

THE STORY OF CIVILIZATION

OUR ORIENTAL HERITAGE

Will Durant, 1935

To give you a sense of the kind of story Quinn opposes, here is the introduction to the famous 10-volume history of civilization by Will Durant.

The Establishment of Civilization

*"I want to know what were the steps by which men passed from barbarism to civilization."
--Voltaire.*

Civilization is social order promoting cultural creation. Four elements constitute it: economic provision, political organization, moral traditions, and the pursuit of knowledge and the arts. It begins where chaos and security end. For when fear is overcome, curiosity and constructiveness are free, and man passes by natural impulse towards the understanding and embellishment of life. . . .

Culture suggests agriculture, but civilization suggests the city. . . .

Civilizations are the generations of the racial soul. As family-rearing, and then writing, bound the generations together, handing down the lore of the dying to the young, so print and commerce and a thousand ways of communication may bind the civilizations together, and preserve for future cultures all that is of value for them in our own. Let us, before we die, gather up our heritage, and offer it to our children.

The Economic Elements of Civilization

In one important sense, the "savage," too, is civilized, for he carefully transmits to his children the heritage of the tribe--that complex of economic, political, mental and moral habits and institutions which it has developed in its efforts to maintain and enjoy itself on the earth. It is impossible to be scientific here; for in calling other human beings "savage" or "barbarous" we may be expressing no objective fact, but only our fierce fondness for ourselves, and our timid shyness in the presence of alien ways. Doubtless we underestimate these simple peoples, who have so much to teach us in hospitality and morals; if we list the bases and constituents of civilization, we shall find that the naked nations invented or arrived at all but one of them, and left nothing for us to add except embellishments and writing. Perhaps they, too, were once civilized, and desisted from it as a nuisance. . . . Preferably we shall call "primitive" all tribes that make little or no provision for unproductive days, and little or no use of writing. In contrast, the civilized may be defined as literate providers.

[Durant's history thus begins about 6000 years ago with the story of Sumeria.]