



The Owl of Athena

CONTRATYRANNOS

The Natural Law Theory of Human Progress Website

EXCURSUS #14

One of a series of monographs that expands the discussion of important topics examined in *The Natural State of Medical Practice*.¹

CIVILIZATION VS. UNCIVILIZATION

Summary: In this excursus the novel declaration is made and argued that our present “Western” civilization is the only true civilization in human history.

“Not only the individual advances from infancy to manhood but the species itself from rudeness to civilization.”²

Adam Ferguson (1723-1816)

Introduction

It is more than disturbing to read daily the homages to great civilizations inevitably mentioned in most things historical. The idea that we are required to attribute our present achievements and good fortune to some form of ancient greatness is, I suppose, an attempt to appear to be fair, just as is our attempt to blame our own shortcomings on historical events that have prevented our own greatness from becoming manifest. Great men, great empires, and great civilizations seem to provide convenient physical and moral explanations for present-day successes and failures.

The Natural State of Medical Practice introduced a quite different dynamic:

- (1) First, it presented objective evidence that Western civilization owes nothing whatever to any other preceding or contemporary civilization other than its necessary genetic makeup.
- (2) Second, it refutes the “great man” theory of progress by presenting evidence that genius is widely and equally distributed throughout every society, from which the inarguable

¹ Volume, chapter and page number of otherwise unreferenced statements in this monograph refer to the version of the four volumes as published by Liberty Hill Press:

Vol. 1 – *The Natural State of Medical Practice: An Isagorical Theory of Human Progress*

Vol. 2 – *The Natural State of Medical Practice: Hippocratic Evidence*

Vol. 3 - *The Natural State of Medical Practice: Escape from Egalitarianism*

Vol. 4 – *The Natural State of Medical Practice: Implications*

² Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, London, 1767, beginning of Section I.

conclusion is that it is some society-wide feature that inhibits the manifestation of that genius, not the individual genius.

- (3) Third, it identifies all the “great” civilizations as not at all great, instead each being a series of authoritarian/totalitarian regimes that are tacked together to form some sort of geographically connected pseudo-civilization that should be a source of embarrassment rather than a source of pride, civilizations that we would prefer to think have endured because of logic and genius rather than the true cause, barbaric wars to enlarge their desirable geography and extract wealth and power from others.
- (4) And lastly, “great civilizations” are shown to inevitably revert to a primitive empiricism as they age rather than being a steppingstone to the next and better civilization.

The Natural State of Medical Practice concludes, based on the Natural Law Theory of Human Progress derived from it, that the origin of a civilization is commercial enterprise around which city-states evolve. It then arrives at “civilization” status when, working together, it has developed specializations, such as medical professionals, previously unknown to the people, and benefits become available to all. It is progressing and is now “civilized.” Then, in a few locations in history, these embryonic “civilizations” coalesced, covering larger regions. I refer here to primary civilizations: predynastic and early dynastic Sumer, predynastic Egypt, the Indus River Valley civilization, the Longshan culture of China, and archaic Greece.³ Sadly, civilizing ceases at the point when authoritarian political hierarchies achieve ascendancy and supplant the primary ones. Histories of the regions are thereafter characterized by sequential totalitarian regimes that might be likened to economic “bubbles” but are far more tragic. Historians often refer to those sequential secondary civilizations as “great” because of vast regional domination: Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Chinese and Greco-Roman. The Indus River Valley primary civilization is exempt from this charge because its disappearance in history was probably related to geo-climatic change rather than being engulfed by its secondary civilization.

This excursus is meant to crystallize the preceding evidence and to clarify the definition of “civilization.” It will then claim at its conclusion that, after several failed attempts at progress, it is our own civilization, commonly identified as “Western,” that is the only true civilization, that all other “civilizations” have been the bane of progress and therefore undeserving of the title, and that we are in great danger of following in their footsteps.

Definition

Nationalization means the process of becoming nationalized; ionization means the process of becoming ionized; civilization, therefore, means the process of becoming civilized, and to be civilized, according to Merriam-Webster, is to show “an advanced stage of social and cultural development.” This definition, by its use of “social” and the quotation that begins this excursus, means “civilized” should encompass all citizens of a civilization, in contrast to the uncivilized, who remain rude and barbaric.⁴

³ A primary civilization is one that has not been “shaped by substantial dependence on or control by other, more complex societies.” See: Trigger, B. G., *Understanding Early Civilizations*, Cambridge (UK), 2003, p. 19.

⁴ The term “civilization” as used today is relatively new. In Samuel Johnson’s 1755 *Dictionary of the English Language* it is defined as “a law, act of justice, or judgment, which renders a criminal process civil,” *i.e.*, its use was legalistic. The word is not even included in his octavo edition of 1760. But notably he references John Locke’s use of

The present definitions imply an intrinsic superiority of civilization over no civilization. But is that appropriate? Was the Aztec civilization, which was based on military conquest in part to acquire captives for its vast human sacrifices, superior or culturally advanced over primitive and uncivilized sedentary, horticultural and herding societies? Inhumanity exists in any society, but bigger is surely no guarantor of better, and is usually the opposite: the bigger the pack, the meaner the dog.

With the preceding as a starting point, it might be asked if it is appropriate to speak of any past civilization in glowing terms. I would answer, it is not. Referring to the five “great” civilizations that are examined in *The Natural State of Medical Practice*, the argument is that, in general terms, a bipartite division of citizens existed in each of those civilizations: one segment, the politically powerful elite, included those refined in culture but barbaric in action, and the other segment, vastly larger, included those rude in acculturation but restrained in action. To truly qualify for status as a civilization, I propose the citizenry at large should generally show cultural appreciation and restraint and should not be rude and barbaric in action. The five “great” civilizations to be discussed in this analysis are therefore not entitled to use the term “civilization.” In a word, no rigidly authoritarian society is entitled to be a civilization, just as Frederick Douglass stated there can be no virtue without freedom.⁵

Given the tradition surrounding the use of “civilization” over the past three centuries, it can be argued that my rhetorical excess in the preceding is, for all practical purposes, meaningless. But consider the following:

- a. The history of China from the Shang Dynasty (1600-1046 BC) to Qing Dynasty (1636-1912) is a sequence, over 3500 years, of more than seventy major kinship-based authoritarian dynasties that ruled, serially or in parallel, *without exception*, by force and conquest. Museums globally display magnificent works of artistry, usually characteristic of a particular dynasty, but the term “civilization” can barely be applied to the region. The elite class, or dynastic kinship, was, overall, ruthless and barbaric in its penchant for war and domination of others, whereas the ninety percent of the population that was the source of the plenty that made possible the tastefulness of the ruling class was poor, fettered and unlettered.
- b. The ancient Egyptian civilization historically spans roughly 3500 BC to 525 BC, and encompasses, over those 3000 years, twenty-six dynastic periods of rigid authoritarian rule plagued by internal and external wars, probably owing its long existence primarily to the fact that on the west it was protected by a vast desert and on the east by the Red Sea. We marvel at its art, temples and pyramids, but all this was done on the backs of a servile population and enslaved conquered peoples. Again, the ruling class was conservatively tasteful in its art and architecture but barbaric in its wars and in its domination of captives, slaves, and the general populace. The common people were malnourished, exploited and manipulated.

the word “civilized:” “Amongst those who are counted the civilized part of mankind, this original law of nature still takes place.” He is referring to natural law and he applies it to all persons in a civilization, not just a sub-population.
⁵ Foner, P. S., editor, *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, New York, 1950, in 5 vols., vol. 2, pp. 182-183. With a broader compass D. D'Souza wrote: "Without freedom there is no virtue: A coerced virtue is no virtue at all." See his *Letters to a Young Conservative*, New York, 2002, p. 16. I realize, of course, that there are degrees of authoritarianism. In this excursus “authoritarian” means exceedingly authoritarian.

- c. Ancient Mesopotamian city-state dynasties began in Sumer *ca.* 2900 BC but then were forcibly unified by the Akkadians in 2350 BC, passing through the hands of a variety of conquerors and remaining rigidly totalitarian for 4,000 years to include the Persian Empire. Several periods were notable for their art, architecture and scholarship, but it was the ruthless elite and militant classes that shaped the cultural accomplishments of that region, not the illiterate citizenry who were the source of its food and its foot-soldiers.
- d. The story is different in ancient India in that its earliest “civilization,” that of the Indus River Valley (flourished 2500-2000 BC), appears to have been throughout much of its existence a relatively egalitarian one, in that a hierarchy of dominating political power seems not to have existed. Unless more evidence to the contrary is obtained, it may truly be considered to have been a “civilization,” although its duration was cut short by geoclimatic change. What followed was a widely scattered system of monarchies, dynasties and empires down through the Mughal empire (1526-1857) that saw the arrival of colonial powers. These were mostly absolute monarchies characterized by incessant wars, and their empires cannot be considered civilizations. In those few dominions overseen by enlightened leaders, both the monarchical nature of governance and the caste system of social organization maintained a large subject population with limited choice. Hindu Chola art and Islamic Mughal art represent the culture of elite classes that were barbaric in their social controls and conquests, the Chola Dynasty (850-1279) through some thirty rulers and the Mughal Empire (1526-1757) with twenty. Combining regional authoritarian empires or dynasties under a single rubric is a fabrication, not a civilization.
- e. Greco-Roman “civilization” also was consumed with wars of conquest. Greek democracies of various types were instituted for the first time in the 6th C BC, and concurrently art, literature, architecture and specializations such as medical practice flourished at all levels of society. The beginnings of a true civilization were apparent and were bearing fruit. But as time passed oligarchical political power and the occasional totalitarian regained prominence and the increased opportunity that had existed for the average citizen was oriented toward preservation of the State (for which their participation was actively sought) rather than self-betterment. Macedonian and Roman conquests ended it all. Even the Pax Romana included wars, particularly the horrors of the Jewish-Roman wars, and a doubling of the area of Roman domination, with the Roman and Romanized elite maintaining a firm hold on plebeian and slave populations.

If a civilization does not somehow identify with the word “civilized,” then perhaps some other term should be used to describe the long sequences of serial despotic rule that characterize most human cultures, thereby reserving the term “civilization” for the true thing. When discussing Arnold Toynbee’s inevitable cycling of twenty-one civilizations, perhaps we should not be including true civilizations among the doomed, for in his theory there is an implication that all civilizations carry within themselves the seeds of inherent destruction. This excursus proposes that true civilizations do not, that the durability of a “free” civilization has yet to be determined, that nevertheless serious internal dangers exist, and that we in the West had better realize the uniqueness and greatness of our own civilization above all others that have existed lest we throw it away and follow suit.

I would highlight a particular facet of the definition of civilization that will help clarify the significance of the word that some definitions imply, and that is the necessity of objective evidence of *progress*. Progress in the present sense is characterized by purposeful improvement over an

existing state of something that benefits members of the civilization. In other words, civilization advances on purpose by seeking utility in ways that benefit all its members, in contrast to culture, which does not change according to any particular goal or plan, and to a dynasty, which exists to benefit the kinship. As discussed in *The Natural State of Medical Practice* (volume 3, p. 211ff), a key gauge of progress in a society is its medical care, and an objective measure of effectiveness of that care is life expectancy. Applying this to the “great civilizations” that value was found to be little more than thirty years for the average men and women who made up the great majority of their populations, the same as reported for Stone Age humans and even Neanderthals.⁶ Only our own civilization has a claim to human longevity, and even that has been late in coming (see Excursus 9).

It is noteworthy that within this critique of the definition of civilization there is in our modern Western civilization no formal ruler such as is implied in “dynasty” and “empire.” Occasionally a ruler might transiently pop up, a Napoleon, Hitler, or Mussolini, only to be snuffed out, by force when necessary, thus preventing the extreme centralization of political power historically represented by Rome, Babylon, Moscow and Beijing.

To conclude, the proposed definition of “civilization” is minimally changed from volume 1, p. 21, of *The Natural State of Medical Practice*:

“An autonomous urban and rural population sufficiently large to require a regulatory hierarchy to optimize production of a food surplus and trade that contributes to wealth and permits specialization of crafts and vocations capable of progress to the benefit of all citizens.”

To cycle or not to cycle

There have been many theories to explain the passage of civilizations, the two most often discussed being cycling and a linear religious unfolding, the former proposed as an explanation for the course of history, each civilization passing through successive phases and ultimately being deposed.

Two 20th C analyses of civilization that have been particularly popular were proposed by Dr. Will Durant and his wife, Ariel, in *The Story of Civilization*, and Dr. Arnold Toynbee in *A Study of History*.⁷ The Durants asked, in their *The Lessons of History*, if human progress was real. They noted that “... progress in science and technique has involved some tincture of evil and good,” that “we frolic in our emancipation from theology” but have we developed a “natural ethic?,” and in scholarly debate it is not clear who would win the “prize,” the ancients or the moderns.⁸ They concluded by equating progress with heritage. The history of our civilization, with its “saints, statesmen, ...poets, artists...lovers, and philosophers,” has provided us with a human heritage of great richness that increases over time and makes our lives fuller. There seems, therefore, to have been hesitancy in acknowledging both the reality and the value of human progress, from which one might conclude that no qualitative distinction exists among the various

⁶ Bocquet-Appel, J., and Degioanni, A., *Neanderthal Demographic Estimates*, in *Current Anthropology*, 54:S202-S213, 2013.

⁷ Will and Ariel Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, New York, 1935-1975, in eleven volumes. Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, London, 1934-1961, in twelve volumes.

⁸ Will and Ariel Durant, *The Lessons of History*, New York, 1968, chapter 13.

civilizations, quite a remarkable opinion of their own time. They did acknowledge, however, that “History repeats itself, but only in outline and in the large” (*op. cit.*, p. 88).

Dr. Toynbee approached the history of civilizations differently, writing of the cycling of civilizations in his memorable work, *A Study of History*. He considered a civilization to have started in the response of a local culture to a regional challenge that the great civilizations have overcome by inventing and adapting successfully, the others perishing. Once successful, they grow and prosper as long as they manage new challenges. They fade when their ability to adapt is lost, and it is lost because centralized power fails to meet a challenge, upon which the mass of the population gets upset and then attempts to obtain control. But a rigidly authoritarian resistance is then expanded by the politically powerful, stifling creativity and adaptability. The end has arrived.

I mention the Durants’ and Toynbee’s theories as paradigmatic, two among many, for most theories of civilizations are enigmatic, and the purpose of this excursus is to present quite a different paradigm.⁹

But consider first another way of looking at cycling of civilizations, namely that it is not civilizations that have cycled. Rather, there is a cycling within each of the many authoritarian dynasties encompassed within a regional culture.¹⁰ Technically the history of each dynasty would be little more than a military history rather than a social one. These strings of authoritarian dynasties might be likened to strings of economic bubbles in their flourishing and collapse. With an apology for repetition, here is a summary:

(a) The Chinese “civilization” can be viewed as merely a prolonged sequence of some seventy serial and overlapping major authoritarian dynasties, each with kinship as its basis, coercion as its method, and an average duration of about one hundred years.

(b) The history of Egypt is similar; a sequence of twenty-six dynasties, some familial, some being conquests, but each with its ruler or sequence of rulers. Egypt had, of course, a governmental bureaucracy that no civilization would ever match, one attended by a myriad of priests that felt the pulse (metaphorically) of the kingdom and provided a conservative regulatory coterie of civil servants that served stabilization and durability for two millennia despite military adventures and misadventures.

(c) Mesopotamian dynasties comprise the history of late Sumerian city-states, the Akkadian empire, a dynastic sequence of Amorite rulers related to Hammurabi, followed by Kassite, Hittite, Neo-Babylonian, Assyrian, Persian and other dynasties. Although these were often not familial, all were militaristic.

To read the histories of Mesopotamian, Egyptian and Chinese “civilizations” is to read of perpetual authoritarian wars and intrigues. The cycling of these supposed civilizations I propose to be an inevitable consequence of authoritarian government that resulted in the *recycling* of

⁹ But Oswald Spengler (1880-1936) should be mentioned here. He proposed *cultural* cycling with the final stage being civilization itself, predicting a century ago the end of our Western culture. Culture, based on his philosophical theory of history, can be likened to an organism with a predictable course and span of life, the reasons supporting his metaphor not given. Spengler’s theory and prediction will gain support if our civilization continues in its authoritarian ways, for, as civilization is the final stage in Spengler’s definition of culture, we are already living in that stage and it will soon fail if he predicted correctly.

¹⁰ As an example, a local strong man becomes a military leader, conquers the regional army, and becomes king. He is succeeded by his son who conquers a neighboring region to the east and passes the larger kingdom to his three sons. One of the sons poisons the other two and is declared king. After putting down a farmers’ rebellion, his weakened forces are overcome by an army from the neighboring region to the west, and the dynasty ends with the king’s beheading.

pseudo-civilizations as they continuously play at “king of the mountain.” The only civilized people, when they have not been required to man an army, seem to have been the common citizenry, the unprivileged folk living in scattered poor villages even in today’s totalitarian states. As a general statement regarding societies, I think most world travelers would agree that the kindest people are the poorest, despite having little to share.

India, as previously stated, was different in that at least some of the initial city-states of the Indus River Valley “civilization” of 2500-2000 BC do not reveal evidence of dynastic, monarchical, or centralized political control.

Our admiration of civilizations is usually expressed in our opinions of their culture, their arts, their discoveries and the individuals associated with these. We may even admire powerful and large dynasties because of their military “genius” and conquests. But what we traditionally call “civilizations” are judged on the basis of their cultural achievements, not their civility. This is like admiring lipstick on a pig and should change.

To conclude, it has yet to be determined if true civilizations have an intrinsic cycle. True civilizations have been few and short-lived because of their displacement by political hierarchies of power. But it is noteworthy that some of their initial accomplishments have been remembered throughout the duration of subsequent authoritarian cycling dynasties. The writing and medical legacies (*i.e.*, the ancient medical classics) associated with transient nascent true civilizations in ancient Sumer, Egypt, India, China and Greece apparently do not cycle. They tend to be retained even when subsequent authoritarian dynasties have been unable to build on them.

Enter natural law

In *The Natural State of Medical Practice* and in Excursus 6 the concept of natural law is considered in detail and its expression in the ethical component of the Ten Commandments and in the Golden Rule as protecting our natural rights is described. The equivalent of natural law has found expression in most cultures in which it has been sought; it can also be considered one’s conscience. We have, therefore, a general concurrence as to the reality of natural law and an approximate agreement on its content, even though there are varying opinions on its source.

Natural law protects our natural rights from infringement by others. It is logical that this protection should include institutional infringements, including those from government. It was propounded in *The Natural State of Medical Practice* that human progress is a natural consequence of protection of natural rights, at least if we use medical practice as a gauge. It proposes as well that a society that does not abide by natural law and thereby denies natural rights will not progress.

Now translate the preceding into a political system. The difference between authoritarian and nonauthoritarian governance is that in a free society a person acquires wealth, and in sense power, by providing a desired product. It is a system of popular exchange, a mutual give and take. In contrast, an authoritarian system (socialism, communism, fascism, totalitarianism) does not abide by natural law and punitively takes wealth and power from part or all of the people and uses it for goals of the political hierarchy. Thus, authoritarianism, which also limits the choices of its subjects to exploit self-interest (see Excursus 13), is not just a matter of forcing people to do something they would otherwise not do and limiting what they can do; it is also a matter of taking from people what they would otherwise not give. In a free society the acquisition of power via enterprise is inherently limited by competition; in authoritarian governance there is no limit to

acquisition of power. In effect, a free society replaces armored medieval knights serving the local lord with self-serving but humane merchants who respect the rights of others.

Thus, to those who have lived in a free society, authoritarianism seems a bad idea, whether in its abuse of power or in its acquisition of power. And so it is sad today that many people are surrendering their rights and responsibilities to central government, for by doing these things authoritarian persons and groups quickly acquire power at no personal cost or effort; authoritarianism is being readily abetted rather than resisted. Active accretion of power is an inevitable accompaniment of any authoritarian system, and it inevitably concentrates that power in the hands of fewer and fewer persons.

From this perspective, authoritarianism cannot be seen as ever doing good, and any apparent good it seems to do is merely camouflage for casting a net to acquire more followers and thus have more power. A related goal of authoritarian process is to obviate any other source of power that might pose a threat. Contradictory ideas are prevented from being heard. In Mao Zedong's China, the purpose of government was not to enforce equity; it was to make people the same and so be rid of opposition by defining and indoctrinating what a citizen must be and do.

As for making people the same, this is not possible, and therefore authoritarianism is characterized by wars in perpetuity. And if that were not enough, (1) to enforce equity will cause human progress to promptly cease, and (2) the inevitable centralization of incompetence will invite unnatural disasters.

The immorality of authoritarian governance is clear: it offends natural law. It takes things from the people which they do not want to give; it makes people do things they know they shouldn't do; it limits the choices of things they should do; it places man-made laws above natural law; and in doing so it arrogates to itself the right to define good and bad. It is no wonder why it is so terrible. What is a wonder is why people, when they have a choice, would purposely choose it or encourage it.

In prior excursus three important points were made:

- (1) The ethical commandments of the Decalogue, the Golden Rule and natural law are considered equivalents.
- (2) Their application over centuries has been directed at the individual, not institutions.
- (3) By ignoring their institutional significance, natural rights have been transgressed, common men and women over the ages have been denied free expression of their ingenuity, and in doing so human progress has been delayed for millennia.

The immorality that authoritarian government inflicts on the unprivileged majority is an immorality of unimaginable proportions. Centralization of political power must be fervently opposed. We can see from the preceding that empires and dynasties have rulers. In contrast, as described in *The Natural State of Medical Practice* and in the above definition of "civilization," the primary city-states of Sumer, Egypt, India, China and ancient Greece first had *settlement hierarchies* rather than rulers to guide their early development.¹¹ Analogously, the remarkable successes of our own civilization evolved at the same time its nations ridded themselves of

¹¹ Definition of a "settlement hierarchy:" "A natural progression of intergroup adjustments that spontaneously occurs as an urbanizing society, having no prior experience with a political hierarchy, becomes more complex and acquires facilities, goods, and services to accommodate an enlarging population." (Volume 3, p. 22, of *The Natural State of Medical Practice*.) The relevance of settlement hierarchy as a natural step in early urbanization is strengthened by the positive correlation between organizational complexity and demographic scale (level of tiered hierarchy and population size). See: Sandeford, D. S., 2018, *Organizational Complexity and Demographic Scale in Primary States*, in *R. Soc open sci.* 5:171137.<http://dx.doi.org/10.1098/rsos.171137>. The text also includes an overview of specific primary "states" in ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, India and China.

totalitarian rulers and were adopting popular assemblies. **An essential difference therefore is the absence of consolidated authoritarian rule in a true civilization.**

Civilizations without rulers

Professor Toynbee was able to fill twelve large volumes with his commentary on twenty-one civilizations because their peculiarities abound. But those peculiarities reflect the respective cultures, whereas their houses of power are similar, authoritarians all: kings, pharaohs, monarchs, czars, emperors, tyrants, sultans, kaisers, dictators, fuhrers, etc. In any new magisterial tome on civilizations perhaps there need be but two types of civilizations: authoritarian and nonauthoritarian.

Toynbee also lays the sad course of civilizations on leadership that becomes progressively more authoritarian to the point that innovation and adaptability are lost. There are few who would disagree with that. The problem with any leadership is that the greater the concentration of power the greater is the concentration of incompetence, for the problems of a large civilization are vast and their solutions are to be found among the people of the civilization, not a single or a few individuals.¹² Of great benefit to our nation has been its extraordinary distribution of decision-making throughout society, rather than confining it to a singular locus. This is the essence of Tocqueville's paragraph regarding associations in America that opens Excursus 15: *Progress: Our Most Important Product*.

To summarize the present argument, only one true civilization is recognized today, our own. All other true civilizations were not permitted to survive and grow; they were aborted. Of Dr. Toynbee's list, the Babylonian, Assyrian, Persian, Pharaonic, Chinese and Roman dynasties do not represent civilizations. All instead represent serial authoritarian "bubbles" that burst upon contact with a superior authoritarian "bubble." If it is argued that we in the West have had our share of dynasties, this is not denied, but the difference is that, like whack-a-mole, the authoritarian with an eye for the main chance just pops up here and there rather than being all-consuming, for when they appear the protectors of natural rights have suppressed them. It is through such Western loopholes in authoritarian governance that have developed since the Reformation that natural rights and natural law have gained a commanding foothold, so far.

Conclusion: Uncivil civilizations

Civilization is too polite a term for what it is traditionally meant to describe. But there is no word that is a satisfactory alternative to "civilization" just as there is no acceptable antonym. It will remain in use, although hopefully with acceptable qualifications. As for our own civilization, a name for it will be the subject of Excursus 16.

¹² In the same sense, it is arguable that university professors are not, and should not be expected to be, the source of ideas more than any other group. Good ideas emerge from all the people. The professors, appropriately through their studies and writings, provide the intellectual arguments about, for, and against those ideas, enlighten their students on the range of criticism of the subject, and in the process educate them on the importance of critical thinking so that they become discerning in forming their own opinions rather than blindly following the opinions of others, and thereby contribute to the pool of ideas from which progress will continue.

But we must wonder about a future “clash of civilizations.” This was the title of a 1996 book by Dr. Samuel Huntington in which he divided the globe among eight contemporary civilizations.¹³ The “clash” was not postulated to result from ideology because it seemed apparent to Dr. Huntington that Western technology and democratic freedoms were being accepted and gradually implemented globally. Instead, it would be cultural enmity that sparked conflict. But if our own civilization indeed captures imaginations worldwide and its benefits are globally realized, why would any reasonable person want to destroy that which has improved the lives of so many, an ideology that is both historically successful and spreads because of its beneficence, not its army. True civilizations, in contrast to cultures, should not clash.

To explain this inconsistency the role of the authoritarian again asserts itself. Islam, Orthodox Christianity, Hindu, Buddhist and Shinto, whether viewed as religions or as cultures, have historically been associated with authoritarian regimes, sometimes, as in the West, as a State religion. But the theological message of all these religions includes a desire for peace. While religious support of authoritarian national or dynastic objectives has at times been sought by the politically powerful, it is today only Islam that extensively and intrinsically provides guidance for State action, although regionally this has occurred with all the other religions in the past. I propose that it is not culture, as expressed through dominant religions, that would originate any clash. It would instead emerge from the centralized political power that guides the respective regions encompassing those religions. Of course, there will be attempts to rally religions and other types of cultural support for authoritarian purposes, but behind it all the small number of persons who maintain total political control over the several regions of the globe will be the authors of violence, not the common citizens. For the moment, persons with supreme power reside in Moscow, Pyongyang, Beijing, and Teheran, not in basilicas, temples, shrines and mosques. Furthermore, three of those four centers of political power are, or have been, declared atheistic. Religions, and thereby cultures, are not the issue, and as an example of human variation they are to be valued.

Although modern culture itself therefore seems an unlikely basis for a call to arms, the same cannot be said for authoritarian concentration of power. That is where the risk lies. Our own civilization’s demotion of authoritarianism and promotion of natural rights protection has been the key to its success, and this is particularly so for the United States of America and its Constitution. As Ayn Rand wrote in 1982: “I can say – not as a patriotic bromide, but with full knowledge of the necessary metaphysical, epistemological, ethical, political and esthetic roots – that the United States of America is the greatest, the noblest and, in its original founding principles, the only moral country in the history of the world.”¹⁴ And within our civilization, to equate the United States with any other nation *or attempt to render it so* is an apostasy. But, based on historical evidence of a society’s almost irresistible acquiescence over time to concentration of political power and on recent trends to tribalism and restriction of natural rights in the United States, the probability is rising that ours will follow. Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” will not be remote if the only true civilization, our own, loses its most potent defender, the United States of America, should we continue to depreciate into just another authoritarian nation.

¹³ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of World Order*, New York, 1996.

¹⁴ This statement is from the opening essay of Ayn Rand’s posthumous book of essays, *Philosophy: Who Needs It?*, Indianapolis, 1982.