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Editor's Note

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Editor's Note

Spring 2021

We in the United States have been privileged to live recently during a period of immense social and political change. If we turn to our civilization's intellectual progenitors and see from the perspective of those upon whose shoulders we stand, we can obtain guidance that enables us to explain, or at least place in some meaningful context, these changes in the flow of time.

As Adam Ferguson, the Scottish thinker, wrote, we can look at certain figures, perhaps those more primitive, now departing from the scene, and observe "as in a mirror, the features of our own progenitors." Are we living on the cusp of a set of sweeping changes which mirror those that scholars of our own civilization have explained? Or is this moment of change merely evanescent, dependent upon the variable whims of a few thousand voters in a half dozen small states?

One can point profitably to many thinkers who explain such periods as the present one. I would note the groundbreaking theories of Claude-Henri, Comte de Saint-Simon. He laid out history as a series of alternations between organic periods and critical periods, the former times during which the social and political institutions are "in harmony with the state of civilization" and the latter times which are transitional, with conflict and change dominant.

For Saint-Simon, "every social regime is an application of a philosophical system and, consequently, it is impossible to institute a new regime without having previously established the new philosophical system to which it must correspond." He wrote that we need to set aside the "incoherence of general ideas" for "as soon as there is a theory corresponding to the present state of enlightenment, order will be reestablished." This orderly future, he maintained, would be guided by an intellectual elite built of "scientists, artists, and men of liberal ideas." Not that far from Plato, perhaps.

Other great social and political philosophers come to mind. One of my favorites from the Enlightenment has long been the Marquis de Condorcet. His book, *Historical Picture of The Progress of the Human Mind*, dealt with the perfectibility of our political and social systems. He saw human perfectibility as available to us ultimately and analyzed history as moving toward the goals of national and class equality. He laid out a series of stages by which mankind would arise from ignorance and tyranny.

We hoped, he wrote, for a future condition of humanity resting on three points: "the destruction of inequality between different nations; the progress of equality in one and the same nation; and, lastly, the real improvement of man."

A whole series of others come to light, all of whom can contribute to an understanding of the future unfolding before us in the present, as perhaps a new period of enlightenment and progress replaces one of horror and regress. You can think of Locke, Rousseau, Hegel, Madison, Mannheim. To explain the period mercifully now ended, and the difficulty of building a better future, one might quote Georges Sorel. He wrote that “movements toward greatness” were “always an effort, and movements toward decadence always natural.”

The great, if too often ignored, Italian political philosopher Giambattista Vico looked during his life forward to a *ricorso*, that is, a time of re-running during which history brings to the fore great values from the past. Thanks to the launching of a new national administration here in Washington, perhaps we can rebuild by drawing once again on American history’s major social and political thoughts, from Washington’s advocacy of tolerance, to Lincoln’s new birth of liberty and equality, to Roosevelt’s attention to, and advancing of, the general welfare.

It is at times like this that our study of the emanations of civilization become important. Then, too, we can celebrate with Wordsworth, who wrote in *The Prelude* of the period of the French Revolution:

Bliss it was in that dawn to be alive ... When Reason seemed the most to assert her rights.

You are looking at the Spring issue of the journal. Happily, in addition to a set of insightful articles and reports, as always, we hope, this issue also includes a brand new index. It has been compiled by three wonderful people, outstanding supporters of the ISCSC, great editors Alexandra Travis, Regan Mozingo, and David Wilkinson. This index is our second one; the first, pathbreaking and also wonderful, was authored by our distinguished former ISCSC president, Prof. Michael Palencia-Roth, and run in the Spring 2006 edition, Number 54.

Please note that this index contains four sections of listings: all articles placed in chronological order; articles by authors, listed alphabetically; book reviews by reviewer; and book reviewers by author of the book. In addition, the three editors also report on the ten most popular articles in the journal, based on downloads in recent years.

This wonderful set of indexes will also be placed separately on the website of the ISCSC as an aid to those conducting research in the field of the comparative study of civilizations.

It is my sad duty to report to the readers of the journal the untimely death of one of our stalwart members and most innovative thinkers, Ross Maxwell.

Ross was a presence at the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations conferences for decades. He and I roomed together many years ago at the ISCSC annual meeting, and I have found him ever since to be the source of a whole series of creative insights into civilization. No one was a finer member of this body, in my opinion.



We will devote space to his intellectual contributions in the next issue, and the editors invite submissions that address the work of this brilliant man. Here is a picture of Ross, from his recent retirement celebration, kindly sent in from San Francisco by his wife, Dr. Phyllis G. Maxwell, herself an author of renown.

In the meantime, the organization is looking forward to the upcoming conference, to be held at the Dimitri Cantemir Christian University in Bucharest, Romania, as summer turns to the fall.

See you then!

Joseph Drew
Editor-in-Chief