

**Harry Redner. *Beyond Civilization: Society, Culture and the Individual in the Age of Globalization.*
Routledge, 2014.**

Reviewed by Mariana Tepfenhart

Harry Redner was a reader at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia, and a visiting professor at Yale University, University of California-Berkeley and Harvard University. His book has three parts: An Overview of History, The Present Predicament of History, and The Future Prospects of Civilization.

The book addresses two major issues affecting our society today. One of them is globalization and its effect on civilization. The topic is analyzed not only from a cultural perspective but also from a political and cognitive standpoint. The second issue is technology and its place in a global society. Redner argues Western civilization's development of science, technology and a rational legal state might prove self-canceling. He examines our response to the problems facing our civilization, finds it lacking, and proposes to "break through this barrier of silence" (Redner, XV) and open an honest debate on the crucial issues of our time.

In the first section of the book, the author presents the elements of the historical evolution that has led to the predicament he sees: the long increase in population and production which eventually created five historical periods, five turning points in the development of human culture.

The first turning-point period was the emergence of human culture about 60,000 to 40,000 years ago, when humans spread all over the world, as proved by the art found in different places. The second was the Neolithic Revolution between 11,000 to 9,000 BCE which occurred in the Fertile Crescent. Although some historians compare the ill effects of the Neolithic Revolution with those of the Industrial Revolution, Harry Redner argues that some of the consequences of the Industrial Revolution such as pollution, climate change and ecological catastrophe, are far more harmful than any type of agriculture.

The third civilizational turning point-period dates from Egypt and Sumer around 3000 BC through the Axial Age of 700-300 BC, a period that produced some of the greatest minds in philosophy, religion, science. The Axial Age developed high-literacy book culture and ethics — expectations of human behavior (Redner, 40): the civic virtue of the Greeks, Judaic morality, and Confucianism's connection of ethical life with political life.

It was in this period that civilizations appeared in different parts of the world, neither isolated nor derived from any one source.

Major cultural transformations during this period also included imperialism (which welded small political entities into kingdoms and empires) and militarism, the development of weapons, increased trade, and further increase in population.

The high-literacy book culture of the Axial period was a critical factor to the intellectual development of the next period, Modernity, from 1500-2000, centered in the West, an unparalleled cultural development. Redner's chapter 3 deals with Modernity as a period of great discoveries and exploration, development of world trade, financial institutions, new weapons, architecture, new theories about the universe, and great achievements in art.

It was the Western civilization that shaped the world as it is today. Against those who attributed the high development of Europe to luck and borrowings from other nations, Harry Redner argues that Europe absorbed innovations and developed them further. Redner gives reasons why modernity started in Europe and not in other parts of the world. One cause is the development of modern capitalism, a new state with a judicial legal system. Another is the fact that Western Europe did not suffer from the Mongol invasion that devastated Russia and parts of Asia and Middle East. Their discovery of America gave the Western Europeans access to an abundance of material goods.

Although the Chinese and the Byzantines had more innovations than the Europeans, the Europeans made better use of the new technology. Western Europe had universities which provided freedom of research, explored possible different solutions to existing problems, and produced free thinkers, a new social class — the intellectuals. The high literacy of Western Europe allowed the rapid spreading of Enlightenment ideas and contributed to the creation of a government that included representatives of the people, and to democracy.

Redner cites civilizationist (and former ISCS president) Toby Huff on why Modernity started in Western Europe and not elsewhere:

What happened in Europe was a social and legal revolution that radically transformed the nature of medieval society and civilization. From one point of view, it represents the grand fusion, for the first time, of Greek philosophy and science, Roman Law and Christian theology. (85).

Chapter 4 examines post-civilization, or beyond civilization, the present age. While past civilizations were defined by distinctive aspects of society, culture and individuality, by the end of Modernity a new civilization process occurred — globalization. The forces of modernity, capitalism, science and technology, and legal state are spreading across the world, at the same time as a dilution of ethics: the norms that characterized the "civilized individual" are in decline; high literacy is replaced by functional literacy, and ethics are displaced by legality.

Harry Redner considered the events of the last century that caused this unprecedented metamorphosis. He sees the World Wars, the Cold War, and the work of individuals like Hitler and Stalin, as contributors to the dissolution of the West. One of the consequences of these events of the 20th century is the rise of America to the status of superpower, and as the leading power for globalization.

Americanization created different reactions throughout the world. The philosopher Paul Ricoeur summarized the negative consequences of globalization:

The phenomenon of universalization, while being an advancement of mankind, constitutes a sort of subtle destruction, not only of traditional cultures, which might not be irreparably wrong, but also what I shall call for the time being, the creative nucleus of great mankind.... We have the feeling that this single world civilization the same time exerts a sort of attrition and wearing away at the expense of the cultural resources which have made the great civilizations of the past. The threat is expressed, among other disturbing effects, by the spreading before our eyes, of a mediocre civilization which is the absurd counterpart of what I was just calling elementary culture. Everywhere throughout the world, one finds the same bad movies, the same slot machines, the same plastic and aluminum atrocities, the same twisting of language by propaganda, etc. (Redner, 131.)

Chapter 5 is a general overview of the forces of globalized Modernity: capitalism and the legal state with a focus on science and technology. Global science is executed by large and highly specialized groups of people. The leaders of the world come from Ivy League schools and want to homogenize and unify the whole world — since that would make it easier for them to control all humanity.

In the past, many jobs required special skills. The new technology provides step by step instructions for a worker to execute a task, without any input from the worker. In consequence of intense computerization, literacy has declined. The ability to rationalize, to think analytically or concentrate, are all reduced by the use of computers.

Chapter 6 focuses on society in a post-industrial world. One characteristic is the development of megalopolises all over the world. There are some advantages of living in a large city like education, better health care, opportunities for employment and others. However, the author also points out social disintegration and the destruction of local communities. Shopping is online, self-service, working from home led to isolation and alienation especially among the elderly. In many of these megalopolises there are ethnic enclaves and those do not help the immigrants to fully integrate in the culture of the country they dwell in.

This is what Anthony Giddens said about the present transformations:

Among all the changes going on in the world, none is more important than those happening in our personal lives — sexuality, relationships, marriage and family. There is a global revolution going on in how we think of ourselves and how we form ties and connections with others ... In some way these are the most difficult and disturbing transformations of all. (Redner, 2 17)

In Chapter 7, the author analyzes the impact of globalization on culture. He argues that the global culture will displace local cultures. Global culture becomes more influential with the people, especially the young ones. Advertisements, music, fashion, fast food are the favorite items for teenagers. America is leading the way in spreading the global culture which is based on market demands. All goods are evaluated according to their market value.

Capitalist industry also follows the market demands that can change very quickly. Advertising, marketing, and the media contribute to people's change of mentality and their adoption of new trends. This homogeneity also makes it easy for the big companies to control people.

All over the world, national states support capitalism as a source of increased revenue. Accordingly, they shift education from cultural instruction to the provision of experts in different fields of industry or service sector. Humanities take second place in education or are gradually eliminated.

Technology is also a factor in the decline of literacy, according to Redner. From an early age children are hooked on video games and different social media; this transforms their minds, which became dominated by the global culture.

In Chapter 8, Harry Redner presents the prospect of individualism in a global society. People are free to travel, and can take jobs that are more profitable. However there are different constraints that force them to conform to the rules of community or to the pressure of their peers. It begins in schools where children that are different are marginalized. To succeed, people must conform to the patterns of life required by society. Mass production forces individuals to mold themselves to the demands of success. Morality, virtues, scruples, and conscience are replaced by conformism. The result is the decline of the national state, ethnicity, and the traditional family.

Chapter 9, the Catastrophe of Nature and Culture, presents some predictions about the post-civilization period. The author notes that predictions are not certain. He states that most predictions are if-then or “hypothetical” in form: **if** such-and-such an action is performed, **then** certain events might follow. (Redner, 305)

Without unforeseen developments, Redner assumes that the current trends like globalization, capitalism, science and technology will continue.

People will live in mega-cities and it will be a challenge for the states to provide services and resources for the population. Some natural catastrophes that might occur are climate change, nuclear accidents, overpopulation.

Science and technology might continue to improve the lives of the people but at the same time will develop weapons of mass distraction. Lack of ethics and degradation of literacy seem likely to continue. Personal lives will change: there will be an absence of family and of community that could provide emotional support.

Chapter 10 is titled “The Future as It Might Be.” The author stressed the fact that in order to prevent the eradication of civilization, people should preserve the past, and an ethics of honor and social justice.

To restore society, Harry Redner recommends that people conserve the environment, their history and culture. Men and women must establish an equal partnership to make their relationship steady and strong. Ethics of the individual conscience must be restored, although Redner also believes that unrestrained individualism is harmful.

The intention of the author in writing this study was to reveal what is the direction of human history, the difficulties we are facing if civilization is eroded, and how to respond to these problems. The study is well balanced and presents with objectivity the mixture of political, cultural, social and literary developments that led to the present post-civilization period. The book is extremely well researched, and it could not come at a better time.