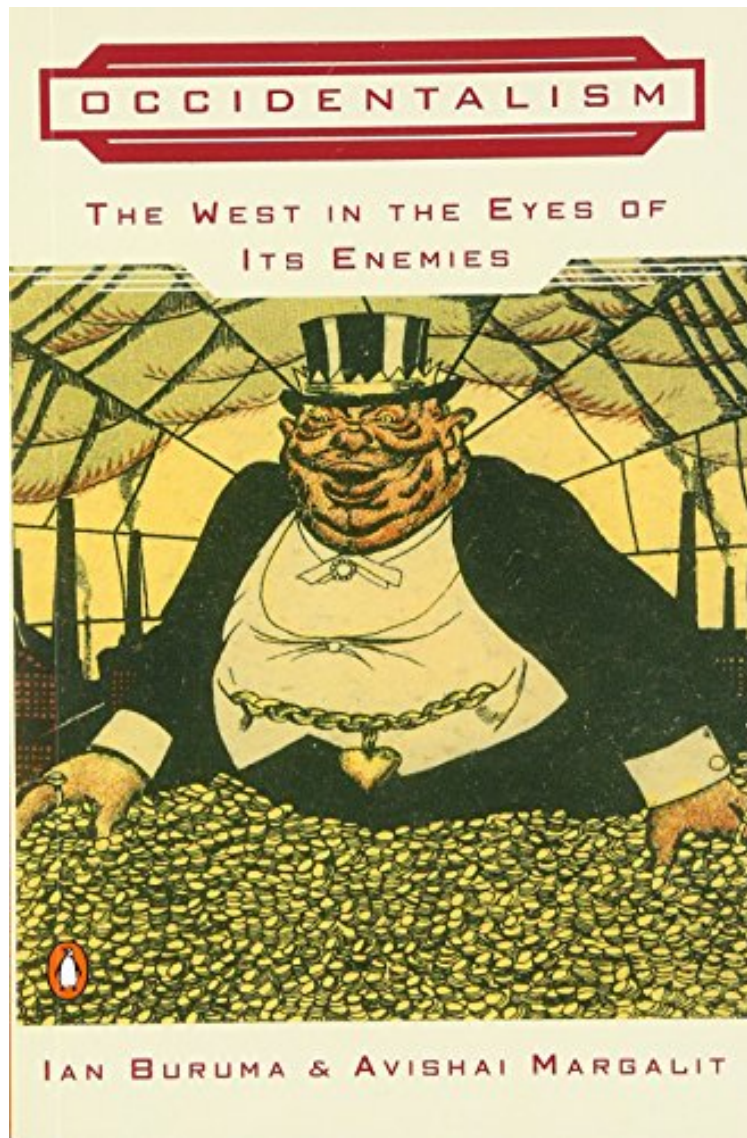


(Download pdf) Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies

Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies

Ian Buruma, Avishai Margalit
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Ian Buruma, Avishai Margalit : Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. 'Anti-heroic, anti-utopian Western liberalism is the greatest enemy of religious radicals, priest-kings, and collective seekers' By Clay Garner This uses history to explain "Occidentalism" - the hatred for the West. Clearly shows this hatred is primarily drawn from the intellectual west, especially the German

romantics. The rise of free market economics along with the Protestant reformation, broke the uniform European culture. The French enlightenment wanted to reimpose a 'scientific' unity. Reason, intellect, calculation, judgement would replace tradition, faith, devotion and feelings. No group identity - in fact no groups at all! Freedom! Napoleon conquered Europe with this plan. The Germans lost to Napoleon's guns. They won the war of the spirit. "There is a great deal of truth in Isaiah Berlin's view that the German Romantic movement and its Romantic nationalism were 'a product of wounded national sensibility, of dreadful national humiliation.'" (77)Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803) detested universalism. Each language, national group are organic wholes, unique and special. "Compared with cold rational Europe, nature's children were better off, purer, more authentic. It was an arrogant mistake to think all men should be free, since our supposed freedoms led only to inhumanity and sterile materialism." (38)Contents -War Against the WestThe Occidental CityHeroes and MerchantsMind of the WestThe Wrath of GodSeeds of Revolution"Was there a way to modernize without letting in Christianity and other forms of spiritual pollution? . . . The appeal of socialism . . . is not at all surprising. Marxism is egalitarian, and indisputably modern. It came from the west, and like Christianity it has universal claims. But it's promise to liberate mankind is "scientific", not cultural or religious. This was tried Egypt, Iraq, North Korea, Ethiopia, Cuba, China, Vietnam and many other places. And it failed." (40)Note these groups imported a (deeply) western ideology - Marxist socialism. (Numerous scholars believe Marxism is a secularized version of the Judeo/Christian "Messianic" promise. George Steiner identifies Marx as 'the last Jewish prophet'.) Marxism destroyed much and - all for nothing. "The most violent forms of occidentalism, of nativist yearnings for purity and destructive loathing of the west, were born from this failure." (40) Fascinating!"Of all third world revolutions, Chairman Mao's was the most inspiring model of Occidental dream. . . . But what made him original, compared with Stalin, was his war against the city. . . . Shanghai, in particular, was seen as the symbol of western imperialism, capitalist corruption, degenerate urban luxury, cultural artificiality, and moral decadence. . . . The fact that one of the most ferocious apostles of Maoism, Mao's own wife, was once a Shanghai movie starlet and good-time girl only goes to show that violent hatred and deep longing can be closely related." (42)Authors connect the cruelty of the Taliban to the viscous Khmer Rouge. "Phnom Penh had western architecture, French restaurants, Chinese merchants, and a relatively modern economy. . . . And they had been told by their masters that educated city people, meaning anyone who had been to school, spoke French, or simply had soft hands and wore glasses, were enemies of the people. Vietnamese or Chinese. Who had lived and traded in the cities for centuries, just as Jews had in Germany, had to be cut out if the new society like cancerous cells." (43)Pol Pot was educated in Paris, influenced by Frantz Fallon and Sartre."Through systematic mass murder, and by smashing the wicked city, the Khmer Rouge would restore purity and virtue to the ancient land." (44)Another example of western suicide - "Nikola Koljevic was a Shakespeare scholar from Sarajevo. He spent time in London and the United States. He was a citizen of the most cosmopolitan city in the Balkans, a secular city of Bosnians, Serbs, Jews, and Croats, a city famous for its libraries, universities, and cafs, a city of learning and trade. Yet there he was, watching his city burn from the surrounding hills. The orders to shell Sarajevo had been signed by Nikola Koljevic, Shakespeare scholar." (45)This short work contains outstanding explanation of the hatred for free markets. This is part, although not all, of the motives for opposition to the West."Liberal societies also give people the to have exceptional achievements. But these are individual achievements. Individuals are rewarded for their exceptional talents with money and fame. . . . This cannot satisfy those who wish to heroism and glory as parts of a collective, and thus often vicarious, enterprise. Fascism appealed precisely to mediocre men, because it gave them a glimpse of glory by association. . . . Choosing to die a violent death becomes a heroic act of human will. In totalitarian systems it might be the only act an individual is free to choose." (72)Material satisfaction differs from spiritual needs."It is a threat because its promises of material comfort, individual freedom, and the dignity of unexceptional lives deflate all utopian pretensions. The anti-heroic, anti-utopian nature of Western liberalism is the greatest enemy of religious radicals, priest-kings, and collective seekers after purity and heroic salvation." (72)(See also, "Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes; by Jacques Ellul)1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Here's why they hate usBy Mal WarwickIn Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies, Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit trace the intellectual history of the dehumanizing picture of the West painted by its enemies. In the authors view, major elements of this picture, though not necessarily the whole, are shared by ISIS, Al Qaeda, Hezbollah, the Muslim Brotherhood, nineteenth-century Russian Slavophiles, Hitlers Nazis, Maos revolutionaries, extreme Hindu nationalists, and the Japanese militarists who plunged their country into World War II. In many of its manifestations, they assert, Occidentalism gives rise to a death cult, rating honor higher than morality and glorifying death as the noblest response to the violation of great ideals.Are they overreaching? Perhaps. To encompass so many diverse historical movements under one umbrella is ambitious, at best. But Buruma and Margalit are exceedingly well read and adept with philosophical concepts. If their book is a stretch too far, the path they take to arrive at their conclusion is nonetheless rich with insight and well worth following.Whats wrong with Western values?In a sense, Occidentalism is anti-Semitism writ large, as hatred for Jews suffuses most of its forms, but Anti-Americanism looms even larger. Though its not the same as anti-Americanism, the Occidental vision of a machinelike society without a human soul is most closely associated with the United States in todays world: the idea of America itself, as a rootless, cosmopolitan, superficial, trivial, materialistic, racially mixed, fashion-addicted

civilization. From an historical perspective, Occidentalism derives from the ancient clash between City and Country an ongoing conflict between rural and urban values. Ironically, though, [t]he West in general, and America in particular, provokes envy and resentment more among those who consume its images, and its goods, than among those who can barely imagine what the West is like.

A response to Orientalism
The phenomenon Buruma and Margalit call Occidentalism is the counterpoint to Orientalism, a term popularized by the Palestinian philosopher Edward Said to characterize what he perceived as a patronizing Western attitude towards Eastern societies that is used to justify Western imperialism. The authors contend that the distrust, even hatred, of the West that is so widespread in the Global South actually originated in Europe. They trace the intellectual source of Occidentalism to the emergence in Europe of modern anti-Semitism following the French Revolution and nineteenth-century German Romantic philosophy. Outside Europe, with the growth of European empires, the clash of new ideas from the West with traditional values gave rise to a split between nativists and Westernizers. The former dream of going back to the purity of an imaginary past: Japan under the divine emperor, the Caliphate united under Islam, China as a community of peasants. . . The struggle of East and West is a Manichaeic struggle between the idolatrous worshipers of earthly matter and true worshipers of the godly spirit.

About the authors
The authors of Occidentalism are both academics. The Dutch writer and historian Ian Buruma teaches human rights and journalism at Bard College. He has written 22 books. Avishai Margalit, now emeritus, taught philosophy at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He has written or edited nine books and innumerable articles.

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. We have met the enemy and it is us.
By Henry A. Kim
Buruma and Margalit suggest that the hostility to "the West" that exists in much of "the East" is hardly a phenomenon that arises from the peculiar cultural characteristics of the latter. To the contrary, they have much in common with various intellectual movements in the West itself, and indeed, are often direct intellectual descendants thereof. To its opponents, "the West" is a caricature, of intellectual rationalism, political liberalism, free markets, cosmopolitanism, and consumerism--basically, the Enlightenment West--and many in the West itself has risen up against it, most notably in form of 19th century Romanticism. The authors suggest that it is not unexpected that Germany and Russia went further than their Western neighbors in the extremes of romantic nationalism in 19th and 20th centuries, for, to them, "the West" often represented ideas from France or England, which were, somehow, "foreign" to the Germans and Russians. Many ideas of German Romantic nationalists, however, did go on to directly shape the views of the "West" among nationalist/nativist intellectuals among the Russians, the Japanese, the Indians, the Arabs, and the others. Particularly analyzing the intellectual roots of militant Japanese nationalism during World War II (Buruma's specialty as a historian of Japan), the authors show that many of its tenets were in fact completely at odds with traditional Japanese beliefs, while had much in common with the extreme versions of the 19th century German Romantic nationalism, with a few concepts exchanged for supposedly Japanese symbols--Shintoism, the emperor, etc. Indeed, many advocates of the new Japan were themselves students of German ideas and twisted traditional Japanese ideas, concepts, and symbols to fit what they had learned. In other words, Occidentalism, to a large degree, was very much made in the Occident. unless, perhaps, one were to define Asia as starting at the Rhine--as the authors suggest Adenauer once quipped--but that would seem a bit extreme.

The abstract notion of "the West," as embodying the Enlightenment ideas, is hardly a reflection of the "real" West, of course. Revolts against this abstract "West" has been much more common within the West itself, going well beyond the Romantics of the 19th century. Hofstadter famously wrote of the streak of "anti-intellectualism," very much directed against the notion of the "West" as laid out by Buruma and Margalit, as a recurrent theme in American politics. Even during the French Revolution, the French countryside did rise up against the "Western" notions that the revolutionaries stood for--the Vendee. Ironically, "anti-Western" sentiments, insofar as the "West" might be defined as Buruma and Margalit do, is sweeping across both North America and Europe and increasingly shaping the politics of much the West at the beginning of the 21st century. It is interesting, given how sharp an observer Buruma normally is, that the book makes no note of how so many in the West are speaking in the same tone against the same abstract "West" as their presumed adversaries in the East, even though the trend was already starting to unfold by the time the book was published.

Twenty-five years ago, Edward Said's Orientalism spawned a generation of scholarship on the denigrating and dangerous mirage of "the East" in the Western colonial mind. But "the West" is the more dangerous mirage of our own time, Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit argue, and the idea of "the West" in the minds of its self-proclaimed enemies remains largely unexamined and woefully misunderstood. Occidentalism is their groundbreaking investigation of the demonizing fantasies and stereotypes about the Western world that fuel such hatred in the hearts of others. We generally understand "radical Islam" as a purely Islamic phenomenon, but Buruma and Margalit show that while the Islamic part of radical Islam certainly is, the radical part owes a primary debt of inheritance to the West. Whatever else they are, al Qaeda and its ilk are revolutionary anti-Western political movements, and Buruma and Margalit show us that the bogeyman of the West who stalks their thinking is the same one who has haunted the thoughts of many other revolutionary groups, going back to the early nineteenth century. In this genealogy of the components of the anti-Western worldview, the same oppositions appear again and again: the heroic revolutionary versus the timid, soft bourgeois; the rootless, deracinated cosmopolitan living in the Western city, cut off from the roots of a spiritually

healthy society; the sterile Western mind, all reason and no soul; the machine society, controlled from the center by a cabal of insiders often Jewish pulling the hidden levers of power versus an organically knit-together one, a society of "blood and soil." The anti-Western virus has found a ready host in the Islamic world for a number of legitimate reasons, they argue, but in no way does that make it an exclusively Islamic matter. A work of extraordinary range and erudition, *Occidentalism* will permanently enlarge our collective frame of vision

From Booklist Four characterizations of the West contribute to the anti-Western stance Buruma and Margalit call *Occidentalism* and are used to justify attacking individual Westerners as less-than-human beings. The West prefers the sinful city to the virtuous countryside; the West destroys heroism and replaces it with trading; the West thinks only of matter and not of spirit; the West worships evil. Buruma and Margalit argue that the first two of those conceptions, typical of secular *Occidentalism*, are themselves Western, products of European romanticism that early-twentieth-century Japan and Germany exploited to their own ruin. The third idea informs Russia's long struggle with the West but stems from German romanticism, in particular, with its sense of the wounded national soul. The fourth, peculiar to religious *Occidentalism*, animates radical Islamism but derives from the good-evil polarities of Persian Manichaeism that the young Augustine embraced. Buruma and Margalit conclude that these ideas' lives are "a tale of cross-contamination" that cannot be ended by answering anti-Western intolerance with more intolerance. A timely tract, brilliantly though broadly argued. Ray Olson Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved "Succinct, elegant, and challenging..." *The Economist* "A useful primer on the habits of mind that drive our most implacable foes.... Accurate and fair-minded." *The New York Times* About the Author Ian Buruma is currently Luce Professor at Bard College. His previous books include *God's Dust*, *Behind the Mask*, *The Missionary*, *The Libertine*, *Playing the Game*, *The Wages of Guilt*, *Anglomania*, and *Bad Elements*. He writes frequently for *The New York Times Magazine*, *The New Yorker*, and *The Financial Times*. Avishai Margalit is Schulman Professor of Philosophy at the Center for Rationality at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. His previous books include *Idolatry*, *The Decent Society*, *Views and s*, and *The Ethics of Memory*.