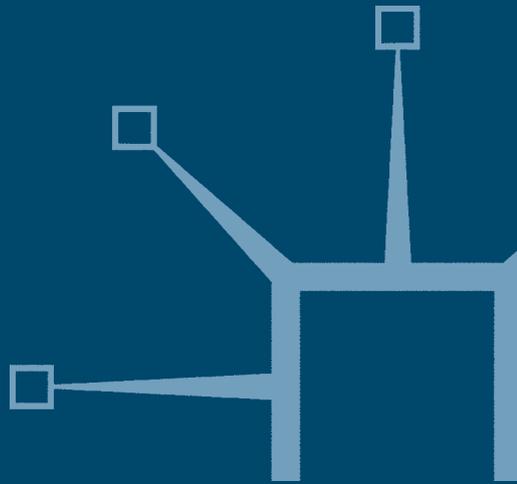


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The Paths of Civilization

Understanding the Currents of History

Jaroslav Krejčí



The Paths of Civilization

Also by Jaroslav Krejčí

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*To the memory of
Anna
who stood by me when times were bad
and walked with me along our path
for sixty years*

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Preface

For the last ten years or so the term 'civilization' has become a word of everyday usage. Samuel Huntington with his article in *Public Affairs* (1993) and then his book *The Clash of Civilizations and Remaking the World Order* (1997) provided the impetus for a heated discussion that surged around scholarly circles.

Of the earlier writings on civilizations, Arnold Toynbee's 12-volume work, *A Study of History* (1934–64), caused comparable agitation; this, however, was limited to the specialist field of historians. Toynbee's approach to history became anathema in Britain and in continental Europe it was received with little enthusiasm. *The International Society for Comparative Study of Civilizations* had to establish its base in the United States, with a positive echo in Japan. Otherwise the study of civilizations continued as a trickle within the broad stream of theoretical sociology. As Arnason expressed this, it was a submerged problematic; its source may be traced to the classics such as Durkheim and Max Weber.

It was only in the 1980s that a more concentrated interest in the study of civilizations as socio-cultural configurations gathered momentum. Fernand Braudel's multi-disciplinary approach was summarized in his *Grammaire de civilisations* (1987); the English translation as *History of Civilizations* (1993) missed the point expressed in the original French title.

Since the mid-1980s, S. N. Eisenstadt continues to publish socio-philosophical studies focused on 'historical constellations in which interaction between cultural and structural factors bring the concept of civilization to the core of sociological theory'. Eisenstadt's *Civilizational Dimension in Sociological Analysis* (2000) points to the heart of the matter. This was the period when I took my first steps in this field in English; this led eventually to *The Human Predicament, Its Changing Image* (1993).

The International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences of 2001 deals with various approaches to the term 'civilization' at unprecedented length. And in 2003, Johann P. Arnason's *Civilizations in Dispute: Historical Questions and Theoretical Traditions* provided exhaustive analytical coverage to the whole range of scholarly work on the topic, thus giving this branch of social science its own encyclopedia.

Why should I take my coals to Newcastle? First, to cover the middle ground, that is the ground between, on the one hand, the multi-disciplinary Braudel and the political scientist Huntington and, on the other, the theoretical analysts such as Eisenstadt and Arnason. Second, I wish to provide a text for a wider readership interested in the global comprehension of history. For this, the main currents of civilization, in a diversity that springs from varied

concepts of the human condition, are viewed as a suitable framework. Students of a comparative study of civilizations may find it useful.

Part I of this book contains an outline of the basic concepts and the respective theoretical suppositions: first, the two understandings of civilization – one as the stage of human development, the other as plurality of socio-cultural configurations; and then, cutting across these, the categories of social, religious, ethnic and political structures. The semantic intricacy of the terms ‘state’ and ‘nation’ in English is given special attention.

Part II consists of historical scenarios ranged according to the spatio-temporal outline of civilizations in the previous section. The Levant (the Near and the Middle East), South and South-East Asia, East Asia and Europe receive full coverage of their whole civilizational span. The latecomers into the contest, the Americas and Sub-Saharan Africa, are dealt with within the European bid to envelop the globe.

The general outlines of Part III review the main turning points of the human condition in the history of civilization. The situation in AD 2000 is seen not only as an attempt by the Euro-American civilization to envelop the globe – to spread its know-how, values and lifestyle world-wide – but the Euro-American civilization is also seen as an anthropological mutation. Its outlook, however, depends not only on the comparative strength of the challenger and those who respond to the challenge, but also on the demographic shifts that may cause the current to take another path.

* * *

My initial encounter with the concept of civilization as used in this book was the first six volumes of Toynbee’s *magnum opus*. I got them in Prague in 1948, the year of the communist take-over in Czechoslovakia. Reading Toynbee was a fascinating antidote to dreary Marx, the prophet of the new establishment. Yet, for a balance of the spiritual and material aspects of history, it was Max Weber who offered me better guidance.

In quite a British way, facts rather than theories became the object of my studies. In contrast to the 20 years of Western-type democracy in my native country, its Nazi German occupation and then the Soviet Russian domination provided me with a unique insight into differences in the human condition, the hallmarks of civilization. Being by nature a continental European, I could not resist the temptation to give what I had learned, and what I had experienced, my own conceptual framework as set out in this book.

My views of the first three teachers to awaken my interest in the intelligible currents of history, namely Marx, Toynbee and Weber, are sketched out in brief in the Appendix to this book.

Acknowledgements

As this book is an abbreviated and updated summary of almost three-score years and ten of study and experience, I acknowledge first and foremost the invaluable participation of my wife, a psychologist (who died in 1995), in all my previous research projects and publications.

Then I express my gratitude to all those who at the time of my exclusion from professional work in my native country helped me to carry on my private studies; these include Mr Manoušek, the Librarian in the Oriental Institute of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences; and Ms Škodová, the courageous typist of innumerable texts.

Also the experience in macro-economic analysis acquired in my earlier employment in Prague proved helpful. My first books in English were on these topics. It was only much later that I was able to turn to the subject of this book.

After I left Czechoslovakia in 1968, Sir Charles Carter (the first Vice-Chancellor of Lancaster University) and Professor Ninian Smart (who founded a new form of religious studies) arranged our safe landing in a safe country, the United Kingdom of Great Britain. Sabbaticals spent in St Antony's College, Oxford, and Santa Barbara (University of California) as well as frequent lecture tours in the United States and Canada, and research visits to the French- and German-speaking countries of Europe enhanced my work and teaching in the Departments of Religious Studies and of European Studies at Lancaster University (UK).

Cooperation with the Board of Higher Education and Ministry of the United Methodist Church in the US (General Secretary, later Professor, Roger Ireson) created for me a secure transatlantic link for various academic ventures, to which has been added, since 1994, international conferences in Prague. Here, at the turn of the millennium I met Professor Johann P. Arnason, who is based in Australia. His comment on my concept of the human predicament as the distinguishing mark of civilizations inspired me to a more precise formulation in this book.

I am deeply indebted to my colleague Professor Phil Payne of the Department of European Languages and Cultures at Lancaster University for his careful and imaginative help with formulating the text of this book and to Mrs Anne Payne for her impeccable word-processing of a manuscript which sometimes bordered on the illegible. Meanwhile, Mrs Olesa Pašková has helped me with some technical aspects of my work and provided me with unstinting care and companionship.

Last but not least I should like to acknowledge the cartography of Mr David Munich from Prague and also the careful and sensitive work on the final manuscript by the copy editor, Ms Penny Simmons.

My attempt to retrace the paths of civilization is also, I hope, a step along the path of the future. As a man nearing the end of his path, I offer the book to those who are not so far along theirs.

Jaroslav Krejčí
Summer 2004

A Note on Spelling and Dates

Spelling

The Chinese names are spelt according to the new Pinyin system of Romanization, with the exception of names taken from a quotation or a book title, and further names which, combined with English endings, have already become familiar in the earlier spelling, such as Taoism, in contrast to Dao Jia in Pinyin.

In the case of Arabic names, only those diacritical marks are used which express specific phonemes that cannot be Romanized by a particular letter of the Latin alphabet, that is, 'ayn and hamza. Nuances of hard or soft pronunciations are omitted.

For technical reasons and in agreement with the publisher I have dispensed with the macrons used in transcript from alphabets other than Latin.

Dates

All dates are given according to the modern Christian calendar unless other dating is specifically indicated.

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Part I

The Global Comprehension of History