How to Think About Civilizations[1]

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Any reader of the preceding chapters will certainly have noted a series of persistent themes animating the ongoing scholarly conversation, including the complexity of the efforts to identify a civilization or to precisely demarcate its boundaries. It is quite challenging to determine where any one civilization ends and another begins, even though every kind of analysis of what a civilization is or does depends, at least implicitly, on some sort of boundary-demarcation exercise. Whether civilizations are "real" or not is, as Matthew Melko once observed, quite beside the point—what matters is whether "we can find value in the concept of civilizations," value expressed in terms of the kinds of social dynamics and relations that the concept highlights and calls attention to (1969:4). But in order to unlock this value, it is first necessary to determine what a given civilization consists of, and where its boundaries are. But whether we are speaking geographically or historically or even conceptually, any concrete specification of where a particular civilization starts or stops seems to be quite contestable, calling the ensuing analysis into question.

There are an impressively large number of scholarly solutions to this problem, a variety of which are on display in this volume. It would therefore be easy for me to spend my time in this concluding chapter criticizing those boundary-demarcation exercises that do not conform to my own preferred way of dealing with the issue.

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[1] Forthcoming as the concluding chapter in Peter Katzenstein, ed., *Civilizations in World Politics* (Routledge, 2009). Obliquely, conversations with Alex Wendt, Nick Onuf, Dan Nexon, and Naeem Inayatullah have shaped this chapter. Directly, comments by Peter Katzenstein and Will Schlickenmaier helped to sharpen the argument.

Indeed, that might be the expected thing to do in a situation like this. In International Relations, Susan Strange's famous contribution to the Krasner edited volume on regimes serves as exemplary of this approach: launch a critique of the preceding contributions, pose some "more fundamental questions about the questions" asked in those chapters, and suggest an alternative not previously on offer in the volume (1983:337-338). Perhaps I could even come up with a characterization of civilizational analysis as memorable as Strange's condemnation of regime analysis as "woolly." But I am not going to take that tack, in part because I've already come out in print elsewhere (2004, 2006) in defense of taking civilizations seriously in the analysis of world politics, so it would be highly unusual for me to now declare civilizational analysis suspect. That said, I do have a perspective on *how* to take civilizations seriously that is somewhat at variance from many of the other authors represented in this volume, as I am—as Peter Katzenstein pointed out in his introductory chapter—more interested in civilizational discourse than in the putatively dispositional properties of civilizations. So I could simply set up camp here and defend my position against the rest of the scholarly community, hoping to cause sufficient damage to my opponents that I win some converts among the volume's readers.

I could, but I'm not going to. Instead, I have a somewhat different agenda in this chapter. Rather than impose an answer to the question of how we ought to think about civilizations in world politics, I am going to spend some time ordering and formalizing the various options available to us when thinking about civilizations in world politics. In this way, I aim to ideal-typify the positions involved in this scholarly conversation,

not for the purpose of selecting one over another, but instead for the purpose of clarifying the issues at stake in the selection of any of these avenues of inquiry. In so doing, I am not looking for points of agreement either conceptual or empirical; if anything, my bias is in the opposite direction, towards points of *dis*agreement. I do not think that there is an implicit consensus position on civilizations lurking somewhere behind the contributions of the various authors gathered in this volume, and I would strenuously resist efforts to impose one. Rather, the only thing that unifies the contributions to the volume—beyond their vague assent to the proposition that civilizations and their dynamics are important to the study of contemporary world politics—is that they disagree about roughly the same things.

This is an important point, so let me unpack it a bit. We spend altogether too much time in our scholarly lives either looking for points of agreement between ourselves and others, or regarding points of disagreement as occasions for a zero-sum game in which we score points by dismantling the claims advanced by others. Lurking not too far behind both of these scholarly practices, and implicit within them, is the presumption that the goal of scholarship is *consensus*, and that the best way to build reliable knowledge is through the steady accumulation of broader and broader consensuses. The philosophical poverty of this brand of neopositivism—"neo" because it embraces the post-Popperian methodology of falsification as an avenue to constructing consensus by weeding out possible contenders, and "positivist" because it continues to posit the production of globally unified knowledge as its goal—does not seem to have affected everyday scholarly practice all that much, at least not in our field.

We still treat disagreements as something to *adjudicate* or *resolve*; we remain uncomfortable with the notion that the world might be qualitatively more complicated than our analytical tools for interrogating it, and more complicated in such a way that the world might support different, even divergent, ways of making sense of it.

And with good reason: "in fulfilling our responsibilities as competent and professional academics, we must write *systematic texts*; we run the risk of being accounted incompetent if we do not" (Shotter 1993a:25). Hence it is difficult for us to even *raise* the question of whether systematicity and global logical coherence—and, ultimately, agreement among fellow scholars on important points of fact and theory—is the proper way to construct knowledge. There is something almost heretical about raising the suggestion that maybe the exercise of constructing knowledge should *not* be thought of as a drive towards consensus, but should instead be thought of as something quite different: a play of discourses, maybe, or an opportunity for the contentious clarification of basic and unresolvable assumptions. Perhaps an occasion to forge and refine useful conceptual tools for the investigation of future, as-yet-unknown situations. This last suggestion owes a lot to the pragmatist sensibilities of John Dewey, who argued that the role of the sciences, including the social sciences, was to do just that, and that scholars should take advantage of the relative isolation of the scholarly world from the world of application in order to design conceptual instruments that are subtle and refined enough to be used to make sense of a variety of situations (1920:126-127, 149). John Shotter refers to this as "critical tool-making" and highlights the often-

overlooked fact that the most significant of such tools are not sharply delineated recipes or programmatic ideologies, but rather more ambiguous.

> The meaning of many important distinctions within Western life…are not in any sense fully predetermined, already decided distinctions. They are expressed or formulated in different ways in different, concrete circumstances, by the use of a certain set of historically developed…"topological" *resources* within the Western tradition. Thus, what might be called a "living tradition" does not give rise to a completely determined form of life, but to dilemmas, to different possibilities for living, among which one must choose (1993b:170-171).

These topological resources—which we might call *commonplaces* (see Jackson 2006:27-32)—and their availability or non-availability (in the first instance) and their specific deployment so as to entail a specific outcome (in the second instance) can be used to construct explanations of social and political action. But an analysis of commonplaces can also be used to make sense of scholarly conversations: "'Topics', already in existence in the background common sense of arguers, are what can hold an argument together as an intelligible social enterprise and give it its style" (Shotter 1993b:156). Such an analysis can be conducted on a fairly broad scale, as when Andrew Abbott (2001) argues that the dynamics of whole academic disciplines, and the divisions between them, can be neatly parsed as the self-similar synchronic and diachronic repetition and interaction of a few basic distinctions (like positivism and interpretivism, or social determinism and individual freedom). In Abbott's conception, what holds an academic discipline together intellectually is the ready availability of a set of distinctions and debates the various sides of which are easily *recognizable* to others socialized in the discipline; one need not invent one's argument out of whole cloth, but

can instead simply begin working *in media res*, intervening into an already-ongoing set of contentious conversations and exploring a novel combination of commitments or a unique place within the overall disciplinary landscape.

I would like to suggest that the same kind of analysis of the ongoing conversation about civilizations in world politics would be useful in at least two ways. First, by identifying the commonplaces over which we contend and the distinctions that unite us in a single conversation by giving us all places to stand relative to one another, it may be possible to better characterize the whole discussion as something of a group effort—Shotter would call it "joint action" (1993b:3-4)—to make plain the implications of adopting different combinations of analytical orientations towards social action. Indeed, I will illustrate that the commonplaces over which we are wrestling in this book are not really unique to the study of civilizations, or of civilizational states, but are instead much broader considerations pertinent to the analysis of social life as a whole, and in particular to the analysis of community and communities. Civilizations have certain empirical peculiarities that exacerbate some issues, but there is nothing like a "civilizational theory" on offer here or, for that matter, in many of the authors on whom the contributors to this conversation draw.

Second, if Dewey is right that the value of social science lies in its refining of conceptual tools, then the lack of consensus on offer here is a *positive* development, since the conversation as a whole then offers a plethora of options from which the reader may choose. Each have their characteristic strengths and weaknesses, and none perfectly captures everything of interest in a complex and ambiguous world—but that

is only to be expected, once we abandon the rather naïve belief in some kind of "prediscursive providence which predisposes the world in our favor" (Foucault 1981:67). A scholarly conversation can at least offer the reader an *informed* choice between equally imperfect alternatives.

Two Debates

In looking for a way to characterize the discussion of civilizations in world politics, I have been guided by two striking facts. First, it has become quite common to see a ritualistic denunciation of Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996) near the beginning of any scholarly article on civilizations—almost as common as it once was to see ritualistic denunciations of Kenneth Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* (1979) near the beginning of any scholarly article on the international system. Virtually no scholar of cultures and civilizations, with the possible exception of Lawrence Harrison (2008), self-identifies as a "Huntingtonian," and virtually every contemporary scholar distances their work from Huntington's by critiquing Huntington's conception of civilizations for being too static, too fixed, too *essentialist*. Civilizations for Huntington might as well be big states, except for the fact that they are states without central governments or authorized representatives; civilizations have pretty firm borders, and relations between civilizations look uncannily like the relations that structural realists expect to see

between states in a multipolar system. Inter-civilizational anarchy doesn't appear to be much different from inter-state anarchy.

Basically, everyone rejects this analytical ensemble. Instead, most analysts embrace the notion that "Civilizations are complex and heterogeneous entities that are capable of developing in a variety of directions…Civilizations are not closed systems like billiard balls but porous and open to outside influences" (Melleuish 2000:118). Far from the Huntingtonian formula of monoculturalism at home plus multiculturalism abroad (1996:318), contemporary civilizational analysis embraces the notion that civilizations are internally diverse, and that the lines dividing them from one another are rarely as sharp as they appear in Huntington's maps. We thus end up with notions like "civilizational constellation" as a way of discussing how a specific group of people make sense of the world (Delanty 2003:15), or a rethinking of a civilization as designating a not-entirely-consistent set of habits and commonsensical practices that a group of people has historically evolved over time for dealing with a plethora of political-economic issues (Robert W. Cox 2002:157). Different authors deploy different analytical vocabularies, but they virtually all begin their scholarship on civilizations with a rejection of strong Huntingtonian essentialism.

The second striking fact is that there are a variety of different ways to reject Huntingtonian essentialism. Roughly speaking, two emphases obtain in the contemporary literature: one pathway emphasizes the temporal variability of a civilization, concentrating on how a variety of historical practices and processes came together to generate a certain characteristic ensemble, while the other looks more

closely at the internal debates and conversations among self-identified members of a civilization about what their civilization entails, and concentrates on the nuances of those conversations as well as their contentious character. This suggests that Huntingtonian essentialism might itself be composed of the conjoining of two analytically distinct commitments—commitments that could be accepted or rejected individually as well as jointly. And that, in turn, suggests a simple categorization of ways of studying civilizations, a categorization animated by two analytical distinctions: one involving a turn from static civilizational *attributes* to dynamic civilizational *processes*, and one involving a turn from the identification of a civilization's key features by *scholars* to an identification of a civilization's key features by the *participants* in that civilization.

I will discuss each of these distinctions in turn, before assembling them into a coherent matrix of scholarly positions.[2]

Attributes versus Processes

The distinction between attributes and processes is a well-established feature of discussions within scientific ontology. By "scientific ontology" I mean the catalog of

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[2] I would be remiss if I did not also admit that these distinctions stem, in part, from my own scholarly work and the value-commitments that drive it. Perhaps someone else looking at the same academic conversation about civilizations would extract alternative axes along which to compare and contrast positions taken up by various participants in that conversation. They are of course welcome to do so, but I'm not going to get into the endless exercise of trying to anticipate all possible ways of dividing up the conversation—nor am I going to try to offer any transcendental grounding for the two analytical distinctions that I am proposing. As fascinating as that can be—see (Onuf 1989) for a sustained example—my tastes run more to allowing an ideal-typical matrix to demonstrate its worth on pragmatic grounds.

basic objects with which a theory or a research agenda operates; this is distinct from a theory's *philosophical* ontology, which pertains to the "hook-up" between the scientific research and the world that she or he is investigating (Patomäki and Wight 2000:215). Every theory presumes, even if only implicitly, both a philosophical and a scientific ontology, and these presumptions act as world-disclosing grounds for subsequent empirical claims (Habermas 1990:321). Such preconditions for sensible thought and action within a given research community, which are often part of what John Searle (1995) calls the "Background" of our dealings with the world, express the shared presuppositions that members of the research community hold in common—and precisely because they are shared and presupposed, they don't have to be discussed under normal circumstances. But philosophers, and by implication philosophically-inclined social scientists, aren't operating in normal circumstances; the very artificiality of a philosophical discussion allows the explicit consideration of what might otherwise remain merely tacit. Ontology, both philosophical and scientific, can thus be *foregrounded* in such discussions (Jackson 2008).

"Attributes" and "processes" are aspects of scientific ontology, and set the parameters for how objects appear in a theory. An attribute-ontology treats objects as collections of properties, held together at their core by some bare and propertyless substantial existence, a dispositional "being-that" around which the object's different qualities are arranged. Properties that are essential to the object's existence as the kind of object that it is—properties close to its core—might be thought of as the object's "primary" properties, while other more contingent qualities might be thought of as

"secondary" properties (Rescher 1996:47). For example, in modern natural science one might think of the primary properties of a substance like "gold" as involving its atomic structure; the secondary properties of gold, such as its solidity or liquidity, are a consequence of those primary properties interacting with a particular environment and its temperature, and as such are less essential to the "goldness" of gold than is gold's atomic structure (Sylvan and Majeski 1998:88-89). And back behind both secondary and primary properties, inferred rather than directly experienced, is the simple existence of the object *qua* object—an existence that, as René Descartes argued when first establishing this kind of scientific ontology, is grasped by mind rather than by the senses, and establishes the continuous persistence of an object even when it undergoes a myriad of changes (Descartes 1993:67-69).

The relevance of these rather abstract considerations becomes readily apparent when we apply them to the existence and dynamics of social objects like individuals or states—or civilizations. Within an attribute-ontology, the claim that something exists depends on the identification of some relatively stable set of primary properties that persists over time; this relatively stable set, in turn, serves as the point of departure for a judgment of existence. Hence we equip ourselves with a definition of an object and go out into the world looking for things that fit the definition: states, for example, might be defined in the Weberian manner as successfully upholding the monopoly of the legitimate use of force within a given territory, and with that as a guide to the primary properties of a state we might proceed to identify a number of existing states in the contemporary world. Of course, if we were to modify the definition, perhaps by

supplementing the Weberian definition with additional primary properties like "sovereignty" and "having a society" (Wendt 1999:201-202), we would generate a different catalog of existing states. But the point is that the grounds for saying that a state *exists* involve the empirical identification of certain properties, which might or might not be possessed by the potential state under investigation.

Attribute-ontology is quite prominently on display in the scholarly conversation about civilizations in world politics. Huntington's own civilizational essentialism is a potent instance of this scientific ontology, as he proposes a definition of a civilization as involving commonalities in the spheres of "blood, language, religion, [and] way of life" (Huntington 1996:42-43) and then proceeds to identify a number of actually-existing civilizations on that basis. But a similar gesture can be found whenever an analyst asks a question about whether a particular civilization exists and then proceeds to adduce empirical evidence either supporting or refuting a conjectured answer to the question. This is perhaps most powerfully illustrated when the candidate civilization is not widely acknowledged to *be* a civilization, as when Oswald Spengler devotes a substantial portion of his magnum opus *The Decline of the West* to establishing the existence of a "Magian" or "Arabian" Culture[3] that lives historically between the decline of the Classical and the rise of the Western. For Spengler, the central property of Culture is a "prime symbol"—"a common world-feeling and a common world-form

[3] Spengler's terminology is somewhat unique among civilizational scholars. For Spengler, the entities that others call "civilizations" are known as "the higher Cultures," and what he calls "civilization" represents a distinct phase in the life history of one of the higher Cultures. David Leheny touches on this particularly Germanic paring of "culture" and "civilization" in his chapter above; see also (Bowden 2004; and Jackson 2006:84-86).

derived from it" (1926:174)—and wherever he can discern such a commonality of world-feeling (especially in art, music, and architecture), he concludes that a separate Culture exists. In this volume, Bruce Lawrence's discussion of an "Islamicate" civilization and James Kurth's analysis of a US-led "Western" civilization illustrate this gesture most clearly, seeking to identify a civilization through the empirical enumeration of its core components.

Attribute-ontology is also implicated, perhaps even more clearly, when analysts turn from the identification of existing civilizations to an explanation of their activities. Again, the analytical parallels with explanation involving other social objects helps to make the logic clear: as when applied to the explanation of state or individual action, an attribute-ontology reasons from a set of properties possessed by an entity to that entity's activities. Thus, to pick a fairly prominent example from International Relations scholarship, we have the claim that democracies are less prone to go to war with one another than non-democracies (e.g. Russett 1993); the logic here runs from a property of an entity (democracy) to an outcome (a democratic state not going to war with other states sharing that property). Note that the basic logic is not at all affected if we make the causal property "fuzzy" rather than "crisp" (Ragin 2000), and allow entities to differ in their degrees of democracy-ness; we just get a more finely-grained association of a property and an outcome. Along these lines, we have claims about what a state's relative endowment of assorted power-resources inclines it to do internationally, what kinds of strategies an ethnic group's internal organizational structure disposes it to undertake, and what sorts of decisions are more or less necessitated by a particular set

of beliefs or pattern of information. In all cases, what matters here is a kind of reasoning that Andrew Abbott refers to as "general linear reality" (1988): the presence or absence, and perhaps the degree of intensity, of some property of an object leads more or less inevitably to an observed outcome.

This aspect of attribute-ontology is also clearly present in the scholarly conversation about civilizations. The logic of properties need not take the form of Huntington's bold claim that "Islam has bloody borders" (1996:258), a stark example of essentialist reasoning inasmuch as responsibility for conflict is transferred to a deep dispositional characteristic of Islam *per se*. Instead, what we most commonly see is a form of reasoning from properties to outcomes that, much like a great deal of constructivist scholarship in International Relations, emphasizes how ideas and meanings and beliefs held by actors lead to particular courses of action. In this volume, the clearest example is Emanuel Adler's identification of a new self-identity for European countries—"Normative Power Europe"—that informs a variety of decisions and strategies. The shift of empirical attention from "material" characteristics to "ideational" self-identification does not affect the explanatory logic in any significant way, whatever implications it might have for the mutability of the property causing the outcome (Tilly 1998). To say that how the members of a civilization understand themselves *as* a civilization leads to their doing certain things rather than others is not, at least not necessarily, to step outside of an attribute-ontology.

The alternative to an attribute-ontology would be a *process-ontology* (Emirbayer 1997; Jackson and Nexon 1999). Such a scientific ontology would not regard objects as

collections of properties, but would instead analytically embed the existence of objects in an unfolding set of transactional mechanisms and relations that have the effect of reproducing the object from moment to moment. Instead of starting with substances in isolation, we begin with concrete connections and interactions: "The fact is that all we can ever detect about 'things' relates to how they act upon and interact with one another—a substance has no discernible, and thus no justifiably attributable, properties save those that represent responses elicited from its interaction with others" (Rescher 1996:48-49). So for example, instead of states with varying degrees of power and wealth, we would have a pattern of political and economic relations that is denser in some places (the "core") and more diffuse in others (the "periphery"). State sovereignty, in such a conception, goes from being a stable property of a state to an ongoing practice of differentiation, whereby states and their boundaries are perpetually shored up and reinscribed (Mitchell 1991; Bartelson 1998). The emphasis moves from solid objects with discernible and stable qualities, to constellations and arrangements of fluctuating practices and historical patterns.

The application of a process-ontology to civilizations is arguably the "mainstream" of contemporary civilization scholarship, at least outside of International Relations. As Peter Katzenstein's opening chapter makes clear, the innovations introduced by Shmuel Eisenstadt and Norbert Elias clearly turn in a processual direction, emphasizing the extent to which a civilization is a complex arrangement of habits, principles, and historic traditions of action on which people may draw in a variety of ways. The notion that civilizations are internally pluralistic is more than a

simple empirical observation; it is a mutation in scientific ontology, one that allows analysts to get past the quest to identify a civilization's "core" or essence and to focus instead on the concrete implications of particular political and economic and cultural arrangements. In this volume, a clear example of that kind of analysis is David Kang's careful tracing of how various "Chinese" practices diffused into regions surrounding China proper, making possible a set of actions that might not have been otherwise possible. Other examples of this kind of analysis dominate the essays that Martin Hall and I collected for our recent volume on civilizations in world politics (2007). The key feature here is the emphasis not on a fully-formed social entity with dispositional properties, but instead on the contingent historical emergence and reproduction of those entities in practice.

Obviously, the kind of "general linear reality" explanatory logic associated with an attribute-ontology will not work particularly well in an approach more centrally focused on processes. If properties don't produce outcomes, the only viable alternative is to look to practices themselves—and in particular to look to practices that intend to shift the contours of an actor's social environment, since action in a process-ontology emerges not from "inside" of an actor, but from the concrete and specific ways that an actor is connected to her or his environment (Joas 1997:161-162). So we could investigate those kinds of historical endowments that a particular pattern of diffusion has made available to a group of actors, and this treat a civilization as a kind of structural context for action—much as Kang does. Alternatively, we could focus our attention on those moments where explicit discussions about the nature and boundaries of a civilization

are taking place, since the contingent resolution of those discussions actively shapes what the participants in those discussions do subsequently; this is the strategy undertaken in this volume by Suzanne Rudolph, whose empirical field of investigation even extends to the scholars of Indian civilization themselves and makes them and their work part of the explanatory account. Similarly, David Leheny's discursive approach examines the ways in which a variety of voices are actively contesting the meaning of "Japan," contending over the precise specification of key symbols and historical events. The object of investigation here is the production and reproduction of civilizational boundaries—an object of investigation that only occurs within a process-ontology.

Who Specifies?

A second, cross-cutting analytical distinction that we can see within the scholarly conversation about civilizations involves the question of who gets to make the determination about what constitutes a civilization. Whether an analyst is committed to an attribute-ontology or a process-ontology, the question of delineation still remains. Does the analyst look at the historical data and try to derive her or his own account of what constitutes a given civilization? Or does she or he follow the actors themselves as they seek to make sense out of their situations in civilizational terms? In the former case, scholarly analysts are in a sense empowered to determine the most appropriate descriptive and explanatory categories for a particular set of social actions without paying much attention to the ways that the actors themselves understand their

situation; analysts can cut through what actors think that they are doing, replacing the operative terminology of the actors with a conceptual vocabulary that corresponds more to academic concerns and debates than it does to the actors' own self-understandings. In the latter case, scholarly analysts are in a sense constrained to limit their academic speculations by referring their descriptions and explanations back to the ways that social actors themselves engage the world, and in particular to take very seriously the meaning-laden accounts of action that social actors themselves generate and operate with—not as secondary-source descriptions of explanations of what those actors are doing, but as inextricably involved with the situation under investigation.

The distinction I am drawing here is by no means a novel one. It picks up some of what linguistic anthropologist Kenneth Pike (1967) was getting at by distinguishing between "emic" and "etic" perspectives on a culture, with an emic perspective adopting an "insider's" point of view and trying to explicate how participants in that culture make sense of their own activities, while an etic perspective adopts an "outsider's" point of view and brings a detached scholarly vocabulary to bear on a culture. Similarly, the "interpretive turn" in the human sciences (Alker 1996; Yanow 2006), which emphasizes the need to use the self-understandings of social actors as a point of departure for both description and explanation, thematizes something like the distinction I am concerned with in contrasting interpretive ways of producing knowledge with "positive" alternatives.

But these ways of talking about the distinction between a scholarly account that deploys an abstract conceptual vocabulary and makes its own determinations about

what actors are doing, and a scholarly account that follows actors' self-determinations of what they are doing and remains more firmly grounded in the actors' lived experiences, reach too quickly for issues in philosophical ontology. Emic/etic, like positive/interpretive, invoke overall perspectives on how scholarly analysts are plugged into the world—whether scholars are necessarily internal to their objects of study, or whether scholars stand sufficiently apart from those objects to produce generally valid knowledge of them (Adcock 2006)—rather than concerning themselves with the character of the objects under investigation. As such, these philosophical distinctions are more like what have elsewhere (2008) termed "monism" and "dualism," with the latter designating a firm differentiation between the knowing subject and the known world, while the former designates a fundamental continuity between knower and known. These distinctions don't specifically pertain to the analysis of social objects.[4]

Instead, what I have in mind here is something more like Benedict Anderson's famous declaration that national "[c]ommunities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (1991:6). Anderson

[4] There are costs in moving too quickly to the level of philosophical ontology, not the least of which is that questions of philosophical ontology are somewhat more fundamental than questions of scientific ontology. This is not to say that questions of scientific ontology are any easier to resolve in practice; rather, the main difference is that questions of scientific ontology are less likely to directly implement commitments about the basic character of knowledge—commitments that are, in many cases, almost theological in character. So differences of scientific ontology might lead to some fierce scholarly debates, but probably won't spill over into scorched-earth scholarly wars. And separating scientific and philosophical ontology in the way that I have throughout this chapter opens the possibility that scholars with divergent commitments about the nature of knowledge might find some shared ground in a conceptualization of their common object of study: a dualist and a monist might both agree, for example, that the self-conceptions of actors are critical to the empirical investigation of social action, and that those self-conceptions should be treated as provisionally fixed attributes of relatively stable social entities, but then disagree on precisely *how* to study those social entities. Separating scientific and philosophical ontology, then, provides more elaborate combinatorial possibilities—and that may be the most important academic effect of a good ideal-typification of scholarly debates.

suggests that scholars should put aside any pretense of determining whether a given group of people belong together according to some abstract criteria, and should instead look at the ways that people organize themselves into groups. For Anderson, this is less a general statement about knowledge of the world, and more a specific claim about the character of human community and human social action. The dynamics associated with a national community or nation, in Anderson's perspective, depend on the participation of a number of individuals in a set of meaningful practices, and cannot be reduced to or explained in terms of pre-social or non-meaningful factors. As for Rogers Brubaker (1996, 2006), "nation" for Anderson is a category of practice, not a category of analysis; what matters is how people speak and act so as to reproduce, or to challenge, their membership in the nation and the implications that such membership carries.

Traditional scholarship on nations and nationalism often conflates this distinction with the attribute/process distinction, as though scholarly delineation went hand in hand with an attribute-ontology and attentiveness to participant narratives necessarily entailed a process-ontology. But there is no logical reason why a scholar couldn't adopt a process-ontology together with a commitment to deploying an abstract scholarly vocabulary rather than grounding an analysis firmly in the lived experience of one's informants; this would mean not advancing the kind of explanatory claims based on categorical membership that are characteristic of a "general linear reality" approach to explanation, but instead turning to some other explanatory logic to interrogate the effects of mechanisms and processes that were abstractly delineated by the scholar. Fortunately for such a scholar, there is a long-standing tradition of structural analysis in

the social sciences that does precisely this, utilizing notions like "function" and "feedback" to clarify how processes—such as the circulation of capital (Poulantzas 2008), the maintenance of hegemony (Jessop 1990), and the reinforcement of organizational changes (Pierson 2004)—exert their effects without necessarily having to manifest themselves in the consciousness or experience of the actors involved. Similarly, there is no logical reason why a scholar couldn't combine an attribute-ontology with a commitment to ground an analysis in lived experience; the central statement of one version of constructivist International Relations theory—"people act toward objects, including other actors, on the basis of the meanings that objects have for them" (Wendt 1992:396-397)—inclines in precisely this direction, and a similar commitment has given rise to a number of empirical efforts to map and assess the consequences of various ways that social actors in world politics have understood themselves at different points in time (Finnemore 1996; Rodney Bruce Hall 1999; Crawford 2002).

Therefore I would like to draw a distinction between a scholarly delineation of a social object (such as a civilization) and a scholarly effort to trace and explain how actors themselves delineate that social object. This is a matter of scientific ontology, in the terms that I have used here, because—much like attribute-ontology vs. process-ontology—it speaks to the general parameters for how objects appear in a particular scholarly analysis. Do we regard a civilization to be the kind of thing that is best identified by a detached scholarly analyst as a part of an academic explanation, or do we on the contrary regard a civilization to be a social and cultural resource that

primarily manifests in the discourse that actors engage in as they seek to creatively act in and interact with their social environment? If 'civilization' is a tool or instrument for making sense of social dynamics, *whose tool is it*: ours, or the people whom we are investigating?

This distinction neatly divides the authors in this volume as well as the distinction between attribute-ontology and process-ontology does, but does so in an orthogonal way: the volume's contributors are grouped differently if we take this distinction as an organizational principle. On the "scholarly delineation" side of the ledger, we find Kang, Lawrence, and Kurth; all three are concerned to identify the civilization in which they are interested by sifting through a myriad of empirical data in order to come up with a scholarly account of the civilization that they are studying. Kang operates with a set of Chinese practices that are identified as such based on his research experience and scholarly gaze, not on the identification of those practices as Chinese by either the Chinese themselves or by those who import or adapt them. Lawrence does something quite similar in establishing the existence and dynamics of Islamicate civilization. Kurth goes one step further, drawing from his historical sketch of components of Western Civilization a series of goals and prescriptions for the members of that civilization—goals and prescriptions that follow from his scholarly delineation of the core elements of Western Civilization.

On the other side of the ledger, we find Adler, Leheny, Rudolph, all of whom seek to ground their analyses more directly in the discourse and experience of those that they are studying. Adler cites speeches and statements to demonstrate that

“Normative Power Europe” is not a scholarly abstraction, but a concrete political strategy being undertaken by various actors in the European political space. Leheny documents the ways in which different Japanese actors seek to frame both Japan’s cultural distinctiveness and Japan’s continuity with other “civilized” countries, and does not limit his field of evidence to the traditional material of “high politics”—hence we get to listen in on discussions of Japanese baseball and manga/anime, in order to see what that tells us about Japanese notions about their own civilization. Rudolph ranges the furthest in her adducing of evidence, even to the point of pursuing the discussion and debate about indigenous Indian society into a California courtroom.

This last is a particularly telling example of what is at stake in allowing the self-identified participants in a given civilization to delineate their own sense of what is involved, since a consistent determination to follow those debates can sometimes necessitate setting aside even the most rudimentary notions of where a civilization stops and starts: in this case, Indian civilization and the efforts to bound it extend halfway around the world. A scholar operating with an ex ante specification of what a civilization consists of—regardless of whether that specification consists of attributes or processes—would likely never appreciate the relevance of those California conversations. A scholar proceeding more inductively, casting her or his nets widely in order to see what people are talking about and where they are talking about it, might see the California conversations as telling us something particularly important about the practice of civilizational identity: the reproduction of a civilization over time seems to be crucially dependent on the passing down of certain origin-stories to the next

generation, *irrespective of who does the passing down*. The claim in the California case was not that the State of California was part of Indian civilization and obligated to act in the best interests of Indian civilization. Instead, it was the rather different claim that by passing down an account of Indian history that did not support the claim that Indian culture and religion were entirely indigenous to the subcontinent, the State of California was undermining Indian civilization (by sanctioning a view of Indian civilization as not being entirely self-contained) both for those Indians living in the United States and for those non-Indians who would receive the non-indigenous account of Indian history. This intriguing push for certification of an origin narrative by outsiders adds a different dimension to the study of civilizations, suggesting that the kind of dynamics of recognition some scholars have explored in the national state context (e.g. Ringmar 1996) might also be in evidence in inter-civilizational relations.[5]

Four Combinations

The two distinctions that I have been outlining here can be easily plotted so as to create a rudimentary two-by-two matrix of available combinations of commitments on either side of these distinctions. Combining a commitment to a scholarly specification of a social object with an attribute-ontology gives us a concern with the *interests* of that

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[5] Of course, those inclined to ex ante specifications of a civilization might reply by arguing that the California case illustrates the extent to which civilizations have become detached from their geographical bases, and then formulate something like a globalized definition of a civilization that takes this trans-locality into account. My point here is only that operating without the ex ante specification can let one see what actors are saying and doing in ways that an ex ante specification might preclude.

object; a commitment to letting participants specify the social object of concern, combined with an attribute-ontology, yields a concern with the *identity* of that object; scholarly specification plus process-ontology leads to a concern with *structural context* within which the object exists; and participant specification plus process-ontology gives rise to the *boundary practices* that establish and re-establish that object from moment to moment. The names I have given to each of these combinations indicate both the primary descriptive concern of each scholarly approach, and the central explanatory factor that each upholds in its explanations.

	Scholarly specification	Participant specification
Attribute-ontology	Interests	Identity
Process-ontology	Structural context	Boundary practices

Applied to the study of civilizations in particular, this matrix foregrounds particular aspects of civilizational analysis propounded by different scholars. Huntington, along with David Gress (1998) and other unreconstructed civilizational essentialists, are centrally concerned with identifying the core principles of various civilizations (especially Western Civilization) so that they can urge retrenchment and defense of those principles; in that way, civilizational essentialists are investigating and proclaiming the interests both of Western Civilization and of all those who consider themselves participants in it. That gesture, in turn, depends both on considering a civilization to be a collection of attributes and on allowing scholars to specify what a

civilization consists of. This is almost exactly the same way that interest-based arguments about other social objects (states and individuals spring to mind here) rely on a scholarly determination of essential attributes over which the social object, and those actors representing or otherwise responsible for the object, has little or no direct influence. Rational economic consumers, or states in a self-help environment, cannot endogenously change their preferences over outcomes; neither, in this conceptualization, can civilizations endogenously change their basic beliefs and values, and in all three cases the only viable option is to act in accordance with those exogenously determined and authoritatively specified interests.

The other three cells of the matrix represent various ways of taking issue with the civilizational essentialist account. Relaxing the demand for essential attributes of a civilization, along the lines recommended by analysts like Eisenstadt and Cox and Elias, yields a greater appreciation for the historically variable structural context of action, such that a civilization shows itself less in a set of core values and more in a relatively homogenous pattern of activities on the part of its members. Relaxing the demand for an ex ante scholarly specification of a civilization yields a greater concern with what might be called "civilizational identity"—in which self-conception, either of a civilization as a whole or of various representatives of that civilization, leads to actions and outcomes, much the way that personal or state identity is taken to lead to actions and outcomes in social-psychological and constructivist scholarship. And relaxing both demands simultaneously yields a focus on practices of civilizational boundary-drawing in assorted practical contexts; a civilization *itself* ceases to mean much, analytically

speaking, as the emphasis here is on how appeals to and efforts to reinscribe civilizational boundary-lines work to promote various aims. Taking a cue from David Campbell (1992), we might call this fourth approach "writing civilizations."[6]

As is usual in such exercises—indeed, as is usual in the ideal-typical elaboration of distinctions in general—I have upheld the polite fiction that there is no middle-ground between the commitments on each of the axes of my matrix. The whole point of drawing sharp analytical distinctions is to clarify the abstract logic of each side of the distinction in the kind of splendid conceptual isolation that one never finds in the messy world of actual entities and actions. Once drawn, one could treat the matrix as a map, and use it to place cases in relation to one another by assigning them to their proper quadrant; this can disclose hitherto unacknowledged points of similarity and dissimilarity between the cases, whether those cases are empirical research sites or, as they are in this case, scholarly positions. But these insights come at a significant cost, inasmuch as a map is a relatively static representation of an actual empirical situation—useful for finding your way around, perhaps, but only inasmuch as the landscape remains relatively unchanging. And static maps also have problems dealing with ambiguous cases, cases that seem to fall someplace near the lines dividing the regions of the map from one another—cases that display elements of more than one commitment.[7]

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[6] This was, in point of fact, the original working title of (Hall and Jackson 2007). Unfortunately, given the matrix I've been developing here, the published title of that edited volume associates the volume with a quadrant that many of the authors in the volume spend much of their time critiquing and criticizing.

[7] One obvious solution is to convert the discrete divisions of the matrix into continuous axes of variation, but that in turn means abandoning much of the logical clarity that was achieved by treating the distinctions as logically pure in the first place!

There is, however, another option. Instead of treating the four quadrants of my matrix as absolute locations, we might embrace what Andrew Abbott (2001:12) calls the "indexicality" of social life, including academic life: the notion that our most important commitments are only made meaningful by their opposition and contrast to other commitments in the local environment. For example, Abbott points out that, despite all the ink spilled within the social sciences distinguishing between social determinism and individual freedom, all social scientists are basically on the same side of this issue when contrasted to others outside of the social sciences:

> Social scientists, broadly speaking, think of human social behavior as determined, indeed determined enough, irrespective of human volition, to be worth thinking about rigorously and comprehensively. Hence, they are determinists by comparison with those who believe that people are completely free to act as they please and that they are therefore only loosely scientizable (*ibid.*: 202).

Freedom/determinism, then, is not an absolute or categorical distinction between two firm and abstract positions. It is instead a distinction that replicates itself in a self-similar, or fractal, way: first we have the division between social scientists (determinism) and others (freedom), and then we have the repetition of the division *within* the camp of social scientists (structure vs. agency, in contemporary parlance). But this also means that a commitment to one or another side of a distinction like this is less of an absolute planting of a flag in a piece of conceptual territory, and more of a gesture in a certain direction: a way of contrasting oneself to a set of local interlocutors.

So I suggest that we should treat attribute-ontology/process-ontology and scholarly specification/participant specification as indexical, fractally-repeating

distinctions rather than treating them as the absolute boundaries of a fixed conceptual territory. To identify a given piece of scholarship as supervening on an attribute-ontology and the scholarly specification of social objects is, in this rendering, to implicitly compare the piece of scholarship with others *by comparison with which* it engages in the scholarly specification of essential attributes and conducts its explanations in terms of interests. I have placed Huntington in the upper left-hand corner of my matrix; my doing so is a reflection of my judgment that in *any* comparative context involving civilizational scholarship and scholars, Huntington will occupy the relatively interest-based position. And since my starting-point for this analysis—indeed, the conceptual starting-point for the volume as a whole—was a rejection of Huntingtonian essentialism, treating Huntington as the relatively fixed point of reference against which to define alternatives is simply a reflection of the empirical character of the scholarly discussion itself.

Graphically, we might imagine my two-by-two matrix replicating itself *within* each cell of the original matrix, which would yield 4 x 4 = 16 different positions that civilizational scholarship might in principle occupy. As a first benefit, this allows much more fine-grained specifications of where scholars fall in relation to one another. For example, consider a further internal division of the "structural context" quadrant:

	Scholarly specification	
Process-ontology	Kurth	Kang
	Lawrence	

I place Kurth's chapter in this volume in the upper-left-hand portion of the quadrant because his position on Western Civilization, while certainly more accepting of historical change than Huntington, is still concerned with roughly the same things that Huntington is concerned with: identifying the essential principles of Western Civilization for the purpose of identifying its core interests. But because Kurth is *first* located in the "structural context" quadrant of the original matrix, his work plays out differently than Huntington's does, even though it is relatively essentialist when contrasted to Kang's discussion of elites attempting to impose "Chinese" solutions on their populations (an attempt that triggers some dynamics best located in the realm of identity, as they involve the implications of self-conceptions) or Lawrence's analysis of how Islamicate civilization is fundamentally shaped by its geographical context. But despite these differences, all three authors are more processual and less attribute-oriented in comparison with Huntington. Such fine-grained distinctions help us to get a firmer grasp on precisely where people stand relative to one another in this debate.[8]

[8] Of course, there is no need to stop with one level of self-similar replication of the original matrix. There is no logical reason why the matrix couldn't replicate a second time, within each of the 16 cells of the fractalized matrix; that would give us 16 x 4 = 64 possible scholarly positions. But the practical utility of such a 64-cell matrix as a way of locating scholars and scholarship would depend, in turn, on whether scholars were in fact occupying most of the logically

Furthering the Conversation

But beyond the drawing of finer-grained maps, the real payoff of this fractalizing of analytical distinctions is to suggest ways in which the scholarly conversation might proceed. If I am right about the importance of these distinctions, then it follows that further rounds in the debate should unfold along the lines envisioned by various combinations of attribute- and process-ontologies on one hand with scholarly and participant specification on the other. In this way the ideal-typical matrix I have constructed stops merely being a static map, and becomes instead a dynamic generator of potential future conversations.

That said, there are a number of logical combinations that might potentially be explored—but not all of them are likely to be particularly productive or illuminating. In order to clarify what I see as the most fruitful intellectual avenues, I need to briefly advance two separate lines of argument. The first involves a dynamic endogenous to the distinctions that I have offered as a way of characterizing the debate, a dynamic that presses scholars and scholarship towards two of the four quadrants at any given level of the matrix, and renders the other two quadrants somewhat unstable. The second involves the fact that different combinations of commitments offer different resources and lessons for scholars in International Relations, and the future course of the debate

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possible cells. Otherwise, the matrix would be largely empty, and we would need to provide some kind of a compelling explanation for why scholarly work on civilizations only occurred in certain conceptual locations but not in others.

about civilizations that we might have within the field will, I think, be decisively influenced by how civilizational analysis intersects with the traditional concerns of International Relations—especially the question of the political interactions between states. Here again, certain quadrants are privileged over others, but in this case three quadrants are privileged (again, at any given level of the matrix) while the fourth quadrant—the upper-left-hand "civilizational essentialist" quadrant—has the least to offer to our field.

Conceptual Attractors

Although I have been operating with two different axes of differentiation throughout this discussion of the scholarly conversation about civilizations, there is an important sense in which the two axes are conceptually similar to one another. For the purpose of clarifying the debate about civilizations, the division between the axes is useful, because the division illustrates available combinatorial possibilities which are, I have argued, actually realized in the existing discussion: scholars and scholarship do occupy these different combinations of commitments with respect to one another. But the two axes are also unified by a sensibility involving the perennial contrast between explanations based on determinism or freedom, or structure versus agency, or—as I prefer to think of the contrast—necessity versus contingency.

A necessity-explanation explains outcomes by subsuming them under some sort of general principle, such that the outcome becomes something "to be expected" in the

light of various antecedent conditions. A contingency-explanation, by contrast, explains an outcome in terms of a case-specific concatenation of factors that gives rise to that outcome in an individual instance; the outcome is not quite "to be expected," but instead becomes comprehensible by being rooted in a particular circumstance.[9] Necessity/contingency is a potent fractal distinction, with an election for either side of the contrast almost immediately falling into a further subdivision along similar lines; in large part this has to do with the fact that *both* necessity *and* contingency are value-commitments firmly established in contemporary liberal society, often in the guises of "law" and "liberty" respectively. This in turn means that there is virtually never any shortage of defenders of either pole of the contrast, and hence always a possibility of further fractalization.

Necessity/contingency informs both of the axes I used to construct my matrix insofar as each axis has a "necessity" pole and a "contingency" pole. Scholarly specification, for example, is the "necessity" pole of its axis in that actions and outcomes are explained by subsuming them under an ex ante delineation of what a civilization involves; observed patterns of action are made comprehensible by integrating them into a conceptual whole of which the actors themselves might be entirely ignorant. Participant specification, on the other hand, is the "contingency" pole in that there is no

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[9] Note that contingency-explanations often—but not always—feature a configurational notion of causality emphasizing the elucidation of causal mechanisms, as opposed to the notion of causality emphasizing cross-case covariations that is often found in necessity-explanations. But this is not a global correspondence, as it is quite possible to have a contingency-explanation that uses a covariation notion of causality (as in, for example, (Gourevitch 1986; and Peter A. Hall 1986), as well as a necessity-explanation that uses a mechanistic notion of causality (as in many forms of social network theory, e.g. Wellman 1997). Here again, separating philosophical ontology (which informs conceptions of causality) and scientific ontology (which informs styles of explanation) increases combinatorial possibilities.

way to predict what associations and oppositions the participants in a particular civilization will draw; scholarly analysis follows participant activity and explicates it, but cannot render it "to be expected" in the light of anything that precedes or governs that activity. Similarly, attribute-ontology is the "necessity" pole of its axis in that explanation means linking core civilizational attributes to outcomes; process-ontology is the "contingency" pole, in that explanation is about tracing assorted civilizational processes and seeing how they play out.

The fact that each of my axes has a necessity and a contingency pole makes the whole matrix susceptible to a mechanism that Abbott calls "fractionation" (2001:84-86). In any single fractal distinction, there are a series of advantages to taking up an extreme position, in which one always selects the same side of the distinction at any given point in the discussion—always necessity, for example, or always contingency. The advantages of an extreme position include the prestige accorded to rigorous consistency in many academic settings, the "pleasures of unconventionality" associated with standing someplace both outside of the messy middle of a debate and in opposition to a widely-held alternative value-commitment (and selecting *either* necessity *or* contingency permits one to stand in opposition to a widely-held alternative value-commitment, further enhancing the appeal of the extreme position), and the greater ease with which one can critically engage other scholars from a position of meticulous logical coherence. These advantages of extremism provide something of an internal motor for the discussion over time, as partisans of either extreme critique their interlocutors for their mix of commitments, provoke reactions, and drive the debate into a further round.

Applied to my matrix, fractionation works to drive the upper-left and bottom-right quadrants further apart, since the upper-left "interests" quadrant represents the conjoining of both "necessity" poles while the bottom-left "boundary practices" quadrant represents the conjoining of both "contingency" poles. Civilizational essentialism is opposed by what we might call civilizational post-essentialism: *post*-essentialist rather than *anti*-essentialist because it is concerned not simply to reject civilizational essentialism, but to account for the power that essentialist claims about civilizations have in social and political practice. Essentialism suggests that essences generate outcomes; post-essentialists retort that it is the practical attribution of essences that generate those outcomes. And while they clash, these partisans of each extreme also criticize other scholars for combining what the partisans see as incompatible commitments. Out of the responses, and the empirical work that is generated by all parties, different areas of the conceptual landscape are explored, and the practical value of different combinations of commitments is put to the test.

Consider, in this respect, various depictions of the relations between and among civilizations. Huntington's position, most famously, is that a clash between civilizations is more or less inevitable; because civilizations are essentially different from one another, and because they "are the biggest 'we' within which we feel culturally at home as distinguished from all the other 'thems' out there" (1996:42), there is no overarching community strong enough to prevent civilizations from engaging in conflict with one another from time to time. The post-essentialist position, by contrast, would argue that clashes of civilizations are a consequence not of deep civilizational essences, but of a set

of ways of inscribing civilizational boundaries in practice; change the writing-style, so to speak, and the clash vanishes along with the putative constitutively autonomous civilizations themselves. That said, post-essentialists do argue that so long as civilizations are inscribed in the Huntingtonian way, the Huntingtonian consequences follow—an argument that parallels the poststructural critique of state sovereignty in International Relations (Ashley 1984; Walker 1993) in arguing that practices, not essences, give rise to conflictual dynamics.

Caught between these extremes are the various claims that conflict between civilizations can be ameliorated by some kind of "dialogue among civilizations." Scholars working on civilizational identity might highlight the possibility of an "other-regarding" identity for a group of civilizations, one that might serve to cement peaceful relations between them. Scholars working on structural context might highlight the interplay of similarities and differences across civilizations, such as the extent to which they are all variations of modern social arrangements in a way that produces (in Eisenstadt's language) "multiple modernities" that are simultaneously different from and similar to one another in ways that might make for interesting exchange and mutual exploration. Or, inhabiting an even more conceptually blended space, consider David Blaney and Naeem Inayatullah's (1996, 2004) ongoing effort to foreground the discovery of the Self in its relations with the Other by pointing to the necessary incompleteness of any given articulation of civilizational identity and the consequent need of any civilization—in particular, Western Civilization—to travel conceptually if not physically in order to encounter reflections of itself in the world it helped to make

through colonial domination. Civilizations in these conceptualizations remain separate from one another, but conflictual consequences do not inevitably follow.

"Dialogue among civilizations" arguments, however, are susceptible to two different avenues of critique. Civilizational essentialists criticize dialogue much the way that International Relations realists have been known to criticize liberal and constructivist strategies for promoting peaceful relations among states: as long as civilizations remain essentially separate from one another, the possibility of conflict remains eternally present, and a prudent civilization (or its prudent representatives) needs to take this into account…which basically vitiates any effort to permanently escape a clash of civilizations. Post-essentialist scholars would call attention to the fact that the very idea of a dialogue implies separate parties to that dialogue, and that separation makes calls for dialogue collapse into a hopelessly optimistic view of what separate civilizations would do in relation to one another; their prescription, of course, would be to move even further away from essentialism and focus on boundary practices if one actually wants to avoid a clash of civilizations. But where civilizational essentialists might claim that no cross-civilizational interaction can do much to alter the underlying dynamics of inter-civilizational relations, post-essentialist scholars might argue that a series of dialogues and debates might have an effect if—and only if—they resulted in the production of novel conceptual tools for making sense of global diversity, and if those tools were subsequently disseminated far and wide enough to affect the conditions of possibility for action of public officials and ordinary people alike.

The point here is that advocates of a dialogue among civilizations have to establish the efficacy of their proposals and accounts against both civilizational essentialism and the kind of post-essentialist view of civilizations upheld by some of the most recent work on civilizations in world politics (Martin Hall and Jackson 2007). In the effort to do so both theoretically and empirically, novel positions are adopted, novel combinations of commitments are forged, and the discussion proceeds into new directions. And perhaps, along the way, clashes of civilizations are avoided—but only time will tell.

Substantive Overlaps

The attraction of extreme positions within the civilizations debate helps to provide an "internal" explanation for the future course of the discussion—internal, in this case, to the debate itself. But discussions and debates do not simply unfold in splendid isolation; "external" factors always intervene and shape the course of conceptual refinement and academic research in important ways. There are many such factors, ranging from the distribution of research funding to the organization of the contemporary academy itself, but for the moment I want to focus on one context in particular: the context of academic International Relations scholarship, which claims for itself the right and the capacity to focus on global issues in a way that other academic fields and disciplines often do not. Hence, the future course of the academic debate about civilizations will be shaped, at least in part, by the interaction of civilization

scholarship with the traditional concerns and considerations of academic International Relations.

Arguably, the most important of these concerns is, and remains, the (sovereign, territorial) state. The field of International Relations has been grappling with sovereign states and the anarchy that they produce in relation to one another since its earliest beginnings in international law, history, and political science (Schmidt 1998). Despite numerous attempts to broader the field's focus, and efforts to introduce different actors (firms, transnational social movements, global classes) onto the world stage, the field's concerns remain stubbornly intertwined with what states do and how other actors influence state action. Whether this reflects an empirical acknowledgment of the continued importance of states (Wendt 1999:8-10) or some kind of collective failure or repression of theoretical innovation (Zehfuss 2002) is somewhat beside the point. What matters is that the field of International Relations is largely defined as a separate field of academic inquiry by its concerns with sovereignty, territoriality, and the relations between units constituted on such principles, whatever else might affect those relations.

Indeed, Huntington's initial call for renewed attention to civilizations explicitly made space for this state-centrism. "Civilizations are cultural not political entities," Huntington declared; this means that "they do not, as such, maintain order, establish justice, collect taxes, fight wars, negotiate treaties, or do any of the other things *which governments do*" (1996:44, emphasis added). In other words, for Huntington, civilizations are not *actors* in their own right, but are instead elements of a global political environment within which states remain "the primary actors in world affairs" (*ibid*.: 34-

35). It was therefore relatively easy for mainstream International Relations scholarship to absorb civilizational essentialism as one among other sources of state interest, adding civilizational membership to the list of potential factors affecting state action. Unfortunately, once scholars did this and began to comparatively evaluate the relative importance of civilizational ties versus other factors, like religious affiliation (Fox 2001) and traditional state concerns with power and wealth (Russett, Oneal, and Michael Cox 2000), civilizational considerations started to drop out of the equations, and these days Huntington's famous thesis receives little sustained scholarly attention in most of the field of International Relations.

Civilizational essentialism, then, had little to offer to academic International Relations scholarship after a brief flurry of excitement in the late 1990s (and in point of fact, most of that excitement was played out in policy journals like *Foreign Affairs* and *The National Interest* rather than in social-scientific journals—good for the circulation of some essentialist commonplaces, perhaps, but less good as a vehicle for shaping the field). In fact, even if one wanted to persist with the state-centrism of academic International Relations, other quadrants of the conversation might prove more fruitful. A focus on civilizational processes and constellations as part of the structural context within which states act might provide a more nuanced way to analyze patterns of alliance and enmity between states than a search for dispositional essences in the sphere of basic values; in this volume, Lawrence and Kang incline the most clearly in this direction. A focus on civilizational identity might attack that problem from the opposite angle, updating classic work on "security communities" by looking more closely at the

terms on which states and their representatives consider one another to be part of a larger whole; Adler's chapter, along with some of his earlier work on the subject (Adler and Barnett 1998), inclines the most clearly in this direction.

Finally, a post-essentialist "writing civilizations" take on the subject would highlight the kinds of civilizational strategies that states undertake in their efforts to relate to one another; elements of this approach can be glimpsed in the chapters by Rudolph and Leheny. Much as Rodney Bruce Hall (1997) does with moral authority, civilizational post-essentialism converts civilizational notions into power resources that states and their representatives can deploy more or less strategically. Among other things, this would provides a less Huntingtonian way to read the kind of civilizational leadership that Kurth identifies as constitutive of American global political action—it would shift the focus from the (likely unanswerable) question of whether or not the secularized Protestantism of the American Creed and the global civilization that Kurth identifies as emanating from it actually is a kind of pre-Axial Age paganism, and instead focus attention on the *claims* about 'Western' or 'global' civilization and the efficacy of those claims in bringing about distinct outcomes. Where Kurth's analysis suggests that the success or failure of American global leadership depends on dispositional qualities out of the control of any political actor—in short, that a clash between the pre- or post-Axial Age social arrangement exemplified by the United States, and the various Axial Age social arrangements on offer in the rest of the world, is more or less inevitable—a post-essentialist perspective suggests, to the contrary, that what happens in the relations between civilizations depends on how those civilizations

are bounded in practice. Therefore, the future of American global leadership as the core state of a civilization depends both on whether state officials elect to deploy civilizational resources at all, and whether those deployments work to bound discrete civilizations in a way that gives rise to irreconcilable conflicts.

Civilizational essentialism, therefore, has little to offer a state-centric International Relations field. Civilizational membership does not seem to be the most significant attribute affecting interstate relations, and attention to the various ways that states engage and deploy civilizational difference is more clearly entailed by the other quadrants of the matrix. Indeed, if the claims of civilizational essentialism were taken seriously, state centrism itself would have to evaporate in the face of irreconcilable civilizational differences; Huntington's protestations to the contrary, I can see little point in continuing to focus on states if one truly believed that broader cultural communities were the really important factors in world politics, and the implication might be to follow Fernand Braudel (1995) into the *longue duree* where civilizations rise and fall and stop worrying about states at all. That's a tough enough sell for academic International Relations—witness the marginalization of world-systems theory and world-system history in mainstream scholarship—but the real irony here is that replacing sovereign, territorial states with essentially-delimited civilizations wouldn't change the most basic presumptions about global political actors. Recall the ways that Huntingtonian civilizations confront one another like states in anarchy, and subsist on core properties that are very bit as essential as the constitutive properties thought to be

possessed by states. A shift to a conception of world politics dominated by essential civilizations might get rid of state-centrism, but essential actors would remain.

In that way, the most important potential contribution that the debate about civilizations might make to academic International Relations would be to *dissolve* essentialism along the lines that contemporary scholars of civilization have critiqued Huntington. Loosening the theoretical definition of an actor to incorporate self-conceptions more centrally would be a first step, since that would make room for the emergence of actors like "Europe" out of collective identifications. Tracing the diffusion of characteristic practices would be a second step, since that might show us how different social arrangements that we might associate with actors like "China" or "the Islamic world" need not always occur together. And a turn to post-essentialism, finally, would unpack actor-hood more or less completely, allowing International Relations scholarship to focus on how various attributions of actor-hood become commonsensical: how it comes to make sense to say that "the Islamic world" did something, or that "the West" reacted in a particular way. This is a phenomenon akin to the way that it has become commonsensical to say that "France" or "the United States" did something—a commonsensical assumption that is normally passed over in most International Relations scholarship. Opening up this line of inquiry—paving the way for *post-essentialist scholarship* in the scholarly field of International Relations—might be the ultimate academic consequence of continuing the conversation about civilizations in world politics.

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