



The Philosophy of Civilization: The Decay & the Restoration of Civilization/Civilization & Ethics

Albert Schweitzer, C.T. Campion

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Albert Schweitzer's social and ethical philosophy is best expressed in The Philosophy of Civilization. Not widely available in recent years, this edition will give contemporary readers the opportunity to discover his prophetic thought.

In Book I, The Decay and Restoration of Civilization, Schweitzer argues that the essential feature of every culture is its world view, and that a culture can be healthy and stable only as its world view is optimistic and ethical. Without this outlook, it is impossible to avoid the world's destruction.

In Book II, Civilization and Ethics, he reviews the world's major ethical systems in search of the essential principle of "the moral," after which the world and life-affirming ethic of "reverence for life" is set forth. Through Schweitzer's guidance, man will strive for spiritual and ethical self-fulfillment which in turn may be actualized in all the processes of the world, making us a truly civilized people. Schweitzer's ultimate goal is to help us recognize that the source of universal misery and catastrophe is the absence of a theory of the universe.

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Kurt says

It took me a while to read this and I've been thinking about how to review it.

It was translated from German to English in something like 1932. The translator himself said that he simply meant to accurately translate the meaning of the original words. He made no attempt to strive for clarity and, in many ways, that showed.

I know nothing of German, but my guess is that compound words are much easier in that language and more commonplace because Dr. Schweitzer made very liberal use of them. This made it rather hard to understand.

To just outline the contents of the book it goes like this:

- explanation of Schweitzer's ethical philosophy
- critique of all previous ethical philosophies
- explanation of Schweitzer's ethical philosophy

So, the middle is the hardest part to get through, though I did get through it and learned a whole lot about philosophy as a whole. He used lots of names (upwards of 100) and seemed to know them all pretty well. But phrases like world- and life-negation, world- and life affirmation, optimistic-ethical, world-view, life-view made it difficult, especially when there were multiple ones in each sentence. You got the feeling he understood what he was talking about, but explaining it wasn't as easy. But this all went away when he talked about civilization, the will-to-live, and reverence for life. These parts of the book (in the beginning and the end) were really beautiful and life-changing and are probably some of the best words written by anyone on anything ever. You got the sense that all these problems in philosophy were finally being solved and not just a feigned solution. They were really being solved.

I'll never forget this book. I share a connection with this work like nothing I could ever adequately explain. Part of me feels a sort of spiritual connection to him as a human being. We are the only 2 people to have ever talked about these issues like this; I having done so before I ever knew of his existence. He said it best: "Through reverence for life, we become, in effect, different persons."

Well, in this case, reverence for life has made us similar persons. Our intense humanistic (and animarchistic, though he had never heard that word) biophilia similarized our minds to the extent that it was sometimes difficult to tell them apart.

I am in awe, doctor.

The only reason I have given this 4 stars and not 5 is because of the difficult middle portion, but that probably has more to do with the translator than anything else. A new translation is definitely needed. *The Philosophy of Civilization* is a woefully under-appreciated work of art and philosophy. He gave us the recipe for everlasting peace. I am convinced that future generations will look back on him as the man who started it all; one of the greatest minds in human history; this being his magnum opus.

Save up an appetite for this and then consume it with a ravenousness. It's a large meal, but it's delicious.
