

No. 1, June 5, 2006

## From the End of European History to the Globality of World Regions: A Research Perspective

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**Abstract:** The article introduces globality studies via the Global Futures of World Regions Project (a conference series) and pays homage to Geoffrey Barraclough, the first historian to note both “the end of European history” (1955) and the beginning of “our global age” (1962). The protracted rise and comparatively swift fall of Europe during the “long” nineteenth century (from the 1851 Crystal Palace Exhibition to the nuclear conclusion of the Second World War) backgrounds the argument that since 1945 historical gravity has moved from Europe to the United States and other world regions. Three foci are emphasized for globality studies: a methodological focus on globality (as a global condition and historical benchmark distinguished from globalization, globalism, universality, and modernity); a topical focus on global regions; and a pragmatic focus on researchability.

**Keywords:** Barraclough, rise and fall of Europe, global age, globality, periodization, regional futures, research

(1) People began to invoke the twenty-first century long before the year 2001. In doing so, the mantra of “the twenty-first century” emerged and became a trope for all sorts of hoped for progress. Of course, nobody knows what the twenty-first century will bring but this does not mean that we have to turn to palm-readers and fortunetellers. Scholarly efforts to address the imagined challenges of the future could begin with the understanding that the present has many potential futures. What people encounter today is the imagination of possible futures seen from different local positions. This leads to a first point: A singular global future does not exist today. Accordingly, the conference series on *Global Futures of World Regions* [1] has pluralized the future to make room for more than one. We want to consider *regional futures*. These imagined regional futures are elements of contemporary history. The contemporaneity of imagined futures makes these futures researchable *today*, which is an important factor for the historian and social scientist.

(2) A second point deals with the popular assumption that the arrival of the twenty-first century has changed everything, which is certainly false: History may change the calendar but does not change according to the

calendar. History does not go through a radical change whenever a century rolls around. Such a coincidence could occasionally occur, but people seem to think that secular revolutions must begin on January 1 with every new century. They must not. Students of European history may imagine the eighteenth century as having an “enlightened” personality but they also know that this is only a convenient historical fiction. The identity of a historical period made by the calendar is ludicrous. To counter this new century fixation we can use the periodization of the *long century* and distinguish between the *long nineteenth century* and the *long twentieth century*. The long nineteenth century runs until ca. 1950 and the long twentieth century starts around 1950 — this way, we can leave the “true” twenty-first century to those who want to talk about the more distant future. The long-twentieth-century concept puts us on firmer ground and allows us to investigate a time that we actually know to some degree, namely the twentieth century that people have traversed only halfway so far (according to the long-century periodization).

(3) Some fifty years ago, the advent of the long twentieth century coincided with the notion that the Second World War had ended Europe’s historical significance. In 1955, Geoffrey Barraclough (1908-1984), eminent British medievalist and global historian *avant le lettre*, articulated the *end* of European history and civilization and the dawn of a *new age* in a public lecture at the University of Liverpool. [2] He also declared that this would be an age of *global politics* and *global civilization*:

Every age needs its own view of history; and to-day we need a new view of the European past, adapted to the new perspectives in which the old Europe stands in a new age of global politics and global civilisation. [3]

(4) Barraclough’s farsighted understanding of the twin novelties of the long twentieth century contained a number of keen and now widely shared perceptions published between 1955 and 1962.

- Barraclough stated “the end of European history” in precisely these terms.
- He noticed that history had begun to operate on “a global plane, which only a universal point of view can elucidate.” [4]
- He acknowledged that the Eurocentric (“Europacentric”) and nationalistic historical approaches had to be replaced by a historiography with “a global perspective.” [5]
- He saw that the political environment was now “world-wide” and hostile to “iron curtains.” [6]
- He realized that the time for a truly global history had come because “our global age knows neither geographical nor cultural frontiers” [7] and
- he urged his fellow historians to keep “pace with our fast-moving world” or “the revolutionary shift in historical perspective” will “atrophy into a parade of fascinating but sterile knowledge.” [8]

(5) A third point builds on Barraclough’s list of insights: During the first half of the long twentieth-century, local histories were drawn into global history proper. Yet this revolution was not a Barracloughian idiosyncrasy. An acute sensing of deep historical change developed in the 1940s and 50s. Lynn White, Jr., leading American historian of medieval technology, wrote in 1956, “The canon of the Occident has been displaced by the *canon of the globe*.” [9] He, Barraclough, and other perceptive authors, notably Eric Fischer in 1943 [10] and Oskar Halecki in 1950, [11] felt compelled to go beyond Europe. They understood that the preeminence of Europe had ended with World War II. Searching for an adequate historical perspective to describe the radically changed world, these historians reexamined the

periodization of history. “It has been suggested,” wrote Barraclough, that

a “Mediterranean age” was followed by a “European age,” which is now being succeeded by an “Atlantic age.” It is not necessary to discuss those appellations now. They seem ... to be better than the old ones – although the term “Atlantic age” begs a lot of questions: if we consider that to-day Russia and America face each other across the Bering Straits as England and Germany once faced each other across the Straits of Dover. [12]

(6) Looking beyond the Atlantic in the mid-1950s, Barraclough saw a “Pacific age” in the making and “the transition from a ‘modern’ to a ‘post-modern’ history.” [13] Of course, postmodernism came to stand for a great deal more than Barraclough and other early users of this tag, Arnold Toynbee and Peter Drucker for example, had imagined. However, to appreciate this far-reaching departure from European tradition, one has to take into account that until the end of the long nineteenth century, Western historians had regarded but a few parts of the earth as historically significant. That changed at the beginning of the long twentieth century. From Barraclough’s initial use of “our global age” [14] to Martin Albrow’s [15] elevation of the words *global* and *age* into a full-blown theory of *The Global Age* in 1996, the globe began to edge into the center of historical significance. This, indeed, suggests a fourth point: The globe has moved into the center of historical gravity in the first half of the long twentieth-century.

(7) To put the end of European history in its wider historical context, a brief review of the rise and fall of Europe is in order. In the fifth century BCE, Europe was a dubious name and a fuzzy part of the earth. [16] Herodotus even questioned the wisdom of naming individual components of the geobody, “since the earth is all one,” but he also reported that Europe’s physical extension was greater than Asia’s and Libya’s combined. [17] After Herodotus, Europe’s size shrank as geographical knowledge grew, and five centuries later, the geographer Strabo considered Europe the smallest part of the tripartite landmass. At that time, the Roman Empire still flourished and nobody could imagine that the backwoods of northern Europe would ever inspire the human mind.

(8) Around 1000, the Middle East and China were highly urbanized while Rome, once a city of 450,000, had fallen to 35,000 inhabitants. Córdoba, the center of Islamic Spain, had grown to half a million and Baghdad was standing tall with almost one million people as the largest city in the world. Its “House of Wisdom” had begun in the ninth century to collect, translate and synthesize the legacy of the advanced “foreign sciences,” notably Greek, Persian, Indian and Roman political, medical and scientific treatises. A few centuries later, Europe was to reap a momentous benefit from this careful conservation of the ecumenical heritage, yet at the cusp of the first Christian millennium, northern Europe was an underdeveloped region with a very low likelihood of achieving global dominance in either civilization or culture.

(9) Around 1450, Europe had put itself on the map with a potent mixture of new universities, free cities, three-field agriculture, heavy-duty plows, stirrups, horse collars and shoes, flour, saw and hammer mills, printing presses, magnetic compasses, cannons, caravels and galleons. Still, it was not apparent at the time of Prince Henry of Portugal and Johann Gutenberg that the next five hundred years would amount to the “rise of the West.” [18] Even so, the early European attraction to power tools that provided access to non-muscular energy via water- and wind-powered machinery was notable. In addition, the geographic lust of Western

Christendom, whose members began to call themselves Europeans in the fifteenth century, [19] had not only been stirred by the crusades and the more or less fabulous travelogues of John Mandeville and Marco Polo but also by the conquest of the Azores and Canary Islands, the exploration of Africa's bulge, and the discovery of the North Atlantic triangle of navigation.

(10) Yet around 1950, Europe was in ruins, literally and metaphorically. About this, I should like to speak from experience. Born during World War II and raised in the rubble of Frankfurt am Main, I can attest to the broken identity of my generation. We could not imagine Europe as an economic, political, or cultural community. For us, Europe was a continental name and Germany a shameful place. It was hard to overlook the ruins or to recognize the "European Civilization" in the patchwork of different states, cultures, histories, landscapes, languages, traditions, prejudices, policies, economies and ideologies. Moreover, the people who did talk about Europe in world-historical terms, the West German politicians of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Bavarian Christian Social Union (CSU), had distinctly medieval preferences. Europe was a word with six letters for us but the sacred Christian Occident for them. We woke up after a temporal ground zero, searched for an alternative modernity and dreamed about history from below; they proceeded to make postwar history as Christian believers in the mission of Europe. Robert Schuman, Charles de Gaulle, Konrad Adenauer, [20] and Helmut Kohl — Catholic leaders with the "back to the future" advantage of a genuinely premodern perspective — bridged the continent's gaps and started to build the European Union (EU).

(11) This point of view may be complemented with a less personal flashback. Around 1950, the long nineteenth century was finally over. It had come into its own in London on May 1st, 1851, with the opening of the Crystal Palace Exhibition of the first world fair and ended on the 6th and 9th of August, 1945, with "Little Boy" and "Fat Man" exploding over the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The world had followed the trajectory of this period via electrical telegraphs, radio broadcasts, moving pictures and roving world fairs. In nearly one hundred years, Europe had gained enormously and then lost hugely. What she gained and lost, both in her self-perception and in the eyes of the world, was her metageographic fame.

(12) The "greatest achievement of organized science in history," as the White House had called "Little Boy," [21] concluded the European phase of Western hegemony. Ten years later, Barraclough lectured about "the end of European history" at the University of Liverpool. When he explained what he meant by *end*, the future Beatles, the first global band, were listening to American rock and roll records brought into Liverpool by merchant seamen. "It does not mean," Barraclough said, "that European history will come to a full stop; it means rather that it will cease to have historical significance." [22] Indeed, European history did not stop after 1945 but became regional once again. A small consequence of this ending without stopping was the effect that it had on the discourse of world history. As the standard reference to the *European Civilization* faded, the *Western Civilization* of the American undergraduate course blossomed. Oswald Spengler's prophecy of the *Decline of the West* came true but on the war-ravaged side of the Atlantic only. [23] The rise and fall of Western Europe found its most eloquent expression in the words of two philosophers, William Whewell and Max Horkheimer.

(13) In 1851, after the doors of the Great Exhibition had closed, Whewell explained the European ascent to civilizational eminence in a lecture before the Society of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce. [24] Favorably

comparing “our progress” in art and science with the “nearly stationary” civilization of the “Oriental nations,” he described the industrial works of technoscience as a civilizational success on a “gigantic scale.”

The great chemical manufactories which have sprung up at Liverpool, at Newcastle, at Glasgow, owe their existence entirely to a profound and scientific knowledge of chemistry ... they occupy a population equal to that of a town, whose streets gather round the walls of the mighty workshop. ... So rapidly in this case has the tree of Art blossomed from the root of Science; upon so gigantic a scale have the truths of Science been embodied in the domain of Art. [25]

(14) Whewell’s address “On the General Bearing of the Great Exhibition” provided his Victorian audience with a glorifying picture of British capitalism cum technoscience. Yet Horkheimer’s *Critique of Instrumental Reason* formulated a general condemnation of technoscientific progress in a capitalistic framework. The dean of Critical Theory argued that promoting industrial technoscience “as the automatic champion of progress” [26] was the “ideology” that was begetting the “opposite of progress” — the failure of civilization.

Human toil and research and invention is a response to the challenge of necessity. The pattern becomes absurd only when people make toil, research, and invention into idols. Such an ideology tends to supplant the humanistic foundation of the very civilization it seeks to glorify ... the idolization of progress leads to the opposite of progress. [27]

(15) Critical Theory spawned pessimism about the course of modern history and the achievements of industrial modernity. Horkheimer and his associates denounced the progress of technoscience as a sure path to universal “dehumanization.” [28] Initially shared by a small circle of German émigrés in the United States, the despairing thoughts of *Eclipse of Reason* and *Dialectic of Enlightenment* resonated in the late 1960s in West Germany and meshed with other European critiques of occidental reason. A tragic chorus reaching from Heidegger to Derrida, Foucault and Lyotard emerged arguing that reason had forfeited its critical capacity when it fused with the powers to be. Yet Europe’s intellectual mandarins went far beyond this reasoning to a hyper-critique of all reason, eventually inspiring the interim-philosophy of postmodernism. A supposedly true verdict about all reason is of course self-defeating in logical terms. Historically, however, the hyper-critique of occidental reason made some sense; it begs to be interpreted as an elegy about Europe’s loss of metageographic power.

(16) Today, America seems to be the country with the badge of “historical significance.” Even the provocation of 9/11 made that point, albeit perversely. The vagueness of the transition from European to Western civilization has disappeared and Western now means primarily the United States of America. For the official USA and especially its neoconservative elite, the West is going stronger than ever. It has won the Cold War and dwarfs whatever tangible and metageographic strength Europe had once possessed. European history, to be sure, has not been idle; the EU has advanced an already highly developed region even further. Nevertheless, the center of historical gravity has vacated Europe. Europeans are now searching for a way to cope with the global predominance of the United States, whereas Americans are debating how to best exercise the global leadership position that has befallen them after the unexpected death of the Soviet Union. A Global Futures conference on “The New America” (September 2005) will explore this constellation from a transatlantic

footing in Berlin.

(17) Two predictions follow now. First, a forecast about global scholarship: The long twentieth century will develop the paradigm of globality. Globality (the condition of being global) will emerge as the distinctive condition and category of the global age; it will not supplant universality but “ground” it. Second, a prediction about the realpolitik of the European, American and Asian power regions: The more developed regions will prioritize the environmental management of the planet and not the social abolition of the third worlds. The domestication of the Earth, which even the environmental movements cannot but advance, will progress from an issue of global concern to a series of global regimes; yet the ever-expanding “slurban” [29] zones of global poverty will be allowed to fester. A Global Futures conference on “The New Third Worlds” (Spring 2008) will focus on this uneven global modus vivendi and especially the urbanization of poverty; a pernicious problem that should tax the more developed and highly urbanized nations most.

(18) A fifth point combines the first prediction with the keyword of global studies: Multiple processes of globalization constitute and require globality as a historical benchmark. However, globality is not yet a common term and regular item in the language and toolbox of the social sciences or history. For that to change it is paramount to develop globality conceptually, distinguish it from globalism, globalization, universality and modernity, find ways to assess it qualitatively as well as numerically, and apply these evaluations to global regionality for the particular benefit of assessing the potential futures of world regions. Globalism is the ideology of globalization, which in and of itself is not a reliable term or concept because it confuses process and outcome and, furthermore, implies a unidirectional development. Globalizations are plural. They are not one process but a host of uneven developments on the face of the earth. Processes of globalization determine the globality of things factually, but different conditions of being global need to be determined analytically to guide empirical studies about global phenomena and theoretical works on historical and contemporary globalizations.

(19) Globality differs from universality. From Copernicus to Newton, the contributors to the Scientific Revolution worked out the laws of planetary motion and eventually arrived at the law of gravitation: All matter attracts all other matter with a force proportional to the product of their masses and inversely proportional to the square of the distance between them. This formulation turned a local mixture of empirical and mathematical research about the two-body system of earth and moon into a universal law. The all-sentence (all matter attracts all other matter...) covered all known and unknown matter in the whole universe and demonstrated the “cosmic” power of universality. Globality is different. Tied to this planet, it does not jump from local realities to a global or trans-global veracity with the metaphysical power of reason. It requires physical growth on the skin of the geobody. Think of networks. A communications network, for example, can be local, national, international or global depending on its actual geographical reach. The transitions have to be defined but the geographical reach-difference between neighborhood-watch networks, the optical telegraph system in France between 1800 and 1850, and the Internet today are such that one can clearly differentiate between local, national and global.

(20) Globality differs from modernity too. It does not spur derogatory distinctions between modern and old-fashioned, progressive and conventional, and it has no cultural ax to grind. It is a cooler and more descriptive term that will mainly note the spatial reach and extent of

things. However, it could help to build a useful global framework for all things that can be represented by local, regional and historical data. Imagine the transformation of the processes of globalization into horizontal and vertical globality spectra, with horizontal lines connecting local places (over convenient macro divisions such as national and international) and vertical lines reaching from contemporary to historical. Imagine new globality maps and atlases with growth-locations and growth-times of local-to-local links and connections, or the design of “globalitymeters” and comparative network-analyses of relational data about intraregional and interregional trade, traffic and transportation. [30] Imagine teaming up with researchers across the planet to create comparative globality spectra for Europe, America, the Asias and the Third Worlds. This global “spectrography” would free the researcher from single-factor hypotheses and trivial rankings (like, for example, the current ordering of “global” cities according to their population size). [31] It would lead to the discovery and investigation of *changing degrees of globality* in time and over space; and it would go beyond qualitative hunches and either/or dichotomies and translate unsatisfactory global/non-global bisections into *specific degrees of globality*.

(21) The research perspective that attempts to guide the projects of the *Global Futures of World Regions* focuses on gauging the extent of things — of the Internet, preventive medicine, multiculturalism, economic performance, urban slums, birth registration, military power projection, alternative energy sources, religious tolerance and other elements of importance with respect to the environment, social relations and human power. Contributions are poised to ask, How global are and will the regions of Europe, America, the Asias and the Third Worlds in these respects be? How global have these regions been? Right now, hardly any researcher is able to provide answers with sufficient recourse to spatial and temporal degrees of globality. Thus a sixth and last point: Understanding past, present and future regional histories in a global context calls for spatio-temporal globality studies. The *Globality Studies Journal* supports this endeavor online, that is to say, with as much globality as possible.

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## Notes

Another version of paragraphs 3 to 16 (Wolf Schäfer, “How to Approach Global Present, Local Pasts and Canon of the Globe”) has appeared in *Globalization, Civil Society and Philanthropy*, ed. by Soma Hewa and Darwin H. Stapleton (Kluwer Academic Press, 2005), 33-48.

[1] See [www.stonybrook.edu/globalhistory/Events.shtml](http://www.stonybrook.edu/globalhistory/Events.shtml) (accessed March 1, 2006).

[2] “The End of European History” was delivered February 16, 1955. For “the end of European civilisation,” see Geoffrey Barraclough, *History in a Changing World* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1956), 205.

[3] Ibid. 220.

[4] Geoffrey Barraclough, “Universal History,” in *Approaches to History*, ed. H. P. R. Finberg (London and Toronto: Routledge & Kegan Paul and University of Toronto Press, 1962), 91.

[5] Ibid. 92.

[6] Ibid. 99.

[7] Ibid. 99f.

[8] Ibid. 100.

[9] White's italics. See Lynn White, Jr., *Machina Ex Deo: Essays in the Dynamism of Western Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1968). The article "The Changing Canons of Our Culture" (1956) was reprinted in the referenced collection of White's essays.

[10] Eric Fischer, *The Passing of the European Age: A Study of the Transfer of Western Civilization and Its Renewal in Other Continents* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1943).

[11] Oskar Halecki, *The Limits and Divisions of European History* (Sheed & Ward: London and New York, 1950).

[12] Barraclough, *History in a Changing World*, 206.

[13] Ibid. 207.

[14] Barraclough, "Universal History," 99.

[15] Martin Albrow, *The Global Age: State and Society Beyond Modernity*, First Published in 1996 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

[16] Herodotus, 4.45: "No one knows whether it is surrounded by water, nor is it known whence came its name or who it was that put the name on it."

[17] Herodotus' "earth" was preglobal. Libya covered North Africa and Asia reached from Turkey to the Indus River. The Americas, Australia and Antarctica did not exist.

[18] William H. McNeill, *The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1963).

[19] Denys Hay, *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1968).

[20] Gordon Craig wrote in a review of Charles Williams' *Adenauer: The Father of the New Germany*, "Williams has a fascinating passage in which he describes Adenauer studying the papal encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*, which defined the attitude of the Roman Catholic Church toward the social and political questions of the day. Adenauer, he writes, was seeking a theoretical and authoritative underpinning for the practical policies that he intended to espouse in the future. It is clear also that, particularly during the years of Hitler's war, he spent a lot of time thinking about Germany's future, which he was the first to realize must be governed by different principles and policies than in the past" (*The New York Review of Books*, vol. 48, no. 17, Nov. 1, 2001, p. 20). Adenauer was mayor of Cologne since 1917 and forced into retirement in 1933. In 1949, at age 73, he became the first chancellor of West Germany.

[21] Richard Rhodes, *The Making of the Atomic Bomb* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986), 735.

[22] Barraclough, *History in a Changing World*, 204.

[23] *The Decline of the West* is a somewhat liberal translation of Oswald Spengler's *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*. "West" and "Abendland" (Occident) do not ring the same historical, cultural and emotional bells. Spengler's "Abendland" was not "the West" but Europe. Introducing an abridged English edition of Spengler's *Untergang*, Arthur Helps wrote in 1961, "Spengler's prophecy that Western Europe would lose its world hegemony has been fulfilled. Must Western culture also go under? Is a global culture, to take its place, even remotely conceivable?" Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West* (New York: The Modern Library, 1965), xiv.

[24] William Whewell et al., *Lectures on the Progress of Arts and Science, Resulting from the Great Exhibition in London, Delivered Before the Society of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce, at the Suggestion of H(is) R(Oyal) H(Ighness) Prince Albert* (New York: A. S. Barnes & Co., 1856), 3-25.

[25] *Ibid.* 22.

[26] Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason*, First Ed. 1947 (New York: Continuum, 1992), 59.

[27] *Ibid.* 153.

[28] Wolf Schäfer, "Stranded at the Crossroads of Dehumanization: John Desmond Bernal and Max Horkheimer," in *On Max Horkheimer: New Perspectives*, ed. Seyla Benhabib, Wolfgang Bonss and John McCole (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), 153-83.

[29] Slurban = slum + urban. For the origin and introduction of this term, see Schäfer, "The Uneven Globality of Children," *Journal of Social History* 38, no. 4 (Summer 2005): 1027-39.

[30] With regard to air traffic, see for instance David Smith and Michael Timberlake, "Hierarchies of Dominance Among World Cities: A Network Approach," in *Global Networks, Linked Cities*, ed. Saskia Sassen (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 117-41.

[31] I have touched upon trivial ranking with respect to global cities. See Schäfer, "How Global is Tehran? Tangential Remarks on the Globality of Cities," in *New Global History and the City*, ed. Elliott Morss Newton Center: New Global History Press, 2004), 175-80.