FERNAND BRAUDEL

A HISTORY OF CIVILIZATIONS

TRANSLATED BY RICHARD MAYNE

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forms, where it has clearly played havoc. What else could have been expected?

In fact, the two kinds of history have both been misplaced, one in the lower forms of the *lycée,* the other at the top, with mutually damaging results. The ensuing confusion has been compounded by the liberties that teachers have taken since 1968: with the best will in the world, they have stressed one part of the curriculum to the detriment of another. Owing to such haphazard choices by a succession of teachers, some pupils have gone through their whole school careers without hearing about one or another important period in history. This hardly helps them to follow the thread of chronology.

Unhappily, the history taught to our children has suffered the same fate as their mathematics or their grammar. Why teach in bits and pieces a subject which is a *whole'?* Especially to ten-year-olds who will never master elementary calculus or will very rarely, and only much later, tackle higher mathematics. The study of linguistics has ravaged grammar like a wild boar's snout burrowing through a potato field. It has cloaked it in pedantic, complicated, incomprehensible language which is also quite inappropriate. The result? Grammar and spelling have never been so badly neglected. But anomalies like these should not be blamed on linguistics, higher mathematics or the new history. They do what they have to do, without worrying about what can or cannot be taught at various ages. The blame lies, in fact, with the intellectual ambitions of those who draw up school curricula. They want to go too far. I am delighted that they are ambitious for themselves. But for those in their charge they should try to be simple, even - and especially - when this is difficult.

I wonder how much this debate can interest a non-French reader. Yet, if one really considers it, what is at stake is of immense importance, and cannot be ignored. Who can deny the violence that has stemmed from history? Of course, historians have no business fabricating dubious national myths - or even pursuing only humanism, which I myself prefer. But history is a vital element in national self-awareness. And without such self-awareness there can be no original culture, no genuine civilization, in France or anywhere else.

Introduction: History and the Present Day

These preliminary pages seek to explain what the new history curriculum requires of students in the senior forms. Logically, they had to figure here, at the beginning of the book; but for teaching purposes they belong elsewhere. Ideally, in fact, they should be read towards the end of the second term, when the first part of the course has been completed and serious study of the great civilizations is about to begin. By that time, students will already be more familiar with philosophical terminology and debate. There is a case, however, for tackling the subject, at least initially, here and now.

The new history curriculum for the senior forms poses difficult problems. It amounts to a survey of the contemporary world in all its confusion and complexity, but made intelligible in various ways by an historical approach which may involve any of the kindred social sciences - geography, demography, economics, sociology, anthropology, psychology, etc.

It would be pretentious to profess to explain the present-day world. All one can hope is to understand it better by a variety of means. Your curriculum offers three such methods.

First, the present can partly be understood by reference to the immediate past. In this brief look backwards, history has an easy task. The first part of your course, therefore, covers the dramatic and often brutal days and years that the world has experienced since the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914, and continuing to the present time. These upheavals have shaken and shaped the twentieth century, and in countless ways they affect our lives still.

By themselves, however, the events of yesterday cannot fully explain the world of today. In fact, in varying degrees, the present is the outcome of other experiences much longer ago. It is the fruit of past centuries, and even of 'the whole historical evolution of humanity until now'. That the present involves so vast a stretch of the past should by no means seem absurd - although all of us naturally tend to think of the world around us only in the context of our own brief existence, and to see its history as a speeded-up film in which everything happens pell-mell: wars, battles, summit meetings, political crises, *coups d'etat,* revolutions, economic upsets, ideas, intellectual and artistic fashions, and so on.

Clearly, however, the life of human beings involves many other phenomena which cannot figure in this film of events: the space they inhabit, the social structures that confine them and determine their existence, the ethical rules they consciously or unconsciously obey, their religious and philosophical beliefs, and the civilization to which they belong. These phenomena are much longer-lived than we are; and in our own lifetime we are unlikely to see them totally transformed.

For an analogy, consider our physical environment. It certainly changes: mountains, rivers, glaciers and coastlines gradually shift. But so slow is this process that none of us can perceive it with the naked eye, unless by comparison with the distant past, or with the help of scientific studies and measurements which go beyond mere subjective observation. The lives of countries and civilizations, and the psychological or spiritual attitudes of peoples, are not so seemingly immutable; yet generation succeeds generation without really radical change. Which by no means lessens - far from it - the importance of these deep, underlying forces that invade our lives and indeed shape the world.

The recent and the more or less distant past thus combine in the amalgam of the present. Recent history races towards us at high speed: earlier history accompanies us at a slower, stealthier pace.

This early history - long-distance history - forms the second part of the course. To study the great civilizations as an explanatory background to the present means stepping aside from the headlong

rush of history since 1914. It invites us to reflect on history with a slower pulse-rate, history in the longer term. Civilizations are extraordinary creatures, whose longevity passes all understanding. Fabulously ancient, they live on in each of us; and they will still live on after we have passed away.

Recent and remote history, then, are the first two keys to understanding the present. Finally, the course provides a third. This involves identifying the major problems in the world today. Problems of every kind - political, social, economic, cultural, technical, scientific. In a word, what is required goes beyond the double historical approach already outlined: it means looking at the world around us to distinguish the essential from the peripheral.

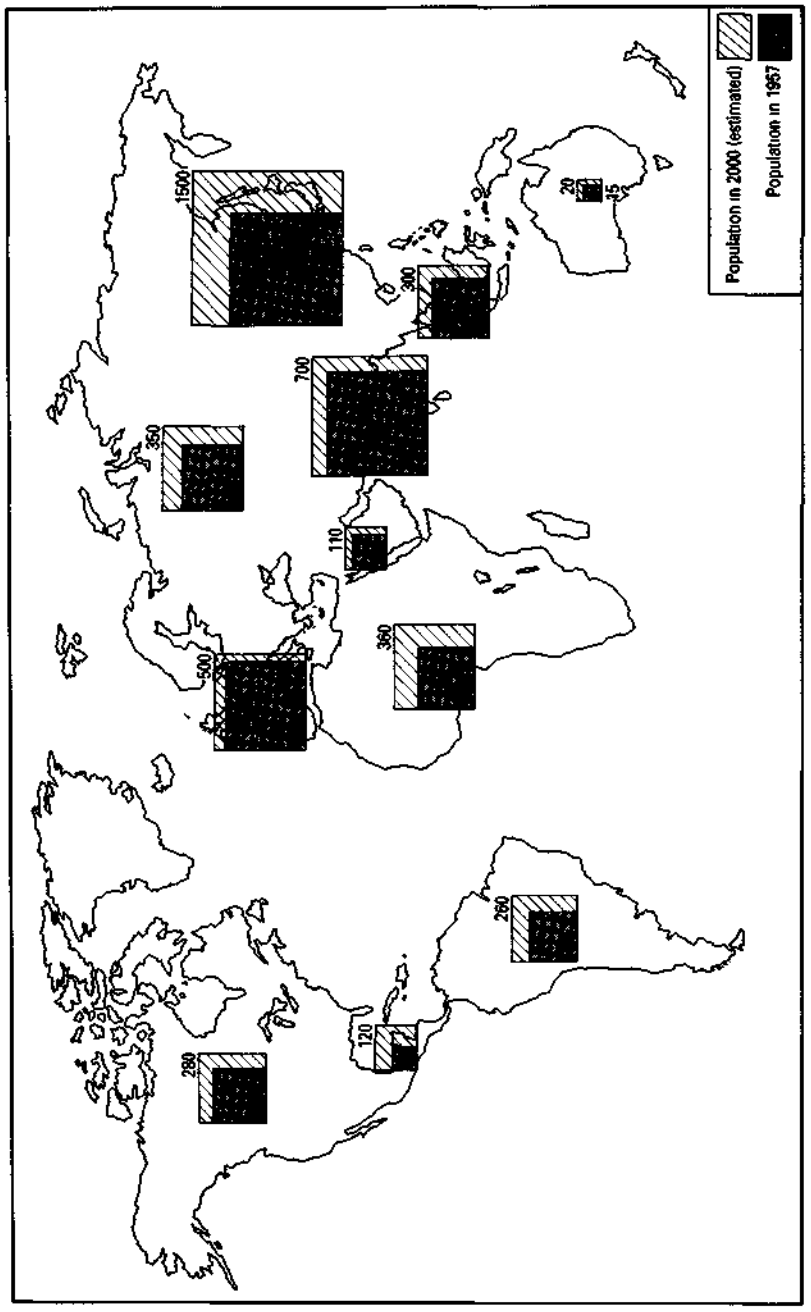
Normally, historians work and reflect on the past; and if the available documentation does not always enable them to grasp it completely, at least they know in advance, when studying the eighteenth century for instance, what the Enlightenment led to. This in itself greatly enhances their knowledge and understanding. They know the last line of the play. When it comes to the present day, with all its different potential dénouements, deciding which are the really major problems essentially means imagining the last line of the play — discerning, among all the possible outcomes, those which are most likely to occur. The task is difficult, hazardous, and indispensable.

Condorcet, the eighteenth-century *encyclopédiste* whose best known work was his *Sketch for an Historical Tableau of the Progress of the Human Spirit,* thought such a task legitimate. Serious historians today also defend forecasting - with some courage, given its risks. In 1951, a world-famous economist, Colin Clark, used the statistics then available to predict the probable scale of the future economy. In 1960, Jean Fourastié calmly discussed *The Civilization of 1980,* which in his view determined - or should have determined - the policy to be followed at the time he wrote. A very precarious 'science', which the philosopher Gaston Berger has called 'prospective', claims to specialize in forecasting the near future - the 'futurible', to use a frightful word beloved of certain economists. The 'futurible' is what now can legitimately be described in the

future tense - that thin wisp of tomorrow which can be guessed at and very nearly grasped.

Such proceedings are sometimes mocked. But although they may be only half-successful, they at least offer an escape route from the confusion of the present day, looking ahead to identify the biggest problems and try to make some sense of them. The world of today is a world in evolution.

The accompanying map shows the probable distribution of the world's population in the year 2000. It contains food for thought. It should make clear among other things that no planners — and planning means the attentive and 'prospective' study of today's major problems — can do their job properly without such a map (and many other documents) in their mind's eye. It certainly corroborates the remark by Félix Houphouët-Boigny, President of the Ivory Coast Republic, that planning must take different forms in Asia and in Black Africa, because poverty in Asia must cope with over-population, whereas in Black Africa under-population is the challenge.



1. World population in the year 2000

History, a house of many mansions

It may seem surprising that history should be open to such diversions and speculations — that it should seek, in a word, to be a science of the present, and of a present which is ambiguous, at that. Is it not going astray? Is it not, like the wolf in the fable, putting on false clothing stolen from other social sciences? We shall return to this question at the beginning of Part II. By then, the problem should have been clarified, for it is a problem relating to time itself, and the nature of time will have been broached in the course of studying philosophy.

The obvious multiplicity of the explanations that history provides, the gaps between different points of view, and even their mutual contradictions, together form a *dialectic* which is specific to history, and based on the different varieties of time which it

describes: rapid for events, slower for periods, slower still, even sluggish, for civilizations. For any particular study one can choose a particular variety of time. But any attempt at a *global* explanation - like the history of civilizations - needs a more eclectic approach. One must consult many different snapshots of the past, each with its own exposure time, then fuse times and images together, rather as the colours of the solar spectrum, focused together, combine at last into pure white light.

I. A HISTORY OF CIVILIZATIONS

1. Changing Vocabulary

It would be pleasant to be able to define the word 'civilization' simply and precisely, as one defines a straight line, a triangle or a chemical element.

The vocabulary of the social sciences, unfortunately, scarcely permits decisive definitions. Not that everything is uncertain or in flux: but most expressions, far from being fixed for ever, vary from one author to another, and continually evolve before our eyes. 'Words,' says Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'are instruments that people are free to adapt to any use, provided they make clear their intentions.' In the social sciences, in fact, as in philosophy, there are wide and frequent variations in the meaning of the simplest words, according to the thought that uses and informs them.

The word 'civilization' — a neologism — emerged late, and unobtrusively, in eighteenth-century France. It was formed from 'civilized' and 'to civilize', which had long existed and were in general use in the sixteenth century. In about 1732, 'civilization' was still only a term in jurisprudence: it denoted an act of justice or a judgement which turned a criminal trial into civil proceedings. Its modern meaning, 'the process of becoming civilized', appeared later, in 1752, from the pen of the French statesman and economist Anne Robert Jacques Turgot, who was then preparing a universal history, although he did not publish it himself. The official début of the word in print occurred in 1756, in a work entitled *A Treatise on Population* by Victor Riqueti, Marquis of Mirabeau, the father of the celebrated revolutionary Honoré, Count Mirabeau.

He referred to 'the scope of civilization' and even 'the luxury of a false civilization'.

Oddly enough, Voltaire omitted the useful word 'civilization' from his *Essay on the Customs and Spirit ojNations* (1756), although as the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga remarked, 'he is just the man to have conceived the notion . . . and first outlined a general history of civilization'.

In its new sense, civilization meant broadly the opposite of barbarism. On one side were the civilized peoples: on the other, primitive savages or barbarians. Even the 'noble savage' dear to Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his disciples in the eighteenth century was not regarded as *civilized.* Without a doubt, the French at the end of the reign of Louis XV were pleased to see in this new word the image of their own society - which at a distance may still appeal to us even today. At all events, the word appeared because it was needed. Until then, *poli* (polite), *police* (organized), *civil* and *civilizé* had no corresponding nouns. The word *police* rather connoted social order - which distanced it somewhat from the adjective *polite,* defined in Furetiere's 1690 *Universal Dictionary* as follows: 'Used figuratively in ethics to mean civilized. To civilize: to polish the manners, make civil and sociable . . . Nothing is more apt to civilize a young man than the conversation of ladies.'

From France, the word 'civilization' rapidly spread through Europe. The word 'culture' went with it. By 1772 and probably earlier, the word 'civilization' had reached England and replaced 'civility', despite the latter's long history. *Zivilisation* took root in Germany without difficulty, alongside the older word *Bildung.* In Holland, on the other hand, it met opposition from *beschaving,* a noun based on the verb *beschaven,* to refine, ennoble or civilize, although the word *civilisatie* did later appear. 'Civilization' encountered similar resistance South of the Alps, where Italian already had, and soon used in the sense of 'civilization', the fine old word *civiltà,* found in Dante. Deeply entrenched, *civiltà* prevented the intrusion of the new word, but not the explosive arguments that came with it. In 1835, Romagnosi tried in vain to launch the word *incivilmento,* which in his mind signified 'civilizing' as much as 'civilization' *per se.*

In its travels round Europe, the new word 'civilization' was accompanied by an old word, 'culture'. Cicero had used its Latin equivalent, as in *'Cultura animi philosophia esf* - 'Philosophy is the cultivation of the soul.' It was now rejuvenated, and took on more or less the same sense as civilization. For a long time, indeed, the words were synonyms. At the University of Berlin in 1830, for instance, Hegel used them interchangeably. But at length the need to distinguish between them began to be felt.

Civilization, in fact, has at least a double meaning. It denotes both moral and material values. Thus Karl Marx distinguished between the *infrastructure* (material) and the *superstructure* (spiritual) - the latter, in his view, depending heavily on the former. Charles Seignobos remarked: 'Civilization is a matter of roads, ports, and quays' - a flippant way of saying that it was not all culture. 'It is all that humanity has achieved,' declared Marcel Mauss; while for the historian Eugene Cavignac it was 'a minimum of science, art, order and virtue'.

So civilization has at least two levels. Hence the temptation felt by many authors to separate the two words, culture and civilization, one assuming the dignity of spiritual concerns, the other the triviality of material affairs. The difficulty is that no two people agree on how the distinction is to be drawn: it varies from country to country, and within one country from period to period, and from one author to another.

In Germany, after some confusion, the distinction finally gave culture *(Kultur)* a certain precedence, consciously devaluing civilization. For the sociologists A. Tönnies (1922) and Alfred Weber (1935), civilization was no more than a mass of practical, technical knowledge, a series of ways of dealing with nature. Culture, by contrast, was a set of normative principles, values and ideals — in a word, the spirit.

This explains a remark by the German historian Wilhelm Mommsen which at first sight strikes a Frenchman as strange: 'It is

humanity's duty today [1851] to see that civilization does not destroy culture, nor technology the human being.' The first part of the sentence sounds bizarre to French ears because for us the word 'civilization' takes precedence, as it does in Britain and the United States, whereas in Poland and Russia culture is more highly prized, as it is in Germany (and through German influence). In France, the word 'culture' retains its power only when it denotes what Henri Marrou has called 'any personal form of the life of the spirit'. We speak of Paul Valéry's culture, not his civilization, because the latter word more usually refers to the values of the group.

There remains one further complication, greater than all the rest. Since the year 1874, when E. B. Taylor published *Primitive Culture,* British and American anthropologists have tended more and more to use the word 'culture' to describe the primitive societies they studied, as against the word 'civilization', which in English is normally applied to modern societies. Almost all anthropologists have followed suit, speaking of primitive cultures as compared with the civilizations that more developed societies have evolved. We shall make frequent use of this distinction in the course of the present work.

Fortunately, the useful adjective 'cultural', invented in Germany in about 1850, suffers from none of these complications. It applies, in fact, to the *whole* of the content of a civilization or a culture. One can say, for example, that a civilization (or a culture) is the sum total of its cultural assets, that its geographical area is its cultural domain, that its history is cultural history, and that what one civilization transmits to another is a cultural legacy or a case of cultural borrowing, whether material or intellectual. Perhaps, indeed, the word 'cultural' is *too* convenient: it has been called barbaric or ill-formed. But until a replacement is found, it remains indispensable. No other, at present, fits the bill.

In about 1819 the word 'civilization', hitherto singular, began to be used in the plural. From then onwards, it 'tended to assume a new *and quite different* meaning: i.e., the characteristics common to

the collective life of a period or a group'. Thus one might speak of the civilization of fifth-century Athens or French civilization in the century of Louis XIV. This distinction between singular and plural, properly considered, raises a further substantial complication.

In the twentieth century, in fact, the plural of the word predominates, and is closest to our personal experience. Museums transport us in time, plunging us more or less completely into past civilizations. Actual travelling is more instructive still. To cross the Channel or the Rhine, to go south to the Mediterranean: these are clear and memorable experiences, all of which underline the plural nature of civilizations. Each, undeniably, is distinct.

If we were asked, now, to define civilization in the singular, we should certainly be more hesitant. The use of the plural signifies, in fact, the gradual decline of a concept - the typically eighteenth-century notion that there was such a thing as civilization, coupled with faith in progress and confined to a few privileged peoples or groups, humanity's 'élite'. The twentieth century, happily, has abandoned a certain number of such value-judgements, and would be hard put to it to decide - and on what criteria - which civilization was the best.

This being so, civilization in the singular has lost some of its cachet. It no longer represents the supreme moral and intellectual value that it seemed to embody in the eighteenth century. Today, for example, we more naturally tend to call some abominable misdeed 'a crime against *humanity'* rather than against *civilization,* although both mean much the same thing. We feel somewhat uneasy about using the word *civilization* in its old sense, connoting human excellence or superiority.

In the singular, indeed, civilization now surely denotes something which all civilizations share, however unequally: the common heritage of humanity. Fire, writing, mathematics, the cultivation of plants and the domestication of animals — these are no longer confined to any particular origin: they have become the collective attributes of civilization in the singular.

This spread of cultural assets which are common to all humanity has become phenomenal in the modern world. Industrial technology, invented in the West, is exported everywhere and eagerly adopted. Will it unify the world by making everywhere look alike - the same ferro-concrete, steel and glass buildings, the same airports, the same railways with their stations and loudspeakers, the same vast cities that gradually engulf so much of the population? 'We have reached a phase,' wrote Raymond Aron, 'where we are discovering both the limited validity of the concept of civilization and the need to transcend that concept . . . The phase of civilizations is coming to an end, and for good or ill humanity is embarking on a new phase' — that of a *single* civilization which could become universal.

Nevertheless, the 'industrial civilization' exported by the West is only one feature of its civilization as a whole. By accepting it, the world is not taking on Western civilization lock, stock and barrel: far from it. The history of civilizations, in fact, is the history of continual mutual borrowings over many centuries, despite which each civilization has kept its own original character. It must be admitted, however, that now is the first time when one decisive aspect of a particular civilization has been adopted willingly by all the civilizations in the world, and the first time when the speed of modern communications has so much assisted its rapid and effective distribution. That simply means that what we call 'industrial civilization' is in the process of joining the collective civilization of the world. All civilizations have been, are being, or will be shaken by its impact.

Still, even supposing that all the world's civilizations sooner or later adopt similar technology, and thereby partly similar ways of life, we shall nevertheless for a long time yet face what are really very different civilizations. For a long time yet, the word civilization will continue to be used in both singular and plural. On this point, the historian is not afraid to be categorical.

2. The Study of Civilization Involves All the Social Sciences

To define the idea of civilization requires the combined efforts of all the social sciences. They include history; but in this chapter it will play only a minor role.

Here, it is the other social sciences that in turn will be called in aid: geography, sociology, economics and collective psychology. This means four excursions into very contrasting fields. But, despite initial appearances, the results will be seen to tally.

Civilizations as geographical areas

Civilizations, vast or otherwise, can always be located on a map. An essential part of their character depends on the constraints or advantages of their geographical situation.

This, of course, will have been affected for centuries or even millennia by human effort. Every landscape bears the traces of this continuous and cumulative labour, generation after generation contributing to the whole. So doing, humanity itself has been transformed by what the French historian Jules Michelet called 'the decisive shaping of self by self, or (as Karl Marx put it) 'the production of people by people'.

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.

The stage on which humanity's endless dramas are played out partly determines their story-line and explains their nature. The cast will alter, but the set remains broadly the same.

For the expert on India, Hermann Goetz, there are two essential Indias. One is humid, with heavy rainfall, lakes, marshes, forests and jungles, aquatic plants and flowers - the land of people with dark skins. It contrasts with the dryer India of the Indo-Gangetic plain, plus the Deccan plateau - the home of lighter-skinned people, many of them warlike. India as a whole, in Goetz's view, is a debate and a tug-of-war between these two contrasting areas and peoples.

The natural and man-made environment, of course, cannot predetermine everything. It is not all-powerful. But it greatly affects the inherent or acquired advantages of any given situation.

To take inherent advantages, every civilization is born of immediate opportunities, rapidly exploited. Thus in the dawn of time, river civilizations flourished in the old world: Chinese civilization along the Yellow River; pre-Indian along the Indus; Sumerian, Babylonian and Assyrian on the Euphrates and the Tigris; Egyptian on the Nile. A similar group of vigorous civilizations developed in Northern Europe, around the Baltic and the North Sea- not to mention the Atlantic Ocean itself. Much of the West and its dependencies today, in fact, are grouped around that ocean, rather as the Roman world of former times was grouped around the Mediterranean.

These classic instances reveal above all the prime importance of communications. No civilization can survive without mobility: all are enriched by trade and the stimulating impact of strangers. Islam, for instance, is inconceivable without the movement of its caravans across the 'dry seas' of its deserts and steppes, without its expeditions in the Mediterranean and across the Indian Ocean as far as Malacca and China.

Mentioning these achievements has already led us beyond the

natural and immediate advantages which supposedly gave rise to civilizations. To overcome the hostility of the desert or the sudden squalls of the Mediterranean, to exploit the steady winds of the Indian Ocean, or to dam a river - all that needed human effort, to enjoy advantages, or rather to create them.

But why were some people capable of such achievements, but not others, in some places but not others, for generations on end?

Arnold Toynbee offered a tempting theory. All human achievement, he thought, involved challenge and response. Nature had to present itself as a difficulty to be overcome. If human beings took up the challenge, their response would lay the foundations of civilization.

But if this theory were carried to the limit, would it imply that the greater the challenge from Nature, the stronger humanity's response? It seems doubtful. In the twentieth century, civilized men and women have taken up the forbidding challenge of the deserts, the polar regions and the equator. Yet, despite the material interests involved, such as gold or oil, they have not yet settled and multiplied in those areas and founded true civilizations there. A challenge, yes, and also a response: but civilization does not always follow - at least until improved technology makes the response more adequate.

Every civilization, then, is based on an area with more or less fixed limits. Each has its own geography with its own opportunities and constraints, some virtually permanent and quite different from one civilization to another. The result? A variegated world, whose maps can indicate which areas have houses built of wood, and which of clay, bamboo, paper, bricks or stone; which areas use wool or cotton or silk for textiles; which areas grow various food crops — rice, maize, wheat, etc. The challenge varies: so does the response.

Western or European civilization is based on wheat and bread — and largely white bread - with all the constraints that this implies. Wheat is a demanding crop. It requires field use to be rotated annually, or fields to be left fallow every one or two years. Equally,

the flooded rice-fields of the Far East, gradually spreading into low-lying areas, impose their own constraints on land use and local customs.

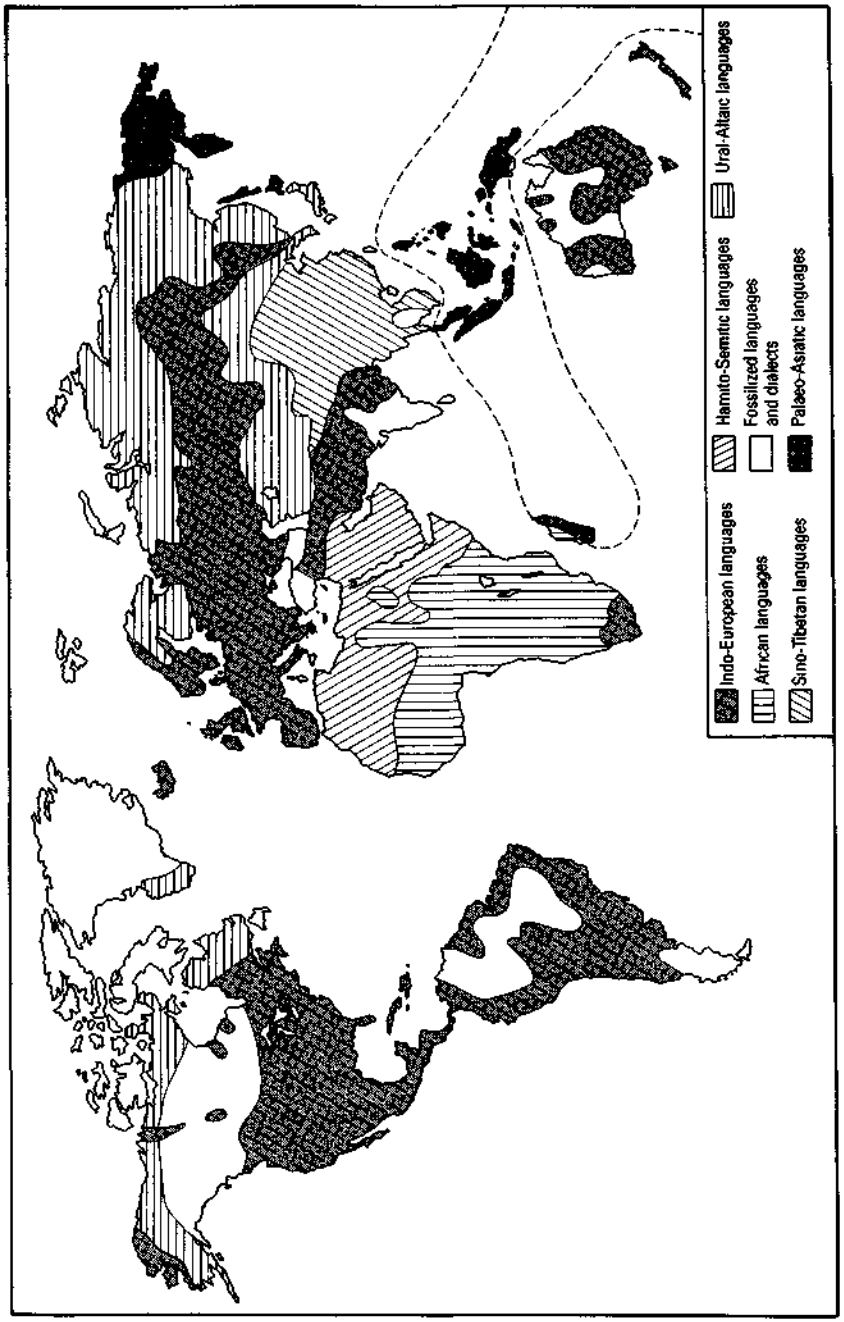
Responses to natural challenges thus continually free humanity from its environment and at the same time subject it to the resultant solutions. We exchange one form of determinism for another.

A cultural zone, as defined by anthropologists, is an area within which one group of cultural characteristics is dominant. In the case of primitive peoples, these may include not only their language but also their food crops, their marriage ceremonies, their religious beliefs, their pottery, their feathered arrows, their weaving techniques and so on. Defined by anthropologists on the basis of precise details, these zones are generally small.

Some cultural zones, however, cover much larger areas, united by characteristics common to the group and differentiating them from other large communities. Marcel Mauss claims that the primitive cultures surrounding the vast Pacific Ocean, despite the obvious differences and immense distances between them, are all part of a single human or rather cultural whole.

Naturally enough, following the example of the anthropologists, geographers and historians have taken to discussing cultural zones - this time with reference to advanced and complex civilizations. They identify areas which in turn can be subdivided into a series of districts. Such subdivision, as we shall see, applies essentially to large civilizations: these regularly resolve themselves into smaller units.

Western civilization, so-called, is at once the 'American civilization' of the United States, and the civilizations of Latin America, Russia and of course Europe. Europe itself contains a number of civilizations - Polish, German, Italian, English, French, etc. Not to mention the fact that these national civilizations are made up of 'civilizations' that are smaller still: Scotland, Ireland, Catalonia, Sicily, the Basque country and so on. Nor should we forget that these divisions, these multi-coloured mosaics, embody more or less permanent characteristics.



The languages of the world

The stability of these cultural zones and their frontiers does not however isolate them from cultural imports. Every civilization imports and exports aspects of its culture. These may include the lost-wax process for casting, the compass, gunpowder, the technique for tempering steel, a complete or fragmentary philosophical system, a cult, a religion or the song about Marlborough that went the rounds of Europe in the eighteenth century: Goethe heard it in the streets of Verona in 1786.

The Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre once made a list of all that his country had received pell-mell from Europe — then very distant - in the last decades of the eighteenth century and the first five or six of the nineteenth. It included brown beer from Hamburg, the English cottage, the steam engine (a steamship was already plying the *baia* of San Salvador in 1819), white linen summer clothes, false teeth, gas lighting and - ahead of all of them — secret societies, notably Freemasonry, which played so big a role in Latin America at the time of independence. A few decades later came the philosophical system of Auguste Comte, whose influence was so marked that traces of it can be detected there even today.

The example of Brazil is one among many. It shows that no cultural frontier is ever completely closed.

In the past, cultural influences came in small doses, delayed by the length and slowness of the journeys they had to make. If historians are to be believed, the Chinese fashions of the T'ang period travelled so slowly that they did not reach the island of Cyprus and the brilliant court of Lusignan until the fifteenth century. From there they spread, at the quicker speed of Mediterranean trade, to France and the eccentric court of Charles VI, where hennins and shoes with long pointed toes became immensely popular, the heritage of a long vanished world - much as light still reaches us from stars already extinct.

Today, the spread of cultural influence has attained vertiginous speed. There will soon be nowhere in the world that has not been 'contaminated' by the industrial civilization that originated in Europe. In North Borneo (which with Sarawak was under British rule until 1963), a few loudspeakers used to relay radio programmes from Communist China and Indonesia. Their listeners understood nothing of what the broadcasts were saying, but the rhythms they heard very soon affected their traditional music and dancing. How much greater is the influence of the cinema, especially from Europe and America, on the tastes and even the customs of countries on the far side of the world.

No example, however, could be more telling than an experience described by the American anthropologist Margaret Mead. In her youth she had studied a Pacific island people whose life she had shared for several months. The war brought them into unexpected contact with the outside world. After the war, Margaret Mead returned and wrote a book in which she movingly described what had happened, with photographs showing many of the same people as they had been and as they were, totally transformed.

Such, again, is the dialogue between civilization and civilizations of which we shall hear so much in this book. Will the ever faster spread of cultural influence remove the frontiers between civilizations that were once so firm in world history? Many people fear — and some rejoice — that they will. Yet, however avid civilizations are to acquire the material adjuncts of 'modern' life, they are not prepared to take on everything indiscriminately. It even happens, as we shall see, that they stubbornly reject outside influence. This is why, now as in the past, they are still able to safeguard characteristics that everything seems to threaten with extinction.

Civilizations as societies

There can be no civilizations without the societies that support them and inspire their tensions and their progress. Hence the first inevitable question: was it necessary to invent the word 'civilization' and encourage its academic use, if it remains merely a synonym for 'society'? Arnold Toynbee continually used the word 'society' in place of 'civilization'. And Marcel Mauss believed that

'the idea of civilization is certainly less clear than that of society, which it presupposes'.

Society and civilization are inseparable: the two ideas refer to the same reality. Or, as Claude Lévi-Strauss put it, 'they do not represent different objects, but two complementary views of a single object, which can perfectly well be described by either term according to one's point of view.'

The idea of 'society' implies a wealth of content. In this it closely resembles that of civilization, with which it is so often linked. The Western civilization in which we live, for example, depends on the 'industrial society' which is its driving force. It would be easy to characterize Western civilization simply by describing that society and its component parts, its tensions, its moral and intellectual values, its ideals, its habits, its tastes, etc. — in other words by describing the people who embody it and who will pass it on.

If a society stirs and changes, the civilization based on it stirs and changes too. This point is made in a fine book by Lucien Goldmann, *The Hidden God (Le Dieu caché,* 1955), which deals with the France of Louis XIV. Every civilization, Goldmann explains, draws its essential insights from the 'view of the world' it adopts. And in every case this view of the world is coloured, if not determined, by social tensions. Civilization simply reflects them like a mirror.

The age of Jansenism, Racine, Pascal, the abbé de Saint-Cyran and the abbé Barcos, whose fascinating letters Goldmann has rediscovered, was as *The Hidden God* shows an impassioned moment in the history of France; and the tragic view of the world that prevailed then had originated with the parliamentary upper middle classes, disillusioned by the monarchy with which they were at odds. The tragedy of their fate, their awareness of it, and their intellectual ascendancy all combined to imbue the period with their own dominant mood.

In a quite different spirit, Claude Lévi-Strauss also identifies civilizations with societies when he argues the difference between

primitive and modern societies - or, as most anthropologists put it, between cultures and civilizations. Cultures in this sense are societies

> which produce little disorder - what doctors call 'entropy' - and tend to remain indefinitely as they originally were: which is why they look to us like societies that lack both history and progress. Whereas our societies (those that correspond to modern civilizations) . . . are powered by a difference of electrical pressure, as it were, expressed in various forms of social hierarchy . . . Such societies have managed to establish within them a social imbalance which they use to produce both much greater order - we have societies that work like machines - and much greater disorder, much less entropy, in relations between people.

For Lévi-Strauss, then, primitive cultures are the fruit of egalitarian societies, where relations between groups are settled once and for all and remain constant, whereas civilizations are based on hierarchical societies with wide gaps between groups and hence shifting tensions, social conflicts, political struggles, and continual evolution.

The most obvious external sign of these differences between 'cultures' and 'civilizations' is undoubtedly the presence or absence of towns. Towns proliferate in civilizations: in cultures they remain embryonic. There are of course intermediate stages and degrees. What is Black Africa but a group of traditional societies - of cultures — embarked on the difficult and sometimes cruel process of fostering civilization and modern urban development? African cities, taking their models from abroad in a style now international, remain islands amid the stagnation of the countryside. They prefigure the society and the civilization to come.

The most brilliant societies and civilizations, however, presuppose within their own borders cultures and societies of a more elementary kind. Take, for example, the interplay of town and country, never to be underestimated. In no society have all regions and all parts of the population developed equally. Underdevelopment is common in mountain areas or patches of poverty

off the beaten track of modern communications - genuinely primitive societies, true 'cultures' in the midst of a civilization.

The West's first success was certainly the conquest of its countryside — its peasant 'cultures' — by the towns. In the Islamic world, the duality remains more visible than in the West. Islamic towns were quicker to arise — were more precociously urban, so to speak - than in Europe, while the countryside remained more primitive, with vast areas of nomadic life. In the Far East, that contrast is still the general rule: its 'cultures' remain very isolated, living by themselves and on their own resources. Between the most brilliant cities lie tracts of countryside whose way of life is almost self-sufficient, at subsistence level, and sometimes actually barbaric.

Given the close relationship between civilization and society, there is a case for adopting the sociological mode when looking at the long history of civilizations. As historians, however, we should not simply confuse societies with civilizations. We shall explain in the next chapter what we believe the difference to be: in terms of the time-scale, civilization implies and embraces much longer periods than any given social phenomenon. It changes far less rapidly than the societies it supports or involves. But this is not yet the moment to go fully into that question. One thing at a time.

Civilizations as economies

Every society, every civilization, depends on economic, technological, biological and demographic circumstances. Material and biological conditions always help determine the destiny of civilizations. A rise or a fall in the population, health or illness, economic or technological growth or decline — all these deeply affect the cultural as well as the social structure. Political economy in the broadest sense is the study of all these massive problems.

For a long time, people were humanity's only major implement or form of energy - the sole resource for building a civilization by sheer brawn and brain. In principle and in fact, therefore, an

increase in the population has always helped the growth of civilization - as in Europe in the thirteenth, sixteenth, eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Just as regularly, however, when the population grows faster than the economy, what was once an advantage becomes a drawback. Such was the case, undoubtedly, by the end of the sixteenth century, as it is today in most underdeveloped countries. The results in the past were famines, a fall in real earnings, popular uprisings and grim periods of slump: until epidemics and starvation together brutally thinned out the too-serried ranks of human beings. After such biological disasters (like that in Europe in the second half of the fourteenth century, with the Black Death and the epidemics that followed it), the survivors briefly had an easier time and expansion began again, at increasing speed - until the next setback.

Only industrialization, at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, seemed to have broken this vicious circle and made even surplus people valuable again, able to work and live. As the history of Europe showed, the growing value and cost of human labour, and the need to economize on employees, encouraged the development of machines. Classical antiquity, intelligent as it was, had no machines to match its intelligence. It never really tried to acquire them. Its failing was that it possessed slaves. Imperial China, flourishing long before the eighteenth century, very intelligent and technically skilful, nevertheless suffered also: it had too many people. They cost very little, and performed almost all the tasks required by an economy virtually lacking animal power. As a result, although China enjoyed a long lead in matters scientific, it never crossed the threshold of modern science and technology. That privilege, that honour, that profit it left to Europe.

Economic life never ceases to fluctuate, at intervals sometimes long and sometimes short. Good times and bad times succeed each other; and societies and civilizations feel their effects, especially when the upturn or downturn is prolonged. The pessimism and disquiet that were widespread in the late fifteenth century - what

Johan Huizinga called *The Waning of the Middle Ages* - reflected a marked recession in the economy of the West. European Romanticism, likewise, coincided with a long economic recession between 1817 and 1852. The expansion in the mid-eighteenth century (from 1733 onwards) saw some setbacks (for instance on the eve of the French Revolution); but in general at that time economic growth placed the intellectual development of the Enlightenment in a context of material well-being, active trade, expanding industry, and growing population.

Whether in boom or slump, economic activity almost always produces a surplus. The expenditure, or squandering, of such surpluses has been one of the indispensable conditions for luxury in civilizations and for certain forms of art. When today we admire architecture, sculpture or portraits we are also contemplating, not always consciously, the calm pride of a city, the vainglorious folly of a prince or the wealth of a *nouveau-riche* merchant banker. In Europe from the sixteenth century onwards (and probably earlier), the ultimate phase of civilization wears the emblem of capitalism and wealth.

So civilization reflects a redistribution of wealth. Civilizations acquire different characteristics, first at the top and then among the mass of the people, according to their way of redistributing wealth, and according to the social and economic machinery which takes from the circulation of wealth whatever is destined for luxury, art or culture. In the seventeenth century, during the very hard times of Louis XIV's reign, there were very few patrons except at Court. Literary and artistic life was confined to this small circle. In the lavish, easy-going economic climate of the eighteenth century, aristocracy and bourgeoisie joined with royalty in spreading culture, science and philosophy.

But luxury, at that time, was still the privilege of a social minority. The civilization underlying it, that of modest workaday life, had very little share in it. And the ground floor of a civilization is often its crucial level. What is freedom - what is an individual's culture — without enough to live on? From this point of view the much-maligned nineteenth century, that boring century of the *nouveaux riches* and the 'triumphant bourgeoisie', was the harbinger (if not yet the exemplar) of a new destiny for civilizations and for the human personality. While the population rapidly increased, more and more of its members were able to enjoy a certain collective civilization. No doubt the social cost of this transformation — unconscious, admittedly — was very heavy. But its advantages were great. The development of education, access to culture, admission to the universities, social progress — these were the achievements of the nineteenth century, already rich, and full of significance for the future.

The great problem for tomorrow, as for today, is to create a mass civilization of high quality. To do so is very costly. It is unthinkable without large surpluses devoted to the service of society, and without the leisure that mechanization will no doubt soon be able to offer us. In the industrialized countries, such a future can be envisaged not too far ahead. The problem is more complex in the world as a whole. For, just as economic growth has made civilization more accessible to some social classes than to others, it has similarly differentiated various countries in the world. Much of the world's population is what one essayist has called 'the foreign proletariat', better known as the Third World — an enormous mass of people, many of whom have yet to earn a bare living before they can enjoy the benefits of their own countries' civilization, which to them is often a closed book. Unless humanity makes the effort to redress these vast inequalities, they could bring civilizations — and civilization — to an end.

Civilizations as ways of thought

After geography, sociology and economics, we must finally turn to psychology. With this difference: that, as a science, collective psychology is less self-confident and less rich in results than the other social sciences so far considered. It has also rarely ventured along the paths of history.

Collective psychology, awareness, mentality or mental equipment? It is impossible to choose among them. Such uncertainties about vocabulary show what a youthful science collective psychology still is. 'Psychology' is the expression preferred by Alphonse Dupront, a great specialist in this field. 'Awareness' refers only to a phase of development, generally the final phase. 'Mentality' is obviously more convenient. Lucien Febvre, in his excellent *Rabelais*, prefers to speak of 'mental equipment'. But the words matter little: they are not the problem. In every period, a certain view of the world, a collective mentality, dominates the whole mass of society. Dictating a society's attitudes, guiding its choices, confirming its prejudices and directing its actions, this is very much a fact of civilization. Far more than the accidents or the historical and social circumstances of a period, it derives from the distant past, from ancient beliefs, fears and anxieties which are almost unconscious — an immense contamination whose germs are lost to memory but transmitted from generation to generation. A society's reactions to the events of the day, to the pressure upon it, to the decisions it must face, are less a matter of logic or even self-interest than the response to an unexpressed and often inexpressible compulsion arising from the collective unconscious.

These basic values, these psychological structures, are assuredly the features that civilizations can least easily communicate one to another. They are what isolate and differentiate them most sharply. And such habits of mind survive the passage of time. They change little, and change slowly, after a long incubation which itself is largely unconscious too.

Here religion is the strongest feature of civilizations, at the heart of both their present and their past. And in the first place, of course, in civilizations outside Europe. In India, for instance, all actions derive their form and their justification from the religious life, not from reasoning. The Greeks were astonished by this, to judge from an anecdote reported by Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea (265—340): 'Aristoxenus the musician tells the following story about the Indians. One of them met Socrates in Athens and asked him to describe his

philosophy. "It is the study of human reality," replied Socrates. At which the Indian burst out laughing. "How can a man study human reality," he asked, "when he knows nothing of divine reality?"'

Siniti Kunar Chatterji, a contemporary Hindu philosopher, gives the following well-known illustration of humanity's inability to fathom the immense mystery and unity of the supernatural. 'We are like blind people who, feeling this or that part of an elephant's body, are severally convinced that one of them is touching a pillar, another a snake, a third something hard, the fourth a wall and another a brush with a flexible handle - according to whether they are in contact with a leg, the trunk, a tusk, the body or the tail.'

By comparison with this deep religious humility, the West seems forgetful of its Christian sources. But, rather than stress the break that rationalism has supposedly made between religion and culture, it is more to the point to consider the coexistence of laicism, science and religion and the serene or stormy dialogue in which, despite appearances, they have always been engaged. Christianity is an essential reality in Western life: it even marks atheists, whether they know it or not. Ethical rules, attitudes to life and death, the concept of work, the value of effort, the role of women and children - these may seem to have nothing to do with Christian feeling: yet all derive from it nevertheless.

Since the development of Greek thought, however, the tendency of Western civilization has been towards rationalism and hence away from the religious life. That is its distinguishing characteristic, and something to which we shall return. With very few exceptions (certain Chinese sophists, and certain Arab philosophers in the twelfth century), no such marked turning away from religion is to be found in the history of the world outside the West. Almost all civilizations are pervaded or submerged by religion, by the supernatural, and by magic: they have always been steeped in it, and they draw from it the most powerful motives in their particular psychology. This is a phenomenon we shall have many opportunities to observe.

3. The Continuity of Civilizations

The time has come for history to join this complex debate. It may add further complexity: but its use of a time-scale and its capacity to explain matters should make sense of the subject. In fact, no existing ciyilization can be truly understood without some knowledge of the paths it has followed, the values it has inherited, and the experiences it has undergone. A civilization always involves a past, lived and still alive.

The history of a civilization, then, is a search among ancient data for those still valid today. It is not a question of telling us all there is to be known about Greek civilization or the Middle Ages in China — but only what of former times is still relevant today, in Western Europe or in modern China: everything in which there is a short-circuit between past and present, often across many centuries' gap.

Periods within civilizations

But let us begin at the beginning. Every civilization, both yesterday and today, is immediately manifest in something easily grasped: a play, an exhibition of paintings, a successful book, a philosophy, a fashion in dress, a scientific discovery, a technological advance - all of them apparently independent of one another. (At first sight, there is no link between the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and a late painting by Picasso.)

These manifestations of a civilization, it may be noted, are always short-lived. How then can they help us to map out a past which is also present, when they seem so often to replace and destroy each other, rather than show any sort of continuity?

These spectacles are in fact subject to relentless change. The programme is continually altered: no one wants it to run for too long. This can be seen by the way in which literary, artistic and philosophical periods succeed one another. It can be said, borrowing a phrase from the economists, that there are cycles in cultural affairs as there are in economics — more or less protracted or precipitate fluctuations which in most cases violently counter those that went before. From one period to another, everything changes or seems to change, rather as stage lighting, without striking the set or changing the actors' make-up, can show them in new colours and project them into a different world. Of these periods, the Renaissance is the finest example. It had its own themes, its own colours and preferences, even its own mannerisms. It was marked by intellectual fervour, love of beauty, and free, tolerant debates in which wit was another sign of enjoyment. It was also marked by the discovery or rediscovery of the works of classical antiquity, a pursuit in which all of civilized Europe enthusiastically joined.

Similarly, there was a Romantic era (roughly from 1800 to 1850, but with both earlier and later manifestations); it coloured people's minds and feelings over a long, troubled, difficult period, in the joyless aftermath of the French Revolution and the Empire, which coincided with an economic recession throughout Europe, between 1817 and 1852. We should certainly not claim that the recession alone explained — still less, created — Romantic *Angst:* there are not only economic cycles, but also cycles in sensibility, in the arts of living and thinking, which are more or less independent of external events . . . Every generation, at all events, likes to contradict its predecessor; and its successor 'will do the same and more. So there is likely to be a perpetual swing of the pendulum between classicism and romanticism (or baroque, as Eugenio d'Ors

called it), between cool intelligence and warm, troubled emotion - often in striking contrast.

The resultant pattern, therefore, is a constant alternation of mood. A civilization, like an economy, has its own rhythms. Its history is episodic, easy to divide into sections or periods, each virtually distinct. We refer quite happily to 'the century of Louis XIV or to 'the Enlightenment': we even, in French, speak of 'classic civilization' in the seventeenth century, or 'the civilization of the eighteenth century'. To call such short periods civilizations, according to the philosophically minded economist Joseph Chappey, is 'diabolical': it seems to him to contradict the very idea of civilization, which (as we shall see) involves continuity. But for the moment let us leave this contradiction aside. Unity and diversity, after all, always coexist uneasily. We have to take them as they come.

'Turning-points', events, heroes: all help to clarify the special role of exceptional events and people in the history of civilizations.

Every episode, when studied closely, dissolves into a series of actions, gestures and characters. Civilizations, in the last analysis, are made up of people, and hence of their behaviour, their achievements, their enthusiasms, their commitment to various causes, and also their sudden changes. But the historian has to select: among all these actions, achievements and biographies, certain events or people stand out and mark a 'turning-point', a new phase. The more important the change, the more clearly significant its harbingers.

One example of a crucial event was the discovery of universal gravitation by Sir Isaac Newton in 1687. Significant events include the first performance of *he Cid* in 1638 or of *Hernani* in 1830. People stand out likewise, in so far as their work marks an epoch or sums up an historical episode. This is the case with Joachim du Bellay (1522-60) and his *Defence and Illustration of the French Language;* with Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716) and his infinitesimal calculus; or with Dems Papin (1647-1714) and his invention of the steam-engine.

But the names that really dominate the history of civilizations are those which survive a number of episodes, as a ship may ride out a series of storms. A few rare spirits mark the limits of vast periods, summing up in themselves a number of generations: Dante (1265-1321) at the end of the 'Latin' Middle Ages; Goethe (1749-1832) at the end of Europe's first 'modern' period; Newton on the threshold of classical physics; or Albert Einstein (1879-1955), herald of today's sub-atomic physics with all its enormous significance for the world.

The founders of great philosophies also belong in this exceptional category: Socrates or Plato, Confucius, Descartes or Karl Marx — each dominates more than one century. In their way, they are founders of civilizations, scarcely less important than those outstanding founders of the world's abiding religions, Buddha, Christ and Muhammad.

In fact, the measure of an event's or a person's importance in the hurly-burly of history is the time they take to be forgotten. Only those that endure and are identified with an enduring reality really count in the history of civilization. Thus may be discerned, through the screen of familiar historical events, the emerging outlines of the more continuous reality which we must now seek to discover.

Underlying structures

Looking at historical periods has produced only transient pictures: projected on the backcloth of civilizations, they appear and then vanish again. If we look for the permanent features behind these changing images, we shall find other, simpler realities which present a quite new interest. Some last for only a few seasons; others endure for several centuries; others still persist so long as to seem immutable. The appearance, of course, is illusory; for, slowly and imperceptibly, they too change and decay. Such are the realities referred to in the previous chapter: the ceaseless constraints imposed

by geography, by social hierarchy, by collective psychology and by economic need — all profound forces, barely recognized at first, especially by contemporaries, to whom they always seem perfectly natural, to be taken wholly for granted if they are thought about at all. These realities are what we now call 'structures'.

Even historians may not notice them at first: their habitual chronological narratives are often too busy to see the wood for the trees. To perceive and trace underlying structures one has to cover, in spendthrift fashion, immense stretches of time. The movements on the surface discussed a moment ago, the events and the people, fade from the picture when we contemplate these vast phenomena, permanent or semi-permanent, conscious and subconscious at the same time. These are the 'foundations', the underlying *structures* of civilizations: religious beliefs, for instance, or a timeless peasantry, or attitudes to death, work, pleasure and family life.

These realities, these structures, are generally ancient and long-lived, and always distinctive and original. They it is that give civilizations their essential outline and characteristic quality. And civilizations hardly ever exchange them: they regard them as irreplaceable values. For the majority of people, of course, these enduring traits, these inherited choices, these reasons for rejecting other civilizations, are generally unconscious. To see them clearly one has to withdraw, mentally at least, from the civilization of which one is a part.

Take as a simple example, with very deep roots: the role of women in the twentieth century in a society like ours in Europe. Its peculiarities may not strike us - so 'natural' do they seem - until we make a comparison with, say, the role of Muslim women or, at the other extreme, that of women in the United States. To understand why these differences arose, we should have to go far back into the past, at least as far as the twelfth century, the age of 'courtly love', and begin to trace the Western conception of love and of the couple. We should then have to consider a series of factors: Christianity, women's access to schools and universities, European ideas about the education of children, economic conditions, the standard of living, women's work outside the home and so on.

The role of women is always a structural element in any civilization - a test: it is a long-lived reality, resistant to external pressure, and hard to change overnight. A civilization generally refuses to accept a cultural innovation that calls in question one of its own structural elements. Such refusals or unspoken enmities are relatively rare: but they always point to the heart of a civilization.

Civilizations continually borrow from their neighbours, even if they 'reinterpret' and assimilate what they have adopted. At first sight, indeed, every civilization looks rather like a railway goods yard, constantly receiving and dispatching miscellaneous deliveries.

Yet a civilization may stubbornly reject a particular import from outside. Marcel Mauss has remarked that every civilization worthy of the name has refused or rejected something. Every time, the refusal is the culmination of a long period of hesitation and experiment. Long meditated and slowly reached, the decision is always crucially important.

The classical instance is the Turkish capture of Constantinople in 1453. A modern Turkish historian claims that the city gave itself up, that it was conquered from within, before the Turkish attack. Although an exaggeration, this thesis is not unfounded. In fact, the Orthodox Church (or Byzantine civilization) preferred to submit to the Turks rather than unite with the Latins who were its only possible saviours. This was not a 'decision', taken hastily on the spot under the pressure of events. It was rather the natural outcome of a long process, as long in fact as the decadence of Byzantium, which day after day made the Greeks more and more reluctant to draw closer to the Latins across the great divide of their theological disputes.

Greco-Latin union would have been possible. The Emperor Michael Palaeologus had accepted it at the Council of Lyon in 1274. The Emperor John V, in 1369, had professed the Catholic faith in Rome. In 1439, the joint Council of Florence had once

more shown that union was attainable. The most eminent Greek theologians, John Beccos, Demetrios Lydones and John Bessarion, had all written in favour of union, with a talent which their opponents could not equal. Yet, between the Turks and the Latins, the Greeks preferred the Turks. 'Because it was jealous of its independence, the Byzantine Church appealed to the enemy and surrendered to him the Empire and Christendom.' Already in 1385 the Patriarch of Constantinople had written to Pope Urban VI that the Turks offered to the Greek Church 'full liberty of action' — and that was the decisive phrase. Fernand Grenard, from whom these points are taken, added: 'The enslavement of Constantinople by Muhammad II was the triumph of the separatist Patriarch.' The West, for its part, was well aware of how much the Eastern Church disliked it. 'These schismatics,' wrote Petrarch, 'feared and hated us with all their guts.'

Another refusal which was slow to take shape was the closing of Italy and the Iberian Peninsula to the Protestant Reformation. In France, there was more hesitation: for nearly a hundred years the country was a battleground between two different forms of belief.

A further refusal, and one which was not wholly political (or unanimous), was that which so long divided the industrialized West, including North America, from the totalitarian Marxist Socialism of Eastern Europe. The Germanic and Anglo-Saxon countries said No categorically: France and Italy - and even the Iberian Peninsula — gave a more mixed and equivocal response. This, very probably, was a clash between civilizations.

One might add that, if Western Europe had taken to Communism, it would have done so in its own way, adapting it as it is currently adapting capitalism, very differently from the USA.

Just as a civilization may welcome or refuse elements from another civilization, so it may accept or reject survivals from its own past. It does so slowly, and almost always unconsciously or partly so. In this way, it gradually transforms itself. Little by little, it sifts the mass of data and attitudes offered by the remote or recent past, stressing one or setting aside another; and as a result of

its choices it assumes a shape which is never wholly new but never quite the same as before.

These internal' rejections may be firm or hesitant, lasting or short-lived. Only the lasting rejections are essential in the areas which are gradually being explored by psychological history, and which may be as large as a country or a civilization. Examples of such exploration include: two pioneering studies of life and death in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, by Alberto Tenenti; an examination of *The Idea of Happiness in Eighteenth-century France,* by R. Mauzi; and a fascinating, fascinated book by Michel Foucault on *The History of Madness in the Classical Age,* 1961. These three cases are instances of a civilization working over its own heritage — something rarely brought fully to light. The process is so slow that contemporaries never notice it. Each time, the rejection — and the occasional acceptance of alternatives - takes centuries, with prohibitions, obstacles and healing processes which are often difficult and imperfect and always very prolonged.

This is what Michel Foucault, in his own peculiar terminology, calls 'dividing oneself off — that is, in the case of a civilization, expelling from its frontiers and from its inner life any value that it spurns. 'One might,' writes Foucault,

> trace the history of the *limits,* of those obscure actions, necessarily forgotten as soon as they are performed, whereby a civilization casts aside something it regards as alien. Throughout its history, this moat which it digs around itself, this no man's land by which it preserves its isolation, is just as characteristic as its positive values. For it receives and maintains its values as continuous features of its history; but in the area which we have chosen to discuss it makes its essential choice - the *selection* [our emphasis] - which gives it its positive nature - the essential substance of which it is made.

This text deserves close attention. A civilization attains its true persona by rejecting what troubles it in the obscurity of that no man's land which may already be foreign territory. Its history is the centuries-long distillation of a collective personality, caught

like any individual between its clear, conscious objective and its obscure, unconscious fate, whose influence on aims and motives is often unobserved. Clearly, such essays in retrospective psychology have been affected by the discoveries of psychoanalysis.

Michel Foucault's book studies a particular case: the distinction between reason and madness, between the sane and the mad, which was unknown in the Middle Ages, when the Fool, like any unfortunate, was more or less mysteriously held to be an emissary from God. But the mentally deranged were imprisoned, at first harshly and brutally, in the seventeenth century with its passion for social order. It regarded them as mere jetsam, to be banished from the world like delinquents or the incorrigibly idle. Then, in the nineteenth century, they were treated more fairly, even kindly, because they were recognized as ill. Yet, although attitudes changed, the central problem remained. From the classical age until today, the West has distanced itself from madness, banning its language and banishing its victims. Thus the triumph of reason has been accompanied, under the surface, by a long, silent turbulence, the almost unconscious, almost unknown counterpart to the public victory of rationalism and of classical science.

One could of course give other examples. Alberto Tenenti's book patiently traces the way in which the West distanced itself from the Christian idea of death as envisaged in the Middle Ages - a simple transition from exile on earth to real life beyond the grave. In the fifteenth century, death became 'human' - humanity's supreme ordeal, the horror of decomposing flesh. But in this new conception of death people found a new conception of life, prized anew for its own intrinsic worth. Anxiety about death abated in the following century, the sixteenth, which - at least at the beginning — was marked by *joie de vivre.*

So far, the argument has presupposed peaceful relations between civilizations, each free to make its own choice. But violence has often been the rule. Always tragic, it has often proved ultimately pointless. Successes like the Romanization of Gaul and of much of Western Europe can be explained only by the length of time the process took — and, despite what is often alleged — by the primitive level from which Rome's vassals began, by their admiration for their conquerors, and in fact by their acquiescence in their own fate. But such successes were rare: they are the exceptions that prove the rule.

When contact was violent, in fact, failure was more frequent than success. 'Colonialism' may have triumphed in the past: but today it is an obvious fiasco. And colonialism, typically, is the submergence of one civilization by another. The conquered always submit to the stronger; but their submission is merely provisional when civilizations clash.

Long periods of enforced coexistence may include concessions or agreements and important, often fruitful, cultural exchange. But the process always has its limits.

The finest example of cultural interpenetration in a climate of violence is described in Roger Bastide's outstanding book on *African Religions in Brazil* (1960). This tells the tragic story of black slaves torn from their roots in Africa and flung into the patriarchal Christian society of colonial Brazil. They reacted against it; but at the same time they adopted Christianity. A number of runaway black slaves founded independent republics — *quilombos:* that of Palmeiras, north-east of Bahia, was not conquered without a full-scale war. Although stripped of everything, blacks such as these reinstated old African religious practices and magic dances. In their *candombles* or *macumbas* they fused African and Christian rites in a synthesis which is still alive today, and even making further headway. It is an amazing example. The vanquished surrendered - but preserved themselves too.

History and civilization

Looking back over civilizations' resistance or acquiescence in the face of change, their permanence and their slow transformation, we can perhaps offer one last definition, which may restore their

unique and particular essence: that is, their long historical continuity. Civilization is in fact the longest story of all. This is a truth which the historian may at first not realize. It will emerge in the course of successive observations, rather in the same way that the view of a landscape broadens as the path ascends.

History operates in tenses, on scales and in units which frequently vary: day by day, year by year, decade by decade, or in whole centuries. Every time, the unit of measurement modifies the view. It is the contrasts between the realities observed on different time-scales that make possible history's dialectic.

For the sake of simplicity, let us say that the historian works on at least three planes.

One, which we may call A, is that of traditional history, habitual narrative, hurrying from one event to the next like a chronicler of old or a reporter today. A thousand pictures are seized on the wing, making a multi-coloured story as full of incident as an unending serial. No sooner read than forgotten, however, this kind of history too often leaves us unsatisfied, unable to judge or to understand.

A second plane - B - is that of episodes, each taken as a whole: Romanticism, the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, World War II. The time-scale here may be ten, twenty or fifty years. And facts are grouped, interpreted and explained in accordance with these phenomena, whether they be called periods, phases, episodes or cycles. They can be regarded as events of long duration, stripped of superfluous detail.

A third plane - C - transcends these events: it considers only phenomena that can be measured over a century or more. At this level, the movement of history is slow and covers vast reaches of time: to cross it requires seven-league boots. On this scale, the French Revolution is no more than a moment, however essential, in the long history of the revolutionary, liberal and violent destiny of the West. Voltaire, likewise, is only a stage in the evolution of free thought.

In this final perspective — sociologists, who have their own

imagery, might say 'on this last deep level' - civilizations can be seen as distinct from the accidents and vicissitudes that mark their development: they reveal their longevity, their permanent features, their structures — their almost abstract but yet essential diagrammatic form.

A civilization, then, is neither a given economy nor a given society, but something which can persist through a series of economies or societies, barely susceptible to gradual change. A civilization can be approached, therefore, only in the long term, taking hold of a constantly unwinding thread — something that a group of people have conserved and passed on as their most precious heritage from generation to generation, throughout and despite the storms and tumults of history.

This being so, we should hesitate before agreeing with the great Spanish historian Rafaël Altamira (1951) or with François Guizot (1855) that the history of civilizations is 'all of history'. No doubt it is: but only if seen in a particular way, using the largest time-scale that is compatible with human and historical concerns. Not, to borrow the well-known comparison made by Bernard de Fontenelle, the history of roses, however beautiful, but that of the gardener, -whom the roses must think immortal. From the point of view of societies, economies and the countless incidents of short-term history, civilizations must seem immortal too.

This long-term history, history-at-a-distance - blue-water cruising on the high seas of time, rather than prudent coastal navigation never losing sight of land - this way of proceeding, call it what you will, has both advantages and drawbacks. Its advantages are that it forces one to think, to explain matters in unaccustomed terms, and to use historical explanation as a key to one's own time. Its drawbacks or dangers are that it can lapse into the facile generalizations of a philosophy of history more imaginary than researched or proved.

Historians are surely right to mistrust over-enthusiastic explorers like Oswald Spengler or Arnold Toynbee. Any history which is pressed to the point of general theory requires constant returns to

practical reality — figures, maps, precise chronology and verification.

Rather than any theory of civilizations, therefore, we must study real instances if we wish to understand what civilization is. All the rules and definitions that we have outlined so far will be clarified and simplified by the examples that follow.

II. CIVILIZATIONS OUTSIDE EUROPE