# Notes on Civilization

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The question is what criteria must a culture meet in order for it to be called a 'civilization' in the sense used by many historians, e.g. Western civilization.

## Shorter OED

*Civicism*: civic system; the principle that all citizens have equal rights and duties

*Civil:* of or belonging to citizens or community of citizens; orderly, well governed; civilized; educated; refined, sober, decent, gentle, humane

*Civility*: social order; good citizenship; secular quality

*Civilization*: the action or process of civilizing or of being civilized

*Civilize*: to make civil; to instruct in the arts of life; to enlighten and refine

I have left out those definitions which pertain strictly to legal matters, e.g. assimilation of the Common law to the civil law.

## Concept of a 'civilization'

Using all of the senses of the words above, we can arrive at the concept of a 'civilization'. It is quite clear that the major theme of, or conclusion to be drawn from these definitions is the following set of criteria:

1. a group or community

2. that lives according to a set of laws

3. which among other things, specifies equal rights and responsibilities,

4. where the group, well ordered or well governed for equality, decent and humane behaviour means citizens have equal access to available food and other resources

5. educates its people including some sense of wisdom ("enlighten"),

6. lives in peace and

7. appreciates beauty in all its forms.

1, 2 and 6 express the ideal of homonomy, sense of belonging [Emery F, 1977 and many publications since]

3 expresses the use of DP2 rather than DP1 or laissez-faire [Emery F, 1967; Emery & Emery, 1974 and many publications since]

4 expresses the ideal of humanity [Emery F, 1977 etc as above]

5 expresses the ideal of nurturance [Emery F, 1977 etc as above]

7 expresses the ideal of beauty [Emery F, 1977 etc as above]

While the above definitions do not specifically mention it, it is implicit in the terms "equal rights and duties" that the citizens have a say in devising the laws that they live

by. For example, a representative democracy (DP1) could not qualify as civilized because at any point in time, all of its citizens do not have equal right and duties as being a politician has become a career option with special privileges, and a representative democracy which did not require its citizens to vote would not qualify on two counts as its citizens have no duties at all. Such a representative democracy is the equivalent of laissez-faire at the level of governance and has the potential to crumble into dictatorship. The definitions, therefore, specify a participative democracy, one structured on DP2 [Emery F, Part III of Emery M, 1993; Emery F, 1989].

## What 'civilization' does not require

*Religion.* Note that "civility" specifically mentions "secular quality". This together with DP2 precludes a theocracy or any society in which religion is anything more than a private, individual belief system. Most religions demark some behaviours with associated rewards and punishments, thereby denying adherents the right to decide on the right behaviour for themselves. The rewards and punishments are of course control mechanisms and the number of successful demarcations can be used to assess the extent of power over other people and, therefore, the power of the church.

We would not expect individuals who lived in a civilized society as defined above to have any need for formal organized religion at all as they would have the perfect conditions for decision making. In other words, they would have control over all the parameters of decision making [Ackoff & Emery, 1972; Emery F, 1977 etc as above] and would feel no need to defer to some external authority.

Formal, organized religion is sharply distinguished from a sense of spirituality that falls under the ideal of beauty and is involved in the process of revitalization or re-creation. The spirituality inherent in the ideal of beauty has nothing to do with control of others and is given immediately by direct perception.

*Technological complexity.* Also note that none of the definitions conveys any sense of technological advancement. Machines of all forms are simply a means to an end and it is obvious that all machines and forms of technology are not equal in their costs and benefits. 'Marvels' of our technological prowess at communication appear to have done little to improve our ability to communicate face-to-face or negotiate conflict as quantity and quality of communication depends on the design principle underlying the relationships between the communicators [Emery & Emery, 1976; Emery M, 2004]. Television and computerized forms of communication are also implicated in advancing maladaptions such as dissociation and superficiality. [Emery M, 1986; Emery & Emery, 1979; Emery M, 2021]

Who would need a washing machine if there was no requirement to maintain a large store of clothes? Many extremely well adapted and long lasting cultures such as Inuit and Australian Aborigines had no need of washing machines but managed to live long healthy lives.

An argument can be mounted that many machines such as large agricultural planters and harvesters have only become necessary as we lost control of population growth. Essentially what we lost was the ecological knowledge that we needed to keep the human population in adaptive relation to the carrying capacity of the land. Behind this loss lies another, our knowledge that we are of the land and our substitution for it of our ownership of the land. This loss and substitution is the direct analogue of the design principles, where 'with or of the land' expresses DP2 and 'own

or above the land' expresses DP1. Such machines, therefore, are devised to compensate for our maladaptions and do nothing to redress the basic failings. They do not speak of our intelligence but only of our stupidity and arrogance.

Highly correlated with an advanced technologically based culture is an economically rich culture as measured by contemporary economics. This definition of 'rich' depends of course on monetary values and their equivalents. However, as economists such as David Korten (2009) have pointed out, money is not wealth. Chief Seattle also pointed out that after we have destroyed the planet, we will find that we can't eat money.

In recent years, there has been a rash of attempts to measure the human condition in terms other than the monetary; indices of human happiness, life satisfaction, quality etc. Almost inevitably they find that 'happiness' as a summary term bears little, no or a very skewed relationship to money. What people appear to value when they speak of happiness or quality of life is being richly embedded in a web of productive and satisfying relationships through which they can see the meaning in their lives, be purposeful, and get a sense of achievement along a path through life. Depending on the various measures built into these indices, they all appear to be centred on the 6 criteria and the opportunities for purposefulness, autonomy and homonomy and ideal seeking as above. Money simply doesn't feature.

The higher SES strata sometimes register higher levels of quality of life, sometimes not but generally, the conclusion seems to be that after a certain reasonably low level of economic attainment, additional money makes very little difference. Therefore, a 'civilization' also does not need to be economically rich. [I don't have time to look up all the refs here but there are plenty around.]

*Literacy*. Nor do these definitions implicate the necessity of literacy. Literacy has many benefits but it has also been realized by many that it has some unfortunate side effects. These include individualizing, dissociating and the decline of memory. Oral cultures were participative, celebratory and joyful and knowledge was maintained and transmitted through telling, 'story telling'. New knowledge is accumulated through meaningful learning where the acquisition of invariances is determined by direct perception. There are many references to oral and literary cultures in *Searching*, 1982 and 1999.


**The evolution or otherwise of 'civilization'.**

There are several texts such as Rianne Eisler's *The chalice and the blade* that document a lost planetary culture which fitted many of the above criteria for 'civilized'. Different analyses place the end of this culture at different points in antiquity  or much more recently.

However, there are still remnant populations of ancient hunter gatherer peoples practicing their cultures around the world. These ancient cultures certainly fit the criteria for a 'civilization' including DP2 at the governance level [e.g. Middleton & Tail, 1958 and many other relevant refs in *Searching* 1982, 1999].

Emery & Trist (1965) conceptualized social environments and identified their changing causal texture over human history. Work since then has put more meat on the bones Emery & Trist identified the case for both the Type II as the most adaptive option humans have ever tried and Type III as the destructive environment that ended

the Type II and ushered us into the race to ecological oblivion that we are currently running. Later work such as in *Searching* 1982 strengthened the case for Type II as active adaptive. In other words, the little pockets of ancient civilization we have left are the remnants of the Type II.

The critical distinguishing feature that Emery identified as making the break between the Type II and III was the change of widespread design principle from DP2 to DP1 in the West. Despite the fact that England and Europe for example had kings and queens before 1793, the great mass of ordinary people were free to organize their lives around DP2 and did so.

Only when the owners of the factories demanded that their systems be made reliable while consisting of unreliable parts was DP1 imported into the everyday lives of the commons. Thus were born the ancestors of the huge bureaucratic monsters that now dot our globalized economy and continue to compete for the Earth's finite and rapidly dwindling resources.

Since the introduction of widespread DP1 in the West, we have seen humanity on the downhill slide. The spiralling maladaptive effects of bureaucracy (DP1) (Emery M, 1993, p227) is only the tip of the iceberg. Let us briefly examine our current circumstances in the light of the criteria we extracted from the dictionary definitions:

1. *a group or community* [people are desperately trying to recreate a strong sense of community because rampant dissociation has seriously damaged it. Today it takes a massive disaster like the fires to bring it back from its latent state. We also have 'gangs' because many of our kids and minorities do not feel a sense of belonging any where else.]

2. *that lives according to a set of laws* [Superficiality appears to be the fastest growing passive maladaptions in our data. There is increasing disregard for the law and cultural conventions. That is resulting in growing individual, community and property damage as drunk kids on junk die in cars and elsewhere; hackers raid banks and NASA and anything they feel like, etc;. image is everything, care is nowhere. This is laissez-faire! ]

3. *which among other things, specifies equal rights and responsibilities* [Enough said. We are riddled by DP1 to the point where in North American literature, the words 'organization' or 'corporation' basically mean DP1. We now have a major educative task to do which is to let people know that there is an alternative to DP1. There are plenty of people now looking for DP2 but unfortunately not everybody is Fred Emery. So its up to us folks. ]

4. *where the group, well ordered or well governed for equality, decent and humane behaviour means citizens have equal access to available food and other resources* [This doesn't even happen in Oz let alone the rest of the world and at the level of the global community, equal access to food and resources is further away than ever before and as climate change kicks in with a vengeance, its all over Red Rover bar a miracle or two.]

5. *educates its people including some sense of wisdom ("enlighten"),* [As we discuss frequently, we despair at what is happening in the education system – another "Education Revolution", while the intellectual level and appreciation of our people sinks and sinks – its even called 'dumbing down' in case you don't understand the word 'intellectual'. As for wisdom, most our people are now so far away from direct experience and understanding of our continent

and ourselves on it, let alone the planet or the biosphere that its just not funny and yet we have so much living knowledge they can tap into. But structured the way we are, that is not about to happen without another much more fundamental revolution (think DP2).]

6. *lives in peace and* [this is sheer coincidence but the New Scientist of 4 July has an article entitled "The end of war' (Horgan, 2009). The great weight of evidence reviewed in this article supports the view that conflict and warfare are certainly not a necessary part of 'human nature' and cannot be explained by biology or genetics. For example, Douglas Fry identified 74 "non-warring cultures" including "nomadic hunter-gatherers such as the !Kung of Africa, Australian Aborigines and Inuit. These examples are crucial…because our ancestors are thought to have lived as nomadic hunter-gatherers from the emergence of the *Homo* lineage around 2 million years ago until the appearance of permanent settlements and agriculture less than 20,000 years ago. That time span constitutes more than 99 per cent of the evolutionary history of *Homo"* (p37). Sound familiar?

This is not to deny the existence of occasional individually based violence but "in band [i.e. group] society, no one likes a bully" and aggressive individuals are dealt with. "The first clear cut evidence of violence against groups as opposed to individuals appears about 14,000 years ago…War emerged when humans shifted from a nomadic existence to a settled one and was commonly tied to agriculture" (p37).

The article also documents the decline in warfare over the last 50 years, due in part to the increase of democracies from 20 to almost 100 around the world. *Please note that this is important data for the L22 as we still get people claiming there has been an increase in war.*

Among the other factors suggested as contributors to the decline of warfare are increasing life expectancy and the education and empowerment of women. However, more important than these and also proven with chimps and other primates are high interdependence and equality including for primates, equal access to food. In other words, inequality (DP1) leads to conflict and war, equality (DP2) leads to cooperation and peace. Global warming is seen as a threat to peace and two proposed keys to continued peace are "population control and cheap, clean, reliable alternatives to fossil fuels. Promoting the spread of participatory democracy clearly wouldn't hurt either" (p39).

I doubt that any of the people quoted in this article would have heard of OST which makes the parallels with the Type II environment more striking.]

7. *appreciates beauty in all its forms*. [unfortunately all our L22 data from the early 1979 study (Emery & Emery, 1979) to the more recent collection documents the paucity of the ideal of beauty and the escalation of the passive maladaption of superficiality.]

All this adds up to the fact that our current circumstances really do not deserve the adjective 'civilized'. Although we do better under representative democracy than pure autocracy, our culture is showing serious maladaptions and is crucially lacking strength in many of the criteria that can be drawn from the meaning of the terms 'civilized' and 'civilization'.

This analysis also means that many of the criteria you mentioned such as 'society is structured by a class or caste system; bureaucracy, etc' or the social dynamics of motivation to power and wealth, are not applicable to a 'civilization' as they are based on DP1 rather than DP2. Motivations to spirituality, erudition, high manual and intellectual skill and artistry and athletic prowess would qualify as they can be fitted within the framework outlined above.

Criteria such as subject to the rule of law and government requiring obedience to common norms with systems or rewards and punishments would apply but would need to be qualified by the addition of the forms of rule and governance. Public infrastructures such as rail, fuel and energy services, rates and taxes, military service are all irrelevant as they pertain to technological and economic externalities, none of which is central to the notion of 'civilized'.

Number 6, 'social systems obtain their synergy through open or closed systems' misses the point as there is no such thing as a closed system and those systems that function as if they are closed are synergy destroying rather than synergy generating. All of our recent survey data measuring cooperation and other signs of synergy show that it is only in open DP2 systems that high and sustained levels of these characteristics can be maintained. The effort involved in trying to maintain these characteristics in DP1 systems is debilitating resulting in high levels of negative affect and mental and physical illness (deGuerre et al, 2007, 2008).

**In conclusion**

To sum it all up, we can see that use of the word 'civilization' to describe a technologically advanced and complex cultures such as our own is an aberration. We are a long way from being a genuine civilization. This is of course the problem with relying on generic concepts, words, nouns, names and labels. It leads to nonsense. As Humpty Dumpty said "words mean what I want them to mean'.

To escape from this verbiage it is necessary to move to serial genetic concepts. I suggest that rather than struggle with the word 'civilization' you would be better able to make a firm case by substituting the concept of active adaptation for civilization. Active adaptation is functional and precise, is based on directive correlation and can be measured. It is a centre point of a large coherent body of theory that has stood the test of time and is supported by a wide range of empirical data.

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