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CIVILIZATION: THE ESSENCE OF AN EVALUATIVE-DESCRIPTIVE CONCEPT

Brett BOWDEN*

Abstract

The power of ideas and language is not to be underestimated – ideas do matter, both "good" and "bad" ideas. John Maynard Keynes was right when he proclaimed that the "ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood." Whether it is ideas associated with Marxism-Leninism, responsible for the deaths of untold millions in revolutions gone awry, or expansionist liberalism in the guise of colonialism, the consequences of ideas and the language that accompanies them reverberate well beyond the realm of abstract theory or the ivory tower – they can have a very real impact on actions and outcomes. Civilization is a powerful idea and ideal; as is the language of civilization. This paper explores how the ideal of civilization, the norm of civilization, along with antithetical terms such as barbarism and savagery, have been used and manipulated to explain, rationalize, and justify decisions and actions that shape the course of history. Civilization is a concept that Quentin Skinner would describe as an "evaluative-descriptive" term. That is, it is a concept that performs both evaluative and descriptive functions in our daily language. The nature of such concepts is that they can be used to either commend or condemn the actions or peoples they are used to describe. Throughout its history the word civilization has proven to be a term of considerable power that is used both to commend and condemn, often with serious consequences.

Keywords: Consepts, Ideals, Norms, Civilization, Progress

Introduction

The power of ideas is not to be underestimated – ideas do matter, both "good" and "bad" ideas.[2] John Maynard Keynes was right when he proclaimed that the "ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood." As he added, "soon or late, it is ideas, not vested interests, which are dangerous for good or evil."[3] Whether it is ideas associated with Marxism-Leninism, responsible for the deaths of untold millions in revolutions gone awry, or expansionist liberalism in the guise of colonialism, the consequences of ideas and the language that accompanies them reverberate well beyond the realm of abstract theory or the ivory tower – they

[1] Professor of History and Political Thought, University of Western Sydney. e-mail: b.bowden@uws.edu.au
[2] See Wright 2004.
[3] Keynes 1936, 383-4.

can have a very real impact on actions and outcomes. As Isaiah Berlin reminded us in his essay "Two Concepts of Liberty", the German poet Heinrich Heine warned the French in the early 1830s "not to underestimate the power of ideas: philosophical concepts nurtured in the stillness of a professor's study could destroy a civilization".[4] Berlin might have added that the idea of civilization is one of those powerful concepts; as is the language of civilization. The ideal of civilization, or the norm of civilization, along with antithetical terms such as barbarism and savagery, have long been used and manipulated to explain, rationalize, and justify decisions and actions that have shaped the course of history.

Civilization is a concept that Quentin Skinner would describe as an "evaluative-descriptive" term in that it is used both to describe and evaluate; or pass judgement in the very act of describing. The nature of such concepts is that they can be used to either commend or condemn the actions or peoples they are used to describe, often with serious consequences. Skinner, considered a pioneer of the Cambridge School method, calls an "evaluative-descriptive" concept one "which perform[s] evaluative as well as descriptive functions in natural languages."[5] The "special characteristic" of such concepts is that "they have a standard application to perform one of two contrasting ranges of speech-acts. They are available, that is, to perform such acts as commending (and expressing and soliciting approval) or else of condemning (and expressing and soliciting disapproval) of any action or state of affairs they are used to describe."[6] As will become evident below, civilization is a term of considerable power that is used both to commend and condemn.

The explicit link between language and action, or political thought and political practise and outcomes is captured in Skinner's assertion of the "fact that to make a statement is to perform an action."[7] He goes on to explain, the "fact that a knowledge of the context of any given text does *help* in understanding it reflects the fact, surely undeniable, that for the performance of any action – and the making of statements is surely to be appraised as a performance – it will always be possible at least in principle to discover a set of conditions either such that the action (the statement made) might have been different or might not have occurred in their absence, or even such that the occurrence of the action might have been predicted from their presence." Skinner concludes that there "seems no question that for every statement there must be some explanatory context, for every action *some* set of antecedent causal conditions."[8]

The idea of civilization occupies a prominent and complicated place in the history of ideas, and world history more generally. It has played no small part in shaping

[4] Berlin 1969.
[5] Skinner 1999, 61; Skinner 1988, 122.
[6] Skinner 1999, 61.
[7] Skinner 1988, 42, note 176, emphasis in original.
[8] Skinner 1988, 43, emphasis in original.

history; the demands of civilization have long been employed to rationalize and justify all manner of interventions and socio-political engineering. The significance of the idea of civilization is captured in the suggestion by the French linguist, Emile Benveniste, that it is one of a small number of "essential" ideas intimately linked to the "whole history of modern thought and the principal intellectual achievements in the Western world".[9] If Benveniste is correct, then this is an awful lot of responsibility to be heaped upon one concept. One might add to this claim that, while civilization is a distinctly Western idea, perhaps its greatest impact has been felt in the non-Western world, where much of the aforementioned intervention and socio-political engineering has taken place.

A better understanding of the idea of civilization has rarely been more important, for in the recent past the term civilization – and its plural, civilizations – have regained some of their lost prominence as tools for describing, explaining, and shaping the world in which we live. As the language of civilization is hastily bandied about in public discourse, almost inevitably it is increasingly misinterpreted and misapplied – sometimes with dangerous consequences. A prominent recent example is the framing of the global war on terrorism as a war *for* civilization. This was not always the case. When the term *civilization* first appeared in a French dictionary in the early 1740s (Trévoux *Dictionnaire universel* of 1743), it was a "Term of jurisprudence" used to describe "An act of justice or judgement that renders a criminal trial civil." It was not until the late 1750s that the term *civilization* first appeared in written form in its non-juridical sense.

Wolf Schäfer recently made the point that for a long time it was very much the case that "Sociologists, anthropologists and historians have learned to avoid civilization, and instead, analyse everything with culture" as a point of reference. In fact, it would be fair to say that a generation of social and behavioural scientists hesitated to use the concept of civilization as a tool of social analysis; it was more the case that "Culture is 'in' and civilization is 'out'."[10] In his highly regarded *Keywords*, Raymond Williams suggests that "culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language."[11] While this may well be the case, it is not unreasonable to add that *civilization*, a word with which culture shares a close but complicated relationship, is one of the other words that fall into this category. So long as civilization was out of fashion this point was largely inconsequential for social scientific study; but civilization is back in a big way.

[9] Benveniste 1971, 289.
[10] Schäfer 2001, 302.
[11] Williams 1985, 87.

French Origins of Civilisation

The French historian François Guizot's declaration that "civilization is a fact like any other,"[12] susceptible to detailed study, is a little misleading in that it makes the task sound considerably more straightforward than it actually is. Even in Guizot's own use of the term, in fact since its very inception, the word civilization has been imbued with a plurality of meanings. Some render it a "fact" commensurable to measurement, while others refer to it as a not so readily quantifiable "ideal."

The word *civilisation* has its foundations in the French language, deriving from words such as *civil* (thirteenth century) and *civilité* (fourteenth century), all of which in turn derive from the Latin *civitas*. Prior to the appearance of *civilisation*, words such as *poli* or polite, police (which broadly meant law and order, including government and administration), *civilizé* and *civilité* had all been in wide use but, in Benveniste's view, none of these adequately met the evolving and expanding demands on the language. Upon the appearance of the verb *civiliser* sometime in the sixteenth century, which provided the basis for the noun, the coining of *civilisation* was only a matter of time, for *civilisation* was a neologism whose time had come. As Benveniste states it, "civilité, a static term, was no longer sufficient," requiring the coining of a term "which had to be called civilisation in order to define together both its direction and continuity."[13] But in its first-known recorded usage the word civilisation held a quite different meaning to that with which it is generally associated today. For some time civiliser had been used in jurisprudence to describe the transformation of a criminal matter into a civil one, hence civilisation was defined in the Trévoux Dictionnaire universel of 1743 as a "Term of jurisprudence. An act of justice or judgement that renders a criminal trial civil. *Civilisation* is accomplished by converting informations (*informations*) into inquests (*enquêtes*) or by other means."[14] But *civilisation's* life as a term of jurisprudence was a rather brief and sparing one once it was appropriated by thinkers who imbued it with the meanings we associate with it today; meanings which were to catch on quickly and gain wide acceptance in intellectual and popular thought.

Just when the written word *civilisation* first appeared in its more contemporary sense is open to conjecture. Despite his extensive enquiries the French historian Lucien Febvre admits that he has no accurate idea as to "Who was the first to use it or at least to have it printed." But he offers that he has "not been able to find the word *civilisation* used in any French text published prior to the year 1766," when it appeared in a posthumous publication by M. Boulanger titled, *Antiquité dévoilée par ses usages*.[15] The passage in which it appeared reads: "When a savage people

[12] Guizot 1997, 11-12.
[13] Benveniste 1971, 292.
[14] Quoted in Starobinski 1993, 1, emphasis in original.
[15] Febvre 1973, 220-21.

has become civilized, we must not put an end to the act of *civilisation* by giving it rigid and irrevocable laws; we must make it look upon the legislation given to it as a form of *continuous civilisation*."[16] From this early passage it is evident that "*civilisation*" is used to represent both an ongoing process and a state of being that is an advance on the condition of "savagery."

Claims to uncertainty aside, Benveniste and Jean Starobinski independently argue that *civilisation* first appeared in written form in its non-juridical sense ten years earlier than Febvre believed.[17] Dated 1756 but not published until 1757, *civilisation* appears three times (on pages 136, 176, and 237) in Victor de Riquetti, marquis de Mirabeau's (1715-1789) treatise on population, *L'Ami des hommes ou Traité de la population*. Perhaps somewhat curiously, Voltaire makes no use of what one would think would be a highly useful word (civilization) in a prominent work of the same year, his *Essay on the Customs and Spirit of Nations*.[18] Reflecting Mirabeau's coining of the term, the 1771 edition of the Trévoux *Dictionnaire universel* included for the first time both the jurisprudential and newer meaning of *civilisation*. The entry reads: "The *ami des hommes* [Mirabeau] *used this word for sociabilité*. See that word. Religion is undeniably the first and most useful brake on humanity; it is the first source of civilization. It preaches to us and continually recalls us to confraternity, to soften our hearts."[19]

Starobinski argues that the authors of the Trévoux Dictionnaire chose their example carefully, for Mirabeau's usage of *civilisation* provided a "welcome" contradistinction to the Enlightenment Philosophes and Encyclopedists' advocacy of reason and the sciences. Rather than singing the praises of reason, virtue, and morality as the successors of religion and the true path to human perfectibility, Mirabeau argued that "religion was 'the principal source' of civilization." Thus, as Starobinski states it, "the word civilization first appeared in a eulogy of religion, which was praised not only as a repressive force (a 'brake') but also as unifying and moderating influence ('confraternity')."[20] For Benveniste though, "civilisation is one of those words which show a new vision of the world," one that is "an optimistic and resolutely nontheological interpretation of its evolution." In this regard, he refers to "the very novelty of the notion and the changes in the traditional concept of man and society that it implies."[21]

Starobinski notes that once coined, the term *civilisation* was rapidly adopted into common usage because it encapsulated a broad range of terms that were already

[16] Boulanger 1766, 404-5, quoted in Febvre 1973, 222, emphasis in original.
[17] Benveniste 1971, 290; Starobinski 1993, 3.
[18] Braudel 1987, 4.
[19] Starobinski 1993, 2, emphasis in original.
[20] Starobinski 1993, 3.
[21] Benveniste 1971, 289 and 292.

in use to describe a pre-existing concept; one that included notions such as advancements in comfort, increased material possessions and personal luxuries, improved education techniques, "cultivation of the arts and sciences," and the expansion "of commerce and industry."[22] Thus, as *civilisation* became increasingly common in French vocabulary, so too it was defined in greater detail in French dictionaries. This development can be seen in Snetlage's *Nouveau Dictionnaire français contenant de nouvelles créations du peuple français* of 1795, which defined *civilisation* thus:"This word, which was used only in a technical sense to say that a criminal case was made civil, is used to express the action of civilizing or the tendency of a people to polish or rather to correct its mores and customs by bringing into civil society a luminous, active, loving morality abounding in good works. (Every citizen of Europe is today embarked upon this last combat of civilization. Civilization of mores)."[23] Building on Boulanger's account of *civilisation*, we see in this definition a hint of the notion that the condition of civilization is the preserve of the peoples of Europe (albeit to varying degrees), while its opposites, savagery, barbarism, or the state of the nature lay beyond Europe's borders.

As seen in these early appearances of *civilisation*, from the very outset it was a term imbued with a plurality of meanings. Serving as something of a "synthetic" or "unifying concept," *civilisation* was used to describe both a process through which individual human beings and nations became civilized and, the cumulative outcome of that process. As Starobinski states, the "crucial point is that the use of the term, *civilization*, to describe both the fundamental process of history and the end result of that process established an antithesis between civilization and a hypothetical primordial state (whether it be called nature, savagery, or barbarism)."[24] That it, it was used both to describe and evaluate; or pass judgement in the very act of describing. In order to explore further the nature of the relationship between the state of civilization and its alternatives (be it antithetical or otherwise), it is helpful to first have an understanding of the plurality of meanings attributed to civilization.

Apart from the distinction between civilization as process and civilization as the end condition resulting from that process, further distinctions have been drawn between what is characterized as civilization as *fact* and civilization as *value* or ideal. In the former sense it is said to be largely a "descriptive and neutral" term, used to identify what are thought to be quantifiable values held in common by a distinct group of peoples. That is, a specific civilization such as that of Ancient Greece or contemporary Western civilization. In the latter sense civilization is a "normative concept on the basis of which it was possible to discriminate the civilized from the uncivilized, the barbarian, and the incompletely civilized."[25] Following a similar line of thought, Febvre notes that the "same word [civilization] is used to designate two different concepts." What is elsewhere described as civilization as "fact" is referred to by Febvre as its "ethnographic" usage.

[22] Starobinski 1993, 3.

[23] Starobinski 1993, 2.

[24] Starobinski 1993, 2-5, quote at 5.

[25] Starobinski 1993, 7-8. As Skinner argues, however, in employing such concepts or "speech-acts", there can be no neutral reading, they describe and evaluate, commend and condemn. Skinner 1999, 61

> In the first case civilization simply refers to all the features that can be observed in the collective life of one human group, embracing their material, intellectual, moral and political life and, there is unfortunately no other word for it, their social life. It has been suggested that this should be called the 'ethnographical' conception of civilization. It does not imply any value judgement on the detail or the overall pattern of the facets examined. Neither does it have any bearing on the individual in the group taken separately, or their personal reactions or individual behaviour. It is above all a conception which refers to a group.[26]

But even this definition is more than just descriptive; it too has an (unacknowledged) normative-evaluative component. Civilization is not usually used to describe the collective life of just any group, as culture sometimes is; rather it is reserved for collectives that demonstrate a degree of urbanization and organization. This normative assumption is evident in that Febvre's ethnographic markers all relate, either directly or indirectly, to a group's socio-political organization.

Immediately following the "ethnographic" account of civilization, Febvre gives a definition of civilization as an ideal or value.

> In the second case, when we are talking about the progress, failures, greatness and weakness of civilization we do have a value judgement in mind. We have the idea that the civilization we are talking about – ours – is itself something great and beautiful; something too which is nobler, more comfortable and better, both morally and materially speaking, than anything outside it – savagery, barbarity or semi-civilization. Finally, we are confident that such civilization, in which we participate, which we propagate, benefit from and popularize, bestows on us all a certain value, prestige, and dignity. For it is a collective asset enjoyed by all civilized societies. It is also an individual privilege which each of us proudly boasts that he possesses.[27]

From these accounts it is evident that the former usage is used to describe distinctive *civilizations* across time and place, while the latter signifies a benchmark or the *civilization* – that is, it represents the *ideal of civilization* – by which all other societies or collectives are compared to and measured against. While the former have been the subject of much comparative historical analysis, which in itself is an unavoidably evaluative exercise, it is the conception of civilization as normative ideal that is more the concern herein. The reason for focusing on the value-laden nature of

[26] Febvre 1973, 220.
[27] Febvre 1973, 220.

civilization begins to reveal itself when looking into further accounts of civilization, such as that of Comte de Volney's published in 1803 after his travels in the United States in the late 1790s. Reflecting the general principles of social contract theory, but just as importantly for the purposes here, the criteria of requiring a capacity for self-government, Volney wrote: "By civilisation we should understand an assembly of the men in a town, that is to say in an enclosure of dwellings equipped with a common defence system to protect themselves from pillage from outside and disorder within ... the assembly implied the concepts of voluntary consent by the members, maintenance of their right to security, personal freedom and property: ... thus civilisation is nothing other than a social condition for the preservation and protection of persons and property etc."[28]

As becomes increasingly evident, the demand for a nation or people to have the capacity to organize into a co-operative society with a capacity for self-government is central to the very ideal of civilization. But the identification of different collectives as *civilizations* on the basis of their capacity for social co-operation and self-government has really only served to distinguish them from other human collectives. Importantly, I demonstrate in following chapters that it is not just about a people organizing and governing in any fashion that counts. Rather, it is about governing in accordance with certain standards – first set by Europe and later by the West more generally – that determines a society's approximation to the idealized "standard of civilization." This factor becomes increasingly apparent in exploring the English language origins and evolution of the word *civilization*.

English Origins of *Civilization*

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word *civilization* first appeared in English in 1772, some twelve years after its initial appearance in a French text. The reference it cites is taken from a passage in James Boswell's *Life of Johnson* that reads: "On Monday, March 23, [1772] I found him [Dr. Samuel Johnson] busy, preparing a fourth edition of his folio Dictionary.... He would not admit *civilization*, but only *civility*. With great deference to him, I thought *civilization*, from to *civilize*, better in the sense opposed to *barbarity*, than *civility*; as it is better to have a distinct word for each sense, than one word with two senses, which *civility* is, in his way of using it".[29] The entry in Boswell's diary is much in keeping with *civilization's* French foundations; it also gives a good indication of at least one sense in which the term entered into English usage. But as the context in which Boswell uses it hints at, it appears as though the word had already been in use for some time prior – and indeed it had. The honor of first recorded English usage of *civilization*

[28] Volney 1868, 718, quoted in Febvre 1973, 252, note 51.
[29] Boswell 1934, II, 155, emphasis in original.

is in fact thought to go to the Scottish Enlightenment thinker, Adam Ferguson, who used "civilization" in his *Essay on the History of Civil Society*, first published in 1767.[30] There is good reason, however, to believe that Ferguson actually used the term some years prior to 1767, as is indicated in a letter of April, 12 1759 from David Hume to Adam Smith in which he makes reference to a "treatise on Refinement" by "our friend Ferguson."[31] If Ferguson also used the word *civilization* in this earlier draft of his *Essay* manuscript then there is cause to believe that *civilization* was in use in English, albeit rarely, no more than three years after its first recorded use in French.[32] As to whether Ferguson began using *civilization* independently of the French, assuming that he was indeed the first to use and record it, which cannot be guaranteed, or had picked it up from the French remains open to speculation.

While the word *civilization* actually only appears in Ferguson's Essay a total of eight times (on pages 1, 75, 90, 203, 232, 243, 244, and 249), the work itself has been described as "a history of civilization."[33] At its core it is an investigation into the progress of humankind and society from a state of "rudeness" to a "refined" or "polished" state. This theme is established on the very first page of the Essay where Ferguson writes, "Not only the individual advances from infancy to manhood, but the species itself from rudeness to civilization."[34] As Duncan Forbes states it in his introduction to the 1966 edition of the Essay, what Ferguson was looking for was a "true criterion of civilization."[35] And as Ferguson clearly states in his later *Principles of Moral and Political Science*, that criterion was some degree of socio-political organization. For he writes in the *Principles* that "success of commercial arts ... requires a certain order to be preserved by those who practice them, and implies a certain security of the person and property, to which we give the name civilization, although this distinction, both in the nature of the thing, and derivation of the word, belongs rather to the effects of law and political establishment, on the forms of society, than to any state merely of lucrative possession or wealth."[36] From these passages alone, and from the general theme of Ferguson's Essay in particular (also from his *Principles*), it is apparent that like the French he too uses the term civilization to describe both a process and a condition. As becomes evident below, Ferguson's line of thought on the criteria of *civilization* contains elements that social and political thinkers had been pursuing as early as the Ancient Greeks.

As indicated by both Volney's and Ferguson's respective accounts of civilization, it becomes increasingly the case that socio-political-legal organization is inherently

[30] Ferguson 1966.
[31] The letter is quoted in Benveniste 1971, 295.
[32] The context of Hume's letter suggests that Ferguson had been working on the manuscript for some time and that Hume had read an earlier draft still.
[33] Forbes 1966, xix.
[34] Ferguson 1966, 1.
[35] Forbes 1966, xx.
[36] Ferguson 1975, I, 252.

and inextricably linked to the ideal of civilization. An example of this is John Stuart Mill's essay of 1836 titled "Civilization," which is also an indicator of the general acceptance and widespread use of the term in English around eighty years after it was introduced. At the very beginning of his essay Mill, like others before him, notes that the "word civilization... is a word of double meaning," sometimes standing "for *human improvement* in general, and sometimes for certain kinds of improvement in particular."[37] For the purposes of his essay, however, Mill is referring to civilization as ideal condition, or what he calls "civilization in the narrow sense: not that in which it is synonymous with improvement, but that in which it is the direct converse or contrary of rudeness or barbarism." And he is not talking here just about the condition of the individual, but "the best characteristics of Man and Society."[38]

The importance of society to the qualification for civilization is expressed in Mill's recipe in which he lists the "ingredients of civilization." Following Montesquieu to some degree, he states that whereas

> a savage tribe consists of a handful of individuals, wandering or thinly scattered over a vast tract of country: a dense population, therefore, dwelling in fixed habitations, and largely collected together in towns and villages, we term civilized. In savage life there is no commerce, no manufactures, no agriculture, or next to none; a country in the fruits of agriculture, commerce, and manufactures, we call civilized. In savage communities each person shifts for himself; except in war (and even then very imperfectly) we seldom see any joint operations carried on by the union of many; nor do savages find much pleasure in each other's society. Wherever, therefore, we find human beings acting together for common purposes in large bodies, and enjoying the pleasures of social intercourse, we term them civilized.[39]

The presence, or otherwise, of the institutions of society that facilitate governance in accordance with established (Western) European traditions was widely believed to be a hallmark of the makings of or, potential for, civilization. Mill was representative of this belief in his assertion that "In savage life there is little or no law, or administration of justice; no systematic employment of the collective strength of society, to protect individuals against injury from one another." Despite the fact that similar institutions performed similar functions in the non-European world, the absence of institutions that resembled those of the "civilized" nations of Europe meant that much of the world beyond its borders was deemed by "civilized" Europe to fall short of meeting Mill's necessary "ingredients of civilization." As Mill stated,

[37] Mill 1962, 51, emphasis in original.
[38] Mill 1962, 51-52.
[39] Mill 1962, 52.

"We accordingly call a people civilized, where the arrangements of society, for protecting the persons and property of its members, are sufficiently perfect to maintain peace among them."[40]

The requirement of a capacity for socio-political organization and the role of society are reaffirmed in Mill's declaration: "There is not a more accurate test of the progress of civilization than the progress of the power of co-operation." For it was widely held that "only civilized beings ... can combine," and "none but civilized nations have ever been capable of forming an alliance." Savages, on the other hand, are characterized by "incapacity of organised combination." The reasoning behind this belief was that combination requires compromise: "it is the sacrifice of some portion of individual will, for a common purpose." As such it was thought that "the whole course of advancing civilization is a series of such training."[41] But as becomes increasingly evident, there was a prevailing view among the self-declared civilized societies of Europe that savages and barbarians lacked the discipline and predilection for compromise and co-operation amongst themselves. Rather, savages and barbarians were seen as trapped in a "state of nature" in which "every one trusts his own strength or cunning, and where that fails ... is without resource."[42] There were, of course, thinkers like Edmund Burke who recognized the value and achievements of non-European civilizations.[43] But for others like James and J. S. Mill, the only way the "uncivilized" could hope to rise to some degree of civilization – if it was thought possible at all – was under the guiding hand of civilized Europeans who would instil the necessary discipline and training that made society possible.

In essence, for Mill, civilization was marked by "sufficient knowledge of the arts of life," "diffusion of property and intelligence," "sufficient security of property and person" and, "power of co-operation" in society so as to "render the progressive increase of wealth and population possible."[44] But the maintenance of civilization did not come cheaply. Adam Smith, for example, argued that an increase in wealth and population was in fact a prerequisite for the discharge of the "first duty of the sovereign" of civilized societies; that of protecting the society from external "violence and injustice." According to Smith, it was "only by means of a standing army ... that the civilization of any country can be perpetuated," an exercise that becomes

[40] Mill 1962, 52-53.
[41] Mill 1962, 55-56.
[42] Mill 1962, 52.
[43] Burke 1921.
[44] Mill 1962, 53 and 57.
[45] Smith 1869, 295-6.
[46] Smith 1869, 296.
[47] Spencer 1892,249.

increasingly expensive the larger society grows and the more "society advances in civilization."[45] Smith also maintained that it was "only by means of a well regulated standing army ... that a barbarous country can be suddenly and tolerably civilized."[46] In summary, much of British thinking is neatly captured by Herbert Spencer's claim: "We may consider it [civilization] as progress towards that constitution of man and society required for the complete manifestation of every one's individuality."[47]

What Civilization Means and Its Implications

As noted, civilization and its plural are interrelated terms and subjects of study that have been examined both independently and with reference to one another. An initial concern with the concept of *civilization* gave way to detailed studies of *civilizations* in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in large part instigated by the foundation and development of the fields of anthropology and ethnography. Such a shift led to claims that a broader concern with the normative-evaluative aspects of civilization had "lost some of its cachet."[48] The result of this shift was a preoccupation with narrow definitions such as that offered by Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, who state that a "civilization constitutes a kind of moral milieu encompassing a certain number of nations, each national culture being only a particular form of the whole."[49]

One of the leading and most influential exponents of the comparative study of civilizations was the historian, Arnold Toynbee. In his *Study of History* and related works, however, he did not completely set aside the ideal of civilization, for he stated that "Civilizations have come and gone, but Civilization (with a big 'C') has succeeded" or endured.[50] Toynbee also sought to articulate a link between "civilizations in the plural and civilization in the singular," noting that the former refers to "particular historical exemplifications of the abstract idea of civilization." This abstract idea of civilization is defined in "spiritual terms" which "equate civilization with a state of society in which there is a minority of the population, however small, that is free from the task, not merely of producing food, but of engaging in any other of the economic activities – e.g. industry and trade – that have to be carried on to keep the life of the society going on the material plane at the civilizational level."[51]

Toynbee's line of argument concerning the organization of society as marked by the specialization of skills, the move toward elite professions and the effective use

[48] Huntington 1997, 41.
[49] Durkheim and Mauss 1971, 46-50.
[50] Toynbee 1948, 24.
[51] Toynbee 1972, 44-45.
[52] Kraynak 1983, 90, emphasis in original.
[53] Hobbes 1985, Chap. 46, 683.
[54] Kraynak 1983, 90-91.

of leisure time is one that has long been held in connection with the advancement of civilization (and civilized society). It is found in the work of Thomas Hobbes for instance, for although his life and work preceded the term civilization, Robert Kraynak argues that "the primary theme of Hobbes' studies in civil history is the distinction between barbarism and civilization." Hobbes is said to equate the "*political characteristics*" of "'commonwealths,' 'cities,' or 'polities'" with their "*civilized qualities*," such as "'civil society' or 'civil life'," to the extent that "he regards civilization as a condition which combined a certain level of political development and a certain manner of living."[52] This is suggested in Hobbes' assertion that the "procuring of the necessities of life ... was impossible, till the erecting of great Common-wealths," which are "the mother of *Peace*, and *Leasure*," which is, in turn, "the mother of *Philosophy* ... Where first were great and flourishing *Cities*, there was first the study of *Philosophy*."[53] That is to say, "Wherever government is sufficiently strong and well-established to provide peace and leisure, men began to cultivate the finer things in life": the very things that are said to be the outward expression of civilization. In "contrast, savagery or barbarism has been a condition where political authority was developed insufficiently or non-existent." Kraynak concludes that by Hobbes' account, "civilization has been distinguished from barbarism by the power and sufficiency of political authority, the enjoyment of leisure, and the development of philosophy or the arts and sciences."[54] But, it is the first of these hallmarks of civilization, the presence of increasingly complex socio-political organization, which, in the first instance at least, is the prerequisite and facilitator of the latter qualities.

Some semblance of this general line of argument has been made time and again throughout history, its influence ebbing and flowing with the times. One of the earliest to do so was Aristotle in the *Politics*, in which he posited that "society [meaning the *polis* or state] ... contains in itself ... the end and perfection of government: first founded that we might live, but continued that we may live happily."[55] On this point, Kraynak argues that for "Aristotle and other classical philosophers the good life is the end or purpose of civilization."[56] While Aristotle's conception of society might differ from contemporary usage, what this is in effect saying is that the realization of the good life is the purpose of government. Furthermore, it is only by living in society with others that this might be achieved, for Aristotle insists, "whosoever is ... unfit for society, must be either inferior or superior to man." He further singles out "the man in Homer, who is reviled for being 'without society, without law, without family'," for in effect, the absence

55 Aristotle 1912, 3, para. 1252b.
56 Kranyak 1983, 93.
57 Aristotle 1912, 4-5, 1253a.
58 Pagden 1988, 39.
59 Collingwood 1992, 502-508.
60 Collingwood 1992, 502-511, quote at 510.

of at least the first two of these institutions means he is without civilization. Instead, he is either savage or barbaric, or a god. Such accounts of the relationship between civilization, society, and government fit with Anthony Pagden's claim that the "philosophical history of civilization was, then, a history of progressive complexity and progressive refinement which followed from the free expression of those faculties which men possess only as members of a community."[58]

In a 1940 lecture titled, "What 'Civilization' Means," R.G. Collingwood spoke of three elements of civilization: economic civilization, social civilization, and legal civilization. The realm of economic civilization is marked not simply by the pursuit of riches – which might in fact be inimical to economic civilization – but by "the civilized pursuit of wealth." The pursuit of wealth is in turn carried out in two ways: through "civilized exchange" and "civilized production." The former means that exchange is carried out justly and fairly in the absence of domination, such as master-slave relationships (which puts him at odds with Aristotle), in accordance with the principles of *laissez-faire* economics. The latter, "Civilized production is scientific production." It is production that is carried out "intelligently" such that "productive industry [is] controlled by an understanding of natural laws." That is to say that it is a mode of production that employs the practice of "natural science... wherein, by means of experiment and observation, men find out how to use the forces of nature to the advancement of their own welfare."[59]

The second of Collingwood's three elements of civilization is "social civilization": it is the forum in which humankind's sociability is thought to be satisfied by "the idea of joint action," or what we might call community. It bears the name "civilization" because it is said to have been "civilized" to the point wherein its members refrain from the threat and use of both physical and moral force to induce fellow members to do "what [t]he[y] want them to do," instead employing methods of persuasion to win them over. Completing Collingwood's tripartite definition of civilization is the legal component. The final mark of civilization is "a society governed by law," and not so much by criminal law but by civil law in particular, "the law in which claims are adjusted between its members." Furthermore, while military and ecclesiastical law may well have their respective places in such a society, those places are subordinate to the role played by civil law. Moreover, a "society thus governed by civil law is one in which there is no arbitrary power; no executive, however constituted, able to override the law and no judicature able to defy it."[60] For Collingwood, then, "Civilization is *something which happens to a community* ....

[61] Collingwood 1992, 283, emphasis in original.
[62] Bauman 1987, 93, emphasis in original.
[63] Starobinski 1993, 31.

Civilization is a *process of approximation to an ideal state.*"[61] In essence, what Collingwood is arguing is that civilized society – and thus civilization itself – is guided by and operates according to the principles of the rule of law.

When we combine the collective criteria of Collingwood's tripartite components of civilization: economic civilization, social civilization, and legal civilization, what they amount to is what I would call socio-political civilization, or the capacity of a collective to organize and govern itself under some system of laws or constitution. Not too far removed from Collingwood's concern with the elimination of physical and moral force via "social civilization" are the more recent accounts of civilized society that address issues relating to the historical and ongoing endeavor to manage violence, if only by removing it from the public sphere. Such a concern is extended in Zygmunt Bauman's account of civilization to the more general issue of producing readily governable subjects. The "concept of *civilization*," he argues, "entered learned discourse in the West as the name of a conscious proselytizing crusade waged by men of knowledge and aimed at extirpating the vestiges of wild cultures."[62]

The nature of the "proselytizing crusade" in the name of civilization is one of the central concerns of this book. Its rationale or driving force is not too difficult to determine when one considers Starobinski's assertion that, "Taken as a value, civilization constitutes a political and moral norm. It is the criterion against which barbarity, or non-civilization, is judged and condemned."[63] A similar point is made by Pagden who states that civilization "describes a state, social, political, cultural, aesthetic – even moral and physical – which is held to be the optimum condition for all mankind, and this involves the implicit claim that only the civilized can know what it is to be civilized."[64] It is out of this implicit claim and the judgements passed in its name that the notion of the "burden of civilization" was born.

The argument that only the civilized know what it means to be civilized is an important one, for as Starobinski notes, the "historical moment in which the word *civilization* appears marks the advent of self-reflection, the emergence of consciousness that thinks it understands the nature of its own activity." More specifically, it marks "the moment that Western civilization becomes aware of itself reflectively, it sees itself as one civilization among others. Having achieved self-consciousness, civilization immediately discovers civilizations."[65] But as Elias notes, it is not a case of Western civilization being just one amongst equals, for the very concept of civilization "expresses the self-consciousness of the West ... It sums up everything in which

[64] Pagden 1988, 33.
[65] Starobinski 1993, 32, emphasis in original.
[66] Elias 2000, 5, emphasis in original.
[67] Bowden 2007.
[68] Schiller 1926, vii.

Western society of the last two or three centuries believes itself superior to earlier societies or 'more primitive' contemporary ones." Elias further explains that in using the term civilization, "Western society seeks to describe what constitutes *its* special character and what it is proud of: the level of *its* technology, the nature of *its* manners, the development of *its* scientific knowledge or view of the world, and much more."[66] Again, it is not too difficult to see how the harbingers of civilization might gravitate toward a (well-meaning) "proselytizing crusade" driven, at least in part, by a deeply held belief in the "burden of civilization."

The issue is not only the denial of the value and achievements of other civilizations,[67] but the implication that they are in near irreversible decline. From this perspective their contribution to "big C" Civilization (if any is acknowledged) is seen as largely limited to the past, out of which comes the further implication that if anything of value is to be retrieved it cannot be done so without the assistance of a more civilized tutor. Such thinking is only too evident, for example, in Ferdinand Schiller's mistaken claim that "the peoples of India appear to care very little for history and have never troubled to compile it."[68] Hence, the British took it upon themselves to compile such uneven accounts as that which was prepared by James Mill and published as *The History of British India* in 1817. Despite never having visited India, Mill's History, an attack on William Robertson's Historical Disquisition of 1791, relayed to European audiences an equally mistaken image of Indian civilization as eternally backward and undeveloped.

Lucien Febvre has suggested that the word (and idea of) "*Civilisation* was born at the right time." "Above all," he added, "it was born at a time when, emerging from the entire *Encyclopédie*, the great concept of rational and experimental science was beginning to make itself felt, constituting a whole in its methods and procedures."[69] The air of enthusiasm surrounding the newly born concept of civilization and the general atmosphere it engendered at the time is captured by Febvre in an unidentified citation he quotes from the work of Albert Counson: "Civilisation is inspired by a new philosophy of nature and of man. Its philosophy of nature is evolution. Its philosophy of man is perfectibility."[70]

Civilization and Progress

The close nature of the relationship between the ideal of civilization and the idea of progress is captured by Starobinski in his observation that the "word *civilization*, which denotes a process, entered the history of ideas at the same time as the modern sense of the word *progress*. The two words were destined to maintain a

[69] Febvre 1973, 229-30, emphasis in original.
[70] Febvre 1973, 230.
[71] Starobinski 1993, 4, emphasis in original.
[72] Nisbet 1980, 9.
[73] Nisbet 1980, 4.

most intimate relationship."[71] This most intimate of relationships between civilization and progress is evident in Robert Nisbet's questioning of "whether civilization in any form and substance comparable to what we have known ... in the West is possible without the supporting faith in progress that has existed along with this civilization."[72] He claims that "No single idea has been more important than ... the idea of progress in Western civilization for nearly three thousand years." While ideas such liberty, justice, equality, and community have their rightful place and should not be discounted, he insists that "throughout most of Western history, the substratum of even these ideas has been a philosophy of history that lends past, present, and future to their importance."[73] Further in this regard, Starobinski makes the pertinent point that "*civilization* is a powerful stimulus to theory," and despite its ambiguities, there exists an overwhelming and irresistible "temptation to clarify our thinking by elaborating a theory of civilization capable of grounding a far-reaching philosophy of history."[74] Clearly, the twin ideals of civilization and progress are important factors in our attempts to make sense of life through the articulation of some kind of all-encompassing or at least wide-reaching philosophy of history.[75] Indeed, in recent centuries it has proved irresistible to a diverse range of thinkers from across the political spectrum.

The deeply intertwined relationship between civilization and progress was central to Francois Guizot's early-nineteenth century analysis of Europe's history and its civilizing processes. In an account that captures both the socio-political and moral demands of civilization, Guizot insisted that "the first fact comprised in the word civilization... is the fact of progress, of development; it presents at once the idea of a people marching onward, not to change its place, but to change its condition; of a people whose culture is conditioning itself, and ameliorating itself. The idea of progress, of development, appears to me the fundamental idea contained in the word, civilization."[76] At first glance, the fundamentals of progress appear to concern merely the "perfecting of civil life, the development of society, properly so called, of the relations of men among themselves." Yet "instinct" tells us "that the word, civilization, comprehends something more extensive, more complex, something superior to the simple perfection of the social relations, of social power and happiness."[77] This something more is the realm of humankind's deeper and broader moral progress; "the development of the individual, internal life, the development of man himself, of his faculties, his sentiments, his ideas." Like Hobbes, and others, for Guizot, socio-political progress or the harnessing of society is only part of the

[74] Starobinski 1993, 33-4, emphasis in original.
[75] Bowden 2004; Bowden 2009.
[76] Guizot 1997, 16, emphasis in original.
[77] Guizot 1997, 16-17.
[78] Guizot 1997, 18.
[79] Bury 1960, 2.
[80] Bury 1960, 5.

picture that is civilization; on the back of which, "Letters, sciences, the arts, display all their splendour. Wherever mankind beholds these great signs, these signs glorified by human nature, wherever it sees created these treasures of sublime enjoyment, it there recognizes and names civilization." For Guizot, "Two facts" are integral to the "great fact" that is civilization: "the development of social activity, and that of individual activity; the progress of society and the progress of humanity." Wherever these "two symptoms" are present, "mankind with loud applause proclaims civilization."[78]

Another distinguished historian, J. B. Bury, one of the first to undertake a large-scale study of the history of the idea of progress, similarly asserts that the "idea [of progress] means that civilization has moved, is moving, and will move in a desirable direction."[79] In keeping with the irresistibility of promulgating a grand theory, Bury contends that the "idea of human Progress then is a theory which involves a synthesis of the past and a prophecy of the future." This theorizing is grounded in an interpretation of history that regards the human condition as advancing "in a definite and desirable direction." It further "implies that ... a condition of general happiness will be ultimately enjoyed, which will justify the whole process of civilization."[80] In short, the end of history is a close proximity to a state of humankinds' individual and social perfectibility in which the dangers and uncertainties of the Hobbesian war of all against all are left behind in favour of the relative safety and security of civil or civilized society.

In essence, the idea of progress has two related components: The first is that the human species universally progresses, albeit at different rates, from an original primitive or child-like condition, through savagery, through barbarism, and culminates at the apex of progress in the status of civilization. The second component holds that human experience, both individual and collective, is cumulative and future-directed, with the specific objective being the ongoing improvement of the individual, the society in which the individual lives, and the world in which the society must survive. This symbiotic relationship between the ideas of civilization and progress brings us to the idea of universal history. Universal history is conceived in a number of different ways, for some it's no different to world or global history in that its spatial and temporal parameters are both deep and broad. The conception of universal history most relevant here is perhaps more the realm of the philosopher than the historian, and is nicely set out in a lecture of 1789 by Friedrich von Schiller, a man who was both:

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[81] Schiller 1972, 328.
[82] Schiller 1972, 330-32.
[83] Starobinski 1993, 17, emphasis in original.

> Who would suppose that the refined European of the eighteenth century is only a more advanced brother of the Red Indian and of the Celt? All these skills, artistic instincts, experiences, all these creations of reason have been implanted and developed in man in a matter of a few thousand years: all these marvels of invention, these tremendous works of industry have been called forth from him. What brought them to life? What elicited them? What conditions of life did man traverse in ascending from that extreme to this, from the unsociable life of the cave dweller to the life of the thinker, of the civilised man of the world? Universal world-history answers these questions.[81]

As Schiller explained, for the adherent of universal history, "there extends between the present moment and the beginnings of the human race a long chain of events which interlock as cause and effect." It is a way of thinking that "reverses the world-order", for whereas the "real series of events descends from the origin of things to the their most recent state ... the universal historian moves in the opposite way from the most recent state of the world up to the origin of things." In essence, the universal historian "imports a rational purpose into the course of the world, and a teleological principle into world-history."[82] An underlying assumption is that history is a linear process that follows the passage of time: past > present > future. The notion of universal history is central to the Western tradition of studying and theorising about civilization, progress and human perfectibility. It is a "big picture" version of history that seeks to explain the history of humankind – savages, barbarians and civilized – as a whole or single coherent unit of study. It is about fitting all peoples and places into the narrative of history, which means placing them somewhere on a continuum between the poles of savagery and civilization. At the same time, knowing that all will ultimately arrive at the same end: civilization, or universal civilization.

Conclusion

While ideas of civilization, progress and perfectibility might sound innocuous enough, Starobinski goes to some length in highlighting the dangers associated with this philosophy in particular, and the deification of civilization more generally. In a passage worth quoting at some length, he argues that

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[84] Starobinski 1993, 29-30.

> because of the connection with the ideas of perfectibility and progress, the word *civilization* denoted more than just a complex process of refinement and mores, social organization, technical progress, and advancing knowledge; it took on a sacred aura, owing to which it could sometimes reinforce traditional religious values and at other times supplant them. The history of the word *civilization* thus leads to this crucial observation: once a notion takes on a *sacred* authority and thereby acquires the power to mobilize, it quickly stirs up conflict between political groups or rival schools of thought claiming to be its champions and defenders and as such insisting on the exclusive right to propagate the new idea.[83]

Starobinski goes on to point out some of the consequences of this situation, one of which is his highly justified warning that 'A term fraught with sacred content demonizes its antonym'.
He continues:

> Once the word *civilization* ceases to denote a fact subject to judgement and becomes an incontestable value, it enters the verbal arsenal of praise and blame. Evaluating the defects and merits of the civilization is no longer the issue. Civilization itself becomes the crucial criterion: judgement is now made in the name of civilization. One has to take its side, adopt its cause. For those who answer its call it becomes ground for praise. Or, conversely, it can serve as a basis for denunciation: all that is not civilization, all that resists or threatens civilization, is monstrous, absolute evil. As rhetoric heats up it becomes legitimate to ask for the supreme sacrifice in the name of civilization. This means that the service or defence of civilization can in certain circumstances justify the recourse to violence. Civilization's enemies, the barbarians, if they cannot be educated or converted, must be prevented from doing harm.[84]

And this is the very essence of Skinner's "evaluative-descriptive" concept at work. It also explains why some people are concerned about the language of civilization, especially during times of conflict, given the sometimes extreme measures that have been taken by supposedly "civilized" peoples of the world against the "uncivilized," all in the name of civilization.

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