of scientism and positivism, one could emphasize the mind without undue worry about the body. Consider the group without a need for the larger community, within the society one did not need civilization, and within the nation-state one could envision the other peoples and ethnicities as travelogue items. The problem is that the human impulse to speculate drove some of the best and the brightest to go

outside the sealed box of scientism and positivism. These “isms” were soon enough identified for what they were: ideologies of a modern kind. And as quickly as these post-romantic frames of confined reference were built, they soon enough showed their limits, and began to crumble.

Not that science and technology were themselves in any way lacking, or that specialization did not have a valid place under the roof of advanced learning. They were real enough in their construction and consequences. The rapidity as well

as the depth of change throughout the last century could hardly be imagined, and certainly was not reined in. The great weakness in classical conservative thought is to see science and technology as enemies of the past and hence of the future tranquility of the human

race. What in fact has been exposed is not science or technology, but the continuing vitality of traditional issues, interest, and values. Science came, but warfare did not disappear. Positivism swept through Europe but it did not prevent untold engineered horrors in the decimation of masses.

It turns out that polarities of good and evil, right and wrong, beauty and ugliness are neither readily overcome by technological advances nor summarily dismissed by formalist exercises in philosophy and the social sciences. Mandates for exclusivity of domains simply are inadequate. We are not back where we were in the eighteenth or prior centuries. Rather, we are faced with the multiple tracking of ideas no less than things. The rates of change in different areas of human endeavor differ profoundly. This can and has led to more complex policies but also to higher risks. Deaths once measured in the hundreds are now measured in the millions. The very magnitude of change and innovation creates a problem of responding with an equal or appropriate sense of retaining lives and sentiments of those impacted by development.

The “new science” of the time is thus an evaluation of these multiple forces and trends in what were formally viewed as exclusive

The rates of change in different areas of human endeavor differ profoundly. This can and has led to more complex policies but also to higher risks.

of each other. The “either/or” of science and religion, empiricism and mysticism has to contend with the “both/and” of so many of these fields of life and learning. In thinking about and reviewing the contents of the second volume of *Culture & Civilization*, it became apparent that to examine all these issues of poverty and wealth, race and religion, happiness and sorrow, the old boxes of exclusive domains simply do not work. They probably never have. I believe that the search for truths of our times either implicitly or explicitly have moved beyond constructed polarities into some larger structures of thought that seek prospects for synthesis as well as new patterns of analysis.

Irving Louis Horowitz
December 7, 2009

Culture & Civilization

Volume Two

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The Happiness of the People

Charles Murray

AMERICA'S CURRENT leaders seem to be leading us down the path to European-style social democracy. But although it makes for pleasant lives, the European model stifles human flourishing and erodes the civic and cultural institutions and habits that make for a vibrant, sustainable, and satisfying way of life. Moreover, critics of the European model are about to get a boost from scientific discoveries in neuroscience and genetics that human nature is not malleable, which will undercut the foundations of social democracy. The answer: American exceptionalism, in which individuals freely unite to construct a civic culture.

The question before the American nation: Do we want the United States to be like Europe?" The question has suddenly become urgently relevant because President Obama and his leading intellectual heroes are the American equivalent of Europe's social democrats. There's nothing sinister about that. They share an intellectually respectable view that Europe's regulatory and social welfare systems are more progressive than America's and advocate reforms that would make the American system more like the European system. Not only are social democrats intellectually respectable, the European model has worked in many ways. I am delighted when I get a chance to go to Stockholm or Amsterdam, not to mention Rome or Paris. When I get there, the people don't seem to be groaning under the yoke of an evil system. Quite the contrary. There's a lot to like—a lot to love—about day-to-day life in Europe, something that should be kept in mind when I get to some less complimentary observations.

The European model can't continue to work much longer. Europe's catastrophically low birth rates and soaring immigration from

cultures with alien values will see to that. So let me rephrase the question. If we could avoid Europe's demographic problems, do we want the United States to be like Europe? I will argue for the answer "no," but not for economic reasons. The European model has indeed created sclerotic economies and it would be a bad idea to imitate them. But I want to focus on another problem.

My text is drawn from *Federalist* 62, probably written by James Madison: "A good government implies two things: first, fidelity to the object of government, which is the happiness of the people; secondly, knowledge of the means by which that object can be best attained." Note the word: happiness. Not prosperity. Not security. Not equality. Happiness, which the Founders used in its Aristotelian sense of lasting and justified satisfaction with life as a whole.

I have two points to make. First, I will argue that the European model is fundamentally flawed because, despite its material successes, it is not suited to the way that human beings flourish—it does not conduce to Aristotelian happiness. Second, I will argue that twenty-first-century science will prove me right.

First, the problem with the European model, namely: It drains too much of the life from life. And that statement applies as much to the lives of janitors—even more to the lives of janitors—as it does to the lives of CEOs.

I start from this premise: A human life can have transcendent meaning, with *transcendence* defined either by one of the world's great religions or one of the world's great secular philosophies. If *transcendence* is too big a word, let me put it another way: I suspect that almost all of you agree that the phrase "a life well-lived" has meaning. That's the phrase I'll use from now on.

And since *happiness* is a word that gets thrown around too casually, the phrase I'll use from now on is "deep satisfactions." I'm talking about the kinds of things that we look back upon when we reach old age and let us decide that we can be proud of who we have been and what we have done. Or not. To become a source of deep satisfaction, a human activity has to meet some stringent requirements. It has to have been important (we don't get deep satisfaction from trivial

things). You have to have put a lot of effort into it (hence the cliché “nothing worth having comes easily”). And you have to have been responsible for the consequences.

There aren’t many activities in life that can satisfy those three requirements. Having been a good parent. That qualifies. A good marriage. That qualifies. Having been a good neighbor and good friend to those whose lives intersected with yours. That qualifies. And having been really good at something—good at something that drew the most from your abilities. That qualifies. Let me put it formally: If we ask what are the institutions through which human beings achieve deep satisfactions in life, the answer is that there are just four: family, community, vocation, and faith. Two clarifications: “Community” can embrace people who are scattered geographically. “Vocation” can include avocations or causes.

It is not necessary for any individual to make use of all four institutions, nor do I array them in a hierarchy. I merely assert that these four are all there are. The stuff of life—the elemental events surrounding birth, death, raising children, fulfilling one’s personal potential, dealing with adversity, intimate relationships—coping with life as it exists around us in all its richness—occurs within those four institutions.

Seen in this light, the goal of social policy is to ensure that those institutions are robust and vital. And that’s what’s wrong with the European model. It doesn’t do that. It enfeebles every single one of them.

Put aside all the sophisticated ways of conceptualizing governmental functions and think of it in this simplistic way: Almost anything that government does in social policy can be characterized as taking some of the trouble out of things. Sometimes, taking the trouble out of things is a good idea. Having an effective police force takes some of the trouble out of walking home safely at night, and I’m glad it does.

The problem is this: Every time the government takes some of the trouble out of performing the functions of family, community, vocation, and faith, it also strips those institutions of some of their vitality—it drains some of the life from them. It’s inevitable. Families are not vital because the day-to-day tasks of raising children

and being a good spouse are so much fun, but because the family has responsibility for doing important things that won't get done unless the family does them. Communities are not vital because it's so much fun to respond to our neighbors' needs, but because the community has the responsibility for doing important things that won't get done unless the community does them. Once that imperative has been met—family and community really do have the action—then an elaborate web of social norms, expectations, rewards, and punishments evolves over time that supports families and communities in performing their functions. When the government says it will take some of the trouble out of doing the things that families and communities evolved to do, it inevitably takes some of the action away from families and communities, and the web frays, and eventually disintegrates.

If we knew that leaving these functions in the hands of families and communities led to legions of neglected children and neglected neighbors, and taking them away from families and communities led to happy children and happy neighbors, then it would be possible to say that the cost is worth it. But that's not what happened when the U.S. welfare state expanded. We have seen growing legions of children raised in unimaginably awful circumstances, not because of material poverty but because of dysfunctional families, and the collapse of functioning neighborhoods into Hobbesian all-against-all free-fire zones.

Meanwhile, we have exacted costs that are seldom considered but are hugely important. Earlier, I said that the sources of deep satisfactions are the same for janitors as for CEOs, and I also said that people needed to do important things with their lives. When the government takes the trouble out of being a spouse and parent, it doesn't affect the sources of deep satisfaction for the CEO. Rather, it makes life difficult for the janitor. A man who is holding down a menial job and thereby supporting a wife and children is doing something authentically important with his life. He should take deep satisfaction from that, and be praised by his community for doing so. Think of all the phrases we used to have for it: "He is a man who pulls his own weight." "He's a good provider." If that same man lives under a system that says that the children of the woman he sleeps with will be taken care of whether or not he contributes,

then that status goes away. I am not describing some theoretical outcome. I am describing American neighborhoods where, once, working at a menial job to provide for his family made a man proud and gave him status in his community, and where now it doesn't. I could give a half dozen other examples. Taking the trouble out of the stuff of life strips people—already has stripped people—of major ways in which human beings look back on their lives and say, "I made a difference."

I have been making a number of claims with no data. The data exist. I could document the role of the welfare state in destroying the family in low-income communities. I could cite extensive quantitative evidence of decline in civic engagement and document the displacement effect that government intervention has had on civic engagement. But such evidence focuses on those near the bottom of society where the American welfare state has been most intrusive. If we want to know where America as a whole is headed—its destination—we should look to Europe.

Drive through rural Sweden, as I did a few years ago. In every town was a beautiful Lutheran church, freshly painted, on meticulously tended grounds, all subsidized by the Swedish government. And the churches are empty. Including on Sundays. Scandinavia and Western Europe pride themselves on their "child-friendly" policies, providing generous child allowances, free day-care centers, and long maternity leaves. Those same countries have fertility rates far below replacement and plunging marriage rates. Those same countries are ones in which jobs are most carefully protected by government regulation and mandated benefits are most lavish. And they, with only a few exceptions, are countries where work is most often seen as a necessary evil, least often seen as a vocation, and where the proportions of people who say they love their jobs are the lowest.

What's happening? Call it the Europe syndrome. Last April I had occasion to speak in Zurich, where I made some of these same points. After the speech, a few of the twenty-something members of the audience approached and said plainly that the phrase "a life well-lived" did not have meaning for them. They were having a great time with their current sex partner and new BMW and the vacation home in Majorca, and saw no voids in their lives that needed filling.

It was fascinating to hear it said to my face, but not surprising. It conformed to both journalistic and scholarly accounts of a spreading European mentality. Let me emphasize “spreading.” I’m not talking about all Europeans, by any means. That mentality goes something like this: Human beings are a collection of chemicals that activate and, after a period of time, deactivate. The purpose of life is to while away the intervening time as pleasantly as possible.

If that’s the purpose of life, then work is not a vocation, but something that interferes with the higher good of leisure. If that’s the purpose of life, why have a child, when children are so much trouble—and, after all, what good are they, really? If that’s the purpose of life, why spend it worrying about neighbors? If that’s the purpose of life, what could possibly be the attraction of a religion that says otherwise?

The same self-absorption in whiling away life as pleasantly as possible explains why Europe has become a continent that no longer celebrates greatness. When life is a matter of whiling away the time, the concept of greatness is irritating and threatening. What explains Europe’s military impotence? I am surely simplifying, but this has to be part of it: If the purpose of life is to while away the time as pleasantly as possible, what can be worth dying for?

I stand in awe of Europe’s past. This makes Europe’s present all the more dispiriting. And should make its present something that concentrates our minds wonderfully, for every element of the Europe Syndrome is infiltrating American life as well.

We are seeing that infiltration appear most obviously among those who are most openly attached to the European model—namely, America’s social democrats, heavily represented in university faculties and the most fashionable neighborhoods of our great cities. There are a whole lot of them within a couple of metro stops from this hotel. We know from databases such as the General Social Survey that among those who self-identify as liberal or extremely liberal, secularism is close to European levels. Birth rates are close to European levels. Charitable giving is close to European levels. (That’s material that Arthur Brooks has put together.) There is every reason to believe that when Americans embrace the European model, they begin to behave like Europeans.