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REVIEW ESSAY

Civilizations in History

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Jaroslav Krejčí, *Postižitelné proudy dějin* (Intelligible Currents of History). Prague: Sociologické nakladatelství (SLON), 2002, 563pp. incl. index. ISBN 8086429091
Jaroslav Krejčí, *The Paths of Civilization: Understanding the Currents of History*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, 281pp. incl. index, £60.00, ISBN 1403917604 (hbk), £18.99 ISBN 1403938210 (pbk).

Jaroslav Krejčí's two most recent publications add new themes and ideas to his earlier work on civilizational analysis. The English text (2004) incorporates parts of the Czech one (2002), but it is much shorter, and some important topics are more extensively covered in the Czech version. The following discussion will therefore refer to both books, but concentrate on a few points that seem particularly relevant to civilizational issues. I begin with a brief comment on Krejčí's way of situating the civilizational frame of reference within the context of alternative paradigms in social and historical inquiry; the next step is then a closer look at his conception of civilizational structures, and more specifically the idea of civilizations as institutionalized visions of the human condition. From these general questions, the focus will shift to two more particular sets of problems: the historical paths and patterns of nation formation and the comparative analysis of revolutions. In both cases, Krejčí's lines of argument are distinctive and controversial, but they also show that more must be done to integrate these problematics into the civilizational framework. Finally, a few words should be said on the question of civilizational and – in the last instance – anthropological mutations, with particular reference to the contemporary dynamics of globalization.

Some characteristics of Krejčí's programme for civilizational analysis should be noted at the outset. It stands apart from more typical approaches to the field: it developed at some distance from the current debate initiated by Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, and does not relate as directly to classical precursors as the main participants in that discussion do. Krejčí's intellectual project grew out of his search for an alternative to Marxist theory that would also make sense of Marxism as a historical force, and of the paradoxical results produced by the move from theory to practice. Communism as a socio-cultural phenomenon, massively different from but undeniably rooted in the utopian construct of a communist exit from history, was a challenge to established modes of social and political thought, and this problem was most pressing in the most Western

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country under Communist rule. Krejčí's response to it was decisively influenced by his encounter with Toynbee's *Study of History*. He accepted, in general terms, the view of history as shaped by the dynamics, sequences and interactions of civilizations, but objected to Toynbee's inadequate conceptual framework as well as to the unreflected shift from civilizations to universal religions. Sociological theory, both classical and recent, served to re-articulate the civilizational perspective. As will be seen, Max Weber's work is crucial to that purpose, but not so much because of direct links to Weber's understanding of civilizations as with regard to the conceptual distinctions that enabled him to develop a multi-dimensional analysis of the social world. The importance of this achievement will become clearer in the context of basic conceptual issues.

1

Krejčí poses the question of alternative paradigms in explicitly anthropological terms: the historical analysis of human societies can take its bearings from either of the 'two most spectacular endowments of the human species' (2004: 3), the ability to form and develop ideas or the ability to produce the means of subsistence and improve the ways of doing so. The latter perspective leads to structural analysis of social formations, pioneered in a particularly influential way by Karl Marx. The former approach has not been brought into a comparably clear focus, but Krejčí's aim is to show that this can best be done at the civilizational level. The choice between the alternatives thus involves basic assumptions about the human condition, but it can also reflect historical experiences perceived as evidence for one view or the other. To take the most striking example, the Marxian idea of modes of production as keys to more complex social formations reflects the unprecedented impact of industrial capitalism on its global social environment. But as Krejčí stresses, this very case is also conducive to reflections that lend some support to the other side. The industrial revolution would not have been possible without prior acceleration of the growth of knowledge and major changes to intellectual orientations. These developments unfolded over several successive periods, and the most important forces at work – notably the Enlightenment – can only be understood in a European (and ultimately global) context. And when the Marxist response to industrial capitalism is translated into practical projects, the primacy of ideational factors becomes visible from another angle. The most spectacular result was the formation of a model claiming to represent a superior global alternative. Both the prehistory and the world-historical ramifications of the industrial-capitalist mutation can thus be analyzed from the large-scale and long-term perspective that defines civilizational approaches: 'we can start with the hypothesis that for the study of long-term development, civilizations understood as socio-cultural configurations are more suitable entities than any other global category' (2004: 6). An 'ideational basis' (2004: 9), i.e. a more or less elaborated and institutionalized world-view, is central to these configurations.

The reference to a 'hypothesis' suggests an open debate between the two paradigms. In that context, the case for civilizational analysis has to be argued through appropriation and reinterpretation of insights gained from the other point of view, and this in turn presupposes a shared terrain where the rivals can take each other's measure. For Krejčí, the main bridging theme is the problematic of social power. As will be seen, his way of theorizing civilizations is meant to lay the groundwork for closer analysis of power structures. But, as he notes (2004: 5), the theorists of social formations have so far been more successful in broadening their perspectives to tackle the question of power in general. In relation to this expanded scope, he distinguishes three main approaches to the study of social formations (2004: 27); (I formulate the defining contrasts in the general terms that seem implicit in Krejčí's references to Marx, Spencer and Weber). The systemic model (mostly based on functionalist assumptions, although Krejčí does not explicitly note that connection) reduces the complex spectrum of human societies to key elements and alternative combinations; the evolutionistic approach focuses on general and continuous trends that determine the direction of social change across the less important boundaries between epochs and cultures; a third view rejects both systemic and evolutionary constructs and prefers to work with selective combinations of variables, oriented towards further exploration of changing relationships between them. Weber's vast repertory of ideal types is the classic example of this third alternative, and Krejčí's proposal to analyse 'social formations as structural elements of civilizations' (2004: 27) draws on it. The categories of feudalism, capitalism and socialism serve to illustrate a general point: although the latter differs from the two others in that it refers to a project rather than a historical formation, we are in all three cases dealing with institutional variations on the level of power structures, operative norms and cultural orientations.

2

One of Krejčí's main reservations about Toynbee was that the idea of civilizations as societies – intelligible fields of interaction – tended to overshadow their cultural profile. However, it was equally clear that an attempt to redress the balance would have to avoid the vaguely culturalist views of those who identify civilizational patterns with styles or other aesthetic categories (this line of thought may be seen as a partial return to Spengler after the reorientation imposed by Toynbee). As we have seen, Krejčí stresses the formative and differentiating role of world-views; he links this point to further considerations on the societal impact of ideas. Civilizations have canonical normative texts, most obviously in the case of sacred books defining the essentials of revealed religions, but there are civilizational texts of less overtly sacral kinds – from the Homeric epics to the classics of Marxism-Leninism. On the level of collective agency, 'protagonist groups' (a more developed and differentiated version of Toynbee's 'creative minorities') translate the logic of world-views into social frameworks and practices. Such groups are more visible

and unified in some cases than others; the Chinese literati and the *ulama* in the Islamic world are obvious examples. A civilization may be characterized by prolonged rivalry and changing relations between different protagonist groups (for instance, *brahmins* and *kshatriyas* at crucial junctures in the history of Indian civilization). A protagonist group may expand in ways that make demarcation more difficult. The aristocratic elite of the early Greek *polis* was replaced by a more broadly-based citizenry, but continuities in regard to cultural orientations and models of conduct have been much debated by historians. In short, more comparative studies are needed to clarify the role of protagonist groups and test the relevance of this category. That applies even more to a third defining component of civilizations: core institutions. Under this heading, Krejčí refers to such eminent cases as the Pharaonic monarchy in Ancient Egypt, the imperial institution in China and the Catholic Church in medieval Western Christendom, but also to the nation-state in modern Western history, which is only one part of a more complex configuration. The institutional cores of civilizations may be more or less integrable within one core institution.

All the abovementioned features of civilizational patterns have to do with the interpretation and organization of social power and thus with the institutional dimension in the broadest sense. Krejčí's disinclination to pursue that line of inquiry in a systematic way is probably not unrelated to the distinctly minor part of the Durkheimian tradition in his sociological research programme – especially when compared with the central role of the Weberian heritage. But if many aspects of the connections between cultural premises and social institutions remain unexplored, that is also due the particular turn taken by the analysis of the premises as such. Krejčí's interpretation of the ideas central to historical forms of life has far-reaching implications, but its potential is not fully realized. The world-views that set civilizational patterns apart from each other and lend consistency to them are defined, more precisely, as visions or paradigms of the human condition. But the English text prefers the more pointed term 'human predicament' (the Czech expression *lidský úděl* has broader connotations), and the reasons for that are clearly stated: the different paradigms are different responses to the inescapable evidence of mortality, divergent forms of the 'sense that people make of their life and death' (2004: 47). The most basic division is between the acceptance of mortality and the belief in some kind of immortality, but the latter alternative can take very different directions, depending on whether the destiny of the soul is decided by a personal god or an impersonal cosmic law. However, when it comes to the historical phenomenology of paradigms, the links to this logical scheme are far from obvious. According to Krejčí, a theocentric paradigm – defining humans as subordinates of the gods – is both more fundamental and more mutable than the others: it shaped the world-view of the earliest civilization (Mesopotamia) but spread far beyond its original borders, adapted to varying contexts and underwent major changes (including the monotheistic turn). Krejčí's account of these transformations is largely convincing, but it is less clear that this paradigm originated as a response to the perceived predicament of mortality. In the Mesopotamian traditions, the theocentric outlook did

not offer a very promising prospect of afterlife. Promises of immortality and salvation came to the fore in later versions of theocentrism, but not everywhere in the same way, and specific contents depended on broader frameworks of meaning. Other problems arise when we move on to major deviations from the theocentric paradigm. The culture and mentality of Ancient Egypt differ from the slightly older Mesopotamian tradition in ways more or less directly related to a distinctive vision of the human condition (the case of the two archaic civilizations and their contrasting spiritual profiles, related but clearly irreducible to differences in the material conditions of social life, may even have been the original source of reflection on visions of the human condition as formative cultural factors). Because of the uniquely strong focus on death as a transition to another life, Krejčí calls the Egyptian paradigm thanatocentric. But it was a modifying complement to the theocentric paradigm, rather than an alternative. Ancient Greece represents the first flowering of an anthropocentric paradigm; but however central the acceptance of human mortality was to the Greek view of life, the gods were still present, and human finitude was understood through the contrast to their immortality. If the relationship between gods and humans differed markedly from the Mesopotamian model, that was due to changes on both sides: the gods were adapted to an elusive but foundational vision of a cosmic order, whereas the invention of the *polis* opened up new dimensions of human life, both through the upgrading transformation of the political sphere and through cultural innovations that transcended it. The result was too complex to be subsumed under the generic formula of anthropocentrism.

As for the major civilizations on the eastern side of the Levant, Krejčí defines the dominant Indian approach to the human condition as psychocentrism: a focus on the soul as caught up in cycles of reincarnation and in quest of liberation. But, as he notes, the emphasis is less on the soul as such than on its involvement on different levels of an order of being, and on ultimate absorption at the highest level. A comparative view can, in this case, easily begin with the ideas of order, or with the tensions between visions of liberation and models of order (both themes figured prominently in Louis Dumont's analysis of India). The focus on order is even more pronounced in the Chinese tradition. Here Krejčí describes the dominant paradigm as 'cratocentric', centred on the state and on statist frameworks for social life. The extraordinary continuity and centrality of sacred rulership in Chinese imperial history seem to lend support to this view. But as other interpretations of the Chinese tradition have stressed, the image of the imperial centre was embedded in a symbolic order that encompassed both the natural and the social realm; some authors have therefore described the whole complex as cosmocentric. Reservations about both terms might be based on comparative reflections included in the Czech text (2002: 51–3), and briefly summarized in the English one (2004: 231–2). Although the world-views and mentalities of the two civilizational complexes in pre-Columbian America are much less well understood than those of the Eurasian macro-region, Krejčí proposes to add them to his list of paradigms. In Mesoamerica, it seems more appropriate than anywhere else to speak of a cosmocentric paradigm that subordinates both gods and

humans to a cyclic natural order; it underlies the ideology and practice of human sacrifice on a very unusual scale. It is more difficult to identify a common denominator for Andean civilizations, but at least the last stage, the Inca Empire, seems to have been characterized by an extremely thoroughgoing cratocentrism: it stands out among archaic states, through successful expansion as well as highly effective mechanisms of social control. However, if the categories of cosmocentrism and cratocentrism are applicable to archaic formations in the New World, it is by the same token problematic to use them for the cultural universe of Chinese traditions, where both the natural and the political order are transfigured through the imaginary signification of the Way. Once again, the need for further differentiation of the notion of order is evident. There is more to be said on all these issues. For present purposes, the main point to underline is that the idea of multiple (but not *ipso facto* mutually exclusive) perspectives on the human condition opens up a promising research program, which is then narrowed down by the *a priori* emphasis on the predicament of human mortality. It would seem more fruitful to move towards a broader horizon of human being-in-the-world, with proper allowance for the multi-dimensionality of human life and its settings. Within this expanded context, it will no longer be taken for granted that different ways of articulating and ordering the world lead to the same kind or level of concern with human mortality. Such an approach would, of course, involve a more philosophical twist to the comparative analysis of civilizations and the particular philosophical perspective most suited to this task is to be found in the tradition of hermeneutical phenomenology. Krejčí would obviously have reservations about that claim, but it seems a logical step to take in light of his own unfinished agenda.

3

One of the differences between the civilizational and the social-formational paradigm is that the former raises questions of collective identity that are not within the purview of the latter. But this does not lead directly to the issue of collective agency. Civilizations are not 'subjects of social action' (2004: 37); the discussion of that problematic must begin with what Krejčí calls 'geopolitical formations', i.e. states and nations, and the Czech text (2002: 233–46) is in this case much more detailed than the English one. Three aspects of the argument merit closer attention: (1) a distinctive conception of the much-discussed relationship between ethnic and political factors; (2) a long-term historical perspective on their changing interconnections; and (3) tentative guidelines for a comparison of European and non-European trajectories.

The reference to ethnic and political nations (2004: 38) is somewhat misleading: in fact, the questions to be discussed have to do with ethnic and political aspects of nationhood, and the variety of their historical combinations. Krejčí accepts Anthony Smith's case for the ethnic sources of national identity, but criticizes Smith for having tailored his model of ethnicity too one-sidedly

to ethno-religious formations, thus neglecting the more widespread ethno-linguistic ones. On the other side, the political aspect is not reducible to issues of citizenship; it involves the whole spectrum of interaction between the dynamics of state formation and the shaping of national identity. But when it comes to more concrete analyses, Krejčí prefers to shift from the dichotomy of ethnic and political determinants to a model that comprises four sets of factors (2002: 244–5). On the social-psychological level, a 'subjective consciousness of belonging' (2002: 245) marks the national dimension of collective identity. Cultural factors affecting the formation of identity include language, religion and the interpretive elaboration of historical experience (this category thus becomes largely coextensive with the ethnic side of the original dichotomy). Even in the case of nations commonly seen as primarily ethnic, the cultural component of their genealogy can only be understood in connection with political processes, and that applies *a fortiori* to more political nations. Finally, the territorial aspect of nationhood is often subsumed under either the ethnic or the political one, but Krejčí lists it as a separate point. The reasons for that are most obvious when geopolitical constellations combined with historical experiences result in nation formation without the more common ethnic background; Austria and Eritrea are two otherwise very different cases in point. But territorial aspects can also intertwine with strong ethnic ones, as in the case of diasporic nations.

This multi-dimensional conception of nationhood and nation formation makes it easier to come to grips with the problem of semantic divergences: as has often been noted, but not always remembered, key terms referring to this field do not mean the same things in different European languages. That can be explained as a reflection of different experiences with a complex problematic. The multi-dimensional model is also a suitable framework for the analysis of long-term trajectories and divergent paths: the different sets of factors can relate to each other in various ways, and the patterns of interaction evolve along different lines. European patterns of nation formation have been studied more extensively than any others. As Krejčí notes, they go back to the ethnogenetic processes that accompanied the transformation of the Roman world (anachronistic notions of them were central to later nationalist ideologies, but the justified critique of myths should not serve to rationalize the forgetting of history). However, he does not deal with medieval and early modern phases, nor does he relate the question of nation formation to the multi-secular processes of state formation first thematized by Norbert Elias. For Krejčí, the most important historical change to the relationship between states and nations resulted from the democratic transformation that began in the late eighteenth century: the politicization of the masses led to the mobilization of new collective actors, notably ethnic communities and classes. The former had a more decisive and durable impact on history – not because identities are bound to prevail over interests, but because the effect of identities on the understanding of interests is more significant than the reverse. The long-term outcome was a state system predominantly – but not completely – aligned with ethnic differentiation.

In the two Americas, European colonization gave a new direction to the interaction of ethnic and political factors. The resultant pattern differed markedly

from the European one. The 'emancipated colonial implantations' (2004: 41–2; Krejčí contrasts this category with the 'emancipated colonial acquisitions' in Africa) aim at creating nations. This does not mean that ethnicity is transcended once and for all (as mythologizing accounts of the American experience have claimed), but its role and significance differ from case to case, depending on the fate of the indigenous population, the dynamics of ongoing immigration from Europe, and the presence or absence of unfree African immigration before and after independence. Krejčí does not explicitly link developments on the two sides of the Atlantic to civilizational contexts; further discussion of that question might draw on Eisenstadt's interpretation of the two Americas as divergent transformations of European civilizational premises. Similarly, the analysis of ethnopolitical patterns in Asia (2002: 286–337) takes an implicit rather than explicit civilizational line. The emphasis is on a complex interplay of universal religions and their ambiguous impact on ethnogenetic processes (they gave rise to transethnic communities, but their heretic offshoots could boost local or tribal identities of the most particularistic kind), empires, indigenous traditions of statehood with a strong ethnic profile (particularly important in Southeast Asia) and the varying forms of direct or indirect Western rule.

4

Although the English text refers to revolutions in various contexts, there is hardly any systematic discussion of this topic, probably because it is treated at length in Krejčí's earlier publications. But the Czech text contains two chapters (2002: 175–231 and 347–418) which sum up earlier work in new ways and with significant additions. A closer look at this part of Krejčí's argument is no less rewarding than in the case of geopolitical formations. Three main aspects of his theory of revolutions should be distinguished.

First, he proposes a working definition (2002: 177–9). Revolutionary upheavals involve violent conflicts, ideological projects of alternative orders, and massive changes to political frameworks as well as to other ways of organizing and distributing social power; they unfold through successive phases and recurrent critical turns. This point is perhaps best understood as a generalization of the widely shared conclusion drawn by historians of the French Revolution: it should be seen as a century-long process that came to an end with the consolidation of the Third Republic around 1880. Some of Krejčí's examples cover a comparable span of time (for instance, the Iranian revolutionary process began with the 'constitutional revolution' at the beginning of the twentieth century), others take even longer, as in the case of the unfinished Chinese revolution. Second, the various classical explanations of revolutionary crises should be treated as empirical hypotheses, neither mutually exclusive nor invariably complementary; it takes concrete historical research to clarify their relevance to particular cases. The models to be tested range from Aristotle's emphasis on conflicting ideas of justice to Marx's conception of the class struggle and Weber's idea of inconsistent

stratification. Third, revolutions take place within geopolitical formations and are therefore most easily identifiable in terms of states and nations (we may note in passing that Krejčí does not devote much space to the theme of revolutions as episodes within processes of state formation), but they have civilizational implications and connections of different kinds, and it is the task of civilizational analysis to bring this aspect of the problematic to light. In the first instance, Krejčí distinguishes two types of revolutions: those with autonomous and innovative aspirations on a civilizational level, and those confined to a more local arena. But as will be seen, further distinctions can be made within each category, and civilizational perspectives apply at least to some cases in the second one.

Krejčí discusses three revolutions with global ramifications on a civilizational scale: the French, the Russian and the Chinese. The French Revolution is the most straightforward case: it represents a key episode in the internal mutation of the Western (or Euro-American) world. A civilization originally based on (but not restricted to) a specific version of the theocentric paradigm took an anthropocentric turn of an equally distinctive kind, and for Krejčí, the most significant aspect of the French Revolution was linked to the main trend of the overall mutation: the 'revolution of human rights' was, in the long run, more important than the accompanying transformations and redistributions of social power. The revolutionary breakthrough was not the only path to broader civilizational change. Innovations paving the way for the mutation had begun at an earlier stage and gathered momentum during the eighteenth century; in other parts of the Western world, the decisive shifts took different forms. But the French Revolution was the most spectacular turning-point and the most productive source of ideological projects that articulated and disputed the meaning of civilizational change. The other two cases are less clear-cut. Neither the Russian nor the Chinese revolution took place at the centre of a larger civilizational complex in transition. In both cases, the victorious revolutionary projects gave a temporary new identity to older civilizational formations in crisis while at the same time aspiring to present an alternative to the dominant Western civilizational model and striving to vindicate this claim in the international arena. Krejčí gives a clearer account of the Russian case than of the Chinese one. The regime that grew out of the Russian Revolution used the ideological language of a Western counterculture to reactivate – in a different setting and on a new institutional basis – the originally conservative vision of Russia as a distinctive and superior civilization. The Chinese version of Communism was a less coherent project: it had to assert its autonomy vis-à-vis the Soviet model by outbidding the latter on its own ground, but was at the same time less equipped to compete with the West and more disconnected from its indigenous imperial tradition. However, Krejčí's interpretation of this very unstable mixture also seems less convincing. It is, for example, quite impossible to agree with him when he claims that Mao Zedong was faithful to the utopian visions of the young Marx (2002: 224).

Four revolutions – the Turkish, the Iranian, the Japanese and the Mexican – are analysed and compared as cases of more local transformations. None of them gave rise to a distinctive civilizational project, but civilizational problems and

challenges were more often than not involved in the revolutionary processes. The comparison of Turkey and Iran is particularly rewarding, because these two Islamic societies responded to the economic, political and cultural challenges of the West in strikingly divergent ways; but although the respective outcomes at the beginning of the twentieth century are very different, unresolved issues and marginalized but resilient currents are in both cases visible enough to suggest further changes of course. In Japan, an ingenious and effective compromise between Westernizing and traditionalist forces was elaborated at an early stage (in the Meiji period) and proved capable of adjustment to changing political and economic conjunctures in the global arena. Finally, Krejčí sees the Mexican revolution as a case of crisis and upheaval on the social-formational level: it restructured the relationship between state and society after a long period of growing tensions and imbalances. But if we accept the idea that the Counter-Reformation became a civilizational matrix for Latin America, there may have been a civilizational side to the unusually sharp conflict between Church and state in revolutionary Mexico: this was a way of modifying the civilizational premises and exploring new paths.

5

Processes of nation formation and revolutionary transformation represent different types of social change. To conclude, we should therefore take another look at civilizations in their capacity as frameworks for change. Krejčí distinguishes internal and external patterns of civilizational change: mutations and renaissances (which always add something to the reactivated sources) fall into the first category, radiation, imposition and adaptation of models into the second (2002: 431–6). For present purposes, mutations – loosely defined as major reorientations of basic cultural premises, resulting from interpretive and reflective innovations, but not from coordinated efforts – are particularly important. The interest in mutations has been characteristic of civilizational analysis in general, both in the classical and the contemporary phase: the Weberian project of comparative history was, first and foremost, an attempt to understand the mutation that had brought European modernity into the world, and more recent work in the same vein is linked to the understanding of modernity as a new civilization. Moreover, Eisenstadt's analysis of mutations during the Axial Age has added a whole new problematic to comparative civilizational studies. Krejčí is, however, sceptical about the mutations that have been most central to the debate. Although he does not discuss the matter in detail, he obviously doubts that the search for a common denominator of 'axial' transformations across a spectrum of traditions centred – as he sees it – on different paradigms can make sense. He also suggests that if comparative historians of civilizations want to single out an example of trans-regional macro-cultural changes, they would be better advised to focus on religious developments across Eurasia from the beginning to the seventh century AD, culminating in the rise and expansion of Islam

(he uses the term 'religionization' to describe the partly parallel and partly interconnected tends at work during this period). He is similarly sceptical of mainstream claims about a modern breakthrough or transformation, so much so that he prefers not to invest the terms 'modernity" and 'modernization" with any strong theoretical content. There is, of course, no denying the radical and global changes during the second half of the second millennium AD; but Krejčí theorizes them as an intra-civilizational mutation, or more precisely one within a civilizational pedigree. The innovations were so momentous that it seems appropriate to speak of a new civilization, but its affiliation with the preceding one is of fundamental importance: for Krejčí, the crux of the matter is a massive shift towards anthropocentrism within a civilizational sequence whose theocentric (or ecclesiocentric) Christian phase had already been characterized by an anthropocentric admixture inherited from classical antiquity. He is strongly inclined to stress the central role of the evolving idea of human rights: 'Originally conceived as a corollary to the equality of human beings before God, its development (mutation) reached the stage where all different beliefs (or non-beliefs) in God are equal before human law' (2004: 24). But to describe the new formation as a 'civilization of human rights', as he repeatedly does, seems too narrow (and it concedes too much to the current self-image of the West). The whole problematic of human rights is better understood as one aspect of the complex and multi-directional field opened up by new visions of human autonomy. Krejčí's own account of 'the avenues of the new mutation' (2004: 174–222) clearly suggests a more multi-dimensional approach. A more differentiated perspective is also implicit in his view of utilitarianism as an alternative conception of human rights – that is the thrust of his reference to the new civilization as 'Kantian-Benthamite'. And a further shift in that direction is evident when he describes the same formation as having made 'the mundane aspects of life . . . the prime movers in the development of civilization' (2004: 226).

This broader background is essential to the understanding of the mutation that now seems to be in the making, and that may be anthropological rather than civilizational. It would not be the first of its kind. Krejčí agrees with those who see the emergence of civilization as an anthropological mutation. It was accompanied by two differentiating processes: one led to the formation of civilizations in the plural, the other resulted in cross-cultural trajectories that provide a basis for comparing these civilizations. Krejčí distinguishes 'the path of knowledge and know-how, the path of religion and rules of behavior, and the complex path of work, wealth, state and law' (2004: 226). The historical transformations of knowledge and meaning are, in other words, separable from the evolving structures of social power. It would be premature to speculate about differentiation within the new constellation now on the horizon. But the trends that have shaped the course of history over the last half-millennium – in particular, the cumulative growth of technically applicable knowledge and the successful 'bid to envelop the globe' – now seem to be culminating in such fundamental changes to the human condition that it would not be going to far to speak of another anthropological mutation. The vastly expanded control over external nature,

especially the minimization of distances, and the unprecedented abilities to interfere with human nature are changing our whole way of being-in-the-world. And as Krejčí adds, these changes have undermined the traditional pluralism of paradigms. Different visions of the human condition now have to coexist and communicate in a way never known before. The revolutionary attempt to transcend this predicament came to nothing (as Krejčí sees it, the failure of revolutionary alternatives can only be properly measured if we take their civilizational ambitions into account), and we are left with the problem of civilizational conflicts – but not of the Huntingtonian type. For Krejčí, the conflicts are vertical rather than horizontal: Westernized elites in non-Western societies and immigrants in Western societies are the cases in point.

Krejčí does not try to predict history. He expresses confidence in the capacity of Euro-American civilization to construct a new synthesis, but allows for the possibility that a new civilizational collectivity might take over. He is obviously not one of those who think that the new synthesis is alive and kicking in North America, waiting to be exported, and he makes no guesses about the identity of the alternative protagonists.

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