

= The Empathic Civilization =

The Empathic Civilization : The Race to Global Consciousness in a World in Crisis is a 2010 non-fiction book written by Jeremy Rifkin . It connects the evolution of communication and energy development in civilizations with psychological and economic development in humans . Rifkin considers the latest phase of communication and energy regimes ? that of electronic telecommunications and fossil fuel extraction ? as bringing people together on the nation @-@ state level based on democratic capitalism , but at the same time creating global problems , like climate change , pandemics , and nuclear proliferation . Rifkin extrapolates the observed trend into the future , predicting that Internet and mobile technology along with small @-@ scale renewable energy commercialization will create an era of distributed capitalism necessary to manage the new energy regime and a heightened global empathy that can help solve global problems .

The book was published by Jeremy P. Tarcher Inc. as a hardcover in January 2010 . It was noted as being well @-@ researched and covering a significant breadth of academic fields . However , reviews were mixed ; several reviewers found that while Rifkin provided a convincing overview of the development of empathy , he did not provide sufficient proof that increased empathy would necessarily bring people together to co @-@ operatively solve global problems .

= = Background = =

Author Jeremy Rifkin had previously written several books that , like The Empathic Civilization , have attempted to extrapolate trends in the economy , technology , and society . For example , his 1995 book The End of Work concerns the changes that tele @-@ commuting would have on the workplace , his 1998 book The Biotech Century concerns the expected impacts of genetic engineering , and his 2002 book The Hydrogen Economy concerns the economic and social effects that will result from the expected replacement of fossil fuels with hydrogen as an energy storage medium . His last book before writing The Empathic Civilization was The European Dream , published in 2004 , comparing the American Dream with the values expressed by Europeans in the post @-@ industrial economy . At the time of publication , the 64 @-@ year @-@ old Rifkin was working as an advisor to the European Union concerning issues relating to the economy , climate change , and energy security , as well as president of the American non @-@ profit organization the Foundation on Economic Trends . Rifkin argues that the global crisis of 2008 and 2011 marks the end of a particular energy regime ? fossil fuels . The new global economy will be based upon renewable energy , like wind power , solar energy , natural gas , etc . He calls this distributed capitalism because these energy sources are dispersed rather than centralized . They are best controlled by individuals or small communities . This will entail a very different power structure from fossil fuel , financial capitalism . This new structure is networked and decentralized , and an inherently much more democratic form of globalization .

= = Synopsis = =

The Empathic Civilization is divided into three parts with an introductory chapter that summarizes the contents and arguments of the book . The first part consists of four chapters and analyses empathy from the perspective of psychology , biology , and philosophy . Rifkin provides a history of empathy in psychology , including how it relates to the works of Freudian psychology , Melanie Klein , Ronald Fairbairn , Heinz Kohut , and Donald Winnicott , leading to John Bowlby and Attachment Theory . As psychological theory has evolved , empathy has played a larger and larger role , especially in the emotional and intellectual development of children . In terms of biology , Rifkin connects the biological function of mirror neurons with the capacity for empathy . Philosophically , Rifkin explores empathy @-@ altruism , the faith versus reason debate , and truth versus reality debate . Rifkin argues in favour of relationalism , that the meaning of existence is to enter into relationships . From the lens of empathy , he deconstructs the concepts of truth , freedom , democracy , equality , mortality .

The second part consists of five chapters and focuses on the rise , development , and fall of civilizations . Rifkin connects the qualitative changes in energy regimes and communication techniques with changes in how people understand and organize reality . Hunter @-@ gatherer societies were all oral cultures and thus only existed in geographically @-@ limited small groups and identified themselves symbiotically in terms of that group . Spiritually , these societies believed in local gods who were only known to others through oral tales . The development of writing , as well as hydraulics and irrigation , allowed agricultural societies to better organize themselves so that a larger geographic area and a larger population could be controlled . Hydraulic power was labour @-@ intensive , requiring large populations of subservient people . With scripts , there was a shift from a mythological consciousness to a theological consciousness ; individuals thought of themselves less in terms of a small , local group and more with a monotheistic religion which included a personal relationship with a god .

Decentralization followed the collapse of the Roman Empire , as each town operated a water or wind mill and the printing press distributed literature , empowering more people . Autobiographies started to be written , more people married for love rather than other arrangements , and the concept of privacy , democracy , and market capitalism was more prevalent . People began to organize themselves more into nation @-@ states . Steam and fossil fuels became the dominant energy regime and electronic communications , like telegraphs , radios , telephones , and television , became the dominant means of communication . With vastly more interaction with other people and cultures , there was more emphasis on studying people and psychology . Personal investments , social exploration , and creativity became highly valued .

The third part consists of the remaining five chapters . Rifkin extrapolates the changes in energy regimes to predict a shift in production towards renewable sources like wind and solar power under distributed (i.e. personal) management . Rifkin also extrapolates the changes in communication to predict a proliferation of wireless , mobile personal communication that allows people to be constantly connected to others regardless of distance , language , or other barriers . This will evolve people 's sense of empathy to create a biosphere @-@ wide consciousness and a mode of production he calls distributed capitalism . Rifkin believes this new system will allow people to solve more complex issues , such as climate change and pathogenic pandemics , focus more on quality of life (rather than materialistic) issues , and value collaboration over competition .

= = Style and genre = =

The book was noted for its heft , in terms of its actual page numbers , exhaustive research , and dense academic language . The writing does occasionally include illustrative anecdotes and some plain language . Rifkin synthesizes research and material from fields such as literature and the arts , theology , philosophy , anthropology , sociology , political science , psychology , and communication theory . The book was described as sociobiology . The Empathic Civilization was contrasted to the book Crisis Economics by Nouriel Roubini and Stephen Mihm , as reaching different conclusions but being complementary by offering valid alternative futures different from contemporary belief in social progress .

John N. Gray 's review in The Guardian described the theme of Rifkin 's argument as " a struggle between the polar forces of empathy and entropy " and that " as civilisation has extended the reach of empathy beyond the family and the tribe ... the expanding infrastructure of industry and transport has needed ever larger inputs of energy , increasing entropy and wrecking the planet " .

= = Publication = =

The Empathic Civilization was published in January 2010 by Jeremy P. Tarcher Inc . , an imprint of Penguin Group (USA) , in North America and by Cambridge Polity Press in the United Kingdom . Cambridge Polity Press also published the book in Australia and New Zealand beginning in March 2010 . A German translation was published by Campus Verlag and Spanish language version was released by Mexican publisher Paidós Mexicana . Excerpts were published in the Huffington Post

and Arianna Huffington named it one of the best books of the year .

= = Reception = =

The book received mixed reviews by critics . Philosopher John N. Gray 's review in The Guardian found that Rifkin spent most of the book defending his " view that humans are essentially empathic animals " and ultimately " fails to substantiate its central thesis " that empathy in humans will make them able to deal with a world @-@ wide crisis , like global warming . In The Globe and Mail , the reviewer expressed a similar view that Rifkin " doesn 't explain how ... empathy can vanquish a physical principle , entropy " .

The reviewer in the Edmonton Journal admitted the book is well @-@ researched and presents " an immense amount of engaging evidence " on empathy , but ultimately dismisses it as " a shallow intellectual hit " due to its " simple thesis , souped up unnecessarily " and " impression of having been written in a hurry , with a marketing rep scribbling catchphrases over Rifkin 's shoulder " . Along with the Edmonton Journal review , numerous others noted either the book 's eurocentric interpretation of history or selective historiography .

Michael Dudley , reviewing for the Winnipeg Free Press , labelled the book " ambitious " , " deserving of a wide audience " and " at times fascinating but ultimately underwhelming " . Dudley found the book " covers so many topics that few of them are given the depth they deserve " and that " despite the book 's considerable length , it is also surprisingly limited in scope " . For example , Dudley was disappointed with the few references made to Marshall McLuhan and the lack of reference to the works of Julian Jaynes . Likewise , the reviewer in Journal of Psychohistory was disappointed with the one reference to Lloyd deMause who the reviewer believed would have helped Rifkin 's case . The book was reviewed in the journal Integral Leadership Review from a spiral dynamics point @-@ of @-@ view , noting that it speaks more towards people at green and turquoise .