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Civilizations in Dispute: Historical Questions and Theoretical Traditions

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sial sense of what a University was about and contempt for the "Captains of American Industry." Veblen is introduced by a wonderful allegorical tale that he loved to tell about the subtle yet deadly ichneumon fly. The female has a long, thin nose-like appendage, used to deposit her fertilized eggs into a caterpillar. The dimwitted hosts may know that something has happened, but have not a clue as to what. They go about their business until the little grubs they have nurtured start to chew their way out. By then it is too late and they are eaten alive. The fly is a metaphor for the robber barons who exploited the environment and lived off of the surplus value generated by continuous cohorts of laborers, that is, the dumb caterpillars. This parasitic relationship is the hub of Veblen's long-lived *Theory of the Leisure Class*. It is still read today and, sadly, is appropriate for the times. As with many memorable books, a number of Veblen's concepts are part of the current vernacular: conspicuous consumption, conspicuous leisure, and conspicuous waste are examples that still typify America's leisure class.

The works that followed built on Veblen's first book and have stayed in print for some time: among them, *The Theory of the Business Enterprise*, *The Instinct of Workmanship*, and *Higher Learning in America*. In this last tome, he argues for the separation of the professional schools with their practical bent from the graduate schools that pursue knowledge for its own sake. He even asserts that undergraduate education should be done elsewhere; to let them into a "serious university" was a mistake. Many renowned scholars, such as John Dewey and Charles Beard, shared his position. Veblen followed his own values and helped create the New School for Social Research in New York City. There he pursued knowledge for its own sake. The professors of the New School were united in their commitments to objective understanding of the world around them and the emancipation of humankind. Veblen had, at long last, found a home. He retired in 1926, moved to California, and died there August 3, 1929. He remains today among those creative scholars and free-thinking trouble-makers who make the world of ideas the distinctive entity that it is.

Ronald Fernandez has produced a readable, insightful, occasionally funny, and

informative tome. Because it reads well, *Mappers of Society* pulls one into the worlds of great theorists. In the process, neophytes and professionals will see things that they may not have seen before, and after all, that is part of what good maps and cartographers do.

Civilizations in Dispute: Historical Questions and Theoretical Traditions, by **Johann P. Arnason**. Leiden, NDL; Boston, MA: Brill, 2003. 380 pp. \$79.00 cloth. ISBN: 90-04-13282-1.

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Civilizations in Dispute is an omnibus study. According to the author, a scholar with many years of experience in the field, it is a book in which the arguments emerge from a clear historical conjuncture: intellectually, that of the "cultural turn" in the social sciences and geopolitically, that of the demise of the rival universalisms of the cold war. From the perspective that the author characterizes as a "rediscovery of civilizations," it is a book with the clear purpose of pulling together the threads of the historical development of the field and sketching the contours of its prospects and problems for contemporary social inquiry.

It is argued that two conceptual issues underlie the development of the civilizational framework. These are the unitary versus the pluralistic conception of civilizations and the relationship between civilizations and culture. The historical antecedents Arnason discusses already reflect these concerns. On the one hand, from the sociological tradition, Durkheim and Mauss were explicitly concerned with civilization as a concept, and Weber argued for a comparative history of civilizations. On the other hand, as the issues that were fundamental to their projects and those following in their traditions suffered to the extent that sociology became more and more present-oriented, they were developed in macro-history by the likes of Spengler and Toynbee and those authors and critics who took up their lines of argument.

In order to flesh out the context of the broader debates (modernity is not explicitly

on the agenda, only the preconditions for an informed discussion), the civilizational legacies of China, India, Islam, and the West, in the main, and the deliberations and disputes surrounding them are carefully examined. Arnason gives a number of detailed accounts of the interpretations of the great civilizations from various authors, and one of the features of the book is his insightful analysis of each. Although he maintains that only selected authors and their ideas are to be discussed, their range and number are striking indeed (e.g., Cornelius Castoriadis, Franz Borkenau, William McNeill, Benjamin Nelson, S.N. Eisenstadt, Jan Patocka, and Jaroslav Krejci stand out).

In terms of concrete recommendations, Arnason argues that there are six main thematic foci around which the agenda of civilizational theory could be organized. The first three have to do with constitutive structures: the cultural premises of civilizational formations; definitions of the social context; and the question of intercivilizational connections. The remaining refer to concrete historical manifestations: the conceptualization of civilizations as multisocietal groupings; the temporal dimension to civilizational analysis; and the geopolitical and geocultural settings or regional configurations of civilizations.

Arnason's book, and the perspective it represents, makes a strong argument against understanding the contemporary world through the lenses of the nation-state. Civilizational analysis is one of the approaches that has recognized that there are longer-term, larger-scale units that configure the possibilities for social action through the construction and reproduction of collective identities. This is a consequence of the recognition of the interrelation of culture and power. By the same token, it is also the goal of civilizational analysis to conceptualize the constitutive role of culture in a way that excludes cultural determinism (note, however, Arnason's nuanced review and articulation of the difficulties of the problematic of "Axial civilizations" as an antidote to functionalism). Civilizational analysis takes seriously the idea that there are many ways of being-in-the-world (to a greater extent than even postcolonialism has contemplated), entailing an inbuilt critique of both Eurocentricism and evolutionism.

The author constantly reminds the reader of critical issues that will demand more study and knotty problems that have yet to be dealt with seriously. One of particular importance is the difficulty in theorizing the articulation between economic and civilizational arenas or, more specifically, the problem of markets and capitalism; in this regard the work of Fernand Braudel is given especially favorable review. A second is the delineation of a theoretically, and empirically, defensible conceptualization of the temporal and geographical extent of civilizations as a unit of analysis; this issue may be even more difficult, perhaps, than the author suspects.

Beyond its value as a compendium and review of the present state of the field, *Civilizations in Dispute* is a book that will find a place on the shelves of scholars and in the course work of students looking for a way of understanding the contemporary world where perspectives based on the nation-state as a unit of analysis have been found wanting. Finally, at least for the present reviewer, in this time of doubts about the idea of progress and the epistemological status of universality, the resurgent interest in civilizations in the plural generates a renewed hope in the possibility of an active and creative invention of the future.

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH TECHNIQUES

Historical Dynamics: Why States Rise and Fall, by **Peter Turchin**. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003. 241 pp. \$35.00 cloth. ISBN: 0-691-11669-5.

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When an individual from the natural sciences takes on a complex issue in the social sciences, the result can be either an exercise in naïve determinism bordering on the absurd, or a set of provocative insights bringing new perspectives to classical problems. In the lat-