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MODERNIZATION ON TRIAL

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A product of modern European civilization, studying any problem of universal history, is bound to ask himself to what combination of circumstances the fact should be attributed that in Western civilization, and in Western civilization only, cultural phenomena have appeared which (as we like to think) lie in a line of development having universal significance and value.

Max Weber (1920)[1]

Once again, the United States is at war. Just as in the 1960s and 1970s, the battlefield is halfway around the globe in a third world country. The deployment of military force is again justified partly in terms of national interest, but also in terms of bringing modernity, freedom and prosperity to a people whose society can be described in terms such as "traditional," "despotic," "backward," "undemocratic," and/or "underdeveloped." The exact meaning of the polar opposition signaled by the words "modern" and "traditional" is, like all politically charged terms, subject to debate and far from stable, but the polarity has figured importantly in international affairs ever since the end of World War II, and its salience was sharply heightened by the suicidal attack on New York's World Trade Center in September, 2001. That tragedy, together with the erratic bellicosity of the American response—directed not solely at the perpetrator, Al Quaeda, but also at Saddam Hussein's cruel dictatorship in Iraq—put modernization back in the headlines for the first time since 1975, when the United States pulled out of Vietnam in defeat. With the return of modernization comes the vexing problem of what to make of differences between "us" and "them." What ethical obligations do scholars have in a world increasingly crowded with people who are

1 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* trans. Talcott Parsons, intro. Anthony Giddens (London/New York: Routledge, 2001), quote from "Author's Introduction," xxvii. Weber wrote this document in 1920, apparently intending it to serve as the introduction for a projected series on the sociology of religion. Ten years later, when Talcott Parsons published his translation of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, he incorporated the document into that publication as if it were the introduction to that text alone—which was, in any event, intended to be the first of the multi-volume series.

eager to sacrifice lives—their own or others'—for the sake either of preserving tradition, or of hastening the triumph of modernity? Most pressing of all, given the potentially civilizational scale of the conflict, is another integrally related question: what does the future hold for ethnocentrism?

In 1920, when Max Weber wrote the introduction for his dauntingly ambitious project on the sociology of world religions—the opening sentence of which is reproduced at the beginning of this essay—he could not have anticipated that readers today might find anything politically or ethically objectionable about the central question he was grappling with: *What made the West different?* At the time he wrote, the greatest sea change to occur during the twentieth century, the early stirrings of a movement to challenge, contain, and possibly even discredit ethnocentrism, had just barely gotten off the ground. Revulsion over the senseless bloodbath of trench warfare in World War I would, in retrospect, figure as one of the watershed events that helped precipitate the movement, for it brought widely into question for the first time the age-old conviction in Europe (as elsewhere) that loving one's own society, loving its people, and loving their folkways, standards, and values was as normal, natural, and praiseworthy as loving one's neighbors, loving one's parents, or loving one's own children. Yearnings for more expansive fellowship are probably timeless; "cosmopolitanism" was much heralded by the Enlighteners; and in the wake of the Dreyfus Affair of 1898 the widespread adoption of the word "intellectual" acknowledged a new respect for accomplished people who wore their ethnicity lightly. But before World War I, valuing the ways of one's own people above all alternatives had scarcely ever been seriously challenged. That would require the force of a movement, not just hopes and scattered voices.[2]

Transvaluing deeply entrenched values is not the work of a single generation, and so, unsurprisingly, it would take the still grimmer bloodbath of World War II

2 The claim I am making, of course, is not that there was no support for cosmopolitan values before the twentieth century, but that until then there existed nothing remotely like a "movement" dedicated to limiting or discrediting ethnocentrism. The movement's existence is most clearly manifested, and its strength in intellectual circles best revealed, by Richard Rorty's playful antics during the 1980s and 1990s—first shocking us all by embracing what he called "ethnocentrism," and then reverting to an orthodox anti-ethnocentric posture in the 1990s so we could all breathe a sigh of relief. David Hollinger observes that "the extremity of Rorty's ethnocentrism was revealed by the end of the 1980s to be a disagreement with other philosophers on the terms on which human solidarity should be affirmed. As soon as the Kantians are disposed of, Rorty's vision of human solidarity takes on a decidedly anti-ethnocentric cast: this solidarity, says Rorty, should be understood as 'the ability to think of people wildly different from ourselves as included in the range of "us"'" (D. Hollinger, *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism* [New York: Basic Books, 1995], 73).

to impart to the campaign against ethnocentrism the breadth and momentum required for self-sustaining growth. Traumatic as the agonies of World War II were, they might not have sufficed to galvanize the movement had it not been for the nightmarish visions of the future that the war happened to put into circulation: mass extermination for the sake of ethnic purity; nuclear weapons so destructive that their repeated use could render the planet uninhabitable. Even today, of course, living as we do on what could prove to be borrowed time, the campaign against ethnocentrism has made few inroads outside the West, and its ultimate triumph even in the world's most cosmopolitan centers is by no means assured. Still, if the deadly century just ended has any redeeming legacy, surely it will include the origination of this frail but hopeful effort to center human sentiment on something more inclusive and less homicidal than unthinking loyalty to the ethnos into which a person happens to have been born.[3]

Although it would be playing tricks on the dead to expect Weber to share the precise values that move us today, one need look no further than his parenthetical aside in the quoted passage—"(as we like to think)"—to see that in 1920 he was already keenly aware that any inquiry into the distinctiveness of the West would be exposed to all the temptations of ethnocentric smugness, parti pris, and self-indulgence. Reading Weber's introduction in its entirety may prompt objections to this or that claim of universality, but no fair reader, I submit, could judge the document a work of chauvinistic piety. It is an acutely self-critical discussion that briskly surveys claims of more or less universal value in both modern and ancient civilizations, and which ranges widely through cultural domains as remote from one another as astronomy, chemistry, architecture, music and bookkeeping. The document concludes with what was for the times an unusually far-sighted rejection of biological heredity as a way of explaining collective traits. Weber justified his rejection on the grounds that "it must be one of the tasks of sociological and historical investigation first to analyse [sic] all the influences and causal relationships which can satisfactorily be explained in terms of reactions to environmental conditions."[4] So it was on "environmental," or cultural and historical, grounds alone that Weber insisted that the West was different and that some of the differences—mathematics and experimental science least controversially—did indeed have "universal significance and value"—value, that is, for all human beings, whatever their time, place, or ethnos.

In Weber's day anthropologists were the scholarly custodians of biological heredity, and it was their disapproval that he was trying tactfully to forestall by

3 For a stimulating effort to bring history and moral philosophy to bear simultaneously on the miseries of the twentieth century, see Jonathan Glover, *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, CT/London: Yale University Press, 2000).

4 Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, xlii.

downplaying heredity, or, as he put it, "the anthropological side of the problem."[5] Today, ironically, anthropologists are the custodians not of heredity but of culture, and in the name of Franz Boas they rightly pride themselves on occupying the vanguard of the campaign to resist or restrain ethnocentrism. Given the ethical and political vantage point that they occupy, it is not surprising that they have little patience with much current work in history and none at all for social science scholarship of the kind associated with "modernization theory."

Consider, for example, a recent article published in the *American Historical Review* by the anthropologist Daniel Segal.[6] He calls upon historians to abstain from "Eurocentrism" and do what they can to help "provincialize" Europe and the West. No surprise there; these are the crude rule-of thumb pieties that unavoidably accompany political movements of all kinds. But in the course of identifying ways in which historians might cleanse their work of ethnocentric residues Segal also calls into question a seemingly innocuous practice having to do with periodization—namely, the well-nigh universal convention of dividing human history into two eras, the *pre-historic*, hundreds of thousands of years long, and a much shorter *historic* period extending back only as far as written records will reach. Segal does not doubt that humans occupied the earth for an immense length of time before written records came into use. He understands that, in the absence of written records, accounts of, say, Neanderthal life will never attain the depth, richness, and complexity that one expects of history. Yet he believes that historians who perpetuate conventional periodization needlessly put fellow human beings at risk.

What he fears is that when we exclude cultures lacking written records from the inescapably honorific category of "history," we unintentionally (but predictably) mark out for disrespect—or even destruction—living people, living cultures, that do without written records in our own world today. From his perspective, insofar as the passage of time is construed developmentally, it invidiously distinguishes "early" from "late," "primitive" from "developed," and thereby demeans living persons whose lives resemble early forms of human existence. In Segal's own words, "the imaginary of a largely empty time prior to history and civilization establishes a point of origin that flattens the multidimensional complexities and discontents of history onto a one-dimensional scale, which can be nothing other than a metric of development . . . History itself is thus fit into a developmental scheme."[7] Distaste for "developmental schemes" is widespread among anthropologists, not least because their fieldwork has brought some of

5 Ibid.

6 Daniel A. Segal, "'Western Civ' and the Staging of History in American Higher Education," *American Historical Review* 105/3 (June, 2000), 770–805.

7 Ibid., 784–5.

them into contact with modernization projects that went awry. To rid history of "developmental schemes" once and for all, Segal recommends stressing history's virtually limitless contingency. I demur, because I think he underestimates how radically and how implausibly contingency would have to be inflated to rid history of "developmental schemes."

We historians are indeed connoisseurs of contingency, but we are also connoisseurs of narrative structure. We routinely link "early" to "late" in such contingency-limiting entities as "tendencies," "trends," and "traditions." We speak of the gradual "rise" and the gradual "fall" of empires, institutions, projects, and careers, implying that events sometimes move for a time in discernible directions. The very idea of treating some act, decision, or event as a *cause* of subsequent events ordinarily arises because it is seen as an *intervention*, altering the pace or direction of some already anticipated *"course of events."* A few paragraphs back I began talking about a growing "movement" to diminish the force of ethnocentrism—a "developmental scheme," in other words, in which Segal himself is proudly enlisted as a worker, just as I am. He and I would lead inconceivably different lives if we and our fellow humans really believed that at any given moment, everything is up for grabs, anything at all could happen, and nothing is in any degree predictable, or more likely to happen than various pertinent alternatives. There is nothing inherently pernicious about developmental schemes, and a heavy burden of proof rests on anyone claiming that the developmental scheme running from "tradition" to "modernity" is no more than a mirage. When developmental schemes have factual warrant they become the means by which human beings pursue goals, make plans, and introduce a modicum of order and stability into their lives, no matter which side of the tradition—modernity divide they stand on.

What we scholars need, then, in order to work through the troubling ethical issues that arise in a world striving to revalue ethnocentrism and deeply conflicted about the merits of modernity and tradition, are historical studies well grounded in archival research, that imaginatively and concretely set before us what modernization has meant at particular times and places. This essay examines and compares two such studies: David Engerman's *Modernization From the Other Shore: American Intellectuals and the Romance of Russian Development* (2003) and Nils Gilman's *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (2003).[8] The books have a good deal in common. Both began as dissertations at Berkeley in American intellectual and cultural history. Both are

8 David Engerman, *Modernization From the Other Shore: American Intellectuals and the Romance of Russian Development* (Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press, 2003), and Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore/London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

about American intellectuals who were involved, as either actors or observers, in twentieth-century projects of modernization. The authors, who mention each other in their acknowledgments, have also collaborated in a recent collection of essays, *Staging Growth*, which is devoted to the same broad topic.[9]

Linked though the two books are by topic and authorial acquaintance, they are inspired by different questions and their stories unfold in contexts that differ both geographically and temporally. All the more reason to read them in juxtaposition if one expects, as I do, that comparative analysis should pay off most handsomely when similarity and difference are richly intermingled. What we have here are books at once similar enough and different enough to spark comparative insights that neither book alone could supply. My plan is to begin with Gilman's book on cold war modernization theorists, then turn to Engerman's account of modernization in Russia as seen through the eyes of American observers, and finally return to Gilman's account for some tentative conclusions about the ethical implications of modernization.

* * *

Nils Gilman's story begins in the aftermath of World War II. His protagonists are academic (mostly Ivy League) social scientists who in the 1940s and 1950s took up modernization as a cutting-edge, interdisciplinary research topic and put their expertise at the disposal of cold war policymakers. In a manner reminiscent of Edward Said, Gilman reads modernization theory as an unending *double entendre*, as much about the identity of Americans as about life in pre-modern societies. The book's "central argument," says the author, is that modernization theory highlights the double-sidedness of mid-twentieth-century American culture, reflecting at once "an optimism about the possibilities and pleasures of American style modernity and a fear that the house of cards might come tumbling down" (p. x). Wisely, the author does not exempt himself from the ambivalence and double-sidedness of the cultural complex he depicts: "Given my initial skepticism of and even disdain for the [modernizers]," Gilman observes, "it has been rather uncomfortable for me to realize my growing respect for the motives behind their ideas" (p. 22).

Gilman's ambivalence about his protagonists is apparent throughout the book. His comments on particular figures are often sardonic, sometimes scathing, yet when passing summary judgments on the modernization project as a whole he generally finds more to admire than to condemn—though only by a slender

9 David C. Engerman, Nils Gilman, Mark Haefele, and Michael E. Latham, eds., *Staging Growth: Modernization, Development, and the Global Cold War* (Amherst/Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003).

margin. Readers of my generation who were on hand to watch the 1960s unfold on college campuses may be surprised by how little Gilman's protagonists resemble the harsh caricatures that circulated among campus radicals at that time—images that still flourish today in some circles of colonial/post-colonial studies. Gilman dismisses as a "great canard" the allegation that modernization theory was "totalitarian" or "just another cold war-driven anti-communist screed" (p. 13). Nor will he even label it "conservative." On the contrary, he regards cold war modernization theory as a "manifestation of American postwar liberalism" and demonstrates to my satisfaction that "its history cannot be understood apart from the fate of that liberalism" (p. 4). Following the lead of Reinhard Bendix and others, Gilman links modernization theory not just to liberalism, but specifically to the social democratic values of the New Deal, suggesting that the "rise and decline of modernization theory mirrored the rise and decline of faith in welfare state modernism in the United States." On this reading, modernization theory becomes the "foreign policy counterpart to 'the golden age of the welfare state'"(Gilman, quoting Esping-Anderson, p. 17).

Gilman's stress on the liberal foundations of modernization theory does not deter him from acknowledging that it had a dark side. He credits the modernizers with a "sincere desire to imagine better lives for the global masses," even as he laments their hubris, their faith in technocracy, their distrust of popular initiatives, their glib certainty that history was on their side, their readiness to press for more drastic changes abroad than they dared countenance at home. He particularly deplores the increasingly authoritarian and militaristic methods that some of them embraced (p. 20). He understands very well that "becoming modern" could hardly help but function as a euphemism for becoming more Western, or more American, with all that that implies about the ostensibly universal appeal and value of American and Western ways of life. The danger that he sees lurking on modernization's dark side is not only celebratory self-congratulation, but also head-in-the-sand self-delusion about the supposedly unalloyed superiority of all things modern:

> Disdainful of anything that stood in the way of progress as they defined it, the modernization theorists hoped to short-circuit the give-and-take of politics and instead substitute fact, knowledge, and the indisputable authority of science. Unruly traditional societies had to be reorganized to make individuals subject to the epistemological control of social science . . . The modernization theorist's attitude of scientific authority marginalized competing sources of knowledge and identity that provided grounds for political resistance . . . At its core lay the eidolon of rationalist modernism: total knowledge about [the means of creating] a society free from both want and dissent, with boredom as its most threatening feature. [Modernization theory] left little room for the emancipatory democratic egalitarianism that Habermas has promoted as a necessary ethical foil to the Enlightenment exaltation of instrumental reason. (pp. 8–9)

Although Walt Rostow, Clark Kerr, Edward Shils, Talcott Parsons, Gabriel Almond, Lucian Pye, and other "mandarins of the future," as Gilman calls them, were authentic liberals, they took for granted the inevitability of cold war competition for the hearts and minds of third world peoples. Their theorizing was meant to clarify what was at stake in that epochal contest. In their eyes the cold war was fundamentally about the momentous choices that several generations of third world peoples were destined to make along a spectrum defined by two rival versions of modernization—on the one hand, Russian communism, with its promise of an ultimate triumph of equality, but day-to-day-reality of grim totalitarianism; on the other hand, the capitalist democracies of the West, especially America, a polity that was undeniably coarse and deeply tarnished by racial injustice, but also redeemed in some measure by its economic productivity, its deep investment in individual liberties, and its tilt (as things then misleadingly appeared) toward a humane, welfare state variety of liberalism.

Liberals though they were, these academicians invested their professional careers in a quintessentially cold war project and so found themselves up against the wall in the late 1960s, when a generation of college-age men erupted in rebellion against the draft. The ultimate target of that rebellion, let us recall, was a Democratic administration, legitimately descended from the New Deal, that was ordering young men into the widening bloodbath in Vietnam. As draft boards called up sons, brothers, and husbands all over the country, modernization came under blistering attack, along with anything else associated with "containing communism" or intervening in third world affairs. By the 1970s the academic modernizers had fallen silent, seldom even bothering to respond to their numerous critics. Gilman construes their silence as evidence that their scholarship had been indefensibly shallow all along. He could be right, but there is room to doubt that their scholarship was any more defective than that of other social scientists whose work was less politically charged. A more likely explanation is that by the late 1960s intellectual considerations had been swamped by political passion as liberal ranks splintered under the crushing weight of Vietnam. Newly minted "radicals" mounted the ramparts, denouncing "liberalism" in terms even more sweeping and indiscriminate than those employed by the right today. In that setting, modernization theorists, precisely because they stood for the swiftest and most influential currents of the liberal tradition, were sitting ducks.

Stepping back from Gilman's text to grasp the broad outlines of his story, one finds it oddly difficult to date the birth of the book's central subject, "modernization theory." When did a fully formed version of the theory first appear on the scene? The trajectory Gilman traces has modernization theory taking shape somewhat indeterminately during the 1940s and 1950s, flourishing spectacularly in the 1960s, and then collapsing under the weight of a perfect storm of criticism, internal as well as external, in the early 1970s. Thereafter he sees it

leading a shadowy existence marked by occasional revivals, most significantly in the writings of Francis Fukuyama in the years following 1989.

Gilman recognizes crucial antecedents in the Tennessee Valley Authority, Lend Lease, the Marshall Plan and the program of foreign aid announced in Truman's "Point Four" inaugural address in 1949. But if we take the first few pages of his opening chapter at face value, as many readers naturally will—supposing them to be the framing assumptions of the study—modernization theory did not appear full blown on the stage of history until a "steamy June morning in 1959." That surprisingly late date is when Edward Shils strode to the front of a conference hall full of social scientists working on issues of "development" and urged them to redefine their enterprise by subsuming "development" under the larger, more supple, and less economistic rubric of "modernization." In the idea of "modernity," borrowed from the art world, says Gilman, Shils found a new "linchpin for understanding the ambitions of the postcolonial regions" (p. 1).[10]

In the new states, according to Shils,

> "modern" means democratic and equalitarian, scientific, economically advanced and sovereign. "Modern" states are "welfare states," proclaiming the welfare of all the people and especially the lower classes as their primary concern . . . [Modernity entails] the dethronement of the rich and the traditionally privileged from their positions of pre-eminent influence. It involves land reform. It involves steeply progressive income taxation. It involves universal suffrage [and] universal public education. Modernity is scientific . . . To be advanced economically means to have an economy based on modern technology, to be industrialized and to have a high standard of living. All this requires planning . . . Modern means being western without the onus of following the West. It is the model of the West detached in some way from its geographical origins and locus. (pp. 1–2)

"With these words," says Gilman,

> Shils placed the question of modernity at the center of a decades-old debate about "development." From now on, thinking about development would have to take on not only the banausic details of how to spur change in the postcolonial world but also the larger question of what kind of society "development" should strive to create. With this speech, the discourse about development would join a larger and older conversation about the nature and definition of modernity, both at home and abroad. (p. 2)

The distinction Gilman draws here between "development" and "modernization" is well worth making, and the close attention he gives to this and other fine distinctions of tone and timing is one of the book's many strengths. But the distinction is so strongly highlighted that some readers may come away with the

10 On pp. 160 and 171 Gilman suggests a slightly different starting date, 1958, which marked the publication of Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East* (New York: Free Press, 1958).

erroneous impression that the truly significant antecedents for modernization theory date no further back than the 1940s (or even 1959), making the entire project of modernization easy to dismiss as nothing more than an expedient reflex of cold war strategy. To be sure, Gilman himself knows better and tries to steer readers away from that mistaken impression. He mentions in passing, with less stress than I think necessary, that "contributing to the taxonomy of modernity was one of the main products of nineteenth-century European social thought." He alludes to modernizing currents that ran deep in Victorian culture and aptly quotes that fearless modernizer of the left, Karl Marx, who famously observed that in spite of having been repeatedly overrun by intruders, India, the classic case of a "less developed" country, had "no history at all." Marx, he also reminds us, spoke calmly of the necessity that England bring about in India the "annihilation of the old Asiatic society . . . [so as to establish] the material foundations of Western society in Asia" (pp. 25–7).

My point is not simply that modernization has been around for a long time, or that it has inspired people of many different political persuasions. What needs stressing is that narratives of modernization have a distinguished intellectual pedigree, one so commodious and far-reaching as to be virtually co-terminus with the origins of social science as we now know it. The Enlightenment anticipated the creation of a distinctly "modern" science of society, but left its articulation and institutionalization to later generations. The pedigree dates back most importantly to the closing decades of the nineteenth century, when the West's own experience of "modernization" was deeply etched into the lives, as well as the minds, of a singularly creative fin-de-siècle generation.[11] In struggling to make sense of the new world taking shape before their eyes—a world of demographic upheaval, technology-driven factory production, swelling urban concentrations, escalating global commodity flows, and ever more implacable market forces—thinkers such as Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, Ferdinand Tonnies, William James, John Dewey, along with the several theorists of marginal utility, created the universe of discourse that we, their epigones, now inhabit and take for granted. Broadly speaking, they created what we today interchangeably call "modern social thought" or "social science"—an analytical mode of inquiry,

11 Four classic texts concern themselves with the fin-de-siècle transformation: H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought, 1890–1930* (New York: Knopf, 1958); Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action: A Study in Social Theory with Special Reference to a Group of Recent European Writers* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1937); Morton White, *Social Thought in America: The Revolt against Formalism,* expanded edn (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1957); James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Social Thought, 1870–1920* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

not confined exclusively to the academy, that is acutely conscious of the power of circumstance to shape human conduct and which accordingly promises, by re-engineering relevant circumstances, to empower human beings, enabling them collectively to remedy injustice and liberate themselves from ignorance, penury and dysfunctional practices of many kinds.[12]

It was the stressful experience of the West's own "modernization" upon which that seminal generation of social thinkers cut its intellectual teeth. Consequently, I regard the silencing of Gilman's modernization theorists by the rising tide of anti-war sentiment in the 1970s as more than a crisis in the careers of a few dozen social scientists trying to ply their trade by hastening third world development. It was also a crisis in the career of social science itself, along with the signature vision that animates that mode of discourse—the ideal of a new, deliberately constructed form of society, as remote from the past as progress could make it, in which people's lives would become increasingly a product of reason and choice, rather than resulting haphazardly from chance, tradition, scarcity, coercion, superstition and kindred constraints. In short, social science and the idea of modernity were joined at the hip long before Edward Shils called attention to their affiliation on that June morning in 1959. Social science, secular thought,[13] and the idea of

12 Welcome as the promise of empowerment was in some quarters, social science aroused resistance in others, for the indispensable premise of social science as a form of inquiry and reform practice has always been that we humans—all of us, not just sinners—are "creatures of circumstance," inescapably mired in a mundane world of contingency and heteronomy that to a great extent makes us who we are. That premise deeply undercut centuries of Christian teaching about a quasi-transcendental self, one that because it embodied an immortal soul possessed a special dignity and could, with the help of the church and the grace of God, be expected to rise triumphant over all but the most adverse circumstances. The remnants of that heroic sense of self were still strong enough in Weber's generation to make the very idea of social science a bitter pill to swallow, and those remnants remain a source even today—even in secular circles—of much evasiveness and confusion about the nature of the self and its suitability for attributions of praise, blame, responsibility, and other human qualities of far-reaching significance. A fuller exposition of these themes appears in my essays on formalism and anti-formalism in part three of *Objectivity Is Not Neutrality: Explanatory Schemes in History* (Baltimore/London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 235–367. Finally, it must also be noted that my characterization of social science tacitly assumes well-intentioned users. Like any human tool, social science can be and often is put to objectionable uses—gulling consumers, manipulating voters, designing electoral districts that silence minorities, etc.

13 In identifying social science with the emergence of "secular thought" I do not refer to anything that could be gauged by a decline in church attendance, or by a diminution of personal piety. Instead, I have in mind Reinhart Koselleck's exquisitely compact essay, "Modernity and the Planes of Historicity," which traces the displacement of one way of thinking by another during the seventeenth century. The "robust religious expectations of the future that had flourished after the decline of the Church" gave way to a very

modernity have long been mutually reinforcing, and their dynamic interaction had no grander ambition than the establishment of the welfare state. To say all this is not to dissent from Gilman's central arguments, but to relate them one to another and to make more explicit some of the premises and presuppositions on which I believe his account must rest.

* * *

There is more to say about Gilman's book, but having established the bare contours of his story let us now begin juxtaposing David Engerman's related but revealingly dissimilar tale. To begin with, the geographical setting of Engerman's story is neither the first nor the third world, but the second—Russia itself. Academic discourse in recent decades has been so transfixed by the horrendous magnitude and urgency of third world suffering that a major global power such as Russia may not even come to mind as an early case study of accelerated transition from "backwardness" to "modernity." No one reading Engerman's account will doubt that it was just that. The chief Russian modernizers of course came from within, not from abroad, and they were neither scholars nor soldiers, but victorious revolutionaries led by the likes of Lenin and Stalin. Unlike the American modernizers studied by Gilman, they did not merely recommend courses of action but wielded power directly—and remorselessly. Engerman tells readers what they need to know about these powerful men, about the decisions they made, and about the Marxian theory of modernization that sometimes shaped their thinking, but as a historian of American culture his principal interest is not in them, but in the way well-informed American observers interpreted the spectacle

different conception of time in which the future was understood to be revealed, not by biblical prophecy, but by "rational prognosis and the philosophy of historical process." For thinkers such as Guicciardini and Bodin, "the future became a domain of finite possibilities, arranged according to their greater or lesser probability." What was left behind was the "conception of the future that was taken for granted by the religious factions: the certainty that the Last Judgment would enforce a simple alternative between Good and Evil through the establishment of a sole principle of behavior." From this distinctly secular "plane of historicity," Koselleck argues, there emerged many new developments, including the idea of progress, an "acceleration" of time, and a heightened ability to historicize, to perceive the past as profoundly dissimilar from one's own, "modern," era. Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (Cambridge, MA/London: MIT Press, 1985), 11–13. Koselleck's analysis gives us another way of highlighting the implausibility of anthropologist Daniel Segal's proposal, discussed earlier, that historians rid their work of "developmental schemes." To do so would be to return to a way of thinking about the future that no longer construed it as a "domain of finite possibilities, arranged according to their greater or lesser probability," thereby rendering "rational prognosis" either impossible or irrelevant.

of cruelty and suffering that Russian modernization unleashed. For although this was arguably one of the most aggressive and reckless modernization projects ever undertaken, American intellectuals watched it unfold with an uncritical enthusiasm that defies understanding.

There may be some sense in which Engerman's book was inspired by the nominally similar task that Martin Malia, a Berkeley historian, set for himself in *Russia Under Western Eyes* (1999), but Engerman's book is confined to American observers and pitched at a decidedly lower level of generalization. It does not rise to the nearly poetic eloquence of Malia—few books do—and neither does it invite readers to sense any deep correspondence between philosophical debate and great affairs of state, as Malia's does. The well-informed American observers whom Engerman takes as the protagonists of his story are not philosophers or intellectual giants of any kind, but intelligent men and (occasionally) women who presented themselves to the public as authorities on Russia and performed well enough in that role to earn wide respect. The close attention Engerman lavishes upon these observers makes this a book not only about modernization, but also about the "professionalization," or institutionalization, of expertise in Russian studies. As such, its narrative necessarily reaches back into the nineteenth century in order to seek out the antecedents of those intriguing, impassioned, and sometimes almost cult-like devotees of Russian studies—some of them government officials, others journalists, scholars, or freelance writers—who by the cold war era had come to be known as "Russia watchers" or "Sovietologists."

The central strand of Engerman's narrative begins in Civil War America, at a time when authoritative opinion about Russia and its people was exceedingly thin. Whatever authority an individual might possess was acquired in unpredictable, highly personalized ways. George Kennan, the most widely read nineteenth-century American writer on Russia, whose advice about the Russian Revolution would one day influence Woodrow Wilson and Secretary of State Lansing (p. 96), embarked upon adult life without benefit of a college education. In 1865, as an Ohio telegraph operator thirsting for adventure, he enlisted in an expedition that was to map potential telegraph routes across Siberia. When the project foundered a year later, he made the best of a bad thing by writing a history of the failed expedition. Redefining himself as a journalist, he traveled extensively in Russia, cultivated a talent for quasi-ethnographic observation, and published books that brought him wide recognition and considerable influence as an expert on Russian affairs (pp. 30–31).

By the time Engerman's narrative comes to an end in the 1930s and 1940s, nearly a century later, the conditions of expert authority in America had been radically transformed. George Kennan's grandnephew, George Frost Kennan, author of the famous 1947 "X-article" that heralded the cold war policy of "containment," grew up within a dense network of institutions whose taproot lay in the modern

research university. The new institutional setting fostered critical exchange, set high standards of performance, and bestowed upon those who performed well a formidable authority that had few counterparts in Civil War America. The younger Kennan was schooled at Princeton. In the 1920s the government's newly established Foreign Service sent him to Berlin for several years of advanced training in language and history. When the Roosevelt administration terminated the US policy of non-recognition in 1933, Kennan was the young Foreign Service officer chosen to set up the new embassy in Moscow. The founder of *Foreign Affairs*, the policy journal that published Kennan's article on containment, was the historian Archibald Cary Coolidge, who had inaugurated a flourishing center for Russian studies at Harvard in the 1890s. Coolidge's authority quickly spread beyond the academy to government circles, yet he confessed early in his career that Isabel Hapgood, a translator and Russophile who held no academic post but did much to introduce Americans to Tolstoy and other Russian literature, knew "twenty times as much about Russia" as he did (pp. 56, 42). The University of Chicago offered Russian studies as soon as it opened its doors, in 1892, even before Harvard. The leading figure there, Samuel Northrop Harper, had few students and left nothing like Coolidge's institutional legacy, but he enjoyed munificent support from Charles Crane, a Russophile plumbing magnate. Harper and Crane, like Coolidge and the elder Kennan, had the ear of the Wilson administration when the Bolsheviks took power.

These and many other intriguing personalities move briskly through Engerman's pages as he sketches a panorama of experts—two or three generations of them—who made themselves the lens through which Russia would be perceived in the United States. The single most distinctive feature of the book is the meticulous attention he devotes to each of these individuals and to what they were thinking—about Russia, about its people, and, most importantly, about the way Russians came to be the kind of people they were. That Russians were *different* seems to have been taken for granted. "With only one tenth of the land arable—and even that land had a growing season roughly half of western Europe's—Russian agriculture was by far the least productive in Europe." Peasants comprised three-quarters of the population. Most peasants were serfs who, until 1861, were owned by nobles or by the state itself. This was a society in which relations of command and obedience had been little tempered over the centuries. No wonder, one might think, that Americans and western European observers dwelled endlessly on the differences between themselves and the Russian peasantry.

Even before Russia became a political entity in the eighteenth century, Europeans saw those living east of the Vistula River as markedly different from themselves. As political boundaries and regimes shifted—from medieval Rus' to early modern Muscovy to the

advent of imperial Russia at the turn of the eighteenth century—western commentators maintained a fairly stable stock of Russian character traits. Diplomats, traders and adventurers joined the leading figures of the French Enlightenment in enumerating Slavic traits: conservatism, passivity, lack of hygiene, fatalism, and general backwardness. (pp. 17–18)

American observers would, of course, be influenced by their European predecessors, and that influence was surprisingly uniform. "From von Herberstein in 1549 to Leroy-Beaulieu in 1877, these [European] writers assessed Russia's backwardness in terms of its inhabitants' nature. Rooting Russian character in climate and geography, the European tradition offered few opportunities for improvement. Backwardness was not just a relative condition but an essential and permanent one" (p. 27). Although Engerman credits some American observers with being slightly more optimistic about the possibility of change in Russian character, what is most striking in his account is the consistency of derogatory images from the early modern period to the twentieth century, and from one side of the Atlantic basin to the other. Within the Russian population itself, the same traits of lethargy, impulsiveness, passivity and self-defeating fatalism were commonly imputed to the peasant population. What is one to make of unflattering stereotypes that persist across centuries and are so widely accepted?[14] There is no easy answer to that question, yet our response to it obviously has ethical consequences that are potentially far-reaching. Projects of modernization make no sense unless modern lives are (a) authentically different from traditional lives, and (b) different in a way that cries out for remediation. Insofar as perceptions of difference are suspect, or distorted by ulterior considerations, the enterprise of modernization may be altogether misconceived. The credibility of people's perceptions of others is therefore a pivotal matter.

Although Engerman takes pains to document extensively the continuity and consistency of the derogatory traits imputed to Russians, especially peasants, he studiously avoids rendering any explicit opinion as to the validity or invalidity of the traits so commonly imputed. Frankly, I found his silence on this issue to be a bit unnerving. His interest in stereotypes is plainly not casual or incidental; readers will be quick to sense that representations of Russian character and conduct are being catalogued, as it were, for a purpose the author has not yet fully disclosed. As the catalogue grows, chapter by chapter, curiosity about the use to which all this evidence will ultimately be put begins to imbue the book with something of a "page-turner" quality. Engerman does not shy away from the word "stereotype," which is used by some authors in such a way as to automatically discredit any opinion so labeled, but of course not all widely shared opinions that persist through time are false. It is my impression that Engerman wants the term

14 To be sure, Engerman also presents scattered evidence of romanticization of peasant life, especially stressing their endurance in the face of hardship.

to be taken in a more neutral sense, as more or less synonymous with "collective opinion" or "collective representation." And insofar as the term is neutral, the greater the consistency of the stereotypes reported, the more credible they seem as a valid representation of character and conduct. Yet Engerman withholds any explicit judgment one way or the other. (He does make it clear in an early footnote that he does not mean to *endorse* any of the characterizations he reports, but that does not speak to the issue of validity.)

I take Engerman's silence on this issue to reflect an interesting methodological decision. One of the most common observations by Westerners was that Russia was conspicuously "Oriental." Like Edward Said, Engerman is confident that perceptions of difference are intimately connected to "imperatives of government rule." They could and did function as forms of "social power" (p. 8). Alert though he obviously is to the dangers of "Orientalism," Engerman also takes pains to distinguish his own approach from that of Said, who in his view paid "minimal attention to the differences among depictions of the Orient, and to the ways they changed over time." In consequence, says Engerman, Said's "critique of homogenization and hypostatization applies equally well to his own analysis of Orientalist discourse" (p. 8). It is presumably Engerman's hope of carrying out a more rigorous and refined version of Said's mode of analysis that prompts him to report with such care and specificity on the exact ways in which Russians were described and their actions explained by Westerners. Still, by not sharing with readers his own opinion as to the validity of the various generalizations about character that he sets before them, he leaves readers in the dark about a crucial issue of interpretation.

Many readers will applaud his silence, and understandably so. Since no one can confidently claim to know how to ascertain the degree of correspondence between collective representations of group character and the historical reality they purport to depict, epistemological humility is certainly in order. Some readers may be content merely to suspend judgment. Others may conclude that although it is important always to take collective characterizations with a grain of salt, the ones Engerman reports were too frequently expressed and too widely accepted to be treated today as no more than libelous fabrications. Although I prefer another mode of interpretation, both of these modes seem to me entirely compatible with Engerman's text.

Other readers, especially the most militant disciples of Said, are left free by Engerman's silence to reach very different conclusions. If one assumes, as some scholars do, that collective characterizations of others are normally motivated by lust for domination, and that they bear at most only a tenuous relationship to the empirical reality of people's actual character and conduct, then it follows that such perceptions have little or no evidential value—except, of course, as testimony to the domineering malice of those who embrace them and benefit from their existence. From this perspective, an author's silence about the validity

of collective perceptions follows unsurprisingly, for the possibility that they are faithful to life has been ruled out in advance.

Finally, there will be still another group of readers, the present author among them, who will hope that Engerman undertook this project of carefully documenting collective characterizations on the tacit assumption that they do have evidential value, even though ambiguous and susceptible to misinterpretation. Engerman's reasoning might go something like this. Stereotypes lacking even a kernel of truth are hard to sustain and unlikely to spread. But once that kernel is in place, the gradual accretion of collateral assumptions, practices, and presuppositions that forms around it can metastasize so far beyond the truth as to become an outrageous lie—especially if the lie serves "imperatives of government rule" or other powerful interests. Yet even then, the most insidious power of stereotypical thinking does not come into play until the lie begins to function as a self-fulfilling prophecy, lowering expectations in the minds of both the beneficiaries of the stereotype and its victims. In that mode, demeaning characterizations begin to make the empirical world over in the image of the libelous stereotype. The so-called "brute facts" of character and conduct become malleable under the relentless pressure of collective expectations.

Motives of political correctness often inhibit well-intentioned people from acknowledging any correspondence whatsoever between stereotype and empirical reality, but that is a needless and ethically ill-advised evasion if the analytical scheme I just sketched is right. There are no Teflon slaves.[15] It will not do to chant hymns of limitless resilience and unconquerable agency in the face of severe oppression. We should never pretend that oppression does not have profoundly detrimental consequences for those subjected to it—consequences that can extend beyond the lives of individuals to alter the communal culture they inhabit, and then be passed on to succeeding generations. Those consequences can include social pressure to "live *down* to" the demeaning expectations bred by stereotypes. And once in place, the cultural imprint of oppression can take generations to eradicate.

So I come away from Engerman's catalog of demeaning stereotypes wishing that he had given me all the guidance he could about the credibility and insightfulness of each of his various observers; we readers need all the help we

15 In reaction against the so-called "damage thesis," identified especially with the work of Stanley Elkins, a whole generation of historians, capped by Herbert Gutman's 1974 book *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom*, set out to show that blacks had managed to create a rich and resilient family-centered culture even in the grip of slavery. Peter Novick observes that, "At its extreme, work in this vein suggested Teflon slaves, all but immune to the system which oppressed them." Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 487.

can get. Lacking that help, I am content to believe that Russian peasants probably were, on the whole, more fatalistic, more lethargic, and more impulsive than the generations of Western observers who repeatedly chose to characterize them in those terms. After all, there is no reason to think that the circumstances of rural life under marginal conditions of productivity are conducive to the heightened sense of personal agency and wide causal horizons that has come to seem normal in the "modern" world. My preferred interpretation implies nothing "essential," fixed, or irremediable about the character of peasants, and it is entirely compatible with the larger point Engerman wants us to embrace: that long-standing stereotypes about peasants may have helped pave the way for the brutality inflicted upon them in the early 1930s by a government so vicious and so intoxicated with dreams of modernization that it shrugged aside even the most elementary considerations of decency. Acknowledging the probable validity of peasant stereotypes in no way excuses the evil inflicted upon peasants in the name of modernization.

Before we proceed to the fateful famine years of 1932–3, consider two examples of the concise, informative, unassuming reports that Engerman supplies to show his readers how modes of explanation affected the thinking of American observers. The elder Kennan was a fairly typical Victorian who prized personal character above all else, defining virtue in terms of the rationality of a person's conduct, the soundness of their education, and the "manliness" of their self-control (p. 31). Group character for him could be little more than the sum of individual characters. Although he did not refrain altogether from thinking in terms of national character, he was less likely to rely on it than most contemporaries. These values, says Engerman, influenced his characterizations of both individuals and cultures:

> Compared with other expert writings (even those from his own era) Kennan's descriptions of Russia were deeply imbued with Victorian sentiments: rooted in a strong sense of social hierarchy, yet offering hopes for improvement; more concerned with individuals than with peoples . . . Prior European accounts had little room for improvement, while subsequent American ones focused primarily on national rather than individual character. (p. 37)

In what may seem a counterintuitive contrast, Engerman finds that the younger Kennan, with his decidedly superior education, took national character, climate, and geography with utmost seriousness as forces that ineluctably shaped personhood and were not at all easy to overcome, collectively or individually. The "major theme" of his Princeton history courses had been "'the effect of such things as climate, geography, and resources on the character of human civilizations'" (p. 245). Studying in Berlin under Russian émigrés in the 1920s, he learned still more about how to "weigh the effects of climate on character, the results of centuries-long conflict with the Asiatic hordes, the influence of medieval Byzantium, the national origins of the people, and the geographic characteristics

of the country" (p. 258). As late as 1946, when Kennan authored the famous "Long Telegram," he continued using the "character-based logic of his wartime essays," explaining Soviet diplomacy in terms of Russia, not communism. "What might seem at first glance like Bolshevik traits, Kennan argued, had Russian origins" (p. 264). Yet a year later, in "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," ostensibly authored by "X," he shifted his ground away from national character for the sake of preserving a working relationship with James Forrestal. Ironically, he then came to be seen as a champion of the idea that rising diplomatic tensions signaled the onset of a battle that was fundamentally *ideological*, not just a clash of dissimilar nations with conflicting characters and interests (pp. 266–7).

Engerman knows better than to think that any particular mode of explanation is all good or all bad. Although he certainly implies that in 1947 reliance on national character would have been preferable to the overwhelmingly ideological modes of interpretation that displaced it, he also believes that explanation in terms of national character did immense harm during the Soviet famine of 1932–3. Dramaturgically, his century-long narrative tracing the dual themes of Russia's modernist ambition on the one hand, and modes of perception and explanation on the other, reaches its emotional climax when the two themes converged in a famine that took the lives of an estimated 8 million people. The victims were overwhelmingly peasants. The grain they grew was needed by Stalin's central planners to feed the growing cities and to export abroad in payment for the machinery necessary to make Russia an industrial nation. Stalin's goal required the Soviet Union to "reach in one decade a level of industrialization that had taken other nations five times as long to achieve" (p. 154). Collectivization was a brutal means of asserting political control over the countryside, heedless of the consequences for those who worked the land (pp. 194–5). Farmers were forcibly deprived not only of seed corn, but of food. Overcoming backwardness was, in Stalin's own hortatory words, as much a matter of psychology—achieving self-respect—as of economic development:

> We are advancing full steam ahead along the path of industrialization—to socialism, leaving behind the age-old "Russian" backwardness. We are becoming a country of metal, a country of automobiles, a country of tractors. And when we have put the USSR on an automobile, and the muzhik on a tractor, let the worthy capitalists, who boast so much of their "civilization," try to overtake us! We shall yet see which countries may then be "classified" as backward and which as advanced. (pp. 153–4)

Although Westerners traveling in Russia were already being carefully coached and shepherded, intellectuals and radicals flocked by the thousands every year to tour the country and witness for themselves the great experiment: an entire society purportedly "organized around modernization." Many American intellectuals were deeply impressed by what they found and "looked to the Soviet Union

for solutions to what they saw as the problems of modern America—or more broadly, the problems of modernity itself" (p. 155). Engerman vigorously rejects the widespread impression that the Westerners who toured Stalin's Russia so acquiescently must have been "diehard Marxists, alienated intellectuals, or simply fools." On the contrary, "some of the greatest American minds of the 1920s praised aspects of Soviet life. They did so not because they were alienated from American society but because they were active participants in heated public debates about the future of the country" (p. 158). Few had done any serious reading in Marx or Lenin; fewer still were followers. Their fascination with Russia was not just a consequence of the Great Depression and the frailties of capitalism that it revealed, for the pilgrimage began before the stock market collapsed. "Finally, and most distressingly, these intellectuals recognized the hardships faced by Soviet citizens but endorsed Soviet policies nonetheless." The same stereotypical views of the peasantry that had been formulated to explain Russia's backwardness were now invoked to justify the brutality of Russia's campaign to become modern. "Whatever allowed their support for the Five-Year plans, it was not ignorance of the costs" (p. 158).

The American economist Stuart Chase regarded Russians as a "'naïve and simple people,'" held back by the "'ancient working habits of the east.'" Those habits exposed them to "years of famine in which they 'starved by the hundreds of thousands'" (p. 164). "'A better economic order,'" he casually opined, "'is worth a little bloodshed'" (p. 165). "Charles Beard calmly looked forward to the establishment of a 'single national authority' to take charge of America's 'five year plans.'" John Dewey endorsed Soviet educational methods, welcoming what he called "an enormous psychological experiment in transforming the motives that inspire human conduct" (p. 174). Thorstein Veblen was excited about Russian economic planning and "found much to like in revolutionary Russia." The list goes on, and includes more than a few who recanted their uncritical enthusiasm in later years. Engerman takes as the book's subtitle a phrase, the "Romance of Economic Development," that comes from a passage drafted by the younger Kennan in 1932 as he contemplated the manifest failings of the Plans, even while acknowledging that they aroused so much enthusiasm among Russians, especially the young, that they might succeed in spite of their flaws. Modernization was an infectious passion, for Russians and foreign visitors alike.

Engerman's central claim is that demeaning stereotypes made peasants easy targets for oppression and contributed to the failure of Western observers to sound any alarm about the brutalities of Stalin's Russia. His strongest evidence for that claim comes in a chapter titled "Starving Itself Great," about American journalists and their coverage of the famine years of 1932–3. Here he brings to bear detailed research in the correspondence and publications of five journalists—Walter Duranty of the *New York Times*, Louis Fischer of the *Nation*, Maurice

Hindus, a freelancer, Eugene Lyons of the United Press, and William Henry Chamberlin of the *Christian Science Monitor*. Engerman's argument—which defies condensation—strives to ferret out who believed what; when they came to believe it; and why all five journalists were so slow to see through Soviet pretences and acknowledge that people in the countryside were dying like flies. Censorship, of course, played a part, as did government machinations and contrived impediments to travel. But there is no denying that the equivocation of these decent, knowledgeable, highly regarded journalists helped make possible what a Russian historian would later call a "top-secret famine" (p. 195). They seem in retrospect to have shied away from speaking plainly for fear of losing access to valued government informants who, as a matter of official policy, sought to discredit every "rumor" of famine. What Engerman believes deflected them from their duty as objective reporters was, in brief, a toxic combination of the "romance of economic development" and a deeply ingrained condescension toward peasants. Once again, he insists that sympathy for communism, while certainly present, has been greatly overworked as an explanation for what these men did and did not do. Fischer, he concedes, did toe the party line. Chamberlin and Lyons once had done so, but party loyalty does not adequately explain their conduct during the famine (p. 217).

> All five of these journalists shared two basic assumptions about Russian and Soviet life . . . First, they generally expressed great enthusiasm for the Soviet Union's program of rapid modernization . . . Like their academic counterparts, they recognized that this program entailed high costs, but they explained these as the price of Russia's bid for industrial greatness. Second, the journalists' calculations of these costs were discounted by their low estimation of Russian national character. Western journalists disparaged the peasantry almost as much as Soviet officials did. (p. 197)

Engerman even goes so far as to say that "American observers found the sacrifices worthy because they considered the people sacrificed so unworthy" (p. 242). Although the ethical perspective from which he writes obviously owes much to Edward Said, it owes even more to the mid-nineteenth-century radical Alexander Herzen, whose best-known work, *From the Other Shore* (1850), is the source of Engerman's title. Writing in the shadow of the failed political excitements of 1848, Herzen, deeply repelled by the recklessness with which some radicals shrugged aside customary standards of conduct in order to advance utopian visions, cautioned against making "one generation the means for some future end" (p. 5):

> Do you truly wish to condemn all human beings alive to-day to the sad role of caryatids supporting the floor for others some day to dance on [?] . . . or [the role] of wretched galley slaves, up to their knees in mud, dragging a barge filled with some mysterious treasure and with the humble words "progress in the future" inscribed on its bows? (p. 5)

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Readers of my generation may be forgiven for reading Herzen anachronistically, as if his cautionary parables were a direct retort to that nameless young officer in Vietnam who, in response to a journalist's question, blurted out the logic of the battlefield—*to save the village, we must first destroy it.* Are the 2 million lives lost in connection with Western military intervention in Vietnam any less horrifying than the 8 million lives lost in the Russian famine of 1932–3?[16] If pressed for an answer, I would have to say yes, but the answer would bring me no satisfaction and would rightly be spurned by anyone of deeply held pacifist convictions. At what order of magnitude do comparative body counts leave sanity behind? Tens? Thousands? Millions?[17]

* * *

As an aid to ethical contemplation, the Russian case proves to be rich and rewarding. The sheer scale of governmental villainy helps us establish a sense of proportion about the pitfalls that await projects of modernization, and the author's meticulous attention to collective representations, coupled with a tantalizing silence about their validity, highlights conundrums that will recur not only in matters of historical interpretation, but also in the formulation of policy. But the story of Russian modernization fails us in one respect. Its villains and victims are so starkly etched that it can only carry ethical inquiry so far. We readers can count on one another to have shared expectations about what journalists should do in the event of a massive famine—publish the truth. There is no comparably easy consensus about what we can reasonably expect of modernization theorists whose government seeks their advice about a third world country being torn asunder by guerrilla war.

So let us now set Engerman's book to one side and return to Gilman's cold war modernizers. From an ethical perspective, what one would most like to know about them is what difference their theories made. How did the work of the modernization theorists affect the formulation and implementation of US national policy, both diplomatic and military? In the absence of theory, would different policies have prevailed? If so, which alternative policies would have gained support? Did theory shape events, or trail along behind? Could

16 The estimate of 2 million killed in the war in Vietnam comes from Glover, *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century*, 47. The figure presumably includes civilian as well as military deaths and includes the French counterinsurgency campaign as well as the American.

17 By way of full disclosure, the reader is entitled to know that in 1964–5 I was a lieutenant in the US Navy, stationed for eleven months in Saigon, where I was attached to the Naval Advisory Group. During most of that time I worked in Vietnamese Naval Headquarters as Advisor to the Assistant Operations Officer of the Vietnamese Navy.

modernization theory have been no more than a veneer of justification and legitimation for decisions made for other, more pressing, more tangible reasons? Is it true, as campus radicals believed in the 1970s, that lives hung in the balance when modernization theorists put pen to paper? Answers to these and related questions would be needed before one could confidently pass judgment and allocate responsibility. But alas, these questions are easier to ask than to answer. Advice-givers seldom leave behind smoking guns, and even under the best of conditions archival limitations make written history a mere sketch of life. Through little or no fault of his own, and in spite of exhaustive archival research, Gilman is not in a position to shed much light on the exact questions that would be most decisive for ethical judgment. To some of those questions, no adequate answer is ever likely to be forthcoming.[18] That said, it of course remains true that this history, like any history, is thick with ethical decisions, those of author and protagonists as well. One ethical question that could mistakenly be seen as solely methodological, or epistemological, is whether modernization theorists knew what they were talking about. Was their expertise reliable?

Gilman's explicit ethical judgments exonerate no one, but neither—as I see it—do they stack up as a severe indictment of the cold war modernizers. He says, for example, that the allegation commonly heard in the 1970s, that modernization theory was "hopelessly reductionist in its conception of change abroad . . . and blindly reflective of the political and social prejudices of the mid-century American Establishment" was a "mixture of truth and half truth" (p. 3). He seems generally to accept the specific charge most commonly directed at modernization theorists—that they naively anticipated that third world change would follow a "single path," conforming closely to the experience of the West—but this was a very easy charge to bring, and a very difficult one to resolve. Like quarrels between lumpers and splitters, or debates over whether a glass is half full or half empty, they elude resolution. Were any of the major theorists really naïve enough to think that the path from tradition to modernity was fixed, ruling out all surprises? Could any of them have really believed that "stages" of economic growth were a rigid sequence of steps that, if followed in the correct order, would yield a guaranteed "takeoff?" I doubt it. Gilman is more receptive to this sort of charge than I would be, but he does not supply the concrete illustrations and examples that it would take to make such charges stick. His characterizations of the vigorous internal debates that went on among modernizers seem to me indicative of a fairly high level of sophistication and critical acumen.

18 The only question that I was disappointed not to find answered in a more systematic way concerns the relationship between scholars and policymakers. In what variety of ways was the work of the theorists brought to bear on events? To what extent were scholars merely writing books and essays, hoping that policymakers would read them?

Although he regards modernization as "misguided in many ways," Gilman also concedes that it "signified a necessary and serious attempt to grapple with the intellectual and policy issues that decolonization raised in the context of the cold war" (p. 3). He does not deny that modernization theory "emerged as an answer to the surging postwar geopolitical and ideological power of the Soviet Union," yet he also rightly observes that it "turned anti-Communism from the hysterical red baiting populism of McCarthy into a social-scientifically respectable political position" (p. 13).

Gilman's ambivalence is well suited to the conflicted character of his subject, even when it results in side-by-side statements so divergent that they seem not to belong on the same page. In the following passage, modernizers' good intentions begin as paving stones on the road to hell, and then, given the collapse of idealism in our own time, become an instructive vision for current policymakers to follow:

> The various hells that postcolonial countries from Indonesia to Iraq to Columbia have entered in the last thirty years were almost always preceded and justified by well-intentioned modernizers, both liberal and communists, who believed they knew what was best for these lands . . .
>
> Today, in the early twenty-first century—when an ideology of consumerism, free trade, and "structural adjustment" is virtually all that the United States offers post-colonial regions—it is instructive to consider the ambitious postwar vision of what the United States could do for the postcolonial poor. The tragedy of modernization theory is that while its misleading understanding of the historical process still underpins much Western (and postcolonial) thinking about postcoloniality, its secular reformist ideas have died without being replaced by positive alternatives. (p. 20)

Gilman's richest archival evidence concerns his main protagonists, people such as Walt Whitman Rostow, Gabriel Almond, and Talcott Parsons. Three chapters of the book are devoted to close archival analysis of the three principal institutions within which these and other leading scholars carried out most of their work: MIT's Center for International Studies, where Rostow and Lucian Pye held forth; the Social Science Research Council's Committee on Comparative Politics, led by Gabriel Almond; and Harvard's Department of Social Relations, where Talcott Parsons trained a generation of prominent sociologists, some of whom worked on modernization.[19]

19 In an exceptionally useful "essay on sources" Gilman identifies the University of Chicago's Committee on the Comparative Study of New Nations as an equally important fourth institutional setting that he would have examined but for the fact that the relevant documents are not yet open to researchers. The committee, consisting of Edward Shils, Clifford Geertz, David Apter, and Lloyd Fallers, was formed in 1959. Of prime interest is Shils, who looms very large in Gilman's account but whose papers will remain closed, at his own direction, until 2045 (Gilman, p. 317).

Of all the cold war modernization theorists, the one easiest to cast in the role of villain is, of course, Rostow—Rhodes Scholar, Vietnam hawk, advisor to presidents Kennedy and Johnson, and author of the most widely read book on modernization, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (1960). An early-blooming prodigy and one of the few "mandarins" to have been trained as an economist, he was one of the founders of the Center for International Studies, established at MIT in 1952 with CIA funding. Gilman takes it for granted that with Rostow as the highly visible public face of modernization theory, there is no denying that the project contributed directly to "justifying the militaristic approach to third world politics," most obviously in Vietnam. "Even if becoming a Vietnam hawk was not the *only* possible policy reading of modernization theory, there was also nothing in the theory that would have given a hawk pause" (pp. 190, 197–9; italics in original). The so-called "Rostow Thesis" blithely called for destruction of "external supports" for guerrilla insurgents. Rostow was among the first to advocate the invasion of Laos and the use of ground troops along the Ho Chi Minh trail. Gilman believes that "the Democratic administrations of the 1960s took Rostow's theory to mean that if the United States could shepherd underdeveloped countries safely through the take-off stage, then the communist contagion could be arrested" (p. 197). Vulnerable as Rostow's legacy plainly is, Gilman deftly captures the complexity of an extraordinary and multifaceted life: "Though Walt Rostow by the late 1960s was spending most of his time directing the killing of Vietnamese peasants, he was also more sincerely interested in improving the welfare of postcolonial people than the vast majority of his contemporaries" (p. 22).[20] Gilman also credits *Stages of Economic Growth* with being, not an anti-Marxist tract, but an insightful attempt to "reclaim Marx from the Communism of the Soviet Union" (p. 201). He even entertains the possibility that Rostow's contributions to modernization theory are best understood as a form of "contrapuntal Marxism" (p. 202).

Gilman's sharpest criticism is directed not at Rostow but at his MIT colleague Lucian Pye, author of *Guerrilla Communism in Malaya* (1956). Trained in political science, but strongly influenced by the Yale psychologist Harold Lasswell, Pye construed communism as a form of psychopathology and "did more than anyone else to elaborate the modernizing potential of the military in 'underdeveloped' countries." Although Gilman credits Pye, the son of a missionary, with many reservations and cautionary asides, he concludes—stretching things a bit in my opinion—that by legitimating the deferral of democracy and supplying a justification for temporary military dictatorship, Pye occupied a position "akin to Martin Heidegger's in his celebration of early Nazism" (pp. 168–70, 186, 190).

20 Surprisingly, the source for this serious allegation is not identified.

If the CIA connection casts a shadow of uncertainty and mystery over the entire program at MIT, it also looms large in the fascinating career of Edward Shils, who in Gilman's account figures as the single most ubiquitous, most productive, and most influential figure among all the modernization theorists. How much our view of modernization will change when Shils's papers are opened to investigators in 2045 is anybody's guess. That he was among the organizers of the CIA-subsidized Congress for Cultural Freedom is already known. A caustic man whose undergraduate major was in French literature, he was a social worker in the black neighborhoods of Chicago during the depression before becoming a research assistant in the University of Chicago sociology department in 1933. There Shils took part in seminars on Max Weber and continental social theory taught by Franklin Knight and Robert Park. Like Gabriel Almond, he spent the war in the army's Psychological Warfare Division. After the war, he was one of four founders of Chicago's famed Committee on Social Thought, and also the founder of two important journals, the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, which fought hard for civilian control over nuclear energy, and *Minerva*, devoted to the history and sociology of the university, together with the academic disciplines it houses. One of Shils's earliest publications, Gilman reminds us, was his translation of Karl Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia*, a pivotal volume in the education of more than a few intellectual historians, myself included. For all the questions hovering over this enigmatic figure, the worst things Gilman finds to say about him are the words his friends used to describe him in their "eulogies" upon his death in 1995: "cantankerous," "abrasive and unhelpful," "very confrontational," and "vituperative."

We come finally to Talcott Parsons, the last of the major figures we have been examining in hopes of clarifying the ethical implications of cold war modernization theory. Gilman identifies Parsons as "the first and most preeminent of modernization theorists" (p. 75). That is a surprising label to assign to Parsons, given the fact that, unlike all the other modernization theorists discussed in this book, Parsons was never in the business of advising policymakers about third world problems. He was not on the White House or Pentagon invitation lists. Gilman explicitly acknowledges that "Parsons was generally unconcerned with the postcolonial regions and their problems" (p. 76). Still, Gilman regards him as the modernization theorist *par excellence*. Why?

The reason, Gilman explains, is that "the basic question his project tried to answer was 'What made the West different?'" (p. 76). Here Gilman seems to forget that the question was Weber's long before it was Parsons's, and that it could equally well be imputed to Tonnies, Durkheim, and others of that fin-de-siècle generation as well, for all of them were struggling to articulate the meaning and significance of the West's own "modernization." The coming of the cold war no doubt gave the question a new practical relevance, but, as I suggested earlier, its intellectual

pedigree, scarcely distinguishable from that of social science itself, goes back to the turn of the century. That is why there is such great risk of misunderstanding in framing modernization theory as a phenomenon originating in the 1940s or 1950s. Modernization is not a distinct or separable episode in the history of the social sciences that one can snip out for inspection and evaluate mainly in relation to the political struggles of the 1960s and 1970s. It is instead a vital current flowing, for better or worse, through the entire history of the social sciences. To put the point provocatively, I hazard the guess that when modernization theory becomes extinct, it will be because social science itself has become extinct.

Gilman gets Parsons's role among the modernizers exactly right when he says that "Parsons articulated the implicit understanding of modernity that undergirded the project of modernization theory better, earlier, and more thoroughly than anyone else" (p. 75). However, I take this as compelling evidence that modernization lies so close to the heart of social science as to be virtually co-terminus with it, while Gilman takes it to be evidence of Parsons's complicity in the somewhat shady business of cold war politics—even though Parsons did not advise policymakers about third world problems. Parsons was the teacher of the teachers. Ironically, he chose to remain within the ivory tower, while more aggressive figures such as Rostow, Shils, and Pye sought practical influence, thereby knowingly exposing themselves to ethical and political criticism—yet Gilman strains harder to find fault with Parsons than with any of the others. The multi-authored signature publication of Harvard's Department of Social Relations, titled *Toward a General Theory of Action* (1951), is described by Gilman as an ominous "attempt to establish a monolithic and exclusive theory" that "aimed to codify all existing knowledge," making it "a bid for theoretical hegemony" (p. 84). Worse yet, it "consistently attenuated individual agency," related individuals to society only through "roles," and enshrined "conformity" and "stability" as the highest values (p. 85). Parsons is said by Gilman to have turned to Weber as a way of "attacking Communism while accepting certain crucial elements of Marx's own thought." Parsons's "smiley-faced reading of Weber," says Gilman, was "perfectly suited" for "attacking Communism." Gilman even suggests that "Americans generally rejected Weber's image of modernity as an 'iron cage,' perhaps cognizant of how this trope echoed the rhetoric of the 'iron curtain'" (p. 92). All this, I believe, is misconceived.

For an author who started out feeling disdain for the modernizers and thinking that cold war modernization was such a hubristic undertaking that it never stood a chance of succeeding, Gilman comes a long way by the end of the book (p. 22). More power to him. Gilman's visible struggle to reconcile his findings with his political and ethical commitments is refreshing at a time when too many historians treat their commitments as sacrosanct and conveniently find nothing in the empirical data that surprises them in the least. Notwithstanding all his

reservations, when push comes to shove Gilman accepts, in effect, the position that Weber endorsed in the epigraph appearing at the head of this essay—that the West is different, and that some of the differences are of universal significance and value. On the final page of the book, summing up the practical lessons he would have us draw from his inquiry, Gilman says that

> the aim must be to actualize the best parts of 1950s modernization theory—its vision of a healthier, wealthier, more equal and more democratic world. It is these benefits that the postcolonial poor want more than anything else, postmodern nonsense about cultural play and resistance notwithstanding . . . The promise of a global Fair Deal enunciated by President Truman in his Point Four address remains the standard against which the achievements of justice on a global scale must be measured. (p. 276)

I agree. Harry Truman's admirably straightforward 1949 inaugural address, which comports well with Weber's sentiments about universal value, needs revisiting:

> We must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas . . . For the first time in history, humanity possesses the knowledge and skill to relieve the suffering of these people. The United States is preeminent among nations in the development of industrial and scientific techniques. The material resources which we can afford to use for the assistance of other peoples are limited. But our imponderable resources in technical knowledge are constantly growing and are inexhaustible . . . The old imperialism—exploitation for foreign profit—has no place in our plans. Greater production is the key to prosperity and peace. And the key to greater production is a wider and more vigorous application of modern scientific and technical knowledge. (pp. 70–71)

Taken for granted here is the assumption that insofar as the achievements of the modern West have universal significance and value, the West incurs a moral obligation to spread the fruits of those achievements far and wide. Given the current state of the debate, one must add that insofar as the West is instead regarded as just one "province" among many, its inhabitants do not appear to be under any particular obligation. Can we imagine Truman's commitment being renewed and carried out any more successfully in the future than it was in the past? Not confidently, I think, but in a world of AIDs, proliferating weaponry, and a deepening chasm between rich and poor, the pretence that the fate of the third world is no business of ours becomes less tenable every day. Or so it becomes, at least, in the eyes of those who are not fully in the grip of ethnocentric loyalties.

Much hinges on the future of ethnocentrism, but the prognosis is not encouraging. In recent years, scores upon scores of Muslims have willingly obliterated themselves for the sake of affirming their traditional faith against the inroads of a rival ethnos whose "modern" values they regard as obscene, licentious, and ungodly. Surely modernity has no greater enemy than ethnocentrism. Yet even the most modern societies remain susceptible to fits

of ethnocentric rage, like the one that gripped Washington on the heels of 9/11 and culminated in the demonization of "stateless soldiers." Forty years ago, in Vietnam, where US forces were already engaged in combat with soldiers who pledged allegiance to no state, I could not in my wildest imaginings have believed that my country would suspend the rights of habeas corpus, set aside the Geneva Conventions, designate the enemy as "unlawful combatants," and incarcerate them at the Guantanamo Bay Naval Station, just far enough beyond the rule of law to maximize the efficiency of the interrogators and torturers as they ply their trade in the name of what is shamelessly called "civilization." As this article goes to press, the lawyer who drafted that policy has just been confirmed as Attorney General of the United States. The president who appointed him and bears ultimate responsibility for the policy is at this moment traveling in Europe, lecturing heads of state on the finer points of democracy. Meanwhile, this morning's *New York Times* carries an editorial lamenting the laggardly pace at which the United States is honoring its commitment under the United Nations' Millennium Development Project, which calls on developed nations to contribute 0.7 percent of their annual national incomes for development aid to poor countries.

What does the future hold for modernization projects? That is not for a historian to say, but I see no reason to think they will go away anytime soon. Taking into account the breathtaking naïveté with which the intervention in Iraq was carried out, and observing hints here and there of an unaccustomed thuggishness on the rise in American political life, I take seriously the possibility that, by comparison with the planners who succeed them, the cold war modernizers with their welfare state values may ultimately come to be regarded as paragons of deep thinking, foresight, and probity. Sweeping judgments for or against modernization are beside the point; whatever name they may bear, such projects will be undertaken by constituencies variously located on the political spectrum. Deciding which to support and which to oppose will depend, as always, on the devilish details. Who can say where modernization leaves off and globalization begins? The closest thing I know to a sound criterion is that forcing people to be free is unwise, and forcing them to be modern is worse. But no one should imagine that applying that or any other criterion will make large-scale social transformations fully consensual affairs.