1 Civilizations and the twenty-first century

Some theoretical considerations

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We look to the past in the light of the problems of the present. This is the sense in which Benedetto Croce wrote that all history is contemporary history.[1] Civilizations represent continuities in human thought and practices through which different human groups attempt to grapple with their consciousness of present problems. At some times, these continuities appear to be vigorous, reaffirmed, even redefined. At other times, they are obscured, subordinated to other dominant modes of thought and practices. At such times and for such groups talk of civilizations is absent, suppressed, or seemingly irrelevant. When and why do civilizations become a significant object of knowledge?

For three decades and more, knowledge about world affairs was constructed predominantly with reference to the Cold War. Its pre-eminent form in international relations theory, particularly in its American expression, was neorealism, a problem-solving form of knowledge applicable to superpower rivalry. Neorealism was a technology of power based upon the premiss of a common rationality shared by both sides in the US–Soviet conflict in which game theoretic exercises and rational choice hypotheses could be taken as guides for policy understandable in the same way by both sides.

Once the overarching control of the Cold War was lifted, the underlying but obscured diversity of the human situation became more fully apparent and neorealism lost its monopoly of explaining the world and proposing action. But the salience of the Cold War was succeeded by the salience of globalization: the vision of the inevitable homogenization of economic and cultural practices, driven by competitiveness in a global market and by new technologies of communication. As an ideology, globalization is the ultimate form of alienation: something created by people that has come to wield absolute power over them.

There is, however, an historical dialectical resistance to this vision of global homogenization – an affirmation of diversity through many forms of identity: gender, ethnic, religious, linguistic, attachment to the land, and a sense of historical grievance and humiliation. The two most prevalent forms of identity of the earlier twentieth century – nationality and class – are submerged, though not eliminated, in these other forms. The largest aggregate of identity is the civilization. Globalization is countered by the affirmation of civilizations in this

dialectic of homogenization and diversification. This is the basic reason for a revival of concern about civilizations in international studies.[2]

How should we theorize civilizations and their role in this future world? What are the implications for international studies? In an attempt to begin answering these questions, I discuss four points in this chapter:

1 To consider reflexively the changing awareness of civilizations in Western thought, in other words, to historicize the concept of civilization. For someone born into the Western tradition, this is a necessary exercise in self-awareness as a precondition to awareness of others.
2 To propose a workable definition of the entity "civilization". What is a civilization?
3 To consider the dimensions of the entity "civilization" as an approach towards analyzing the dynamics of civilizational change.
4 To propose a research program as an heuristic guide to the study of present and future encounters and transformations of civilizations.

Historicizing the concept of civilization

The origin of the word "civilization" is traceable to eighteenth-century France (Braudel 1994: 3–8; Elias 1995). In German, the word *Kultur* assumed comparable significance about the same time. Both had the connotation of a process of increasing civility, the antithesis of barbarity. The context was the emergence of the bourgeoisie as a strong social force – in France more closely linked to state power, in Germany more separate and having its stronghold in the universities. The civilizing process was conceived as a universal phenomenon characterizing the Enlightenment of eighteenth-century Europe, at one with universal reason and natural laws applicable in the physical sciences, economics, law, and morality. The finality of the process was civilization in the singular.

The Enlightenment perspective of civility was soon challenged by the Romantic movement which rejected the notion of an objective world governed by universal laws and striving towards the attainment of universal norms of law and morals. Romantic thinkers gave more place to subjectivity and uniqueness. Each distinctive national culture had its own aim and destiny in world history. Herder in Germany, Michelet in France, Burke in England voiced this counter-perspective to the universalism of the Enlightenment. The theme was developed later during the nineteenth century by German historicism (e.g. by Wilhelm Dilthey). The European expansionism of the nineteenth century gave substance to these philosophical leanings. *Les bourgeois conquérants* (to borrow the phrase of Charles Morazé, 1957) encountered other civilizations. Civilization in the singular gave way to civilizations in the plural. But imperialism and its accompanying scholarship now defined the non-European civilizations as objects of knowledge. European civilization (and its American offshoot) were to be thought of as dynamic, an active agent inspired by the doctrine of progress. Non-European civilizations were thought of as passive and fixed.

Conditions during the later nineteenth century – the long depression of the last three decades, the social conflicts arising from urbanization and industrialization, the social transformations that Tönnies described as from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* and Durkheim as from mechanical to organic solidarity, and ultimately the imperialist rivalries that led to WWI – encouraged skepticism about the doctrine of Progress. Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West*, the first major European work of the twentieth century on the theme of civilizations, reflected this more pessimistic mood. The manuscript was substantially completed just before the outbreak of WWI and was worked over and published in 1918 in the context of German defeat. The English translation was published in 1926 and 1928. Its pessimism resonated to the era of the Great Depression and the rise of fascism.[3]

Spengler saw history as recording the birth, maturity and decline of a number of civilizations, each with a distinct spirit. This he called his "Copernican revolution". Europe and the West were not the center around which other societies revolved; they were one among other civilizations, each of which followed a predetermined sequence of stages and European civilization was entering into its final phase. His approach elaborated upon the visions of Giambattista Vico and the Romantics of the earlier nineteenth century. Spengler's thoughts for his own time focused on what remained possible for Western civilization to achieve during its inexorable decline.

The other great work on civilizations of the first half of the twentieth century, Arnold J. Toynbee's *A Study of History* (1946, 1957), was more optimistic in tone since it envisaged the possibility of rebirth of civilization through a religious revival. This monumental work was published in a series of volumes through the 1930s. Its major impact came after WWII and was quite important especially in the United States.[4] A major promoter of Toynbee's work in America was Henry Luce, the publisher of *Time*, *Life*, and *Fortune* magazines. Luce seized upon Toynbee's concept of the "universal state" as the ultimate stage of a civilization and put the United States in the role of creator of a new universal state for the world. He signed an editorial in *Life* entitled "The American Century" which reflected the internationalist and interventionist views of the Eastern Establishment against American isolationism. *Time* published an influential summary of Toynbee's work by Whittaker Chambers, the ex-communist soon to attain renown as the principal witness in the trial and conviction of Alger Hiss. Luce undoubtedly enhanced Toynbee's reputation but his use of the work deviated from Toynbee's own preoccupation with religion as the road to salvation for civilizations as well as individual souls (McNeill 1989).[5]

Luce's appropriation of Toynbee placed emphasis once again upon civilization in the singular – the creation of a single all-embracing American-inspired world order. As the Cold War came to dominate thinking about the future of the world, the choice seemed to be between two universalisms, capitalism and communism, both derived from the European Enlightenment. The sense of coexistence of a plurality of civilizations was obscured. Whatever was not pertinent to the Cold War did not matter in the top levels of world politics. Of

course, at the lower levels, the Cold War was less a matter of concern than the daily struggle for survival in conditions of poverty and deprivation, the subordination of peoples to imperialism, and various forms of discrimination. But such sentiments were obscured in the top-down view of the Cold War. With the formal end of the Cold War these other sentiments began to be more clearly articulated as forms of identity. A plurality of civilizations re-emerged as the largest aggregates of identities. However, these new burgeoning identities were contradicted by the triumphant universalism of the Cold War victor: the ideology of economic globalization.

Western consciousness has been split between a dominant universalistic perspective that sees civilization as a *Western* civilization encompassing the whole world, and a pluralistic perspective that sees Western civilization (variously defined) as coexisting with and interacting with other civilizations. In the Western historical trajectory, the pluralistic conception is recurrent as counterpoint to major historical upheavals: the affirmation of national cultures in response to the conquest and containment of the French Revolution, the *fin de siècle* pessimism of the late nineteenth century, and the loss of certainty in the exhaustion of the certainties of WWII and the Cold War in the late twentieth century. The universalistic notion of civilization has, however, remained a characteristic of Western consciousness and an intellectual obstacle to recognition of the ontological equality of other civilizations.

What is a civilization?

Archeologists who have studied ancient civilizations have defined them in material terms (Childe 1942). The process of civilization is associated with urban life, state structures, and technological innovation, from neolithic through copper to bronze eras, including invention of the wheel, the ox-cart, and the sailing ship. Such material civilizations are recorded *c.* 2500 BCE in the Nile Valley, Fertile Crescent, and the environs of Mohenjo Daro, other such sites of autonomous civilizations being in China, Africa, and Central and South America.

These material, technological, economically organized and class-structured entities were unified by religion, myth, symbols, and language, which were all the same thing until the rationalization of language distinguished among them. Those sets of symbols which made possible meaningful communication among the participants in a material civilization can be called sets of inter-subjective meanings. *So a working definition of a civilization can be a fit or correspondence between material conditions of existence and inter-subjective meanings.*

The notion of a "fit" does not imply a base/superstructure relationship in a "vulgar Marxist" sense. Different sets of inter-subjective meanings may correspond to the same material conditions of existence. The requirement is that they make sense of these material conditions for the people concerned and make it possible for them to conceive their future and to concert their activities towards certain ends. The relationship is more like Max Weber's "elective affinity" between religions and social groups (Weber 1948: 267–301). Some implications

flow from this definition: epistemology; theories of history; boundaries in time and space.

Epistemology

The emphasis on inter-subjectivity implies that there are different perspectives on the world, different understandings about the nature of the world, different perceptions of "reality". Accordingly, the "real world" is not a given, external to thought. "Reality" is socially and historically constructed as part of thought interacting with its material environment. Different civilizational perspectives perceive different "realities"; and these different realities are constantly changing and developing. One inference from this is the need for reflexivity, for self-awareness of the social and historical conditioning of our own thought. Another inference is the need to be able to enter into the mental frameworks or inter-subjective meanings of others (Vico 1970: para. 338).[6] It leads to the postmodern dilemma: if there are no absolute foundations for social knowledge, where is truth?

Theories of history

Various theories of the development of civilizations may yield heuristic hypotheses but must be rejected as laws of history. Giambattista Vico posited that each civilization had a distinct origin and a history independent of other civilizations.[7] These separate histories, however, followed a common pattern, the "ideal eternal history" which, from heroic creative origins out of the barbarism of the senses evolved a rationalized society under universal laws, which in time descended into the "barbarism of the intellect" in which pursuit of self-interest was unconstrained – a condition more depraved than the original barbarism of the senses. Vico minimized contacts and borrowing among civilizations, placing all the emphasis on the internal dynamics of development activated primarily by class struggle. He formulated the classical statement of the cyclical concept of the history of civilizations.

Oswald Spengler's view of the distinctness of civilizations was similar to Vico's. Each civilization had its distinct spirit, but each also went through the same phases of birth, creativity, rationalization, and decline. The characteristics of these phases were somewhat different from Vico's but the pattern was the same. Toynbee introduced more interaction and borrowing among civilizations. He was interested in the process of succession linking one declining civilization to another emerging civilization; but he retained the essentials of the cyclical hypothesis.

A triadic view of the history of civilization preceded and coexisted with the cyclical hypothesis. The fascination with the number three in Western consciousness as a key to history can be traced to the twelfth-century Calabrian monk Joachim of Floris and may well derive from the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. Joachim of Floris divided history (there was only one history, i.e. the history of

Christianity) into three periods: the reign of the Father, the rule of the unincarnate God, an authoritarian pre-Christian era; the reign of the Son or the Christian era in which political institutions were necessary to constrain people's behavior in conformity with the revelations of religion; and the reign of the Holy Spirit which he imagined as a communitarian future in which harmony would naturally prevail without the need for political constraints. This triadic form, entrenched in Western consciousness, lent itself to the dialectical theories of Hegel and Marx. In simplified form, it became a linear, progressive doctrine of history. Triadic and linear forms conceive of only *one* civilizational trajectory.

In non-Western perspectives, a dyadic picture of history has been more common. Its foremost expression is in the Chinese conception of a fundamental rhythm of the universe alternating between *yin*, a quiescent phase of unity and harmony, and *yang*, a phase of activity, conflict and fragmentation. The fourteenth-century Islamic diplomat and philosopher Ibn Khaldun posited a recurrent swing between two forms of social and political life, *'umran badawi* and *'umran hadari* (Khaldun 1967; Lacoste 1984).[8] The first derives from rural life and the second from urban life but the meanings go far beyond those terms. *'Umran badawi* is the origin of social organization and is conceived of as an ascetic form of life in which may arise a spirit of solidarity (*'asabiya*) through which people become capable of creating a state. The aim of the state will be enjoyment of sedentary, urban civilization or *'umran hadari*; but urban life and the affluence it generates are corrupting and ultimately erode the spirit of solidarity which created it. Thus history, in both Chinese and Ibn Khaldun's conceptions, is cyclical rather than progressive. Both conceptions refer to the dynamics of one civilization and say nothing about the coexistence of civilizations.

Boundaries in time and space

Spengler and Toynbee do not agree about the number or the boundaries of civilizations which suggests this is not a matter about which any categorical statements can be made. Fernand Braudel insists that each civilization develops from a specific geographical zone:

> To discuss civilization is to discuss space, land and its contours, climate, vegetation, animal species and natural or other advantages. It is also to discuss what humanity has made of these basic conditions: agriculture, stock-breeding, food, shelter, clothing, communications, industry and so on.
>
> (Braudel 1994: 9–10)

Certainly, historically civilizations have evolved upon specific geographical sites and have, as Braudel remarks, been colored by these origins. Today, however, with demographic expansion, migratory movements, the diffusion of ideas, and the proliferation of diasporas, geographical definitions become more problematic. Susan Strange has referred plausibly to a non-territorial "business civilization" (Strange 1990). Different civilizations coexist within the geograph-

ical space of one country, even within the personal space of one individual. Nowadays it makes more sense to think of a civilization as a community of thought, taking up the inter-subjectivity side of my proposed definition, while acknowledging that inter-subjective meanings evolve in relation to material conditions in which geography continues to play a role alongside transnational economic networks and world-spanning communications technologies.

Braudel also wrote: "The history of civilizations … is the history of mutual borrowings over many centuries, despite which each civilization has kept its own original character" (1994: 8). One can agree with this statement and at the same time acknowledge that it leaves unresolved problems. If civilizations are continually borrowing and changing, how do we recognize the core identity? How do we know the boundaries?

Thinking of a civilization as a community of thought allows for the physical intermingling of civilizations. It loosens the analogy of civilizations to nation–states and the notion that one can plot the "fault lines" between civilizations on a map.[9] I would therefore rather focus on inter-subjectivity and the dynamics shaping different forms of inter-subjectivity.

Dimensions of civilizations: what are the factors that shape inter-subjectivity?

What follows has no pretensions to completeness. I signal here some of the factors that influence the ways in which peoples understand the world in which they live. These are factors which seem to be at work within all civilizations. They may differentiate civilizations that coexist but they also account for changes within each civilization. There may well be other factors that the following itemization overlooks.

Social economy (or social relations of production)

The way people are organized to satisfy their material needs is a basic aspect of civilization. Both liberalism and Marxism see capitalism as an economic system functioning according to inherent laws, although they differ, of course, in their evaluation of that system. Karl Polanyi's view was different. As a social anthropologist, he studied "substantive economies", i.e. the various historically created forms through which people had become organized to satisfy their material needs. In these different substantive economies, economic processes were embedded in social relations. They served the social goals or conformed to the social norms of the community. In consequence, different substantive economies, different modes of social organization of production and distribution, have come into existence throughout history, each conforming to a particular form of society.

Polanyi's concern centered upon the attempt initiated in England in the early nineteenth century to sever that historically prevalent connection between economy and society: the attempt to create a self-regulating market over and

above society. This "utopian" venture, according to Polanyi, tore at the fabric of society, reducing whole classes to the condition of isolated and helpless individuals. It provoked a reaction from society that later in that century began to re-establish social protection against the destructive effects of economic processes: factory acts, organized industrial relations, social security, ultimately the welfare state (Polanyi 1957). Another effort to introduce the self-regulating market on a world scale is now happening through economic globalization. There is an implicit conflict between the dominance over society of abstract economic laws and the construction of substantive economies that organize economic activity in compatibility with the norms of existing societies. That conflict is expressed in practical policy issues in different parts of the world today. In that conflict civilizational perspectives challenge the dominance of the global self-regulating market.

Globalization is in practice challenged by resistance from below, from the aroused consciousness of people hurt by globalization; and also by the affirmation of different forms of capitalism rooted in different cultural traditions or different and conflicting views of the future. Instances of resistance from below include strike waves (France in December 1995 and South Korea in January 1997) that were consciously directed against globalization; the rebellion of the *Zapatistas* in Chiapas that broke out significantly on the day the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) came into effect (New Year's Day 1994); what Fantu Cheru has called the "silent revolution" in Africa or the turning away from the state and international institutions by local self-help movements (Cheru 1989); and the mobilization of civil society movements that blocked the proposed Multilateral Agreement on Investment.

Capitalism is global to the extent that it seems to function according to certain general laws, specifically the behavior of markets in respect of supply and demand. This common nature of capitalism is reinforced as governments have lost both the power and the will to intervene in market behavior. Capitalism remains culturally specific insofar as its institutionalization in different parts of the world has been shaped by different historical experiences and different conceptions of social purpose. Herein lies the conflict between globalization and civilizations, for civilizational forces work towards the social embedding of different forms of capitalism.

This conflict is most salient today in Europe as the European Union (EU) on a variety of issues is confronted by the choice between hyperliberal and social market (or social democratic) conceptions of capitalism.[10] The debate in the institutions of the EU over "social Europe" and the "democratic deficit" is propelled by social and political forces in the different countries. Lionel Jospin seized the point when he qualified the unexpected Socialist Party victory in the June 1997 elections as "un choix de civilisation" (*Le Monde*, 7 June 1997).

The Asian financial crisis of 1998 may well give rise to conflict between global capitalism, which has created conditions for Western firms to gain financial control over Asian productive resources, and Asian governments and people determined to regain control over their economic and political future

(Richardson 1998). The distinctiveness of Asian, and particularly Japanese, capitalism in terms of the social relations of production has been well established (Johnson 1982; Tsuru 1993; Fallows 1994). The relationship of individual to group, the roles of state and society, and of consensus and competition, are understood differently from the way these things are understood in hyperliberal capitalism. Resentment against global finance, perceived as western controlled, could stimulate determination to construct more indigenous forms of social and political economy.

In Russia, a predatory capitalism infiltrated by mafia-type enforcement methods has grown up in the space left by the collapse of "real socialism". In China, a more managed transition from socialism seems to be taking place. Other projects of substantive economy exist outside the realm of capitalism in the perhaps utopian goal of an Islamic social economy, in the movements towards self-sufficiency and internally determined development by indigenous peoples, and in the support to be found among "Green" dissenters in more affluent areas of the world for a social economy subordinated to maintenance of the biosphere.

A conventional Marxist would say it is all capitalism, and in one sense that is probably a fair statement but it obscures the fact that the differences in social organization and in widely accepted values and norms of behavior and expectations may be very significant for people living and working under these different forms of society. Civilizations confront the economic imperatives of capitalism and move social economies in different directions.

Dominance and subordination

Edward Said (1979) described the Western approach to Eastern civilizations as "Orientalism" by which he meant a form of knowledge through which Eastern civilizations were seen as subordinate to the West.[11] Western scholarship, assuming a position of universalist objectivity, defined the characteristics of dominated civilizations and had the power to transmit to the dominated this knowledge of themselves. The elites of the dominated could thus become absorbed into an alien universalism. Kinhide Mushakoji has used the term "occultation" to describe the manner in which the thought processes of one civilization have been displaced by those of another dominant one. Yet the thought processes of the dominated civilization are not totally suppressed but remain latent, ready to be aroused by some crisis (Mushakoji 1996).

Antonio Gramsci's concept of "passive revolution" has some relevance here, although Gramsci was not discussing civilizations (Gramsci 1971: 105–20). Gramsci took the term from Vincenzo Cuocuo, the historian of Naples under Napoleonic rule for whom passive revolution was the introduction of ideas from an alien society which were embraced by a local elite though they did not resonate with the common people. The result was a situation Gramsci called revolution/restoration in which the newly adopted ideas and modes of behavior were never securely entrenched since they never penetrated thoroughly to the

mass of the people. One might draw a parallel with British intellectual and institutional influence in India, seemingly secure in the Nehru era but subsequently contested by the Hindu nationalists when they gained power.

Oswald Spengler, despite his thesis that civilizations were separate and did not impinge upon one another, put forward an interesting concept that suggests how an impetus from one civilization penetrating into another can partially transform that other but be constrained by the persisting structures of the other. Borrowing a term from mineralogy, he called the process "pseudomorphosis" and applied it to the formation of the European Middle Ages from the time of Augustus to the tenth century.[12] A nascent Arabian spiritual energy became configured by a fixed and persistent Greco-Roman political form. Spengler discerned a similar phenomenon in the way Westernization imported into Russia by Peter the Great framed and shackled the Russian spirit.[13] All of these concepts – Orientalism, occultation, passive revolution, and pseudomorphosis – evoke the phenomenon of dominance of one civilization over another but also of the continuing latency of the dominated culture and the potential for reaffirmation of its authenticity. A most important object of enquiry is thus to trace the evidence of linguistic and conceptual superposition, to try to assess the different meanings given to these superimposed concepts in the discourse of subordinate groups, and to identify the kinds of crisis likely to precipitate a rejection of the superimposed discourse by subordinate groups.

Spiritual consciousness

The sociologist Pitrim Sorokin contrasted two types of culture: the sensate and the ideational (Sorokin 1957).[14] The sensate culture admits only observation of external phenomena. The observer achieves "objectivity" by classifying and plotting the relationships among the data observed. The ideational culture posits the existence of a spiritual world behind the observable phenomenal world – the thing-in-itself or noumenal world of Kant. For Sorokin, these were ideal types, neither of which has ever existed in a pure form, but always in combinations stressing the one tendency or the other.

The notion "spiritual" here need not mean mystical; it can just as well mean a world animated by thought both at an individual and a collective level. Nor need "ideational" imply "idealism" in the sense that the world is the concrete expression of ideas alone. Recognition of a spiritual element behind observable phenomena is consistent with a recognition that the specific form the spiritual may take in different times and places responds to the material conditions of existence that people have experienced and the social practices they have devised to cope with these material conditions. Max Weber recognized this in his sociology of religions (Gerth and Wright Mills 1948; Bendix 1960: 49–281). It is the common feature of historicist thought in the West from Giambattista Vico, through the German historicism of Wilhelm Dilthey and the English of R.G. Collingwood, to the Italian of Croce and Gramsci. The common theme is that thought is the point of access to an understanding of the continuing interaction

of mind and material conditions in the making of history. As method, the ideational hypothesis is the obvious key to an understanding of civilizations, since civilizations represent the ways large aggregates of people interpret the world, respond to it, and shape projects for acting in it.

Pitrim Sorokin had in mind something more than a method for understanding, however. He saw an alternation between a predominance of the ideational culture and that of the sensate as marking changes of era. All the main components of a culture: science and philosophy, law and ethics, forms of social and political organization – all these he saw as changing synchronously and in the same direction (1957: 223). The ideational was characteristic of a creative, poetic initial phase of a culture (Sorokin always speaks of culture rather than civilization). The sensate emerged in a mature phase and fully characterizes a post-mature culture. This reading of the process of civilization is similar to that of Vico and Spengler. Spengler used the term "culture" (which has that special connotation of creativity in German) for the initial phase of the historical entity which, in its mature and declining phases, he called a civilization. Sorokin, writing in the 1930s, like Spengler, writing somewhat earlier, predicted a crisis of the prevailing sensate culture of the West.[15] In his thinking, as in the *yin* and *yang* of Chinese culture or in the alternations of rural and urban in Ibn Khaldun's thought, the demise of the sensate culture should make way for a revival of the ideational.

As suggested above, such notions of historical laws may be taken as heuristic hypotheses though not accepted at face value. Whatever value may be placed upon a notion of historical sequence or alternation of cultural perspectives, it is useful in the study of the dynamics of inter-subjectivity to reflect upon the implications for human understanding and action of different types of spiritual consciousness. Theology, over the centuries, has given us three types that have contemporary applicability: monotheism, polytheism, and pantheism.

The monotheistic idea may have been derived from the centralized power of ancient hydraulic empires where everything appeared to flow from a single source. The idea took root in the Eastern Mediterranean and spread worldwide through the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (Armstrong 1993).[16] The monotheistic mentality, however, is not limited to adherence to one of these three religions. Its most important aspect is belief in absolute truth which may be retained by people who have severed any formal religious affiliation.[17] The absolutist cast of mind not only affirms with certainty; it also excludes and anathematizes heresy. This cast of mind impresses an indelible character upon the civilization it shapes.

Polytheism admits of multiple truths and accepts the coexistence of non-exclusive religions. Polytheism is relative where monotheism is absolutist and it has been more characteristic of Eastern civilizations. The point is not to stereotype civilizations with the monotheistic or polytheistic mode of thought, but rather to examine the way such tendencies may be indicators of change in the evolution of civilizations. Postmodernism in Western civilization may be seen as a polytheistic development to the extent that postmodernists accept that different

individuals and different groups have their own "truths", that "truth" is socially and historically constructed.[18]

Pantheism sees a spiritual unity to the cosmos which is manifested through the manifold variety of existences. Everything is linked to and dependent upon the whole. This has been a common feature in the religious consciousness of indigenous peoples. It is also present in the Hindu *upanishads* which posit a single Reality or Unity that manifests itself in multiple ways.[19] Pantheism has arisen within contemporary Western civilization in deep ecology or the sense of unity and interdependence of all forms of life and life sustaining substances within the biosphere (Lovelock 1979).

Modern societies have also known an extreme form of spiritual consciousness that takes the form of doomsday cults. These cults mix science or science fiction with doctrines of salvation under the supreme authority of their leaders. They have attracted technically sophisticated people, which suggests that some formally educated people do not find sufficient meaning in their lives within the contemporary world. Some, like the Solar Temple and Heaven's Gate, have led to mass suicide of their members. Others, like the Aum Shinrikyo have actively sought to make their doomsday prophesy self-fulfilling (Iida 1997).

No civilization is ever reducible to a single form of spiritual consciousness. Civilizations are shaped through a mingling of different forms and a shifting predominance of one or other of these forms; and this mingling and shifting consciousness is related to the development of the material world. Monotheism is not powerful through a resurgence of church-going but through the absolute certainty of the ideological exponents of global capitalism.[20] The strengthening of alternative forms of social economy could encourage an acceptance of diversity reminiscent of polytheism. The advancement of Green economics gives substance to pantheism; and the alienation from society of the cultist is not unrelated to anomie produced by modern economies.

Time and space

Harold Innis, from his study of civilizations, inferred that the relative emphasis on time and space gave a bias affecting broad aspects of a culture. A stable society, he concluded, had a proper balance between a time orientation and a space orientation (Innis 1951, 1986). Innis saw space orientation as being derived from an emphasis on administration, law, and military power. A time orientation derived from the sense of continuity in religion and an oral tradition. Innis was troubled by what he saw as the "present-mindedness" of his contemporary world, the dominance of the ephemeral. He urged recovery of a time orientation to restore a proper balance.[21]

Time is a most complex idea. The more one reflects upon it, the less certainty there is about it. According to Henri Bergson, whose philosophical work is of the late nineteenth century, there were two contrasting conception of time (Bergson 1945). One was the common-sense notion of time, what we can call "clock time", the notion of a universal homogeneous medium measuring from outside

whatever is happening. This was, as Bergson thought about it, time reduced to space, the space traveled by the hands of the clock. The other kind of time, which interested Bergson more, he called *durée*. The term is not very adequately rendered into English as "duration", since duration may also have the spatial meaning of an externally observed trajectory between two points, a beginning and an end. *Durée*, for Bergson, signified rather lived time, experienced time, the subjective feeling of acting and choosing and of pressures limiting action and choice.

Modern physics since Einstein has destroyed the common-sense absoluteness of clock time. Time and space, since Einstein, are seen as interrelated and relative to each other. Time, with the universe, has a beginning, and so will have an end. There are different times depending on the relative motion of bodies in space. Time is not an absolute in the mind of God but a construct of the minds of human beings. The post-Einsteinian physicist John Wheeler has said: "The word Time came not from heaven but from the mouth of man" and he reduced the concept to the rather modest definition that "Time is nature's way to keep everything from happening at once" (Davies 1996: 236–67). There is for modern physics no absolute standard against which happenings in the physical world, let alone the human and social worlds, can be plotted.

In the history of time, the European Middle Ages held time to be an organic, subjective thing, a part of nature. The Enlightenment, with Newton, initiated the idea of time as an abstract independent standard of measurement, divorced from nature. Einstein put time back into nature and at the same time deprived it of the common-sense certainty inherited from the eighteenth century.

The subjective notion of *durée* has also undergone development. Bergson's work was related to the individual's consciousness of time. Fernand Braudel expanded it to cover historical time (Braudel 1979).[22] For Braudel, different aspects of human and social life have different tempos. Economic change moves at a different pace from art and architecture or from change in law and mores. In this he differs from the vision of Vico or Spengler in which all aspects of society change simultaneously from a single impetus. For Braudel, changes in these different departments of life are not unrelated, but they are not synchronous. So there is a history of mentalities moving at a different pace from a history of material life but nevertheless interacting with it.

In all these different histories – these different "times" – there are three levels of time according to Braudel. The level of immediacy is the time of events (*l'histoire évenmentielle*). Events can be recorded but they do not explain themselves. To be explained, they must be understood within their context in time and space. The first level of explanation is what Braudel called *conjonctures*, an intermediate time-frame such as that of a long economic cycle, a persisting configuration of social forces, e.g. Fordism or social democracy, or the duration of a scientific paradigm. The *conjoncture* in turn is explainable within the framework of the *longue durée*, an historical structure created by collective human activity over long periods of time which comes to be regarded in common sense as the natural order of things. Language, the moral code, property relations, the state and the

interstate system are all constructions of human collective activity in the *longue durée*, though they come to be regarded as enduring foundations of human life. They are all, however, subject to slow change through collective human activity and that change can, often in retrospect, reach points of radical transformation into new historical structures.

An historical structure of the *longue durée* is to be understood in both synchronic and diachronic dimensions – both in terms of the interactions and interdependencies of its different component elements, and in terms of its development over time. Braudel's magnum opus on the world-economy of capitalism seemed to privilege the synchronic, the understanding of this economy as a world system but one can read into it that the purpose of understanding the synchronic dimension is to be able to see the contradictions out of which structural transformation could come. Braudel's theorizing of history bridges the gulf between the homeostasis of structural–functional sociology and the change through conflict of Vichian and Marxian dialectic. It brings us back to Harold Innis' problematic of balance between a space orientation and a time orientation.

In our own world, the time–space balance is having a profound effect on economic behavior and through the economy on all other aspects of life. Money is a symbol of economic power. The real economy is the actual production of goods and services. Money is fungible and mobile at the speed of electronic communication. Production is fixed in specific enterprises and it takes a long time to develop – technological innovation and building of producer goods, training of workers. The symbolic economy of finance operates in a synchronic dimension; it is space-oriented. The development of production takes place in a diachronic dimension; it is time-oriented. As the world economy has become global in extent, global finance has come to dominate production. Globalization means the triumph of space over time, the victory of the transitory and the ephemeral. The economic basis for the subordination of the time orientation is reinforced by the globalization of the media which propagate a consciousness of an eternal present. This is the psychological meaning of "the end of history".

Revival of civilizations would shift emphasis from space to time. Civilizations are entities of the *longue durée*. In part, this involves a sense of continuity and development from past origins but primarily it implies the construction of alternative visions of a future – an escape from the inevitability of the eternal homogenized present of globalization into an active collective construction of future economies re-embedded in self-conscious societies.

A research program

To study civilizations and their role and potential in the world today implies both an approach to knowledge and a focus on topics that enable us to assess how the aforementioned dimensions of civilization are interacting in the process of civilizational development.

Epistemology

Two propositions stand out as implicit in the very notion of civilizations:

1 *There are alternatives for the human future.* Mankind is not bound into an inexorable expansion of globalization determined by competitiveness in a global market which will lead inevitably to a homogenized global society on the model of contemporary America. Civilizations embodying different values and different patterns of social organization are conceivable, for good or ill. There is still a problem of moral and social choice.
2 *If different civilizations do coexist, the problem of mutual comprehension becomes paramount for the maintenance of world order.* This arises in an epistemological context far different from the game theoretic and rational choice notions popular during the Cold War which assumed a single shared rationality. An ability to enter into the mental framework of the Other becomes an essential ingredient in peaceful coexistence.

R.G. Collingwood, in his book *The New Leviathan* (1942), put forward a relevant thought. The book bears the marks of its conception during WWII in its insistence on the struggle between civilization (in the singular) and barbarism.[23] But it contains a thought about the process of civilization – the process of generating civility – that is relevant to a coexistence of civilizations (in the plural). Collingwood refers to the distinction made by Plato between two kinds of discussions: eristical and dialectical. In an eristic discussion each party tries to prove he was right and the other wrong. In a dialectic discussion each party hopes to find that initial disagreement will, through the process of discussion, lead to a perception by both parties that they are both right (1942: 181–3). Each sees one aspect of a truth that both, through the process of dialectic, may ultimately share. To Collingwood, dialectic discussion was especially appropriate in a Heraclitean world, i.e. a world of change in which reality, the object of discussion, was in constant transformation. Dialectic was, he argued, the means of absorbing non-social elements into a larger society; but it might also, extrapolating now from Collingwood, become a means of understanding among coexisting civilizations each of which had different perspectives on a world common to both.

Mikhail Bakhtin, using a different vocabulary, takes a not dissimilar but perhaps more fully applicable approach to the problem of coexistence (Bakhtin 1984). Bakhtin rejects the term dialectic insofar as it has been appropriated by Hegelian and Marxist theories of history in which the dialectic is determined by a single central impulse, whether ideal or material. He uses the term "dialogue" which derives from the Socratic dialogues of Plato (Collingwood's source for the term "dialectic"). For Bakhtin, the Hegelian and Marxian dialectics are monologues, the expression of a single thought interpreting and explaining the world. Bakhtin's world is peopled by self-conscious beings, each with its own perspective on the whole. In his reflections on Dostoevsky, these beings were the characters of the novels, each of which brings a distinctive perspective to the action; and there is no overarching "author's" interpretation. But we may also

think of civilizations as beings each with its own inter-subjectivity, together engaged in an interaction in which there is no authoritative overarching theory of historical change. These civilizational perspectives evolve in time; and the world of coexisting perspectives is open-ended. There is no closure, no end of history. No one being (individual or civilization) may legitimately reify the Other, i.e. treat it as an object (as in Orientalism). The condition of dialogue is mutual recognition of self-conscious beings. Referring to Dostoevsky's novels, Bakhtin writes: "there stands in place of a single cognizant and judging 'I' to the world, the problems of the interrelationship of all these cognizant and judging 'I's' to one another" (ibid.: 100).

Civil society

The formation of inter-subjectivity may be examined both from the top down and from the bottom up. Established institutions – state, church, media and family – tend to stabilize and reproduce inter-subjectivity, the common-sense view of reality, morality, and the sense of what is normal. Change in inter-subjectivity – in a sense of injustice and of new social norms – comes from the bottom, from civil society. Movements for emancipation of women, for human rights, and for action to relieve poverty come from civil society. Changes in the social relations of production come about through a reaction by civil society to initiatives from dominant economic forces. Study of these movements can trace changes in the balance of power in production, in dominance and subordination of civilizations, in forms of spirituality, and in orientations to space and time. Civil society is the site in which change in inter-subjectivity is generated and in which the basis of political authority at all levels from local to global is grounded. Study of civil society is thus fundamental to knowledge about the dynamics of civilizations.

Civic solidarity

The effectiveness of civil society in promoting change depends upon the degree of civic solidarity. This is a classic problem of political theory. The historian and political theorist Charles Cochrane, in his book *Christianity and Classical Culture*, traced a shift in mood from the creative politics of the Augustan empire, accompanied by notions of commonwealth, reason and justice, to the fatalism of the late empire when life seemed dominated by circumstances, and the state, far from being the creation of human beings in their collectivity was thought of as imposed by a heroic individual of the past.[24] The sense of self-conscious human efficacy, once dominant, was emptied and replaced by determination of the external force of fate. People, once the creators and supporters of political authority, become its passive objects.

The reasons for this transformation have been discussed in a sequence of historical interpretations, each one of which may tell us at least as much about the historian's own time and its preoccupations as about the imperial transfor-

mation of Rome.[25] Classical humanism, e.g. in Cicero and Virgil, sought a balance between "virtue" and "fortune", but in the late empire "fortune" had overwhelmed "virtue". Machiavelli hoped for a revival of *virtù* in his time – the creative energy needed to overcome internal fragmentation and conflict and to resist external invasion. He thought his contemporaries too corrupt to provide it from what we could now call civil society; and so he looked to a Prince as a surrogate for civic *virtù* (Chabod 1958; Pocock 1975; Machiavelli 1977). The fourteenth-century Islamic diplomat and historian, Ibn Khaldun, discussing the history of North Africa, saw the collective solidarity of the austere rural community, which he called *'asabiya*, as the force necessary for the creation of a new state. *'Asabiya* was, however, a fragile force, subject to decay in the security and affluence of urban life (Khaldun 1967; Cox 1992). In twentieth-century America, the sociologist Robert Putnam has pointed with concern to a decline of the spirit of association that de Tocqueville credited with the strength of American nineteenth-century society (Putnam 1995).

The strength of civic solidarity is a measure of a society's capacity for civilizational development and therefore of its capacity to resist becoming overwhelmed and "occulted" (Kinhide Mushakoji's term) by another civilization. To understand more about the factors that underpin civic solidarity is thus a key element in the understanding of civilizational dynamics.

The biosphere

Maintenance of the material conditions propitious for human life is the fundamental prerequisite for any form of civilization. At the close of the millennium, awareness of the fragility of the biosphere – the ultimate material constraint – is more vivid than at any earlier period of history. This poses a challenge to develop practices and inter-subjective meanings conducive to maintenance of the biosphere.

Where globalization fosters the synchronic space orientation of global finance, maintenance of the biosphere involves a sense of time, a way of thinking and acting that foresees the consequences of economic practices in terms of their ecological effects. Where globalization is accompanied by absolutist precepts of economics, maintenance of the biosphere involves a mode of spirituality that contemplates the interdependence of all forms of life. And this sense of global biological interdependence would exclude any form of environmentalism that merely shifts the problem from one place to another, from dominant to subordinate economy, cleaning up affluent areas and polluting among the less powerful.

Concern for the biosphere also becomes a central issue in the social relations of production. When corporate interests make competitiveness the supreme criterion, they subordinate both ecological consequences of production and employment and human welfare to it. Taking the biosphere seriously will involve transforming conventional economics into a science that gives priority over competitiveness to nature and society – in Polanyian terms, re-embedding the

economy in society and nature. Different civilizational developments may be capable of achieving this in different ways.

Global governance

To think of world order in terms of a coexistence of civilizations poses the problem of global governance in a new way. One aspect of what is happening now is a transformation of the inter-state system (Bull 1977; Sakamoto 1994). A multi-level structure of governance is emerging: institutions of the global market limit the rights of states to intervene; political authority is fragmented among regional, national, and sub-national entities; the principle of "subsidiarity" (as consecrated in the EU) applies more and more widely, whereby authority in specific fields descends to the level most able to effect it; weak states descend into chaos; and one reluctant superpower acts or refrains from action insofar as it is motivated or obstructed by the intensity of purpose of elements of its domestic opinion.

Given these conditions, the most feasible form of global governance may be that of a weak center in a fragmented system. Such a pattern is not without precedent. It existed in phases of the Chinese empire, and also of the Japanese, and in the European Middle Ages with the dual centers of Empire and Papacy. In the present world, the United States appears to be acting as that kind of center, albeit uncertainly and without clear and general acquiescence on the part of others. This form of governance underwrites economic globalization and the concept of a single civilization into which other civilizations would ultimately be absorbed.

The alternative would be an even weaker center like a reconstructed United Nations freed from US unilateralism that conceived its purpose as to search for common ground among coexisting civilizations and to define and promote the material conditions requisite for the development of any and all forms of civilization. The minimal objectives of such a center of global governance could be: (1) maintenance of the biosphere; (2) avoidance of major violence; and (3) mutual recognition of difference among civilizations. From that minimum, objectives could extend to facilitating alternative forms of social and economic organization consistent with a minimal understanding of human rights and welfare. Such a "United Nations" would operate with an epistemology on the lines sketched out above, one which recognizes a multiplicity of "realities" and "truths" and which works not to bring about their convergence but their reconciliation.

Notes

1

> The practical requirements which underlie every historical judgment give to all history the character of "contemporary history" because, however remote in time the events there recounted may seem to be, the history in reality refers to present needs and present situations wherein those events vibrate.
>
> (Croce 1955: 17)

2 In *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Samuel Huntington gives a different reason that future conflicts will be "clashes" of civilizations. This leads to a refurbishment of Cold War mental structures, with a new enemy (a putative Islamic/Confucian alliance) to replace the Soviet threat and with the basic Cold War strategies reaffirmed.
3 A one-volume edition of *The Decline of the West* was published by Knopf, New York, in 1939. For the context of this work, see Hughes (1952).
4 The publication in 1946 of Somervell's abridgement of the first six volumes of Toynbee's *A Study of History* made his ideas more accessible to the general reader.
5 McNeill's *magnum opus The Rise of the West* (1963), obviously entitled as a rejoinder to Spengler's *Decline of the West* (1939), was expressive of the American *hubris* of the post-war decades. His theme was that the principal factor promoting historical change is contact with foreigners possessing new and unfamiliar skills. Civilizations result from a diffusion of skills and knowledge from a central point such as the United States appeared to be following WWII. Twenty-five years later, in a more reflective mood, McNeill came to regard this thesis as "a form of intellectual imperialism". (The retrospective essay which first appeared in the *Journal of World History*, I, 1990: 1–21 is reproduced in the 1991 re-edition of *The Rise of the West*.)
6 R.G. Collingwood called this process "rethinking the thought of the past" (1946). Collingwood applied this notion to different temporal epochs in a continuous history but it is equally applicable to different cultures or civilizations. Indeed, it is the method used and advocated by Giambattista Vico (1970) who wrote that his effort to discover the way in which the first human thinking arose "cost us the research of a good twenty years" in which it was necessary "to descend from these human and refined natures of ours to those quite wild and savage natures, which we cannot at all imagine and can comprehend only with great effort".
7 Vico did not use the word "civilizations" more than a century before it became current in European discourse. Rather, he spoke of "nations", although with a meaning very different from that of nineteenth- and twentieth-century nationalisms. "Nation" for him meant an entity with a common origin and a common set of institutions, in the sense of common social practices, not formal institutions, and a common language, not in the sense of English or French but as a common means of communicating meaning, or what we have here called "inter-subjectivity."
8 The meanings of Ibn Khaldun's concepts are discussed in Yves Lacoste, *Ibn Khaldun: The Birth of History and the Past of the Third World* (1984: 92–117).
9 This is one of the difficulties I have with Samuel Huntington's metaphor of civilizations as tectonic plates colliding along specific geographical fault lines and his picturing of civilizations as states writ large.
10 See e.g. Michel Albert (1991).
11 See also his more recent *Culture and Imperialism* (1993).
12 Spengler (1939: vol. II, 189):

> In a rock stratum are embedded crystals of a mineral. Clefts and cracks occur, water filters in, and the crystals are gradually washed out so that in due course only their hollow mould remains. Then come volcanic outbursts which explode the mountain; molten masses pour in, stiffen, and crystallize out in their turn. But these are not free to do so in their own special forms. They must fill up the spaces that they find available. Thus there arise distorted forms, crystals whose inner structure distorts their external shape, stones of one kind presenting the appearance of stones of another kind. The mineralogists call this phenomenon *Pseudomorphosis*.
>
> By the term "historical pseudomorphosis" I propose to designate those cases in which an older alien Culture lies so massively over the land that a young

> Culture born in this land, cannot get its breath and fails not only to achieve pure and specific expression-forms, but even to develop fully its own self-consciousness. All that wells up from the depths of the young soul is cast in the old moulds, young feelings stiffen in senile works, and instead of rearing up in its own creative power, it can only hate the distant power with a hate that grows to be enormous.

13 The tragedy of the Russian pseudomorphosis, in Spengler's analysis, has been the continuing dominance of Western imported thought over a suppressed and barely articulate Russian spirit. By analogy, the current "market reformers" are but an extension of the Western-inspired communist managers, themselves natural successors to Peter the Great's modernization. In the post-communist débâcle, opposition to the advocates of "shock therapy" have revived awareness of non-Western *narodnik* sentiment. One literary instance is in a revived interest in the work of Nicholas Berdyaev (1947). Those with a longer historical perspective could trace the phenomenon back to the Varangians!

14 Pitrim Sorokin, *Social and Cultural Dynamics*, revised and abridged in one volume by the author (1957). Original four-volume edition published in 1937.

15 According to Sorokin:

> The crisis is far deeper than the ordinary; its depth is unfathomable, its end not yet in sight, and the whole of the Western society is involved in it. It is the crisis of a Sensate culture, now in its overripe stage, the culture that has dominated the Western World during the last five centuries. It is also the crisis of a contractual (capitalist) society associated with it.
>
> (1957: 622)

Against this prediction, it can be argued that the three decades following WWII saw a flourishing of the sensate culture, especially in American social science, and the collapse of "real socialism" appears to negate a crisis of capitalism. In favor of it, it can be argued that the crisis was only postponed and that movements like postmodernism and deep ecology redefine the crisis in more meaningful contemporary terms.

16 For a concise statement, see Karen Armstrong (1993).

17 As an instance of absolutist thinking Louis Althusser has written: "It has been possible to apply Marx's theory with success because it is 'true'; it is not true because it has been applied with success" (Althusser and Balibar 1979: 59). The French Catholic philosopher Jean Guitton, who had been Althusser's professor in his preparation for the *Ecole normale* and was his companion in *l'Action catholique*, remained his friend after Althusser's conversion to atheism and Marxism. The two maintained a close relationship and correspondence thereafter. In 1980, just before the psychiatric crisis in which he strangled his wife, Althusser came to Guitton with a premonition of human catastrophe which, he thought could only be avoided by a union of Rome with Moscow. Reflecting on this strange and enduring friendship, Guitton (1988) wondered whether from his days with *l'Action catholique* to his role as foremost exponent of Marxism in post-1968 France Althusser had fundamentally changed *"dans son intimité secrète et profonde"*.

18 David L. Miller writes:

> Polytheism is not only a social reality; it is also a philosophical condition. It is that reality experienced by men and women when Truth with a capital "T" cannot be articulated reflectively according to a single grammar, a single logic, or a single symbol-system. It is a situation that exists when metaphors, stories, anecdotes, puns, dramas, movies, with all their mysterious ambiguity, seem more compelling than the rhetoric of political, religious, and philosophical systems.

> They seem more compelling than tightly argued and logically coherent explanations of self and society because they allow for multiple meanings to exist simultaneously, as if Truth, Goodness, and Beauty can never be contained in a logic that allows for only one of the following: good versus evil, light versus dark, truth versus fiction, reality versus illusion, being versus becoming. In a philosophically polytheistic situation the "new science" of the time will break forth with principles of relativism, indeterminacy, plural logic systems, irrational numbers; substances that do not have substance, such as quarks; double explanations for light; and black holes in the middle of actual realities.
>
> (1974: 5)

19 For a discussion of how this concept of unity in diversity has influenced Indian political history, see Satish Chandra (1997).
20 For a critique of this certainty, see George Soros (1997).
21 David Harvey (1989: 204) sees a compression of time and space as the present condition. Time, he sees as privileged over space in social theories; and space over time in aesthetics. Space is compressed in the awareness of global interdependencies. The compression of time comes about through the shrinking of decision-making horizons into a non-historical present. (One might say, inspired by Innis, that time is being compressed into space.) Harvey's strongest point is that our consciousness of both time and space is dependent upon material processes:

> From this materialist perspective we can then argue that objective conceptions of time and space are necessarily created through material practices and processes which serve to reproduce social life … The objectivity of time and space is given in each case by the material practices of social reproduction, and to the degree that these latter vary geographically and historically, so we find that social time and social space are differentially constructed. Each distinctive mode of production or social formation will, in short, embody a distinctive bundle of time and space practices and concepts.

Harvey relates present-day concepts of time and space to the reorganization of production from Fordism to Postfordism; the fragmentation of production processes in what he calls "flexible accumulation" enhances the sense of the ephemeral.
22 Braudel's theoretical reflections on time and history are to be found in Braudel (1980); and in Braudel (1979) vol. III especially Chapter 1 and Conclusions.
23 The subtitle to the book is *Man, Society, Civilization and Barbarism*.
24 Cochrane was a student of R.G. Collingwood. Harold Innis' work on civilizations was informed by his conversations with Cochrane, his colleague at the University of Toronto.
25 E.g. Edward Gibbon (1776–88); and the work of Jacob Burckhardt (1852), the Swiss cultural historian.

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