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Christopher Schwartz
La Salle University

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Book Review

A History of the Cold War and The Clash of Civilizations

By Dr. John Lukacz and Dr. Samuel P. Huntington



Reviewed by Christopher Schwartz (Graduate Student)

Dr. John Lukacz's *A History of the Cold War* and Dr. Samuel P. Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* are two that books build upon each other, one dealing with the Cold War era, the other with the world emerging after the climax of that most epic of modern conflicts. Though written in very different styles and with different methodologies, both books take as their starting point the view that the motivating forces of 20th Century history—and history to come—is neither ideology nor national interest, but technology and, most of all, culture. Both books have as their discipline of origin European studies, but their perspectives expand so far as to encompass the whole globe. Thus, these two scholars have penned what is essentially “historical philosophy”—a method of analysis that is ethical in approach but historical in content, for they derive their respective theories not from abstract principles, but from the blood and guts of lived, raw human events.

In the case of Lukacz, the experience is of the traumatic conflict that cleaved Europe into two, the Cold War. It is a titanic struggle between two incredible modern powers vying for world supremacy, a Sparta against Athens re-writ stupendously large. He first traces the rise to power of Russia and the United States from 1763 onward, and the impact of this rise on European affairs up to the 1947 division of the continent into two spheres of interest. Writing in 1961, he argues that this division is “the supreme condition of contemporary history,” “not the Atomic Bomb and not Communism,”¹ for it schizophrenically dichotomized the civilization that has been the engine of change in world history for 500 years. The change has been racial, economic, and most of all, technological, a change that has brought Mankind the closest he has ever come to mastery of the physical universe—and the closest he has ever come to total destruction.

Military accident (or inevitability) created and re-creates the geopolitical conditions defining the Cold War: in order to successfully combat the Nazi power, the two societies transformed themselves into technological beasts, and the resultant collapse of Germany caused a power vacuum, or more so a power *vortex*, that quite literally sucked the two into a face-to-face encounter on the banks of the Elbe River. The relationship of the two sides, already marked by distrust, quickly devolved into the most paranoid suspicions of each other. On the one side of the Iron Curtain, the successive presidential administrations viewed the Russians as an Antichrist-like, evil collective bent on global dominion and the annihilation of the human

¹ Lukacz, *Cold War*, p. 3.

individual; on the other side, the successive premierships viewed the Americans as diabolical imperialists intent upon dismantling their rightful Slavic and Central Asian possessions, perhaps even going so far as to destroy Russia itself.²

In Part 2, Lukacz appraises the social, material, national, and ideological factors that have shaped Russian and American destinies, or as he puts it, “the tendencies of the two societies... of their political theories... of the two States... of their national character... [and] their spiritual tendencies.”³ His great theme here is the evolution of both societies from agrarianism into industrialization and into bureaucratization, the last being their condition at the time he was writing. This transformation is manifested in what he calls the “Pioneer State,” the “Welfare State,” and the “Administrative State,” the latter a corporate-industrial-bureaucratic monstrosity. It is a twist of fate of the greatest kind that the liberalism of the one and the communism of the other lead to the rise and expansion of white collar, middle-class existence, and with it, “governmental intervention [and] the extension of socialist patterns of life and thought.”⁴

At the root of Lukacz’s arguments in both parts of the book is that ultimately it is culture and not ideology shaping the destinies of the United States and the Soviet Union.⁵ Their cultures are the concoction of historical conditions and innate racial conditions: the missionary universalism and boundless optimism of the Americans on the one side, the guarded parochialism and boundless paranoia of the Russians on the other side, and the peculiar fatalism that infects them both. The temptation to drop the bomb and just end it all may be greater in the Russians, Lukacz says, but it is dangerously present in the Americans as well. Whether fatalism or survivalism prevails depends upon the two societies’ conscious relationship to Europe, specifically, if they come to conceive of themselves as European or not: “It is this precious unique Christian doctrine of Free Will, leading to the will to live, that the European heritage may bequeath to both.”⁶ The Cold War is, then, really not so much even about culture, but about the purpose and persistence of human existence itself.

For Samuel P. Huntington, the experience at the center of his book is what happens *after* the Soviet Union dies and Europe unifies. His defining experience is not of a modern Sparta against Athens, but of an all-out clash between Sparta, Athens, Persia, Egypt, et al.—an Olympics waged at a global scale with Kalashnikovs, nukes, and suicide bombers. His thesis is that “In a post-Cold War world, for the first time in history, global politics has become multipolar *and* multicivilizational.”⁷ Writing in 1996, he sees economic and armed competition between pan-national group identities as the true shapers of patterns in war, peace, and development in the late 20th and early 21st Centuries. As the old ideology-based alliances and arrangements of the Cold War give way to new alignments structured according to “blood, faith, and language,” every conflict between groups risks becoming an ethnic cleansing, a holy war, and, given the right circumstances, a world war.

Is Europe again at the center of this development? Not exactly, for all that the Cold War really accomplished was to channel and otherwise smother these ethno-religious rivalries, not resolve them, as the bloody dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia demonstrates. In terms of contributions, we must go further back, to colonialism, in which case Europe is

² *Ibid.*, pp. 72-77.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 214

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 227

⁵ Actually, the most recent scholarship coming out does demonstrate that ideology played a significant world. For example, read Vladislav Zubok’s *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War*.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 339

⁷ Huntington, *Clash*, p. 21.

responsible for the cartographical and technological conditions underlying the Clash of Civilizations, and to some extent, by bequeathing economic liberalism to regions such as East Asia, it is also the source of the means by which China and its “Confucian” kin are now rising toward hegemony. In fact, Europe and her offspring the United States and Australia—the West—is simply one civilization among all the others, and it is in decline.

Why the West is diminishing has everything to do with mentality. Ideologically, Europe’s contribution is about nil—and here is the most disturbing element of Huntington’s thesis—for in the emerging world we are not dealing with *nationalism* per se, argues Huntington, but older, in some cases ancient, modalities of identity. The conflict between the civilizations of Islam and the West is really the age-old contest between Persia and Greece; the antagonism of Orthodoxy and the West is really the schism of 1054, and even earlier, of Byzantium and Rome; and so on. Furthermore, the mentality is intrinsically not modern, but primitive: “civilizations are the ultimate human tribes, and the clash of civilizations is tribal conflict on a global scale.”⁸ The definition of the self by what and who it is *not*, genetically, linguistically, and doctrinally; the self-centered drive to horde any and all natural resources; the quick turn to armed, ferocious violence; and the persistence of extremism and winner-take-all vying over moderation, negotiation, and compromise (“a history of off-again-on-again slaughter”)—all these derive more from our simian past than our evolved future. Thus, in the emerging Darwinian world, the West is uniquely *unfit* for survival, for its perspective and aspirations are universalistic, while the geopolitical environment around us is becoming rabidly particularistic.⁹

As with Lukacz, what is it at stake in Huntington’s thesis is the very continuance of human existence. The difference between the Cold War and this present Clash of Civilizations, however, is not fatalism against survivalism—in reality, we are dealing with survivalism run utterly amok. The question is whether we survive as a civilized species, or as barbarians. To Huntington, “civilization” as a concept is not simply urbanized, sophisticated living, nor is it a set of beliefs and rituals with a specific intellectual content and emotional texture; it is, ultimately, matters of morality, faith, and co-existence that transcend all differences. The irony is that by fanatically focusing upon our differences, our species risks becoming blind to, and then obliterating, what makes us a species: our shared human spirit. “In wars between cultures, culture loses.”¹⁰

At what point does an historian or political scientist become a philosopher? Lukacz and Huntington provide us a model for such a transformation. It occurs when a scholar evolves beyond the petri dish mentality to that of the eagle, soaring over time, space, and human experience, aiming toward abstraction: “If we are to think seriously about the world, and act effectively in it, some sort of simplified map of reality, some theory, concept, model, paradigm, is necessary,” writes Huntington.¹¹ “I believe that just as the essence of our Christian heritage is the unique Teaching of Charity, the purpose of knowledge, and especially historical knowledge, is Understanding,” writes Lukacz. “History tells us more about human nature than does science... the quality of historical truth is such that it may be understood by anyone whose willingness to read or to listen reflects the willingness of his heart.”¹²

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 207

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 301-321

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 252

¹¹ Huntington, *Clash*, p. 29

¹² Lukacz, *Cold War*, pp. xi-xii

Both scholars are men who have experienced their subjects firsthand. Lukacz is an expatriate from Hungary, where he suffered persecution under the Nazis and subsequently fled the Soviet onslaught. Huntington is a Cold Warrior who, as an advisor to President Lyndon B. Johnson as well as an expert in the relationship of military, civilian government, and the phenomenon of *coup d'état*, participated in and witnessed the demise of the United States' communist nemesis and the eruption of our transnational era. As a result, they bring into their analyses a vivid sense of familiarity, of having been on the frontlines of sweeping historical change.

In terms of style, though, only Lukacz's reflects this familiarity. His writing actually has a strong resemblance to the high-flying, epic prose of comic book authors, especially those who worked in Marvel Comics, Inc. during the 1960s and 70s. This may be symptomatic of his ethnic background,¹³ as well as his many years in teaching, during which he undoubtedly faced the challenge of constantly developing new and magnetic ways of holding his students' interest. Huntington, on the other hand, has the technician's dryness one would naturally expect from a political scientist who has spent a lifetime writing papers for think tanks and incurious, nearly illiterate political figures. The fact that Lukacz experienced the Cold War in the most intimate way, as an émigré, while Huntington experienced the struggle and the ensuing post-Cold War wars from an office, also explains the religious-like urgency of the first book, and the cold, analytical attitude of the second.

What of their theses? Are they sound? Again, Lukacz appears the better of the two. It is true that he makes many inversions of common wisdom with little recourse to explanation, and unlike Huntington, he provides almost no sources for any of his arguments. The few footnotes he does give are never to proof-texts, but philosophical tangents, including one that is over half a page long! Nevertheless, the logical cogency of his perspective is, on the whole, potent. His position is simple: character, be it individual or societal, creates destiny. He combines Great Man theory with Core-Periphery argument, and his development of the characteristics of the two nations is rooted in both intelligible historical conditions, such as geography and technological development, and a mystical race theory from which arises innate and inexplicable patterns of being and behavior that mark all Russians and Americans. By the end of his book, when he plays his final card—the presence of a terrible fatalism lurking in *both* the Russian and American psyches among others—the reader truly feels like the Cold War is a titanic struggle of mythological proportions.

Huntington, on the other hand, is not as cogent. His definition of civilizations is sloppy. For example, his clumping of all Muslim societies, both nation-states and immigrant communities in the West into a single civilization is deeply problematic. Asian Muslim countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia display far more "Confucian" and "Hindu" tendencies: their pluralism, relatively easy-going sexual mores, deference to authority, and capitalistic instincts implicate their roots in pre-modern Indian and Chinese colonization more than they suggest any commonality with Arabic or Iranian tendencies. The Middle East as a whole, Shia and Sunni, has moved inexorably in the direction of a dynamic tension between racialism, socialism, and anarchism, shifts that have exploded since the Iraq War flared up at the Battle of

¹³ A significant number of comic book writers of that era and up to today are first or second generation Eastern Europeans, all of whom share an attraction to grand, gigantic, scientific-esque themes of race theory, evolution, and technology. Take for example Jim Krueger's magnum opus *Earth X*, published in 2000, the premise of which is what the earth is like after every single human being abruptly manifests a superpower.

Fallujah.¹⁴ Central Asia has displayed similar tendencies, though there it seems to increasingly be going down a tumultuous path of democratization or authoritarian-democratization, as in the case of Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan, the parliamentary peace-making in Tajikistan, and even the *faux* referendum in post-Turkmenbashi Turkmenistan. Meanwhile, North Africa is evolving far more erratically—within the northern coast of the *al-Maghreb* there are a bewildering variety of political systems, including a monarchy, a military junta, a socialist-religious commonwealth, and two authoritarian republics—than either the Middle East or the former Soviet Muslim territories, and it is light years away in difference from Asian Muslim countries. Indeed, North Africa is perhaps very instructive of the conceptual problems inherent to Huntington's theory. How does one apply his theory to conflicts such as that in Darfur? There we see Arab Muslims fighting African Muslims. Is this a case of an *intra*-civilizational civil war, or an *inter*-civilizational war between Africa and Islam?

Huntington's definition of civilizations is also inconsistent. For example, he categorizes Japan as a distinct civilization from "Sinic" civilization (China, et al.). A chief characteristic he attributes to Sinic civilization is its members' submission to hierarchical authority, a tendency to, as he puts it, "bandwagon" with whoever is the hegemonic power. Yet, he never attributes any characteristics to his conception of Japanese civilization, and then he goes on to predict that Japan will bandwagon with China, and Viet Nam, a member of Sinic civilization, to attempt rebelling. According to his logic, it is Viet Nam which should be a standalone civilization.

What of his predictions? As it so happens, Japan is in fact seeking to *balance* or outright *counter* China, while it is Viet Nam who is bandwagoning. However, this is only one instance of time proving him wrong; for the most part, he has been dead-on. Among the developments he foresaw are many of the major elements of the post-September 11th present: a "quasi-war" between the West and (Arab) Islamic countries; the position of Russia as a "swing" state between a rising China and a declining America; the difficulties the United States faces with its identity and Latin immigration. A recent BBC article, "Perils of a New Pacific Arms Race,"¹⁵ is just one of numerous pieces of journalism in the last decade that would appear to bear out the utility of Huntington's theory.

Does *realpolitik* have any place in Huntington's theory? He argues that while the so-called "realist" school of political science approximates the closest to his thesis, it nevertheless misses out on the essential point: civilizational loyalties will trump old fashioned national interest. Even the eternally Machiavellian ambitions of the power-hungry, he contends, will serve civilizational agendas. However, he simultaneously argues that the West must close ranks lest its differences be exploited by other civilizations, and that Islamic civilization, as it lacks a central "core state," can be also be manipulated and directed by the Sinic giant. These contradictions to his basic thesis strongly suggest that even by Huntingtonian standards civilizations are not monolithic, and that in a future world war between them, intra-civilizational civil war is a real possibility.

What Huntington lacks in cogency he makes up for in terror. Since we now know how the Cold War resolved, and despite the dourness of Lukacz's prose, at the end of *A History of the*

¹⁴ Moreover, he never explains his conception of the relationship of religion to civilizational identity. Among societies and scholars who have been studious of the Analects and the Koran, the Chinese, Arabs, and Iranians are infamous for playing fast and loose with their scriptures. How can they be characterized as Confucian or Islamic when their behavior, in the eyes of so many, are so distinctly un-Confucian and un-Islamic?

¹⁵ Burnell, Paul and Andy Denwood. "Perils of a new Pacific arms race." *BBC News Online*. Accessed Tuesday, August 14th, 2007. <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/6937293.stm>>

Cold War the reader is left with a real sense of choice. Not so for *The Clash of Civilizations*, which leaves its reader—or, at least, *this* reader—with a formidable feeling of despair. If Huntington is correct, then it seems that rape, plunder, and ethnic genocide are inevitable, that the human species is hell bent on devouring itself in a gluttony of brutality. Ironically, it is for this reason that his book is so often misunderstood by critics as an avowal or happy proclamation in favor of the Clash; in fact, the whole point of his book is just the opposite, to set up a theory for other thinkers to utilize in order to prevent the breakout of an apocalyptic conflagration.

To conclude, the two books, appearances to the contrary, do actually speak to each other. Fundamentally, their approach is the same, and the stakes involved—total annihilation in the one, total barbarization in the other—are not dissimilar. After all, if humanity descends into out-and-out mongrelism, and in the process forsakes the advanced future we could attain, we might as well perish. And so, taking the two books together, is there a general moral or political principle that one can devise about the 20th and 21st Centuries? Yes, there is: national character in the form of culture, and culture in the form of identity, *does* create destiny. But what *is* it? The America and Russia of Lukacz are self-blind behemoths, woefully lacking in self-knowledge and colliding in potentially catastrophic ways. The America, Russia, China, et al. of Huntington, on the other hand, are very much conscious of identity. Yet, self-blindness may nevertheless persist even in the Clash of Civilizations, for identity is an organic reality, not something ideologues can conjure or contrive. Just as blades of grass will push through the thickest of concrete sidewalks, the true angels and demons of who we are will push through the façade of the illusions we tell ourselves. The question is whether we are willing to be humble and listen to these inner, nearly forgotten voices, or dive headlong into madness and destruction. Our future may very well be determined, as Lukacz says, by the willingness of the human heart.

A History of the Cold War
New York: Doubleday, 1961.
Pg. 288. List Price: \$3.95

The Clash of Civilizations
Simon & Schuster, 1996.
Pg. 368. List Price \$16.00