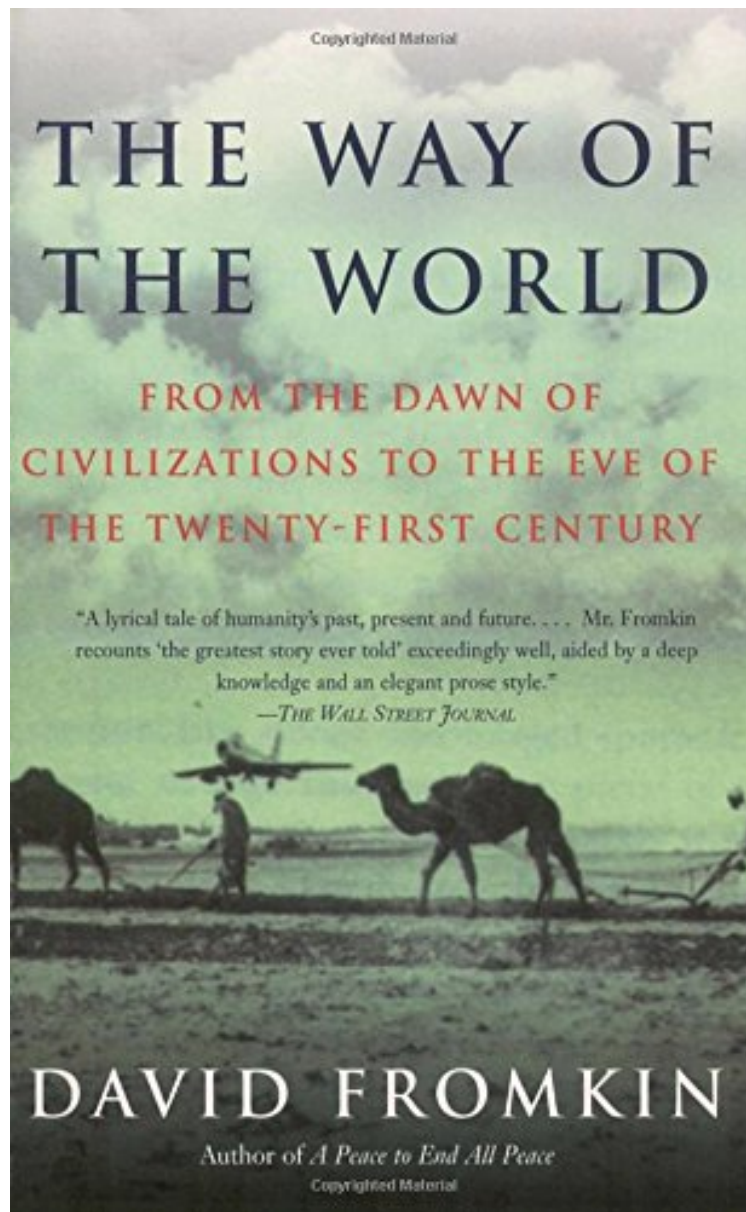


The Way of the World: From the Dawn of Civilizations to the Eve of the Twenty-first Century

David Fromkin

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David Fromkin : The Way of the World: From the Dawn of Civilizations to the Eve of the Twenty-first Century before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Way of the World: From the Dawn of Civilizations to the Eve of the Twenty-first Century:

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Thoughtful Review of History By Alan Dale Daniel The author attempts the near impossible: to summarize world history in a quick easy to read volume. What is interesting is the author manages to reach the goal. I have read a very large number of history books, but I have seldom read one so pithy. The author hits home again and again with thoughtful summarizing concepts that attempt to put history into a larger perspective - one that pulls history together in a comprehensible fashion. The book manages to show how the beginnings of history tie into the present. I recommend this book to anyone interested in history, and especially those who want to know how all these seemingly unrelated facts and events fit together. One can decide the framework does not really fit the facts, but it is undeniable the framework pulls the facts together in a cogent way. A way that makes history approachable and interesting. A thought provoking book. A must read for any history enthusiast. 32 of 34 people found the following review helpful. The March of Progress? By Omer Belsky David Fromkin goes out in search of a useable past. Nor would he, I think, shy away from that description. He starts 'The Way of the World' with a description of a shaman "clad in bear skin" and a tale in front of the fire, telling the tribes people where they have come from and where they are heading. Fromkin's avowed purpose is to do the same for a Modern audience (p.3) Fromkin was nominated for a Pulitzer for 'A Peace to End All Peace', the story of bravery and folly at the birth of the modern Middle East. In it, he demonstrated considerable writing skills, original thought, and enormous amount of research. Only the first of these qualities is also apparent in 'The Way of the World'. The prose is even better this time around - but unfortunately, the other elements that made 'A Peace to End All Peace' into a near classic are missing. 'The Way of All World' seems to be based on fairly well known secondary sources. That's not necessary a bad thing, but you can feel that Fromkin is not as conversant about, say, Vasco da Gama's voyages, as he was about British Middle East policies in the 1920s. Lack of originality in research can also be made up for in original thinking, but although Fromkin's analysis is insightful and clever it is hardly unique. The first two parts of the book are a short history of mankind, the first chapter is about the biological evolution of homo sapiens (a well written account, drawing on such popular science books as Richard Dawkins's River Out of Eden), and the second one about pre history. Then we get two chapters on ancient civilizations, before Fromkin decides to narrow his scope and look at Western History, from the Roman Empire to the modern day. Fromkin's is a not a very original account; although it is a break with some traditional views of European history (the Reformation is mentioned in all of four pages), it is consistent with the themes of recent books about the rise of the West, such as David Landes's 'The Wealth and Poverty of Nations'. Like Landes, Fromkin sees a triumph of the West ("the history of the modern world can be seen as the tale of how, out of the many civilizations that flourished in the year 1000, all but one succumbed in the course of the next thousand years" p. 87) caused by a 'scientific. technological and industrial revolution' (ibid). Unlike Landes, Fromkin all but ignores the importance of politics and capitalism (mentioned only 3 times in the index) to rise of European Civilization. The third part of the book, in which Fromkin attempts to draw conclusions about the Future leaves much to be desired. Unlike Alexis de Tocqueville, whom Fromkin lionizes, Fromkin is too cautious to make predictions. He says that, at least in the beginning of the twenty first century, America will still be the most powerful country, but that is near obvious. Other predictions are equally self evident, even handed, and safe "... a central question in the politics of the twenty first century throughout the world will be the tension between holding together and pulling apart: between the centripetal pull of a modern global economy that requires regional and planetary organization, and the centrifugal push of atavistic tribalism" (p. 188). Some six years on, it is clear that this book was published during the Clinton years. Much in the last few chapters is a hymn to American values, in particular democracy, environmentalism, secularism and multilateralism. For a liberal such as me, the importance of these values is self evident (although it should not go unquestioned). But is George W Bush's America really the best champion of these values? Fromkin's seems oblivious to the undercurrents of American life that goes in directions opposite to the ones he champions. He discusses Woodrow Wilson's League of Nation as an embodiment of American values in International Relations. But his book is missing one crucial name: Henry Cabot Lodge, who stopped the US from entering the league of nation. As a world leader, the United States does embody values of freedom, secularism and multilateralism. But it also has values which are unilateral, imperialistic, protectionist and isolationist. A safe prediction is that the world will be shaped significantly by the US decision of which of these sets of values, or which combination thereof, it will pursue in the 21st century. 12 of 13 people found the following review helpful. History of the World as a Poem By Mitch Orfuss For those who occasionally like their history in the largest of big-picture perspectives, this is the book to read next. No wasted words or ideas--a kind of poem. I found it thrilling. Fromkin's ability to communicate what could well be the great themes in the story of the world is stunning. You finish the book feeling as if you've just sat through a Greek Tragedy--purged of fear and pity, in a heightened state of wonder. Nothing trivial gets in the way of "The Way of thre World." You've been told the story as if from God's perspective. A great, great book. I'd like to go on and read everything David Fromkin has written.

"Ambitious.... The truth is that Fromkin's outline is persuasively thought out and presented."--The Washington Post Book World As the human race approaches the 21st century, questions of our past trouble us as much as those that concern our future. How did we get here? Where--and how--did Homo sapiens originate? How did we, precariously

bipedal, come to dominate the animal kingdom, direct the flow of the Euphrates, fly a rocket to the moon? David Fromkin, author of *A Peace to End All Peace* and finalist for both the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Critic Circle Award, provides an arrestingly cogent answer in *The Way of the World*. With insight and sound scholarship, he reveals how human culture has evolved according to the principles of self-determination--from the footsteps of the first hominids 3.5 million years ago to the efforts of contemporary democracies' to establish a global, lasting peace. Here is a world history wherein early forms of Christianity give way to rationalism, the tyranny of kings crumbles to the merits of representative government, and modern science presents us with the master key to the future. Refreshingly positive, David Fromkin reminds us of the astounding record of human achievement, and the potential in each of us to improve the way of our world. "Mr. Fromkin recounts 'the greatest story ever told' exceedingly well, aided by a deep knowledge and an elegant prose style."--*The Wall Street Journal* "The Way of the World is worldly, civilized, genial."--*The Boston Globe*

.com Historians and philosophers of history have long debated whether the human story is one of constant improvement and progress, or whether history is instead a wheel that leads us again and again to the same place--the same choices, the same errors. To judge by this slender volume, David Fromkin is an unabashed partisan of the first school. In his view, the logic of history leads to "the only civilization still surviving, the scientific one of the modern world," the civilization of capitalism and technology. That view is, of course, arguable, but Fromkin defends it ably and intelligently. General readers will be more interested in Fromkin's overview of world history, a fast-forward tour of the evolution of civilization from a simple congeries of agriculturalists, as in Sumer, to a collectivity of peoples interested in such ideals as morality and peacemaking. Fromkin's whirlwind approach is sometimes vexing--he treats, for instance, the fall of Rome in just a few sentences, ignoring generations of scholarly inquiry on the multiple causes of that decline--but it nonetheless yields a spirited synthesis of past events and patterns. Fromkin closes by remarking that although the future may promise "a nightmare of nationalist, religious, and language-group wars," the worldwide adoption of an American-style federalism that transcends such distinctions is a more attractive possibility. "For all its faults," he writes, "the American way may prove to be the only viable one to deal with the consequences of the modernizing revolution. If so, the world is in luck, for continuing American leadership, like it or not, seems to be what the world has got." --Gregory McNamee
From Publishers Weekly
As its subtitle indicates, this is a broad, ambitious work. Boston University historian Fromkin (*A Peace to End All Peace*) guides readers on a whirlwind journey from the dawn of time to the present, touching on subjects as wide-ranging as Jane Goodall's observations of chimpanzees, Pizarro's conquest of Peru and Thomas Edison's ingenious inventions. The main subject is human civilization: what it is; how it came about; why civilizations rose and fell; what the future of civilization itself may be. Beginning with the city-states of ancient Mesopotamia, humanity gradually transformed from a herd of nomadic hunter-gatherers to an ordered society. The ancients invented agriculture, politics and religion?all while struggling with the ever-present barbarians who threatened to destroy them. Central to Fromkin's story is his account of how Western civilization?although by no means the most "advanced" civilization of its day?managed to conquer and eclipse its rivals and dominate the world to such an extent that "modernization" and "Westernization" have come to be synonymous. The final section, on the future of civilization, sometimes sinks into banalities ("For countries, as for people, becoming too wealthy or too powerful tends to be dangerous"). Of course, any work that combines such brevity with such broad scope is bound to be somewhat superficial. Nevertheless, Fromkin is a skillful raconteur with a keen eye for the telling anecdote and a conquistador's power to cover vast swaths of territory in a short amount of time. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.
From Library Journal
This is a conscious attempt to relate world history in about 250 pages. Actually, its eight stages of history are set in the West, from the emergence of humans in Africa to the rise of Western governments. Fromkin sees history as natural, not divine, "the story of the human race in the world," and believes that humans are therefore responsible for their own future. For high school, public, and college libraries. (LJ 10/15/98) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.