



10-1-2013

# Editor's Note: The Struggles of Civilization

Joseph Drew

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr>

---

### Recommended Citation

Drew, Joseph (2013) "Editor's Note: The Struggles of Civilization," *Comparative Civilizations Review*: Vol. 69 : No. 69 , Article 2.  
Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr/vol69/iss69/2>

This Front Matter is brought to you for free and open access by the All Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Comparative Civilizations Review* by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact [scholarsarchive@byu.edu](mailto:scholarsarchive@byu.edu), [ellen\\_amatangelo@byu.edu](mailto:ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu).

## Editor's Note

### The Struggles of Civilization

Is mankind rational? Does logic reside within civilization? Dr. Andrew Targowski, our former president, argues in a paper he has written for this issue that we are now facing a set of crises of civilization but are not addressing them reasonably or successfully. These crises are inter-related, yet our scholars, he says, only bring forth yesterday's methods and shopworn theories as they fail to inspire us with solutions, or even present us with meaningful alternatives to impending disaster.

It may be true that with modernity science and business have built for us an iron cage. But does Max Weber's iron cage of rationality now lead beyond the disenchantment of the world to a failure to cooperate, to foresee, to plan? Prof. Targowski asks: Where are the applied sciences? Have we simply been beguiled by inertia and habit, misled by greedy corporations, inadequate government, and hidebound disciplines wrapped by inadequate curricula in antiquated universities? Have all our social institutions failed to prepare us to address critical, pressing needs that may destroy us?

It is not easy for civilization to mount an effective challenge to any or all of the sixteen contemporary crises Dr. Targowski describes. Exacerbating it all is our failure, as he writes in a new book, to harness the power of wisdom. Is this the nadir *Homo sapiens* have arrived at, after 200,000 years of existence? As a result of our failures, are we, and world civilization itself, doomed?

Certainly, a logical person might easily despair, but there can also be hope. General Lynn Rhodes writes in this issue of the challenges facing Mongolia. Abundant, valuable minerals have been discovered in the ground of that ancient, vast land. Extract them at all costs and make the country rich quickly, argue both a number of massive corporations and the neighboring country of China, which covets the products of Mongolia's earth. But facing them, on the other side of a titanic struggle, is a traditional society, a pastoral society, one which wants to preserve its way of life.

If the world's most advanced scientists and educators can't apply what we know to stop the world's population from blindly tripping down the road to destruction, especially on account of what Prof. Targowski identifies as the unforeseen implications of globalization, can a newly emerging democracy hold back against the very same, ineluctable pressures? Well, Gen. Rhodes shows us that the battle for the Mongolian future has only begun. Perhaps in that country sustainability will triumph over exploitation, reason will prevail, and a peaceable civilization will be preserved, at least in part of the national territory.

In this issue authors look at how geography has played a critical role in creating the type of societies and civilizations that have risen to dominate much of our planet today. James DeMeo explains that 6,000 years ago huge sections of savannah, verdant land in North Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia teeming with vegetation and animal life, suddenly became desert, leaving large swaths of the earth's surface hostile to human life. Thus was born, he argues, armored Patristic societies in which intolerance, male dominance, and violence became supreme; these replaced unarmored Matristic societies in which democracy, egalitarianism, and toleration dominated. Then, the aggressive, Patristic societies radiated out from the deserts and they continue to challenge Matristic cultures worldwide.

Senior editor Laina Farhat-Holzman continues the emphasis on geography and culture, tracing the rise of humanity's chief cities and examining problems that have occurred with the recent development of huge megacities worldwide, especially in the Third World. The majority of humanity now lives in cities, and reason must be applied if we are to solve problems of poverty and disease caused by inadequate planning for new city dwellers. Harry Rhodes discusses the development of three types of weaponry that gave mankind fighting capabilities equal or superior to those of the animals: the spear, the atlatl, and archery. While these weapons may have been used to obtain meat in the beginning, they became useful also as man fought his enemies. Finally, Toby Huff builds on Durkheim and Mauss's definition of civilization and on ISCS founder Benjamin Nelson's concepts of cultural heritages and civilizational complexes as he looks at the origins and meaning of the unique and powerful European civilization.

A comparative civilizationist isolates, examines, and weighs the often countervailing trends civilization confronts over the years, with the future of societies and cultures hanging on how the challenges are met. Today a near universal struggle between progress and regress continues to play out, but some of the most hopeful trends are found in the advanced, peaceful, democratic republics.

On the one hand, there are clearly arrayed the forces of violence, of xenophobia, and of intolerance, the evidence of which is all around us. But perhaps a Hegelian dialectic operates, and the wine of old conflicts is poured into new bottles, moving history.

Thus, there are many in the United States who are seeking to improve our immigration laws, recognizing in these new Americans a resource which will advance the country, its economy, and its universality. Or, observe the workings of tolerant men and women, as the world seeks to follow Churchill: "jaw, jaw which is better than war, war." When we honor those who help stop wars, welcome immigrants, heal the sick, rescue the downtrodden, free the enslaved, visit the prisoners, and advance the cause of justice, we honor what is best in our character.

*Comparative Civilizations Review*

Standing on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. during the sweltering heat of August, I joined hundreds of thousands of others to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1963 March for Jobs and Freedom, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. "I Have A Dream" march. As I was a marcher in that earlier demonstration, as well, it was impossible not to consider how far we have come in these many years. Today, sadly, the United States Congress has abandoned many of its responsibilities. But we have a President whose ancestry is both African and American; could we have imagined that fifty years ago? There is much to celebrate, to give us joy, even amidst the ongoing struggle against those who would pull us back to the dark days of the past.

The patterns and meaning of history, a topic that engaged many philosophers in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, are always open to interpretation. If a creature from outer space were to stop us on the street and ask what had been the sum total of mankind's contribution since we emerged from the Great Rift Valley of Africa three million years ago, how would we respond? Would our answer be negative – that, on balance, we have produced centuries of great, bloody violence? Or would it be positive – the Statue of Liberty, the U.S. Declaration of Independence, the French Declaration of the Rights of Man, Lincoln's Second Inaugural, and the tolerance we are able to show for others? Are we but little lower than the Angels?

Was the Age of Reason correct, and is there a tableau that lays out the progress of the human spirit? Hiding from his murderous adversaries during the French Revolution, Jean Condorcet thought so. He wrote that man would be restored to his rights, delivered from oppression, and proceed with rapid strides in the path of happiness; forgetting his own misfortunes, he would no longer live in adversity, calumny and malice. Francois Fourier, a man whose stars were decidedly mixed, traced our path: from savagery to patriarchy to barbarism to civilization. Locke, Mill, St. Simon, and Comte all saw progress, and Gandhi, Boas, Mead, Kallen, and Dewey taught us tolerance.

Were they right? Or, does the violence of the 20<sup>th</sup> century mean that we have moved back a stage, to savagery? Do we sing a song of ascents or descents? Do we take a turn with Kohelet, Ecclesiastes, and conclude that there is a time for everything under the sun?

Civilizationists search out what is greatest in mankind's patrimony, employing the largest unit of social analysis we have in an attempt to understand the pathways of human history. I hope that this journal and this issue help us continuously to refine our purview, examine the options, and reach with optimism into the future based on an informed understanding of the past.

Joseph Drew  
Editor-in-Chief