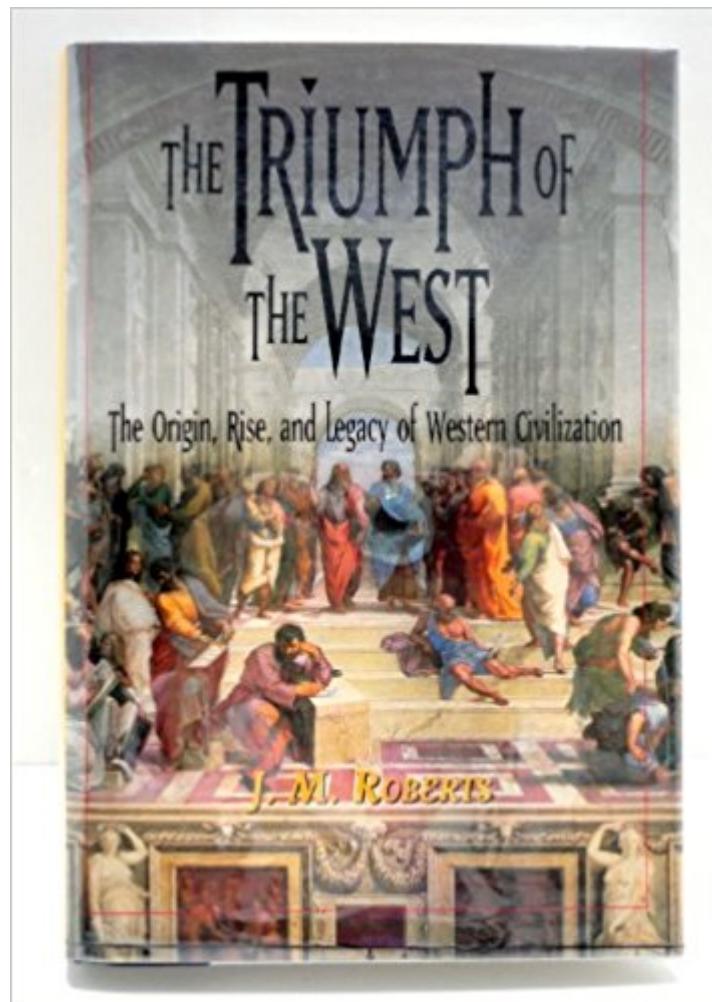


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The Triumph Of The West



Synopsis

Over the centuries, two important beliefs arose in Europe: a faith that man could order his own destiny, and the idea that progress was normal. But by 1900, doubts had arisen concerning traditional Western values. The continuing problems of world poverty, environmental deterioration, the inequality of women, and continued warfare pose real questions about the advancement of the human race. The Triumph of the West is noted historian J. M. Roberts' engrossing, well-reasoned, in-depth essay on the nature of the dominance of Western civilization and its ambiguous "triumph." Roberts' interest is not in judging the West's push toward greater cultural preeminence but in gaining a better understanding of the present by analyzing what got us here and, possibly, indulging in a bit of cautious optimism. --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In 1900, "Western" and "civilized" seemed synonymous, with Western culture spreading over the globe and bringing progress everywhere. Eighty years later, there is an uneasy feeling that Western hegemony may have shot its bolt. In this companion volume to a BBC series, a distinguished British historian looks at the development of Western culture and its universal influence. Even resistance to the West, Roberts points out, usually takes forms borrowed from Western culture. At its core, he concludes, Western civilization is an audacious championship of humans as a unique, change-making species and of the value of the individual. Larger collections should purchase; worth considering for any general collection. Nancy C. Cridland, Indiana Univ. Libs., Bloomington

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J. M. Roberts (1928-2003) was born in England and educated at Oxford. After National Service, he returned to Oxford as a fellow. He held posts in the United States at Princeton and Columbia universities, among others. He was general editor of The New Oxford History of England and authored several influential books of history. --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

For a basic overview on the origins and evolution of Western Civilization, a primer, this work is good. Analysis, on implications of western ideals and philosophy on current and future geopolitical outcomes is wanting. For deeper dives on the impact and implications of Western Civilization on world history see anything by Dr. Victor Davis Hanson.

This author clearly shows us how the West and its unique ideas have shaped the entire World. Many things that we take for granted are not so for most of the people on Earth. The writer gives a very thoughtful perspective on some of the reasons why.

I had bought this book quite a few years back, and only recently revisited it to spend more time on this most fascinating subject. I found the book to be a very balance view of the development and impact of Western Civilization on itself and on the world. As it is was written in the 80s, it misses the demise of the Soviet Union, the rise of China's economy, and the continuing turmoil in the Middle East, but this does little to diminish the relevance of Prof. Robert's story today. It is very comprehensive in treating the roots of W.C., its development and rise, as well as subsequent explorations and aggressive relationships with the rest of the world. It covers subsequent colonization and dominance, along with responses and repercussions. Prof. Roberts gives his take on what some regard the demise of the West and puts that into what I think is a proper perspective. He finishes with some thoughts about what this portends for the future and whether there will be - or is - such a thing as the "Post-Western World". One area I found surprisingly missing in the development of Western thought, is that of The Renaissance which gets only brief mention. His description of WW1 and 2 as the "European Civil War" is an interesting idea. The book is replete with illustrations and color photos - befitting the fact that this book was companion to the BBC series upon which this was based.

J. M. Roberts is probably the best person writing popular histories in the world today. His "History of the World" and "A History of Europe" are more recent examples of his good writing skills. But, this

book is from earlier. It shows how good of a writer of history Roberts is. It is much more of an analysis of what makes up Western Civilization, and what the author thinks is the reason it was able to fling itself outward at the world world, and basically subdue it all for a time. Sometimes which was basically unprecedented in the history of the world. He criticizes at times, but mainly he believes there is more good in Western Civilization than bad. Which, of course, is the truth.

William H. McNeill emphasizes the importance of cultural interchange in the rise and fall of great civilizations. I think Roberts goes wrong here when he neglects to point out the critical role played by the Mongols in disseminating Chinese technology to Europe - things such as the compass, paper, printing and gunpowder, which quickly enabled Europeans to circumnavigate and settle the globe. Certainly both McNeill and Joseph Needham, the distinguished British historian of science, would dispute one of Roberts's main points: that Europe owed nothing to the rest of the world for its subsequent "triumph". At the very least Roberts presents a one-sided view. Historically China has been the richest and the most powerful civilization in the world. The last few centuries saw the rise and dominance of Europeans, who not only created the scientific and industrial revolutions but who aggressively explored and settled the whole world. It remains to be seen whether China will be able to catch up. Even if it resumes its former position as the leading civilization, it remains a question whether it can reverse Western dominance everywhere. The sinologist John K. Fairbank despairs of this possibility. Others aren't so sure. Roberts himself has doubts about the "triumph" of the West; hence the chapters entitled "A Sense of Decline", and "A Post-Western World?" I think we must be clear about what time-frame we're talking about when discussing what the future holds for world history. The triumph of the West is not likely to be a mere afterthought even two or three hundred years from now. But all bets are off if our time-frame is extended to over a thousand years. What is a thousand years? Roberts's own analogy is excellent when discussing relative timespans in his "History of the World". If "one minute" is compared to a hundred years, then mankind began to evolve from apelike creatures about "two or three weeks" ago, developed writing much less than "an hour" ago, and Christianity was born about "twenty minutes" ago, while Europeans began to settle in the Americas about "five minutes" ago, and of course both the two world wars and the cold war happened within the last "60 seconds". To a paleontologist, the appearance of apelike creatures would itself seem like a mere instant ago because the dinosaurs only died about "450 days" ago and life first appeared on Earth as early as "60 YEARS" ago. To an astronomer even this is short: the Universe is over "two and a half centuries" old. And if Sir Martin Rees of Cambridge is correct then "our" Universe is only the latest in an endless series - itself one series among countless others

- stretching back to infinity. So, using our analogy, what is the shape of the world to come "ten minutes" from now? Will the West still be the dominant civilization? I think China can afford to take its time, having existed as an independent civilization for at least "half an hour" by now. After all "ten minutes" ago even England was under foreign rule (first by the Danes and then by the French). But will the Earth still be habitable in the fourth millennium? That's much harder to say. Of course, not even a nuclear war or a giant asteroid can wipe out all life on Earth; evolution will start all over again much as it did when the dinosaurs died. Only when the Sun dies or if our solar system gets sucked into a giant black hole will life disappear from Earth. So there's always hope and cause for optimism. This is an excellent book. I'd love to see Roberts bring it up to date and speculate a bit on the future.

Having watched the TV series I bought the book, although I have the series on VHS, I would like to obtain a DVD set, does anyone know if the BBC released the series on DVD

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