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Book review:

Akop P. Nazaretyan, *Anthropology of violence and culture of self-organization. Essays in evolutionary historical psychology*, 2nd edition, Moscow, URSS, 2008, 256 pages (in Russian)

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The Russian psychologist, cultural anthropologist and philosopher Akop P. Nazaretyan explores the study of the evolution of social violence/non-violence in the course of human history. From his book we can see how technological developments impelled humans to substitute successively violent methods of control and management with more refined ones including economic influence.

The models of sustainable non-equilibrium, system theory and chaos theory are applied to synthesize heterogeneous data from natural sciences and humanities. Nazaretyan claims that the fact of humankind's continued existence carries a certain paradox: since its very origin, the *Homo* genus has infringed upon a number of natural balances and conditions for survival. The humankind has been increasingly interfering with natural boundaries and it was more than once on the verge of irreversible self-destruction. To the extent that we understand by what means our far and near ancestors could have repeatedly overcome the situations of dramatically lowered sustainability, the author adds, we enlarge the chances to anticipate the crises and restore sustainability in future.

In the first chapter "*Aggression and its boundaries in nature*", the author develops a general concept of aggression as a substantial vital factor and indicates psychological differences between inter-species and intra-species aggression. He surveys how multilateral balances of aggression and aggression-retention are established, how this entails drawing up the ecological systems with circular energy flow, regular crises and evolution of animals' intelligence as an instrument of competition for free energy, and how the symptoms of "malignant aggression" appear in the wild nature.

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The second chapter "*Premises and regulation of social violence*" tells us a story (certainly, a rather hypothetical one) of disturbance in the natural aggression/retention balance at the initial stage of anthropogenesis and first artificial boundaries produced by proto-culture to furnish viability of hominid groups. Universal regularities, hypotheses and calculations are presented in this chapter that gives us an integral view of human history as a single and dramatic successive process with a set of interconnected evolutionary vectors. One is the development of non-violent mechanisms in social relations as consecutive responses to the challenges provoked by the growing human capacity of energy flow manipulations.

The general assumptions are illustrated in details in the third chapter "*Culture of self-organization. Qualitative leaps in the development of humankind*". Here, we find full-length causal analysis of the anthropogenic crises and complex revolutions in technology, economy, social organizations and psychology from the Paleolithic until today. The chapter ends with new generalizations and conclusions that drive us to some prognostic assumptions.

The fourth chapter "*The sweet Siren of the Future*" concludes the book. The author traces short-term and long-term scenarios for the Earth civilization and designs the conditions for its further survival proceeding from the patterns of evolution described previously.

A universal portrayal traced in the book looks like the following.

Since *Homo habilis* of the Olduvai Cave started to make tools, they have once and for ever interfered with the ethological balance, which sustains viability of animal populations: proportional development of natural weapons and instinctive intra-species aggression inhibition. This "chimerical" species combined strong killing facilities (sharp choppers) with psychology of harmless animals lacking natural weapons and accordingly, adequate instinctive ban on killing conspecifics either. This combination doomed them to self-extermination, like a flock of "doves with hawk's beaks" [1].

What could have saved the first tool-makers from extinction and helped them start a new spire in the Earth evolution? Having confronted the data from anthropology, archeology, ethnography, zoo- and neuro-psychology, the author hypothesizes that the initial artificial aggression inhibition was concerned with a pathological shift in their mind: proto-humans acquired neurotic fear of the dead. This, on the one hand, restrained mutual killings within the group and on the

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other, motivated care for the sick and cripples, first archeological evidence of which refer to the Lower Paleolithic. From there on, the hominids had no natural guaranties of their existence any longer. Instead of instinctive aggression/inhibition equilibrium, a new cultural mechanism furnished the shifting levels of social system's sustainability. Having investigated multiple man-made crises and catastrophes in various historical epochs, the author finds a regular correlation between three variables: technological potential, quality of cultural behavior regulation and internal sustainability of social system. He calls it *the law of techno-humanitarian balance*. *the higher the power of production and war technologies, the more advanced behavior regulation means are required to enable the self-preservation of a society*.

A formal apparatus of this pattern demonstrates that more powerful technologies ensure higher external sustainability – the social system's independence from spontaneous natural or geopolitical habitat fluctuations. At the same time, it becomes more vulnerable to the internal ones, i.e. mass and individual emotional states etc. unless grown instrumental opportunities are compensated by correspondingly enhanced values, norms and mass consciousness. However, in fact instrumental/regulative disparity usually entails mass euphoria sense of omnipotence and permissiveness, an irrational desire of “small victorious wars” (p.67) and expanding domination over natural habitat or neighboring communities. This social-psychological syndrome pushes society to unrestrained extensive growth, which sooner or later, destructs its natural and/or geopolitical background. The author demonstrates that this was the scenario of crack and decay in many oases of civilization in all the geographical regions and at all phases of the human history.

The book describes seven crucial episodes from the Lower Paleolithic until today, which are qualified as “optimistic tragedies” (p.109). In certain cases, when an anthropogenic crisis involved vast regions with high cultural diversity, its inhabitants managed to find a radical way out of the evolutionary deadlock. These have been the turning points in panhuman history, for each time they required obvious shifts in technologies, social organization, individual and collective mind and value systems. The law of techno-humanitarian balance has been playing the role of social selection mechanism, which successively discarded social groups with imbalanced aggression. Akop Nazaretyan claims it is thanks to this mechanism that *Homo* genus has yet escaped direct or indirect self-destruction in spite of progressively growing technological might.

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To test this hypothesis, the author considers its non-trivial corollaries, and some calculation results look surprising indeed. Thus, an original comparative index Bloodshed Ratio (*BR*) is introduced – a ratio of the average number of killings per time unit to the population size, – which helps to observe the long-term historical dynamics in social violence. It shows that while weapons' destructive power and population densities have been successively growing up in the course of millennia, violence death rate was irregularly decreasing. Current fears of “growing violence in the world”, the author says, are due to our unprecedented sensibility and intolerance to violence and besides, to very high cost of violence (developed destructive potential makes local conflicts fraught of global consequences); whereas in fact, current level of violence, both in policy and everyday life is considerably lower than in any previous epoch.

Historically constraining physical violence does not mean that the humans have been turning “less aggressive” in the course of time; on the contrary, concentration is a bio-psychological factor of growing aggressiveness, and developing technologies gave new opportunities for multiple killings. Still, deadly threats for social system because of repeated power/wisdom disparities made the cultures progressively diversify, improve and select creative mechanisms of aggression-sublimation.

The economic factors were among most effective instruments of social compulsion, which could consecutively push aside primitive physical violence at successive stages of history. This strategic trend began in the Neolithic, when the first “society – nature partnership” gave rise to the food production: humans started to construct agrocenosis instead of one-sided appropriation of the natural product by the hunter-gatherers (as far as quick development of the “hunter automation” had become, according to Nazaretyan, a factor of global extinction of mega-fauna and global ecological crisis). Social projection of this new attitude was collective exploitation (and defense) of the agricultural communities by the “warrior” ones, which supplanted typical cannibalism and genocide of the Paleolithic, and formation of multicommunity chiefdoms.

While surveying how human culture and psychology adjust to developing technologies, the author indicates a psychological discrimination between the concepts of “menace” and “danger” (p.193): menace is any factor that can damage the actor's interests, and danger is the magnitude, which reflects the relation of menace to the actor's readiness to withstand it. Thus, any new technology, military

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or productive, usually carries potential menace and danger of extensive destructions as long as adequate attitudes have not developed. It prospectively entails catastrophes and dramatic selective processes – the phase of cultural-psychological *fitting*. During this phase, the appropriate common understanding and sense of menace arises. After the fitting phase is completed and collective mind and behavior respond to the new challenge, most destructive technologies cease to be deadly dangerous for society, and moreover, they turn to be life-protecting factors. After that (but only after that!), the more potentially destructive a weapon is the less destructive effects it really causes.

Akop Nazaretyan suggests that the technologies, which half a century ago really threatened with self-extermination of the Earth civilization, have lost their danger because the politicians, governments, producers and the masses developed adequate sense of menace. Nuclear weapons contributed to save our world from a global hot conflict between the super-states, and their appearance has stopped armed conflicts in the China – Taiwan and India – Pakistan cases.

Intercontinental missiles made the governments understand the global threats and stimulated considerable changes in political mentality (the same way the fire-arms, steel weapons, bronze weapons or arrows had done it in respective epochs). The banning of nuclear tests and other global treaties, which were not aimed against common enemies made the planet relatively safer in certain respects. Comparative appraisals demonstrate that had the activities of humankind remained so “ecologically dirty” as they were in the middle of the 20th century, life on Earth should have become unbearable already in the 1990s.

From there, Akop Nazaretyan infers a very risky statement: actually the appeals for nuclear and other disarmament are nothing but political rhetoric, mostly counterproductive, which distracts our attention from the real global threats. The strategic overcoming power/regulation disparities has always been not reduction of the instrumental intelligence to the level of humanitarian intelligence (eliminating the advanced technologies of war or production served sometimes as local provisional measures, not more) but *vice versa*, elevation of the humanitarian intelligence to the level of technological might. In other words, human society has been reestablishing its sustainability by means of learning to live with more and more potential technologies and progressively fit the ability of aggression sublimation to growing instrumental opportunities.

Still, the author says, the fact that humanity has been able to survive up to our time does not guarantee its further existence: the same techno-humanitarian

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balance pattern provides the scenarios of final planetary self-destruction. It is not the "classical" ballistic weapons that make the problem today, as far as modern political mentality looks adequately "fitted" to this menace. But the century of weapons of mass destruction is giving place to the century of "knowledge of mass destruction". Most sophisticated arms like mini-bombs, nanotechnologies, robot techniques or genetic engineering turn increasingly cheaper and more available for separate plotters in the context of enlarging mass access to education and information.

From calculations made by the Australian and Russian scientists that demonstrate hyperbolic/power-law ("logarithmic") acceleration of the evolutionary processes involving all the biospheric and social stages, we find out that in the next decades, a dramatic phase transition – either a collapse of the Earth civilization or perhaps cosmic stage in its history – will take place. From there, the author suggests that the next human generation will define whether our planet's civilization breaks through into the cosmic development or remains among the universal losers... Note that our own research does not support such "Doomsday" interpretation of the singularity effects. It rather indicates that the above-mentioned phase transition is taking place just now; it started in the late 18th century and is likely to be completed in the forthcoming decades [2].

Endnotes

[1] Nazaretyan A.P. (2005) "Fear of the dead as a factor in social self-organization", *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 35:2, 155-169.

[2] For mathematical models describing both the World System development in the blow-up regime and its present-day withdrawal from the blow-up regime see Korotayev, A., A. Malkov, and D. Khaltourina, *Introduction to Social Macrodynamics: Compact Macromodels of the World System Growth*, Moscow, URSS, 2006, 67–86.

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