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Jaroslav Krejci, *The Paths of Civilizations: Understanding the Currents of History*

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REVIEW 2

This book is written by the 88-year-old Czechoslovakian scholar, Jaroslav Krejci, who was a political prisoner in Czechoslovakia between the years 1954 and 1960. After the Warsaw Pact forces invaded Czechoslovakia in 1971, he and his wife Anna went into exile and settled in England. He is currently a professor at Lancaster University and has published several books on civilization and history.

In this book he fuses his personal lifelong experience across civilizations with an investigation of human history through the prism of civilizations — defined as socio-cultural configurations of civilized societies (i.e., societies which are urbanized and literate).

Two main criteria of civilization analysis are applied: a spatial-temporal outline of civilizations; and the human predicament. This may be perceived as paralleling Toynbee's religious approach — meaning the sense and significance that people make of their own life and death. The author is also aware of other criteria such as structural aspects of power and wealth, division of labor, the scales of social status, tendencies, trajectories, recurrent plots or rhythms, and overall scope for change. However, the two main criteria serve in tracing the "mutations" of civilizations and constitute the core of the book.

World civilization is characterized as a set of five components; the Levant (the Middle East and Northern Africa), South (India) and South-East (Malayan world) Asia, Eastern Asia (China and Japan), Europe, and the Globe as the bid for the "envelope." The introductory chapters discuss the conceptual framework, which is reached by comparing the most popular approaches to the study of civilization (in the singular and plural sense) as presented by such authors as Toynbee, Braudel, Weber, Elias, Arnason, and McNeill. The author highlights Toynbee's contribution; however he is critical of him and states that; "Toynbee aroused, in general terms, more criticism than genuine fellowship. Nevertheless, his work has become a source of inspiration, with more impact overseas than at home." Perhaps the author tries to balance Toynbee's popularity overseas by omitting contributors to the study of civilizations from this region of the world.

In the concluding chapter of the book, the author reviews the historical turning-points of the human condition. The contemporary Euro-American civilization is seen not only as the promoter of a comprehensive globalization but also — due to the multi-faced impact of fast technology — as the seed-bed of anthropological "mutation."

According to the author, the first mutation occurred when human

civilization transformed from hunters to farming settlers around 9000 BC in the Levant, and approximately 6500 BC in Europe, with South-East Asia closely following. The second anthropological mutation took place with the rise of urbanization, diversified metallurgy, and above all, with the development of writing, which occurred about 4000 BC. As a result, civilization and population expanded rapidly. The third anthropological mutation started in the West, where advanced agriculture led to industrialization, sophisticated technology, and discoveries and breakthroughs in medicines, which the author contends, contributed greatly to advances in human and civil rights. Nevertheless, it is not clear to the reader whether modern Western civilization, which the author posits has developed comparatively quickly, leads de facto to the fourth mutation.

In the scientific sense these “mutations” are not of an anthropological type as the author writes. Rather, they reflect major stages of human knowledge and wisdom, acquired through intensified life experiences over millennia.

The book is very fascinating and rich in facts and associations. Moreover, it appears that the author has in-depth knowledge of civilizational configurations and dynamics. The narrative approach is impressive, yet often it falls short, retaining the flavor of an analytical approach rather than a synthesis, which is what we have come to expect from this kind of a writer.

Andrew Targowski