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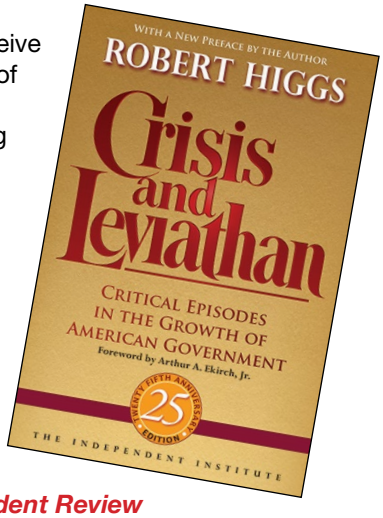

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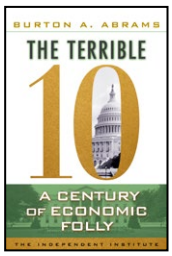
❑ 

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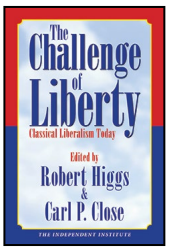
❑ 

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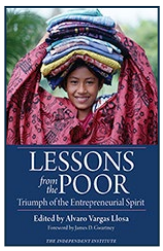
❑ 

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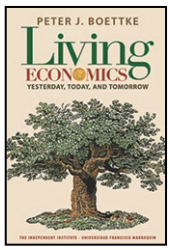
❑ 

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REVIEW ESSAY

The "European Miracle"

Warrior Aristocrats, Spirit of Liberty, and Competition as a Discovery Process

ANDREI ZNAMENSKI

While reading the news, I recently came across a small story with a photo, which produced more than forty thousand reposts and an avalanche of comments in the Chinese blogosphere. On the way to an appointment, Gary Locke, the newly nominated American ambassador to China, was spotted at the Seattle–Tacoma International Airport by a Chinese American businessman who happened to know him and who snapped and posted on his blog a picture of the ambassador standing at a Starbucks' counter, buying a cup of coffee and carrying a backpack. The posted picture fascinated Chinese bloggers. They wondered how it could be that the ambassador stood in line just like a common man with a backpack, buying himself a coffee. This image was a genuine shock. In China, things are simply not done this way. First, a person of his status never travels alone, but rather with a retinue of assistants and subordinates, who always jump to fulfill their superior's wishes. Second, such a dignitary does not stand in line and hang out with everybody else. He should be hidden, at least from the eyes of ordinary people, in VIP facilities. The businessman who took the pictured summarized well the gist of shared surprise among the Chinese at this news: "This is something unbelievable in China. Even for low-ranking officials, we don't do things for ourselves. Someone goes to buy the

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The Independent Review, v. 16, n. 4, Spring 2012, ISSN 1086–1653, Copyright © 2012, pp. 599–610.

coffee for them. Someone carries their bags for them" ("A Photo of Bag-Carrying Ambassador Charms China" 2011).

This story (to which I can add similar stories from experiences in my former homeland, Russia) haunted me while I was reading Ricardo Duchesne's *The Uniqueness of Western Civilization* (Leiden: Brill, 2011). Such accounts highlight what Duchesne has tried to explain throughout his more than five-hundred-page text and what seemingly should be obvious to any unbiased observer: at least in some pockets of Europe, mobile horizontal relations among autonomous individuals have long prevailed, in contrast to many non-European and European societies, where to the present day personal relations and political and social connections have frequently been based on vertical hierarchical subordination, with an "enlightened master" or a group of "masters" at the top of a power pyramid. Moreover, it appears that in human history people more often than not resorted to the latter system as their basic organizing principle. That fact, Duchesne stresses, is what makes parts of Europe unique. Here, unlike in the rest of the world, something gave rise to the idea of liberty, which, despite numerous obstacles, nourished horizontal relations among independent individuals. Going against mainstream humanities and social sciences scholarship, which for the past few decades has been preoccupied with elevating non-Western "others" to the center of world history, Duchesne unequivocally wants to remind us that Western civilization, with its idea of liberty, should be at the center, not vice versa.

His particular target is world history, a scholarly offshoot of multicultural ideology that came to dominate mainstream media and education in Western countries in the 1980s and 1990s. In an attempt to combat Eurocentric biases that had shaped earlier historical narrative and to make the past "equal," historians, anthropologists, and popular writers have rewritten history to catalog and highlight the accomplishments of non-Western "others," simultaneously downplaying Western civilization's contributions. One of the founding fathers of the world-history discipline was William H. McNeill, the author of *The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community* (1963), an important work that stressed the historical connections among various cultures, successfully replacing the earlier dominant parochial vision of civilizations developing independently from each other. At the same time, as early as the 1970s McNeill declared that the idea of liberty as the guiding principle in organizing history courses should be cast aside. Instead, learning from his anthropological colleagues, he suggested that cultures, how they interacted with each other, and how they responded to environmental challenges should be the core elements of world-history courses. For some reason, Duchesne does not mention another important name, anthropologist Eric Wolf, who with his influential and in many other respects brilliant book *Europe and People Without History* (1982) also helped intellectually to shape world history as an academic discipline.

Attempts to correct the distorted Eurocentric lenses through which people had earlier read history led eventually to another extreme orthodoxy—a new set of biases

with a different twist. In this new narrative, which frequently represented a mirror image of old Eurocentrism, the basics of ancient Greek science and philosophy were said to have been corrected by Arab intellectual masters, and Imperial China was claimed to be a burgeoning industrial nation that produced landmark inventions that Europeans stole and used to promote their imperialist agenda. Characters such as Crazy Horse and Mansa Munsa began to be viewed as having shaped world history no less or even more than George Washington and Queen Elizabeth of England. Duchesne designates his book as a necessary intellectual antidote that serves to counteract the arrogance of the scholarly enterprise now running amok. Trying to set the record straight, he does not shy from asking many uncomfortable questions. For example, Why did the Indo-European nomadic pastoralists who changed the face of Europe, the Near East, and India suddenly disappear from history books, whereas another group of nomads, the Mongols, were repeatedly praised as culture heroes and political geniuses who linked the East and the West into "Pax Mongolia," a web of cultural and trade networks? Why did people in many non-Western societies kow-tow, kiss the feet of a ruler, crawl, prostrate, or bow down, whereas the Europeans hardly practiced these acts of subservience? Why are the *Iliad* and the Scandinavian sagas filled with personalized stories and the names of various protagonists, whereas Oriental epic tales center on the great deeds of great kings? Why did some European societies manifest tremendous inquisitiveness about surrounding societies, whereas many non-Western cultures were not only *not* curious about their neighbors but also considered them to be primitive barbarians from whom they had nothing to learn?

Duchesne does not intend to revive the grand narrative of the triumphant march of Western civilization. In fact, he is not interested in exploring Europe's economic and political rise, which secured its global domination by the end of the nineteenth century. Instead, he examines the roots of the unique tradition of liberty that made possible various intellectual, artistic, and technological accomplishments in Europe and that, yes, contributed to its military and political hegemony. His goal is to bring to light a story of how in Europe—through the acts and deeds of heroic human actors who were more concerned about their individual autonomy and prestige—there emerged a type of society that held individual liberty in high esteem.

Duchesne reminds us that scholars too often have operated with such big, faceless aggregates as social forces and classes and paid too much attention to the material circumstances that conditioned people's activities, while giving too little room to individual human agency. To be sure, Duchesne is not the first to deal with this issue. As early as the 1970s and the 1980s, economist P. T. Bauer (1972) and economic historian Eric Jones (1981), in their books on the causes of modern economic growth in Europe, stressed that excessive emphasis on exclusively economic causes handicaps our discussion of the sources of Europe's emerging hegemony in the early-modern era. Libertarian historian Ralph Raico later reiterated this argument by drawing attention to the roots of the problem: "[T]here appears to be a methodological holism that prefers to manipulate aggregates while ignoring individual human

actors and the institutions their actions generate" ([1997] 2006). Bringing to light political and cultural factors widened the analysis of the "European Miracle." At the same time, the whole discussion evolved within the limits of so-called institutional approach that stresses the role of political fragmentation and decentralization as the major factor that allowed Europe to spread its economic wings. Although this approach is a well-taken and well-supported one, it leaves unanswered the simple question of how the fragmentation and decentralization came into existence in the first place.

There have been other explanations of the "European Miracle." For example, geographer Jared Diamond, in his best-seller *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (1997), which is now routinely used in college history courses all over the English-speaking world, plausibly ascribes Europe's rise to its favorable geographical environment. Other authors have tried to single out particular pivotal periods as responsible for jump-starting the European Miracle, focusing on the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Scientific Revolution, and the Enlightenment. Scholars have traced Europe's rise to the beneficial influence of Greek and Roman tradition and to Christianity's powerful influence. Finally, proponents of so-called dependency theory, who hold the West responsible for everything that goes wrong in the Third World, have insisted that Europe rose in power simply because it benefited from ripping off the Aztec and Inca gold and profited from the slave trade.[1]

Many of these factors are valid, yet no one of them separately can explain the rise of European creativity and its unique libertarian ethos. For example, many classical scholars in the past took it for granted that ancient Greece, with its polis system and sparks of rational thinking, stood at the very source of that libertarian tradition. Even if we accept this argument, the question remains: Where did the concept of the democratic polis come from in the first place? Duchesne takes the discussion of the European Miracle to a new historical and philosophical level by viewing such issues as Europe's modern economic advancement and its political decentralization as fractions of a bigger question: What are the general sources of the rise of European creativity? Digging deep into ancient history, he comes up with a provocative argument: the cultural roots of what later evolved into the European Miracle should be traced back to the social ethos of the Indo-European warrior aristocracy, which he considers an "unusual class with a strong libertarian spirit" (p. 406). He does not dismiss the geographical, social, and economic factors, but at the same time he stresses that the spark that ignited the whole process was this particular cultural group and its ethical code.

The bands of Indo-Europeans who laid a foundation for modern German, Slavic, Roman, and Greek languages had originally resided north of the Black Sea at the Ukrainian steppes, whence they moved to central and western Europe, the Near

1. In response to the latter assertion, a natural question arises: How in the first place did the Europeans come up with the tools and technology that, for example, allowed them to conquer the New World?

East, and India. They migrated in several waves separated by long time periods between 4,000 BCE and 1,000 BCE. One of the last migrations was that of the notorious Germanic "barbarians" who dislodged the crumbling western Roman Empire. Duchesne informs us that a peculiar democratic ethos of the Indo-European warrior aristocrats became a sort of "big bang" that initiated the whole chain of historical events that together molded "Western spirit" with its individualism and autonomous institutions: "The primordial roots of Western uniqueness must be traced back to the aristocratic warlike culture of the Indo-European speakers who spread throughout Europe during the 4th and 3rd millennium" (p. 344).

Daredevil free spirits always ready to fight and prove themselves, intolerant of any imposition on their personal status, and well nourished by their meat diet, these "Indo-European speakers" were physically strong warriors, who, on top of everything, became extremely mobile by being the first in history to domesticate horses. In modern times, the history of these people unfortunately was appropriated by the proponents of the so-called Aryan myth, who labeled them "Aryans," cast them into perfectly shaped blond, blue-eyed creatures, and (incorrectly) placed their original habitat somewhere in Nordic Europe. This connection explains the Indo-Europeans' conspicuous absence in our history books after World War II. Sensing that this aspect of history is an intellectual minefield, many historians and archaeologists simply avoid talking about it in order to stay on the safe side. In all fairness, these Indo-European nomads and their descendants were not exactly nice people. From Scandinavian sagas, we learn that they were essentially a bunch of self-centered brutes obsessed with a megalomaniacal quest for prestige and status, constantly seeking to prove themselves in the eyes of their peers either by fighting each other or by throwing feasts.[2]

Duchesne's point here is that out of this unattractive, individualized "military democracy"[3] a strong sense of personal autonomy gradually grew, which these noble aristocrats later sought to codify and safeguard in such documents as the famous Magna Carta. Later, new groups of "aristocrats" (towns, universities, members of guilds, farmers, and, eventually in modern times, workers' unions) began to claim their personal autonomy, extracting from lords and governments their own "charters of liberty". To secure their liberties, all of these people eventually connected themselves with each other by a web of contractual relations. Thus, in the course of time what had originally emerged as the selfish ethos of Indo-European warrior aristocrats opened doors to the full expression of individual potential, which was channeled into various economic, scientific, creative, and political pursuits. Duchesne describes this process by using the Kantian expression "unsocial sociability." Of course, many

2. One of the most notorious tales in this respect, in my view, is a saga about Arrow-Odd (Edwards and Palson 1970), who, in addition to making the customary Viking quest for heroic exploits, is shown (without any value judgment on the narrator's part) as plainly a mean, self-centered, and arrogant chap, although toward the end of the story, as he grows older, he mellows a bit.

3. I have borrowed this expression from old Marxist social science jargon (Engels 1884). To me, it captures well what Duchesne talks about here.

writers and philosophers had already noted a long time ago the beneficial presence of this "unsocial sociability" in the Western tradition. The most well-known examples are *Leviathan* (1651) by Thomas Hobbs and Adam Smith's famous economic dictum in 1776 about the invisible hand of the free market, when people working for themselves indirectly benefit the entire society.

This European libertarian ethos contrasted drastically with what existed in many contemporary non-Western societies, where individual initiative was suffocated and people were ruled, to borrow Ludwig von Mises's expression, by "virtue of command and subordination or hegemony" (1949, 196). At the same time, we know that the Indo-European bands migrated not only to western Europe, but also to the Near East and India. Why, though, did their allegedly libertarian ethos never materialize in these areas? Duchesne explains that in India and the Near East the Indo-Europeans represented a minority that was assimilated into local indigenous cultures that were heavily imbued with group-oriented ethics and in this way lost their individualized tradition of military democracy.

Moving further, Duchesne compares European heroic tales (the *Iliad,* the *Odyssey,* and Scandinavian sagas) with such Near Eastern epics as *Gilgamesh.* He finds that in Eastern tales, all characters except kings are faceless and frequently nameless sidekicks. All great deeds are performed by great kings or by great menacing gods who overshadow everybody else. In contrast, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are populated by individuals who have their own characters. They are enterprising people who are usually on a journey full of daring deeds. They interact with each other as comrades, with only traces of subservience or domination in their relationships with certain types of others.

Surely these epics somehow reflect the contrasting social ways in two different civilizations. Using these drastic differences in two bodies of epic tales, Duchesne draws attention to the examples of the enduring tradition of despotism in the East and in many other non-Western civilizations: kowtowing in Imperial China, nobles bending their backs when approaching an Inca in Peru, subjects prostrating themselves before a monarch and a noble in India or crawling in front of an Egyptian pharaoh, to name only a few. At the same time, he notes the absence of such customary habits in Western culture. Mentioning these facts certainly might offend the cultural sensibilities of non-Western "others" (including my own, for I originated in a country with a strong "kowtowing" authoritarian tradition, which had included prostration among other things).

In these circumstances, in old "Oriental" societies there was clearly less room for creativity, Duchesne sacrilegiously insists, providing numerous illustrations to support his argument. My favorite one concerns the famous textbook example about the invention of printing in China/Korea. School and college textbooks inform us that printing was invented in China, not in Europe, forgetting to note that in China this invention remained dormant and never spearheaded a vibrant print culture. We are also sometimes reminded that the metal-type press was invented not in Europe, but

in Korea in 1403, more than fifty years before Gutenberg printed his famous Bible. Yet the historians who inform us about this fact forget to remind us that when one of the Korean emperors decided to introduce a new script to organize mass printing twenty years later, the Korean elite, which was raised in the Confucian spirit of blind veneration of past tradition, was petrified by the prospect of losing Chinese script and flatly rejected his project.[4] So the printing revolution never materialized in the East.

In the meantime, in Europe the explosion of book printing did not emerge out of the blue. The ground for it had been prepared by the growth of towns—the islands of freedom in the medieval world—and by universities that enjoyed a high degree of autonomy in their curricula. The printing revolution in Europe was also fostered by the prior transition from the scroll to the codex, which already had pages resembling those of modern books, that had occurred gradually during the Middle Ages. On top of everything, the Europeans had at their disposal the Roman alphabet, which, in contrast to the elaborate Chinese hieroglyphs, could be readily adapted to mechanical use. So, as Duchesne reminds us, the most important thing was not who invented something (although here, too, Europe was the leader), but rather whether there were available opportunities to exercise one's ingenuity, including by freely borrowing from surrounding cultures. The Europeans were traditionally curious about other civilizations and were eager "multicultural" learners—unlike, for example, the Chinese. This curiosity definitely helped the Europeans to spearhead their creativity and eventually raised them economically and technologically above other groups.

The aristocratic libertarian spirit of military democratic chiefdoms, which, according to Duchesne, had awakened the Europeans' creative potential, was not a uniquely Indo-European feature, and he seems to understand this well. Although he does not elaborate much on this point, he does note that at the dawn of history various societies developed along two different trajectories: individual-oriented chiefdoms that had been collectively ruled by groups of "big men" (as among the Indo-Europeans) and group-oriented chiefdoms, where a single "big man" usually monopolized all power. Duchesne points out that other societies in world history cherished values similar to those of the ancient Indo-European warrior aristocrats. Thus, he briefly mentions the native peoples of the northwestern coast of North America (p. 385), where decentralized chiefdoms were driven by the same megalomaniacal quest for prestige and status. He unfortunately does not compare these societies with their European counterparts. Instead, he contrasts early medieval Denmark (and its individualist-oriented ethos) with two societies that were driven by a group-oriented ethos (Hawaiian and Incan). Of course, medieval Denmark and its class of free-spirited warrior aristocrats shine when cast against such textbook

4. This example also illustrates that even the "Oriental" despot was constrained in his actions by cultural and political circumstances beyond his control.

examples of "primitive socialism"—for example, the Inca Empire, where individuals were totally subjugated to the interests of a redistributive state.[5]

Duchesne's book definitely would have profited from a more detailed discussion of such examples as the Native American bands of the northwestern coast of North America (the Tlingit, Tsimshian, Haida, and others), whose entire social and economic life was saturated with the quest for prestige and whose chieftains hosted grand potlatch give-away ceremonies to prove their status (Kan 1993). An even better example is the American Indians of the Plains (Lakota, Blackfeet, Comanche, Crow, Cheyenne, and others), nomadic horse riders and meat eaters whose lifestyle and even migration patterns closely resembled those of the Indo-Europeans.[6] Duchesne unfortunately does not even mention them. To me, the Celtic and Germanic warriors' aristocratic tradition of prestige seeking, feasting, and constantly combating each other, which he describes in detail (pp. 369–77, 380–88), resembles something that comes straight from the playbook of an eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Plains Indian warrior, so similar are the features of the two civilizations. Like their Indo-European counterparts, the Plains Indians manifested the same megalomaniacal ethics of glory hunting, constant combat, and decentralized political structure in which a powerful "big man" could easily challenge his competitor and split away from the group along with his comrades and relatives anytime he wanted. Even the format of the Plains Indians' military parties (spontaneously organized groups of volunteer warriors in search of great deeds and booty) resembled that of the Celts and the Germanic "barbarians." Like their Indo-European counterparts, "berserks" from the American Plains threw themselves into combat to display their warrior spirit. Plains Indians also had special military societies that united "warrior aristocrats" of all ages (Wallace and Hoebel 1952; Lowie 1954, 106–8, 117, 125).

Like his European counterpart, the Plains chief was far from being an autocrat, sustaining his precarious status solely by continuous performance of glorious deeds. An extreme example of this practice is the Cheyenne, who, with a population of barely four thousand, were ruled collectively by a council of forty-four (Hoebel 1960, 37–49). We will certainly never know if these Plains "military democracies" would have evolved into something that would have resembled the Athenian polis, simply because some of them declined from natural causes,[7] while others were overrun by the American bureaucratic state that put these "warrior aristocrats" on governmental welfare rolls by 1900.

Most important, Duchesne does not say a single word about what happened to the "Aryans" who did not migrate to western and northern Europe but remained in

5. For more on the Inca "primitive socialism," see Baudin 1961 and Shafarevich 1980.

6. On the Lakota Sioux's westward migration to the Plains and their "imperialism," see White 1978.

7. For example, the famous "Comanche Empire," a highly decentralized collection of horse-riding and bison-hunting chiefdoms that lived by war and were ruled by "warrior aristocrats," collapsed by the 1840s because of drought, disease, and decline of the bison herds through overhunting even before the Americans advanced and took over their lands (Hamalainen 2009).

their "motherland," which eventually evolved into what became known as Kievan Russia, a collection of Slavic principalities whose Indo-European libertarian ethos had allegedly received a double boost when the Scandinavian warrior aristocrats joined their distant Slavic "cousins" and jump-started the Russian state in the early Middle Ages. As we know, Russia drifted along a different path, which eventually, in early-modern times, led to a despotic czarist regime and later produced a brutal totalitarian dictatorship that even the National Socialist regime in Germany, its twin brother, barely matched. There was surely interplay here of many unfavorable geographical, political, and religious conditions that totally muted any "libertarian ethos" that might have existed in the first place.[8]

The examples of Russia and especially Germany show well that the trajectory of the "libertarian spirit's" evolution even within its "European hub" was far from linear. In modern times in pockets of Europe, it was either eclipsed or greatly eroded or at least spread unevenly. The spirit of liberty obviously was more heavily represented and sustained in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, with its common-law practice, than in continental Europe, which might explain why England and the United States did not "crack" in the 1930s under the assault of socialist and nationalist ideas, whereas Germany and much of Europe happily placed themselves under dictatorial father figures. In fact, to the present day it is still unclear if the spirit of liberty, apparently an accidental by-product of European multicultural mutations (Germanic, Greek, and Roman people and Judeo-Christians), will survive or not, having to face now the suffocating bureaucratization of society and the entitlement ethos that has captured the minds of large segments of Western populations both in the corporate world and among the populace.

To support theoretically his argument about the gradual unfolding of the Western spirit of liberty, Duchesne turns to Wilhelm Hegel and Friedrich Nietzsche. In his famous *Phenomenology of Spirit,* Hegel wrote about the progression of the human spirit through several stages, which Duchesne invites us to read as the evolution of the Western spirit. Nietzsche, in his turn, emphasized the role of heroic individuals as movers and shakers of history. Both philosophers clearly fascinate Duchesne. He is particularly fond of Hegelian philosophy, with which he fell in love as a graduate student when he took specialized courses and apprenticed with one of the big names in this field. I may have misread or missed something, but upon finishing Duchesne's book, I concluded that his major argument would have stood well on its own without any Hegelian and Nietzschean backup.

If we seek a theory to help organize our thoughts about the evolution of the Western concept of liberty, a better choice than Hegel's or Nietzsche's might be

8. The first and foremost such condition was the Byzantine tradition of a centralized state that Russia absorbed along with Greek Orthodox Christianity—a regime in which church and state were never separated. Another unfavorable factor was a three-century period of living in a tributary state under the Mongol Golden Horde, a status that killed all sprouts of the aristocrats' autonomy and nourished instead the ethos of servitude. Medieval Russia's only "libertarian" enclave, the so-called Novgorod merchant republic that was collectively ruled by merchants and the nobility, lingered until the 1400s, when it was taken over and literally shut down by the autocratic Muscovite state (Riasanovsky 1969, 25–96).

found in libertarian scholarship, especially in that part of it known as the "Austrian school," in particular in Friedrich Hayek's concept of spontaneous order.[9] Well in tune with what Duchesne argues in his book, the Austrian school focuses on individual human action. As such, it has challenged various grand paradigms that operate with such large entities as classes and social forces and claim to explain and predict economic and social developments. The basic premise of the "Austrians" is that scholars should be biased in their analysis in favor of spontaneous individual activities because the overall trajectory of social and economic events cannot be accurately modeled or predicted—a stance that in fact perfectly fits the general current of so-called postmodern thinking. Out of individual efforts, more or less feasible traditions emerge that in turn might affect human behavior. This emergence does not mean that people become prisoners of their tradition. Because social and economic life is essentially unpredictable, room always exists for creative or, as Duchesne would say, heroic individual activities that might change the course of events. Hayek's concept of spontaneous order may help us to understand the rise of both societies based on the tradition of liberty and societies grounded in various forms of despotism.

Directly related to the question of the origin of European creativity is Hayek's approach to knowledge. He maintains that in any society knowledge is not monopolized but dispersed in bits of incomplete and contradictory forms among many individuals and that societies that permit individuals to make use of this dispersed information usually achieve better economic and intellectual results and eventually become more creative. This approach to knowledge also provides one of the major foundations for the libertarian critique of socialist, collectivist, and various statist utopias in which people's actions are directed from the top down according to a single central plan. In contrast, in a free society horizontal relations prevail, and many private "plans" collide and interact with each other. As history shows, the latter system, even though it is "chaotic," messy, and imperfect, ultimately outperforms the former, which at least on the surface appears to be well ordered and organized (Hayek 1984b, 212).

Contrasting a horizontally organized society based on a tradition of liberty with a statist society based on central planning, Hayek concludes: "Which of these systems is likely to be more efficient depends mainly on the question under which of them we can expect that fuller use will be made of existing knowledge. This, in turn, depends on whether we are more likely to succeed in putting at the disposal of a single central authority all the knowledge which ought to be used but which is initially dispersed among many different individuals, or, conveying to the individuals such additional knowledge as they need in order to enable them to dovetail their plans

9. Although preoccupied mostly with economic issues, this school of thought contains many insights that scholars in various humanities disciplines have recently used. See, for example, Higgs 2004; Woods 2005; Cantor and Cox 2009; and Raico 2010. Even some Marxist political scholars (Griffith 2007) have recently become interested in using Hayek's methodology, which might be a reflection of a slow and rather uneven paradigm shift away from the preoccupation with large "collective" aggregates such as social forces, races, classes, and genders toward an examination of the individual, the unique, and the "chaotic."

with those of others" (1984b, 213). Hayek points out that he is referring not only to scientific knowledge, but also to all kinds of "big" and "small" knowledge, including the knowledge of particular circumstances of the fleeting moment not known to others. It is reasonable to assume that in Europe historically the greater room for individuals to act on such knowledge fostered an upsurge in creativity in contrast to the slower pace of such development in various despotic societies, where, as Mises notes, thinking and acting, the foremost characteristic of man as man, were the privileges of one man only (1949, 152–53). As a result of the "chaotic" activities of competing autonomous individuals, in pockets of Europe better opportunities existed to utilize knowledge, which eventually pushed Europe ahead of other civilizations not only in the economic, scientific, and military fields, but also in various other creative pursuits. Hayek (1984a) has well analyzed this situation on a philosophical level in his essay "Competition as a Discovery Procedure."

If the ancient Indo-Europeans indeed carried the traits of the libertarian ethos, they might be considered unique not because they were the only ones who possessed this tradition, but because through the efforts of their descendants and favorable circumstances this ethos was spontaneously cultivated through millennia. What we usually call the West might have emerged as an accidental multicultural offshoot of social evolution, an offshoot that in modern times generated so many slurs and so much blessing from all over the world. At least in my reading, however, the grand "libertarian epic" that might have started somewhere around the 4,000 BCE and that Duchesne traces well into early-modern times, is not about the Indo-Europeans and the societies that evolved from their bands. Instead, it is a story about how people have spontaneously shaped the conditions that either constrain individuals in their creative pursuits or, on the contrary, allow them to spread their wings. In this respect, we might well conclude that people deserve whatever government, culture, and social mores they have created.

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Acknowledgments: This article is an expanded version of a paper presented at the first Euroacademia conference "Europe Inside Out and Europeanness Exposed to Plural Observers," Hotel de France, Vienna, September 23, 2011.