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### Editor's Note

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

A census of the membership of the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations would likely show that many of those scholars currently involved with the organization either have been, or will be faculty members. And for most of such members, this means at the university level.

It is also a fact that the members of our association have never been able to agree, except within broad parameters, on what constitutes a "civilization."

Therefore, one might ask how these experts on civilizations introduce and teach the subject. Is there a common substance to the discipline? If so, of what is this comprised?

To find out, I decided to begin by surveying the editors of this journal. Mostly this is because we are in constant communication and, as a result, I figured that they would be quickest to answer my query. The question was: What literature do you use or recommend in teaching the comparative study of civilizations?

### I.

A prolific author and longtime member of the faculty at the University of Alaska in Fairbanks, Dr. Walter Benesch, Manuscript Editor, responded to the request in a decidedly philosophical vein. He wrote:

First, the problem with the request from my point of view is the decision on "fields to be covered" as in comparative technologies, literatures, social problems-classes-structures, philosophies, religions and theological systems, political structures, etc. *ad infinitum*.

Thus - rather than a list, I would suggest an extensive "History of the World" basic text: one of my favorites would be an updated J.M. Roberts *History of the World* (Knopf) or a similar universal history. This provides a good reference text for events, movements, and periods.

I would couple this with a large format (oversize) *Atlas of World History* which provides maps and dates. There are several of these around - Harper Collins did a good one several years ago - but something more recent would be better.

Once one has two or three such general reference texts then one can add additional materials according to the direction in which one wants to go with the course. Here, again, the challenge is tricky - for example a basic overview of technologies, sciences, literatures, philosophies---but then an emphasis on reading as much original source

material as possible - novels, poems in case of literature, scientific treatises (even if simplified) in case of science, particular philosophers in case of philosophy.

For example - and it just happens to be mine - I started out writing a comparative logic book which had students mastering logical systems from a number of traditions. When one U.S. university publisher sent the manuscript back with the comment "Americans don't think like that," I changed the title to a *comparative introduction to philosophy* but kept the logics and, as a result, it is a useful approach to civilizations via the logical systems that different traditions have developed. It also offers insight into contemporary physical theory where logical boundaries are being crossed with considerable success in both physics and biology. Macmillan London liked it and printed it.

Second, I don't really care for the term "civilization." I prefer "traditions" - and prefer the idea of a comparative approach to "traditions," which leaves the areas open so one can then discuss/compare the ways in which different aspects of different traditions around the world influence the development of everything from physical science to religion to literature.

Third, the more I think about it, the more I believe comparing civilizations is most valuable and useful - but the comparisons are loaded - and the comparer needs to level with both her/himself and students on the nature of the exercise.

Two of the challenging aspects of "Chaos Theory" have been firstly the awareness of the non-linear nature of the world as we experience it and conceptualize it, and secondly the expression of this non-linear nature in what Mandelbaum called "fractals." When one inquires into the length of a section of sea shore, a head of cauliflower, or a lung - the answer, except in a very coarse sense, is "infinite." The same situation occurs when one compares civilizations—the books and books on the books on the books, paper about papers also approach fractal infinity.

I think a wonderful analogy might be found in Charles and Ray Eames' film/poster the "The Power of 10" - which begins with the hand of a man at a summer picnic and proceeds into the macro cosmos and micro cosmos in steps to the power of 10. I show the film in my philosophy classes when discussions turn to the "nature of reality."

What one means by reality (or civilization) is where one wants to take the "coarse measurements" in fractal sequences of ideas and events. As the Greek philosopher Protagoras said: "Man is the measure

of all things, of things that are that they are, and of things that are not that they are not... There are intelligible principles inherent in the matter of every phenomenon; because matter is essentially the sum of all the seemings it has for any and all persons."

What is critical in comparing civilizations, it seems to me, is a shared and probably utilitarian and relatively honest answer to the question "So What?"

## II.

From the somewhat sunnier clime of Southern California, Prof. David Wilkinson, Book Review Editor, took an approach shorn of philosophy but relatively thorough in history and civilizational studies.

His suggested list is as follows:

Spengler, *Decline of the West*

Toynbee

1. Two volume abridgement, *A Study of History*
2. *Reconsiderations*
3. One volume Jane Caplan 1972 update of *A Study of History*
4. *Civilization on Trial* and *The World and the West*

Quigley, *Evolution of Civilizations*

Melko

1. *Nature of Civilizations*
2. *General War in World History*

Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*

Melko & Scott, *Boundaries of Civilizations*

Ford, Richard and Talbott, Palmer, *Sorokin and Civilization*

Sanderson, *Civilizations and World Systems*

Frank, *ReOrient*

Frank and Gills, eds., *The World System*

Gills and Thompson, eds., *Globalization and Global History*

Denemark et al, eds., *World System History*

## III.

Professor Matt Melko of Ohio, Peer Review Editor, launched a full and thorough attack on the subject. He wrote as follows:

I taught the course to undergraduates in 15 and 10 week segments, as well as to graduate students over 20 weeks.

At the time I used my *Nature of Civilizations* which may still be available from Porter Sargent at its original \$4.50 price, and is readable, covers the basics. Quigley's *The Evolution of Civilizations* was reprinted in 1979 by Liberty Press and may still be available; it is salty, opinionated, interesting, and includes enough case chapters for this purpose.

You can then assign library reading from the Atkinson *Spengler*, the original Toynbee (not the abridgement), and Kroeber's *Configurations or Style and Civilizations*, which is also short enough to use as a supplementary.

You can only present the general ideas and give some cases as examples.

One student said to me that she didn't like the course because what can you do about civilizations?

The course was always fun to teach.

A list of basic references for teachers or student papers might include:

Philip Bagby, 1963 (1958), *Culture and History*, University of California Press. Set up the civilizational theory he would develop, but then he died suddenly.

Fernand Braudel, 1972, 1976 (1966), *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, 2d rev. ed. 1966 trans. Sian Reynolds, v. 1 Harper & Row, v. 2, Harper Torchbooks. Contains much interesting material on civilizations derived from a time and space specific situation.

Mark N. Cohen, 1989, *Health and the Rise of Civilization*, Yale University Press. With McNeill's plagues, a view we may not sufficiently take into consideration.

Paul Costello, 1993, *World Historians and Their Goals*, DeKalb, Northern Illinois University Press. Readable, perceptive. Alas, McNeill says Costello has taken other directions in his career.

Rushton Coulborn, 1958, *The Origin of Civilized Societies*, Princeton University Press. Justifies Coulborn's self-perception as the first normal science civilizationist.

1966, "Structure and Process in the Rise and Fall of Civilized Societies," 1966, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 8: 404- 451. Coulborn puts his civilizational theory together in

50 pages.

Christopher Dawson, 1968 (1933) (1922), *Enquiries Into Religion and Culture*, Liberty Press. Contains the 1922 article in which he first articulated a cycle theory, before he had read Spengler or Toynbee.

Jared Diamond, 1997, *Guns, Germs and Steel*, Norton. Imaginative theories of civilizational origin and exchange, bane of Sted Noble.

William Eckert, 1992, *Civilizations, Empires and Wars: a Quantitative History of War*, McFarland. In which Bill puts his ideas together.

Brian Fagan, 2004, *The Long Summer: How Climate Changed Civilization*, Basic Books. The ecological setting for all of our studies.

Laina Farhat-Holzman, 2000, *Strange Birds From Zoroaster's Nest*, Oneonta NY, Oneonta Philosophy Studies. A Creationists view, Ahura Mazda being the creator.

John Farrenkopf, 2001, *Prophet of Decline: Spengler on World History and Politics*. Louisiana State University Press. Follows Spengler beyond the Decline.

Felipe Fernandez-Arnesto, 2001, *Civilizations: Culture, Ambition, and the Transformation of Nature*, Free Press. In many respects an anti-civilizationist but a great writer with challenging hypotheses.

Andre Gunder Frank, 1998, *ReOrient*, University of California Press. The title, I hear, is Wilkinson's. My colleague and adversary makes a singular reorientation concerning China and the West.

Eiji Hattori, 2000, *Letters From the Silk Roads*, tr. Wallace Gray, University Press of America. On civilizational interactions across Asia.

Samuel P. Huntington, 1996, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon and Schuster. Challenging book, a punching bag for the rest of us.

Vytautas Kavolis, 1972, *History on Art's Side*, Cornell University Press. Includes his cyclical theory combining stress, event and culture over periods of a century or two.

A.L. Kroeber, 1944, *Configurations of Culture Growth*, University of

California Press. A masterful book on how art, science and philosophical movements arise, fulfill and decline. Has many macrocultural applications.

1957, *Style and Civilizations*, Cornell University Press. In which Kroeber summarizes his ideas in a series of lectures, and then goes on to introduce and criticize others, including contemporary civilizationists, he perceives to be working on similar idea.

William H. McNeill, 1963, *The Rise of the West*, University of Chicago Press. The original, more Western, more civilizational view of world history.

1976, *Plagues and People*, Doubleday. The historical relation between plagues and civilizational development.

1989, *Arnold J. Toynbee: A Life*, Oxford University Press. Satisfying biography.

J. R. and W. H. McNeill, 2003, *The Human Web*, Norton. Presents more of a systems view of history.

Matthew Melko, 1969b, *The Nature of Civilizations*, Boston, Porter Sargent. Readable introduction. Contains an annotated bibliography indicating books thought most relevant at the end of the Sixties.

2001a, *General War Among Great Powers in World History*, Mellen. Study of great power wars in ten civilizations. Wilkinson preface.

Melko and Leighton R. Scott, editors, 1987, *The Boundaries of Civilizations in Space and Time*, University Press of America. ISCS sessions on this broad subject from 1978-1985. Participants wrote short papers, commented on each other's. The discussions were taped, transcribed and edited.

W. M. Flinders Petrie, 1911, *The Revolutions of Civilisation*, London, Harper. Christopher Dawson insists that he, Spengler and Toynbee were all influenced by this little book.

Carroll Quigley, 1979 (1961) *The Evolution of Civilizations*, Liberty Press. Beautifully written book on civilizational cycles, developing the idea that civilizations could reconstitute themselves. Quigley was a member of the ISCS until his death in 1976.

J. M. Roberts, 1993, *History of the World*, Third Edition, Oxford

University Press. Very useful on the origin and diffusion of civilizations

Lee Daniel Snyder, 1999, *Macro-History--A Theoretical Approach to Comparative World History*, Mellen. Magisterial, flexible durationist, "Students: Do not try this at home!" Melko preface.

Pitirim A. Sorokin, 1957, *Social and Cultural Dynamics*, abridged edition, Porter Sargent. Presents the theory of worldwide long term fluctuations of sensate and ideational culture. "Let anyone who can do better do better." "Thus far history has followed the course I have set for it."

1963, *Modern Historical and Social Philosophies*, paperback edition of 1950 *Social Philosophies*. Sorokin's view of historical philosophers, including the civilizationists of his time, whose views sometimes nearly equaled his. Cf. Kroeber's *Style and Civilizations*.

Oswald Spengler, 1980 (1932) (1917-1921), *The Decline of the West*, Charles Atkinson translation, Knopf. Der founder. The translation is readable, the ideas are still exciting.

Arnold J. Toynbee, 1934-1961 *A Study of History*, Oxford University Press. Full of wonderful ideas, but someone ought to write a book locating them.

1946, *A Study of History*, abridged by D. C. Somervell, Oxford University Press. Necessary, but often misses or crunches crucial ideas.

1961, *Reconsiderations*, vol. XII of *A Study of History*. Basically a book in itself.

Immanuel Wallerstein, 1974, *The Modern World System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century*, Academic Press. Regarded as the founding book of World Civilizations.

Robert G. Wesson, 1967, *The Imperial Order*, University of California Press. Civilizational empires.

1978, *State Systems*, Rutgers University Press. Companion book on multistate systems.


David Wilkinson, 2005, "Fluctuations in the Political Consolidation of Civilizations/World Systems." *Comparative Civilizations*



*Review*, 52: 92-102. Wilkinson, a wonderful, droll and concise writer, has written only one book, and that not relevant. This article summarizes a massive amount of previous work, and comes to a remarkable conclusion.

(Comment from the other editors: Thank you, Prof. Melko, for this wonderful list.)

#### IV.

Our ever-sparkling  or, Dr. Laina Farhat-Holzman – who writes wonderful columns for the press on such subjects weekly – kindly sent her suggestions in for this note. She said:

I never taught a year-long Comparative Civilizations course, but I have had the special problem of teaching a 15-week course in World History. I had to really focus on what I thought the students ought to know.

I used the Rand McNally *Atlas of World History*. This provided an excellent basic text with maps (very useful for students who didn't know geography). By the time we went from prehistory to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, they saw the world map often enough to become familiar with it. The texts were dense, but very good.

Because Rand McNally is British, they ignored the Indians of the Americas. I used an excellent text--*Kingdoms of Gold, Kingdoms of Jade*, by Brian M. Fagan, to fill in on Pre-Columbian America.

If I were doing a two-semester class, I would add Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs, and Steel*. I would also use *Plagues and Peoples* by William O'Neill.

This is a very pared down list. I provided my students with a much more extensive recommended readings list.

#### V.

This journal's former Managing Editor, Dr. Midori Yamanouchi, was recently elected to be Vice President for Academic Affairs at Lackawanna College (congratulations on the new post, Dr. Yamanouchi!) in Pennsylvania. Nonetheless, she took the time to respond to the query. In her remarks she focused on books on Japan that might be of interest to students of comparative civilizations.

1. Sansom, George. *A Short History of Japan*. (This title has been re-published in the last few years by a publisher other than the original one.)

Although it was originally published nearly thirty years go, this is

by far the best book on Japan's history. Sir George Sansom worked closely with an outstanding Japanese scholar of history who was also a good friend of his.

2. Murasaki Shikibu (Lady Murasaki). *Tale of Genji* (translation of Genji Monogatari). I believe that there are a couple of excellent English translations.

By general repute, this is the supreme masterpiece of Japanese prose literature. The book was written in the very beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> Century in Japan. Lady Murasaki, the author, portrays some aspects of the very fascinating life of the court.

This was during a period when, while male members of the elite were spending a great deal of time studying Chinese classics, women wrote in the vernacular. This is the most famous of such writings.

Another outstanding female author of the period was Sei Shōnagon.

## VI.

For myself, I think that it is best to begin with broad introductions, having had that experience myself as a college student. I learned the most from Columbia's two volume set, *Introduction to Contemporary Civilization in the West* and the comparable three-volume set entitled *Introduction to Oriental Civilizations*. Similar texts in the Oriental Humanities and (Western) Humanities courses – twenty or thirty in each—helped round out much of the fact-based portion, when added to general books dealing with world history.

If one overlays with these such important conceptual works as the basic writings of Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, and, especially, Max Weber, plus a basic review of the modern great thinkers (I would propose *From Hegel to Nietzsche* by Lowith, *Consciousness and Society* by Hughes, Raymond Aron's two volume set, *Main Currents in Sociological Thought* and perhaps Talcott Parsons' magisterial *Theories of Society*), one might then approach the subject with both some essential knowledge and a broad theoretical framework.

## VII.

But these are only the picks of the editors. What do you suggest? Please write in and I'll cheerfully publish a second round on the books we think students should read in order to be exposed intellectually to the comparative study of civilizations.

Joseph Drew  
Spring, 2007