

Security Blanket

I am normally unconscious of my extreme luck to live in this time and place. My existence is so effortless I am usually unaware of the micro-network of systems weaving together to create a thin web of comfort and security. This invisible security blanket allows me to thoughtlessly enjoy so many of the trappings of modern life. On a cold winter day in Wisconsin I enjoy a warm home; hot running water; a chocolate scone, banana, and cup of coffee sourced from far off South America; a stocked medicine cabinet with a variety of treatments for every ailment; and my favorite music playing with only a spoken request to my digital assistant. If our modern day civilization collapsed, these things would no longer be readily available and I would miss them intensely. However all of these features of modern, middle class, American civilization would not be a part of my life without the more fundamental bedrock of civilization: the safety and security provided by a stable government which allows for the free flow of information and ideas.

The great civilizations throughout history were notable for their systems of government and their ability to communicate. I remember studying the importance of the Rosetta stone and Hammurabi's code for the establishment of Middle Eastern and European civilizations. I marveled at the societal impact of shallow lines etched on stones. Communicating across distances in multiple languages and establishing a code of laws, enforceable by the government, create the right environment for a modern civilization to flourish. General literacy for the majority of the populace, spurred by the invention of the printing press, fosters the growth of new ideas and creativity. The free exchange of ideas allows for development of different systems of government, scientific innovation, and explorations of new cultures and continents. Great poetry, theatre and literature expand our horizons and allow us to understand the "other" better. We live now in the information age, where the Internet feeds us ideas and facts anywhere, at anytime. This information access seems as vital as food and medicine in our modern age. However, as important as an open communication system is to civilization, it depends on a stable and fair government to operate successfully.

A strong system of democratic government that can establish and enforce law and order and create a safe environment for its citizens is essential for free travel, free trade, and free scientific discovery. The knowledge that I can travel without an armed guard to my neighbors, or across the country, and be reasonably assured that I will not suffer harm, allows me to easily share ideas and trade goods and services with others. Without this safety and security, my concept and experience of civilization would be distinctly different. I say this with awareness that my perception of safety and security is conditional on my identity as a white, middle class, American. If I were a different color, had a different economic status, or lived in a different country under a less democratic rule of law, the thin membrane of my security blanket could be easily torn asunder. When I read accounts of medieval society, the Wild West, or post-apocalyptic fiction stories, what I am most struck by is the vulnerability to violence that is ever present when legal and societal norms are not available to protect us from each other. We seem to live on a knife's edge between violence and order. The only thing keeping us in balance is the just enforcement of a code of laws agreed to by society. In our modern world, I benefit from that justice system, and while it is flawed, it is the thing I would miss most in the case of civilization's collapse.

I am sad to realize that this protection from vulnerability, that I would so miss if it were torn away, is not just a condition of this particular time in history, but also my place in the socio-economic order. There are many others who currently live in fear of violence in America and throughout the world, which inhibits their ability to experience the many benefits of modern society – including education, economic opportunity, medical care, and artistic pursuits. I recognize my privilege to live in this time and place and the security blanket that protects me. I hope that the idealized system of justice and fair governance that I value continues to be developed and extended to provide the same benefits of civilization to all people.