

this era when sex and violence are a child's daily TV fare. In contrast to James, Adams, the first American historian to call himself a scientist, prided himself on having added nothing imaginative to the facts. This difference not only characterizes their major works but runs throughout the correspondence. While Adams's letters are forcefully direct, James's are hedged, circuitous, playful, metaphorical—the high Jamesian style of the novels transferred to daily life.

For both men, "the facts" of their world had become increasingly distasteful by their middle age, as their genteel, aristocratic world crumbled and the rowdy industrial democracy of the 20th century emerged. But their responses to the new age differed radically. Adams, as revealed in these letters, settled into a "monotonous disappointed pessimism" (James's phrase), while James was avid to observe and find the right metaphors and precise descriptions for the vulgar new little world. Returning to America on a visit in 1904, he rushed off to inspect the president—"Theodore I" he called him and found him "verily, a wonderful little machine... quite exciting to see"—while Adams declined Roosevelt's invitation and stayed at home. As the curtain comes down and this volume closes, the contrast between the two men is so stark that no dramatist could have heightened it. Adams's vision had become unmitigatedly bleak: After reading James's memoir, he sighed, "Why did we live? Was that all?" James could sympathize with Adams, and he almost apologized for still finding his consciousness in the presence of life so interesting. "It's, I suppose," he said, "because I am that queer monster the artist... an inexhaustible sensibility."

Henry Adams was the finest American historian of the 19th century and, quite possibly, the most farseeing intellectual in American history. But in reviewing the autobiographical *Education of Henry Adams* (1918), T. S. Eliot said that it was not Adams but James—inadequately educated as he was—who was "the most intelligent man of his generation." Eliot argued that it was "the sensuous contributor to the intelligence [in James] that made the difference," and then added that unforgettable phrase: James "had a mind so fine that no idea could violate it."

Contemporary Affairs

THE IDEA OF CIVIL SOCIETY. By Adam Seligman. Free Press. 241 pp. \$24.95

NEW WORLD DISORDER: The Leninist Extinction. By Ken Jowitt. Univ. of Calif. 342 pp. \$30

Remember when history ended? It was in 1989, when the collapse of communism led Francis Fukuyama, in a now-famous essay, to proclaim that history—or the ideological war that was its motor—was over. Henceforth, Fukuyama predicted, liberal democratic capitalism would reign everywhere, in vindication of the Western idea of civil society. In 1992, however, "history" resumed with a vengeance in Yugoslavia and other regions of the former Soviet empire. Eastern Europe today, writes Jowitt, a Berkeley political scientist, resembles less the end of history than the beginning of the book of Genesis, a world "without form and void."

For Seligman, an Israeli sociologist, as well as for Jowitt, the once-bright hopes of reformers like Vaclav Havel for a new birth of "civil society" in their countries now appear deflated. Seligman observes that civil society is not a universal ideal but one that grew out of unique historical circumstances. Elaborated by John Locke and the two Adams of the 18th-century Scottish Enlightenment (Ferguson and Smith), it depended on values derived from Christian individualism. According to its various theorists, civil society was a social order based on morally autonomous individuals—each one the bearer of universal human capacities—who would come together in churches, clubs, political parties, and other organizations.

In Western Europe, civil society was realized over the course of centuries through the creation of a national unity that liberated individuals from ethnic and religious identities. In Eastern Europe, however, under the empires of the Hapsburgs, Romanovs, Hohenzollerns, and finally the communists, modern nations—and modern individualism—never fully emerged. Ethnic and religious loyalties remained paramount, as the strife in Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia makes painfully clear. Similar-sounding institutions can mean quite different things in Western and Eastern Europe. The Catholic Church in Eastern Europe for example,

Seligman writes, represents "an alternative moral universe of values or norms, an image of the public good with claims to overall legitimacy that the Church in [the] West has more or less renounced."

For such reasons, Jowitt is scornful of "the facile pacific notion of 'transiting to democracy' (where having entered at the 'Lenin station' one gets off at the 'liberal station')." In Eastern Europe, he observes, nearly half a century of a party elite overseeing "ideologically unreconstructed" masses has widened the gap between the public and private realms. He quotes Alexis de Tocqueville on how despotism "depriv[es] the governed of any sense of solidarity and interdependence; of good-neighboring feeling and a desire to further the welfare of the community at large."

Arnold Toynbee described history in terms of the rise and fall of "world civilizations." Jowitt believes that Leninist society was one such civilization, and that its collapse may have repercussions as significant as those resulting from the fall of the Roman Empire. Jowitt likens Eastern Europe today (except for, perhaps, Poland) to the Third World in the wake of decolonialization, predicting that "demagogues, priests, and colonels" will now shape that region. Although less pessimistic than Jowitt, Seligman has little hope for the triumph of such Western ideas as civil society and Enlightenment humanism in the former Soviet empire, especially when these ideas seem in trouble in the very lands of their invention. "There are serious problems," he dryly concludes, "with the vision of Eastern Europe as the Scottish Enlightenment *revivudus*."

SEX AND REASON. By Richard A. Posner.
Harvard. 458 pp. \$29.95

Today a voyeur in a porno shop confronts less sexual material than do many judges in U.S. courts. Abortion, homosexual rights, surrogate motherhood, AIDS matters, funding of erotic arts, sexual harassment in the workplace, pornography—all are overloading America's already strained court system. Yet most judges, writes Posner, who sits on the Seventh Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals, "know next to nothing about the subject [of sex] beyond their own per-

sonal experience, which is limited." Here Posner tells them everything they needed to know but never bothered to ask.

In the last election some politicians sought to turn the "family values" debate into a crusade for traditional sexual arrangements. Such a campaign, Posner implies, is folly because there are no "natural" sexual arrangements or norms. Conducting a grand tour of the practices of other cultures and eras, Posner discovers that what is condemned as deviant in one place is accepted as normal in another. As an example of "sexual relativism" closer to home, Posner cites heterosexual prisoners who, when no women are available, will engage in homosexual acts. "If the price of vanilla skyrockets," he comments, "you may decide to substitute chocolate even though you have a strong preference for vanilla . . ."

Posner never says whether his own tastes run toward chocolate or vanilla. In this 450-page catalogue of fleshly desires and cultural responses, only once does he endorse something as "exciting": not nude dancing, sadomasochism, or pornography, but economics. To bring sex into the court system rationally, Posner treats it not as an instinctual matter but as a deliberate, conscious choice (see heterosexual prisoners), one that can be logically adjudicated. And the logic that explains and rationalizes sexual behavior, for Posner, is the economist's concept of rational self-interest. Using this economic gauge of rational self-interest, Posner, a conservative judge appointed by Ronald Reagan, ends up defending almost everything Reaganites find abhorrent. He would not forbid abortion in early pregnancy or criminalize homosexual acts or stamp out prostitution or ban pornography by recognized artists: In these cases, he says, the individual is only acting in his or her self-interest, without doing provable harm to the rest of society.

How persuasive has the judge made his case? Freud might have howled at Posner's thesis that "emotionality" attaches to the sexual act itself but does not significantly affect the thinking that precedes or follows it. Lesser mortals may get a few chuckles, too, when Posner explains the rationality of women wearing high heels: It restricts their movements, and that restriction suggests they are more likely to be contained within a marriage arrangement. Ironically,