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# Andrew Targowski, *The Limits of Civilization*

Joseph Drew

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## Book Reviews

### Andrew Targowski, *The Limits of Civilization* Nova Science, 2015

Reviewed by Joseph Drew  
josephdrew4920@verizon.net

Can there be a larger problem confronting mankind than the fact that we are approaching the limits, the end, of our civilization? This is the looming disaster examined in depth by one of the world's leading civilizationists, Prof. Andrew Targowski, in his new book, *The Limits of Civilization*.

The book begins with Targowski's probe of the near and distant future. Of course, life on Earth is ultimately doomed with the expiration of our sun; but much sooner, in about 3,000 years, or less, we will have exhausted all resources necessary for our survival. The present simultaneous crises of overpopulation, depletion of resources, and deteriorating ecology are not likely to be reversed. We face this "Triangle of Civilizational Death" now, and it can only be confronted by the emergence of a wise universal civilization, one which substitutes more intelligent economic and social systems for those currently leading us to the pit.

Dr. Targowski divides his examination into three parts: "Introduction to Civilization," "Civilization in Crisis," and "The End of Civilization?"

Civilization began about 6,000 years ago and has been manifested in 26 separate, discrete examples, of which nine currently exist: Western, Eastern, Chinese, Japanese, Islamic, Buddhist, Hindu, African, and Global. These civilizations shape the way we view the world, and they also interact with each other. Moreover, each civilization gradually transforms into something else.

The author provides an excellent review of the leading thinkers about civilizations. He explains the theories of the Russian Danilevsky; the German Spengler; the English Toynbee; the Polish Koneczny; the Russo-American Sorokin; two earlier Americans, Kroeber and Kluckhohn; the French Braudel; the American Coulborn; three recent Americans, Quigley, Melko, and Wilkinson; and himself.

We have arrived at what Dr. Targowski labels a Twenty-First Century Global Civilization. Unfortunately, we have reached, simultaneously, a second Great Crisis of Civilization, the first having been the fall of the Roman Empire. This one arrives in stealth -- it is relatively unnoticed. Comprising this new great crisis are subsidiary crises in ideas/morality, politics, religion, ecology, and technology, plus twelve others.

The first great crisis was resolved when the Renaissance arose. Today, Dr. Targowski fears, we have to await a second Renaissance. Will it come, and in time? The rapacious workings of global business – a religion in itself – have already destroyed much of the world. What is needed is wisdom to save the planet and its people. Will we generate the necessary wisdom?

Perhaps we can begin to answer that by looking at how well we have met subsidiary problems – for example, the population explosion. The United Nations set out Millennium Development Goals to be reached this year: eliminating extreme poverty; securing basic education; promoting gender equality and reinforcing the position of women; reducing infant mortality; improving mother health; fighting disease such as HIV/AIDS, malaria and others; securing environmental indestructibility; and developing global partnership for development (see page 62).

Addressing these eight areas of concern would not solve the problem of overpopulation. Yet, even meeting these seems too difficult; any observer today can see the paucity of mankind's responses to such goals. It's too little, too late. By the year 2050, we are going to need three worlds like ours simply to maintain even the present civilization at current levels of quality of life, he projects. Human life is likely to become extinct or vastly reduced, just as species of animals have disappeared. To avoid catastrophe we need to reduce mankind's population down to five billion by 2050, drop the fertility rate dramatically (fewer than two children per mother), and meet the Millennium Development Goals. Even if we do all that, climate catastrophes loom.

In a more general sense, to save ourselves we need to replace what we call capitalism with a more sustainable political and economic system. Second, we must recognize that consumerism has become the new opiate of the masses; it depletes the planet of resources rapidly, while making humans less intelligent. And so, third, while praising science and technology, which have brought great advances and have been seemingly friendly to man, let us recognize that they have resulted in culture being subservient to technology. What is needed, therefore, is a more sophisticated culture, and wise regulation of science and technology. But, can we act wisely and in time?

Surely, neither capitalism (today's "turbo-capitalism" oriented toward generating exorbitant profit for the elite), nor socialism (too expensive for seven-to-nine billion people), nor communism (a murderous system cavalierly destructive of the environment) will provide the wisdom we need. Neither will the virtual world. True, we have become more connected to others, but these connections are impoverished and impersonal, says Dr. Targowski, with educated humanity less and less responsible for the content of what is being communicated.

So what can we hope for? A new civilization based on tolerance, wisdom, kindness, equal access, and sensitivity to ecology and sustainable development points the way. Unfortunately, assesses Dr. Targowski, mankind most likely will fail to overcome the crises now facing it. Thus it will not develop such a new civilization based on wisdom, and the beginning of the end will be manifest this century.

Let us hope that while his prescription is right, we, given our 200,000 years of existence and adaptability, ultimately will rally and thus, will prove his prediction wrong.