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Mark Nathan Cohen. *Health and the Rise of Civilization*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989. x + 285 pp.

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Clendinnen concludes that what characterized Spanish-Maya contact most was a lack of mutual understanding. Although undoubtedly true, this conclusion may also be a reflection of how far our understanding of pre- and post-contact Maya society has to go. This book does not take us as far as it might have, but its theories, synthesis and accessibility make it a worthwhile contribution nevertheless.

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Mark Nathan Cohen. *Health and the Rise of Civilization*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989. x + 285 pp.

With the dangers of environmental catastrophe becoming more apparent everyday, increasing scholarly attention has been paid to humanity's long standing ecological difficulties. Connections between scarcity of food resources, transformations in social organization, and changing patterns of disease have led a growing number of scholars representing a diversity of fields to revise previous assumptions related to the so-called rise of civilization. The process gained momentum in the 1960s with a group of anthropologists claiming that contrary to the barbarian stereotype of hunters and gatherers, this earliest form of human organization was actually the original "affluent" society. From the revisionist perspective it was civilization that was somehow aberrant in this behavior and detrimental to subtle ecological relationships.

In light of these revised assumptions about civilization and its presumed march towards progress, Mark Nathan Cohen has written a book that attempts to address questions concerning changes in the quality of life for humans, historic and prehistoric. Specifically, Cohen's interest is how changes in human behavior wrought by transformations in social organization have affected human health. Cohen uses a broad stroke to demonstrate how all forms of human organization are intricately bound by overriding ecological considerations. The transition from hunting and gathering to sedentary agriculture is an acute expression of human depletions of formerly abundant big game food supplies. Cohen shows how the Neolithic revolution, which led to the repeated rise of civilization

in varied parts of the world, increased the necessity for greater complexity while simultaneously eroding powerful informal bonds of small-scale social organization. Civilization according to Cohen is the set of structures which hold these forms of social organization intact.

While rejecting the affluent "Eden" interpretation of hunters and gatherers, Cohen demonstrates shortcomings in the claim that the agricultural revolution somehow reduced ecological stress on human populations. An archaeologist by training, the author shows how skeletal remains are used to draw conclusions concerning the quality of life at a given moment in time. It appears that while food and disease pressures may have been alleviated for the privileged few, the class divisions necessary to support an agrarian culture "partitioned" stress on the less fortunate laboring classes. Many of civilization's ill-effects—malnutrition, disease, crime—came to affect certain classes more severely. These insights, to many, come as no surprise.

Civilization has long been discontented by varying degrees of inequality amongst its inhabitants. Cohen's book grounds these conclusions in a convincing archaeological account of the agricultural transition. In fact, Cohen argues that one of the most salient features of civilization—especially late modern civilization—is its repeated success in re-partitioning stress to these groups. Early civilization had only local classes for purposes of redistributing ecological stress; more ominously modern civilization has those plus an abundant underdeveloped world at its disposal.

The questions raised in Cohen's provocative work are not always satisfactorily addressed by the methods he imposes. The broad multi-disciplinary approach which the author uses throughout his work is of necessity heavily dependent upon the synthesis of secondary data derived from fields for which Cohen has little expertise. Admitting in the Preface that he cannot do justice to many of the fields he has chosen to support his thesis, the author nevertheless contends that when imperfect techniques of varying disciplines produce similar results, then it is time to take notice of those conclusions in an attempt to reconstruct patterns of human existence extending back into prehistory.

Far under utilized are the perspectives of geography and history in the book. Cohen assumes that all civilizations have displayed more or less equal tendencies to overwhelm small-scale societies. His chapter on the evolution of human society reads like a blueprint for such process.

Yet too infrequently does Cohen differentiate amongst these civilized societies. The addition of geographical and historical approaches may have added an important dimension to the work which could address the crucial question of European ascendancy at the expense of a number of other civilizations. The dominance of the Europeans over Mesoamerican and Andean civilizations is one of the most obvious omissions. The works of William McNeill (1976) and Alfred Crosby (1872, 1986), in particular, are good starting points in helping us see the relationships between history and ecology. As these studies demonstrate the particularities of history and place-specific ecology matter much in accounting for the structures of modern civilization.

The multidisciplinary approach has for Cohen an additional benefit: individual disciplines often take for granted certain assumptions which if posed as questions might otherwise prove to be embarrassingly revealing. The author is seeking to challenge those assumptions; but more importantly he wishes to implicitly challenge the assumption of progress as a necessary outcome of civilization. For those of us concerned with questions of underdevelopment, this is a particularly relevant undertaking. It is almost second nature for underdevelopment specialists to raise a question like: Progress for whom and at whose expense? Yet for colleagues in other fields these kinds of questions may never surface. Cohen's book attempts to build bridges to these other fields so that a more dynamic understanding of the immense problem of managing global life support systems becomes possible. For this challenge alone, in light of the ecological sword of Damocles hanging over us, Cohen's book is worthy of our attention.

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Arturo Cruz Jr., *Memoirs Of A Counterrevolutionary. Life With the Contras, The Sandinistas, and The CIA*. New York: Doubleday, 1989 xvi + 267 pp.

In its first decade the Sandinista revolution has spawned a burgeoning number of books on long-neglected Nicaragua, from in-depth