Here, there, and in-between: On the Civilizing Process and Civilizational Analysis

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Abstract
This essay presents a cautionary tale about certain problems with systematization and abstraction in comparative civilizational studies. It advocates instead for the analysis of single works, limited events, or particular figures, within larger issues pertaining to what is understood as a “civilization” or “culture”. It prioritizes certain aspects of the civilizing process: the here, or the civilizing and interpretive gaze; the there, or the Other that is the object of that gaze; and the in-between. It further suggests that insights and methods from Mikhail Bakhtin, Hans-Georg Gadamer and others from the humanities, social sciences, and philosophy can be useful in the kind of analysis advocated here.

Keywords: classical literature, cartography, evangelization, colonizations, medieval and other journeys, The New World, Japan

Introduction
As a comparative literature scholar and student of comparative thought and axiological consciousness for more than 45 years, I am wary, along with Isaiah Berlin, of what he has called the “historical inevitability” patterns of some grand interpretations of history. He consistently draws our attention to the unease with which he views the large, overdetermined schemes favored by, in his words, the great generalizers of world history: the Schellings, the Hegels, the Spenglers, even the Toynbees, all those for whom ‘nations or cultures or civilizations’ are more ‘real’ and more ‘concrete’ than the individuals who comprise them. These interpretive schemes are, he concludes, teleological in nature.¹

I myself am drawn to analyses of single works, moments, and limited events, even when the frame of reference is as large as “civilization” or “culture”. This is partly because experience has taught me the value of focus before engaging in generalizations. In this essay, I ask how we might understand a particular work, moment, or event in relation to its context and what that might tell us about certain elements of the civilizing process:

the here, or the civilizing and interpretive gaze; the there, or the Other that is the object of that gaze; and the in-between.

The term “civilizing process” recalls a book by Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: The Development of Manners.* However, I use the term somewhat differently than Elias does. On the one hand, Elias’s work is not so much inter-civilizational as intra-civilizational, dealing with manners or customs of single cultures or civilizations; and he deals mostly with Germany and France. On the other hand, his book is historical in that Elias considers how changes in manners and customs contribute over time to state formation in the evolution of a particular culture or civilization. Critical is what he calls the “self-regulation” of the citizens, who acquire the habits and self-control represented by the larger society, in other words, “manners”. He does not really concern himself with a particular kind of cross-cultural encounter: how the conquest and colonization of one culture by another may become part of a “civilizing process”. Therefore, the civilizing process analyzed by Elias is not comparative and cross-cultural in the way that I am exploring in this essay.

**The Farinati paradigm**

In 1595, Paolo Farinati (1524-1606) created in the Villa Della Torre in Verona, Italy, a series of allegorical lunettes representing the four continents, Europe, Africa, Asia, and America. Of these, the one most directly relevant to the present essay is the lunette America, which depicts the civilizing process as it was commonly understood in the Europe of the 15th and 16th centuries.

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3 There are many metonymical representations of “America” from the 16th century on. Hugh Honour has collected many of these cultural images – allegorical and otherwise – in *The New Golden Land: European Images of America from the Discoveries to the Present Time.* See his brief comments on Farinati on p. 97.
Allegorical representations of the continents are usually female, but this figure is male. He holds a bow in his left hand. Further to his left is an open fire over which a human shoulder and arm are being roasted, turned on a spit by an odd little figure resembling putti in other works by Farinati. In his right hand, he holds a crucifix which rests on the back of a turtle. His face is turned toward the crucifix, and the angle of his body suggests, both symbolically and allegorically, that by turning away from the left, sinister, side of the body to contemplate the crucifix on his right, he is open to conversion to Christianity. That is, as the native is civilized by European Christianity and culture, he will be saved. That this process is not peaceful is further suggested by the armed and aggressive man on horseback to the far right, with an odd dragon’s foot for a hoof.

A comparison of the lunette with its preliminary study gives a good indication of Farinati’s interpretive intention. In that study, above the shoulder and arm being prepared on the open flame, to the native’s left, is a blurred sketch of a Spanish caravel topped with a crucifix. That sketch is erased from the final work and the message of conversion and conquest is shifted exclusively to the right and Christianizing section of the lunette.

Farinati’s typological imagination is the result of the European fascination with man-eaters from the time of the Greeks to the 17th century. In the documents from Homer on, man-eaters were known as *androphagoi* or *anthropophagoi*. That Greek and European fascination became a Spanish obsession with man-eaters in the New World and with the metonymical identification of the man-eater with America. When, during his first voyage in 1492, Columbus heard of the existence of man-eaters on certain islands, he identified them by their Arawakan name: canib [*Diary of the First Voyage* or *Diario del primer viaje*, 26 November 1492]. Subsequently, canib was also written as carib in the documents after 1492 [see, for example, Columbus’s letter to Luis de Santangel, 13 February 1493]. Within just a few years after discovery, and increasingly after the Crown’s promulgation of the “Cannibal Law of 1503”, which permitted the enslavement of cannibals but not of other Indians, island after island quickly was classified as a cannibal island and their entire population legally enslaved.4

4 Among my publications on cannibalism, listed in the references, are the following essays: “Cannibalism and the New Man of Latin America in the 15th and 16th-Century European Imagination”; “The Cannibal Law of 1503”; “Mapping the Caribbean: Cartography and the Cannibalization of Culture”.

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In the end there was a whole Sea of Cannibals, Sea of Caribs, or The Caribbean.

Farinati’s gaze is that of the civilized eye, a gaze informed by a set of presuppositions. In this case, his gaze reflects not what he has seen through experience (literally, cannibals) but what he has understood from the Spanish and European story about the need to convert cannibals in order to civilize them. His interpretive and artistic mind is influenced by what Hans-Georg Gadamer in his hermeneutics has labeled the pre-structure of the understanding or the cultural preconceptions (Vorverständnis) formed by tradition. There are other terms which Gadamer uses to explain the dynamics and results of this process, for instance, “horizon fusion” or Horizontverschmelzung, which is the zone of common understanding or experience between the two horizons, that of the interpreter and that of the interpreted (Gadamer, 1960: passim).

A long history leads up to Farinati’s “America”.

**The Homeric paradigm and legacy**

Homer’s *Odyssey* was created, recited, and transmitted during the Greek colonization of the Mediterranean. It is a paradigmatic tale not only of the nostalgia for home and hearth, but of encounters with unknown peoples. It is a tale of expectations met and unmet, of seeing what one is predisposed to see, and of acting from the ground of one’s cultural and ethnic identity. In Book 9, Odysseus is asked by his host, Lord Alkinoös, to tell something of himself. Hoping to align himself with that court society, Odysseus narrates his confrontation not with an ordinary outsider or a foreigner (ξένος) but with a particular barbarian Other, the monstrous cyclops who eats men. He enlarges on a series of binaries that — from his own perspective, his own ‘gaze’ — reflect the distance between the civilized and the non-civilized, the human and the non-human, the ethical and the non-ethical, all for the purpose of justifying his own behavior, post hoc, and of affirming his civilized status to Lord Alkinoös.

Let’s consider a key passage from his narrative:

> In the next land we found were Kyklopes, giants, louts, without a law to bless them. In ignorance leaving the fruitage of the earth in mystery to the immortal gods, they neither plow nor sow by hand, nor till the ground, though grain, wild wheat, and barley grow untended, and wine-grapes, in clusters, ripen in heaven's rain. Kyklopes have no muster and no meeting, no consultation or old tribal ways, but each one dwells in his own mountain cave dealing out rough justice to wife and child, indifferent to what the others do. (*Odyssey*, 9: 105-115. Robert Fagles translation)

Here is the Greek (Homer, 1984: 310):
Fagles’s translation glosses over some of the wordplay in this passage. The term “themis” (θέμις) and its derivatives are used three times: θεμιστῶν, θεμιστέους, θεμιστεύει. “Themis” (θέμις) is a mostly untranslatable term which means “right custom”, “the proper procedure”, “the proper social order”, “what is lawful”, or “what is agreed to by common consent”. The repetition in the Greek of the various forms of themis, especially in the negative, reinforces — in ways that a translation cannot — the view by Odysseus that the gigantic cyclopean louts do not behave according to proper custom; they are ignorant of agriculture as well as of the importance of assembly. They cannot live in communities, but rather in isolated caves, are indifferent to the needs of others and are domineering toward their individual families. Odysseus returns to this characterization (Book 9: 214-215) when he calls Polyphêmos savage or wild and says that he knows nothing of justice or law (δίκας dikas; θεμιστας themistas).

Turning the negative (athemistón) in Homer’s description into the positive (themis), we get a Greek definition of “civilization” that most students of comparative civilizations would likely find reasonable, though not comprehensive. Lord Alkinoös accepts Odysseus’s presentation of the Cyclopean people as uncivilized, barbarous, monstrous, and only partly human. The otherness and violent behavior of this cannibal Polyphêmos is justification enough for Odysseus to blind him with a burning stake.

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5 In Greek, the term generally used for monster is teras (τέρας), a word that Odysseus uses several times elsewhere in his narrative to refer to the cyclops. Teras (τέρας), of course, is the root term for teratology, or the study of monsters. Another similar term that we see in the epic is “Pelor” or “Peloron” (πέλωρ, πέλωρον). Teras and Pelor also have extended meanings of “huge”, “marvel” or “portent”.

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Polyphêmos will forever remain at the edge of the civilized/non-civilized binary for Odysseus. Odysseus ignores, as Homer does not, the gentleness with which Polyphêmos takes care of his sheep and goats, milking them to make cheese and then putting a lamb or kid below each one to suck (Book 9: 244-249). A similar gentleness is evident the morning after suffering his blindness, when Polyphêmos speaks lovingly to his dear old ram (Book 9: 447), running his hands over the fleece before letting him out of the cave. Odysseus also ignores his own responsibility for violating the guest-host relationship when he and his men first enter Polyphêmos’s cave. The binary contrast, therefore, between civilized and non-civilized, self and Other, human and monstrous, is not as clear-cut in Homer as it is often subsequently made out to be. Homer established the literary paradigm for the perceptions of the monstrous Other; several centuries later, Herodotus (c.485-424 BCE) established the historical one. He described the peoples and cultures in Egypt and generally to the East and the North, toward Persia and beyond. In comparison with Homer’s Odysseus, Herodotus was less judgmental. Though sometimes voicing skepticism about his own descriptions, he nonetheless wrote down what he saw and heard, and he heard a lot about peoples and practices he considered to be less civilized and even barbarous. For example, in Book IV, section 106, Herodotus writes that “the Man-eaters [ἀνδροφάγοι] are the most savage of all human beings. Justice and law are unknown to them. They are nomads, wear Scythian dress, speak a language peculiar to themselves, and are the only people in this region who eat human flesh” (Book IV: 106). The farther Herodotus got from the here, the more questionable some of his descriptions became. He described people whose language resembled the jabbering of bats (Book IV: 183).

6 The island of the Kyklopes is not the only experience of Odysseus with cannibals or man-eaters (Ἀνδροφάγοι). After he escapes from Polyphêmos, Odysseus lands on the island of Aeolus, who very kindly gives him a sealed bag of wind so that he can safely sail back to Ithaca, with only the West Wind at his back, commanding that the bag not be opened. On the way, however, his men take advantage of Odysseus’s momentary neglect and open the bag, releasing contrary winds. Odysseus is then driven back to Aeolus who angrily expels him from the island. The next island he lands on is that of the Laestrygonians, who are violent and man-eaters. They eat several of Odysseus’s men and destroy some of his ships. Apart from brief references to a herding culture and the lack of agriculture, compared to the Polyphêmos episode there is little civilizational language in this description. In sum, the Laestrygonian adventure might best be considered as draconian punishment for having disobeyed the instructions of Aeolus.

7 Although in this essay, I am mainly concerned with Herodotus’s contributions to teratology, it should be noted that in general he described the Scythians and their culture with a combination of respect and restraint. For instance, he writes that one of the most prominent Scythians was Anacharsis, notable for his wisdom (Book IV, 76), as well as for being a great traveler. Yet Anacharsis, though of royal descent, is killed because of his fondness for foreign (i.e. Greek) culture and customs (νομοὶ νόμοι). The Greeks recognized Anacharsis as a sage because, despite being a ‘barbarian’, he reflected Greek ideals. See A. MacC. Armstrong, “Anacharsis the Scythian,” Greece and Rome, vol. 17, no. 48 (January 1948): 18-23.

8 For an extensive discussion of othering in Herodotus, see François Hartog, Le Mirroir d’Hérodote: Essai sur la representation de l’autre.

9 See Herodotus, Histories, p. 237.
There are others who “are the dog-headed creatures and the headless creatures with eyes in their breast, and also the wild men, and wild women, and a great many other creatures by no means imaginary” (Book IV: 191). Teratological ethnography, geography and iconography occupy a miniscule part of the Histories, but that teratology influenced the representation of the far reaches of the world, especially in relation to India and the “marvels of the East”. Ktesias the Knidian, Solinus, Pliny, Megasthenes and others followed Herodotus and expanded upon his views. As can be seen from Herold’s Heydenwelt (15th century), it was an alternative ethnography that continued well into the 15th and 16th centuries, nourished by legends, travelers’ tales, theological commentaries like those of St. Augustine in The City of God, and fables like those of Prester John.

The Judeo-Christian tradition adopted these Greek and Roman classifications of “the pagan world” and added to them, making them central to its moral philosophy. In Judeo-Christian texts, the Other, especially the pagan Other, is placed at the margins of humanity and made to endure the consequences. The most famous example of such a marginalization and its consequences may be read early in the Bible. After the flood, Noah passes out in his tent, drunk. As he lies on his back, his son Ham enters the tent and sees his father’s exposed genitals. For this transgression, Ham and all his descendants are exiled and sentenced to be slaves to his brothers (Genesis 9: 18-27). In medieval cartography and cosmography, Ham becomes the metonymical symbol for Africa.

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10 Herodotus, Histories, p. 261.
11 See Rudolf Wittkower, Allegory and the Migration of Symbols, pp. 46-74. See, specifically, Isidore, Etymologiae, XI, iii, where he speaks of the cynocephali and the big eared people (Panotii); Solinus Collectanea rerum, LII.
Isidore of Seville (c. 560-636), in his famous T & O World Map, draws the world as a sphere, oriented to the East, with the Mediterranean (*mare magnum sive mediterraneum*) bisecting the center and separating Europe, Asia, and Africa. The world is encircled by the Ocean Sea. In this example of theological cartography/cosmography, one sees the enslavement of black Africans as biblically justified by Ham’s “sin”. Ham’s brothers, the European Japheth and Asian Shem, who do not see their father’s genitals, symbolically become the masters over Ham’s descendants. Thus did Africa come to occupy a dark and marginalized space in western religious and social consciousness.

In the theological and ideological geography of Isidore’s T&O map, the periphery is morally and culturally less worthy than the center. This view is critical to the history of Christianity.\(^{12}\) In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus commands his disciples to go to ends of the earth and convert everyone (Matthew 28: 18-20). This command is behind the history of the missionary orders in the Middle Ages and in the New World. The injunction is to bring those unfortunate peoples at the margins to salvation and to Christian civilization in the center of the world.

In Book XI of the *Etymologiae*, known for its “ethnographical descriptions”, Isidore of Seville writes of human beings and others — monsters, portents and prodigies — on the margins of the known world. These beings and those like them elsewhere may appear to be “contra naturam” (XI: section 3, 1), but in fact Isidore considers them to be part of the nature which was created by God, for prodigies and portents are warnings about the future more than anything else. And yet, Isidore says that the monstrous creatures mentioned by the Greeks — giants, cynocephali, cyclopes, blemmyae, panotii, sciopodes or monopods, etc. — are more fable or fiction than anything else:

\(^{12}\) This awareness may be in part the legacy of Greek culture, as transmitted through Roman culture. For the Greeks, the *oikuméné* or the world is seen in relation to its center (the *omphalós*) at Delphi. At the margins were the “boundaries” (*peirata*) of the earth, beyond which were the unknown – the “ocean river” and areas of danger.
“It is also said about other fabulous human portents that they are not really such [i.e., fabulous portents], but rather that they are invented to explain the cause of things that exist” [my translation].

“Dicuntur autem et alia hominum fabulosa portenta, quae non sunt, sed ficta in causis rerum interpretantur” (XI: section 3, 28).

Part of the legacy of Isidore and others is that Greek-Roman ethnography and the Christian conversion narrative merge in medieval cartography and cosmography. Consider, for example, the Ebstorf Mappamundi, created about 1235. Here I choose the top half:

![Ebstorf Mappamundi](image)

The world is the body of Christ. His head is at the top of the world. Next to his head is the Garden of Eden. His feet are at the bottom. On his left or sinister side of his body, one can see the world’s monstrous races, in this detail. Jerusalem is in the center of the world map.

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13 The original of the Ebstorf World Map was destroyed during World War II in an allied air raid on Hanover in 1943, and we possess only copies.
This theological geography of the monstrous is like the marginalization implied with the pagan description of the Other in Johann Herold’s 15th century Heydenwelt (The Pagan World). It is noteworthy that in the Ebstorf world map, “Africa” is placed next to the representations of monsters.

In an influential book on anthropology, *Time and the Other*, Johannes Fabian has diagrammed how the merging of the classical and the Christian functions.\(^{14}\)

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\(^{14}\) See Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology makes its Object*, p. 27. Before the Christian era, Herodotus also arranged the civilized/barbarous peoples of the world in concentric circles, the outer circles being occupied by the more ‘primitive’ cultures. See James Romm, *Herodotus*, p. 106.
For Fabian, the vectors of inclusion and the drive toward the center — toward Imperial and later Christian Rome, as well as toward Jerusalem — are similar for both the civilizing and christianizing processes.

Yet difficulties always remain, concerning the margins and the Others that inhabit them. Distortions occur, morally, geographically, even cartographically. In cartography, azimuthal projections, which were created to illustrate the effect of equidistant projections on a flat surface from a central point, are structurally analogous to T&O maps and world maps like the Ebstorf map. Thus, for example, an azimuthal projection with Tokyo at the center demonstrates how unfamiliar this view of the world must look to a westerner accustomed to seeing world maps centered on London and Europe.

A medieval interlude

What happens when the culture of the Other is perceived to be as strong as one’s own, while remaining alien, even exotic, and perhaps also resistant? We may point to two sets of examples. The first is from the 13th century, when Latin Christendom, building on its successes in the 11th and 12th centuries, was determined to extend its influence eastward.

In 1245, in preparation for a journey to Central Asia by Friar Lawrence of Portugal, Pope Innocent IV wrote two papal bulls addressed to the Khan, ruler of the Mongols, long viewed in Europe as the barbarians at the doorstep. In the first bull, the Pope explained Christianity to the Mongolian ruler and urged him to “acknowledge Jesus Christ as the very son of God and [to] worship his glorious name by practicing the Christian religion”. In the second, he criticized the ruler for having invaded so many countries, and for having “laid waste to them in a horrible desolation and with a fury still unabated”. If the Mongol emperor did not stop, the Pope wrote, God would punish him. The Khan replied to the Pope a year later, completely disagreeing with the Pope and commanding him to yield to Mongol rule. Otherwise, he warned, the Pope would become his sworn enemy.15

In 1253, as an envoy of Louis IX of France, the Franciscan friar William of Rubruck traveled the Silk Road to find the Khan and, on meeting him, to speak to him about Christianity, and to gather information for Louis IX back in France.

15 See The Mongol Mission, edited by Christopher Dawson, pp. 73-76 for the two Papal Bulls from Innocent IV; pp. 85-86 for the Khan’s reply to the Pope.
The Silk Road, or die Seidenstraßen, as Baron von Richthofen named it (or them) in 1877, was then, as it had been intermittently since its early contacts with the Roman Empire and the West generally, an “in-between” area of trans-Eurasian exchanges linking the East (Manchuria) and the West (Persia, Kiev, and Latin Christendom generally). Its middlemen exported silk, cotton, and paper on some of its routes, fur on its northern routes, spices and other goods on parts of its maritime routes. Ideas also came into the West along the various silk routes, as did diseases like the plague. Buddhism came into Central Asia from India and from there went east to China and beyond. Nestorian Christianity came into Central Asia from Persia and, though it still had its practitioners during William’s travels, was eventually absorbed mostly into other religions.

William remained relatively tolerant about what he was seeing and experiencing. He was very much aware that he was travelling between civilizations, and, as he put it at the end of the first chapter of his report of King Louis IX, as if, upon entering the lands of the Tartars (Mongols), he “were entering some other world”. He was ever conscious of his marginal status in Central Asia. William reported but did not condemn the Mongols’ excessive drinking. He described suffering and the lives of slaves but did not condemn the society for it (The Mission, 84). He witnessed starvation among the people and tried to help but, again, he did not condemn Mongolian culture for this situation (The Mission, 188). True, he held a series of conversations about Christianity with various tribesmen and Mongol leaders, and especially with the Great Khan Möngke at the end of his stay in Central Asia, but he was not heavy-handed with the Khan, who held his own throughout those discussions (The Mission, chapter 34: 194-197). Perhaps because William carried nothing like the papal bulls of Innocent IV and did not forcefully impose his beliefs on the people, he was well received and generously treated.

New colonizations

The second set of examples comes from the early 16th century and beyond. Toward the end of his long life, Bernal Díaz del Castillo (1498-1584), who fought alongside Hernán Cortés on his journey of conquest from the coast to Tenochtitlan (today’s Mexico City), the capital of the Aztec Empire, wrote Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España (The True History of the Conquest of New Spain). He said that, as he approached Tenochtitlan, he saw great towers and buildings, all built of stone, rising as if from the water. For him and his fellow Spaniards, this all seemed like a dream, an enchantment like those in the romances of Amadís de Gaula. They had come upon a city, culture, and civilization more advanced and more splendid than anything in Spain.

16 See, in this regard, the fine essay by Duncan Weaver, “William of Rubruck: Cosmopolitan Curiosity and Restraint in an Age of Conquest and Mission”, Comparative Civilizations Review, 83 (Fall 2020).
To the Aztecs, the Spaniards were, on the one hand, terrifying monsters who rode huge deer and came from the sea in large floating houses with trees on them. On the other hand, the Spaniards were like gods who had come in fulfillment of certain prophecies. Moctezuma tried and failed to deter the Spaniards from coming to Tenochtitlan. When they finally met in the Aztec capital, Moctezuma treated Cortés in a courtly manner and offered him everything that he had. It was a generosity born of terror. Through the translations by Doña Marina, later known also as La Malinche, Cortés explained to Moctezuma who the King of Spain and the Pope were, and he summarized some of the main points of Christianity. Then he informed Moctezuma that from the moment of their meeting the Aztecs had become subjects of the Spanish Crown. This meeting and the civilizing process that followed were facilitated by the mediating presence and efforts of the woman in-between Cortés and Moctezuma, La Malinche, who translated for them both.

Words can make stark the differences between cultures and peoples, as happened with Odysseus and the Great Khan. Words can soften differences, as was the case with William of Rubruck. Words can serve the interests of empire, as was the case with La Malinche. The Spanish Crown learned this truth early in their colonizing adventures. In 1492, a professor from the University of Salamanca, Antonio de Nebrija, gave his just published first book on Spanish grammar to Queen Isabel. The Queen asked Nebrija what use she could make of a Spanish grammar since she already knew the language. Nebrija’s answer was prophetic: “Language was always a partner of empire” (“Siempre la lengua fue compañera del imperio”). Lengua in Spanish means speech or language. It also means tongue. Three decades later, La Malinche would become known as “la lengua de Cortés”, the tongue of Cortés, sometimes vilified as a traitor to her people for mediating the encounters between the Indians and the Spaniards. In the Nahua drawings representing that time of conquest, she is portrayed generally as between Cortés and the natives, and always speaking.

This drawing, taken from the Florentine Codex, presents La Malinche translating for Cortés in his encounter with Indians on the way toward Tenochtitlan.
While we don’t know how La Malinche really felt about her in-betweenness and her role in facilitating Spanish aggression against the Native Americans, we do know that she converted to Christianity, eventually became Cortés’s mistress and bore him a son, Martín.

A particularly interesting account of the effects of in-betweenness on an individual during the Christianizing or civilizing process is related by the Dominican Diego Durán in his monumental history of Nueva España.\(^\text{18}\)

I reprimanded an Indian about certain things, in particular that he had gone around gathering money, experiencing bad nights and worse days, at the end of which time, having worked so hard to accumulate so much money, he put on a wedding and invited the whole town to it, spending everything; but he, disputing the bad thing that he had done, answered me: father, don’t be frightened, for we are still Nepantla; and, though understanding what he wished to say with this term and metaphor, which means to be ‘in-between’, I still insisted that he tell me what kind of ‘in-between’ they were in. He told me that since they were still not well established in the faith, I should not be frightened. That is, they were still neutral and could completely follow neither one law nor the other, or, better said, they loved God but at the same time they followed their ancient customs and the ceremonies of the devil, and this is how the Indian used this abominable excuse to say that they were still ‘in-between and neutral’. [my translation]

Reprendiendo yo a un indio con motivo de ciertas cosas, y en particular, de que había andado arrastrado, recogiendo dineros, con malas noches y peores días y, al cabo de haber allegado tanto dinero y con tanto trabajo, hace una boda y convida al pueblo todo y gástalo todo, y así, riñiéndole el mal que había hecho, me respondió: Padre, no te espantes, pues todavía estamos Nepantla, y como entendiese lo que quería decir por aquel vocablo y metáfora, que quiere decir ‘estar en medio’, torné a insistir me dijese qué medio era aquel en que estaban. Me dijo que, como no estaban aún bien arraigados en la fe, que no me espantase; de manera que aún estaban neutros, que ni bien acudían a la una ley, ni a la otra, o por mejor decir, que querían a Dios y que juntamente acudían a sus costumbres antiguas y ritos del demonio, y esto quiso decir aquel en su abominable excusa de que aún permanecían ‘en medio y eran neutros’”. (Durán 1967: 237)

Despite fully understanding what Nepantla is, Durán forces the Indian to define it further, considers his explanation ‘abominable’, is dismissive of the Indian’s ‘evil or bad behavior’ (el mal), and shows little or no compassion for the Indian in this time of difficult transition from one set of cultural and spiritual values to another.

\(^{18}\) Diego Durán, *Historia de las Indias de Nueva España e islas de la Tierra Firme* [1581; 1867], pp. 199; 410-411.
In another part of his narrative, Durán writes (1967: 236) that *nepantla* is “a salad that mixes up ancient superstitions, laws, and sacred ceremonies” (una ensalada y mezcla de antiguas supersticiones y de la ley y ceremonias divinas).

Sometimes, through language, people on the margins can be agents — wittingly or unwittingly — of the civilizing process. This happened in the English colonization of India. In 1835, Thomas Babington Macaulay famously asserted in his “Minute on Indian Education” that the main reason for educating some of the people of India was to create “a class of persons Indian in blood and colour but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect…. [These Indians are to be the] interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern”.

Such in-betweenness was considered permanent. 150 years later, Salman Rushdie takes up the theme of in-betweenness as a central theme of *Midnight’s Children*. At the beginning of this iconic novel, the narrator recalls the experience of his grandfather, Aadam Aziz, who was studying medicine in Germany. On a spring morning in 1915, Aadam Aziz is surprised to learn that India, like radium, had been discovered by Europeans. In Rushdie’s words, that discovery knocks him forever “into that middle place” between Europe and India itself. The rest of the novel narrates the legacy of in-betweenness.

Change is inevitable when cultures and peoples encounter one another for an extended period. The result of such an encounter need not be a permanent and difficult in-betweenness; it may also result in a kind of syncretism or a reconsideration of a particular in-betweenness that reflects a new historical reality and points to a different sort of future.

Around the year 1615, a Peruvian native, Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, sent a letter of more than 1,000 pages with almost 400 of his own hand-drawn illustrations to King Philip III of Spain. The manuscript was entitled *The First New Chronicle and Good Government (El primer nueva corónica y buen gobierno)*, and it merged the Christian history of the world with Andean cosmography and history. The document disappeared for almost three centuries, surfacing only in 1908 in the archives of the Royal Library of Denmark.

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21 On “syncretism”, see Jerry Bentley, *Old World Encounters: Cross-Cultural Contacts and Exchanges in Pre-Modern Times*, pp. 6-42. Bentley asks how cultures and individuals change because of intercultural contacts. For him, a possible result of this process is “syncretism”, which he defines as permitting the co-existence, for a time, of varying beliefs and values within the same society, group of people, or even individuals. (16) For instance, early Christianity used pagan cults in their worship and associated the qualities of pagan heroes with Christian saints” (17).
How it got there, no one knows. I extract the following two moments of spiritual syncretism, cultural adaptation and even resistance (Adorno, 1986: Plate 10 and Plate 11). Both line drawings were made by Guaman Poma himself and included as part of his text.  

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22 Mary Louise Pratt, in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, pp. 2-4, prints this line drawing (taken from Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, *Nueva Coronica y Buen Gobierno*, p. 20) and utilizes it to illustrate how the history of Christendom was rewritten to include the Andean people. See also Rolena Adorno’s extensive analysis of Guaman Poma in *Guaman Poma: Writing and Resistance in Colonial Peru*, as well as her brief bilingual book, *Guaman Poma and his Illustrated Chronicle from Colonial Peru.*
This image of Adam and Eve in the First World sends a rather different message from that of Farinati’s America, created at roughly the same time. Guaman Poma’s drawing, though thematically Christian, is organized — scholars have noted — according to Andean symbolic space, with a male and female side. Adam, facing the viewer from the frame’s right side, is pictured under the male symbol of the sun; Eve, facing the viewer from the frame’s left side and holding the infants Cain and Abel on her lap, is marked by the female symbol of the moon. Next to Adam is a rooster, signifying maleness; on the ground next to Eve is a chicken. Adam wields the Andean staff of creation and agriculture, which marks the diagonal separation of male from female. In the background are the Andes Mountains. The use of the diagonal in this manner is characteristic of the spatial organization one sees in Andean cosmology and in other drawings by Guaman Poma.

Guaman Poma’s text, which follows this line drawing, takes us to the Christian creation story and biblical genealogical history. In some 250 words, he describes how God, after creating Adam and Eve, enabled them to engender Seth, who engendered Enos, and on through generation after generation to the time of Noah, when God punished the world for its sinfulness. The flood completed, according to Guaman Poma, the first two “European” ages. The third European Age is that of Abraham, the fourth that of David, the fifth that of Jesus Christ.

Guaman Poma interpreted these European ages as paralleled by Andean ages: the first is that of Vari Viracocha Runa, the second that of Vari runa, the third that of Purun runa, the fourth that of Auca runa, the fifth that of Inca runa. The two parallel ages come together and meet in the world’s sixth age: that of Spain in the Indies.23

The equivalent of Adam and Eve is Vari Viracocha Runa, as Guaman Poma’s line drawing makes clear:

23 Runa means Indian or Indian Man
Guaman Poma de Ayala recommended that Spaniards and colonials should unite with the Andean elites to form a new syncretistic government to replace the in-betweenness into which Peruvian culture had been thrust for so long.

**Vistas**

I have sometimes wondered how world history might have evolved differently if the second attempted invasion and conquest of Greece by Persia had succeeded in 479 BCE. But it did not. I have also wondered what civilizational analysis might be like if Central Asia had remained the crossroads between civilizations and more central to world culture and historical interpretation. But it did not.
World history turned western with the age of discovery and colonization in the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries. And that turn has continued into the 19th and 20th centuries.

Take the case of Japan, thrust into in-betweenness by the arrival of Commodore Matthew C. Perry and the forcible opening of Japan in 1854 after almost two and a half centuries of isolation. In measured academic prose, W.G. Beasley describes the consequences of that encounter in his 1995 study, *The Rise of Modern Japan*:

[What the Japanese people left behind because of the Western incursion and the rise of industrialization] was both traditional and Asian. What they moved towards was both modern and Western. The transformation therefore required them, not merely to abandon past modes of thought and ways of doing things, but also to sacrifice a part of their cultural identity…. A religious and philosophical tradition based on Shinto, Buddhism and the Confucian ethic was bound to react to the challenge from scientific thought and nationalism in ways that differed from that of Christianity.

A century before Beasley’s assessment, Yukichi Fukuzawa (1835-1901) published a groundbreaking civilizational work, *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization* (1875). In the preface, Fukuzawa writes that the arrival of the Americans in the Kaei era (Kaei 6 and 7, 1853 and 1854) was a “sudden jolt” which threw the Japanese people “into confusion”, the “most powerful single set of events since Confucianism and Buddhism were introduced from China in the distant past. A massive upheaval … is being stirred up at the very depths of men’s souls …. The resultant complications and confusion in Japanese society almost defy imagination…. Contemporary Japanese culture is undergoing a transformation in essence …. Even to discuss [this transformation] is extremely difficult”.

Fukuzawa traveled to the West in 1859, 1862, and 1869, returning to Japan with the first English books to be imported into Japan. He was influenced by Western historiography, especially by the civilizational writings of Scottish Enlightenment thinkers and others: Locke, Hume, Robertson, Smith, Ferguson, and Burton. Mid-19th-century geography texts also contributed to the way he viewed world history and the world: Mitchell’s *New Geography* (1865), Cornell’s *Geography* (1866). All of this contributed to Fukuzawa’s interpretation of world history in terms of western paradigms that he compared to the historical evolution of Japan.

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26 I follow the Western style here, with the given name first and the family name second.
In doing so, he did not ignore the Japanese sources of its civilization (see Chapter 9 of *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization*) but, because of the feudalism and imbalance of power in Japanese culture and society, Fukuzawa’s conclusion was that the civilizing process in Japan had been delayed. Albert M. Craig, in agreeing with Fukuzawa’s analysis and being cognizant of his western bias, has analyzed the influences of western thought on this first Japanese civilizationist.  

Writers and researchers from both Spain and France have sought to justify such a bias, whether on religious or secular grounds. For instance, in 1552, Francisco López de Gómara introduced his *La historia general de las Indias (The General History of the Indies)* with the pious and evangelizing statement that “the most important event after the creation of the world, with the exception of the incarnation and death of Him who created it, is the Discovery of the Indies”. There are numerous examples in Spanish historiography that support this bias.

For a secular French example, Isaiah Berlin, in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, would have us turn to Voltaire, who, says Berlin, “strongly believed that the only objects worthy of historical study were the peaks, not the valleys, of the achievements of mankind. [Voltaire] had no doubt about what they were: Periclean Athens, Rome of the late Republic and early Principate, Renaissance Florence, and France during the reign of Louis XIV… the finest hours of mankind. [Darker periods of world history are] not worthy of the attention of intelligent men. [for it is of little use to know that] “one barbarian succeeded another on the banks of the Oxus or the Iaxartes” (Berlin, 2013: 54-55). That, at least, is Isaiah Berlin’s take on Voltaire. While it is true that Voltaire viewed much of the past through the lenses of Enlightenment values, he is broader than Berlin gives him credit for being. In his *Essai sur les mœurs et l’esprit des nations (1756)*, translated as *An Essay on Universal History, the Manners and Spirit of Nations*, Voltaire reacted against Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet’s view that the Judeo-Christian nations of the West were by far the most advanced. Such a view was far too narrow for Voltaire, who is commonly acknowledged by French critics to be the first truly serious scholar of universal history in France. He began his *Essai sur les mœurs* in 1741, publishing it in 1756, and continuing to revise it until a few months before his death in 1778.

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29 “La mayor cosa después de la creación del mundo, sacando la encarnación y muerte del que lo crió, es el descubrimiento de Indias; y así, las llaman Mundo Nuevo”.  
30 See also Isaiah Berlin’s chapter on Giambattista Vico and World History in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*.  
It was the most serious and sustained work of that kind up to that time, with pages on the origins of civilization, on the wide ethnic diversity of mankind, on the religious views of the “premiers hommes”, on the Chinese, the Indians of India, the Chaldeans, and others. Only gradually does he turn his attention to the West.

Where does the judgmental confidence in the unique superiority of the West — as stated by Francisco López de Gómara, Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet and many other western thinkers and writers — come from? I agree with Isaiah Berlin that in the West it comes, first, from an inherited Platonic confidence in the truth of universals and their validity everywhere and at all times; second, from the notion that there is an essential MAN, writ large, against which particular individuals and civilizations can be measured and assessed; and third, from the Judeo-Christian faith in one God, creator of the world, and in a single set of moral values valid for all human beings. As for us, as comparative civilizationists in the West, seeing the world from the fore-structure of our understanding, perhaps we have even been too easily attracted by the implied historical inevitability behind some of the influential interpreters of world history. Thus, we may have been led to slant our interpretations toward Western horizons and to overlook what specifically happens to societies and individuals caught in the middle of the civilizing process. In doing so, we may have missed some of the interesting interpretive possibilities, contributions, and dynamics of the in-between.

Yet we may ask, what then? Should we focus comparative civilizational work on in-between events, persons, and situations simply because it is interesting to do so and because that focus has been neglected? Is it not important also to ask about the relationship of the in-between to larger views or patterns, especially civilizational ones? Norbert Elias, in *The Civilizing Process*, does not address this issue. In fact, that is Johann P. Arnason’s most significant reservation about *The Civilizing Process* and Elias’s work in general. In *Civilizations in Dispute: Historical Questions and Theoretical Traditions*, Arnason writes that, while Elias effectively analyzes how power, especially economic power, is used over time in state formation within a single culture, he avoids the “pluralist” cultural analysis (Arnason, 320). In other words, Elias avoids comparative civilizational analysis.

Barbara Tuchman, in her essay “In Search of History,” published in her series of essays, *Practicing History*, criticized “the big thinkers, Toynbee and other systematizers” for their “obsession” with finding a particular explanation of history. She states that, to that end, they “arrange systems and cycles into which history must be squeezed so that it will come out evenly and have a pattern and a meaning.” As I said at the beginning of this essay, there is for these thinkers a teleological inevitability to history.

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32 Johann P. Arnason, *Civilizations in Dispute: Historical Questions and Theoretical Traditions*. See pp. 64-65; 103-104; 201-202; 225.
But history is not so easily squeezed into systems and cycles, Tuchman insists, and it is often the humanists who recognize that the human record is often illogical and not inevitable. In other words, humanists are generally better at recognizing the in-betweenness in historical events, even in large civilizing processes.

To bring in-betweenness into a pluralist comparative analysis is not easy, for it is less a question of method than of the adoption of a certain kind of consciousness that is alive to uncertainties, ambiguities, and the sometimes untidy and open-ended processes of history. There are interpretive approaches which can help in this regard. In my view, among the more fruitful are two: the kind of dialogical and cultural analysis advocated by Mikhail Bakhtin and the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer. Both Bakhtin and Gadamer were critical of analyzing history using the methods of the natural sciences, which they viewed as too rigid for interpreting the vagaries of the human experience through the scientific method. Both were interested, of course, in enlarging the realm of human experience by focusing on the consequences of “the particular”. For each, “the particular” is equally the point of departure and of reference.

In this essay, I have called the time-limited epoch of most intercultural encounters as “the in-between” and an instance of what Bakhtin would identify as a “chronotope”. For intercultural encounters, one may usefully ask how the in-between influences the larger context or becomes absorbed by it, how it contends with hegemony or yields to it — or not. This larger context may be a community, an institution, a state, a culture or a civilization. Bakhtin would draw our attention to the in-between as a dialogical consciousness within the chronotope itself, and he would describe the in-between’s absorption into the larger context as the transformation of the dialogic into the monologic, which is the hegemony or authority of the dominant single voice or “utterance”. For Bakhtin, what shapes that transformation is the “discourse” in which it takes place, a discourse that, over time, tends to exert a “finalizing effect” on the in-between. This finalizing effect is akin to the civilizing process. And yet, for Bakhtin also, the finalizing effect is always tempered by “unfinalizability”. For him, history is essentially fluid, inconclusive, and open-ended. The final word about the world and history has not been spoken. Because of unfinalizability, it is a mistake to explain history through the lens of “historical inevitability”.34

The analogue of “discourse” in Bakhtin is “tradition” in Gadamer. In the ordinary sense of the word, “tradition” would seem to exert a “conservative” pressure that limits meaning.

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34Throughout a long career and a long life (1895-1975), Bakhtin developed a series of concepts which he used for the analysis of literary texts, of society, and of history, and which are relevant to my thoughts in this conclusion. Among his more significant works in this regard are the early Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics (1929: 1963), followed by Rabelais and his World (1965: 1984), The Dialogic Imagination (1975), Speech Genres and Other Late Essays (1986).
For Gadamer, however, tradition — considered as Vorverständnis — frames meaning and understanding not by limiting them but by placing them in a continuous stream of history that explains not only the past but also the present and is suggestive about the future. In this sense, tradition permits and encourages a dialogical approach, for, framed by tradition, it is in the in-between — whether that is a person, an event, or a text — where interpretation takes place. Part of our responsibility in comparative civilizational analysis is to seek to understand how the finalizing effect, unfinalizability, the dialogical, the framing effect of Vorverständnis, discourse, tradition, and the in-between function in tandem in specific situations. Bakhtin and Gadamer do not prescribe a “method” of analysis; rather, they identify a consciousness through which the civilizing process can be understood. Farinati, Homer, Herodotus, the teratological tradition in literature, ethnography and cartography, the Christianizing mission, conquest and colonization, and intercultural encounters in general — all may be viewed through the interpretive lenses provided by Bakhtin and Gadamer. Doing so, we may better understand significant aspects of the civilizing process, the here, the there, and the in-between.

William of Rubruck went to central Asia about two decades before Marco Polo did. For each, their experiences and dialogues with the Khan seemed to have been formative. Polo, of course, recounted to a fellow prisoner, Rustichello da Pisa, his dialogues with the Khan and his experiences in Asia, which then became the basis for the influential Il Milione or The Travels of Marco Polo. This book gave rise to a number of later works — autobiographies, biographies, travel sketches, novels — inspired by the contacts between the Khan and western figures. Among the more interesting of these works is the recent novel Invisible Cities by Italo Calvino, which is composed of the descriptions of invisible cities, conversations between the Khan and Marco Polo, and interlocking ‘authorial’ commentaries. In an observation calling to mind the experiences of William of Rubruck and Marco Polo, as well as the experiences of other travelers, persons or interpreters who find themselves in the in-between, Italo Calvino writes: “the traveler’s past changes according to the route he has followed: not the immediate past, that is, to which each day that goes by adds a day, but the more remote past”. To that, I would add that the future also changes according to the route we have followed. It is not a question of choosing between the finalizing effect and unfinalizability. It is more a realization that Shakespeare’s phrase in The Tempest, “What’s past is prologue” (II.i.253), is more complex, more ambiguous, more richly nuanced, more suggestive, than one first might think.

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35 Italo Calvino, Invisible Cities (1972; trans. William Weaver, p. 28. Le città invisibili: “il passato del viaggiatore cambia a seconda dell’itinerario compiuto, non diciamo il passato prossimo cui ogni giorno che passa aggiunge un giorno, ma il passato più remoto”, p. 34.
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