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Natural Law and Civilizations: Images of "Nature," Intracivilizational Polarities, and the Emergence of Heterodox Ideals*

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This article focuses on the role played by key civilizational categories, especially images of "nature," "natural law," the "state of nature," and several related notions in the gestation of heterodox ideals and movements in different civilizations. It focuses on the tensions and balances struck within the civilizational settings of Europe, China, and India between "major" (or orthodox) currents of ideas and institutions and "minor" (or heterodox) ones. The conflicting outcomes derived from Stoic-Christian natural law in Europe (as described by Troeltsch) are compared with the structurally similar, yet differently composed and articulated, tensions in China between Confucian and Taoist ideals, while the altogether different outcomes in India (noted by Weber) are used as a third negative reference point. Similar problems in the Russian setting are briefly discussed as a fourth point of comparison. This paper concludes with theoretical reflections drawn from Marx, Toennies, and the Durkheim school on the explanation of such intracivilizational structures and processes.

The central issue examined in this essay concerns the evident existence in all complex societies and civilizations of "major" and "minor" themes that represent competing ideals of life or alternative visions of the proper way to realize the ultimate values of the civilization. These "polarities" — to adapt Robert Hertz's term (1973) — are bound together within more comprehensive structures of consciousness. Although they often represent contradictory viewpoints, they co-exist in one or another complex tension, balance or imbalance, in Turner's (1969) words, as "structure" and "anti-structure."

A second related problem area points to the investigation of the composition and orchestration of fundamental "categories" (Mauss, 1966:333-34) or "unit ideas" (Lovejoy, 1936) of civilizations seen as a perennial source of ideals and forms of thought from which both the "major" and "minor" tendencies draw renewed sustenance.

The third and perhaps most traditionally "sociological" dimension of the problem raised in this article involves the analysis of the dynamic balance, tensions, and conflicts within and between the "major" and "minor" themes as they are brought to life by

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those persons competing to act as spokesmen for the civilization and are articulated historically within the diverse lives and experiences of individuals and groups in actual social, economic, and political settings. Here, the focus is on the ways in which "major" and "minor" themes in the structures of consciousness mold and are in turn influenced by social class and status arrangements, social movements, political organization, urban and rural groupings, and so forth.

This article focuses on the first, and by direct implication, the second dimensions of the problem stated above. While the essay will necessarily touch at many points on the third horizon, it leaves the myriad details connected with the histories of particular orthodox and heterodox structures and processes in varying civilizations for treatment at some future date and concentrates instead on the relationships between basic civilizational categories and the formation of "polarities." At the most general analytical level, the article argues that the abstract civilizational categories provide the direct basis for the reappropriation of fundamentally different value systems and in this way give rise to permanent "polarities" in the structures of consciousness.

Talcott Parsons has pointed out that "there are strong forces in all social systems working for commitment to 'utopian' patterns of value-orientation, that is, patterns which are incompatible with the known conditions of effective long-run institutionalization" (1951:166). However, his exclusive concern with the functional problems of social systems led him to see the operation of this "latent reservoir of legitimate possibilities in the more radically romantic or utopian elements of the cultural tradition" as being "incompatible with the functional needs of the institutionalized order," even when "in terms of the approved cultural traditions, it is not possible to stigmatize these interpretations out of hand as illegitimate," since they are often attached to "exactly the same symbols as the institutionalized culture uses" (1951:296). Parsons's theoretical commitments, as well as his own evident value preferences revealed in the rather disdainful references to the "utopian" and "romantic," led him to neglect the direct study of this problem in cultural dynamics, one rooted, as he himself noted, in the very categories of the cultural system. By contrast, I want to examine the precise ways in which the civilizational categories (Parsons's "symbols") do work in this fashion to gestate "polarities" with different types of balance in different civilizational settings.

This wide-ranging theme in the comparative sociology of civilizations is difficult to examine directly in its entirety or full complexity. While the general model of analysis has been stated, its full historical elaboration is best executed through a focus on particular problems within this general domain. Premature conclusions based on excessively rapid assimilation of allegedly key categories and polarities of different civilizations to one another, or the immediate comparison of civilizations seen as "organic wholes," may led to a foreshortening of the many analytical and historical issues connected with this theme. It is not to be expected that different civilizations will have identical or even easily comparable key categories, polarities, structures, or anti-structures.[1]

[1]Although this article frequently employs Turner's (1969) distinction between "structure" and "anti-structure," it is difficult to settle on a single term or set of terms that best captures the phenomenon. Moreover, the use of his terminology as a convenient shorthand should not be taken as an endorsement of the full range of analysis presented in his very congenial and stimulating work. Terms such as structural "imbalances," "balances," "polarities," "antinomies," "contradictions," "major" and "minor" themes, and so forth involve a variety of metaphors that evoke different images of social and cultural

However, short of a lapse into complete historicism, which ends in a mere juxtaposition, rather than meaningful comparison, of cases and also suggests the antecedent failure of any practically relevant efforts toward universalization, it is necessary that civilizational comparisons begin with categories that have been drawn from one civilization and have "functionally" comparable counterparts within other civilizations. This provides a starting point for comparison, even if perfectly identical categories cannot be found in every case, or if a category that exists and operates in comparable fashion in several settings is largely absent or of limited significance in others. The crucial problem is to locate a category from which to open the comparison and reconstruction of the different civilizational polarities. This must be the starting point — and not the immediate search for "universals" reflecting some allegedly universal "human nature," or the lapse into the comparison of incomparables. The only universal required initially is the analytical one, which suggests the universality of polarity itself in all civilizations. From one standpoint, it makes little difference which categories are chosen as the starting point or from which civilization they are initially drawn.

This essay therefore attempts a preliminary investigation of these issues by focusing on only one set of categories, those connected with the idea of "nature," and carrying through the comparison about this focus. This essay begins by examining competing interpretations of the cluster of notions of "nature," "natural law," "reason," the "light of reason," the "state of nature," and some related terms as they have been effective forces in the historical development of both "major" and "minor" currents of historic life and thought in the West.

Troeltsch's (1925, 1960) treatment of the role of Stoic and Christian natural law doctrines in European civilization, as well as his related use of the concepts of church, sect, and mysticism will provide a particularly helpful starting point. In his spirit, this essay treats that particular conflict between "major" and "minor" premises, or themes, that appears in the form of an opposition between (1) efforts to realize a "primitive," "natural," original state of mankind and human perfection, and (2) attempts to realize ultimate values through their embodiment in a set of dominant institutional orders existing in a state of tension with and accommodation to the world. For purposes of comparison, the essay will examine related, if not at all identical, notions and processes as they emerged (or failed fully to emerge) within the civilizations of China, India, and Russia. In passing, it will also be helpful to note, if not fully explore, other categories that might be the starting point for future forays into this general field of research.

Finally, it should be stated at the outset that there also exist a variety of other key civilizational phenomena relevant to a complete study of the relationship between

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life. Although this problem cannot be definitively resolved, "polarities" is generally preferable to "balances" and "imbalances," in part because of the mechanical quality of the latter pair, but also because "polarity" provides links to the sociological tradition of Durkheim, Mauss, and especially Hertz, from which this article draws inspiration. Moreover, "contracitions" is such a well established term in the Marxian rhetoric that its use in a different form here would probably confuse matters. The notion of "antinomy," closer to that of "polarity," is more congenial. It is directly related to the European philosophical tradition and to the work of Toennies, from whom this essay also draws sustenance. Finally, the distinction between "major" and "minor" themes, often used above, is one of the better metaphors, evoking as it does musical sensibility and pointing to the idea that civilizational actors express themselves through different "keys."

"major" and "minor" civilizational themes. This article examines only one specific, if very important, set of ideas, those connected with the notion of "nature."[2]

THE DUAL ROLE OF STOIC AND CHRISTIAN NATURAL LAW IN THE WEST: TROELTSCH'S ANALYSIS

The writings of Ernst Troeltsch are particularly helpful in the analysis of the present theme. While his use of the concepts of church, sect, and mysticism is well known, his treatment of the role of Stoic-Christian natural law and its relationship to the Christian West has not been given the same attention. As a result, even his better known concepts have been narrowly interpreted or incompletely understood.

Troeltsch argued that the concept of "natural law," in his view largely Stoic in inspiration, became merged with Christian ideas and experiences in several different ways.[3] The ambiguities of this concept allowed early Christian apologists to argue that there is "a relative Natural Law, corresponding to the conditions of the sinfulness of humanity, which exists alongside the absolute Natural Law of the Primitive State" or Golden Age of mankind before the Fall (Troeltsch, 1960:154).[4] The former idea

[2]The role of other key ideas in the civilizational setting in gestating the processes connected with "major" and "minor" themes needs further study. Sociologists have often concentrated heavily on the study of dominant orthodox or institutionalized forms, or studied the heterodox forms in isolation from their built-in dependence upon and structural relationship to the orthodox ones. The historian R. H. Tawney remarked that "it is only by dragging into prominence the forces which have triumphed, and thrusting into the background those which they have swallowed up, that an appearance of inevitableness is given to existing institutions, which satisfies the desire to see them as links in an orderly chain of development" (Tawney, 1912:177-78). In this spirit, a fuller inventory is especially needed of the phenomena included here under the heading of "minor" or "anti-structural" processes. We need to locate the role of primitivisms, heterodox sects, secret societies, communal movements and popular revolts, bohemian artistic enclaves, countercultural movements of individuals and groups of all kinds within the structures and balances of civilizations, and in their permanent relationships to orthodox structures (for various leads see Eliade, 1975; Passmore, 1970; Whitney, 1934; Bestor, 1970; Turner, 1969; Nielsen, 1984; Morton, 1970; Hill, 1973). Moreover, this sort of study must be carried out for the several civilizations involved, with due emphasis on the distinctive characteristics of each setting, and an avoidance of the premature tendency to assimilate "minor" themes to one another.

[3]It is not possible now to discuss the origins of the notion of "natural law," nor the complexities of its early development. One of the term's origins is the encounter between the Judaic notion of a written law of God (found in the Pentateuch) and the Greek notion of nature (Hengel, 1974). Koester (1968) has shown that the notion is first developed in a decisive fashion by Philo and, in turn, was an important reference point for the Christian theologians of Alexandria such as Justin, Clement, and Origen (Chadwick, 1966). However, another probably independent source of the idea of "natural law," perhaps with a somewhat different set of meanings, is Greek and Roman Stoicism and Roman jurisprudence (Schulz, 1967). Troeltsch may overestimate the exclusively Stoic origins of this idea in the early Church. However, he gives a crucial account of the complex theoretical and practical derivations made from the term "nature" by early Christian thinkers such as Ambrose, Tertullian, and others and also explores the relationship of this idea to the notion of natural law, the state of nature, the Golden Age, the pre-lapsarian condition before the Fall, primitivism and so forth. Thus, his work along with the related observations of Hatch (1988), Carlyle (1927), Lovejoy and Boas (1935), Robson (1935), and others are still the best reference point if we recall that Stoicism is probably not the sole source of such images in the early Church, even if it is one predominant source.

[4]Troeltsch's idea that there was a distinction made by early Christian apologists between an "absolute" natural law of mankind before the Fall and a "relative" natural law applicable to mankind afterward

("relative natural law") allowed for a simultaneous accommodation to and criticism of the existing positive law and institutional orders of political, economic, and familial life of the Greco-Roman world in the name of a natural law that was seen as inspired by Divine Nature and Providence. Christian moral law was identified with Stoic natural law, and actual positive Roman law was measured by this higher standard of natural law and natural justice, in order to bring the actual world in its Fallen State closer to the demands of Divine Justice. However, the imperfection of the Fallen State also made possible an accommodation to the mandatory institutions of law, politics, economic inequality, and the patriarchal family. Since man was inherently sinful, these institutions were both a necessary curb on and an expression of his evil tendencies, and therefore legitimate forces at least for the condition of man after the Fall. Thus, if tempered and criticized by the Stoic-Christian moral and natural law, they could also be accepted as Divinely ordained. This rationale paved the way for a permanent Christian society and church operating within the realm of civilization, culture, and civil society, if not wholly part of it.

The other interpenetration of Stoic natural law into Christian ideas — the notion of an "Absolute Natural Law" of the primitive state — pointed in a wholly different direction. Stoic "primitivism" had already isolated a primitive state of nature, a Golden Age, from all later history (Lovejoy and Boas, 1980). There "the Law of Nature prevailed completely and there was no slavery, no force, no contrast between rich and poor." A state of perfect equality and freedom or at least childlike innocence prevailed. In the present situation, although the Law of Nature still operates as a norm of justice and is visible in natural reason, it exists in a "clouded and disfigured form." Christian thinkers identified this Stoic primitive state with the hypothetical Judeo-Christian condition of man before the Fall, although they clothed this idea with a religious content that emphasized mainly "religious perfection, the love of God, humility and the state of Grace." All objectionable institutions, or objectionable aspects of institutions, were identified with the Fall of Man and a lapse from the perfection of Eden. Not only had human reason been greatly dimmed with the Fall (as it had, perhaps less so, in the Stoic version of a historical decline from the Golden Age), but the Law of Nature, as already noted above, had itself been transformed and now appeared "in the form of an order of law and compulsion," and thus a reaction against human corruption. It is the Law of Nature of man in a fallen state that itself necessitates compulsion, law, and control. In the end, for the Christian apologists, working under the influence of the Stoic natural law doctrine, the natural law is "at once a result of sin and remedy for sin" (Troeltsch, 1960:152-53). This formulation is closer once again to the first conception of a "relative" Natural Law, suited to man's fallen state and perhaps to an amelioration and partial improvement of that state. However, the most important point is that, like the Stoics who enjoined man to act "according to nature," live simply, and pursue a life guided by reason, and thereby perfect oneself, despite the great decline of man from the Golden Age, so too some Christian apologists employed the notion of an Absolute Natural Law of man in the prelapsarian state before the Fall as a rationale

has not gone undisputed (see, e.g., D'Entreves, 1965:37). However, Troeltsch found independent confirmation of his views in Carlyle (1927), and further support for his thesis can be found in Lovejoy (1960:esp. 296-307).

for "radical" attempts to recapture the primitive innocence and perfection of man in Eden through individual efforts of asceticism or communal efforts to lead the Apostolic life. Thus, two very different types of conclusions were drawn from the notion of a natural law of humanity.

These ideas turn in something of a circle, and my discussion has greatly simplified Troeltsch's long and complex analysis. However, the thrust of the argument is clear. When early Christian experiences and ideas drawn from Judaism entered into an environment of Greco-Roman speculation, especially ideas of Stoic natural law theory, two distinctively different currents of Christian thought emerged: one emphasizing the role of Natural Law as a means of accommodation to and tempering of Greco-Roman society in the direction of Christian moral teachings, and the other stressing the identification of the Stoic primitive "state of nature" with the Genesis account of the condition of perfection and simplicity of newly created mankind before the Fall. The first idea helped (along with other notions) to provide the Christian community with a rationale for a permanent church in (but not wholly of) the world. The second provided continued sustenance for perfectionistic "sects" of men and women, as well as extraordinary efforts of individuals, who demanded a path leading back to Eden or, at least, a more thoroughgoing excision of their sinfulness, with an eye to attaining a vision of God, self-deification, or spiritual perfection. Here can be seen the beginnings of a permanent split in Western European civilization, one developed and resolved in a variety of ways depending on historical setting. It stands as a premier instance of the division between "major" and "minor" premises of a civilization, and of the dependence of both on a stock of inherited categories or forms of thought, interpreted in opposing directions and resulting in different variants of world view and different social formations.

Several related points need to be brought out. First, these ideas emerged from an encounter between the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian worlds, and would not have been possible without that encounter. Although this issue is of great historical interest, it cannot be pursued at this time (for a fuller analysis see Nielsen, 1990). Second, and more central to the present discussion, is the fact that from an early date, ambiguous universalistic categories (such as the notions of "nature," "natural law," "the primitive state," and so forth) played a key role in the establishment of a permanent antinomy, a cultural "fault," in the structures of consciousness of Western European civilization. Third, and most central, is the fact that these ambiguous ideas and the antithetical interpretations given them resulted in rationales for radically different and often opposed forms of religious community, Troeltsch's "church" and "sect" types. They incidentally also provided the central civilizational backdrop for his notion of "mysticism," the essence of which (in the West, at least) is the individual experience of a religious illumination and spiritual vision based on the pursuit of the Divine light through the Divine spark of "reason" as it has been placed within the individual in accordance with his original nature. Although the social and cultural forms taken by these phenomena vary over time and, more important from a sociological standpoint, take on different structural relations and balances with one another historically (for instance, in the Medieval versus the post-Reformation era, or versus the nineteenth century), they have frequently traced themselves to one or another recasting of key no-

tions such as that of "nature," the "state of nature," "reason," the "inner light," and so forth. In this sense, even though the ideal forms or unit ideas that make up civilizational traditions have been subjected to opposing interpretations, reconfigurations, and even total reconstructions, the key categories have been an omnipresent background and source of changing social and cultural expressions for individuals and groups and have provided fertile soil for the continuation of structural oppositions between "major" and "minor," "structural" and "anti-structural," themes within societies.[5]

It is unnecessary now to follow Troeltsch (1950, 1958) in tracing the later outcomes of these ideas, or take up a discussion of the ways in which Max Weber's studies of Europe, China, and India greatly amplified (and modified) this problem. The latter's typological analysis of mysticism versus asceticism, inner worldly versus other worldly orientations, churches versus sects, and so forth, and his studies of the "balances" struck between them in East and West, remain to be treated on another occasion.[6] Similarly, discussion will be deferred of Weber's treatment of several historical problems

[5]This essay emphasizes that particular historical epochs are characterized by the cluster of "unit ideas" (Lovejoy, 1960) or categories (Mauss, 1966) that are regularly used as a reference point in the thought of the period. These basic notions are likely to have a great historical longevity and outlive the particular political, economic, and social formations and individual experiences that originally give them life. They come to be interpreted in new ways, and at times there is a wholesale recasting of terms, a gestation of new "categories," and a restructuring of the basic reference points of thought. In late Antiquity, Greek, Roman, and early Christian thought drew on distinctive traditions, yet also, as they interpenetrated one another, employed a common idiom in which such terms as nature (*physis*), convention or law (*nomos*), the law of nature and nations (*ius naturale, ius gentium*), reason, the light of reason, the *logos*, and others played a central role. The twelfth century produced a whole new cluster of ideas, as well as reinterpreting the inherited Greco-Roman, Jewish, and early Christian notions in new ways. New "unit ideas" around which debate turned from the twelfth century forward include science (*scientia*), conscience (*conscientia*), *universitas, summae, order sacer, hierarchia, anima mundi, vita communis, vita apostolica*, and so forth (Chenu, 1968; Nelson, 1969, 1981). Similarly, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw a simultaneous recasting and rejection of Medieval ideas, and a revival of ancient notions, especially the complex of ideas connected with Stoic and Roman natural law (Gierke, 1950). New wholly "secular" mathematical and mechanical images of nature, law and society also emerged. Mechanical images of "balance" were especially in evidence, as were notions of political arithmetic and natural law, often combined in odd mixtures (MacPherson, 1962). Finally, the nineteenth century saw a widespread break with the inherited structures of consciousness of the West and an introduction of new sets of terms. The widespread rejection of the key notion of nature and natural law was combined with the introduction of terms of reference such as industry, class, democracy, culture, art, progress, and others (Williams, 1966). Here, we cannot pursue what amounts to a major research program into the social and civilizational history of the "categories of the human spirit" (Mauss, 1966) and their patterned interrelations in structures of consciousness of the West. However, any study interested in the "balances" and "imbalances" struck between "major" and "minor" civilizational premises would need to locate these antinomies carefully within the cluster of key ideas or dominant structures of consciousness of the particular historical epoch under examination (whether the third, the twelfth, the seventeenth, or the nineteenth century).

[6]Weber's manner of relating his complex typologies to particular historical cases does not always allow clear identification of the "major" and "minor" themes or the harmonies struck between them in different civilizations. Thus, it is not always desirable to proceed precisely along his lines. Elsewhere, I have attempted to extend Weber's discussions in the general direction indicated by the present paper (Nielsen, 1988b, 1989) and also to critique his approach from the standpoint of Toennies's general categories (Nielsen, 1988a). For other stimulating reconstructions of Weber, see Schluchter (1981) and Roth and Schluchter (1979). Finally, the present remarks have nothing in common with the "natural law" critiques of Weber discussed by Roth (see Bendix and Roth, 1971:62-67).

central to this paper, especially the roles of natural law and natural rights doctrines, notions of conscience, and "the charisma of reason" in early modern and "Enlightenment" Europe (Weber, 1968:868-75, 1209-10; see also Gierke, 1950; Nelson, 1969, 1981; Roth and Schluchter, 1979; Bloch, 1986). Here it is sufficient to note that Nelson (1975:236-38) offers some especially helpful clues to one of the ways in which a related aspect of Weber's work can be reconstructed along lines congruent with the present discussion. He writes that "only the modern post-Reformation West saw the simultaneous, if conflictual, breakthrough to the legitimation of inner worldly mysticism as well as inner worldly asceticism," whereas, "the Medieval church never accepted the foundations on which the post-Reformation world was to rest" and instead "had various blends of other worldly asceticism and mysticism," with little encouragement of inner worldly viewpoints (see also Nelson, 1981:ch. 12). These observations are an important reference point for a discussion of the wider problems raised in this article, even if the present treatment is more comparative and points in a somewhat different analytical direction from his statement.

Can dynamics similar to those discussed above be found in other civilizational settings? In what ways have comparable civilizational categories representing alternative images of nature, order, law, the primitive state, and so forth in China, India, and elsewhere provided (or failed to provide) the hermeneutic setting for sociocultural dynamics containing oppositions between "major" and "minor" premises in those civilizations? More important, how have these developments differed from those in the West? Here it is possible to illustrate only briefly the utility of extending Troeltsch's (and Weber's) analyses in the directions suggested in these pages in order to understand better the key problem: the place of structural polarities, structures versus anti-structures, in civilizations and the role of basic civilizational forms or categories in the gestation and maintenance of these "polarities."

THE TWO WAYS AND THE ORDER OF "NATURE": TAOIST PRIMITIVISM AND CONFUCIAN RATIONALISM IN CHINA

The problems and processes to which Troeltsch pointed are paralleled, if not identically reproduced, in China. In what follows, differences as well as similarities between China and the West will be noted.[7] Joseph Needham's writings provide a

[7]It is difficult for the nonspecialist to make a judgment on the key words in Chinese civilization or in India. It is also necessary to use great caution in assimilating Chinese to European terminology. All schools of thought relied on the key notion of *tao*, although the Confucians interpreted it in social terms and the Taoists in a more "naturalistic" fashion (in general see Chan, 1969). The term also figured prominently in the work of the Legalists and other authors less easy to classify (for instance, Hsun-Tzu). The Confucians combined the *tao* with an optimistic ethic of humanity (*jen*) and the notion of *li* (good customs and manners) and adopted a family-based model of society. The Legalists adopted a pessimistic, even Hobbesian view of human nature, and their key notion, *fa* (positive, written law), was at basic variance from the Confucian view. Their view was never dominant in Chinese history, although elements of it were used in Chinese statecraft (Duyvendak, 1963; Bodde and Morris, 1967). The Taoist *wu-wei* (taking no "unnatural" action) was also employed by the Confucians, but played a much more central role in Taoist thought and helped provide the basis for an "anarchistic," communal philosophy generally at odds with centralized authority. Here I cannot begin to trace the usages of these terms in different

valuable starting point. Although they are focused on the relationship of Chinese civilization to the history of Chinese science, they also relate directly at many points to the issues raised in this essay. The story Needham relates is very complex, involving not only Taoist, Confucian, Legalist, and Buddhist ideas, but changing variants of each world view. However, the central outlines of the discussion can be made clear in a somewhat simplified form for present purposes.

Needham suggests that there was an opposition within Chinese civilization between the proponents of Confucian bureaucratic rationalism and feudalism, and the representatives of Taoist primitive communism and empirical mysticism of nature. The Confucians interpreted the key category of *Tao* primarily in terms of "the ideal way or order of human society" and linked it to their view of humanity (*jen*), good customs and ceremonial action (*li*), and to the moral order in the universe, or Heaven, as reflected also in man and society (1969a, II:8). For the Taoists, employing the same category, "the *Tao* or Way was not the right order of life within human society, but the way in which the universe worked; in other words, the Order of Nature." It was necessary "to imitate the *Tao*, which works unseen and does not dominate" (1969a, II:36-37). Needham remarks that "Taoist patterns of thought and behavior included all kinds of rebellion against conventions, the withdrawal of the individual from society, the love and study of nature, the refusal to take office, and the living embodiment of the paradoxical non-possessiveness of the *Tao Te Ching*; production without possession, action without self-assertion, development without domination" (1969a, II:164).

Although it absorbed selected elements of statecraft from the Legalist school, the Confucian persuasion with its emphasis on filial piety and the family model of social order became linked to the examination system and imperial bureaucracy, the rationalistic ethic of the status group of cultured literati that dominated Chinese civilization into the nineteenth century (Weber, 1964). The Taoist view was fundamentally antifeudal. In an especially revealing passage, Needham writes: "The Taoists were against feudal society, but not exactly in favor of something *new*. They were in favor of something *old*, and wanted to go back to the primitive tribal society before feudalism — as they themselves put it, 'before the Great Way decayed'." This return to primitive simplicity is interpreted by Needham as a return to a tribal society before the differentiation of classes. Needham further notes that Taoism had a political significance and "has always been connected with movements against the government," and been implicated in the work of secret societies, sects, and peasant movements that have been linked to revolutionary activity throughout Chinese history (1969b:163-65).

This view is supported by Franke (1970) and has been confirmed in greater detail by Balazs for the Han dynasty (1964:187-225; see also Muramatsu, 1960). The Han was a period of great instability; Confucians, Legalists and Taoists competed for intellectual hegemony. The inherited conflict between the Confucianists and the Legalists "turned upon the question: which should have priority the family or the state" (Balazs, 1964:10). However, this fierce opposition had ultimately been susceptible

thinkers or schools in various historical eras but will only comment that, although the Confucians and Taoists had some common reference points, they interpreted the same notions in different ways and also linked them to other ideas that they did not have in common, thereby helping to produce "major" and "minor" civilizational themes out of a shared stock of images.

to a syncretistic resolution, one already adumbrated in the work of Hsun Tzu (Needham, 1969a, II:26-20). Thus, "the ultimate bureaucratic ideology and formal structure was a synthesis of Legalist and Confucian principles" with the dominant emphasis on Confucian values (Needham, 1969a, II:1; also 29, 212). Only Taoism was left outside this dominant synthesis, and during periods of upheaval Taoist ideals were able effectively to assert a wider influence as the foundation of heterodox movements and communities. Balazs notes that the mass of starving peasants and vagrants left by the economic instability of the Han were mobilized by militant sects such as the "Way of the Great Peace," or Yellow Turbans, whose "bible," the *Tai-ping ching* "was full of Taoist signs and symbols and magic formulae," and who "did not limit themselves to announcing to their followers the coming of a new Golden Age, of property and equality — the real meaning of the expression *t'ai-ping* — or stop at mere promises of a miraculous recovery: they organized them into actual phalansteries, rural communities in which there was a public confession of sins and communal repasts" (Balazs, 1964:192). In the end the difference between the Legalists and Confucianists was overcome by a common opposition to the Taoist utopian ideal of mystical community, along with its cultivation of empirical-mystical science and "techniques of the body." Similar responses fueled by Taoist ideals were to appear regularly throughout Chinese history, especially during times of political and economic instability.

With the widespread introduction of Buddhism into China in the third century, there was a simultaneous movement to establish Taoism as a popular religion, in opposition to Buddhism, as well as to assimilate the Buddhist and Taoist positions to one another, especially among Buddhist missionaries interested in the efficacious communication of their new teaching. Indeed, Taoist and Buddhist elements became inextricably mixed in Chinese popular religion (Wright, 1971). Both these religious currents together and separately helped advance "anti-structural" tendencies in the form of groups such as the White Lotus Sect, which is traceable to the fourth century and inspired anti-imperial activities again in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Franke, 1970:14).

It would be premature to identify *tao* easily with the Western idea of "nature." More important was the capacity of the *tao*, like the category of "nature," to generate cultural polarities. The similarities as well as the differences between the Taoist opposition in China and the Western ideas of a primitive Golden Age require our attention. For instance, especially important parallels can be found between the Taoists and the efforts of early Christian fathers such as Ambrose to assert a communistic regime of primitive equality on a religious foundation (Lovejoy, 1960:ch. 15). Similarly, the repudiation of "civilized" existence found in the Cynics and the Stoic attempt to live in accordance with nature clearly resembled the Taoist effort. However, there are also some very relevant differences among the seemingly similar currents. While the Cynics and Stoics of the Hellenistic and Roman eras were individualistic and cosmopolitan in thrust, the Taoists were far more communal, more organized, and more avowedly anti-feudal. On the contrary, the Stoic philosophy could be fully assimilated to Roman political and legal institutions. As Needham notes, the Taoists cultivated a brand of empirical-mystical scientific knowledge, a pursuit of little interest to the ethically and politically oriented Cynics and Stoics or to the occasionally anti-intellectual currents

of early Christianity (1969: II:129-30; see also Boas, 1948). At this point, however, it is unnecessary to follow Needham further into his own special field of inquiry.

Needham's remark that "Among later thinkers William Blake stands out as exceedingly 'Taoist' in many ways" (1969a, II:162) is closer to the mark and takes on added significance when we recall that Morton (1970) and Hill (1973) have demonstrated a clear link between Blake's heterodox ideas and the seventeenth century radical, equalitarian and millenarian English political and religious sects such as the Ranters, the Diggers and the Levellers and their literary representatives, notably Gerrard Winstanley (1973). Indeed, in a manner congruent with the present analysis, Hill argues that the seventeenth century sects represent the onset of a modern, permanently based "counter culture" in the West, and links them to the upheavals in Europe and America in the 1960s (on this theme see Nielsen, 1984). It can be added only parenthetically that debates over alternataive images of the role of "nature," "reason," the "state of nature," "revelation," and so forth in human society were at the heart of the early modern oppositions between Hobbes and Winstanley (MacPherson, 1962), and later the rejection of Locke and Newton by Blake, and tie directly into the main thesis of this essay.

Quoting a remark by the Sinologist Dubs, Needham continues: "Confucianism has been the philosophy of those who have 'succeeded' or hoped to succeed. Taoism is the philosophy of those who have 'failed' — or who have tasted the bitterness of 'success' " (1969a, II:164). This remark raises particularly interesting issues, and helps to differentiate further the structures and balances found within European and Chinese civilizations.

Indeed, despite the evident existence of a permanent Taoist opposition in China (the "minor" or "anti-structure" theme), it would also appear that Taoism existed in a peculiar "balance" within the structures of consciousness of Chinese civilization and was, in many ways, integrated into Chinese life more deeply than these remarks about its revolutionary character would imply. Taoist insurgency seems to have been associated with periods of political, economic, and cultural breakdown; yet Taoism as a more permanent "minor" theme available to individuals was also compatible with periods of stability in Chinese bureaucratic civilization. In another context, Baird (1960:16) has noted the close association of "primitivism" and "cultural failure." He writes that "cultural failure accelerates primitivism, whatever the type" and that "cultural failure means the loss of a regnant and commanding authority in religious symbolism." Although his study is of literary representations of primitivism in America and Europe in the era of cultural crisis of Protestantism, and the ways in which the Orient, as the "source of religion," served as a reference point for primitivistic reconstructions, his general statement has a bearing on the Chinese context. Levenson has noted that "together Confucianism and Taoism made the whole man, one implying a testimonial to civilization and the values and goals of social life," the other, "release from society and social concerns" (1968, I:44). Despite their common emphasis on "harmony," their opposing stresses on society and nature made Confucianism and Taoism opponents, especially at times when the bureaucratic Confucian social order collapsed, and Taoism reasserted its fullest claims in the form of popular rebellion against society. However, the two remained "polarities" of a single cultural order. "In Taoist or Buddhist

rebellions the doctrine, for the time of violence, was chiliastic — i.e., anti-social, anti-historical in the messianic sense of a vision of the 'end of days'," but when society has passed through its time of violence, Confucianism was "left undisturbed as the dominant thought for prosaic social history" (Levenson, 1968, II:87). By contrast, the nineteenth century Tai-Ping rebellion represented a throughgoing rejection of Confucianism and a rejection of the implicit balance struck between Confucian and Taoist principles in Chinese history. While "Buddhism and Taoism had a wide, *extra-rebellious* existence in China," the "Christianity of the Taiping stamp was purely rebellion-bred" and had "no existence in normal times" (Levenson, 1968, II:88). Here, the Taoist "return to nature" was associated with periods of the failure of the Confucian ethic during breakdowns of the imperial system (and also with the failures of individual careers), yet did not involve a wholesale rejection of Confucianism as such. In sum, Chinese civilization until the nineteenth century and the Taiping rebellion seems to have achieved a balance or harmony between the "primitivistic" Taoist and "civilized" Confucian themes, to an extent and in a fashion less frequently found in the West, where the exclusiveness of alternative claims seemed greater and the tensions more difficult to resolve (see Schwartz, 1959). The reasons for this are of considerable interest.

The Chinese philosophical polarity of *Yin* and *Yang*, the theory of the five elements, and other related speculations were used as a reference point for harmonizing varying aspects of existence into an image of an organic whole (see Granet, 1968). Indeed, this emphasis on "organism" is central to Chinese civilization. It is therefore not wholly surprising that the Confucian-Taoist "polarity" should be susceptible to higher forms of harmonious balance or integration. By contrast, European experience, dependent more on abstract categories and universalizing modes of thought that created ontological hierarchies in which lower levels resulted from or were encompassed under higher ones (Lovejoy, 1936), was more likely to contain potentially unresolvable oppositions derived from ontologies beginning from fundamentally different categorical starting points or from fundamentally different interpretations of the same category. European thought was more often a case of "either/or," while Chinese experience evidently leaned more toward a standpoint of "both/and" (obviously a crude way of putting the matter).

Here, however, it is unnecessary to exaggerate differences. The "anti-structural" tendencies in the West were also most evident during epochs of social and cultural upheaval, or transformation (for instance the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries). Attempts were made with considerable success during periods of more "organic" cultural integration to accommodate the perfectionistic tendencies of Christianity within the established church, as was the case with the other worldly Medieval monastic orders (see Nielsen, 1988b). In conclusion to this section, I would note Needham's very suggestive statements that, despite the existence of "groups and figures in European history which have a Taoist flavor, for example, the Pythagoreans and Gnostics, as schools, and Roger Bacon, Nicolas of Cusa and Giordano Bruno as individuals," it remains the case that "the history of European thought shows no real parallel to the Taoist complex," and further, that "Europe had no parallel to the Confucian phenomenon, the refusal to look at nature, and hence no parallel to the Taoist phenomenon, the disinclination to trust reason and logic" (Needham, 1969a, II:162-63). Needham's use

of the word "complex" is worth emphasizing here, for it points to many of the difficulties involved in the comparison of individual "traits" found in different groups and individuals in East and West. The focus must be on the structural tensions and balances between opposing themes *within* different civilizational *wholes*, and not on the discovery of any exact correspondences between "anti-structural" tendencies identifiable across civilizations through a process of abstraction of traits from their wider settings (see the discussion in Nielsen, 1988a).

NATURAL LAW AND INDIAN CIVILIZATION: NOTES ON WEBER AND DUMONT

Only a few remarks, confined to a commentary on some passages in Weber and Dumont, can be made at this time about our problem in the Indian context. Weber states that among the Hindus, "There was no universally valid ethic, but only a strict status compartmentalization of private and social ethics." The *dharma* specific to each caste, supported by the soteriology of reincarnation, made ritual offenses relative to the rank order of castes the central type of offense. "The conception of an 'original sin' was quite impossible in this world order, for no 'absolute sin' could exist." In addition, "there was no place for a blissful original state and no blissful final kingdom. Thus, there was no 'natural' order of men and things in contrast to positive social order. There was no sort of 'natural law'." The absence of any notion of "natural" equality or a "state of nature" among men prevented the emergence of the wide range of problems connected with "natural law" in the West. This system "excluded forever the rise of social criticism, of rationalistic speculation, and abstraction of the natural law type, and hindered the development of any sort of idea of 'human rights'." No political ethic arose in this absence of ethical universalism and natural law theory (Weber, 1958:144-46). The Prince's *dharma* was to gain and maintain power, while that of the priest, higher in status and caste standing than that of the Kshatrya, was the ritualistic maintenance of the sacred law. Even though factually the Brahmin was under the power of the prince, the latter yielded in "status" within the hierarchy to the priestly caste.

In a related vein, Louis Dumont has pointed to the predominance in India of a different categorical structure, based on the distinction between "pure" and "impure," and linked to a wholistic world view, caste hierarchy, and the absence of any valorization of the individual within the world, an absence not only of "inner worldly asceticism," but, more important, of any sense of natural individual equality, or natural rights (see Dumont, 1980; also Bougle, 1969). In India, the individual was validated only in the social structural role of "world renouncer," that is, the individual appears only outside of the worldly realm of caste obligations and social functions, either as a renouncer of worldly ties in maturity or at the end of a lifetime of other socially structured roles. World renunciation becomes built into the established system, rather than opposed to it. Here, there are clearly some parallels to the individualistic version of the Taoist ideal, in the way in which both structure in individual world renunciation as a legitimate option, although the Indian version has little of the Taoist communal opposition to society. This corresponds perhaps best to a variant of Troeltsch's type

of "mysticism." Moreover, heterodox sects in India tended to become easily assimilated to the dominant priestly controlled caste system (or "church") by being absorbed within the hierarchy as new castes with distinctive types of *dharma*, or, if they carried through prescribed or "impure" practices, then as outcastes. In this view of cosmic order, by "nature" — if this word be allowed — men were ranked into a wholistic system of castes on the basis of the distinction between the "pure" and "impure" and through ritualistic, legalistic, and soteriological means. The hierarchical whole, made up of a ranking of groups, took precedence over the parts and over the individual in India; while in the West the individual in the world was increasingly valorized, and the "whole" and "hierarchy" reappeared in empirical fact in the form of the "nation" and "social stratification." This alternative civilizational structure, based on different categories, cannot be fully examined here.

For present purposes, the most important aspect of these observations is the absence of the notion of a "state of nature" and original equality or that of "original sin." The perfectionistic impulses in the West associated with the attempt to revive the original primitive state of prelapsarian purity, the "absolute Natural Law," often in opposition to the established church order, had little parallel in India, where the individual world-renouncer (emerging usually from the upper Brahminical caste) attempted to achieve release from the round of reincarnations and the duties of caste. The tensions between what Troeltsch called "relative natural law," and the social system and positive law, were, as Weber notes, also absent in India, where the only obligation for the prince was to carry through his caste *dharma* of power and rule, and to submit to the higher status of the priest in matters of sacred law and ritual. In this context, "enlightenment" meant the path of world renunciation, not the use of the illuminating powers of the inner light of natural reason within worldly activities for purposes of critique and reform. However, as Weber points out in a note (1958:352), the periodically felt need for a theory of "origins" did result in a quasi-natural law doctrine which took the form of time speculations, different "ages" (the doctrine of the Yugas), which were characterized by different degrees of moral perfection. Thus, there emerged a species of "primitivism" in Indian thought (see the remarks by P. E. Dumont in Lovejoy and Boas, 1935:433-46; also Zimmer, 1962:esp. 13-15). In this doctrine, the first Krta Yuga was one of perfect virtue (*dharma*), and was succeeded by others of descending virtue, until we reach the Kali Yuga (the present age) where *dharma* is the most imperfectly realized. Although this immense time span is ultimately only one phase in an ever repeated cycle, the theory does give rise to a sort of "temporal primitivism" which laments lost perfection. However, from a sociological standpoint, it is decisive that these speculations were doctrinal rationalizations that had few social structural consequences and do not appear to have been translated into an actual tension within Indian civilization between existing institutions and ideas and "anti-structural" movements toward the reassertion of a more "pure" primitive state, as was the case with related speculation in Europe or China. Moreover, these temporal doctrines actually tended to support demands for obedience to existing caste *dharma* by insisting that moral improvement could come about only for the individual and only by flawless adherence to current caste obligations. Therefore, they confirmed the existing hierarchical social system, rather than undermining it in the name of the recovery

of an alternative perfectionistic social state. Once again, only the extraordinary efforts of the world renouncer seemed to be an adequate response to the world condition defined by the Hindu ethic.

NATURAL LAW, RADICAL CHRISTIANITY AND COMMUNALISM IN RUSSIA

This essay attempts to limit itself to cases that best exemplify the theoretical problems under investigation. However, a few brief remarks on the problem of "natural law" in the Russian setting are helpful as an added point of comparison concerning the problem of polarities in civilizations. The Tsarist Russian regime, for historical reasons, inherited a limited portion of Eastern Orthodox civilization. It knew nothing of the concept of "nature," and there is little or no trace of "natural law" theory in the history of Russian law — indeed, no trace of systematic jurisprudence at all in Russia up until the nineteenth century. However, earlier in Russian history, heterodox sectarian phenomena similar to those in Europe, based on doctrines of world rejecting asceticism and apostolic poverty, can be found in opposition to the Orthodox church, for instance, in the ideas of St. Nilus of Sora and the "non-possessors" in the sixteenth century. Although an anti-structural current of this sort, in constant tension with the dominant church and state institutions, seems to have existed, it was not as persistent or prominent as the comparable European phenomena. The late seventeenth century schism of Avvakum and the Old Believers was, in turn, wholly traditionalistic and ritualistic in character and in opposition to currents of "reform" within the Church. Although it had monastic roots and did come to constitute an important "minor" theme in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it did not rest on any notion of natural law, primitivism or perfectionism. Its ideals were wholly traditional, sacro-magical and communal, and pointed toward the almost universally shared ideal of the Russian Caesaropapist church-state — Moscow as the "third Rome" — which had become consolidated between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries.[8]

Natural rights oriented outlooks were imported into Russia only later from the West and were influential in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In this vein, Weber remarked that "The Russian revolution of the last decade [1905-06] in all probability is the last of the world's natural law oriented agrarian revolutions" (1968:872). This revolution in the name of natural rights (to share in the land in accordance with one's laboring power, to land ownership based on the traditional standard of living, and to the full product of one's labors) was superseded in 1917 by a Communist revolution oriented to substantively new values.[9]

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[8]I have provided a fuller treatment elsewhere of the entire problem of the Russian church and sects in their relationship to Russian civilization (Nielsen, 1989).

[9]Habermas writes that since Marx's critique of ideology, bourgeois legality, and capitalist society, "the link between Natural Law and revolution has been dissolved" and that now "the parties of the international civil war have divided this heritage between themselves with fateful unambiguity: the one side has taken up the heritage of revolution, the other the ideology of Natural Law" (1973:113). Although studies are still needed to access the role of Natural Law doctrines in the revolutionary upheavels of this past century, Habermas's sweeping judgment surely requires modification. Movements of revolu-

The other most important and distinctive instances of "anti-structural" tendencies in modern Russian history are found in "communal" phenomena such as the Russian populist movement, the work of Kropotkin, Bukharin's anarchism, and Tolstoy's Christian communalism and anarchism. Here, key reference points are the Russian notions of *Sobornost* ("conciliarity") and the village community (or *mir*). Perhaps the closest parallel to the Western European doctrines is found in Tolstoy's assertion of the Gospel "law of love" as an alternative to the "law of violence" in man's present "fallen" state (see Tolstoy, 1965). In his case, the "modern" literary form taken by the moral and religious phenomenon is especially important. These literary representations stand in a peculiar tension with the direct efforts at peasant education and reform at Tolstoy's estate. However, this entire phenomenon is very complex. A much more direct and detailed analysis would be required to show its relationship to the present theme, and such an analysis of Tolstoy's work must be deferred to a future date. It can be noted only parenthetically that Tolstoy greatly influenced the young Gandhi (1957) and that the ideas associated with their names have in this century traveled beyond their civilizational boundaries and perhaps begun to constitute an international anti-structural current.

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY TO THE PRESENT

The key historically inherited categories and basic polarities of these civilizations all began to undergo decisive transformation and reorganization in the nineteenth century, although the precise breaking points and changes in structure would need to be established and the relative importance of intracivilizational dynamics versus the effects of civilizational encounters need to be specified for each case.[10] In China, the Taiping rebellion signals the onset of fundamentally new forms of unrest, and since the middle of this century, the Communist regime has attempted to restructure the categorical framework of Chinese civilization. As a result, it has begun to demonstrate wholly new forms of opposition between revolutionary "purity" and bureaucratization and "development," between "red" and "expert" (Schurmann, 1968:esp. 51-53). In India's case, the Indian Renaissance of the nineteenth century (Kopf, 1969), the nationalist movement (Seal, 1971; Rudolph and Rudolph, 1967), and especially the turn toward newer forms of resistance with the Gandhi movement

tion and reform in the past century owe more to Natural Law ideas than Habermas allows. It is of some interest that Habermas's predecessor in the Frankfurt school, Herbert Marcuse, in the 1960s explicitly defended the notion of "a universal higher law" that does not reflect merely "special group interests" and argued that "we can and should lay claim today to the right of resistance as more than a relative right" (Marcuse, 1970:105; also 96). Also, Ernst Bloch (1986), in a very stimulating treatment of the Western natural law traditions, has envisioned a project of revolutionary social transformation explicitly linked to natural law premises. Habermas's view does not go unchallenged, even among those who share a "critical" stance toward modern society. For a critique of Habermas from the present standpoint, see Nielsen (1987). For a more balanced treatment of "natural law" doctrines, see Neumann (1957:ch. 3).

[10]In general, it would appear that the transformations of China, India and Russia were spurred especially by Western penetration, while the major upheavals in Europe itself were more the result of "internal" sociocultural dynamics, rather than the outcome of non-European influences. However, this verdict is not meant to underestimate the many influences on Europe exercised by Chinese and Indian ideas (Moraze, 1966).

early in this century are particularly noteworthy. Here, the traditional Indian role of "world renouncer" takes on new and more radical political dimensions (Dumont, 1970), and the break with older categorical frameworks and polarities is more difficult to define. Russia after the 1860s began to witness various waves of populism, communalism, and socialism that culminated in the revolutions of 1905 and 1917, although the Stalinist consolidation of the later 1920s appears to have reintroduced newer variants of some of the older structures and polarities (see Nielsen, 1989a). Europe itself was in upheaval throughout the nineteenth century. Decisive rumblings were heard in the 1830s and 1840s with the advent of widespread forms of prophetism, utopian socialism, and bohemian countercultural expression (Langer, 1969), even if it was left to the generation of the 1890-1930 era to experience the full "crisis" of the inherited amalgam of European consciousness. American experience in the past two centuries has often paralleled and interacted with that of Europe, with the 1840s and the turn of the century also being crucial periods. However, the 1960s qualifies as an especially imporant time of reassertion of American forms of civilizational polarities and anti-structural currents (Baltzell, 1979; Nielsen, 1984), although here again the movements are really international in character, rather than purely American. To determine the precise ways in which earlier European and American forms of "structure" and "anti-structure" were related to the earlier inherited civilizational categories and polarities, or represented entirely new structurations and antinomies, with new categorical foundations, or represented some mixture of both, is a task for historical sociological research which can be only mentioned in this context.

While it is remarkable that the nineteenth century in general saw the beginning of a simultaneous worldwide dissolution of inherited civilizational traditions, it is especially important for present purposes that this global upheaval also involved the breakup of or severe challenge to the traditional forms of opposition between structural and anti-structural currents within different civilizations and the beginning of new forms of polarity and opposition based on new efforts at total structural reorganization. Thus, while it can be expected that the old oppositions will continue to have salience, newer forms of expression will undoubtedly come to the fore, organized around new polarities and new senses of opposition between major and minor themes. A critical fact is that these new balances and oppositions may be global, international and intercivilizational in origins and scope as well as intrasocietal and intracivilizational (for different formulations of this problem, see Robertson and Chirico, 1985; Wallerstein, 1984; Nelson, 1981). As more stable forms of international economic, political, and social organization emerge, there are also likely to occur the assertion of global, international forms of "anti-structural" opposition. While the precise details of this change remain within the realm of speculation, the present analysis suggests that certain basic dynamics of civilization, the genesis of both structures and anti-structures in relation to key, abstract civilizational categories, will continue. It is unlikely that the structured oppositions between major and minor cultural themes will disappear, even in the era of global social life and consciousness. Indeed, they may intensify because of the increased scope and scale of the processes. The battles fought in the past in various places within civilizations between Confucians and Taoists, Christian church officials and radical sectarians, will probably be repeated on a global scale as there occur struggles over new forms of world order.

CONCLUDING THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS

The foregoing pages have suggested that civilizations are likely to contain permanently structured oppositions between relatively dominant (or "pro-structural") and subdominant (or "anti-structural") strains. Furthermore, these different strains emerge from a collectively shared set of abstract civilizational notions which become — are capable of becoming — subject to conflicting interpretations and accompanying ideals of life. On the basis of an examination of Europe and China, with briefer side-long glances at India and Russia, it would appear that these opposing strains become especially salient when there exists in the civilization some complex of ideas and images connected to a notion of "nature" or a "Law of Nature" that can be the reference point for comparisons with existing arrangements, or provide an ideal image of a past that can be revived and counterposed to the "fallen" present state. Here, I certainly do not mean to identify European and Chinese ideas about "nature" and *tao* (or *li*), but rather suggest that, by comparison with India, where individual world-rejecting mysticism seems to have been the major alternative, there appears to have been in both these cases, a greater capacity to legitimate "minor," "anti-structure," strains of thought and conduct by reference to some notion of "nature." Clearly the differences between China and Europe from other points of view are themselves great.

While it is not possible to offer a full "explanation" of these differences, a few remarks in conclusion may help to throw light on this problem from a purely theoretical standpoint.

The inherited constellation of ideals and images that provide the ultimate reference point for the definition of God, nature, man, society, and their relations are civilizational phenomena of the *longue durée* (Braudel, 1980:209-10) and, therefore, must have achieved a level of abstraction and universality which allows them to live many lives beyond their points of social origin (see Durkheim and Mauss, 1971; Nelson, 1984). Changing individual and group experiences, sentiments, and interests provide the substratum of life through which the "unit ideas" of a civilization enter the historical process. While the civilizational categories give form to the flux of human experience, the manifold qualities of life give the ideas real embodiment. In the phrase of Simmel (1968), "life" and "form" are opposed but mutually implicated horizons.

But why should the historical processes of individual and group life come to divide the civilizational structures along two alternate paths, into "major" and "minor" themes? Is it because "civilization," as such, always contains fundamental class oppositions and, therefore, as Marx and Engels once wrote, "the social consciousness of past ages, despite all the multiplicity and variety it displays, moves within certain common forms, or general ideas, which cannot completely vanish except with the total disappearance of class antagonisms" (1977, I:126). While attention to class antagonisms, status groups, and other forms of "social stratification" are important in any civilizational analysis of the actual historical manifestations of "major" and "minor" themes, it would be more fruitful to place the emphasis on the role (in Marx's phrase) of "common forms, or general ideas" that constitute civilizations. As these ideas become increasingly abstract, rationalized and universal, they become disengaged from any particular social setting (Durkheim and Mauss, 1963) and become "relatively autonomous." Such civilizational

forms can therefore accommodate a diversity of opposing interpretations. They are suited to an increasingly socially differentiated and individuated world, as they become prime vehicles of expression for peoples who have simultaneously become mutually divided and become shaken in their senses of collective identity and solidarity, yet are in need of constant communication and self-definition.

This has been especially true in the West, where the degree of universality and abstraction, and the extent of social differentiation and individuation have been the greatest (see Nelson, 1981). The same degree of abstraction and universality of ideas seems not to have developed in China, a fact that may help account for the Chinese ability to achieve a greater harmony and balance between their "major" and "minor" themes and a greater "building in" of diverse cultural ideals into a stable societal structure. Similarly, in India, there was an absence of any ideas of "nature" that could actually operate as the basis for the creation of a fundamental "polarity" in the structures of consciousness. A high degree of abstract rationalization of ruling doctrines was achieved among intellectual strata, along with world renunciation by individuals, but without a radical challenge to or transformation of social structures through the emergence of popular "anti-structural" versions of the civilizational ideals. On the other hand, the instability in the relationship of opposing themes in the West may very well be directly related to the greater degree — perhaps more accurately, the different types — of universalization and abstraction of cultural ideals and images that emerged there. In the West, universalization was linked to greater individuation, to the breakdown of older forms of community and the creation of more inclusive social systems, and to more abstract cultural ideals capabale of passing beyond social frontiers — *but also* to a vastly enhanced degree of indeterminacy and potential conflict of meanings that regularly emerged in the form of opposing interpretations of key civilizational categories.

In addition, although we cannot pursue this question, the tendency toward the "polarization" of these ideals is probably related to the fundamental social forms (themselves rooted in sociological "natural law") that Toennies identified as *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* and the various types of mixes achieved between different types of "community" and "society" in different civilizations (see Toennies, 1963; on Toennies, see Nielsen, 1988a; see also Mannheim, 1936). Moreover, once "major" and "minor" themes have become established as abstractly universal components of a civilizational process, they act as a "collective memory" (Halbwachs, 1980) and provide a relatively constant set of opportunities for the reappropriation of "heterodox" ideals, identities, and forms of community for actors from various social locations. Thus, there emerge heterodox as well as orthodox "traditions" (on this theme see Shils, 1981). This process of "reaappropriation" is itself complex, and also cannot be treated at length in this article. However, it would appear to be the case that once "polarities" have originally been structured into civilizations, it is difficult (not impossible) to remove them. Even a complete reorchestration of civilizational ideas and ideals, and the reworking of the precise types of structures and balances among elements which make up the new images of life, as has occurred at several points in the history of the West, will not eliminate a perpetual tendency for the breach to open up once again between newer forms of opposition. For this reason, this essay has concentrated on "origins" and basic

"structures" and "anti-structures" more than on the later complex histories connected with this problem. The many historical manifestations of the "polarities" within civilizations, as well as the more recent emergence of newer global oppositions, and their relationships to the present theme, must be left for treatment at some future date.

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