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Sustainable History with Dignity and without Directionality

What drives history? Is humanity following foreseeable stages of progress or degradation over time, or is our life amorphous and governed by randomness? Much work has been undertaken to lay bare the deeper driving forces behind history, to identify its trajectory and ultimate outcome. From divine providence to inexorable evolution and human ambition, the drivers of historical change have been understood from a range of different disciplinary perspectives, some of which inspire optimism, others of which instil fear about the future. Depending on which approach to history one subscribes to, the present age may be classified as a hope-inspiring phase of human advancement or a time of decay and conflict over fundamental values. For all their differences, what unifies most approaches to history is their failure to provide any means for ensuring a sustainable history. I define *sustainable history* as a durable progressive trajectory in which the quality of life on this planet or other planets is premised on the guarantee of human dignity for all at all times and under all circumstances.[1] Although often invoked by academics and policymakers, dignity and its critical role in historical processes remains insufficiently appreciated. The sustainable history approach offers a novel way to address this gap, one that changes the nature of reflection about history by drawing on neuroscientific research to elucidate the importance of dignity to humans as they struggle to control their destiny. By 'dignity' I do not mean the mere absence of humiliation, nor do I exclusively refer to the inherent worth of every human being. Rather, and in light of

insights from neuroscience, I use this term to denote a set of universal, critical and permanent human needs, namely: *reason*, *security*, *human rights*, *accountability*, *transparency*, *justice*, *opportunity*, *innovation* and *inclusiveness*.[2] Each one of these requirements for dignity is deeply ingrained in our nature, shaping our drive to achieve a transformational impact, the impact we refer to as 'historical change'. Writing at a time of rising polarisation and inequality, with a pandemic ravaging the world and the existential threat of climate change looming ahead, I suggest a way forward through which we can secure lasting progress and prosperity for humanity as a whole.

In order to understand what truly drives history, we must study human nature. Humans – some more than others – have agency and power to act on their environments in ways that leave a lasting impact on the world around them. For all the constraints of our circumstances, we are not merely puppets in the hands of external forces. To a significant extent, the reins of history are within our grasp. The key question, therefore, is: What drives human choices at critical moments in time? What has motivated us to transform villages into nations, to develop nuclear weapons, to declare war or make peace? Drawing on cutting-edge research from various disciplines – and especially from contemporary neuroscience, I argue that human nature is *emotional* (never solely rational), *amoral* (lacking innate notions of good and evil) and *egoistic* (driven by powerful survival instincts). Furthermore, the human brain is pre-programmed to 'feel good' and to seek sustainable gratification. We seek this much-needed sense of well-being through a set of five human motivations, the five main drivers of human action, which I refer to as the 'Neuro P5': *power*, *profit*, *pleasure*, *pride* and *permanency* (the latter denoting longevity on Earth, as well as the goal of living on after death through the creation of a legacy). I believe that being cognisant of our neurobiological makeup and the social and political tendencies it motivates is key to comprehending the trajectory of human history.

In order to shape history for the better, we must understand the governance structures humanity needs in order to unlock its positive potential and minimise its darker impulses. Indeed, no single human agent is so powerful that they can bend the tides of history, for better or worse, irrespective of circumstances. The right context matters: it can channel human beings' emotional amoral egoism and their drive to fulfil the Neuro P5 into productive enterprises that promote progress.

What do I mean by progress? I do not interpret 'progress' as necessarily implying a uniform journey towards Western models of liberal democracy. Despite its proven successes and the fact that it is more stable and prosperous than most other systems, we should be careful not to idealise democracy, even in its most advanced (Western) form, nor to hail it as the ultimate harbinger of peace or as a Hegelian final point in history. In fact, their merits notwithstanding, the vast majority of today's leading democracies struggle with rising levels of polarisation, marginalisation and injustice; they all face a gauntlet of economic, technological and cultural challenges. Most of the shortcomings of democracies result from policies devised with an insufficient understanding of human nature. My sustainable history approach focuses on identifying the right context needed to encourage the best in human behaviour, and on how to realise it.

I argue in this book that sustainable civilisational progress can only unfold in a context in which the fulfilment of the requirements for human dignity is prioritised. Good governance – both national and global – plays a major role in creating an environment that reconciles our need for dignity with the emotional amoral egoism innate within us all. Good governance involves three key elements: (1) assuaging vitriolic human *emotionality* by providing *security*, safeguarding *human rights* and fostering a society based on *reason*; (2) countering human *amorality* with *justice*, *accountability* and *transparency*; and (3) channelling human *egoism* to benefit society through *opportunity*, *inclusiveness* and *innovation* (see Figure 1.1). In this book, I propose minimum criteria for ensuring governance which is capable of mediating between human nature and our need for dignity. Importantly, these criteria must be implemented through a context-sensitive approach that is attentive to local cultures and histories. Such an approach may give rise to forms of governance which share similarities with liberal democracies, without being exact replicas of them. What is important is not the exact form of governance a particular political system adopts, nor how we choose to label it, but simply that these minimum criteria for good governance are met. These criteria require fine tuning to make them appropriate, acceptable and affordable for each cultural domain. They should also meet a certain common global standard to ensure maximum cooperation.

For humanity to thrive, good governance must be ensured at both the national and global levels, creating what the Centre for the Study of Global Governance calls a 'framework of principles, rules and laws necessary to tackle global problems'.[3] Good governance should be accompanied by a

Figure 1.1 Sustainable History

new understanding of security, one that moves beyond state-centric and militaristic approaches to encompass not only the national but also the transnational, human, environmental and transcultural dimensions of global security. In fact, we live in an increasingly interconnected world in which local events often have global consequences, and where no national government alone can address the multitude of challenges it faces.[4] From climate change to the Covid-19 pandemic, today's major threats necessitate collective effort at the international level. This, in turn, requires an approach to international relations that moves beyond zero-sum games, where one group has to lose in order for another to win. Instead, we must strive towards what I call *symbiotic* (mutually enriching) interstate relationships that create a more just world in which opportunities and burdens are fairly distributed.

As the world grows increasingly interdependent, the success and fate of any one group or, more specifically, any *geo-cultural domain* is likely to be dependent on or, at the very least, tied to that of another. By 'geo-cultural domain' I refer to an area of the world characterised by a shared heritage of cultural traditions, social norms and values, political and economic systems, and technological development. No geo-cultural domain can excel in isolation from others. Indeed, the greatest achievements in human history, albeit often wrongly attributed to a single geo-cultural domain, have been the result of mutual cultural borrowing and *transcultural synergies* from multiple geo-cultural domains. In fact, transcultural synergy is a major pillar on which a sustainable history rests. It implies a situation in which two or more cultural influences together produce a positive effect that is greater than the net effect of each individual cultural force.[5] In light of these considerations, the act of identifying discrete civilisations is empirically unfounded and tainted by ahistoricity. It produces the erroneous idea of cultures as homogenous units that are easily separable from one another and devoid of internal differentiation. Historically, the concept of culture has often acted as a means of maintaining hierarchical binaries by fuelling narratives of divisions or 'incompatibility' among cultures.[6] Such narratives are belied by neuroimaging techniques yielding evidence about our shared neuroanatomy and neurochemistry. They have also been disproved by robust historical research. Just as an ocean is fed by many rivers, so human civilisation is an accumulation of contributions from distinct yet intertwined geo-cultural domains which, throughout the centuries, have interacted and shaped one another. This idea, which I have labelled the *ocean model of human civilisation*, is at the heart of my approach to history.[7] By stressing the equal worth of all cultures and our richly intertwined historical heritage, it contains the heightened imperative of transcultural understanding, in the absence of which cultural prejudices and tension are exacerbated at the expense of collective progress.

Sustainable history denotes a progressive trajectory into the future. It is a novel neurophilosophical approach that draws on neuroscientific research and neurophilosophical analysis to shed light on puzzling dilemmas that drive human reflections about history. It thus redefines the contours of philosophy of history and requires us to rethink a number of old concepts, such as statecraft, security and justice. I believe that by using human dignity (in its holistic sense) as a navigational tool, we can successfully manoeuvre through the thicket of challenges ahead of us, including climate change and the pitfalls of intrusive and disruptive emerging technologies.

1.1 The Purpose and Structure of the Book

The purpose of this book is to set out a new philosophy of sustainable history, understood as a durable progressive trajectory for humanity, which is achievable through the promotion of human dignity. More specifically, this book endeavours to identify the preconditions for a lasting improvement of the human condition. Sustainable history rests on the premise that the main driving forces in history are innately rooted in human nature, without determinism and reductionism, and that human civilisation is made up of different yet intertwined geo-cultural domains, as summarised in the ocean model of human civilisation. It is a future-oriented perspective that allows us to discern the kinds of institutions and arrangements required to ensure durable progress in all parts of the world.

This book is composed of three distinct parts. Part One focuses on key questions that have traditionally inspired philosophers' writings about history: Where do we come from? What is the fundamental nature of human beings and what traits define these agents of historical change? What is the meaning of existence? And what do we know for certain? Part One begins by telling the story of the universe from its origins (see Chapter 2). Interweaving insights from different disciplines, it teaches us humility as it reveals what a spatially and temporally tiny part of existence *Homo sapiens* is. At the same time, it considers a time frame long enough to capture what is most unchangeable and universal in human nature. Chapters 3 and 4 explore in more detail our most immutable characteristics, namely our emotional amoral egoism and the Neuro P5, that are powerful drivers of human behaviour. Chapter 5 subsequently proposes possible answers to the question of the meaning of life, whilst Chapter 6 subsequently advances a new philosophy of knowledge: the neuro-rational physicalism paradigm. Overall, Part One rethinks key questions raised by philosophers of history in light of twenty-first-century insights from various disciplines. Integrating these insights into a new theory, sustainable history redraws the boundaries of the philosophy of history.

Part Two focuses on the eight prerequisites for sustainable history, which are: (1) the requirements for human dignity, which can be balanced with our emotional amoral egoism through (2) dignity-based national and global governance; (3) global justice; (4) a multi-sum (rather than zero-sum) security principle adequate for today's complex and interconnected global environment; (5) symbiotic realism as a framework for international relations; (6) meta-geopolitics and

reconciliation statecraft, allowing for a more effective and just statecraft in the twenty-first century; (7) transcultural synergy and the need for a universal axiology; and (8) the beneficial development of all individual geo-cultural domains. I use the term *universal axiology* to refer to the study of the values and criteria for making value judgements, that seeks points of overlap between value systems as a means of facilitating dialogue and eventual transcultural synergy. One of the major tasks we face in the early twenty-first century is therefore to identify more clearly what unites the members of different cultures and the extent to which the achievements of certain geo-cultural domains have frequently been dependent on those of others, making large parts of history a common legacy for humanity.

Part Three looks into the future, exploring the question of what may become of *Homo sapiens* in light of current scientific and technological advances. It takes into consideration the Kardashev scale, which envisages the emergence of civilisations far more technologically advanced than those that exist at present and that may be capable of colonising the solar system or the universe. Finally, this part identifies ten major transformative technologies and civilisational frontier risks. How we use these technologies, and how we respond to these civilisational risks, will largely determine the future of humankind. No matter how technology will change human nature, however, upholding the requirements for human dignity through mechanisms of good governance will remain key to ensuring the well-being of the current and future generations.

1.2 A Sustainable Approach to History

Before delving into the sustainable history approach in more detail, it is helpful to acquire a basic understanding of the intellectual landscape in which philosophical inquiries into history have occurred. The course of history and the idea of progress have been conceived in a number of ways in relation to civilisation. It is useful to recall that the term *civilisation* arose within a specific context. It emerged in eighteenth-century France as a derivative of 'civilised' and 'to civilise', terms which had already been in use for several centuries. The noun form was used to specify the opposite of barbarism, which was at that time associated with 'primitive' peoples. Against the backdrop of a linear notion of history, 'civilisations' in the plural began to enter into popular discourse.[8] Indeed, Enlightenment thinkers tended to view history

as progressive. Imbued with a Eurocentric view of progress, they saw humanity as moving towards an ideal level of civilisation.[9] The plural use of the term 'civilisations' was therefore bound up with imperialism and its belief that Europe had a global civilising mission. While Europeans were obliged to acknowledge the existence of 'the Other', the expectation was that those Others would eventually come to resemble them as their societies advanced.[10] Thus, reference to civilisations in the plural is intertwined with a particular context, marked by Europe's economic and technological strength.[11] Material domination went hand in hand with modes of thought that reflected the relationship between the dominant and the dominated.[12] Edward Said's notion of 'Orientalism' refers precisely to the connections between the production of knowledge and power in structuring relations between the 'West' and the 'Orient'.[13] I elaborate on this particular relationship in Chapter 16.

Linear notions of history inform a number of key contributions to the philosophy of history. These include Immanuel Kant's (1724–1804) and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's (1770–1831) conceptions of history as the unfolding of human freedom. Kant's attempt to put forward a universal history in the latter half of the eighteenth century marked all others thereafter. He argued that history would effectively come to an end when humankind attained freedom guaranteed through liberal institutions.[14] Humankind would reach this objective through the application of reason rather than instinct.[15]

Like Kant, Hegel also believed that history would end when human beings attained freedom.[16] The philosophy of history is at the heart of Hegelian thought.[17] History was conceived as being propelled by a dialectic in which internal contradictions eventually bring about the fall of existing systems and the rise of new ones.[18] The evolution of freedom in history was believed to be determined by the 'logic' of this dialectic. The dialectic suggests that when the exploration of an idea (thesis) reaches its limits, a counter idea (antithesis) becomes apparent. The conflict between the thesis and the antithesis produces a new idea (synthesis).[19] Hegel argued that the Battle of Jena, in which Napoleon's forces defeated those of Frederick William III of Prussia in 1806, marked the 'end of history' because the principles of liberty and equality had permeated advanced countries.[20] In contrast, he identified China, India and Persia as 'stationary civilisations', which lay outside world history because their development, he believed, had come to an end. The commonality these oriental societies shared was thought to be the absence of individually generated law and morality.[21]

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), Hegel argued that there is a collective consciousness called the *Geist* (mind), which is continuously evolving according to the dialectic described above. In Hegel's view, people who are not conscious of being part of the *Geist* see themselves in competition with one another. In the subsequent struggle, some enslave others. The relationship between master and slave is therefore a result of a false belief that others represent a threat to them.[22]

Karl Marx (1818–83) was strongly influenced by Hegel's philosophy. In contrast to Hegel, however, Marx believed that it is the material conditions of life, rather than ideas, that lead to people's alienation from themselves.[23] According to his philosophy, material forces of production give rise to social relations of production which shape the political and legal institutions of society. Material conditions determine social consciousness and not the other way around.[24]

According to John Hobson, Marx privileged the capitalist West as an active subject and denigrated the East as a passive one. Marx is believed to have assumed that the capitalist West was unique in its capacity to develop capitalist relations of production, which were imagined to be absent from Asian social history. Marx believed that the Asian continent was dominated by a state of 'despotism' which prevented private property and class struggle from emerging there. He thought this explained the supposedly unchanging nature of this part of the world when compared to the dynamic West.[25] According to Hobson, in their book *The German Ideology* (1845), Marx and Engels identified Ancient Greece as the source of Western modernity.[26]

In France, Hegelianism influenced such thinkers as Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–80), Jacques Lacan (1901–81) and Alexandre Kojève (1902–68). In Germany, Theodor Adorno (1903–69), Jürgen Habermas (b. 1929) and H.G. Gadamer (1900–2002) were all affected by it.[27] Kojève, for example, elucidated Hegel's philosophy in his *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit* (1947). He argued that the evolution of the individual for Hegel was a voluntary progression made by a free individual. He also pointed out that all human desire – conceived as distinct from animal desire or instinct – is the desire for recognition. Self-consciousness is therefore the struggle for recognition of one's value.[28]

Francis Fukuyama's 'end of history' thesis, which held sway for many years,[29] is similarly linear. Fukuyama put forward an alternative paradigm in the wake of the Cold War and the collapse of the majority of communist regimes. He claimed that the future would be characterised

by the spread of liberal democracy as the ultimate and final form of political system best suited to humankind's needs. His thesis is captured in the title of his book *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), which is based on the notion that history is moving in a single direction, one which is universal. According to the book's main contention, a pattern is developing that indicates the triumph over all others of one form of economic and political organisation: liberal democracy. This is based on more than simply Western triumphalism. It rests on an assumption about human social evolution. The end of history relies on an assumed universal history determined by the search for recognition and resulting in the pursuit of liberty and equality. However, as Fukuyama himself has acknowledged,[30] the events of the last three decades have called into question the core assumptions of *The End of History*.[31]

Fukuyama's intellectual heritage, as he himself points out, owes much to both Kant and Hegel.[32] Contrary to what some observers claim with regard to Fukuyama's idea of the end of history, he does not, in fact, idealise Western liberal democracy, which he considers an imperfect form of governance since it is based on the acceptance of economic inequalities. Indeed, he suggests that this is perhaps the most fundamental contradiction and limitation of that particular political form in terms of the politics of recognition.[33] To some extent, this seems to reflect an unspoken longing for the continuation of history marked by continued challenges to the existing orders.

In general, any universal theory of history seeking to extrapolate common principles from the European or Western experience and to apply them to the rest of the world is problematic. The path Europe or the West took was contingent.[34] The Magna Carta of 1215, on which liberal individual rights are based, especially within Anglo-American jurisprudence, was a response to a particular conjuncture. It was the result of an effort to defend the feudal rights of English barons against the power of the sovereign and it took several centuries for this to be translated into liberal individual rights.[35] Furthermore, the definition of civil liberties, political rights and progress differs across countries. Recognition, for example, might equally be sought within the group or the tribe rather than in terms of liberal individual rights.

History has also been considered in non-linear, non-progressive terms. Some approaches, for example, have attempted to identify historical stages. Arab-Islamic scholar Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) adopted a cyclical view, stressing the social, political, economic, cultural and physical conditions that gave shape to *'umran* or 'civilisations'.[36] He examined civilisations both in general and in the particular context of

the Maghreb from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries. His focus was on the transition from primitive to more advanced societies and on how the latter decline. Looking at the specific case of the Maghreb, he distinguished between the *'umran badawi* (nomadic, Bedouin life) and *'umran hadari* (urban, sedentary life). The former represents the first phase in the development of a civilisation, which develops into the latter. Among the nomadic group, Ibn Khaldun identified camel nomads of the desert, semi-nomadic people and sedentary farmers. Among the urbanised, he distinguished those who live close to towns from those who live in them. Each of these groups represented a different level of development. Town dwellers aspired to luxury and culture, but also marked civilisation's decay. The *'umran hadari* would be destroyed by the *'umran badawi*, which sowed the seeds of a new state with many of the old characteristics and which, in turn, would then develop into a new *'umran hadari*.[37]

This cyclical view of history is driven by what Ibn Khaldun refered to as *'asabiya*, which represents something like a vital force derived from the group solidarity that exists in the *'umran badawi*. This cycle is associated with the waging of war. He believed that *'asabiya* is present in times of war, when group feeling is high, but that the raising of taxes and the spoils of war introduce hierarchy and lead to the disappearance of this vital force. This notion has caused some to suggest that his thinking prefigured Marx's dialectic.[38]

Several centuries later, Giambattista Vico (1668–1744) maintained that there is an identifiable universal pattern of growth and decline that all nations share in common. This pattern was thought to be caused by 'Providence'. In his major work, *The New Science* (1725), he attempted to elaborate on the notion of growth and decline. He held that most periods of history can be classified as either an 'age of poetry', an 'age of heroes' or an 'age of humans'.[39] In the age of poetry, people were brutal and irrational, but endowed with a rich imagination that nourished the myths that underpin language, institutions, laws and values, and elevated to a privileged position in society those who claimed to communicate with God. In the age of heroes, these individuals began to lose their privileged position as people lost their faith in them. This, Vico argued, signalled a need for institutions based on justice and humanity. In the age of heroes and the age of humans, people grew out of non-rational, mythic consciousness and developed a more rational consciousness. Vico did not see this transition as progressive, since he believed doubting God to result in moral corruption and a lack of creative power. Vico conceived of world history as generally cyclical. He

did, however, see specificities, such as disease, climate, conflict and so on, as causing variations in this general pattern.[40] He thus believed that studying history can help us better understand the factors that shape our own times.[41]

In *The Decline of the West* (1918), Oswald Spengler (1880–1936) also identified several historical stages. The book offers a comparative study of the birth, growth, decline and eventual demise of eight cultural domains: Babylonian, Indian, Chinese, Egyptian, Mayan-Aztec (Mexican), Classical (Greco-Roman), Magian (Arabian, Syrian, Jewish, Byzantine and Islamic) and the so-called 'Faustian' (Western Europe). He suggested that cultures pass through similar phases. They experience their spring when society is agricultural and feudal; their summer when urbanisation takes place; their autumn when cities and commerce are established, monarchies become centralised and religion and tradition are questioned; and their winter when materialism, scepticism and imperialism form and world cities emerge – he saw the West as a civilisation in its winter. A culture may also cease to exist as the result of an external attack or be prevented from developing due to the continuing influence of a dominant older culture. According to Spengler, employing a common comparative framework in which there is a birth, growth, decline and death of cultures enables predictions about the future of any given culture.[42]

In Arnold J. Toynbee's (1889–1975) view, civilisations generally go through four stages of development: (1) an age of growth; (2) a time of troubles; (3) a universal state; and (4) an interregnum or disintegration.[43] If a 'primitive' society is to develop into a sophisticated civilisation, it must surmount challenges, which typically are posed by external factors, political, economic and otherwise. If a time of troubles prompts the breakdown of civilisation, this is likely to be due to internal factors, such as excessive nationalism, the idolisation of an individual, or of institutions or processes, or a general erosion of creativity. In light of this, Toynbee viewed the disintegration in terms of suicide and self-destruction. As the result of war in this phase, a universal state would be established by a dominant minority. Although less pessimistic than Spengler regarding the fate of the West, Toynbee did maintain that the West demonstrated suicidal characteristics. He thought that the disintegration of a civilisation took place in three phases involving three social groups: a dominant minority, an internal proletariat and an external proletariat. Toynbee's proletariat was not the same as Marx's. In his view, *proletariat* refers to those who did not gain dominance in an age of growth. In a time of troubles, the

dominant minority attempts to maintain its position, but some of its members become the internal proletariat. At the same time, pressure is placed on the stability of the civilisation by an external proletariat. Finally, the internal proletariat leads the uncreative majority to exploit an opening for change.[44]

Cyclical notions of history tend to suffer from the weakness of monocausality, the tendency to identify only one causal factor rather than multiple combined ones. Spengler, Toynbee and Ibn Khaldun all interpreted historical phases on the basis of certain generalisations drawn from a restricted sample. Ibn Khaldun's conclusions, for example, were based on historical knowledge of the Persians, Arabs, Berbers and, to some degree, Spaniards, in all of which he encountered the same basic forms of state (tribal states, despotic kingdoms and empires).[45] Cyclical approaches, nevertheless, do have the benefit of highlighting the internal struggles that develop within geo-cultural domains over time and, by doing so, they avoid conceiving of cultures as monolithic entities.

Non-essentialistic conceptions of 'civilisations', such as that provided by Fernand Braudel (1902–85), for example, understand the histories of different cultural areas as intertwined, with the achievements of one often owing a debt to those of another: 'The history of civilizations, in fact, is the history of continual mutual borrowings over many centuries, despite which each civilization has kept its own original character.'[46] Time and geography play an important role in Braudel's conception of the evolution of 'civilizations'.[47] He set out a threefold view of time: (1) individual time; (2) social time; and (3) geographical time. Individual and social time are classified as *l'histoire événementielle* (event history or the history of short-term events) and geographical time as *la longue durée* (long time span). He believed that in order to gain a better understanding of the world, we must examine *la longue durée*. In this context, the deeds of individuals are believed to be of relevance only insofar as they reveal underlying structures.[48]

While there are those who believe that it is possible to develop a general theory of history, the notion that a universal history can exist remains contested. Some maintain that history lacks any such coherence and that there are a number of specific histories.[49] Although we know that specific events occurred, the meaning of those events is subject to interpretation. In other words, historical records are no objective repository of truth. This raises an additional question about who has done the writing of history. For the most part, it has been recorded from the point of view of the dominant classes.

Another approach to history is hermeneutic – based on a theory of interpretation. For Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005), for instance, ideas and actions are informed by particular historical contexts and open to interpretation. Ricoeur was interested in the interpretation of texts, which he defined in a broad sense.[50] In *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004), he set out a 'historiographical epistemology' which emphasised the selective nature of representations of the past.[51] He held that the past exists in a way which is similar to how unperceived objects exist.[52] Narrating the past draws on the re-imagination and re-interpretation of events, which we infuse with new experiences and new angles of reflection. We relate to the past in a similar way that we make sense of unperceived objects, building connections and integrating imagined perspectives into actual experiences. Ricoeur's approach is distinct from others who approached hermeneutics from a post-structuralist position, such as Jean Baudrillard (1929–2007), Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), Jean-François Lyotard (1924–98), Richard Rorty (1931–2007) or Michel Foucault (1926–84). Foucault argued that, for the most part, people's thoughts are shaped by rules and regularities of which they are not conscious. These rules and regularities – known as the 'archive' – place limits on what can be thought and said. The archive is itself historically determined and thus subject to change. Because the archive can place limits on the possible, it is believed to be connected to questions of power. It is generally linked to the power relations in society at any given historical conjuncture.[53]

Table 1.1 offers a comparative summary of these leading philosophical approaches to history.

1.3 The Ocean Model of One Human Civilisation

In the preceding pages, I have endeavoured to illustrate briefly the various ways the course of history and the idea of civilisational progress have been conceived by past thinkers. Today, the notion of civilisation is increasingly employed in efforts to discern the factors shaping global dynamics. A prominent contemporary account of the relevance of 'civilisations' is provided by Samuel Huntington. In *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996), Huntington put forward what he claims to be a new paradigm with which to capture the general tendencies in motion at the dawn of the twenty-first century.[54] Huntington's general argument is that we are now in a period of history in which major ideological conflicts are over, and that conflicts between

Table 1.1 A Comparative View of Philosophies of History

KEY FIGURES & YEAR OF PUBLICATION	HISTORICAL APPROACH	SHORT DESCRIPTION
Ibn Khaldūn (1332-1406) *An Arab Philosophy of History (1377)*	**PRE-MODERN CYCLICAL HISTORY** *propelled by 'asabiya or 'group solidarity'*	1. Cyclical conception of history. 2. Emphasises the social, economic, political, cultural and physical conditions that produced 'civilisations'. 3. Focuses on the transition from more primitive to advanced 'civilisations' and their subsequent decline.
Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) *New Science (1725)*	**CYCLICAL HISTORY** *propelled by religious spirituality*	1. Generally cyclical pattern to history. 2. A universal pattern of growth and decline that nations share. 3. Phases of history are identified as the (a) 'age of poetry'; (b) 'age of heroes' and (c) 'age of humans'.
Georg Wilhelm Hegel (1770-1831) *The Philosophy of History (1837)*	**LINEAR HISTORY** *propelled by a dialectical 'logic' of thesis, antithesis and synthesis*	1. Idealistic in the sense that the realm of ideas determines the material realm. 2. Linear conception of history. 3. History would end when human beings attained freedom through liberal institutions.

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Table 1.1 (continued)

Oswald Spengler (1880-1936) *The Decline of the West (1918)*	**CYCLICAL HISTORY** *propelled by moral creativity*	1. Cyclical view of history. 2. Cultures cycle through similar phases: Spring (agricultural-feudal); Summer (urbanisation); Autumn (cities and commerce, centralised monarchies, decline in faith and tradition); and Winter (materialism, scepticism, imperialism and formation of world cities).
Arnold J. Toynbee (1889-1975) *A Study of History (1934-61)*	**CYCLICAL HISTORY** *propelled by the presence or lack of creativity*	'Civilisations' pass through four stages: (a) an age of growth; (b) a time of troubles; (c) universal state; and (d) an interregnum or disintegration.
Fernand Braudel (1902-85) *A History of Civilizations (1962)*	***LONGUE DURÉE* HISTORY** *propelled by geographic time*	1. The history of 'civilisations' is a history of mutual borrowings. 2. Time and geography play an important role in history. 3. A three-fold conception of time is proposed: (a) individual time; (b) social time; (c) geographical time. 4. Individual and social time are classified as *histoire événementielle* and geographical time as the *longue durée*.
Francis Fukuyama (present) *The End of History and the Last Man (1992)*	**"END OF HISTORY"** *Linear History propelled by the human need for recognition*	1. Inspired by Hegel's philosophy of history. 2. Idealistic in the sense that the realm of ideas drives history. 3. Linear conception of history. 4. Universal conception of history. 5. The ultimate and last form of political system that fulfils the human need for recognition is thought to have been reached in liberal democracy.

(*continued*)

Table 1.1 (continued)

Nayef Al-Rodhan (present) *The present volume (Sustainable History and Human Dignity)*	**SUSTAINABLE HISTORY,** *propelled by the presence of good governance which balances the attributes of human nature* (*emotional amoral egoism) with the requirements for human dignity* (reason, security, human rights, accountability, transparency, justice, opportunity, innovation *and* inclusiveness)	1. Sustainable history is defined as a durable progressive trajectory in which the quality of life is premised on the guarantee of human dignity for all at all times and under all circumstances. 2. Sustainable history is propelled by the presence of good governance which balances the attributes of human nature (emotional amoral egoism) with the requirements for human dignity (reason, security, human rights, accountability, transparency, justice, opportunity, innovation and inclusiveness). 3. This new dignity-based good governance paradigm limits the excesses of human nature while encouraging prosocial behaviour. 4. Sustainable history specifies minimum criteria for good governance, which must be fine-tuned to be appropriate, acceptable and affordable to each system and cultural domain. These criteria should also meet a certain common global standard to ensure maximum cooperation. 5. Humankind is an insignificant part of existence. 6. Human beings are important agents of historical change. They are primarily driven by emotions, amorality (since they lack an innate understanding of good and evil) and egoism (in the sense of being endowed by nature with powerful survival instincts).

(*continued*)

Table 1.1 (continued)

		7. What makes our existence meaningful is highly subjective and ultimately determined by neurochemical gratification, sought mainly through the pursuit of the Neuro P5 motivations (power, profit, pleasure, pride and permanency). 8. All knowledge is acquired through the application of reason and has a physical basis. 9. There is only one collective human civilisation comprised of geo cultural domains and cultures. 10. The history of human civilisation is a history of mutual borrowings. 11. Contemporary events can be comprehended through an understanding of human time. 12. A life governed by reason is more likely to be useful and dignified. 13. Security, stability and prosperity will depend on the application of the multi sum security principle that captures the multidimensional aspects of security and insists on the centrality of global justice for lasting security. 14. Harmonious interstate relations will be guided by the paradigm of symbiotic realism that stresses the importance of absolute rather than relative gains. 15. Effective statecraft is characterised by the successful reconciliation of all interests.

(*continued*)

Table 1.1 (continued)

		16. The concept of *just power* ought to guide the use of power in an interdependent and interconnected world. 17. The interaction of geo cultural domains should be synergistic to maintain global harmony. 18. A set of global values in keeping with human nature and dignity need to be identified and developed. 19. Strict ethical guidelines need to be developed in anticipation of significant technological and biotechnological advances in order to guarantee human dignity, autonomy, authenticity, fairness and meritocracy.

* The approaches to history depicted here have been chosen because of their pertinence to the study of geo-cultural domains. The table does not reflect the totality of the ideas of the thinkers but is meant as a brief synopsis.

civilisations are replacing the ideological battles of the bifurcated bipolar world of the Cold War. A civilisation-based order is emerging, in his view.[55]

Whether Huntington really does offer a new paradigm with which to understand the world is doubtful. His argument rests on a number of assumptions that for the most part do not represent a rupture with the dominant realist framework in international relations. At first sight, his analysis may appear to focus on civilisations as the major actors within international relations rather than states, which constitute the principal actors within the international system, as far as realists are concerned. Yet Huntington does not, in fact, imply that states are being replaced by civilisations as the main actors in global politics.[56] Instead, he seems to suggest that, while states are likely to retain their centrality, their interests and practices will be increasingly defined by not only power but also their membership of a particular civilisation.[57]

Huntington views China and Muslim countries as the major sources of threat to the West. Although he stresses the importance of a resurgence of religious identities within 'Islamic civilisation', it is not

extremism that is thought to pose a threat to the West, but rather the 'Islamic civilisation' itself. His argument runs as follows. Muslims are convinced of the superiority of their religion, culture and values, and, at the same time, are obsessed by their lack of power in the global realm. The West is equally perceived to be a problem for the Islamic world, due to its belief in the universality of its values and the applicability of liberal democracy, as well as its declining relative power.[58] Given demographic trends, growth in Muslim populations will, he claims, continue to fuel opposition to the West and the affirmation of resistant Islamic identities.[59] China is thought to pose a threat to the West because continued Asian economic growth will, in Huntington's view, shift the balance of global power. Asian civilisations are thought to be the potential winners in this slow modification of the status quo, with China emerging as a challenger to the West.[60]

Huntington's predictions about potential instability caused by population growth in the Islamic world and economic growth in East Asia are clearly informed by realism's theory of the 'balance of power', which holds that states will form alliances in order to prevent a rising power from destabilising established power relations in the international system. East Asia's economic growth is believed to be the cause of increased future instability as China rises and other states in the region attempt to balance it in order to prevent a change in the balance of Asian civilisations. Against this backdrop, greater economic resources will contribute to a military build-up, making the situation even more dangerous.[61]

Lacking a 'core' or dominant state that is capable of enforcing order, the Arab-Islamic world is thought to portend even greater instability. Huntington argues that civilisations that lack core states are not only volatile but also pose a greater threat to other civilisations. In the Arab-Islamic world, he contends, the continued prominence of religious and tribal loyalties is thought to prevent the emergence of a core state, which militates against the emergence of strong states. In his view, Latin America and Africa also lack core states, but they are weak economically and militarily and are less of a threat as a result.[62] According to Huntington's criteria, however, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia nowadays would qualify as an emergent core state.

At the global level, civilisations are expected to try to balance each other, forming alliances only when it is in their interest to do so. Huntington does not anticipate a general anti-Western coalition forming as a result of an alliance between Sinic and Islamic civilisations, although he does identify some emerging civilisational alignments.[63] He cites the

Soviet-Afghan war of 1979–89 as a first instance of a civilisational war. In the West, this war was viewed as an ideological conflict in the struggle between communism and capitalism. Yet, according to Huntington, it was widely perceived by Muslims as a victory for Islam. What Huntington seems to imply but stopped short of saying is that culture is being identified as a security issue, both by those intent on fuelling tension and by those who unwittingly reinforce the belief that there is a coming clash of civilisations.[64]

Huntington acknowledges that the arrogance of the West may be adding to the formation of cultural affiliations. Specifically, he thinks that the West's belief in the universality of its values and applicability of liberal democracy aggravates relations with other civilisations.[65] Having acknowledged this, he then continues to state that a major challenge facing the West is its promotion of the universal appeal of its culture and values and its diminishing capacity to be successful in this endeavour.[66] Huntington concludes that the West should recognise that its culture and values are not universal but rather unique. This would acknowledge that Western liberal democracy and values such as individualism may be specific to the particular historical and cultural context of the West, and that it cannot simply be assumed that they may be transposed elsewhere, at least not in the same form. He thus encourages the United States – presumed to be synonymous with the West – to concentrate on defending the uniqueness of the West.[67] Yet this uniqueness, according to Huntington, comes from the fact that the West has been able to affect disproportionately the world system for the past five hundred years.[68] Since Huntington defines power as the capacity to alter the behaviour of others, the West is unique because of its power – and its uniqueness or power ought to be preserved from challengers.

The future resilience of the West, if we are to believe Huntington, will depend in part on how it responds to the 'moral decay' with which members of Asian and Islamic civilisations often charge it. While this may seem reasonable enough, he goes on to argue that 'one such challenge comes from immigrants from other civilisations who reject assimilation and continue to adhere to and propagate the values, customs and cultures of their home societies'.[69]

The 'clash of civilisations' thesis has been widely criticised and disgraced in academia but remains influential in some minds.[70] Many of Huntington's original assumptions are simplistic. Imagining, for example, that policies of assimilation will help reduce tensions seems foolhardy at best. Simply because minorities are 'visible' in terms of dress and customs does not mean that they represent a threat to societal

stability. Conflict perhaps seems inevitable in Huntington's paradigm because he adopts a view of human nature that assumes that the need for identity is synonymous with a tendency towards enmity.[71]

Huntington's attempt to identify multiple discrete civilisations is, moreover, empirically unfounded and tainted by ahistoricity.[72] It ignores the fact that civilisational vitality depends on borrowing and exchanges across cultures. In fact, it is simply inaccurate and misleading to say, as Huntington does, that 'during most of human existence, contacts between civilisations were intermittent or non-existent'.[73] As I illustrate in more detail in Chapter 16, Arab-Islamic and Western/European histories, for example, cannot be understood in isolation from one another. Indeed, it is being increasingly recognised that there has in fact been a great deal of cross-fertilisation between different geo-cultural forms.[74] The technologies that enabled the European agricultural revolution, for example, came largely from the East. The watermill, the windmill, the heavy mouldboard plough, particular types of animal harnesses and the iron horseshoe all appear to have entered Europe from the East.[75] Muslim communities drew on Greek heritage. East of Egypt, the territories that came under Muslim rule in the seventh century had once formed part of Alexander the Great's realm and were influenced by Greek philosophy. To Egypt's West, the Arab-Islamic caliphate included parts of North Africa, Iberia and southern France, which were once under Roman rule and equally influenced by Greek culture.[76] In the Middle Ages, stimuli from Muslim lands influenced philosophy, theology, mathematics, chemistry, medicine, music, literature, manufacturing and cuisine across Europe. Many of these borrowings helped lay the foundations for Europe's later scientific and intellectual advances (see Chapter 13) but are often missing from the West's own historical account.[77]

Rather than thinking in terms of competing and separate civilisations, we should think in terms of a single, global human civilisation (one human story), comprising multiple geo-cultural domains that contain subcultures, as is shown in Figure 1.2.

Into this single, collective, human civilisation flow rivers, representing different geo-cultural domains. Into those rivers, in turn, flow tributaries, representing subcultures, as is shown in Figure 1.3, which illustrates the ocean model of civilisation.[78] At the points where rivers (geo-cultural domains) enter the civilisational ocean, there is likely to be a concentration or dominance of that culture. Over time, however, all rivers become one. Thus, in the middle of the ocean an equal mix of all cultures exists, although it may be weighted towards the dominant

culture of the day. A fluidity at the centre of the ocean exists, nevertheless, which means that some cultures may 'weigh' more or less than others depending on whichever culture happens to be globally more dominant, or on the particular balance that is found between cultures. Borrowing between cultures occurs, particularly between geographically adjacent geo-cultural domains, as is represented in the figure as rivers G and H. But proximity can also generate friction between members of different cultures, as shown by rivers G and F. The size and influence of the dominant culture of the day is subject to change and may decline as the influence of another rises, or as other cultures become better accommodated.[79]

Figure 1.2 Human Civilisation

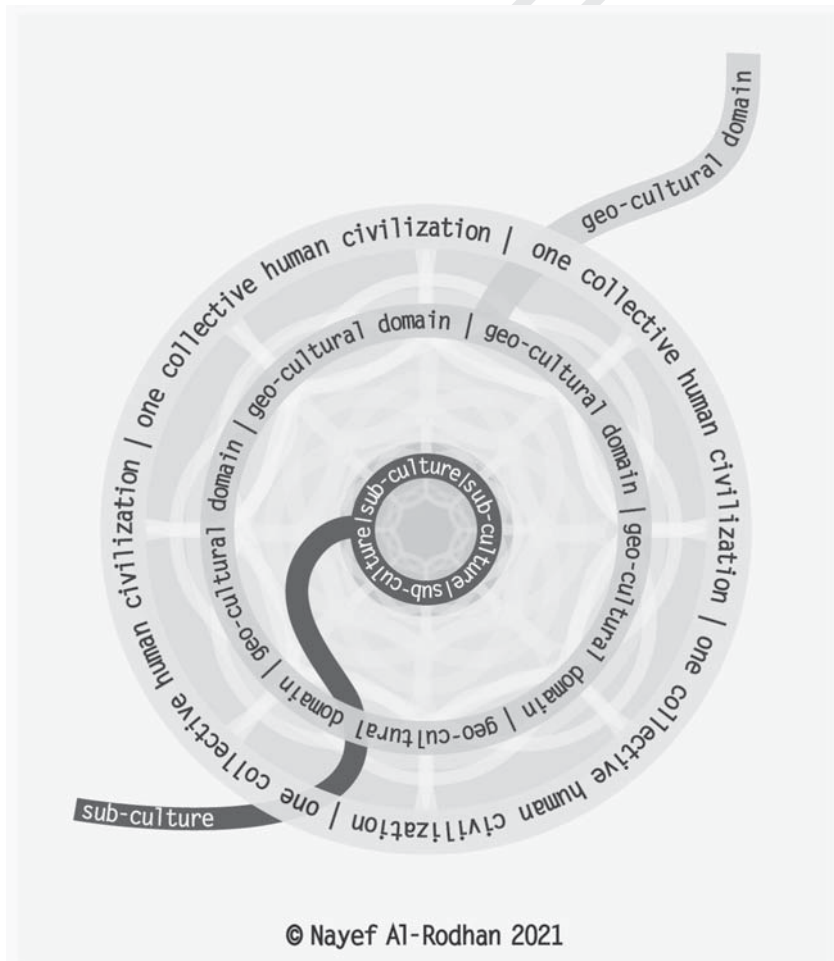
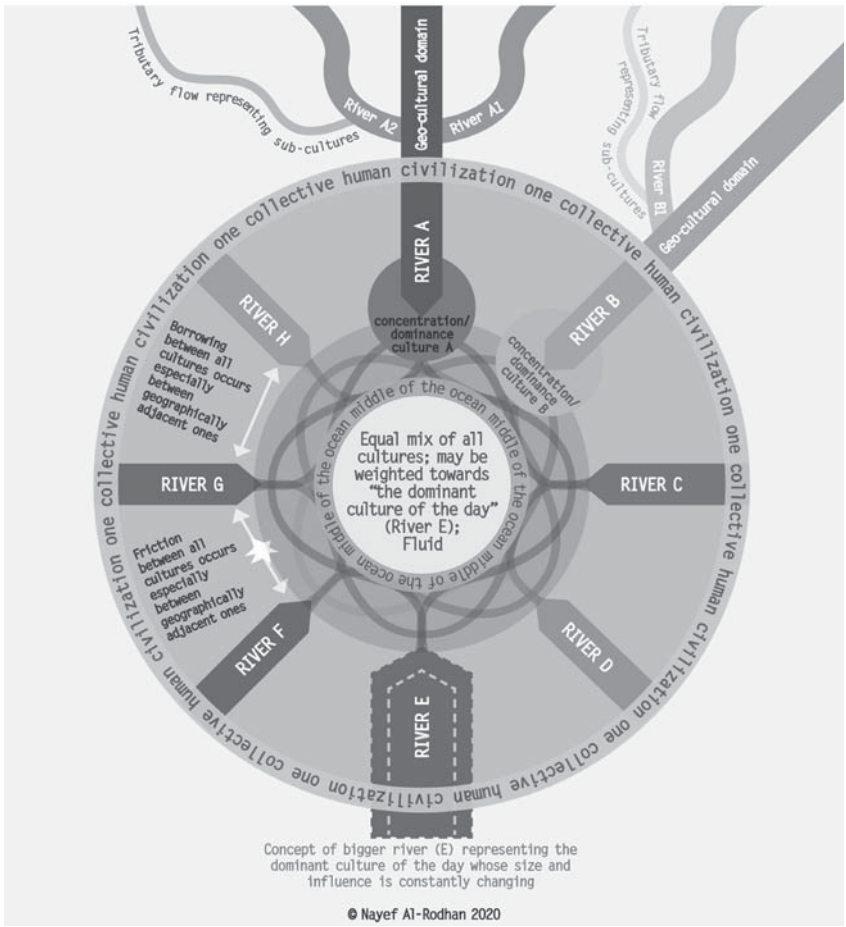


Figure 1.3 The Ocean Model of Human Civilisation



Efforts to advance a better understanding of such specificities have taken a number of forms in recent years and are based on the notion that, at least in terms of fundamental values, a common ground exists among different groups on which dialogue can be established. Such efforts are positive because they help avoid assuming a hierarchy among cultural achievements. Diverse cultures are viewed as different expressions of a broader human experience[80] and not – as anthropologists such as Christoph Brumann stress – as isolated entities defined by fixed boundaries, homogeneity, coherence and stability.[81]

This awareness of the interconnectedness of cultures and of their equal worth is especially important if we are to foster what I refer to as transcultural understanding, which is critical for a peaceful and prosperous world. As I explore in greater depth in Chapter 15, tolerance and dialogue among different cultures are key to the achievement of human dignity for all. Acknowledging our shared civilisational heritage and the things that unite rather than divide us is the first step of this fundamental process.

One example of work in this direction is the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, a project aimed at facilitating greater understanding and reconciliation among people of different cultures and communities in order to mitigate polarising discourses and extremist tendencies. It was established in 2005 as a joint Turkish and Spanish initiative under the auspices of the United Nations (UN). While this organisation focuses on the promotion of increased understanding between cultures in general, that between 'Muslim' and 'Western' societies is given special emphasis. The Alliance of Civilizations aims to facilitate platforms of dialogue between political and religious media and civil society personalities.

It seeks to promote educational initiatives, student exchanges and media initiatives, among other projects.[82] The Alliance of Civilizations also emphasises the need for a dialogue among cultures. In 2008 in Madrid, for instance, Saudi Arabia and Spain held the First Alliance of Civilizations Forum, an interfaith dialogue among Christians, Muslims and Jews.[83] This has since been followed by similar global forums organised by the Alliance of Civilizations, as well as the creation of institutions such as the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Dialogue Centre in Vienna.[84] This unique intergovernmental organisation, founded in 2012 by Austria, Spain, Saudi Arabia and the Holy See, brings together states, religious leaders, experts and policymakers to help them find 'common solutions to shared problems'.[85]

Some have suggested that dialogue should take place as a rational conversation focused on comprehending a subject or concept. In order for one culture to understand another culture, Michael Mitias, for example, suggests that participants in a dialogue need to occupy some common ground, which he believes already exists by virtue of our shared humanity. In other words, the universality of human needs is what we share in common no matter what cultural background we possess. Moral values such as courage, justice and compassion, for instance, are considered universal because of our common human nature. Dialogue takes the form of a search for truth, which should not happen only between high-level representatives from diverse cultures,

but should also comprise continual cultural communication based on experiencing other cultures and working together on common projects to deal with shared concerns or aspirations.[86]

The usefulness of inter-civilisational dialogue based on the rational search for truth has, however, been challenged by some commentators. Ken Tsutsumibayashi, for example, argues that this approach is unlikely to result in more than minimalist principles such as the desire for self-preservation, which would not even amount to the preservation of others, let alone a global ethic.[87] Instead of dialogue based on rational discourse, Tsutsumibayashi suggests an inter-civilisational dialogue leading to a 'fusion of horizons' – 'a term that signifies a dialogic process by which the interlocutors gradually come to achieve mutual understanding through the transformation or extension of their value criteria'.[88] In order for intercultural dialogue to lead to mutual understanding, he contends, the importance of the issue of identity has to be taken into account because it is central to people's sense of due recognition and thus mutual respect, which is a prerequisite for fruitful intercultural dialogue.[89]

The idea of a fusion of horizons implies an interaction during which different participants come together to create a shared ethos. Tsutsumibayashi makes reference to the tension between Asian values and Western conceptions of human rights. In many Asian countries, resentment has been generated in response to the West's promotion of human rights. According to Tsutsumibayashi, this reaction occurs not because Asians tend to disagree with the content of human rights, but because people feel that the moral idioms embedded in their own cultures, traditions and religions are not recognised or understood, and they become offended by what they view as the patronising attitude of people in the West.[90]

Several themes relate to this issue: the value-laden nature of social actions and the value-laden interpretations of historians. This raises the question of whether there is an objective historical reality, or if such a reality is dependent on the specific meanings people attribute to it. I believe we can say that historical objectivity is possible insofar as historians can undertake 'good-faith' investigations. This, however, does not mean that there is an objective historical 'truth'. A new philosophy of history, which embraces kaleidoscopic views of the past, will enable us to overcome the prejudices of historians and to truly understand the complex reality in which we live.[91]