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It is clear that some approximation of Morgan’s idea of a progression of social, technological, cultural, and political changes has become the common view of those educated in Western traditions. Upon this has been grafted a somewhat more sharply delineated picture of a stone, a pottery, a metal (copper, then iron) age of technological evolution, progressing from hunting-gathering to agriculture to manufacture. This picture is meant to serve as both historical outline and theory. We are still caught up in that generalized fiction of “progress.”

Nevertheless it behooves all educated persons to own such books, so that—if nothing else—they have a basis to compare facts as modern discoveries are made and offer a better view of reality. Hopefully, in time, some more compelling theory than a progression of states (Comte) or a dialectic turning of history on its head (Marx) may arise to account for man.

A. S. Iberall

COMMAND VS. MARKET IN CIVILIZATIONAL HISTORY


This book by a noted historian provides some material and a viewpoint that may be of some use to civilizationists, as well as to peace researchers, educators, and activists. The book focuses on the period since 1000 AD, but an introductory chapter provides some background on arms and society in antiquity since 3500 BC, at which time bronze weapons and armor came into being at or near the beginning of civilization in the Middle East. At this time, and throughout most of the time until and including the present day, wars were fought by what the author calls “command economies,” that is, economies responding to governmental needs rather than the needs of the marketplace. In the beginning of civilization these “commands” took the form of pillage and plunder as early civilized governments provided for the needs of their armies by authorizing the armies to take what they needed from the “citizenry” along the way. This “command” procedure apparently worked well enough for several thousand years, but military progress was slow. Weapons and armor were not much better than those used by primitive peoples, except that they were made of metal instead of sticks and stones. The nobles and royalty rode to battle in chariots, but as often as not they dismounted from their awkward chariots before fighting, because the chariots only got in the way. New and improved chariots appeared sometime after 1800 BC, but this did not help the so-called “civilized” (city-dwelling) peoples as much as it helped their “barbarian” (agricultural) neighbors, who had better access to horses, which enabled them to raid their Middle Eastern civilized neighbors.

Barbarian successes led Egypt to hire some of them as a permanent army in the 16th century BC, which served to defend the New Kingdom very
effectively for several generations. This was the first known permanent army in human history. Before this time military activities were relatively unorganized encounters between towns or villages, or between them and the barbarians. Iron replaced bronze about 1400 BC in the Middle East, but this was not widely spread until 1200 BC, which only strengthened the barbarians more and which put an end to chariots. From 1200 to 1000 BC, the barbarians introduced a measure of equality wherever they conquered, since barbarians (farmers and herders) were organized along more egalitarian lines than civilized peoples were, even as savages (gatherers and hunters) were organized along more egalitarian lines than barbarians were. However, the barbarians were soon co-opted by the civilizations which they conquered, so that they soon became as bureaucratic as civilized peoples, if not more so.

The Assyrians were most successful in improving on the bureaucratic management of their armies in the early iron age, peaking from about 900 to 600 BC, and in replacing chariots with cavalry. That is, they simply did away with the chariots, but kept the horses. However, they were still commanding the economy by plunder and pillage, until the equalitarian horsemen of the steppes destroyed the Assyrian empire about 600 BC. Nomadic equality conquered civilized peoples not only in the Middle East, but in the Far East as well. And this pattern of nomadic conquest of civilized lands continued from time to time almost up to modern times.

But, a big change came about in command economies about 600 BC when the Medes and the Persians somehow hit upon the bright idea of charging their subjects rents and taxes instead of plundering and pillaging them in order to support their armies. And this bright idea was soon picked up and institutionalized in China, India, and even in the Mediterranean area with the rise of Rome! This was a remarkable step forward, which gave civilizations an edge on the barbarians, although it did not stop the barbarians entirely from trying to spread their egalitarian ways around the world. But this new method of commanding economies made subjects somewhat more loyal and amenable to being commanded than had plunder and pillage. As a result, civilizations, empires, and wars took a giant step forward. They passed “Go” on the game board of civilization, empire, and war. They amassed more territory than they could handle. Alexander came along and annexed the Persian empire, but Caesar soon followed and annexed the Macedonian empires.

Throughout these ancient and classical times, there was always some market behavior and private entrepreneurs, but this kind of behavior was generally frowned upon in civilized societies, and remained secondary and subordinate until about 1000 AD, halfway through the Middle Ages. Then the commercialization and industrialization of war came into play much more than previously, slowly at first, but then at a runaway speed in modern Europe.

First, the Chinese toyed with this idea for several hundred years, but it seemed immoral from the Confucian point of view. The Chinese had the wherewithal to conquer the world, or at least to give it a good try. They had the crossbow since Han times. They had gunpowder since about 1000 AD,
and guns by 1300 AD. They had a million soldiers under government hire. But, presumably because of their Confucian ethics, they renounced their industrial revolution and overseas empire in the 15th century. The same thing seemed to happen in the Far East generally, including South Asia, which was presumably influenced by its Hindu and Buddhist ethic.

But not so Europe, whose religion had little or no trouble accommodating itself to industrial revolutions and overseas empires. However, never let it be said that the Christians had no scruples, because they certainly did. When the manufacture of the crossbow expanded in the 12th century, the 2nd Lateran Council permitted its use against infidels, but banned its use among Christians. For the most part, however, private enterprise prevailed over governmental commands during this period. This resulted in bigger and better crossbows, which led to superior armor to withstand the arrows. Steel was used instead of wood. Private entrepreneurs experimented with bigger and better guns. Knights (the cavalry) gave way to the infantry in the 16th century. The armies were generally mercenary and as free-wheeling as the arms manufacturers, leading to foreign and overseas adventures which increased the size of European empires beyond that of most of the empires that had preceded them.

Private enterprise gave a boost to civilizations, empires, and wars so that Western Europe (because even Eastern Europe with its more orthodox form of Christianity did not keep up with the West) kept on improving its weapons, its arts, its sciences, its literature, etc. etc., until it became the most civilized, imperial, and warlike place on the earth, dominating and exploiting the Americas, Asia, and Afria. What made this effort so much more successful than the ancient, classical and early medieval command economies was the tremendous advances made by private enterprise when it was freed from the ethical constraints which held back the rest of the world: "As long as European overseas enterprises were managed in this fashion, armed force on the seas was made to pay for itself by a relatively close conformity to the dictates of the capital market... As European ships gradually became more numerous, their capacity to affect Asian economic and political life increased until, eventually, even the greatest land empires of Asia were unable to resist European power. This extraordinary shift took three centuries to reach its climax... But until the 19th century, sea trade and privateering remained intimately connected" (p. 104).

When Europeans fought one another, this seldom paid because they were too evenly matched. But, Siberian furs paid Russia to war in Siberia; American silver paid the Spanish to war in America; the Asian coastline paid Portugal, and later the English and the Dutch, etc. These imperial wars were pushovers, since the less civilized countries could not begin to match European hardware, thanks to European "know-how" developed by private entrepreneurs in competition with one another. While command economies were characterized by private profit being subordinated to public welfare, market economies were characterized by the invisible hand of private profit ruling over all: "their reluctant readiness to tolerate private pursuit of profit allowed western Europeans to dominate the rest of the earth" (p. 116). The
rise of the West was an illustration par excellence of how to gain a whole world by simply losing your soul. Western civilization has not been called "Faustian" for nothing: we sold our soul to the devil in order to rule the world.

The author, however, found this market economy to be "an eccentric departure from the human norm of command behavior—the sort of behavior that dominated ancient times and has reasserted itself with remarkable power since the 1880s" (p. 116). "The result was systematic expansion . . . at the expense of other peoples and polities of the earth . . . technological and organizational innovation continued, allowing Europeans to outstrip other peoples of the earth more and more emphatically until the globe-girdling imperialism of the 19th century became as cheap and easy for Europeans as it was catastrophic to Asians, Africans, and the peoples of Oceania" (p. 143).

This imperial process was helped along by the democratic revolution in France and the industrial revolution in England at the turn of the 19th century. The democratic revolution brought everyone into the act. Everyone was in the army now. The age of totalitarianism was ushered in under the name of democracy, long before totalitarianism was perfected in the 20th century. This beat the old Persian rents and taxes all hollow as a method of generating loyalty and obedience. And the industrial revolution made industry a part of the military 150 years before President Eisenhower's speech writers hit upon the happy phrase "military-industrial complex," somewhat belatedly. Civilization advanced apace, empires grew bigger, and so did wars, except imperial wars, of course, which remained pushovers and which involved little expense. The Napoleonic wars helped the industrial revolution which, in turn, helped democracy. France and Great Britain raised their wealth and power to new heights, while eastern Europe, including Russia, lagged behind.

By the latter part of the 19th century, armies were counted by the million; railroads and steamships came into play; guns became more powerful, and ships became more armored to ward them off. Mass production joined the army after the Crimean War. The US Civil War was the first full-fledged industrialized war, with its machine-made arms and its railroad supply. The Prussians added the telegraph to the railroad. Imperial expansion became cheaper and easier, and everyone got into the act. Even the "diseases of civilization attacked the native populations of such places as Australia, South Africa, North and South America. . . It consequently became possible to settle and develop these half-emptied lands without using any but the most trifling military force" (p. 260).

As the 19th century drew to a close, something new began to happen. The private enterprisers began to run out of steam. Their military expenditures were exceeding their economic incomes, so the governments had to step in to bridge this gap with no-risk assurance to the private military entrepreneurs. This led to another giant step forward. Pass "Go" with a vengeance. Experiment at public expense. The public takes the chances and the losses, while the capitalist keeps the profits. Now, this is surely capitalist
heaven! Not to mention militarist heaven, and nationalist heaven, and who knows how many other kinds and numbers of heaven?

In any event, this new kind of command economy is my interpretation of McNeill’s historical data. McNeill himself did not interpret this as anything new, but merely a return to the ancient norm where governmental command ruled over the free market. World War I introduced the old command economies to the 20th century; World War II intensified commands over markets; and the arms races, nuclear weapons, space launches, atomic explosions, and military expenditures since 1945 have all brought command economies to new heights (or depths, depending on your point of view or value system). According to the author, the subordination of the market to command in the 20th century has made world government not only necessary but feasible: “when and whether a transition will be made from a system of states to an empire of the earth is the gravest question humanity confronts” (p. 384). This is the only way to bring to an end the “millennium of upheaval” (p. 386) from 1000 to 2000 AD, which disrupted the civilized norm of command over the market.

McNeill’s analysis is brilliant, and the breadth and depth of his historical vision is breathtaking. But I respectfully disagree with his conclusion to the effect that command has superseded the market in the 20th century (starting in the late 19th century). My own conclusion from his data and analyses is that the marketeers have conned us again. As long as they could make war pay, they were happy to bear the costs in return for the freedom of charging whatever the traffic could bear. Governments were always in their pockets, but when military expenditures exceeded economic profits, the Danish, Dutch, English, and French East India Companies soon got their respective governments to foot the military bills, which enabled them to continue their exploitation of the East Indies under the guise of governments instead of companies. And this transformation happened well before the end of the 19th century. But, as the author was always careful to emphasize, these things always happen gradually. History, almost by definition, is a gradual process of social evolution. Beginning and ending dates are arbitrary assignments to outstanding events which had their precedents, however dimly perceivable these sometimes were. In any event, the old command was not so old, after all. It was something new which, rather than bring the market under some kind of social control, fooled the command structure into thinking that it was in control when, in fact, the market was running roughshod over the power structure, using the public to pay the bills and to suffer the losses, while the market collected the profits.

McNeill’s own data can be used against his interpretation of them. If the “millennium of upheaval” is a function of the free market, why did not this “upheaval” settle down after the private market came under public control in the late 19th century. This should have resulted in less devastating wars in the 20th century, more like those that occurred prior to 1000 AD. But that is not what happened. On the contrary, military devastation hit new heights never before achieved, suggesting that the market was more in control than ever, in spite of appearances to the contrary. The market had simply co-opted command to pay the bills and take the losses which, after all, is a
very sensible and rational thing for marketeers to do. Why take chances if you don’t have to? Why not take the profit and leave the debts to others as long as you can get away with it? “Nice work if you can get it,” according to the words of a popular song in the late 20th century, “and you can get it if you try.” The history of the 20th century would suggest that you can get it without even trying, and this concept is also expressed by the title of a very popular play and movie in the late 20th century.

The reader of this review is advised to read the book itself, which is a pleasure to read and full of fascinating historical facts and insights, many of which could not be included in this brief review. The reader might very well come to a conclusion different from those of the author and this reviewer. That’s what history does best: challenge the human imagination! It is almost, if not quite, like an ink blot, into which we can read our heart’s desires. Everyone should give it a try. Why let some of us determine what the rest of us will think?

William Eckhardt

“SOCIAL SPECTROSCOPY” AND “LONG CYCLES”


The first paper in this volume is by two of our members, Arthur Iberall and David Wilkinson, “Dynamic Foundations for Complex Systems,” and needs to be considered separately from the others. It is mostly an attempt to apply the laws of thermodynamics to civilizational processes. Its major presentation is of a set of “spectroscopic” time scales, that is, proposed time scales on which various human activities occur, and these are useful and interesting ans general background knowledge. The smallest is one-tenth of a second, and is the approximate reaction time that people have to outside events, e.g. to the change of a traffic light while driving. The next eight range from one second to 30-90 days in length and are also part of individual human activity. Various others are longer, but only one, “200-1200 years,” is of specific application to problems of civilizational development, and since this ranges over a whole order of magnitude its predicting power is limited. The major weakness of this section is that in civilizational (as against human-biological) terms it is almost entirely hypothetical; there is only one single application to anything approaching a specific civilizational problem. Even this single application is questionable. It concerns activity on the time scale of 3-4 years (p. 31):

For instance, Grant (1985) discusses ninety-two Roman emperors and mentions nearly one hundred others over the period from 31 B.C. to 476 A.D., implying, as one of many such illustrations, an average period of political rule of about two and one-half to five years. This short average tenure suggests an implicit, underlying binary yearly evaluation process with memory and involving weak decision making: Did our leader