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Why was the European civilisation the first to expand?  
The Eurocentric vs. the anti-Eurocentric view.

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## **Abstract**

In this essay the question of why the European civilisation was the first to rise and expand will be analysed. As there is more than one answer to this question two of the explanations: the Eurocentric and the anti-Eurocentric have been chosen for a comparison and analysis. The Eurocentric explanations see the expansion of Europe as caused by its inner qualities such as: environment, state-system, people and religion. The anti-Eurocentric explanation on the other hand sees the rise of Europe as caused by the colonisation of the Americas in 1492. The riches and resources provided from this made Europe's remarkable development possible. Europe did not own any special or superior features in comparison with other civilisations; in fact prior to 1492, they were all on a par with each other. The aim of this study is to look upon the argumentation of these two explanations and examine what lies behind them. The arguments will be analysed in terms of: time & space frameworks, aim & method, validity & material and theory.

Being a debated question the arguments for the rise of Europe are many, and even if we cannot find the right or wrong answers each explanation can be criticised. What seem to be the underlying factors for the arguments are our worldviews. The way we choose to look upon the world then affects the arguments that we make for its development.

*Keywords:* Eurocentric, anti-Eurocentric, Europe, non-Europe, civilisation

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# 1 Introduction

This world has seen different civilisations develop, rise and decline. The extent to which they have expanded has differed greatly. But one civilisation has differentiated more in its development, the European one. When the European civilization started to develop it was by no means the first to do so but the progress that followed this development had not been seen before nor has it been exceeded since. During the high point of Europe's expansion about 89 % of all the world's countries were under its rule and the mark it left on the world is still known today. What was it that made this particular civilisation the first to expand in this manner?

## 1.1 Purpose and question at issue

The purpose of this bachelor's thesis was at first to find out why Europe was the first civilisation to expand throughout the world. Though, when commencing the research work the realisation came that there was more than one answer to this question. Thus I had to change my purpose and instead of finding the "one" or the "right" answer I will be looking deeper into two given explanations on why Europe was "first". The two explanations under study are, in brief:

- The Eurocentric explanation: which consists of theories and views that it was qualities within Europe, such as the environment, mindset and religion, that resulted in its extraordinarily expansion. The term Eurocentric is chosen as the focus is on Europe and little significance is placed on developments in the surrounding world.
- The anti-Eurocentric explanation: which sees the colonising of the Americas as the reason why Europe could develop in the way it did. The riches and resources that were drawn from these colonies enabled Europe's rise. The term anti-Eurocentric emphasises non-Europe's participation and role in the development of Europe.

Accordingly, the question that will be examined in this bachelor's thesis is:

- Why was the European civilisation the first to rise and expand?

## 1.2 Limitations of the study

As mentioned above there are more than one answer given to the question posed in this study, but since this is a bachelor's thesis certain limitations have to be made. I have chosen to look in depth upon the explanations presented above; the Eurocentric and anti-Eurocentric. These represent two central explanations given to the expansion of Europe and they stand for opposite viewpoints to this

question. Therefore, they make for an interesting study and comparison. The Eurocentric view will mainly be based upon Eric L. Jones's book, *The European miracle: environments, economies, and geopolitics in the history of Europe and Asia*, and the anti-Eurocentric view mainly on James M. Blaut's, *The colonizer's model of the world, geographical diffusionism and Eurocentric history*. In addition to this, other literature will be used as complements, but due to the time and space limits of this thesis and the amount of literature presented on this subject, the main focus will be these two books, both in the presentation and the analysis. This choice will limit my study in its own way, since it will be built upon two person's explanations. I do feel though that it is a necessary choice to make due to space and time limits, and since these two authors represent two broad viewpoints I see this choice as legitimate.

The concepts that will be used throughout this thesis are problematic since they represent vague and complex concept such as, civilisation, Asian, European, Islamic, the West and the East. Can you really speak of civilizations as a homogenous entity? What is meant by Asian, European, Islamic, the East and the West? These questions alone contain enough to be the subject of a bachelor's thesis and understandably I cannot go in-depth in this discussion. They are the kind of concepts that make great simplifications and generalisations of the world, but I find that in order to make this study their use is essential. Both explanations will be generalised, and they cannot be developed upon as much as I would have liked, neither is there a chance for me to bring up all arguments made due to the space limitations.

### 1.3 Definitions

When speaking of the different civilisations, peoples, countries and continents around the world it will be on the broadest level and highly generalised. It needs to be said that the concepts used are creations from the European/Western world; this means that they carry underlying meanings and biases. Most of these concepts have been created to define something non-European or non-Western and also imply a value in what is European and Western. This has great implications on my study given the subject, and that has been taken into consideration. The ideal situation would be to have concepts and definitions without these biases but none have been found.

### 1.4 Relevance of the study

I am aware that the subject and question of my thesis might not be within what can be called "political science". However since my subject is essentially about how we chose to look upon the order of the world today, I feel it to be relevant from an International Relations and political perspective. The way we choose to look upon the world is of great importance and the way we chose to look at history is the manner in which we see present day changes. This can be related to

many of the issues in the world today such as the under-development of countries. Are they responsible for their development or can it be traced back to other aspects such as colonisation?

## 1.5 Disposition

With chapter one coming to its end part of the outline of this thesis has been presented. The theories underlying the Eurocentric and anti-Eurocentric view are presented in chapter two and a full account of method and material used follows in chapter three. Chapter four consists of my empirical study; the two explanations will be outlined theme wise parallel to each other. In chapter five the analysis is presented and the conclusion of this thesis can be found in chapter six. Chapter seven will contain the references.

## 2 Theory

This theory chapter will present what underlies the Eurocentric explanation and the anti-Eurocentric explanation to “the rise of Europe.” The theories presented in this chapter will be those of Max Weber and Sandra Harding. Weber will be representing the Eurocentric explanation and Harding the anti-Eurocentric one. By no means is there a claim that these are the only theories behind these two viewpoints but they will give a general understanding of what lies behind the opinions and views of each explanation.

### 2.1 The Eurocentric explanation

This line of thinking stems from notions of Europeans as better than other people. The choice of Max Weber has arisen from the fact that he appears as a reference and is cited in some of the literature that I have studied, such as that of Eric Jones, John Hall and Michael Mann. Weber’s books and theories are admittedly not brand new, and some of his arguments and theories are quite old fashion being written during times when European superiority was seldom questioned. But since I have seen traces of his work in the literature chosen for this study, Weber seemed like an appropriate choice.

The theories and arguments of Weber are European in origin and have as its ambition to show why and how Europe came to have such an extraordinary development. The base of Weber’s theories is that of a European rationality due to which certain features and developments that only occurred in the West. For example, Weber has claimed that it is only in the West that genuine science exists.<sup>1</sup> Other features that are exclusive to the West are; the state, capitalism, rational structures of law and administration and the rational organization of free labour and individuals.<sup>2</sup> Features such as music, architecture, printing, and the feudal state have existed elsewhere but are considered inferior to Europe’s.

This exclusivity of Europe is due to rationalism and the existence of Christianity in the European culture.<sup>3</sup> Since this rationality has only existed within European culture Weber concludes that it must be inherent in being European.<sup>4</sup> The reason Europe were to develop towards capitalism can be found in the “rational technology, rational law, rational spirit and a rationalistic economic ethic”.<sup>5</sup> Christianity also provided a number of crucial features in the development of Europe. It helped develop the decreasing meaning of family and community

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<sup>1</sup> Weber, Max, *The protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism* (1930) p 13.

<sup>2</sup> Weber, Max, *The protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism* (1930) p 16-22.

<sup>3</sup> Weber, Max, *The protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism* (1930) p 26.

<sup>4</sup> Weber, Max, *The protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism* (1930) p 30.

<sup>5</sup> Weber, Max, *General economic history* (1927) p 354.

bonds, making economic relations more business orientated.<sup>6</sup> Another special characteristic within Christianity is the dislike and hostility towards magic and superstition. Weber claims that the notion of magic and superstition outside the Christian civilisations has been blocking a “rationalised economic life.”<sup>7</sup> The basic reasons for other civilisations not to follow Europe or have the same development as Europe was, according to Weber, that they did not possess this rationality and other complementary features such as: irrigation farming<sup>8</sup>, the influence of magic traditions<sup>9</sup> and centralisation of the authority<sup>10</sup> and last the existence of caste and clan systems.<sup>11</sup>

## 2.2 The anti-Eurocentric explanation

The anti-Eurocentric explanation comes from “newer” lines of thinking and ways of viewing the world. It argues that the expansion and “rise of Europe” was not caused by inherent qualities of Europe, but due to the wealth and riches that Europe gained during the colonisation of the Americas. This event shaped the world system as we know it today and the effects of it can still be seen around us. This is a non-European perspective and it tries to illuminate the part of history and humanity that has been excluded. There are many representatives and scholars within this field but I have chosen Sandra Harding mainly because her line of thinking complements that of J.M Blaut.

The notion of modern science as the one true science, neutral and value-free has been challenged.<sup>12</sup> These challenges come from a post-Khunan tradition, claiming that even science has been and still is affected by the world in which it is created and exists.<sup>13</sup> Within this tradition postcolonial studies and theories can be found. These studies are interested in the connections between European expansion and the emergence of modern science in Europe.<sup>14</sup> Within postcolonialism, the focus lies on the history and geography of non-Europe told from the perspectives of the people residing there. The old version of world history and science has been biased in favour of Europe and non-Europe has been seen to have a marginal role if any in Europe’s development.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Weber, Max, *General economic history* (1927) p 356.

<sup>7</sup> Weber, Max, *General economic history* (1927) p 361.

<sup>8</sup> Weber, Max, *General economic history* (1927) p 56-57.

<sup>9</sup> Weber, Max, *General economic history* (1927) p 161.

<sup>10</sup> Weber, Max, *General economic history* (1927) p 56-57.

<sup>11</sup> Weber, Max, *General economic history* (1927) p 344-345.

<sup>12</sup> Harding, Sandra, *Is science multicultural? Postcolonialisms, feminism and epistemologies* (1998) p 2.

<sup>13</sup> Harding, Sandra, *Is science multicultural? Postcolonialisms, feminism and epistemologies* (1998) p 2-3.

<sup>14</sup> Harding, Sandra, *Is science multicultural? Postcolonialisms, feminism and epistemologies* (1998) p 6.

<sup>15</sup> Harding, Sandra, *Is science multicultural? Postcolonialisms, feminism and epistemologies* (1998) p 7.

These studies deal with the anti-Eurocentric version of history and study the technology and science traditions of non-western cultures.<sup>16</sup> This has led to the realisation of the level of sophistication of other cultures science and technology and the way they have contributed to the development of Europe and modern science.<sup>17</sup> There needs to be a greater understanding of the actual interaction that has taken place during world history and that the non-European world has had an active role in the creation of modern day Europe.<sup>18</sup> In 1492 what was found was not barbarian people but "complex and sophisticated cultures with highly effective scientific and technological systems" which were either borrowed from or destroyed depending on their value to Europe. With the start of the colonialist expansion science became used for solving colonial problems thus, "important parts of Europe's organised scientific research were fundamentally in the service of establishing and maintaining colonialism and slavery."<sup>19</sup> This led to a destruction of non-European scientific and technological societies which were deemed as inferior by Europeans.<sup>20</sup> Thus development in Europe was brought about at the expense of non-development in non-Europe, and some claim that these structures preside today.<sup>21</sup>

In sum, what postcolonialist traditions mean is that there is no way to decide or prove that one cultural systems tradition is superior to the other. There exist different ones but who is to say which one is right and which one is wrong?<sup>22</sup> There have been claims that Europe's science and technology is superior, but these claims need to be seen in the social and historical context in which it was created.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Harding in Narayan, Uma, Harding, Sandra, *Decentering the center philosophy for a multicultural, postcolonial and feminist world*. (2000) p 248.

<sup>17</sup> Harding in Narayan, Uma, Harding, Sandra, *Decentering the center philosophy for a multicultural, postcolonial and feminist world*. (2000) p 249.

<sup>18</sup> Harding, Sandra, *Is science multicultural? Postcolonialisms, feminism and epistemologies* (1998) p 42-43.

<sup>19</sup> Harding, Sandra, *Is science multicultural? Postcolonialisms, feminism and epistemologies* (1998) p 45.

<sup>20</sup> Harding, Sandra, *Is science multicultural? Postcolonialisms, feminism and epistemologies* (1998) p 48.

<sup>21</sup> Harding, Sandra, *Is science multicultural? Postcolonialisms, feminism and epistemologies* (1998) p 50.

<sup>22</sup> Harding, Sandra, *Is science multicultural? Postcolonialisms, feminism and epistemologies* (1998) p 19.

<sup>23</sup> Harding, Sandra, *Is science multicultural? Postcolonialisms, feminism and epistemologies* (1998) p 18.

## 3. Method and material

This chapter includes a presentation of the method and material used when conducting this thesis, with a following critique of these choices.

### 3.1 Method

My thesis will be done using the qualitative method of textual analysis. This method is used when one wants to create a deeper understanding of the material under study. The point of departure for this thesis is the question; why was the European civilisation the first to rise and expand? This question will be examined through two of the given explanations, the Eurocentric explanation and the anti-Eurocentric explanation. These will be presented theme-wise and analysed and from that conclusions will be drawn. As the purpose of this study is to examine two explanations, I find this method to be the most relevant.

The two views consist largely of the same components, such as arguments on environment, technology and state-system, and will be presented theme wise. The categories used will be made by me, since those used by Jones and Blaut are not at all times compatible. These categories will be presented opposing each other, one theme at a time in order to make comprehension and reading easier.

It is not the aim of this thesis to show or prove which one of these answers is correct. I am unsure whether the right or wrong answers can be found and either way that task would require far more in terms of time and space than this bachelor's thesis allows. Instead my ambition is to critically examine the two explanations and analyse what lies behind the arguments proposed. Since the main focus will be on the arguments of J.M Blaut and E.L Jones, these will dominate the analysis; which will be done according to the following points:

- Time & Space
- Purpose & Method
- Validity & Material
- Theory

As I want to go behind the arguments and see what they are based upon, the examination of underlying choice of time and space frameworks, method, material, aim and theory seems legitimate. The strengths and weaknesses in arguments will be examined under validity.

### 3.2 Material

The material used in this study consists solely of books, and the main focus will be on two of these: *The colonizer's model of the world*, *geographical diffusionism*

*and Eurocentric history*, by James M. Blaut and, *The European Miracle: environments, economies and geopolitics in the history of Europe and Asia*, by Eric L. Jones. The main reason for choosing these books is because they are opposites and therefore convenient to compare. It is also these two books that have been my main guidance in choosing books for further reading. I have chosen this way of working mainly to be able to confirm the arguments presented. Both authors' are very convincing in their arguments and as my ambition is to examine them critically I found this to be a good way of choosing my material and it also kept the focus and span of my study constricted. The chosen books are all secondary resources.

### 3.3 Critique of method and material

The choice of material is critical for the development of all studies. The books that I have chosen will affect every part of the study, influencing it from introduction to the conclusion. But choices of material have to be made since it is simply not possible to read all that is written about this subject. Thus the main part of this thesis will be built on the argumentation of J.M Blaut and E.L Jones, with them being the central sources. Had this study been based on other books the result would have been different. The main views that I am presenting are from these two people, thus what is mainly under investigation are two peoples world views.

The reliability of secondary resources may pose a problem and primary sources are usually preferred, as is new material preferred over old. My sources are all secondary and some have been around for a while. When basing your work on historical texts there are certain issues that need to be taken into consideration, since history as it was written cannot be relied upon as being without biases. Hopefully by being aware of these traps of history I can avoid them.

### 3.4 Criticism of sources

Source criticism is important when conducting this kind of study seeing as historical events will be studied. The following rules for source criticism can be found in "Metodpraktikan":

The authentic criteria; investigates whether or not the material in question have actually been produced at the time, in the context and by the person that is states.<sup>24</sup> Since I have been using established writers I am confident that this criterion has been filled.

The independent criteria; in what degree can one trust the material that is under study?<sup>25</sup> The material used in this study is of the secondary kind, and those are

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<sup>24</sup> Esiasson, Peter, Gilljam, Mikael, Oscarsson, Henrik, Wängnerud, Lena, *Metodpraktikan konsten att studera samhälle, individ och marknad* (2004) p 307-308.

<sup>25</sup> Esiasson, Peter, Gilljam, Mikael, Oscarsson, Henrik, Wängnerud, Lena, *Metodpraktikan konsten att studera samhälle, individ och marknad* (2004) p 308-310.

sometimes considered to be less trust worthy than primary sources but since what I am after is arguments presented from two viewpoints, should a source not be trustworthy it would still present arguments which can be analysed.

The contemporary criteria; the closer, in terms of time and space, the source is to the phenomenon under investigation the better is its possibility to picture it correctly.<sup>26</sup> My material is both “old” and “new” but since it is the arguments I am after this might not be such a big problem.

The tendency criteria; whether or not the author has an interest in giving a distort view of reality; most of the material I will be studying have an interest in showing the world from a certain point of view.<sup>27</sup> Thus the study will not be without tendencies, but since I am investigating two sides and can compare the arguments made, this will not pose much of a problem, indeed tendency might be unavoidable.

### 3.5 Objectivity

It has been my ambition to keep as high a level of objectivity as possible. One can always aim for objectivity but there is no guarantee that it will ever be reached. I have tried to keep my thesis open and declare and explain the choices made, in order to make understanding greater and the realisation on how the conclusion came about clearer. There is no way to reach a completely objective outset for doing this thesis since one carries certain views whether we like it or not.

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<sup>26</sup> Esiasson, Peter, Gilljam, Mikael, Oscarsson, Henrik, Wängnerud, Lena, *Metodpraktikan konsten att studera samhälle, individ och marknad* (2004) p 310-311.

<sup>27</sup> Esiasson, Peter, Gilljam, Mikael, Oscarsson, Henrik, Wängnerud, Lena, *Metodpraktikan konsten att studera samhälle, individ och marknad* (2004) p, 311-313.

# 4 Empirical part

In this chapter the arguments posed by the Eurocentric and the anti-Eurocentric explanation for Europe's expansion is presented. The arguments will be presented theme wise within categories chosen by me. In sum, the Eurocentric explanation claims that Europe had certain advantageous features such as: the environment, population, the state-system, religion, diversity in resources and political decentralism. These inherent qualities made their remarkable development possible.<sup>28</sup> Whereas the anti-Eurocentric explanation argues that "the rise of Europe" is due to the riches that were accumulated during the colonisation of the Americas that began in 1492. Europe was not superior to other civilizations prior to this event, nor was the rise produced from forces within Europe.<sup>29</sup>

## 4.1 Environment

### 4.1.1 The Eurocentric explanation

Asia was hit harder by natural disasters than Europe.<sup>30</sup> Natural phenomena such as earthquakes, flooding, drought and famine were more severe in Asia<sup>31</sup> and much animal and human disease spread from there.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, Europe's population and capital losses during times of war were less than Asia's due to their quicker rate of recovery.<sup>33</sup> The explanation to Europe's faster recovery and fewer losses can be found in the environment. It offered good protection for capital goods<sup>34</sup> and the climate and geography of Europe also meant fewer natural disasters, even if wars, disease and famines still tormented the continent.

Further advantages brought by Europe's environment were its variety in resources.<sup>35</sup> This brought about diversity in the trade and made it possible for regions to specialise.<sup>36</sup> Europe was a divided area with small cores, the majority of which had deep and productive clay soils fed by rainfall, thus there was no need for work demanding irrigation.<sup>37</sup> These core-areas were the origin to the state-system of Europe with the natural boundaries creating protected regions

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<sup>28</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 226.

<sup>29</sup> Blaut James, *The colonizers model of the world* (1993) p 51.

<sup>30</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 37.

<sup>31</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 27-29.

<sup>32</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 31.

<sup>33</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 227.

<sup>34</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 39.

<sup>35</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 227.

<sup>36</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 90.

<sup>37</sup> Hall, John, *Power and liberties* (1985) p 111-112.

where people settled.<sup>38</sup> This in combination with differences in ethnicity and language formed an individuality of these areas.<sup>39</sup>

#### 4.1.2 The anti-Eurocentric explanation

Natural disaster were known to occur more often in Asia than in Europe, but this can not be seen as very strange since Asia spans a area over four times larger than that of Europe, and has different types of geography.<sup>40</sup> The diversity of European resources is known but not to the extent that interregional trade and capitalism were created out of it. That these core-areas would have led to a trading system exclusive for Europe is not true.<sup>41</sup> Core-areas did play an important role and were crucial in trade, but they existed in many places and were not confined only to Europe. The argument that North-western European soils are superior to others is a myth. The expansion of Europe did not come about because of Europe's soils or its rainfall farming.<sup>42</sup> There is nothing superior to rainfall farming compared to irrigated farming. Neither is there any point to compare what soils are better, since they are neither better nor worse, but different.

## 4.2 Technology

### 4.2.1 The Eurocentric explanation

Europe was the first to modernize and this was due to its interest and inventiveness within technology.<sup>43</sup> Between the sixth and the ninth centuries Northern Europe experienced an agricultural revolution and a number of important technological innovations were made, which had a significant effect on development.<sup>44</sup>

It began with the development of the heavy plough in the sixth century, an invention that meant labour savings and an increase in production.<sup>45</sup> More oxen were needed to use this plough, which meant peasants started to work together, which created a certain village pattern.<sup>46</sup> The use of the plough was part of another fundamental feature, man as the exploiter and master of nature, a feature not known in many other civilisations, enabling Europe to develop and progress.<sup>47</sup> In the ninth century, the use of horsepower was discovered.<sup>48</sup> As the horse was able to do the same work as oxen but more efficiently, productivity increased.<sup>49</sup> The

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<sup>38</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 105.

<sup>39</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 106.

<sup>40</sup> Blaut, James, *The colonizers model of the world* (1993) p 93.

<sup>41</sup> Blaut, James, *The colonizers model of the world* (1993) p 92.

<sup>42</sup> Blaut, James, *The colonizers model of the world* (1993) p 92.

<sup>43</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 45.

<sup>44</sup> White, Lynn Jr, *Medieval technology and social change* (1962) p 40.

<sup>45</sup> White, Lynn Jr, *Medieval technology and social change* (1962) p 43-44.

<sup>46</sup> White, Lynn Jr, *Medieval technology and social change* (1962) p 44.

<sup>47</sup> White, Lynn Jr, *Medieval technology and social change* (1962) p 56-57.

<sup>48</sup> White, Lynn Jr, *Medieval technology and social change* (1962) p 57.

<sup>49</sup> White, Lynn Jr, *Medieval technology and social change* (1962) p 62.

use of horsepower led to a more settled agrarian life and the creation of stable villages.<sup>50</sup>

The triennial system started to spread in the late eighth century.<sup>51</sup> This gave increased production, efficiency and greater crop and diet diversity.<sup>52</sup> This new source of food explains a lot of the reasons behind the population expansion, growth of cities, rise in industrial production and commerce that northern Europe enjoyed at this time.<sup>53</sup>

Medieval Europe's accomplishments within technology seem constant.<sup>54</sup> The agricultural revolution led to population growth and economic expansion.<sup>55</sup> Technological transfers took place between civilisations and even if inventions were made elsewhere, Europe was the one to improve and put innovations to more sophisticated use.<sup>56</sup> Europe was thus good at both borrowing inventions and coming up with new ones.<sup>57</sup>

This technological leadership of the west began early and by the late thirteenth century Europe took the lead from Islam. This development and progress is caused by Christianity's impact on the relationship between man and nature.<sup>58</sup> With Christianity spreading, the belief of man as the exploiter of nature began. It was God's wish for man to use and farm the land, and the belief in nature and its spirits vanished with paganism.<sup>59</sup>

#### 4.2.2 The Anti-Eurocentric explanation

It is wrong to claim that progressive attitudes about technology and innovations have been inherent in the European culture and only there since the middle ages. It is called "telescoping history" when a modern day feature is believed to have existed within a culture all along. Europeans are not "uniquely inventive", nor did all other civilisations stand still. Neither Europe, Africa or Asia were more progressive in terms of technology than the other, instead there was a similar developments within those continents, if anything Europe was lagging behind China.<sup>60</sup>

The heavy plough was not invented in Europe nor was it exclusively used in Europe. That the plough re-organized the social life in Europe seems unlikely, that was probably more due to population growth and feudal exploitation.<sup>61</sup> That the use of horses caused the increase in production, commerce, villages to rise and communication to increase also seems highly unlikely. They are faster animals but

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<sup>50</sup> White, Lynn Jr, *Medieval technology and social change* (1962) p 68.

<sup>51</sup> White, Lynn Jr, *Medieval technology and social change* (1962) p 69.

<sup>52</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 48.

<sup>53</sup> White, Lynn Jr, *Medieval technology and social change* (1962) p 76.

<sup>54</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 40.

<sup>55</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 52-53.

<sup>56</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 58.

<sup>57</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 57.

<sup>58</sup> White, Lynn Jr, *Machina ex deo essays in the dynamism of western culture* (1968) p 81-83.

<sup>59</sup> White, Lynn Jr, *Machina ex deo essays in the dynamism of western culture* (1968) p 85-86.

<sup>60</sup> Blaut, James, *The colonizers model of the world* (1993) p 115-116.

<sup>61</sup> Blaut, James, *Eight Eurocentric historians* (2000), 34-35.

also demanded more fodder and maintenance thus the benefits might not have been as enormous as claimed.<sup>62</sup> The three-field system is neither a technological revolution nor uniquely European and it seems doubtful that an improvement in diet will lead the way for social change.<sup>63</sup>

The belief that Europe's distinct development in technology and science is based on Christianity neglects other religions and those attitudes towards nature were not present until the industrialisation began.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, during the Middle Ages Europe's technology and science were not superior to the Chinese, Indian or Islamic societies.<sup>65</sup> Ideas of science and technology were shared and spread between these civilisations.<sup>66</sup>

## 4.3 Religion

### 4.3.1 The Eurocentric explanation

Europe showed a dynamic in medieval times, within technology, production growth and population growth.<sup>67</sup> The answer to this progress is to be found in Christianity which together with the church created a sense of unity within the European civilisation. Christianity was the common culture within Europe and it created certain norms for the society and integrated the south and north-western parts.<sup>68</sup> The expansion and development of Europe is interlinked with the circulation of the Christian faith. The spiritual dynamics of the High Middle Ages can be seen as having a key position in the explanation of the "European miracle".<sup>69</sup>

### 4.3.2 The anti-Eurocentric explanation

The claim that the church played a role in the history of Europe is not in question. It is true that the church did provide a sense of unity for people. What seems strange though is to argue that the force and role that the church had in Europe during the Middle Ages, were not provided by any other church or religion in non-Europe. Clearly, Europe was not the only place that had religious institutions.<sup>70</sup> If the church were seen as a source of unity and dynamic how could it only be the European church that provided this? It would seem reasonable to argue that non-

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<sup>62</sup> Blaut, James, *Eight Eurocentric historians* (2000) p 35-36.

<sup>63</sup> Blaut, James, *The colonizers model of the world* (1993) p 114.

<sup>64</sup> Blaut, James, *Eight Eurocentric historians* (2000) p 40-41.

<sup>65</sup> Blaut, James, *Eight Eurocentric historians* (2000) p 41.

<sup>66</sup> Blaut, James, *Eight Eurocentric historians* (2000) p 42.

<sup>67</sup> Mann in Baechler, Jean, Hall, John, Mann, Michael, *Europe and the rise of capitalism* (1988) p 8-9.

<sup>68</sup> Mann in Baechler, Jean, Hall, John, Mann, Michael, *Europe and the rise of capitalism* (1988) p 12.

<sup>69</sup> Wener in Baechler, Jean, Hall, John, Mann, Michael, *Europe and the rise of capitalism* (1988) p 172.

<sup>70</sup> Blaut, James, *The colonizers model of the world* (1993) p 123.

European churches and religions had this ability.<sup>71</sup> Christianity did provide a common set of ethical values and much of a common culture to Europeans, but so did other great religions around the world.

## 4.4 People

### 4.4.1 The Eurocentric explanation

In Asia there was pressure to breed as many sons as possible in order to secure survival; this was not the case in Europe thus the population was kept under control.<sup>72</sup> One cause can be found in the marriage pattern; marriage took place at an older age in Europe and when both husband and wife were able to support themselves, thus fewer children were born and there could be a greater care of the individual. This led to the nuclear familial system unique to Europe.<sup>73</sup> European families had stability in their population growth which was unseen in Africa and Asia.<sup>74</sup> Breeding was not restricted in Asia and in Africa, people married at an early age and the couple might stay in their parent's household.<sup>75</sup>

### 4.4.2 The anti-Eurocentric explanation

The problem with notions of population growth and fertility rates is that there is more data for Europe than non-Europe. But enough evidence exists to prove that most societies have their own form of population control.<sup>76</sup> Population growth needs to be seen as a dependable variable, which is dependent on food and the economy of families.<sup>77</sup> The theory that population control is restricted to Europeans can be dismissed since there is research on demography of non-Europe that shows that population control is something that has been practised in non-Europe as well.<sup>78</sup>

The “unique” nuclear family were not only to be found in Europe but were common in non-Europe too. The arguments that the European family created a special kind of personality and “an individualistic, competitive, materialistic but caring person” seems very unlikely.<sup>79</sup> It is yet another case of telescoping history, the attitudes of modern people in Europe are assumed to have been there since the middle ages.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Blaut, James, *The colonizers model of the world* (1993) p 123.

<sup>72</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 226.

<sup>73</sup> Laslett in Baechler, Jean, Hall, John, Mann, Michael, *Europe and the rise of capitalism* (1988) p 238-239.

<sup>74</sup> Laslett in Baechler, Jean, Hall, John, Mann, Michael, *Europe and the rise of capitalism* (1988) p 235.

<sup>75</sup> Laslett in Baechler, Jean, Hall, John, Mann, Michael, *Europe and the rise of capitalism* (1988) p 238.

<sup>76</sup> Blaut James, *The colonizers model of the world* (1993) p 67.

<sup>77</sup> Blaut, James, *The colonizers model of the world* (1993) p 66.

<sup>78</sup> Blaut, James, *The colonizers model of the world* (1993) p 68.

<sup>79</sup> Blaut, James, *The colonizers model of the world* (1993) p 132-134.

<sup>80</sup> Blaut, James, *The colonizers model of the world* (1993) p 134.

## 4.5 The discoveries

### 4.5.1 The Eurocentric explanation

European society had been “on the go” long before the discovery of America; this is shown by previous expansions of the Vikings, the Normans and the Crusader’s.<sup>81</sup> If you take this into consideration, the Discoveries and trade that followed seem to follow an existing process.<sup>82</sup> There was a mix of reasons for it but the main one was finding resources. However, this does not mean that lack of resources was the reason behind Europe’s expansion.<sup>83</sup>

There were other civilisations that undertook the same form of exploration and some went further than Europe, like the Polynesians, but Europe rationalised these trips and the resources that they gained.<sup>84</sup> Europe was favoured by geography and the gains that came from colonialism grew into unknown proportions.<sup>85</sup> But the developments within Europe also need to be taken into account.<sup>86</sup> In pre-industrial Europe development and the growth of trade within European borders, were merely boosted by the new discoveries.<sup>87</sup> Also Europe was decentralised and flexible enough to develop in response and not only consume these new gains.<sup>88</sup>

### 4.5.2 The anti-Eurocentric explanation

First of all there was no “discovery” of the Americas, people had lived there before. Second of all oceanic voyages were done by all civilisations; in fact many of them were even ahead of Europe in such matters, thus someone else could have “found” America.<sup>89</sup> How then could Europe conquer the Americas? It all came down to location and diseases. Europe had an opportunity since the Americas were more accessible from Iberian ports, and the sailing conditions were better.<sup>90</sup> Also, the diseases and epidemics that the Europeans brought with them led to depopulation and loss of power to resist. Moreover there was a difference in military abilities, in favour of Europe, but that in itself would not have been enough.<sup>91</sup>

The colonisation of the Americas was about money and the goal to make as much profit as possible.<sup>92</sup> The colonial enterprise produced capital in many ways, through precious metals, slavery, plantations, spices and cloth and profit from

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<sup>81</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 71-72.

<sup>82</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 75.

<sup>83</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 78.

<sup>84</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 80.

<sup>85</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 81-82.

<sup>86</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 82.

<sup>87</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 82.

<sup>88</sup> McNeil, William, *A world history* (1967), p 296.

<sup>89</sup> Blaut, James, *The colonizers model of the world* (1993) p 182.

<sup>90</sup> Blaut, James, *The colonizers model of the world* (1993) p 181-182.

<sup>91</sup> Blaut, James, *The colonizers model of the world* (1993) p 183-184.

<sup>92</sup> Blaut, James, *The colonizers model of the world* (1993) p 188.

investing.<sup>93</sup> The accumulation was massive and enough to fuel a major transformation in Europe and for the power of the bourgeois to rise which led the way for capitalism.<sup>94</sup> The argument that Europe had done voyages before seems more like an excuse to reduce the importance of the colonisation of the Americas.<sup>95</sup>

## 4.6 The state system

### 4.6.1 The Eurocentric explanation

In Europe imperial rule ended with the fall of the Roman Empire. The European state system is important both in terms of Europe's economic development and its industrialisation.<sup>96</sup> The core-areas of Europe became the base of the state-system, which later developed into the nation states. This system was preserved by a balance of power among the states, making sure that no one would gain imperial control over Europe. The states balanced off each other and outside aggressors.<sup>97</sup> With the absence of empire there was no centralised power that could hinder development and progression as was done in centralised Asia.<sup>98</sup>

As Europe was a decentralised group of states it was able to continue to evolve and compete, and this decentralisation was important to economic and technological progression.<sup>99</sup> In an empire with monopolies there were little incentives to find new methods.<sup>100</sup>

### 4.6.2 The anti-Eurocentric explanation

There is no denying that neither the state system nor the nation state was unique. But it needs to be remembered that the interstate system did not come into existence until early modern times.<sup>101</sup> That the core-areas were the origins to the state-system might be true, but these core-areas were found in the non-European civilisations too.<sup>102</sup> That the formation of nation-states is inherent in European culture is simply wrong.<sup>103</sup> When the European states are compared to non-European society formation, Europe is seen as the evolving and competitive one and the non-European societies as stagnant and unable to progress. Europe did

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<sup>93</sup> Blaut, James, *The colonizers model of the world* (1993) p 188. Eric Williams claims in his book, *Capitalism and slavery*, that the slave trade made a huge impact on the commerce and eventually to development of Industrialisation and capitalism. The same is claimed by Solow & Engerman in *British capitalism and slavery*, The exploitation that really mattered for 300 years was the exploitation of African slaves.

<sup>94</sup> Blaut James 1492, *The debate on colonialism, eurocentrism and history* (1992) p 41.

<sup>95</sup> Blaut, James, *Eight Eurocentric historians* (2000) p 120.

<sup>96</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 104.

<sup>97</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 108.

<sup>98</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 109.

<sup>99</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 68.

<sup>100</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 118-119.

<sup>101</sup> Blaut, James, *Eight Eurocentric historians* (2000) p 95.

<sup>102</sup> Blaut, James, *The colonizers model of the world* (1993) p 120.

<sup>103</sup> Blaut, James, *The colonizers model of the world* (1993) p 120.

have processes of modernization before 1492 but they were not alone, those modernization processes took place outside Europe too. Europe had potential to develop but so did the other societies.<sup>104</sup>

## 4.7 Europe vs. Africa

### 4.7.1 The Eurocentric explanation

Africa has had no other direct or major influence on the world apart from with its slaves. Also in Africa man was not in control of the environment as in Europe.<sup>105</sup> Agriculture was low in productivity, and the population remained low because of diseases and agricultural restrictions. The use of slaves prevented innovation of new techniques and methods. Since agriculture was limited not much surplus was produced, there were no private property rights and not much accumulation of capital. The money that was accumulated was spent on luxury items.<sup>106</sup>

Conflict and slave raiding caused instability, and the hot environment made it harder to work. This held population, market and economic power down.<sup>107</sup> The defects in the environment affected the economic life in an important way. To summarise, there was “no development of the African economy to set along side that of Europe in the Middle Ages and after”.<sup>108</sup>

### 4.7.2 The anti-Eurocentric explanation

Arguments made of Africa having more diseases than Europe needs to be considered with the fact that poorer and under-developed countries also have more ill health and disease. Those health problems are more due to poverty than the environment. It should also be noted that many diseases, such as, “smallpox, typhoid, pneumonia, diphtheria, measles, bubonic plague and anthrax” are not primarily tropical.<sup>109</sup> Third World historians claim that the slave trade was much the cause to the problem of disease, since “the slave trade utterly devastated the continent, destroying states and civilizations, depopulating vast regions, and leading, overall, to disastrous underdevelopment.”<sup>110</sup> Either way not much research and history exists that has surveyed people’s health conditions in Africa and even if there would be such studies those diseases cannot have been the only or reason for a “blocked” development.<sup>111</sup>

All people are able to work in hot weather if they can prepare for it and get used to it. The argument that people or the minds of people slow done in hot

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<sup>104</sup> Blaut, James, *The colonizers model of the world* (1993) p 122.

<sup>105</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 154.

<sup>106</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 155.

<sup>107</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 156.

<sup>108</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 156.

<sup>109</sup> Blaut, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 78.

<sup>110</sup> Blaut, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 79.

<sup>111</sup> Blaut, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 80.

weather is not true.<sup>112</sup> Nor can there be claims that certain soils produce certain developments and progress. It is invalid to compare soils and climate, as neither of them is better than the other, they are different.<sup>113</sup> Arguments about Africa having less productive soils, poor farming methods and famines are more due to events during the slave trade and colonial era than qualities of their agricultural and technological innovations.<sup>114</sup>

## 4.8 Europe vs. Asia

### 4.8.1 The Eurocentric explanation

The histories of the peoples of Europe and Asia constitute the main share of world history.<sup>115</sup> The empires in Asia; the Ottoman, the Mughal, the Manchu and Ming were all ruled by military despots and this prevented their development. Even though these societies were showing some progress the political centralism barred this from going further.<sup>116</sup> Other problems that Asia suffered from were those imposed by irrigation farming and that of overpopulation.<sup>117</sup> Irrigation farming means that more work has to be put in compared to rainfall farming.<sup>118</sup> Asia was known to have more climate disasters, this affected agriculture; it is the combination of these disasters and the need to produce food that hindered progress.<sup>119</sup> It has been suggested that a lack of general logical debate significantly contributed to the failure of Chinese and Indian scientific development as the oriental philosophies consist more of “emotion, values and cosmologies”<sup>120</sup>

The political centralisation also put limits on the markets of Asia.<sup>121</sup> Politics reduced productive efforts and took away incentives to extend the markets. These economies were unstable as they were open to warfare, natural disaster and a threat of confiscation from the state, it is understandable therefore that they did not pursue technological and economic development.<sup>122</sup> Despite some of the Asian societies being ahead of Europe in terms of creativity, most of this seemed to be use in the production of luxury goods to further increase the wealth of the imperial courts.<sup>123</sup> These courts were overflowing in luxuries whereas the people starved.<sup>124</sup> The luxuries of the courts of Europe were more modest compared to Asia.

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<sup>112</sup> Blaut, James, *The colonizers model of the world* (1993) p 70.

<sup>113</sup> Blaut, James, *The colonizers model of the world* (1993) p 74

<sup>114</sup> Blaut, James, *The colonizers model of the world* (1993) p 75.

<sup>115</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 159.

<sup>116</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 161.

<sup>117</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 171.

<sup>118</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 9.

<sup>119</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 19-21.

<sup>120</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 161.

<sup>121</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 164.

<sup>122</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 171.

<sup>123</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 231.

<sup>124</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 109-110.

The presence of empires did affect and prevent progress in Asia; it was thanks to the environment and the natural boundaries that Europe could remain decentralised and continue its development.<sup>125</sup> The individual empires also suffered from individual problems, in India there was further blocking to development from the caste system and the empires of China were suspicious of new technology and after a promising start with oceanic voyages and progress they stagnated and became more isolated.<sup>126</sup>

#### 4.8.2 The anti-Eurocentric explanation

The theory that irrigation societies will be prevented from progress cannot be viewed as true.<sup>127</sup> Asia's and Europe's agricultural societies were rather similar prior to 1492, ideas and technologies were spread amongst them and no one was more progressed than the other.<sup>128</sup> The notion of Asian people being more influenced by feelings and emotion and not capable of logical thinking is a colonial stereotype. As is the argument of their love of luxury or that the gap between rich and poor were greater there than in Europe. Most arguments seem to conclude that non-European states are set a certain way; simply because they are non-Europeans. Enough is known about these civilisations to know that this is not true.<sup>129</sup>

The caste system cannot be used as an explanation for all of India's development, there was more to India's development than that, and the caste system is not as inflexible as is believed. It had preventive effects in India's development, but systems of social hierarchies was by no means confined to India, they existed in Europe too.<sup>130</sup> There are several myths and misunderstandings concerning China, about its "isolation and stagnation." China went on great ventures before Europe and in 1440 the purposes for these trips were accomplished. Contrary to what might be thought nothing stopped.<sup>131</sup> Nor did China have a problem with stagnation; its economy was substantial and by no means finished.<sup>132</sup> That "stagnation" is more related to what happened after 1492, when Europe thanks to resources from the Americas took control over the trade within Asia.<sup>133</sup>

### 4.9 Summary

#### 4.9.1 The Eurocentric concluding argument

Europe has been moving towards its remarkable development since Mesolithic times, with emphasis on the period of 1400-1800.<sup>134</sup> This development may

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<sup>125</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 165.

<sup>126</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 168-169.

<sup>127</sup> Blaut, James, *The colonizers model of the world* (1993) p 90.

<sup>128</sup> Blaut, James, *The colonizers model of the world* (1993) p 90.

<sup>129</sup> Blaut, James, *The colonizers model of the world* (1993) p 121.

<sup>130</sup> Blaut, James, *Eight Eurocentric historians* (2000) p 134-135.

<sup>131</sup> Blaut, James, *The colonizers model of the world* (1993) p 118.

<sup>132</sup> Blaut, James, *Eight Eurocentric historians* (2000) p 130.

<sup>133</sup> Blaut, James, *The colonizers model of the world* (1993) 117-118.

<sup>134</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 225.

appear “miraculous”, but the fact is: “Europe or rather the western or northwest of Europe, was a minor region that generated economic growth when other larger societies did not.”<sup>135</sup> This development, miracle or not was due to a number of factors working together such as; the decentralisation, the environment, the culture, the political institutions, the states system and interstate competition.<sup>136</sup>

#### 4.9.2 The Anti-Eurocentric concluding argument

Before 1492, whatever happened in Europe happened elsewhere.<sup>137</sup> 1492 was a breakpoint and the wealth from the colonisation of the Americas is the reason that Europe rose towards capitalism.<sup>138</sup> Before 1492 evolution was proceeding evenly in Africa, Asia and Europe. They were developing towards capitalism and growing out of feudalism. The level of development was alike all over the hemisphere and Europe was not ahead in development. After 1492 this situation changed, Europe received riches and resources which gave the bourgeois enough capital and power to dissolve feudalism and make way for capitalism. The colonial expansion and exploitation continued to Africa and Asia. This led to a world with a centre and periphery with Europe as its dominator. Colonialism has been a central component of the world-system since 1492 and the effects of this event are seen around the world even today.<sup>139</sup> What is important is that the development of capitalism and the rise of Europe cannot be explained as a “process internal to Europe.”<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 239.

<sup>136</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 244-249.

<sup>137</sup> Blaut, James, *The colonizers model of the world* (1993) p 152.

<sup>138</sup> Blaut, James, *The colonizers model of the world* (1993) p 153.

<sup>139</sup> Blaut, James *1492, The debate on colonialism, eurocentrism and history* (1992) p 2.

<sup>140</sup> Blaut, James *1492, The debate on colonialism, eurocentrism and history* (1992) p 3.

# 5. Analysis

Now that the two explanations have been presented they will be analysed according to these criteria:

- 5.1 Time & Space
- 5.2 Purpose & Method
- 5.3 Validity & Material
- 5.4 Theory

## 5.1 Time & space

### ➤ The Eurocentric explanation

The reason why Jones can make such a clear case for Europe's greatness is less found in the arguments but in the choices of what period and what civilisations to study. The main time period is that of 1400-1800, with some reference to earlier times when searching for the origins of special features of Europe. The study concentrates on Europe and Asia, and the civilisations of the Ottoman Empire, the Mughal Empire and the Manchu and Ming Empire. Thus the main arguments for the explanation are based on a time period when Europe began its remarkable development and past other civilisations with regards to development. Therefore it might not be strange that the descriptions and comparisons show that Europe were the one enjoying more progress and favourable conditions. What is critical about this time frame is that it might be "too late". In order to explain why Europe evolved into its present state, it might not be sufficient to have 1400-1800 as your main focus. There might be a need to go even further back in time.

There are claims that the development is grounded in features inherent in Europe, these arguments are complicated by the fact that much of the data and comparisons are from a time when Europe had already started its development. In some cases there is a lack of comparative material which undermines the validity. Some comparisons are even done during modern times, when the differences between Europe and other civilisations had increased even more.<sup>141</sup> The claims that these qualities have been present all along may be true, however as Jones admits that sources and material are lacking, it makes one question the validity of this comparison when conclusion are drawn from it. If there is insufficient material to substantiate this claim one cannot establish whether these features were indeed individual to Europe or if they were prevalent across non-Europe too.

Europe and Asia, with the Ottoman, the Mughal, the Manchu and the Ming Empire, are the areas that are chosen for this study. It is not this choice in itself that is the critical part but the arguments of why they were made. Jones claims

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<sup>141</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 31-32, 34, 38.

that these civilisations make up for the “lion’s share of history”.<sup>142</sup> History occurs on all time and space scales, thus how can one decide what is “more” or “less” history? In addition to this the Americas, Oceania and Africa are briefly summed up implying that they are of not much significance.<sup>143</sup> This means that half the world is concluded not to have been that important with arguments that they lie “outside” the “important” history. Africa is excluded as it has not contributed much to world history apart from with slaves.<sup>144</sup> Can the contribution of slaves and the slave trade be considered to be small matters? Eric Williams and his follower’s argue that slavery was a huge contributor to the development of Europe and the modern world.<sup>145</sup> Whatever the choices made the fact is that Jones does not undertake a very critical analysis of his decisions.

### ➤ The anti-Eurocentric explanation

Blaut has his emphasis on history occurring prior to 1492; a near opposite of Jones’s time-frame. The books are written 10 years apart, thus Blaut’s book might be affected by new lines of thinking on the world system and the access of more research and studies on and from non-European countries.<sup>146</sup>

Blaut focuses on both Europe and non-Europe; however as it is his aim to show the “real” non-European situation he does put more emphasis on non-European views preferably from a non-European perspective. Since he argues that non-European factors had a central role in the development of Europe both Africa, the Americas and Oceania are incorporated into his argument. Blaut goes back in time, and studies the developments of civilisations that are barely acknowledged by Jones, which naturally produces differences in argumentation. This is not to say that it is wrong to oppose and criticise Jones’s arguments, but since the timeframe and the civilisations under study differ, the explanations and arguments will do so also.

Jones might not be the only one that is “too late” though, there are suggestions proposed by André Gunder Frank that the world system with its different hegemony cannot be explained solely with 1492 as its breakpoint. If we are to believe Frank, the world system has been around far longer than 500 years, instead he proposes the beginning of the world system to be 5000 years ago beginning with the Mesopotamian civilisations. Janet Abu-Lughod’s claims in “*Before European hegemony A.D 1250-1350*” that the world was far more intertwined than might have been thought prior to 1492. So to find the

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<sup>142</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 159.

<sup>143</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 156.

<sup>144</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 153.

<sup>145</sup> Williams, Eric, *Capitalism and slavery* (1944) p 52-53. Solow, Barbara and Engerman, Stanley, *British capitalism and slavery* (1987) p 51-52, 76-77.

<sup>146</sup> Jones has in fact modified his argument in a follow-up to “The European miracle”, called “Growth Recurring”. In this book the some arguments and claims modified and softened and more acknowledgements are given to Chinas development.

explanations for the development of Europe and the world there might be a need to go even further back in time.<sup>147</sup>

If one is to believe the arguments and theories proposed by John Hobson in “The eastern origins of western civilisation”, both Blaut and Jones need to remove their space focus and give a much greater significance to the East. Hobson is claiming that Europe would have never developed the way it did without the influences of ideas and inventions that spread from the East.<sup>148</sup> The East were ahead of the West in development up to the nineteenth century<sup>149</sup> and it was due to the ideas spreading from the East that the West had their agricultural revolution, the feudal system and the creation of an identity.<sup>150</sup> In sum, without the influences, ideas, and material coming from the East, Europe would have never experienced or been able to have its development.<sup>151</sup> Thus it is possible to argue that both Jones and Blaut have an improper time and space frame, and that a broader one is required to explain the expansion of Europe.

## 5.2 Aim & Methods

### ➤ The Eurocentric explanation

Eric Jones is an economic historian and his aim is to try and see how the world economic systems were developed, in order to explain the rise of Europe. Doing so he claims it necessary to stand back and look in a “very long time perspective” and from a “bird’s eye perspective”, in order to find these economic patterns.<sup>152</sup> This results in detail and individuality being lost to the bigger picture.<sup>153</sup> The fact that Jones is interested in the economic history of Europe and Asia affect the outcome of his work. Jones claims that these generalisations must be made, and he is aware of the dangers this implies.<sup>154</sup> I agree that it is necessary to make generalisations when investigating this subject; this is not where the problem lies. The problem is the type of generalisations made; it is always good that ones intentions and ways of working are revealed, and generalisations have to be done, but when they are done in forms of stereotypes credibility is lost.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Frank and Gills in Frank, Andre Gunder and Gills, Barry *The world system* (1993) p 81-83, 103, 144-148, 209-214. Abu-Lughod, Janet, *Before European hegemony A.D 1250-1350* (1989) p 3-4.

<sup>148</sup> Hobson, John *The eastern origins of western civilisation* (2004) p 25.

<sup>149</sup> Hobson, John *The eastern origins of western civilisation* (2004) p 74-77.

<sup>150</sup> Hobson, John *The eastern origins of western civilisation* (2004) p 100-101, 104-106, 111-112.

<sup>151</sup> Hobson, John *The eastern origins of western civilisation* (2004) p 316.

<sup>152</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 232, 235.

<sup>153</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 123.

<sup>154</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 64.

<sup>155</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 109, 154-156, 161-162, 179, 186-187, 192, 103, 212-213, 231.

### ➤ The anti-Eurocentric explanation

Blaut is a scholar in political and geographical history of European colonialism and his aim and method of working consists of arguing against the Eurocentric line of thinking. The aim of this explanation is to show the non-European side of the story and prove all generalisations and stereotypes as incorrect through the investigation of non-European perspectives. Blaut does give a more credible impression seeing as he can attack the stereotypical assumptions that are presented as facts by Jones. This gives him a trustworthiness that spreads over to the rest of the work. It should be said though that Blaut presents Jones to be a bit more rigid than might be the case. The arguments that are presented by the Eurocentric point of view, which he is out to oppose, are by no means as definite as he points them out to be.<sup>156</sup>

## 5.3 Validity & Material

### ➤ The Eurocentric explanation

The credibility of the arguments posed by this explanation is lost when they are mixed up with derogatory remarks about non-European civilisations and people. There may be some excellent and true arguments here but when comments like these are made the whole material suffers.<sup>157</sup> The lack of substantiating material when making comparisons also poses a problem. When it concerns an issue where Europe is seen to be on top, the absence in material is mentioned, but the conclusion is drawn in favour of Europe.<sup>158</sup> On the other hand when non-Europe is considered to be on top there seems to be more hesitation as to whether a conclusion can be drawn.<sup>159</sup>

The literature has an effect on the arguments and conclusions presented. In Jones's case most material is sourced from a period when non-European perspectives were not necessarily taken into consideration and research may have been limited. Moreover, the main part of the literature used is written by European or western scholars, which further reduces the perspective of non-Europe.<sup>160</sup>

### ➤ The anti-Eurocentric explanation

Blaut is in the favourable situation to be able to dismiss and prove wrong many of the arguments proposed by the Eurocentric side, and rightly so, stereotypical, near-racist remarks should always be opposed. But as mentioned the Eurocentric arguments are not as definite as Blaut presents them, nor is Jones the only one being dogmatic in his argument. Jones does mention that there are problems in

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<sup>156</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 80, 81-82, 105, 118, 232..

<sup>157</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 39, 67, 186, 188.

<sup>158</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 25-26, 31, 33, 49.

<sup>159</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 49, 57, 82, 84.

<sup>160</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 274-293.

finding good and valid material and points to the dangers of making generalisations and their implications.<sup>161</sup> In Blaut's description of these arguments one would believe that none of this critique has been done. It is not wrong of Blaut to criticise or question, but he presents it in such a way that he is obviously right and all Eurocentric arguments wrong. Nothing is ever that clear-cut.

When studying the Eurocentric arguments one can conclude that they are not dogmatic nor made without caution or uncertainty, this view is never properly shown in Blaut's critique. One example is that of natural disasters. Jones claims that they occurred more often in Asia as opposed to Europe, but Blaut dismisses this claim as they occurred over a greater geographical area.<sup>162</sup> Even if it is possible that these disasters occurred over a larger area in Asia, is it impossible to concede that they may have had an effect on development? Is it not worth considering the severity of individual disasters and their effect on development? Also it should be said that Jones concludes that several different factors led to the development and expansion of Europe, not one feature on its own. But when Blaut opposes them he attacks each individual claim, concluding that it was not a source of development on its own, which gives a further "unfair" view of the Eurocentric argument. As it is Blaut's aim to give a more non-European perspective non-European literature is more dominant in his work.<sup>163</sup>

## 5.4. Theory

### ➤ The Eurocentric explanation

The theory underlying the different explanations might be what is most important as it affects the other aspects of time and space, purpose and method, validity and material. If the underlying belief is that Europe can be seen as superior and a possessor of inherent unique qualities that caused its development, then it might legitimise the choice of 1400-1800 as your focus of study. It might also seem legitimate to exclude certain parts of the world. The choice of method and material spring from these underlying beliefs, as does what one feels to be valid arguments. For example, Jones does not even consider the thought of his work as Eurocentric to be a big deal. "Anyone who does not see the spread of European technology and institutionalism as the central dynamic force of modern times is hard to reason with." The thought of Europe's development on account of stealing others resources, he calls "pseudo scholarship".<sup>164</sup>

In sum the choices made will be done in coherence with the underlying theories, and when it concerns this kind of issue it might be particularly important to think about why one makes the choices and what they imply for one's explanations and arguments.

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<sup>161</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 33, 59.

<sup>162</sup> Blaut, James, *The colonizers model of the world* (1993) p 93.

<sup>163</sup> Blaut, James, *The colonizers model of the world* (1993) p 217-236.

<sup>164</sup> Jones, Eric, *The European miracle* (1981) p 249.

➤ The anti-Eurocentric explanation

The same argument can be made here. If ones theories consist of notions about European inferiority and the importance of non-Europe in understanding the development of Europe the choices made will be different. You would chose to include and give voice to non-Europe through literature and the way you pose your arguments. The relevant time-frame might not be 1400-1800 but more in what happened before those dates, seeing as during that time the development took of and what is interesting is what happened before. Blaut argues for alternative theories and ways of looking at the world. He claims that alternative theories are just as valid as the Eurocentric one.<sup>165</sup> In the end how do you prove that one cultural system is better than the other?

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<sup>165</sup> Blaut, James, *The colonizers model of the world* (1993) p 10.

# 6 Conclusion

## 6.1 Conclusion

The purpose has been to examine two explanations to the question: Why was the European civilization the first to expand? The two explanations are the Eurocentric and anti-Eurocentric and the aim was to present the arguments posed by each side and examine what lies behind these arguments in terms of: time & space, aim & method, validity & material and theory.

When it comes to drawing conclusions I feel that there are few that can be made. Due to the extent of the material available and the limitations imposed on this study it would be foolish to think that many conclusions can be drawn. The kind of question that is under study has its own limitations. It is a debated question and the ability to find the correct answer is slim or non-existent. What it boils down to is how we chose to look upon history, maybe even our politics and what we chose to believe in.

If we follow Hobson's argument both could have done with a greater focus on China. They might both be too late in there time frame, but in different ways, if we were to follow Andre Gunder Franks arguments. In sum the choices underlying the study are affected by the theories underlying our world view, which in turn affects the arguments for why the world order has developed in this way. This does not mean that critique is not necessary, arguments with racist and colonialist tendencies and stereotypes are not acceptable to be presented as facts, nor are the conclusion about entire continents as being insignificant.

## 6.2 Reflections

It is important to be aware of the thoughts underpinning the arguments, and to bare these in mind when considering both explanations. To be aware of what your worldviews can do and what this implies is important. It has been very interesting to be forced to question my own beliefs, some of which I have carried with me from early school, and start thinking about what a powerful tool history has been and is in many cases. The early versions of history were written in accordance with the "winners" beliefs and although they are questioned now, many of them still reside. One of the intriguing things about what I have studied is that it can be related to so many current issues, like that of the relationship between the first and third world. Can the under-developed world be seen as responsible for their own development? Is the First world in part responsible for this development? Are the two developments interlinked? I feel that I am left with more questions than answers.

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