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Social Discipline, Democracy, and Modernity: Are They All Uniquely ‘European’?

Salvador Santino F. Regilme, Jr.***Abstract**

Historically, narratives about the grandiosity of absolute monarchy and social discipline dominated the research agenda on European absolutism, as in the case of the renowned works of Norbert Elias. Yet, less emphasis was made about the various levels of powers existing outside the central monarchy and the importance of other institutions in laying the foundations of European modernity. It is in this spirit that it is worth examining the work of the German social historian Gerhard Oestreich and his historically rich notion of ‘social discipline’, as he gave light to the various differentiated levels of authority that demystified the powers of the absolutist state. As Oestreich argues that the establishment of social discipline was one of the most notable achievements of the absolutist state in as much as it is crucial in establishing a vibrant democracy, the paper examines the conceptual- and praxis-oriented links between and amongst the notions of social discipline, modernity, and democracy. Particularly, I locate this notion of ‘social discipline’ within the grand (meta)-narratives of Euro-centric modernity and how such dominating discourse has to be re-thought and re-drawn amidst emerging disquisitions about the various ‘stories’ of modernity (ies) in the non-Western world in which (Euro) Western-centric scholarship endeavors have dismally and unfortunately ignored. Furthermore, discussions of ‘modernity’, ‘democracy’ and ‘development’ have to be discursively situated within the broader realm of delicate cultural, social, historical and political nuances and subtleties of the context-in-question (e.g. state, nation or a political community) as opposed to totalizing and universalizing tendencies that European scholarship has been consistently characteristic of such.

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1. Introduction

In the late 1960s, Norbert Elias first gained prominence when his two-installment work *The Civilizing Process* (*Über den Prozess der Zivilisation*), originally published in the late 1930s in German, was introduced to a wider global audience through their English editions. The first installment was published in 1969, while the second one was released in 1982. These two volumes lay down in nuance empirical treatment the historical transformation of European social attitudes and standards on sex, bodily issues, table manners, and even speech vis-à-vis the notions of individuality and shame; and trace such developments within the wider gamut of institutional development in the rapid centralization of early modern states in Europe.

While Norbert Elias became a household name in academic sociology, the German social historian Gerhard Oestreich (1910-1978) who also works on themes similar to that Elias' has yet to garner much attention in the academic English-speaking world. This is true, to a large extent, despite the publication of the English edition of *Neostoicism and Early Modern State* in 1982 by Cambridge University Press.¹ This landmark publication by Oestreich traces the emergence of Neo-stoic writing in the dominantly Protestant Netherlands that stood in stark contrast against Catholic Spain. He maintains that social discipline, a theme common in Neostoicism, actually gave birth to the modernization and rigorousness of bureaucracy, armies, and institutions – which all proved to be the seeds of the early modern European state.

Historically, narratives about the grandiosity of absolute monarchy dominated the research agenda on European absolutism, as in the case of the renowned works of Norbert Elias. Yet, less emphasis was made on the various levels of powers existing outside the central monarchy. It is in this spirit that it is worth examining the work of Gerhard Oestreich and his historically rich notion of 'social discipline', as he gave light to the various differentiated levels of authority that demystified the powers of the absolutist state. As Oestreich argues that the establishment of social discipline was one of the most notable achievements of the absolutist state in as much as it is crucial in establishing a vibrant

¹ Elias' *The Civilizing Process* records around 4,324 citations, while Oestreich's *Neostoicism and the early modern state* registers a measly number of 307 citations. This is based on Google Scholar citations as of November 20, 2012.

democracy, the paper will problematize upon the conceptual- and praxis-oriented links between and amongst the notions of social discipline, modernity, and democracy. Also, I locate this notion of ‘social discipline’ within the grand (meta)-narratives of Euro-centric modernity and how such dominating discourse has to be re-thought and re-drawn amidst emerging disquisitions about the various ‘stories’ of modernity (ies) in the non-Western world in which (Euro) Western-centric scholarship endeavors have dismally and unfortunately ignored. Furthermore, discussions of ‘modernity’, ‘democracy’ and ‘development’ have to be discursively situated within the broader realm of delicate cultural, social, historical and political nuances and subtleties of the context-in-question (e.g. state, nation or a political community) as opposed to totalizing and universalizing tendencies that European scholarship has been consistently characteristic of such.

As a caveat, it is not my ultimate goal in this paper to tease out in narrowly focused veins the analytical, theoretical, and empirical contours of Oestreich’s work or even the notions of *modernity*, *social discipline*, and *democracy*. Instead, I endeavor to reintroduce the work of Oestreich in a wider English-speaking audience and select some central themes in his work and re-examine them amidst the broader global debates on Euro-centrism, ‘multiple modernities’, and democracy. Having said that, I envision that the reflections and insights I lay down here will spark a broader debate on European modernity and social discipline, and thereby stimulate future scholarship on these related fields of inquiry.

This paper is organized as follows. Building upon the work of Oestreich, I first provide a historical presentation of the rise of the European absolutist state. This is followed by a theoretical discussion of social discipline and democracy. Consequently, I consider some empirical illustrations and reflections about European social discipline and the rise of “modernity” in other parts of the globe, and thereafter juxtapose these with the larger scholarship on Euro-centrism. Finally, I provide some concluding remarks that summarize my key questions and arguments as well as some future relevant areas of inquiry for scholarly endeavor.

2. The Rise of the European Absolutist State

Originally tintured with a theological conceptual coloring that later on was exported to the political realm (Slevin 2009:1), European absolutism denotes a form of authority where the ruler “might legitimately decide anything”. Starkly different from tyrannies, absolutist regimes are customarily conceived as ‘legitimate’ – as illustrated by Louis XVI of France in November 1788 when he argued to his cousin (duc’ d’ Orleans) that any ruling he made was lawful because it conformed to his will. In other words, the notion of an absolute monarchical rule means that the absolute monarch somehow rules unconditionally. As this may be the case, the question of absolutism in European historical research is not a guileless task. Oestreich (1982:258), for instance, claims that the period of absolutism spanned from the middle of the 17th century to the French Revolution. Indeed, the conceptual term “absolutism” – purportedly a late coinage itself in the 19th centuries – implies enormous power and authority in as much as the absolute monarchy has the propensity to dismiss other forces from participation in local and external politics. Specifically, these forces pertain to agents of particularist opposition that may pose as hindrances to the centralizing ambitions of the prince or the monarch.

As research on absolutism is usually dominated by issues of internal politics², Oestreich (1982:260;262) deconstructs and demystifies the oversimplified picture of absolutism as a “largely uniform European phenomena”. Thus, one sees multifarious country historical studies of France, Scandinavia, Netherlands or Spain, England or Germany regarding the nuances of their local legal and social conditions. These sophisticatedly described “multiplicity of intermediary powers”- that totally discards the oneness, wholeness and the indisputability of the absolute monarch – includes the self-governance of towns and manors, middle-class magistrates and aristocratic landowners, German knighthood, English counties, Polish regions, Hungarian countries as well as nobles and town councils that resist the state sovereignty whenever their interests in provincial and local government were at risk.

² See Oestreich (1982:260). These dominant themes include the historical evolution of bureaucracy, government and civil service as well as the conflicts of state institutions against the estates.

Notably, by traversing the consolidation of absolute monarchy, one may recognize that the different levels of authority were apparently inept to encumber the expansion of the absolutist state. The orthodox understanding of history usually dictates that the monarchical prince succeeded in untangling the elaborate web of feudal authorities and, eventually, in consolidating the previously fragmented pockets of power. Oestreich (1982: 263) issues a powerful disclaimer by saying that the consolidation of the central locus of power and authority was attained through disengaging itself from regional and local affairs, whenever it deems necessary. This ultimately means political governance not by commanding local powers into unconditional submission. Accordingly, monarchical authority only had a partial sway on the lower levels of authority and there was a considerable sagacity of independence in the policy areas of justice, religion, education, bureaucracy and the police. It is suspected that this nous of autonomy granted to social and political institutions also paved the way for the successful evolution of bureaucracy, as autonomy is presumed to be critical in making institutions below the central, monarchic authority (most especially the bureaucracy) into permanent, independent, and impartial social organisms that have more direct access over their constituencies. One may reasonably claim that without this sense of autonomy granted to bureaucracy by the central monarchic authority, the successful evolution of bureaucratic institutions would probably take a long and intractable heap of difficulties.

3. Theorizing upon the Notion of ‘Social Discipline’

Historically, absolute states emerged in Western Europe at some stage in the Late Middle Ages and which were then consolidated during Renaissance that positioned the political and institutional foundations of the different forms of representative democratic polities (Escobar 1997). While citing that the “centralization” of the state’s power occurred in the 19th and 20th centuries, Oestreich (1982:265) furthers that absolutism was achieved through monarchic discipline and modern state authority, but nuances his argument by differentiating his notion of “disciplining” with that of Max Weber’s “rationalization”³. The former argues that “disciplining” appears have a more palpable logic comparable to

³ See Weber, Max (1930).

“rationalization” – although, both refer to the (in) efficacy of institutions⁴. True enough, Hsia (1996) remarks that the analytic term “social discipline” originated from two protuberant concepts in the Reformation and modern writing of history: Weber’s notion of discipline and Oestreich’s *Sozialdisziplinierung* that characterizes the evolution of the early modern state in central Europe⁵. While Weber (1930) traces the historical basis of the “modern” character and society in the Reformation Period in Europe, primarily in its Calvinist manifestation, Oestreich (1982; see also Hsia 1996) refers to a more “abstract” notion that conceptually unites multifarious developments in early modern Europe. Such developments include the establishment of church discipline in the post-Reformation era in conjunction with state’s assistance, more stringent discipline and professionalization of the military, and a much-pronounced ethos of self-restraint or temperance.

What makes Oestreich’s notion of “social discipline” more theoretically persuasive, at least at the *prima facie* level, is that it asserts a more inclusive conception how transformation is critical not only at the formal institutional level but, likewise, the informal, communal and societal levels are equally indispensable in espousing certain changes that remain decisive in the formation of the absolute state. More specifically, this observation is evidenced by Oestreich’s (1982; see also Hsia 1996) historicization of the implementation of church discipline and the high demand for religious conformism that supplemented the significant advancements in philosophical and social thought. With this in mind, I suppose that Oestreich’s apparent ‘thick description⁶’ offers a much more profound historical knowledge as it tackles not only the historical evolution of ideational factors or the *Zeitgeist* that govern the social context at that time, but also the empirically based contextualization of the macro-level institutions which were responsible in the generation of

⁴ Hermeneutically speaking, my personal conception of the word institutions alludes to a more comprehensive notion wherein all types of political, social and cultural exchanges are embedded at the macro-level of the social realm. Insightfully, speaking for the Anglo-American political studies literature on historical institutionalism and taking a more unrestricted view, Goodin (1996:22) notes that political institutions are no longer likened with political organizations, rather an institution is broadly denoting to “stable, recurring pattern of behavior”.

⁵ It might be noteworthy to remark how appealing it could be to investigate on how influential Weberian scholarship has been to Oestreich, if that was indeed the case. However, this reminds me of the issue on “influence” in the development of philosophical ideas. See Skinner’s (1978) critique on the historian’s concept of influence (refer also to Tarcov 1982).

⁶ Borrowing Geertz’s term (1973), thick description refers not only to the actual pattern(s) of social behavior but also the broader and the macro-level contexts in which the behavior occurs. Admittedly, he also borrowed this from British philosopher Gilbert Ryle (1968).

such *Zeitgeist*. Referring to the broadest manifestations of social discipline, Oestreich (1982: 268; 270) points to the bureaucracy, militarism and mercantilism, and education where imposition of discipline upon the citizenry became critical in arguably promoting community's interests. Furthermore, the notion of 'police' emerged within the field of civil administration in the 17th and 18th centuries that made available the rules and stipulations for acceptable behavior and order amidst the continuing expanse of public life (Oestreich 1982:270). At the level beyond the nation-state, accordingly, one may also recognize the attainment of humanizing and restricting military law within the bounds of international law in accordance with discipline and rational restraints. Thus, Hsia (1996) has pointed it rightly when he says that the 'convergence' of state and religious authority paved the way for discipline to become a quintessential feature of the Reformation.

Moreover, pertaining to the micro-level, Oestreich (1982:265) avers the overwhelming value of "spiritual, moral, and psychological changes which social discipline produced in the individual, whether he was engaged in politics, army life or trade". To support this claim on the internalization of discipline within the human individual, Schaer (1984; cited in Hsia 1996), referring to Calvinist city of Zürich, cites elders and priests as enforcers of discipline and are also expected to practice what they are called upon to enforce. Thus, this resulted to the enormous psychological anxiety that pervaded across the society especially among the elites. At the individual level, Oestreich (1982:268) juxtaposes the importance of discipline with the public provision of education during the 16th to 18th centuries, and thereby notes that the latter facilitated self-discipline in the individual's desires and personal expressions and fortified self-control which were the notable aims of a disciplined human nature.

Although this argument initially displays a strong sense of rhetorical pomposity, the depth and thickness of his empirical argumentation as well as philosophical explanation to support the viability of "disciplining" over "rationalization" seems markedly absent given that most of the explanations seemed purely anecdotal. Therefore, one may demonstrably argue that "disciplining" over-emphasizes (un) justifiably the individual level without even addressing the empirically- and philosophically-laden question of how these sorts of individual changes can be just mere derivatives of institutional, macro-level and society-wide transformations. What is more scholarly interesting though is the possibility of describing, historicizing and philosophizing extensively how such "disciplining" ema-

nates from macro-level institutions and how it trickled down to the individual level, and how the individual has further internalized this very spirit of “social discipline”, and how such sense of “discipline” is inherited or passed on trans-generationally.

Henceforward, it seems judicious to concretize now how such *Sozialdisziplinierung* is exhibited in various social instances. Hsia (1996) refers to the indispensable significance of regular house visits, parish records and archives and notes that historians have discovered insightful elements in these records – confession of sins, sending of children to catechism, disobedience to parish authorities, among many others. Accordingly, he argues how social discipline would have been virtually unachievable without these records. For instance, Sabean (1984; cited in Hsia 1996), in his historical investigation into the visitation records of southwest Germany, remarks that the absence of parishioners from the execution of church sacraments would carry the social stigma of being ‘non-conformists’ or even the inability to receive Communion at least once in a year was tantamount to official parish inquiry and official sanctions. As what can be gleaned from the literature on social discipline, localization of ‘disciplining’ by the authority occurred in a sense where local pastoral work became more organized, procedural, and administrative. In fact, this ‘localization’⁷ is not only restricted to the parochial level, but it also reached the micro-cosmic societal unit, that is, of the family. Hence, Hsia (1996) argues that social discipline strengthened patriarchal authority within the family that reflected the power held by the prince and pastor and objectified men and women as weak subordinates. This particular historical finding reinforces the idea on how various social agents of *Sozialdisziplinierung* from the various levels of the social hierarchy are all reflective of how normative values of that specific social milieu are being perpetrated. More specifically, one may just need to look into how patriarchal norms successfully embed itself even in the micro-politics of family relations.

Finally, the socio-historical dialogue and discourse on social discipline vis-à-vis state building will be unfortunately inchoate without trying to probe the analytical contributions, not only of Oestreich but also of Max Weber and Michel Foucault⁸. While Fou-

⁷ This is a personal observation: ‘localization’ refers to the ‘trickle-down’ phenomenon of surveillance and control of authorities from the various layers of the society.

⁸ A very good historicization of this dialogue is substantively described by Van Krieken (1990).

cault's⁹ claim to fame has possibly been his work on "asylums, prisons, the relations between power and knowledge and the history of governmental rationalities" (Patton 2003:531), Weber's¹⁰ influence hinges upon the notion of discipline with ascetic Protestantism in conjunction with the emergence of modern Western capitalism as well as the psychological power of capitalism and the disciplined modern self. Unlike Weber, Oestreich emphasizes the enormous influence of the Neo-Stoic intellectual movement and the various related forms of state intrusion in spreading discipline as, for instance, in the newly-reformed armies of Western Europe (Van Krieken 1990). Considering this dialogical stream, both Weber and Oestreich appears to tackle upon the question of modernity and its emergence while the former seems to offer a bit more parochial yet a 'thick description' of how Protestantism was the key factor in the formation of the 'modern', the latter endeavors to see various agential factors that contributed to the modern. Thus, it appears that Weber's story of development has 'universalizing' and 'totalizing' tendencies by pinpointing primarily to Protestantism. In contrast, Oestreich apparently presents a more 'multi-factorial' historical narrative that includes the church, military, monarchical discipline, local authorities whose 'disciplining' powers eventually seeped into the internal capillaries of realization of the 'modernizing' human individual. Despite a seeming divergence on the issue of which primary factors are responsible for the emergence of the 'modern' self and the society offered by Weber and Oestreich, the convergence appears to be on the 'societalization of the self'¹¹.

⁹ To examine further the various normative practices that govern and dictate behavior (which is very insightful of Foucault's version perhaps of social discipline), one may refer to Foucault (1975; 1976).

¹⁰ See Weber (1930).

¹¹ This term is originally (as far as I know) coined by Van Krieken (1990: 10). The term refers to how the "external constraints" (e.g. traditional societal bases of power) have somehow intruded the 'self' and such has clearly "internalized" the constraints which are all parts of the disciplinary processes that initially occur at the societal level.

4. Social Discipline and Democracy: Some Theoretical Considerations

What is perhaps the most strikingly profound in Oestreich's work that may still be very much relevant in the contemporary debate on democratic theory is his idea on democracy as a very important prerequisite in democracy. Hence, Oestreich (1982:271) succinctly yet potently contends:

Yet, beside freedom of information and debate, democracy presupposes discipline on the part of the citizen, a discipline which serves the common good. The process we have been discussing has received little attention, yet it is a prerequisite for the fundamental democratization of the bourgeois community, for the modern state and its society.

In this case, what does it actually mean to be a 'disciplined' individual in a democratic context? What does it refer to when we say that a society is democratic¹²? When we say that one is 'disciplined', we are referring to a very persuasive Weber-Oestreich-inspired notion of the 'communalization of the self'¹³. One is 'disciplined' when a human person, defined to be a member of socio-political community, fully understands and internalizes the normative standardization practices in behavior that are considered to be generally accepted by any given community in which such person is a member of. This presupposes a norm-neutral conception of a 'disciplined' individual – that is, a 'disciplined' individual may exist in totalitarian state of North Korea or even in a liberal democratic state such as the United States – as long as he or she obeys the North Korean totalitarian or American democratic norms, respectively. Nonetheless, it may be argued, that being 'socially disciplined' has some sort of cognitive-intellectual, physical and psychological considerations. At the *cognitive-intellectual* level, the 'modern' individual comprehends what it means to be modern, what it takes to be non-modern, and thus imbibes a dualisti-

¹² Interestingly, Moravcsik (2004) presented four representative strands or 'understandings' of democracy: pluralist, libertarian, social democratic and deliberative democracy.

¹³ I use the term "communalization" as opposed to Van Krieken's term "societalization" as I contend that the term "community" implies a stronger sense of affinity, cohesion, and affection more than the dominantly-mechanical connotation couched on the notion of 'society'. In the short-term, social discipline may sound purely mechanical, instrumental and utilitarian for societal good; but, I contend that in the long-term, self-disciplined citizens realize and internalize later on that they are one indispensable part of a community of 'like-minded' individuals. Thus, Cornell University's Benedict Anderson (2006) used the term "imagined communities" rather than "imagined societies", at least based on my hermeneutical interpretation of his famous work.

cally framed cognitive conception of the modern and its 'other'. Consciously or sub-consciously, the 'disciplined' individual continues to 'other' the "Other", that is, the 'disciplined' one assumes the position of a superior subject objectifying the 'Other' who is the un-disciplined and the alter-Ego of the 'disciplined subject'.

This process of 'othering' does not only occur at the individual level, but it also befalls at the meso- and macro- levels of the broader society. The meso-level refers to the immediate social network of the 'disciplined subject' while the macro-level refers to the broader society. True enough, the meso- and macro-oriented 'institutions'¹⁴ utilize and maximize its instrumentalities of power in order to differentiate, to discriminate and perhaps to penalize the 'undisciplined objects' of the society.

In terms of *physical* features, the 'modern' and 'disciplined' individual cognitively understands what it has to do to appear aesthetically and physically distinguishable from that he/she is 'not', and thus acts according to such cognitive understanding. More importantly, 'discipline' also means restraint – veering away from all that may be considered worth restraining by any 'modern' society or community, or staying away from executing any act that may be generally apprehended as 'un-modern'.

Henceforth, this 'democracy-thesis' of Oestreich refers to an implicit agreement with Hobbes' profound doubts on the rationality of human nature such that democracy may only flourish with 'self-disciplined' political citizens averring to a certain notion of rationality in social exchanges and a recognition of the centralization of political power in the state (Van Krieken 1990).

Conceivably, Oestreich's claim that a certain level of 'social discipline' is ultimately indispensable in a democratic community requires some critical nuancing and further reflection. In its most self-evident terms, 'social discipline' is a *necessary* but not *sufficient* condition for a fully democratic polity. First, 'discipline', at the individual level, requires

¹⁴ Foucault's (1975) *Discipline and Punish* reveals a lot of examples in which 'micro-political' techniques of physical coercion, control, training and surveillance are being employed. In fact, such techniques, though geared towards the micro-politics of the self, from a variety of European state and non-state institutions from the 16th century onwards, are already activated in the workplace, factories, educational organizations and prisons. See also Patton (2003).

a strong sense of ‘*demos*’. This means that the human individual is no longer an isolated, mundane, alienated self, but a human person deeply embedded in a socio-political community wherein the human self is always defined in this community of persons and not just a miniscule part of societal aggregation of human subjects¹⁵. Arguably, *in the short term*, the imposition of discipline – though may have despicable effects on the human emotions and may undermine a certain sense of individuality, in the first instance – can be humiliating, loathing and reductionist. It may result to reducing the individual as a mere object of discipline, a mere object of societal values, a mere object of the institutional instrumentalities of power. Nevertheless, *in the long term*, the imposition of discipline, perpetrated by institutions, also facilitates the human individuals’ acculturation into the society; thereby making the individual to be ‘one’ with the community. As a case in point, education, as a socio-political instrumentality of state power empowers the individual by equipping the latter with all the skills, attitude, and knowledge couched with the teleological purpose for an individual not only to be productive in the society, but also to be a holistically informed and capable self-realizing subject. For this, Shapiro (2005:4) notes that universities and educational institutions have the function of being a “responsive servant” and a “thoughtful critic”. Though they ‘discipline’ individuals, educational institutions also provide the ‘public good’ of ‘public and social knowledge’ to the individual and, probably, as a desirable consequence, may also help the individual gain skills for *social and political criticism* that are absolutely essential in the further development of a truly democratic society.

Second, it is generally argued that most types of democracy would presuppose a people-centric, society-centric conception as its foundational genesis and ontology. Most non-democratic states, such as for instance, totalitarian¹⁶ and authoritarian¹⁷ states, would tend

¹⁵ This astutely reminds me of Benedict Anderson’s famous work called “Imagine Communities”.

¹⁶ This refers to a type of a non-democratic state in which virtually all aspects of the citizen’s life are being controlled (or being attempted to be controlled) by the state. Not only political and civil rights are suppressed but also the social and cultural rights remain to be non-existent. In contemporary comparative politics, communist North Korea falls under this ideal-type typological category. In this example, political and material equality are both being implemented and endeavored by the state.

¹⁷ This refers to a type of a non-democratic state in which only the political and civil rights of the citizens are being repressed while other aspects of the life of the citizenry are still less controlled by the state.

to over-concentrate the powers within the state apparatus, whereas the citizenry within the societal sphere are facing a seemingly insurmountable struggle against how this over-concentration of powers has led to the latter's extreme oppression. This makes an exemplary case of a *zero-sum* game between state and society¹⁸. However, ideally and typologically speaking, it is argued that democratic states tend to have the powers in the state-society nexus reasonably distributed leading to a *positive-sum* game instead. More important than this ontological fact is that the foundational *raison d'état* of the state is the people, in which the 'disciplining' functions of the state and its collaborating actors and institutions are legitimized only in its purpose of serving the common good and the individual good, co-terminously, rather than directing only to the institutional good of the state itself. Nevertheless, a considerable level of 'social discipline' is indispensable because there are certain tendencies that the entirety of the citizenry may fall into high propensities of irrationality, or worst, and utterly misplaced selfishness. This is indeed reminiscent of what Tocqueville (2003) calls as the 'tyranny of the majority' in the context where:

Justice is the end of the government. It is the end of civil society. It ever has been, and ever will be pursued until it be obtained, or until liberty be lost in the pursuit.

In this case, social discipline has the desirable outcome of safeguarding the citizens' abuses against others and it is such kind of discipline that emanates from a higher moral pedestal that is the state - which tries to flatten out these potentially burgeoning irrationalities and misbehavior from the citizenry. For instance, public education system in most advance liberal democracies or even in struggling liberal democracies in the developing world endeavors as well – among many other public benefits – to inform the citizenry of the most critical socio-political and economic issues facing the community. For instance, in the Philippines – Asia's largest Catholic nation-state and having one of exorbitantly high population growth rates in Asia-Pacific – is facing a heated public policy debate on the moral legitimacy and policy effectiveness of the newly instituted state proposal (that is also supported by the United Nations) sex education campaign in Philippine primary and secondary schools in which the emphasis will be given on safe sex and reproductive

¹⁸ University of Washington's Joel Migdal (2001) introduced a pioneering study that our Weberian-inspired understanding of state and society is in fact incoherent. He argues that states are 'fragmented' and are always embedded in a cobweb of power relations wherein different actors are involved trying to influence the state center.

health services. This goes along the goals of curbing the spread of sexually transmitted diseases and preventing unwanted pregnancies - amidst the anger from the conservative social circles led by the Catholic Church in the country. Notably, in this empirical case, the state 'securitizes' the issue of sex – which is normally conceived as a private matter – into a public policy issue and institutionalizes an instrumentality of 'social discipline' by utilizing the public education system to provide information and guidelines on such a 'securitized' issue of private health turned into a public health issue.

In a more acutely abstractive sense, I argue that the rigid, consistent, and strict enforcement of social discipline across the macro-, meso- and micro-levels of societal spheres is critical for civilizational development. Social discipline, in its most liberal sense, is not only directed in conquering and restraining the irrationalities and incalculability of human behavior but it also geared towards making the external natural environment in concurrence with the human society's teleologically-, future- and development-oriented aims. Empirically, one may only need to glean to the following examples: the pioneering efforts in the institutionalization of economies-of-scale that makes large-scale food production in Europe and North America possible; the seemingly unimaginable high-technological goods manufacturing industry in Japan; the capital- and technology-intensive mineral and oil resourcing in Canada, Australia and the Middle East; as well as the booming cheap labor yet highly efficient manufacturing industry in China and Southeast Asia. These are all lucid empirical illustrations of how 'social discipline' propels the human race to further dramatic leaps in advancing the frontiers of civilizational evolution. Thus, it is indeed perfectly right when Richerson and Boyd (2005) argue that cultural transformational development is not only a product of evolutionary genes but it also a question of culture. Their argument posits that humanity's environmental dominance and monolithic social systems originates from a psychology that is distinctively adapted to create a "complex culture". Insightfully, Oestreich's emphasis on the power of individual human psychology to internalize macro-induced social discipline speaks perceptively of this pioneering anthropological study of Richerson and Boyd (2005). In other words, social discipline is also about a matter of self-empowerment in as much as a matter of societal empowerment in which the effects not only transcend the micro-individual level but also has macro-societal, trans-historical and trans-generational trickle-down effects.

5. Social Discipline vis-à-vis The Others' Experience: Reflections on Euro-Centrism

In the previous sections, 'social discipline' was theorized upon and empirically substantiated based on how it is generally construed mostly in the basic strands of the Western perspective, with a particular eye on the influential work of Gerhard Oestreich. I gleaned upon theoretically informed empirical reflections on how it propelled democracy and how democracy denotes to be the most idyllic, pre-eminent and undisputed form of political community¹⁹. Hermeneutically, it is contended that when Oestreich asserts that social discipline is a critical imperative for the emergence of a vibrant democracy, this claim arguably springs from an implicit disciplinary bias among Western scholars that democracy and discipline – strictly construed on whatever is being practice in advanced industrialized liberal democracies of the Western world²⁰ – are all Western inventions that overtly yet unjustly glamorizes, mystifies and romanticizes Western civilizational superiority. When Weber and Oestreich refer to modernity and cultural development, respectively, they always refer to this implicit - or perhaps sometimes explicit - bias on emphasizing the isolation of Western European historical events as if they are uniquely quarantined from Eastern influence. When Weber asserts that the Protestant ethic was a primary factor that propelled modernity, does this mean that the East is deprived of such 'Protestant' ethic so much so that it somehow explains the 'underdevelopment' in social and political communities in the non-Western civilization? When Oestreich maintains that the intellectual movement of neo-Stoicism and its associated forms of state intervention aided the spread of discipline in modern Europe, how does this make sense to non-Western discussion of social discipline? A more important question to ask is this: what is the current state of epistemic discussion regarding social discipline vis-à-vis democracy and development?

¹⁹ This idea of democracy construed as such is insightfully climaxed by the idea of Harvard-educated Francis Fukuyama's (1992) *The End of History and the Last Man* in which he argues that the historical trajectory of ideological conflicts has largely come to an end with liberal democracy emerging as the most favored political set-up after the Cold War.

²⁰ This term denotes the highly-economically developed societies in Western Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand.

I suspect that this whole discursive push on social discipline and its causal relationship with development and democracy are all effusive symptoms of the still persisting Euro-centrism that still makes Western scholarship (and even global governance elites based in the West) unable to understand, to appreciate and to critically study the nature of ongoing recent socio-political developments in the non-Western world. More specifically, in the past two decades, there has been a heated discussion on how some cultures are indeed inherently incapable of achieving developmental success comparable to the West (see Harrison and Huntington 2002²¹, and Landes 1998). As such, it seems scholarly appealing to problematize why it seems conceptually- and discursively-puzzling for Westerners to disapprove ‘Asian values’²² and its accompanying forms of ‘social discipline’, while, in fact, such Western disapproval is acutely expressive of Euro-centric bias and stubbornness in Western scholarship that shows non-willingness to understand the cultural intricacies of the non-Western “Other” as well as the inherently implicit presumption that the path to modernity is utterly European perpetrated by a Euro-centric European scholarship. More recent and notable though is Eisenstadt’s (2000:1) contention on “multiple modernities” that refers to:

“...a certain view of the contemporary world – indeed of the history and characteristics of the modern era – that goes against the views long prevalent in scholarly and general discourse. It goes against the view of the “classical” theories of modernization and of the convergence of industrial societies prevalent in the 1950s, and indeed against the classical sociological analyses of Marx, Durkheim, and (to a large extent_ even of Weber, at least in one reading of his work. They

²¹ This is an edited book with several essays implying how some cultures are indeed dismal in achieving Western levels of success. For instance, some essays attempt to explain the causes of African American underachievement in the U.S.

²² The recent economic success of East Asian tigers (Japan, Hongkong, Singapore, Taiwan, Malaysia, and to a certain extent, Thailand) propelled a certain conceptual imagination of what came to be known as ‘Asian values’. For further discussion on ‘Asian values’, see Thompson (2000). For instance, in Singapore – one of East Asia’s most successful economies that enjoys a high GDP per capita and a very high standard of living - is criticized by some Westerners for its apparently absurd and peculiar form of ‘social discipline’ and for severely punishing some ‘minor crimes’. As such, there is this controversial case this year of a Swiss national – Oliver Fricker - working as an information technology consultant in Singapore who pleaded guilty in the court for vandalizing Singapore’s graffiti-sanctioned walls. (Un?) fortunately, vandalism in Singapore carries a required three to eight strokes of cane (which are indeed very painful and can leave physical marks for a lifetime) and a fine of around 1,500 US dollars or up to three years in the prison. The country enjoys one of the lowest crime rates in the world and is known for death penalty that may even include hanging drug dealers. Interestingly, it even recently put a ban on the sale of chewing gum and a heavy crackdown on littering. (See Fox News 2010).

all assumed, even if only implicitly, that the cultural program of modernity as it developed in modern Europe and the basic institutional constellations that emerged there would ultimately take over in all modernizing and modern societies; with the expansion of modernity, they would prevail throughout the world”

Arguably, though more subtle, Oestreich’s substantive historicization of the emergence of the absolute state vis-à-vis social discipline also makes a good candidate to join the league of what I shall call the ‘*monolithic modernization discourse*’ spearheaded by Marx, Durkheim and to some extent, Weber – as argued by Eisenstadt. Hence, the literature on social discipline can be construed as just a chapter of a whole canon on ‘European-centric modernity narrative’ which attempts to exclude, to discriminate and to undermine non-Western/ “Other” narratives of modernity. Euro-centrism²³, as may be justly suspected, is an old ‘language-game’ in most ranges of intellectual scholarship, most notably of which would be in the social and historical sciences.

The prevalence of Euro-centrism is undeniable that it is not only confined within the epistemic communities but also among high-level policy-making communities and the political elite class of advanced Western states. In fact in the late 1990s, the East Asian tigers’ miracle story (Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan etc.) were badly hit with much criticism from the West during the 1997 Asian financial crisis. Nonetheless, the East Asian narrative of modernity remained vindicated as these economies recovered and continued to develop. In fact, much more attention is leveled again in the Pacific (or in East Asia) with the rise of China as an emerging global power – or more accurately, the resurrection of a lost global power.

Repudiating prejudiced and extremely partial accounts of the Western modernity narrative (as advanced by Marx, Weber, Oestreich, Foucault, and even Elias), contemporary English-speaking world’s leading critic of Euro-centrism John M. Hobson (2004) offers a more peculiar yet intriguing and thought-provoking historical sociology of modernity. Re (de)-constructing and de-mystifying European modern cultural hegemony attributive to purported ‘European superiority of traits’, Hobson (2004:20) notes that the East (or the

²³ I take Oxford Dictionary of Politics’ (2009:177) definition of what Eurocentrism is – which, most specifically, is characterized “whereby history and development have been analysed in ways which are narrowly focused on Western conceptions of progress, whilst minimizing the contributions from, and exploitation of, non-Western societies...”

‘Other’) was in fact the prime mover of global development and that “leading Western powers were inferior, economically and politically, to the leading Asian powers. It was only near the very end of the period (circa 1840) that a Western power finally eclipsed China”. More controversial is Hobson’s contention that the faith on European hegemony associated with free trade, rational rule and democratic rule (or social discipline as well?) is an extremely misleading travesty as European powers claimed trading powers and rule by coercion and even Great Britain drove the Industrial Revolution under harsh and brutal circumstances. And now, this begs the question: where is this political criticism of purportedly ‘harsh social discipline’ in contemporary East Asia (China with its authoritarian rule and Singapore’s soft authoritarianism; though both countries seem to prove that ‘Other’ countries can match Western levels of modernity) coming from? One just needs to be just reminded of the past brutal conditions in which Western countries needed to develop (e.g. colonization, extermination of indigenous people in the ‘New World’, unjust extraction of resources). I refer, particularly, to the vivid historical European escapades and encounters with the natives of the American frontiers and how their communities soon vanished; the aboriginal communities in the Land Down Under which until now have yet to be recognized by the modern day Euro-oriented Australian state; the thousands, and some say, a million of Filipinos who died from the brutality of the Americans in the 1900s when the US ‘bought’ the archipelago from the fallen Spanish Empire. Indeed, one can only provide an endless litany of historical examples depicting how social discipline, when taken afar, often in the guise of Imperial ambitions, may indeed have *dehumanizing* effects. What is ironic though is that a truly democratic²⁴ society requires a certain level of discipline in order to be a fully realized *homo democraticus*; too much of “social discipline” as in the political tutelages of totalitarianism may indeed be de-democratizing let alone dehumanizing, yet too little of it as in the case of minimalist forms of governance may create ripe opportunities for unjust self-aggrandizement. On top of that, even the well-celebrated accounts of Oestreich and like-minded acolytes about social discipline and its merits are infused with so much unwarranted glorification of

²⁴ Too much of social discipline may sometimes be crafted under the guise of “illiberal policies”. See, for example, the highly regarded philosophical-historical account of Domenico Losurdo’s *Liberalism: A Counter-History*. In this work, he examines the inner philosophical contradictions of liberal thinking from Locke to Bentham, and consequently posits that the genesis of liberalism as a philosophical position has always entailed the “most illiberal policies” such as slavery, snobbery, and genocide.

Western social discipline that becomes the historical foundation of a successful modern-day liberal democratic states in the West.

Perhaps more famous and empirically oriented than Hobson's works is Martin Jacques's (2009) recent book on the re-emergence of China as a global power. Arguing that the days are almost gone when the 'modern' is synonymously and automatically means 'Western', Jacques (2009) distinguishes China as a 'civilization-state' – contrary to a European nation-state-induced modernity – will become the leading player in the decades to come when the narrative of Western modernity is strongly open to heated contestation such that it will not only overtake the United States as a leading economic power but will also topple our fundamental conceptions of what it means to be modern.

Considering the pensive yet seemingly threatening prognostication from Jacques (2009) and the re-tracing of Western modernity to Eastern origins of Hobson (2004), I argue that it is high time to embark on a more profound (re)-historicization of what accounts to be *modern, disciplined and developed*. In this spirit, it also necessary to recast the notion of Western discipline and modernity within the broader remit of "multiplicity" whereas historical contingencies, political particularities, and cultural sensitivities are given epistemological priority in our analysis of what it is to be *disciplined and modern* (Eisenstadt 2000). Thus, while social discipline brings modernity, yet the latter implies also emancipation from society and thus more autonomy, one can only think of that both of these analytical concepts are *not unique* to the European context. One can only glean on the massive social disciplinary practices of Imperial Beijing against the barbarians through the tremendous and rigorous training of the guardians of the Chinese empire during its heyday, let alone the modern-day economic miracle of Singapore amidst the seemingly perplexing soft authoritarianism of the one-party city-state. In this case, various degrees of social discipline coalesce with a truly modern macro-community, where most, if not all, feel a sense of freedom from material suffering and a sense of autonomy to pursue one's goals. In other words, the path to modernity cannot solely be described only by the remarkable *history* of European social discipline; instead, there are multiple pathways through which one can nostalgically traverse the *histories* of modernity. Hence, I maintain that Western scholarship as well as policy-making networks in the most advanced Western liberal democracies must recast doubt and a serious re-thinking into its false

sense of security²⁵ as an undisputed model²⁶ of modernity, economic success and cultural superiority.

6. Conclusion

In closing, I started this essay with a brief yet substantive historical exposition on the rise of the European absolutist state based on the less known yet insightful account of the German social historian Gerhard Oestreich. I also deployed a theoretical rumination about the notions of *modernity*, *social discipline*, and *democracy* and raise several key arguments: (1) while social discipline is key to European modernity, this is no case unique to the European experience; (2) variations in the level of social discipline are correlated to the variations in the type of political system in question; (3) a certain tolerable level of 'social discipline' is needed for democracy, and that it is a necessary yet not sufficient condition for democratic development.

Finally, a substantive case on the link between the social discipline and democracy was made, and let me reiterate these points. First, social discipline is a critical imperative in enhancing (if not introducing, initially) the "communalization of the self" which is indeed important in ensuring a sense of community belongingness on the part of individual which then has clear and beneficial ramifications in promoting a vibrant, participatory and inclusivist democracy. Second, notwithstanding the fact that 'social discipline' is not mutually-exclusive (in regard to its presence in democratic and non-democratic regimes, albeit in varying levels), it was claimed that a form of 'social discipline' becomes an effective instrumentality of the state and its associated institutions in order to make the 'ir-

²⁵ Although both of which comprise what is construed to be 'Western', I must say that the United States is way ahead of Europe (E.U. powers) in terms of reappraising its reduced power in the global level considering the recent strategic political-economic developments in the non-Western world, most especially in East Asia (China). It appears to be a sham the E U (asserting itself as a 'normative power') was completely displaced in terms of influence as one coherent actor during the Copenhagen Summit on Climate Change last 2009 when China and the United States dominated much of what happened during such significant event in the global governance on climate change.

²⁶ See for example, the empirical case on the EU's self-perception as "global normative power" and its lack of political clout in the East Asian region: Regilme, Salvador Santino F. Jr. "The Chimera of Europe's Normative Power in East Asia: A Constructivist Analysis," *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies*, 5/1(2011), pp. 69–90.

rational', 'not-so-social' individual to become a 'self-disciplined', 'calculating' and 'community-minded' self as the citizenry plays a critical role in governance of public policy issues. Third, social discipline has trans-generational and trans-historical effects, as it remains a key propeller in advancing the frontiers of civilizational or, at the very least, community development.

Ultimately, the Western centric notion of 'social discipline' was arguably couched (ex) implicitly in the aim of presenting an overtly glamorized European 'grand story' of cultural and political modernity and economic success. Considering recent indispensable social and political developments in the global balance-of-power and the reduced influence of the Western world in the global governance of issues (e.g. climate change, global trade and financial markets), the meta-narrative of cultural modernity (in which social discipline is embedded upon) has to be re-thought, re-drawn and re-meditated (if not to be re-historicized) in the goal of re-appraising various 'stories' of modernity and various 'versions' of 'social disciplining' (e.g. East Asian development state model; Chinese model of development, for instance). For future scholarly endeavors, it would be more intellectually fruitful to see comparative historical, sociological and political studies of various 'stories of modernity' (e.g. how 'social disciplining' could probably vary in central Europe and feudal Japan or imperial China?). It is indeed not too late to 'discipline' ourselves to re-appraise various alternative discourses (or forms) of 'social discipline', 'democracy' (or other political systems) and 'development' amidst the stubborn European scholarship that paints a picture where "the Rest" is mute when it comes to their historical journeys to *modernity, social discipline, and democracy*. Obviously, the reflections expounded above raised more critical questions rather than providing 'totalizing' and 'universalizing' answers – which, more broadly reflects how the scholarly discourses on discipline, modernity and development should be – that is, 'non-totalizing', 'non-universalizing' but critical and open-ended. What we indeed need is an approach similar to a 'world historical perspective'²⁷ that is more inclusivist, well informed and more

²⁷ I take this approach from Barry Buzan and Richard Little's (2000) seminal work *International Systems in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations* published by Oxford University Press which I think was a notable attempt to gravely undermine the Euro-centric approaches in the study of international relations that usually begins with the birth of Westphalian nation-states. In contrast, the authors of this work present the 60,000-year story of historical evolution of 'international systems'.

promising – something that is markedly distinct from Euro-centric ‘thick descriptions’ of their own *historical paths* to modernity, social discipline and state building.

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