
Pagden argues that East and West have always been different, and that intermittent wars are a symptom of this. The difference lies in politics and political culture. The West is democratic; that is, it supports the rule of law. The East is monarchical and authoritarian; shown both by its governments and by its religions. Pagden locates modern western democracy in the process of secularization. (It is refreshing to encounter so much unabashed support for the Enlightenment project.)

The inspiration for this book comes, we are told, from Herodotus. The Greek/Persian dualism is not unconvincing, though somewhat overstated: most Greek authors thought other peoples could adopt the enlightened way of life of the Greeks, Herodotus and Aristotle here being, confusingly, the exceptions (see H.C. Baldry, *The Unity of Mankind in Greek Thought*, Cambridge UP, 1965 not in Pagden’s bibliography). We are then taken on a wonderfully entertaining, but largely unoriginal, skip through various historical episodes from Alexander through the Crusades (how surprising!) down to modern colonialism. The chapter on orientalism, however, brings together a mass of little-known material. It also offers a refreshing corrective to Edward-Saidism: the first orientalists were decidedly not ‘lackeys of a colonial ideology’.

The material presented focuses on the stereotyped images which easterners and westerners had of one another. But to make his case (that this was their *predominant* view of one another) he would have had to survey the contrary strands of cosmopolitanism, and of other categorizations (including the religious). One would need to take account of what those outside the literary spectrum thought; and, if we do not know what they thought, to say as much.

The problem is that Pagden selects data which sustain his case rather than looking for any contrary facts. What about European monarchies from the first to the eighteenth centuries (and in some cases beyond)? He does not explain why the papacy should not be classified as ‘eastern’. With the Byzantine empire and the rise of Islam, ‘the East’ effectively split into (at least) two; Pagden does not say so. It would not fit his argument. Where Russia is placed we hear only from the asides of European statesmen; it too clearly makes nonsense of his categories.
One would have expected some comparison of the rule of law in European and Muslim states prior to 1789. One would perhaps have found that the dividing-line was within Europe rather than between 'East' and 'West'. Interestingly, he does not discuss feudalism. This is an example of a type of society which many historians and sociologists, from Weber on, have tried to envisage as a global category, but which does, in the end, seem to have been quite specifically West-European; and, in the views of some, at least as important for the development of representative democracy as the Greeks. One important difference between Europe and elsewhere has long been family structure (see Jack Goody), but this also is not mentioned.

'The East', once you step out of the gutters of historical stereotyping, is far too complex to be embraced in a single category. Part of the problem with Pagden's argument, and a problem which weighs heavily on international relations today, is that China was not (and is not) simply another despotism. There is far too much that is sui generis. Another factor which should have complicated Pagden's argument is the persistence, in much of 'the East', of various forms of tribalism, which, while not exactly democratic, were certainly not authoritarian. And where do the Jews fit in? Pagden has them as eastern on theological grounds, but their political culture was so different from all others, even in the age of the ghettos, as to make this quite meaningless. He even has Christianity as 'Asian', ignoring the Levellers and indeed the entire political culture of Calvinists.

When he comes to the present, Pagden has no difficulty in arguing that the stereotypes are alive and well; indeed booming—in Islamic fundamentalists' demonization of 'the West'. Noah Feldman, however, in The Fall and Rise of the Islamic State (Princeton UP, 2008) has argued that Islamism is actually the expression of a desire for, precisely, the rule of law (the Shari'ah) in place of (largely secular) absolutisms.

So Pagden ignores crucial nuances. What is more, although the focus is on war, he has nothing to say about why certain cultural differences lead to wars while others do not. (At times, it reads suspiciously like a historical ratification of the 'clash of civilizations' thesis.) And India has adopted far more of western political culture than most Muslim-majority countries; and then again there is Indonesia.

Pagden does not tell us to what extent he thinks the East-West divide was—at various times—an imagined one. There is more than a touch of essentialism in Pagden's argument. This book turns out to be a personal statement about the way the human world is. It is confessedly inspired...