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## What is the “West”?

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**Abstract.** Renowned historian Niall Ferguson speaks often on the future of the “West”. He warns against the threats of Russia and China as well as Iran. His message is a repetition of S. Huntington's Clash of Civilisations (1996), updated with recent events Ukraine and Gaza. At the same time Mearsheimer and Sachs hands down a very different story of the “West”, blaming first and foremost US, saying it is much responsible for the present calamities. By the way, what is the “Western” civilization today?

**Keywords.** Social regulation; Social networks; Cameroonian adolescents.

**JEL.** A10; E59; N16.

### 1. Introduction

Let me begin with the concept of Occidentalism, supposedly the core of the West. This theme entails also orientalism, namely that the West looks down upon other civilisations – the rest (Mearsheimer). The orientalist discourse has a background in cultural studies with an implicit idea about Muslim beliefs and values. Now, the “Western” civilization may be unpacked as Christianity, capitalism, global warming and orientalism.

### 2. A Christian civilization?

Leibnitz may have believed that Christianity in combination with a German emperor was the best of all possible worlds, but Christians no longer dominate in the West. The 20th century was the secularisation of Western countries. Thus. E.g. churches have been closed or rebuilt into apartments. Secularisation has diminished the relevance of all forms of Christian belief. Today the research into Christianity and the world religions is a cultural study or science. Thus, in serious history enquiry into the three monotheistic religions, there is no room for bias. One has to employ the well-known methods of evidence also when taking on the big questions like:

(a) Were the alleged founder of regions beliefs historical persons: Moses, Jesus and Muhammed?

(b) When were the key religious texts composed and by whom?

(c) Are the proportions different between types of believers: fanatics or zealots, lukewarm, and hypocrites?

Islam is either accused of fundamentalism (jihad) or hypocrisy (just observing the tradition of Five Duties). But no matter what, a substantial portion of the population in Western countries are no longer Christians.

### 3. Capitalism exploitation

The West is much richer than the East, when it comes to GDP per capita. The total GDP of China (18 trillion USD 2022) and of India (4 trillion USD

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2022) is not far from that of US (25 trillion USD 2022). The average living standard is however much higher in Western states with the exception of the Gulf monarchies and Singapore.

The economic advantages of the West are looked upon by the others mainly as the outcome of colonialism. The narrative is that the gap can be narrowed by states like China, India and the Gulf, if the rules of the global market game would be fair. The Asian and African countries complain with support often from Latin America that the global market institutions favor the West.

The response to Western economic dominance has been to either turn to another institution or mechanism than the Western market economic system, or to adopt it whole heartedly.

The planned economy was a major attempt to create an alternative to the capitalist economy. Tried in several countries, it failed in the 1980ies in Soviet Union and its satellites. Another development model was import substitution, employed in Asia and Latin America. It was abandoned in the 1990ies.

On the other hand, the economies like China and India that emulated decentralized capitalism performed much better.

Thus, we are now left with one global economy with a regime for creating a level playing field – the WTO institutions. Communism and socialism belong to the 20th century. Today the economy is either pure capitalism or the welfare state. In the latter, citizens have access to free or subsidized public services. The oil monarchies also provide free public services.

### 4. Environmental gap

The suspicion of Occidentalism recurs in global environmental policy coordination. West is not only accused of having caused global warming through their oil thirst, but they are also told to take a much greater share of the necessary cuts in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. It is true that western countries started industrial revolution much earlier including the CO<sub>2</sub> emission.

**Table 1.** *Top seven emitters total CO<sub>2</sub> 2022.*

Country	% of world emissions
China	29
USA	11
India	7.3
Russia	4.8
Brazil	2.4
Indonesia	2.3
Japan	2.2

Yet, the non-western countries argue at the COP meetings that Table 2 is more relevant.

**Table 2.** *CO<sub>2</sub> emissions per capita of the top emitters.*

Country	GDP per capita (tonnes)
China	11.0
USA	17.9
India	2.8
Russia	18.0
Brazil	6.0
Indonesia	4.5
Japan	9.4

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The drive for cuts in emission of greenhouse gases should be based on Table 2 and not Table 1, according to the non-western counties.

### 5. Eastern polities

As stated, the ongoing wars in the world today have rejuvenated the theme of clash between civilisations, as suggested by Huntington (1996).

Orientalism used to be a big theme in the occidental view of Arabia, Islam and Turkey. A key person in the development of the Orientalist theme was Montesquieu. He characterized the Oriental society in *Persian Letters* (1730) as male chauvinist (harem) as well as fundamentally hierarchical. Moreover, he also coined the expression "Oriental Despotism" when analyzing the first typical polity. Thus, orientalism entailed gender inequality and personal and intellectual unfreedom. It was in his major work *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748) that Montesquieu characterized Eastern civilisations as despotic.

However, Karl Wittfogel offered an alternative perspective on despotism. In stead of viewing it as a flawed institution, he linked it up with social efficiency. Following Max Weber, Wittfogel (1957) focused the access to clean water in "hydraulic societies" which required centralised government for drinking water and irrigation. A few majestic rivers or lakes called for large scale water management.

### 6. Herodotos and orientalism

The orientalist perspective may be traced to Greek historian Herodotus's story of the Persian wars, where the barbarians were defeated – a theme given philosophical connotations by Hegel. In his recent book Llewellyn-Jones (2022) argues that the regime of the Alchaemids has been interpreted in this light, and unjustly so. I remain unconvinced though due to the presentation of ruling families in this book.

### 7. West and East

There is no fixated demarcation line between Western and Eastern countries. Today we have the OECD versus Asia with a few exceptions like Japan and South Korea. More precisely, the US and the EU confronts Russia, China and central Asia. With the invasion of the Ukraine, Russia appears no longer European. The so-called Shanghai Group of nations stands against the West in addition to the BRIC nations.

The separation between West and Shanghai + BRIC used to be affluence, but no longer so. The Molem world enters also the East with the 59 countries in the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) although Turkey is in the Nato.

Especially for the Arab league and Iran, the state of Israel is viewed as originating in orientalism. It is not only a matter of the territory of old Palestine but also the occidental meeting with Islam. There is no Eastern one religion like Christianity in the West.

Around 1900, the Koran was seen as a copy of the Bible. Weber devoted books to Calvinism and the various religions of India and China. He wrote a couple of pages on Islam, "a religion of warriors" (Weber, 1978).

This is surprising, given his interest in religion and politics. Thus, Weber bypassed the idea of Islamic fundamentalism with ibn Taymiyya and the rise of Salafism. In the 20th century his ideas were reinvented in a violent rejection of occidental hegemony. As a matter of fact, Islam is rich on different

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interpretations of Islam of various groups with political consequences, in e.g. New York and Gaza.

### 8. Occidentalism today

Occidentalism used to entail capitalism and environmental exploitation. Yet, the Western countries have something inherently positive, namely the firm institutionalization of the search for truth and individual freedom. This should now be seen as the core of occidentalism – Locke’s political philosophy.

### 9. Imperialism

It can not be strongly emphasized that the “West” is not synonymous with US foreign policy and is ambition to be a global or regional hegemon. Western political values: Life, liberty and property Entails nò support for the massive US warfare in Middle East.

### 10. Conclusion

The West is no longer the land of the “white man“. Western nations comprise sizeable minorities from other civilizations. And the pressure on immigration is immense. Why? Poverty – of course, but not only. Rule of law and liberty is valued also by immigrants from the “East”.

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