

Mathews estimates that 20% of the mobile phones currently in use in Africa were sold in Chungking Mansions. Large traders use the building to make contacts on the mainland, shipping containers of phones, clothing, watches and even cars directly from factories in Guangzhou to Nairobi or Lahore. Smaller traders carry a few hundred mobile phones in their luggage, hoping to make just enough profit to cover their airfare and fund their next trip back to Hong Kong.

Immigration officials turn the other cheek when traders repeatedly cross the border on tourist visas. Police largely allow illegal workers to man Chungking Mansions' restaurants, guesthouses and phone stalls, intervening only when there is a complaint or a violent crime is reported. Copy goods (such as 'Sory-Erichssen' mobile phone handsets) are readily bought and sold; authorities only intervene if there is deception on the part of the seller.

Like elsewhere in Hong Kong, business is the top priority.

The attitude of the Hong Kong government stands in stark contrast to the corrupt and statist administrations that traders must negotiate with in their home countries. Many of the small business people who pass through Chungking Mansions operate on the fringes of legality, not because they are dealing in illicit substances or are inherently criminal, but because local restrictions mean they must smuggle Chinese goods across their borders in contravention of import bans, or pay off crooked customs officials.

This, Mathews says, is the coal face of the protectionism versus

free trade debate: where some new regulation can make the difference between a small-time trader being able to feed his family or go out of business.

Goods are usually of inferior quality or are shoddy imitations of Western brands. But for the poor end-consumers in African villages, they are often the only realistic conduit to the globalised world. A young Kenyan woman may never be able to afford a Nokia phone, but she can use her 'Nokla' to communicate with her family, pay her bills, and perhaps start her own small trading business. This, Mathews says, 'is the ultimate significance of these traders: they bring at least a facsimile of global goodness to the world's poorest continent.'

Ghetto at the Centre of the World focuses not just on the traders but also on the guesthouse owners, illegal (or semi-legal) workers, asylum seekers, restaurateurs and tourists who congregate and often live in Chungking Mansions. Here, in a place where business matters above all else, Bangladeshis and Pakistanis, Ethiopians and Somalis peacefully coexist in a way they never could at home.

Muslims, Christians and non-believers live side by side, but they all share one unifying faith: 'the faith that in the capitalist ghetto of Chungking Mansions, within the neoliberal world of Hong Kong... one can squeeze out enough profit to make a better life for oneself and one's family.'

Low-end globalisation is not just a path to economic development but also a road to greater tolerance. Perhaps the world would be

a better place if there were more spaces like Chungking Mansions.

Reviewed by Jessica Brown

The Uniqueness of Western Civilization

By Ricardo Duchesne

Brill, Leiden, 2011

US\$139.50, 527 pages

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Was Europe the only civilisation capable of spontaneous industrialisation? Is its heritage of individual liberty unique? These questions have long been central in history, economic history, and political philosophy. Until a generation after World War II, they were treated as puzzles about positive internal changes. Scholars rarely examined the comparative performance of non-Western lands assumed to be mired in sloth, barbarism or tyranny. Then, rather suddenly, a revisionist school reared up, insisting that Europe possessed no special institutions or propensity to growth, and was original only in forming militaristic states. The Rise of the West was attributed to plunder and luck—plundering American resources and (in Britain's case) fortunately possessing an abundance of coal. Nor was it conceded that Europe broke away from a world of supposedly uniform achievement, or rather lack of achievement, until the early nineteenth century.

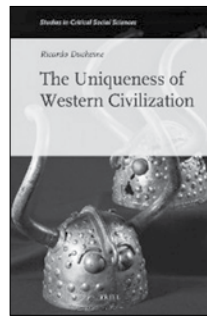
These opinions were advanced by quasi-Marxists and by area studies students affronted at the neglect of their specialisms. Vehemence is hardly strong enough

to characterise much of their manner-less and sometimes viciously ad hominem writing. As one author said of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, he 'seeks to convince not by arguments or historical analysis but by spraying charges of racism, imperialism, and Euro-centrism from a moral high ground.' But on the anti-Western side there was also genuinely heavy scholarship, which is what Ricardo Duchesne of the University of New Brunswick, Canada, mostly succeeds in refuting in his massive and staggeringly well-informed work.

It was high time a full defence of the West was mounted, and since I agree with the bulk of Duchesne's case, I shall have to lean over backwards to criticise him. Duchesne takes Hegel's point that it is vital to defeat opponents on their own ground. This may be true but it involves meeting opinion with opinion, which makes *The Uniqueness of Western Civilization* hard reading for anyone unfamiliar with the works Duchesne dissects. He has little difficulty exposing the inadequacies of anti-Western scholarship; wilful misattributions; and misconstructions of Malthus and Weber, for example. Duchesne shows that many of the revisionists slide when it suits them between writing about Britain (or England) and Europe, concealing that what they assert may apply to one but not to the other. Duchesne himself is not immune to the usual North American muddling of Britain and

England. It is strange that simple but important distinctions are often missed in otherwise elaborate texts.

The difficulty in following Hegel's dictum is of becoming trapped by the prejudicial terms of the revisionists: they are inclined to pigeonhole the writers they attack by attributing political motives to them or labelling them as (say) 'neoclassical,' a term without real analytical meaning in this context but bandied about as abuse. Duchesne does not wholly escape this trap and might have been advised to work with a specific model that would have enabled him to identify and dispose of his opponents' crucial errors, thereby rendering unnecessary some very, very long passages of point-by-point refutation.



While Duchesne's method, like that of the revisionists, owes too much to Marxist-style rhetoric, I do not wish to leave the matter of approach on a critical note. This is a persuasive volume, utterly crushing in its marshalling of evidence, yet consistently fluent and remarkable in the author's willingness to trace every constituent argument to its source. He provides many an account of topics that others pass over with a flourish, two of the neatest being his synopses of the histories of the steam engine and printing. Benjamin Jowett, Master of Balliol, said, 'one man is as good as another until he has written a book.' With this book Duchesne, who had so far written only articles, becomes more than a good man—he stakes his claim to being thought a sage.

Perhaps it is no surprise that in a work of such length—the bibliography alone runs to 29 pages—two or three parts could stand on their own as books. The first is a solid, standard *Rise of the West* text, discussing 'why Europe' and 'why industrialisation here first,' which examines studies by Andre Gunder Frank, Ken Pomeranz, and John Hobson—and finds them wanting, even tricky. Duchesne recognises that this literature concentrates on economic performance in early modern times. The complexities of the record have made it possible for revisionist authors to place Europe's economic attainments of that period in an unfavourable light. Although he thinks they are wrong even in that respect, Duchesne astutely points out that economic life is not the only sphere of importance, since Europe additionally cherished individualism and created liberty. Europe's peculiar qualities and gifts to the world are as marked in the polity as the economy. Although they are not unrelated, the cloudier aspects of political history do not all bear narrowly on industrialisation, say, and there is no reason why economic history should not be tackled in its own right. The practical reasons for so doing are plain.

Historians and philosophers tend to trace Europe's political singularity from Christianity to ancient Greece. As Duchesne fruitfully observes, they tend to park the matter there, as if Greece were *sui generis*. He probes into this, displaying prodigious learning in historical anthropology (informed throughout by

Hegelianism). To collapse many, many pages of debate, his argument is that Europe's essence lay in aristocratic competitiveness, contrasting with a 'serene and deferential East'—an aspect, however, that Duchesne explores sparingly. Europe's individualism, aggressiveness and so on reached the continent, he insists, as the baggage of invading, prestige-hungry Indo-European steppe nomads. These qualities, let alone their transmission to society as a whole, are rather imprecise and I was on the brink of dismissing them as too speculative when I found myself rather extensively cited. There must be something in the topic after all! But these hoary, contentious themes are really several orders of magnitude more speculative than the tracts of early modern history where Duchesne fences with the most fashionable of the revisionists.

It is a problem to exhume the history of thought and social structure in ancient Greece, but at least reams of scholarship exist on the subject. For centuries, higher learning in Europe dwelt on little else, except the slightly less faded history of Rome. Duchesne shows himself a master of the subject, especially in its anthropological guise. He shows himself, too, as a master of the archaeologically based sagas of the Indo-Europeans. He faces down anyone who would frighten us off the subject because of the Nazi's Aryan perversions, after which everything Indo-European was amputated and sanitised into mere linguistic studies. The task of taking the Indo-European legacy forward and connecting it with the priceless individualism

and liberty of modern European peoples is of an even taller order. This section of the book—or books—is relatively diffuse.

Europe's central merit, in my eyes, is to have installed in its politics a flexible system of self-correction. Europe's societies and their overseas heirs are far from faultless, but they do seem to show themselves better able than the alternatives to recover from mistakes—and often do so within the lifetimes of individual citizens. The greater part of *The Uniqueness of Western Civilization* is a critique of the type of revisionism that would toss all this out with the bathwater of Europe's militarism and imperialism. The author makes creative use of his combats with first one, and then another, revisionist—but a work of criticism remains a work of criticism. Its contribution stems from contradicting the negative. Only towards the end does Duchesne construct a more positive solution to the 'why Europe' question.

In a section on the emergence of the self, he turns from Hegel to Nietzsche, then back to Hegel and phenomenology. This goes beyond or even deeper than his view that 'the restlessness of barbarian individuals was the primordial source of all that has been noble and great in Western civilization.' It requires him to contemplate, and even speculate about, human motivation and the drives that animate us. Duchesne's book may persuade readers to ponder on the ineffable nature of the human soul. It will certainly

become an indispensable reference on the great passages of history.

Reviewed by Eric Jones

The Ethics of Voting

By Jason Brennan

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2011

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\$16.17

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T*he Ethics of Voting* argues that if we vote, then we should vote well or not at all.

Jason Brennan, an assistant professor of philosophy at Brown University, asks: 'what defender of democracy wishes to see her favoured system polluted?' Bad voting occurs when voters vote without sufficient justification 'for harmful policies or for candidates likely to enact harmful policies. For example, a person who votes to ban gay marriage because she finds it disgusting would, except in extraordinary circumstances, be guilty of harmful voting.'

Bad voting also occurs when someone accidentally or fortuitously votes for beneficial policies or candidates who support beneficial policies, but vote without sufficient reason to believe that those candidates or policies would be beneficial. In other words, they make the right choice for the wrong reasons or for no reason at all. Voters, Brennan says, are like surgeons. Not everyone can be a

