A TOPOLOY OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

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Abstract: In this paper I argue that there is a common logic to identity at several levels: the self, historical biography, the nation, mentalities, civilizations and world systems. It follows that we can expect arguments over identity to take certain forms, but it also means there are standard ways of adjudicating between them. It means that identity is temporal, that it may be expected to change over time. In the end, it means that identity has no more reality than that of a "center of narrative gravity," but also that it has no less. Identities are created, but they are nonetheless real. We must not reify identity, but we neither may we deny it.

The task of analyzing cultural identities is shared by the historian, the anthropologist, the sociologist, the psychologist and the cultural theorist. In numerous works, historians, for example, try to determine the identity of historical persons, of nations, of civilizations and so on, but rarely do we see any theoretical treatments of this activity. Even more rare is a synoptic look at the various levels of identity creation. This is unfortunate since it turns out that a survey of historical identities at various levels reveals a distinctive logic of unity. This paper will survey the literature of identity at several levels and show that identity has an inherent cultural logic that displays the same structure at each level. The result is a topology of cultural identity. This survey will show that the best way to think about the logic of cultural identity is on the basis of Daniel Dennett's notion of a "narrative center of gravity," and I will show how this might work at each level.

There is a great advantage to the scholar once this cultural logic of identity is recognized, for solutions in one field may profitably be applied to others. For example, if it turns out that the pragmatic solution to the problem of the self in philosophy is acceptable, we may then attempt to apply the same solution to the issues of nationalism, civilizations and world systems. This will not always work smoothly because while there may be structural similarities to the problems, methodological differences may preclude an easy transfer. In my view, however, there is a great deal of progress to be made by comparing these levels of argument, for there are points in these debates that can be profitably addressed by comparing different levels of identity: the self, historical biography, nationalism, mentalities and civilizations. What this comparison will reveal is that there is a distinctive logic of identity that cuts across different kinds and levels of identity. I will also suggest that identity formation is the result of common mappings that play out in distinctive fashion depending on the type of environment in which they exist.

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Some argue that an entity such as a self, a nation, mentality or civilization has a single identity, but we find that scholars disagree what this identity is. Some argue that there are identities, but that they are retrospectively narrated into existence rather than simply discovered in the world. Others argue for multiple identities, sometimes even contradictory identities. Some deny identity altogether and claim the existence of a type of entity is illusory. Some argue that identity only makes sense in terms of an opposing "other." Some will claim that any proposed identity is an attempt to impose a hegemonic view or ideology on the less powerful. Given this amount of disagreement, it is no wonder that some might be skeptical about the whole enterprise of personal, historical and cultural identity.

While this skeptical conclusion view has merit, at the end of this paper I will give a argument that it is too radical to the extent that it suggests that doing without these unities is somehow a possible option. Identities get created because they are highly functional. But the process of their creation is an interpretive contest between competing narratives. This shows us that identities have always been contested concepts, and that they will continue to be contested and, as a political matter, should be contested. This contest of identities forms an important part of both cultural ontology and political critique.

What are the things that persist through time that interest the cultural theorist? States, civilizations, societies, individuals, classes, styles and so on are the subjects of history, yet the delineation of these entities is often taken for granted, or at least not regarded as scientific. Identity construction is most clearly exemplified by historical biography, diplomatic history, national history, cultural history, intellectual history, any aspect of history that focuses on human action. The best place to start is, unsurprisingly, with the simplest level of all, the self. This does take us outside of historical studies and into the philosophy of mind, but it has the merit of reducing the argument to the point where some measure of clarity can be discerned.

I. Level One: the Self

Unreflective common sense tells us that there is a core to our being that we understand as the self. Our personal identity is thought to be unproblematic to the ordinary person. Indeed, it seems nearly impossible to imagine that there is no such thing. This common sense view is buttressed in philosophy by Descartes, who made the self, or at least, the mind, the foundation of certainty. In his famous Second Meditation, Descartes is looking for something certain, something impervious to any doubt, and he finds it in the "I." "How about thinking? Here I discover that thought is an attribute that really does belong to me. This alone cannot be detached from me. I am; I exist; this is certain." [1] Descartes' argument has not met with unanimous approval in the philosophical community, but the specific arguments do not concern us here. The two key points are that the self is presented as something that exists and

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[1]Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans, Donald Cress, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1979, 18.

that it is rather difficult to deny. Later philosophers will do just that, and they often base their accounts of personal identity on memory.
[2] Thomas Reid, for example, writes "My personal identity, therefore, implies the continued existence of that indivisible thing which I call myself…But perhaps, it may be said, this may be fancy without reality. How do you know—what evidence have you—that there is such a permanent self…which you call yours? To this I answer, that the proper evidence I have of all this is remembrance."[3] Now it turns out that memory as a criterion of personal identity also has its flaws, some of which Reid was aware. I raise the connection here because it will become important in our treatments of identity at other levels.

The critique of the idea of the self is standard in European philosophy since David Hume, and was preceded by several centuries by the Indian philosophy of the Buddha. The basic argument is that any attempt to isolate the self empirically is doomed to failure. Hume writes: "For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but perception."[4] Hume is arguing that while we have perceptions of this or that thing, we never have a perception of our self separate from such perceptions. He offers instead a "bundle theory" of the self. The idea is that the self, instead of being a unitary entity, is really a bundle of perceptions that we pull together to form an idea of a continuing self. Hume's basic view is still extremely popular among materialists and may constitute some sort of orthodoxy in materialist philosophy of mind. Contemporary materialists are particularly impressed by split-brain experiments which seem to imply that if there are selves, there may be more than one in a body at one time, a result that is surprising but also enlightening. Discussing multiple selves, Patricia Churchland writes, "But hard on the heels of the observation comes the inescapable inclination to infer that they have two of something where the rest of us have only one. But two of what? Two minds perhaps, or two souls, or two selves, or two persons, two centers of consciousness, two centers of cognition, two centers of control, two wills or what?"[5] And if two, why not more? Thus, even at the neurological level we see that the unitary self is problematic.

Philosophy thus has led us to a deep skepticism about the self. An evolutionary perspective tells us that this flexible kind of identity may have evolved to help us cope with different sorts of social and natural environments. Pragmatism, on the other hand, has forced us to positions in which, while maintaining the ultimate truth of Humean skepticism, nevertheless grant the need for a "pulling-together" of personal identity via memory. It is true that the ordinary notion of a clearly demarcated self

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[2]See, for example, Thomas Reid's *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, ed. James Walke, Boston: Phillips, Sampson and Company, 1855.
[3]Thomas Reid, *Essays* 249.
[4]David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, section 6, Part IV, Book One, 1739 reprinted in *Personal Identity*, ed. John Perry, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975, 162.
[5]Patricia Churchland, *Nerurophilosophy*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995, 179.

with an essence in the form of a mental substance is certainly too strong a claim. The sense of the self is most likely a narrative construction of the person that is reinforced by the social framework around the person. But while the personality may consist of different identities, it is still necessary for mental health that people construct a central and dominant identity. Further, there is little doubt that such unitary identities serve an evolutionary function.

Daniel Dennett does not believe there is a self except as a narrative construction. He does argue that we can talk about the self as a theoretical entity, however, and he postulates the idea of the self as a "center of narrative gravity." By utilizing a concept from physics, namely a center of gravity, he can also borrow some of its clearly defined aspects. Dennett writes:

> This is a well-behaved concept in Newtonian physics. But a center of gravity is not an atom or a subatomic particle or any other physical item in the world. It has no mass; it has no color; it has no physical properties at all, except for spatio-temporal location. It is a fine example of what Hans Reichenbach would call an *abstractum*. It is a purely abstract object. It is, if you like, a theorist's fiction. It is not one of the real things in the universe in addition to the atoms. But it is a fiction that has nicely defined, well delineated and well behaved role within physics.[6]

Dennett then argues that the self is similar to a center of gravity.

> A self is also an abstract object, a theorist's fiction. The theory is not particle physics but what we might call a branch of people-physics; it is more soberly known as a phenomenology or hermeneutics, or soul-science (*Geisteswissenschaft*). The physicist does an *interpretation*, if you like, of the chair and its behavior, and comes up with the theoretical abstraction of a center of gravity, which is then very useful in characterizing the behavior of the chair in the future, under a wide variety of conditions. The hermeneuticist or phenomenologist--or anthropologist--sees some rather more complicated things moving about in the world--human beings and animals--and is faced with a similar problem of interpretation. It turns out to be theoretically perspicuous to organize the interpretation around a central abstraction: each person has a *self* (in addition to a center of gravity).[7]

Dennett, who has done work on multiple personality disorder, argues that the construction of multiple selves by such patients is really just an aberrant species of what we all normally engage in by narrating ourselves. We shall see that what counts as a disorder at this level of analysis becomes the norm at higher levels of narrative construction. Does this mean selves are not "real"? I would argue that centers of gravity are real even though they are abstract. Numbers are real even though they are abstract. But they are not objects in the world. They are not "essences." Thus selves have a certain reality, simply not the reality of an object or an essence. Selves are

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[6]Daniel Dennett, "The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity," Retrieved November 24, 2004, from http://as.tufts.edu/cogstud/papers/selfctr.htm, 1, also located in F. Kessel, P.Cole and D. Johnson, eds. *Self and Consciousness: Multiple Perspectives*, Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1992.
[7]Dennett, "The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity."

narrative constructions, but they are not complete fictions. They do exist, just as one can say centers of gravity "exist." One can say true things about centers of gravity. They can move, for instance.

But how are these theoretical fictions different from ordinary fictions? Are our selves no more than characters in a story? In a deep sense, yes, it is true that we make it all up, but once we make it up, we can generate truths about the things we make up. For example, truths such as "Watson was the sidekick of Holmes" can be said to be true because the statement has a reference in some sort of text. One can be ontologically promiscuous in this way and still employ reasonable ontological limits. One can meaningfully apply rather more The "real" self of a person is an evolutionary response in humans to the natural and social environments in which the self evolved. But the self is not a new organ; rather, it is the result of connectionist networks developing patterns of organization for the inputs they receive. It seems likely that we will find narrativity to be a basic "software" for the construction of selves. While we must stop short of ascribing the status of "object" to the self, that does not mean that selves are not things over which we may quantify.

One should not overemphasize the concept of a "center" in the "center of gravity" metaphor. It is not meant to imply a core set of attributes that constitute an "essence" of a self. One should think of the self as a web of beliefs that a person holds about himself or herself and that others hold about that person. Some beliefs are more central than others, but none may be absolutely essential. Some are rather peripheral. But the line between core and periphery is fuzzy. Further, there can be movement between core and periphery. A belief about oneself may be peripheral at an early age, but then become very important to that person as he or she gets older. The opposite is also possible. One may also have opposing or even contradictory beliefs about oneself; one might even say the same person could have multiple identities. I may act differently in a group of my musician friends than I do with my philosopher or sports friends. Each group may think of me very differently. This multiplicity at the level of the self, while quite flexible, has practical limits. If the splits go too deep, one may be a victim of multiple identity disorder. At other levels, however—such as the level of the nation, we will see that greater multiplicity may be perfectly normal and acceptable; indeed, it is probably a mark of health.

This cursory account of philosophical views of the self will be the basis of what follows. We have seen that while it is very natural to ascribe to a belief in a unitary self, there are nevertheless good reasons to doubt it. This need for unity and skepticism towards unity will replay itself at several levels. As we move through each level we will see that additional considerations come into play, particularly ideological considerations as ideology becomes more relevant to identity construction.

II. Level Two: Historical Biography

With historical biography we move beyond personal identity into the field of cultural identity. While we all construct our own and others' identities individually and collectively, historians inspect (and create) certain narrations with greater rigor than the ordinary person. Bismarck is a good example for an examination of historical

biography. Enough time has elapsed so that there have been several successive trends in treatments of Bismarck, but not so much that the political elements have submerged in the passage of time. Bismarck scholarship extends to roughly six generations, and, as Karina Urbach notes, "almost every second German generation has encountered another version of Bismarck."[8] These different versions of Bismarck are a reflection of the times in which they were written. "Bismarck served scholars as a martial figurehead during the First World War, as an ideal Nazi predecessor in the thirties, and as a caricature of everything 'Prussian' after 1945."[9] Thus we see the biography of an historical figure changing with changes in the political framework of the biographers. This is not, of course, surprising, but it will constitute the first part of a framework on the ontology of historical unities. The subject-object distinction fails to provide us with an historically static identity for the person of Bismarck. One can argue that while this is true of Bismarck, a highly political person in the first place, it is not necessarily true of all historical biography. I argue that Bismarck's political character only brings out the "essentially" political nature of biography formation more clearly than usual.

The biographies of artists show a similar pattern of change. The scholarship on Artemesia Gentileschi has changed over time not only to raise her work to a higher status but in deepening our interpretations of such works as *Judith and Holofernes*. Even better examples are Judith Leyster and Sofonisba Anguissola. Leyster was unknown at the time of her death, then her works were attributed to her husband or Franz Hals. Then one of Hals' works was revealed to actually be Leyster's work. Then her work was regarded as a mere imitation of Hals and finally she is taken to be a significant artist in her own right today.[10] The history of the critical reception of Sofonisba Anguissola's work was similar. In the 16th century her works were considered very realistic, "breathing likeness." Some however simply regarded her as a prodigy of nature rather than as a real artist. By the 17th century her work was rated equal to that of Titian. In the 19th century her work was assigned to male artists, among them Titian, da Vinci, Coello and Van Dyck, but by the 20th century her work was dismissed as sentimental.[11] These changes in the assessment of artists reflect a cultural logic of on-going revision. These cases all concern female artists, and thus reflect trends in the appreciation of female artists as well as general attitudes toward women. We shall see that feminist criticism takes on a similar form at each level we examine and, in fact, constitutes a subspecies of the cultural logic of historical interpretation. But we shouldn't suppose that interpretive revision in artistic biography is limited to female artists. One can discern similar changes in the interpretation of the works of male artists such as Michelangelo.

Lisa Pon has examined sixteenth-century books about Michelangelo and points out that "These books were neither the first biographies of Michelangelo, nor the

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[8]Karina Urbach, "Between Savior and Villain: 100 Years of Bismarck Biographies," *The Historical Journal,* Vol.41, No.4 (1998), 1142.
[9]Urbach, *Between Savior and Villain,* 1142.
[10]See Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art and Society*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1991, 20-21.
[11]Chadwick, *Women, Art and Society*, 70-72.

earliest texts written about artists. Nonetheless, they were instrumental in building a public image of Michelangelo as an artist of outstanding stature; they did so through their dialogues with other texts and genres, their amplified effects as printed and published books, and their tangible presence as objects which could be bought or given."[12] The significance of this is that these writings had a formative effect on all later interpretations of Michelangelo. Not all interpreters are equal. Early interpretations have great power in shaping later interpretations, and later interpreters often must struggle mightily to overcome even extremely erroneous early interpretations.

One lesson to be drawn from scholarship on Michelangelo is the way exemplary personages form an "oppositional base" for the interpretation of historical individuals. Michelangelo's life becomes a point of comparison in the interpretation of the artist, Bernini. This is a point that will take on greater importance at the higher levels of analysis I will be examining. Identities are always formed partly in opposition rather than "from the ground up." As Catherine M. Soussloff writes, "The rhetorical use of a praiseworthy example from the past, which can then be used for emulation in the present, is an essential aspect of the literary-historical genre known as the *Life,* or biography, of an artist."[13] I would argue that this is, in fact, true of a biography, indeed, of all historical unities. It is simply part of the logic of identity.

Michael H. Duffy argues that "in the early nineteenth century the romantic identification of Michelangelo with sublimity evolved from a focus on the beholder's point of view and experience to a focus on the work of art as a reflection of the artist's interior being and state of mind."[14] Thus what we see in Duffy's argument is a shift in interpretation brought about by changes in Romantic thinking about art generally. Interestingly, Duffy also sees this change in the interpretation of Michelangelo as telling us something about the nature of romantic criticism of the time.

So the interpretation of identity in a social context is mutual. Not only does the social framework partly determine identity, but the interpretation of identity also influences our interpretation of the social context. Duffy writes, "These paradigms illuminate three critical junctures in the history of romantic criticism of the sublime."[15] Thus we see the subject/context distinction to be interpretively mutual. Again, this point will be reflected at the higher levels of analysis.

One could argue that historical biography typically studies "great" men or women, and because of the contestable status of "greatness" attributions, biographies are more likely to undergo interpretive revision. While there is some truth to this claim, even biographies of ordinary people seem to change over time and in

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[12]Lisa Pon, "Michelangelo's Lives: Sixteenth-Century Books by Vasari, Condivi, and Others," *Sixteenth-Century Journal XXVII/4* (1996), 1015.

[13]Catherine M. Soussloff, "Imitatio Buonarroti," *Sixteenth Century Journal, XX*, No. 4, (1989), 581.

[14]Michael H. Duffy, "Michelangelo and the Sublime in Romantic Art Criticism," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 56, No. 2. (1995), 217-238.

[15]Michael Duffy, "Michelangelo and the Sublime" 218-19.

accordance with outside circumstances. Natalie Davis' *Return of Martin Guerre*[16] is an attempt to bring a fresh look to legends that grew up surrounding the case of Martin Guerre, a peasant who returned after several years absence to reclaim his identity. The nature of peasant biography is such that there is not typically a whole school and history of interpretive revision of particular individuals. No one supposes that Martin Guerre is as important as Bismarck, Michelangelo or even Leyster. Thus later scholars are less likely to revisit the historical record, and it therefore follows that there is less room for the cultural logic of revision to be engaged. Nevertheless, even this sort of scholarship shows a type of interpretive revisionism about identites. The formerly faceless peasant develops an identity as historians turn to non-traditional subjects for historical biography. Historians are increasingly concerned to understand the lives of the lower classes, which have typically been underrepresented in historical studies until recently. The picture we have of the past cannot help but be changed as we develop a greater understanding of previously ignored groups of people, and this picture is changed partly because of the change in identity narration.

It is not surprising that it is often the case, in the end, that historical biography reflects the ambiguity and performativity of personal identity. Maybe there is no final truth about someone that is uncontestable. Maybe the facts themselves are contradictory. Karina Urbach makes this point when she refers to John Updike's novel, *Memories of the Ford Administration*[17], in which an unsuccessful attempt to write a biography of James Buchanan leads to the following lament: "After ten years of endless research the professor comes to the paradoxical conclusion that in history, 'as in physics, the more minutely we approach them, the stranger facts become, with leaps and contradictions of indecipherable quanta. All we have are documents which do not disagree.' The same may ultimately be true of Bismarck."[18] Thus Bismarck, Michelangelo, Martin Guerre and so on should not be regarded as historical essences, but rather as "centers of narrative gravity." Facts and interpretations swirl around names of historical figures much the same way objects move in relation to other objects.

It is also crucially important to remember that identity is a concept used for argument. Which identity one uses depends on what use one attempts to make of it. Thus while we might not be able to come to any clear agreement about who Bismarck was overall, we might very well have an easier time coming to agreement about Bismarck as a statesman. Of course there are disagreements even on this restricted use of Bismarck's identity, but at least the arguments can take place on the same field of argument. We shall see that this operational approach is useful at other levels of identity as well; indeed, it becomes the necessary first step in the discussion.

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[16]Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre*, (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1983).
[17]John Updike, *Memories of the Ford Administration* (New York, 1992), 75.
[18]Urbach, *Between Savior and Villain*, 1141.

III. Level Three: Nations and Nationalism

In no area of research has the idea of identity been more important than in the field of nationalism. Historians, sociologists and anthropologists have debated the idea of nationalism and the nation from several angles. A thorough survey of the literature is impossible in this article, but there are key points that have arisen from the nationalism debates that are essential to my argument. Although the general antecedents go back even further, Ernest Renan's "What is a nation" marks the beginning of the modern debate concerning nationalism.[19] Key figures in the now classic debate include, Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson and Elie Kedourie, and relevant contemporary thinkers include Homi Bhabha, Philip S. Gorski, Lloyd Kramer, Pierre Birnbaum, Tracy Strong, Erik Ringmar, Edmund Burke, III, Anthony D. Smith and Edward F. Fischer.

Ernest Gellner's work is germane to this discussion because he not only asks "what is a nation," but "when" is a nation?[20] Gellner argues that there are no nations before nationalism, that nationalism is associated with the third great period of history, the industrial age, which comes after the pre-agrarian and the agrarian (which he associates with the Imperial form of social organization). Gellner understands nationalism as a peculiarly "modern" phenomenon. It is connected with the uneven diffusion of modernization and its necessary correctives such as mass education. Gellner is not the only one who makes the "modernist" argument, as the term "modernist" has taken on the specific meaning in nationalist debates as referring to thinkers who regard nationalism as a modern phenomenon, as opposed to those, such as Phillip S. Gorski, who argue that nationalism goes back at least to the Medieval period.[21] One's position on the modernist question has much to do with how one understands nationalism. Paraphrasing Anthony D. Smith, Gorski writes: "If one sees nationalism as an ideology, he says, then the modernists are right, because in his view, the ideology of nationalism is no older than the French Revolution. If one sees nationalism as an identity, however, then the modernists are wrong, since one can find numerous examples of national identity that antedate the French Revolution. Indeed, Smith goes so far as to suggest that the Ancient Israelites possessed a national identity."[22]

Even among modernists there is disagreement about whether nationalism was necessary, as Gellner indicates, or accidental, as argued by Kedourie.[23] Kedourie argued that nationalism "is the result of a world-historical error: an accident and bad set of ideas, loosely derived from Kant, and disseminated by philosophical

[19]Ernest Renan, "What is a nation?" 1882 lecture at the Sorbonne, in, *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (New York: Routledge, 1990), 8-23.
[20]Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1983).
[21]Phillip S. Gorski, "The Mosaic Moment: An Early Modernist Critique of Modernist Theories of Nationalism." *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol.105, No.5 (Mar., 2000).
[22]Gorski, "The Mosaic Moment," 1432.
[23]Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism*. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publisher, 1960).

incompetents with disastrous results."[24] Kedouries view of nationalism shows that the nation is an especially important form of cultural identity since it is associated with some very negative aspects, namely racism, militarism, and jingoism, to name a few. This makes nationalism very central to my argument because I take "identity history" to be an approach to history that is very aesthetically evaluative and morally critical. It thus forms the basis for an excellent "critical theory."

Benedict Anderson points out, for example, that our view of nationalism need not be entirely negative. "In an age when it is so common for progressive, cosmopolitan intellectuals (particularly in Europe) to insist on the near-pathological character of nationalism, its roots in fear and hatred of the Other, and its affinities with racism, it is useful to remind ourselves that nations inspire love, and often profoundly self-sacrificing love."[25]

Gellner also sees nationalism as beneficial in that it helped the world preserve political liberalism and avoid worse alternatives, namely empire and world government. "In both these counterfactual worlds liberalism would have been obliterated. A world government passing through the second, global phase of industrialization would have resembled South Africa under apartheid, a coercively organized hierarchy of races and ethnic communities; while a world of industrializing empires would have been wracked by ferocious battles over citizenship fought between the metropolitan cores and the more numerous and poorer peoples of the territories they had conquered."[26]

This ambivalence concerning nationalism is very instructive. Identities come with both positive and negative baggage, and so a critical theory must take careful note not to be overly simple-minded in its critique of social forms. Nationalism, for example, has a tragic history, but an alternative history with a different social form of organization could very well have been worse.

The complex and ambivalent nature of the concept of a nation is reflected in the definitions of the nation. Anthony Smith, for example, mixes both reasons for the emergence of the nation with the results of nationalism.[27] Smith defines nation as a "named human population sharing an historical territory, common myths, and historical memories, a mass public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members."[28] This way of defining "nation," especially the reference to mass public culture and rights and duties, makes clear that Smith is referring to the modern Gellnerian notion of nation, but it gains its referential specificity by mixing causes and characteristics. Such definitional confusion actually reflects the confused reality of nations and thus we may want to refrain from further clarity for the sake of specificity.

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[24]Brendan O'Leary, "On the Nature of Nationalism: An Appraisal of Ernest Gellner's Writings on Nationalism." *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol.27, No.2 (April, 1997), 193.
[25]Bendict Anderson*, Imagined Communities*, London: Verso, 1998, 1983, 141.
[26]O'Leary, "On the Nature of Nationalism," 197.
[27]See Tamir's critique of Smith in Yael Tamir, "The Enigma of Nationalism," *World Politics* 47, 418-40.
[28]Anthony Smith, *National Identity*, London: Penguin Press, 1991, 14.

Nations are often constructed negatively in opposition to an "other" than is represented as in some way defective. Two sorts of cases are prominent in the historical record. Fascism and Nazism offer an ideology that is constructed in part on the basis of antagonism to others, Jews, communists etc. The other type of case occurs when a nation rejects its own past, such as in the French, Russian and Chinese revolutions. In both sorts of cases, the definition of the nation is partly a negative formulation.

The deconstructionist will argue that any narrative of the nation always contains its own counter-narratives at the same time it attempts to conceal them. Homi K. Bhabha writes that "Counter-narratives of the nation that continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries—both actual and conceptual—disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which 'imagined communities' are given essentialist identities. For the political unity of the nation consists is a continual displacement of its irredeemably plural modern space…"[29] Bhabha is here not only pointing out the existence and concealment of counternarratives, he is also showing how the temporal status of the dominant narrative is simultaneously concealed and revealed. Nations are generally projected backward rather than lived or experienced forward from the time of supposed origin. Nations are constructed narratives created for political purposes that are current rather than ancient. As Bhabha shows, "the sameness of space returns as the sameness of time."[30] Thus the nation is a vacillating representation, moving between unity and plurality in space as well as past and present in time.

The postmodern perspective is, of course, not without its critics. Anthony Smith rejects the creative aspect of the postmodern view of nationalism. In his view, the postmodernist believes that nations are simply "the constructs of cultural engineers or chefs who tailor pre-existing mythologies, symbols and history for their own ends." Smith believes the postmodernist exaggerates "the ability of elites to manipulate the masses and fails to explain why millions of people may be prepared to die for a cultural artifact; and once again it disregards the premodern history of ethnicity."[31] While Smith is right that we should not overestimate the purely creative aspect of nationalist ideology, we should also not misunderstand the postmodernist critique. The postmodernist will not argue that elites are doing all the manipulating. Everyone is manipulating everyone else, and language itself is manipulating them, so to speak. Nor would the postmodernist deny the effectiveness of nationalist ideology or that the cultural creators draw on traditions of ethnicity. They are simply concerned to emphasize the creative aspect of the nationalist narrative as well as the fissures in the narratives.

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[29]Homi K. Bhabha, "DissemiNation," *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha, New York: Routledge, 1990, 300.
[30]Bhabha, "Dissemination," 300.
[31]Anthony D. Smith, "Culture, community and territory," *International Affairs* 72 (1996) 446-7.

In an interesting summary of approaches to nationalism, Lloyd Kramer[32] divides the approaches to nationalism into treatments that look into

(a) the intellectual origins (Kohn[33], Kedourie)
(b) the cultural origins (Benedict Anderson)
(c) the economic origins (Gellner)
(d) the social origins (Greenfield[34])
(e) the political origins (Colley[35])
(f) nationalism as a religion (Renan, Hayes[36])
(g) nationalism as a construction of language and literature (Deutsch[37], Kedourie, Bhabha)
(h) nationalism as a discourse of gender, sexuality and ethnicity (Mosse[38])[39]

This list shows the kind of complexity that is involved in national identities, and I would extend the point and argue that all historical identities have similarly complex structures. Indeed, I believe this kind of structural complexity is the case with all forms of identity from the self to the species. Before I summarize, however, we must move to the next level of our analysis of historical identity, the level of civilizational identity.

China and India are of particular interest because they have narrative unity as nations, mentalities and civilizations. The cases of India and China, therefore, help us examine the transition from one type of identity to another. In the case of China, it is instructive to examine two contrary arguments, one by Prasenjit Duara, in his "De-Constructing the Chinese Nation,"[40] and the other by David N. Keightley, [41] in his "early Civilization in China: Reflections on how it became Chinese." Both writers utilize the notion of Chinese identity but differ in their estimate of the reality of the idea of China.

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[32] Lloyd Kramer, "Historical Narratives and the Meaning of Nationalism." *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 58 (1997).
[33] Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in its Origins and Background*, New York: MacMillan, 1944.
[34] Liah Greenfield, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*, Cambridge, Massachussetts, 1992.
[35] Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation*, 1707-1837, New Haven, 1992.
[36] Carlton J.H. Hayes, "Nationalism as a Religion," in *Essays on Nationalism*, New York, 1966.
[37] Karl W. Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication: An Inquiry into the Foundations of Nationality*, New York, 1953, 1966.
[38] George Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe*, New York, 1985.
[39] I have taken the liberty of adding the corresponding thinker or thinkers associated with each approach.
[40] Prasenjit Duara. "De-Constructing the Chinese Nation," *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 30 (1993).
[41] David Keightley, "Early Civilization in China: Reflections on How It Became Chinese," in *Heritage of China: Contemporary Perspectives on Chinese Civilization*. Ed. Paul S. Ropp, University of California Press, 1990.

Duara is very critical of the concept of historical identity and deconstructs the idea of Chinese national identity. Even though his concern is nationalism, it is clear that his argument applies to any kind of large-scale historical identity such as "Chinese civilization" or mentality that is discussed by Keightley. Duara, like most deconstructionists, sees Chinese identity as a contest or field of opposition rather than a clearly definable set of characteristics. He writes that "the universalistic claims of Chinese imperial culture constantly bumped up against, and adapted to, alternative views of the world order, which it tended to cover with the rhetoric of universalism: this was its defensive strategy."[42] Thus identity is not to be discovered but formulated, and the process of formulation is best thought of as a political contest where interests are at stake in the outcome. Further, identity is really more of a relationship between contending subjects than a set of characteristics. Duara believes this is true of all nationalisms:

> When these political identifications are viewed in these dynamic or fluid terms, it becomes clear that what we call nationalism is more appropriately a relationship between a constantly changing Self and Other, rather than a pristine subject gathering self-awareness in a manner similar to the evolution of a species.[43]

The deconstructionist approach to national identity has a great deal of support in the literature on other forms of identity, from the self, to gender to class all the way to the level of civilization. Lewis Wurgaft has traced the logical connections between identity as a clinical or developmental phenomenon, gender identity and identity in treatments of nationalism in his "Identity in World History: A Postmodern Perspective." [44] Wurgaft writes, "Both from a clinical and a broadly cultural perspective, concepts like identity have been linked to a discursive strategy in western thought to impose a sense of order and coherence on a subjective experience riddled by the contradictions and displacements inherent in language and desire."[45] This is a typically postmodernist approach in its rejection of metanarrative and narrative coherence generally. Indeed, not only is the metanarrative of nation incorrect, it is pathological. Wurgaft points us to the work of Tom Nairn, who describes nationalism as "the pathology of modern developmental history, as inescapable as "neurosis" in the individual, with much the same essential ambiguity attaching to it, a similar built-in capacity for descent into dementia, rooted in the dilemmas of helplessness thrust upon most of the world and largely incurable."[46] Nairn's view is rather negative about nations, but it does have some truth to it if one thinks of fascist nations which attempt to close down the national dialogue into a single voice, or even those overly concerned about patriotism in democratic nations.

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[42]Prasenjit Duara, "De-Constructing the Chinese Nation," 3.
[43]Duara, "De-Constructing the Chinese Nation," 9.
[44]Lewis D. Wurgaft, "Identity in World History: A Postmodern Perspective," *History and Theory* 34 (1995), 67-85.
[45]Wurgaft, 70.
[46]Tom Nairn, *The Break-up of Britain*, London, 1977, 359. Quoted in Wurgaft, 79.

This is a clear contrast with the level of the self, where too much of a deep multiplicity of identity is generally a mark of mental illness. In the case of nations, a monolithic identity is more problematic. It is much healthier for a nation to have a contested identity that is part of an on-going dialogue. Thus a nation is best described as an on-going argument between established narratives, with different interpretations taking the upper hand by turns.

When it comes to using concepts of identity, we must always ask what purpose we have in mind, and this especially so in the case of national identity. Are we arguing about the economics of a nation? If so, then the concept of identity used will be one that is interested in legal arrangements, borders, systems of economic regulation and so on. If we are interested in the music or art of, say, France, our criteria of identity will be very different. One should not privilege one set of identifying criteria over another unless one is also prepared to argue that the questions at issue are more central to a general understanding of a nation than other questions.

IV. Level Four: Mentalities

The notion of mentality as an identity is initially problematic. It does not seem to belong in a category that includes selves, biographies, nations, civilizations and world systems. One might therefore omit it from this discussion. But that would be a mistake. The literature on cultural identity is filled with discussions of mentality, and questions of mentality constitute some of the most interesting that arise, particularly in comparative studies. This is also the best place to discuss the issue of essentialism since essentialist claims and claims of "Orientalism" arise most in this area of discussion.

David Keightley is interested in determining how China became Chinese, a topic that postmodernists would incorrectly find naively essentialist. Keightley examines prehistoric and early Chinese history for keys to the later development of Chinese mentality. These keys are an anti-heroic ethos and a tight connection between ancestors and the living. Keightly looks at cultural artifacts such as pottery and material remains such as burial sites. From the pottery, which he compares to examples from Ancient Greece, he finds a definite lack of heroic individuality and a lack of the corresponding tragic sense of life. Keightley sees the décor on a late sixth to fifth century B.C., Eastern Chou *hu* wine vase from Chengtu, Szechwan expressing an ethos in which "men fought less for individual honor, as Achilles had done, and more for the survival of the state. Aesthetic concerns were focused on the general, the social, and the non-heroic rather than on the particular, the individual, and the heroic."[47] This is in clear contrast with a kylix vase by the Penthesileia Painter from ca.460 B.C., in which the tragic tale of Achilles and Penthesileia is portrayed.

On the Greek vase, we see the heroic characters of Achilles and Penthesileia. On the Chinese vase we see only stereotypical silhouettes wearing uniforms. Keightley extends the Greek and Chinese contrast to the manufacture of the vases themselves.

[47]Keightley, 19.

We are aware of an individual responsible for the creation of the kylix vase, but the Chinese vase was the result of an industrial-scale casting process.

Describing this Greek world, Keightley writes that the Greeks "live in a quirky, unpredictable and ironic world that is by no means responsive to human values and desires."[48] The Greek heroes were generally tragic and the morality of their situations ambiguous. Whereas the Greek hero might rage against the injustice of the cosmic order, the Chinese world is a less ambiguous, more optimistic one. The Greek hero is not one to be emulated. No Greek wished to kill one's potential lovers, one's father (like Oedipus), one's mother (like Orestes) or oneself (like Antigone). Chinese heroes "were heroes precisely because they were models worthy of emulation;" the universe of moral action was "untrammeled by ambiguities."[49] The heroic Chinese warrior in a work like the fourth century semi-historical chronicle, *Tso chuan,* would likely be rewarded in the here and now with promotions, honors and status because he would be doing the bidding of the lord, who would deign not to dirty his own hands, and thus gave the worldly tasks to others, who then would be repaid in an appropriate fashion. Virtue in a Confucian framework requires that the relationship between a superior and inferior be conducted according to tradition. Rewards for the virtuous show that in the Chinese world view, "cause and effect in the universe were rigorously fair."[50] Following the dictates of trustworthy leaders, recruits could always be certain of the justice of their cause.

Interestingly, Keightley links this attitude to the whole political future of China when he states that "This optimism also helps to explain the lack of safeguards against the power of the state that has characterized Chinese government for at least two thousand years."[51] Keightley makes an even stronger case of cultural persistence with his examination of burial practices. Ancestor worship is well-known as a definitive cultural practice of the Chinese throughout its history, and Keightley makes a persuasive case that the origins of this practice can be seen in its earliest burial practices.

This kind of connectivity between the origins and later instantiations of a cultural identity are precisely what postmodernists find objectionable. But notice that Keightley is not building his case on nothing, he is working with established cultural artifacts, the sort of cultural sediment that makes this sort of argument more than the mere assertion of one set of interests against others. When one can point to a cultural artifact that can be argued to be representative of its time and then can then connect it to later cultural attitudes or institutions that are instantiated in cultural artifacts one is following a prima facie defensible form of argument. This form of argument is furthered supported when comparative examples are used to show how different early practices played differently in later history. Of particular interest is the reference to heroism in Keightley's argument. There seems to be a key difference between Chinese culture on the one hand and both Western and Indian culture on the other in

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[48]Keightley, 17.
[49]Ibid, 20.
[50]Ibid, 20.
[51]Ibid, 21.

the arena of epic poetry. While epic is clearly foundational in the West (Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*) and India (the *Mahabarata* and *Ramayana*), there is no comparable tradition in China. We have already seen a glimpse as to why this might be the case with Keightley's discussion of heroism. A critic cannot merely rule such arguments about mentality out of court.

Jaroslav Prusek makes an even stronger claim of connectivity than Keightley.[52] He states that "I should like to show that the specific thought pattern, the specific perception of reality, intrinsic to a specific cultural category—that which is the predominant one in a given cultural complex—influences all other categories and determines their nature."[53] It is not surprising that Prusek is a comparativist. Comparativists tend to more "essentialism" than those confined to area studies. This is partly because of differences in the nature of the approaches. A scholar of say, China, is more likely to seek out subtle differences between particular Chinese or groups of Chinese. A comparativist is looking for broader similarities and differences. Prusek, like Keightley, is impressed by the fact that China not only lacks epic, it lacks the "epic form." He makes his case by showing that while in West the epic form is not only a literary mode, but a mode which determines historical writing as well, in China the absence of literary epic is reflected in its historical writing. Prusek cites Ferdinand Stiebitz, who argued that that the "structure of [Herodotus'] history resembles the epic technique...To a certain extent the work of Herodotus can be described as an epos extended into prose."[54] Prusek notes that in China, "we find nothing of the kind; the basic structure of Chinese historical works is the direct opposite of the homogeneity and continuity demanded by Hirt for an epic work."[55]

The critics of Chinese essentialism point to key periods, such as the fourth century, when the typical unifying elements such as an established state, a territorial homeland, a shared historical tradition and a common language were not all present to the degree that seems to be required by the thesis of narrative connectivity. Charles Holcombe examines the identity crisis in China in the fourth century and shows how the Confucian tradition forged the connection necessary to keep Chinese identity intact in spite of the great difficulties facing the new Eastern Chin state.[56] The Chinese state had collapsed in the north and had moved south to Chiang-nan, where the majority population did not regard themselves as Chinese, did not speak the same form of Chinese and regarded the northerners as interlopers. As Holcombe asks, "What kind of "nation" could the Eastern Chin court be said to have ruled?"[57] Holcombe's answer is that "In China…Confucian principle postulated a higher

[52]Jaroslav Prusek, "History and Epics in China and in the West: A Study in the Differences in Conception of the Human Story," *Diogenes* 42 (1963), 20-43.

[53]Prusek, 20.

[54]Ferdinand Stiebitz, Herodotus, *Zdejin vychodnich narodu* (From the History of the Eastern Nations) Praha (1941), 14, quoted in Prusek, 21.

[55]Prusek, 22.

[56]Roger Holcombe, "Re-imagining China: The Chinese Identity Crisis at the Start of the Southern Dynasties Period, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 115, (1995), 1-14.

[57]Holcombe, 2

political order that even emperors were obliged to serve, and laid the foundations for an incipient sense of what we might even call a premodern Chinese identity."[58] The Chinese court used Confucian religious ritual to "construct the reality" of Chinese identity. The Emperor constructed altars, ancestral temples, conducted sacrifices and restored canonical court music, all in an attempt to transfer the Chinese identity to the south, and it is clear that he was successful. It is true, however, that the key bearers of this identity were not ordinary peasants, but the *shih-ta-fu,* the elite office-holding class. Nevertheless, the *shih-ta-fu* maintain the narrative connectivity that constitutes the thread of identity that eventually does spread to the population as a whole. The Confucian set of rituals, practices and ethics are thus central to Chinese identity, to "Chineseness," in social life.

If we think of our previous cautionary remarks about the uses one makes of a concept of identity, mentality provides an excellent case. Chinese mentality is the focus of much of the professional work of the scholars, Roger Ames and David Hall, who in a series of books and articles have argued for a Chinese "thought-pattern" distinct in important ways from Western thought patterns.[59] This "thought-pattern" is deeply implicated in Confucian thought, but lies at a more fundamental level. What is crucial about the idea of mentality as a key part of Chinese identity is that, as Hall, Ames, Fingarette and most other scholars of Chinese culture have argued, without a clear understanding of this mentality one is bound to misunderstand the religion, philosophy and literature of China. Hall and Ames believe that Chinese thinking is more correlative than Western thought. I would argue that Hall and Ames are correct, although the picture now seems to be that correlative thought characterizes the human mind cross culturally. Correlative thought has been argued by Farmer, Henderson and Witzel to be a result of the organization of the connectionist brain.[60] Correlative thought is still a way to distinguish Chinese and Western thought even though it is common to both Western and Chinese thought. The West developed the concept of the logos, and this gave rise to the notions of universalization, logical consistency as the foundation of thinking, reductionism and metaphysical completeness, and over time these notions separated Western logocentric mentality with Chinese correlative mentality. The difference between the two systems, the logocentric and the correlative, is a result of developments in the West (and India) that did not occur in China. Logocentrism entered China on the backs of the Buddhist missionaries from India. Once there, Logocentrism percolated and gave rise to metaphysics, but never gave rise to systematic science. Science too was introduced from the outside. The late arrival of logocentrism and science in China had a telling effect on its mentality. Chinese mentaltiy remained largely correlative until the introduction of Buddhism, and even then the propagation of scientific knowledge did not begin in earnest until after the introduction of modern scientific ideas. The correlative mind-cast is

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[58]Holcombe, 4.

[59] See David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking From the Han: Self, Truth, and Transcendence in Chinese and Western Culture*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1998.

[60]Steve Farmer, John B. Henderson and Michael Witzel, *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 72, 2000, 48-90.

therefore identifiable by its continued reliance on correlative models of rationalization. Thus if the use one wants to make of Chinese identity is to understand its religion, philosophy or literature, one is wise to consider the ramifications of the differences between correlative mentalities like the Chinese, and the logocentric mentality of the West.

The idea of a Chinese "thought-pattern" or mentality brings us to the issue of the definition of a civilization, for China has been regarded not only as a nation or mentality, but a whole civilization. The case of China raises the following questions: Is a civilization a territorial entity? A mentality? A narrative imposed after the fact?

V. Level Five: Civilizations

In this section I include my own contribution to identity theory in the area of comparative civilization in order to indicate how what we have learned so far may be brought to bear.

The definition of civilizations is a veritable cottage industry in the field of comparative civilizations. The starting point of current debates was established in the 1960's by comparing the works of Spengler, Toynbee, Kroeber, Bagby, Coulborn and Quigley.[61] Such an approach yields a short list of civilizations that includes the Far Eastern (China with a Japanese "offshoot"), Indian, Middle Eastern, Egyptian, Meditteranean, Eastern European, Western European, Central American and South American civilizations. This list is fraught with problems too numerous to detail with any completeness. I will focus on a few that relate to the concerns I have raised already.

1. Do civilizations exist at all?
2. Are civilizations narrated into existence?
3. Is the concept of civilization a scene of ideological argument?
4. Are the temporal starting points and spatial boundaries foci of ideological argument?

My answer is yes, to all the above, but before proceeding further I must indicate what sorts of question I wish to address with my concept of civilization. Identity is such a plastic concept that one needs to first say what issues are going to be addressed. The concept of identity is only useful if we clarify what use we are going to make of it. In the following discussion I am interested in a concept of civilization that can be used for comparative purposes. If we want to be able to compare, say, Chinese painting with European painting, it helps to have a sense of what one means by "Chinese" and "European." This may involve further distinctions between Northern and Southern Chinese painting or between English and French painting, but it is certainly plausible to use the terms "Chinese painting" and "European painting" with a discernible reference. This reference will be to argumentative narratives of painting rather than to definitive and unchanging styles. We may also note that what is important to the

[61] See, for example, Matthew Melko's *The Nature of Civilizations*, Boston: Porter Sargent Publisher, 1969, 21.

identity of China in regard to its history of painting may not be as important if the questions concerned China as a maritime nation or China as a political system.

Civilizations exist to some extent because we say they do. Civilizations have a "performative ontology" in that a human practice must imply them. Someone (who is a participant) must act or have acted in such a way that their actions presume a particular civilization to exist. The performative approach to identity and the narrative understanding of civilizations tends to focus less on some of the traditional questions concerning civilizations, such as their origin and demise and more on others I will examine below. But one might then justifiably wonder just how one is to identify civilizations if not from their beginnings and endings. I work with a stringent set of criteria:

1. The civilizations I examine must be at least several hundred years old. There must have been enough time for them to develop a clearly discernable identity.
2. There must be some people who would claim to be part of the tradition.
3. They must have relatively continuous traditions in literature, philosophy, history and religion. These traditions must refer back over the time span of the civilization in the way Western literature refers back to Homer and the Bible, Indian to the Ramayana, Mahabarata and the Vedas and Chinese literature refers back to the Odes and Confucius.
4. There must be periods of high aesthetic achievement and a recognized canon of greatness.
5. There must be a recognizable style, or more precisely, a narrative of sets of styles that are easily associated with the civilization

One could contrast the following set of criteria that are more traditional for comparative civilizationists:

1. There must be a highly developed agriculture yielding a surplus.
2. Significant internal and external trade over most of its history in luxury and bulk goods.
3. Cities.
4. Elites in the economic, political and aesthetic spheres.
5. Writing.

These criteria are also useful, and are probably implied by the ones I listed above—one can count them as necessary but not sufficient conditions of civilization, but the do not go to the heart of the issues I am interested in, so they will not be my criteria of identity. Indeed, they reveal a key equivocation in civilizational studies. Anthropologists are interested in the transition of peoples living without the list of five above to those with the list of five, believing that this marks a significant change in social life if not a transition from one stage of social evolution to another. It is true that the possession of these characteristics is a mark of a very different type of society from those that do not possess them, but this is not necessarily the beginning of what

we refer to as “Indian,” “Chinese,” or “Western” civilization. These kinds of civilizations are marked by long traditions of culture in literature, art, architecture, religion and so on, and are what people mean when they refer to these entities. We must distinguish the anthropological concept from the humanistic concept. The anthropologist who deals with the above list of five characteristics is interested in general forms of living, not the cultural identity of the long-lived traditions we generally mean when we use the term “civilization.”

There is much to gain by using this approach derived from the study of other levels of identity. The number of civilizations is small and thus a bit easier to manage than say, a Toynbean list of twenty-one. I recognize four clear cases and these are the focus of my investigations: Western, Islamic, Hindu, Chinese. These are the clear cases, with Japanese, Russian and Latin American having strong cases as well. This way of proceeding picks out exactly the sorts of entities most people think of when they hear the term “civilization.” They have to be big, old, grand and still around. There is no doubt about their status as civilizations. It is also clear that they are all in the same class of identities. We are always comparing apples with apples, never oranges. Any results achieved could be tested on the more questionable, “orangeish” cases, but my approach is to proceed only with clear cases.

The purpose of my way of defining civilizational identity is also straightforward: non-reductionist aesthetic comparison construed in the widest possible sense. I think it is very fruitful to compare, say, Chinese and Western landscape painting, Indian and Western music, Chinese and Western ethics, Indian and Western metaphysics. Such comparisons help us understand otherness in a very deep way. They help us decide what is specific to a culture and what is universal to human nature.

This performative and narrative conception of civilizational identity is very different from traditional views such as those of Spengler and Toynbee, who believe that civilizations are objective entities in the world to be discovered rather than created. Spengler had an organicist conception of civilizations as living entities with typically biological life-cycles of birth, growth, maturity and death and seasonal stages of spring, summer, fall and winter. Preculture, the form of tribal human existence prior to classes, states and politics gives way to the next stage, “culture,” when two classes, the nobility and the priesthood distinguish themselves from the rest of the people. Eventually we see the rise of the state and the capitalist class and the dominance of money. Money undermines democracy and all traditional values, and the materialistic and acquisitive nature of money culture leads to the overextension of imperialism. Mass civilization emerges when the money spirit becomes dominant and spirit and individuality recede. Mass civilization, in turn, gives way to a time of Caesars, who are the harbingers of the end of a civilization. Decay is inevitable. For Spengler, this is the life cycle of all civilizations. Nevertheless, each civilization has its own spirit and its corresponding symbol, so it is clear that Spengler understands civilizations to have distinctive identities, and these identities go very deep. “Each culture has its own new possibilities of self-expression which arise, ripen, decay and die to never return. There is not one sculpture, one painting, one mathematics, one physics, but many, each in its deepest essence different from the others, each limited in duration and self-contained, just as each species of plant has its peculiar blossom or

fruit, its special type of growth and decline."[62] There is some truth to Spengler's relativism in that civilizations do have a style (or better, styles), their narratives do have themes, their identities do have symbols. This is why it is fruitful to examine civilizational mentalities.

Toynbee follows Spengler in arguing that civilizations emerge, grow, decline and die like organic entities. Toynbee adds to the notion of organic growth the ideas of challenge and response to explain the mechanism of change in civilization. Civilizations are challenged and a creative minority arises to the challenge with a response that fuels the transformation of civilization. The creative minority thus functions as the motive force in the growth stage of a civilization. When the creative minority loses its creativity and begins to lead the majority through coercion rather than creative leadership that inspires imitation, then decline sets in. The process of decline includes the actions of an external proletariat in addition to the internal proletariat that initially follows then rejects the lead of the creative minority. Through militaristic domination the creative minority creates a universal state, the internal proletariat a universal religion, and the external proletariat creates barbarian war bands that afflict the periphery. Disintegration thus begins from internal and external class struggles. The later Toynbee altered his view of history and reinterpreted the last stages more positively for giving rise to world religions than negatively for signaling decline.

The intellectual descendants of Spengler and Toynbee spend a rather large amount of time arguing over the number of civilizations, exactly which ones actually exist and the approximate time of rise and demise. If my view is correct, this whole approach is wrong-headed. Civilizations, like all cultural identities, are narrated into existence after the fact. To think of them as if they were clearly definable from the start is simply a category mistake.

The narrative or performative conception of civilization, as I have already suggested, is less interested in the origins and demise of civilizations. More important than the origin or even demise is the "maintenance" or narration of civilizations. There is probably no key in the origin of a civilization that will indicate the longevity of that civilization. Many subsequent events, challenges, opportunities and conjunctures will interact, largely as a result of chance but sometimes as a result of a creative minority to bring about a long lived civilization. It helps to not originate in the path of a marauding horde or a particularly strong competitor. It helps to be challenged, but not too much. It helps to have ambitious people, but not too ambitious. And it wouldn't hurt to have protective geography, moderate weather with winters to have an annual kill-off of dangerous life forms and so on. Not much in the way of a world view or a political leader can stave off severe challenges.

An analogy that may be instructive is to compare the origins of a civilization with the origin of the self. In their contribution to the abortion debate, some philosophers have suggested that there is simply no clear starting point at which a non-person becomes a person. Further, if one is rigorous in applying the attributes of personhood,

[62]Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, quoted in *Macrohistory and Macrohistorians*, Eds. Johan Galtung and Sohail Inayatullah, Westport: Praeger, 1997, 100.

we find that persons don't exist until much later than we imagined. Thus not only is, say, a 3-month or 8th month fetus not a person, neither is a six-month old child. This unsettling result is, however, very instructive. It turns out that for these philosophers the moral community has a definitive role in determining when a being becomes a person. Some societies don't name their children until they have reached three years of age. Does that mean that they were completely without personhood prior to that time? Of course not, but the moral community makes a decision about when to grant personhood status. By the same token, historians, ideologists and canon builders do much the same with civilizations. They find identities and work backwards to create the details. And in regard to biography, defining moments in a person's life generally have little to do with one's genetic make-up.

We find a similar logic at the end of a life and a civilization. Sometimes the end is clear. You might get hit by a truck and die instantly. Sometimes you slowly die of some debilitating disease that takes your mind like Alzheimer's or Huntington's, and it is unclear when exactly you are no longer there. The same is true of civilizations. Sometimes conquerors kill all the people and all traces of the culture and make the land uninhabitable. That is a clear death. But most of the time remnants remain. Or if you are really clever, you find a way to keep living by having your conquerors take up your identity as the Chinese did for millennia. Or maybe you get lucky and a future group of people decides that they would like to imagine themselves as your intellectual ancestors, and you live again in that way. Greece and Rome live with us today for pretty much this reason.

In the light of these considerations, let's examine the concept of "the West." In an interesting approach to defining civilizations, Andrew Bosworth develops an empirical classification based on writing systems.[63] Bosworth believes Western civilization begins in pagan Rome, "where the foundations of Western urbanism, law, democracy, art, architecture and, most importantly, writing, were laid."[64] I would contend that this is a case of anachronism. There was no such thing as "the West" until much later.[65] The Romans thought of themselves as Romans, not as "Westerners," nor would they have admitted to falling under such a designation if informed of it. It is only much later that our contemporary concept of "Western" can be accurately applied[66], and even later before it was articulated. This last point is an interesting one. Certain designations of identity seem able to be applied even before they are articulated. This is because of the retroactive narrativity of historical ontology. But this retroactive narrativity has limits. The narrativity has to be successful. The idea of the West was only clearly articulated in the 20th century as a ideological notion to aid American and European efforts in the Cold War and as an

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[63] Andrew Bosworth, "The Genetics of Civilization: An Empirical Classification of Civilizations based on Writing Systems," *Comparative Civilizations Review* 49 (2003).
[64] Bosworth, 12.
[65] David Gress, *From Plato to Nato: The Idea of the West and its Opponents,* New York: Free Press, 1998.
[66] Gress, Kroeber, Bagby, Coulborn, Quigley, Toynbee and Spengler all date the West to the Medieval period.

aid to "Canon" builders trying to assimilate new immigrants to the United States. Nevertheless, these canon builders were successful. We do think of our roots as belonging in Greece, Rome and even Israel.

This is, of course, a contentious issue in the debates on the idea of the West: whether to include the Classical world of Greece and Rome. Braudel makes the argument that ecological considerations make the Mediterranean world (civilization) distinct from northern Europe, thus splitting the traditional unity of the West.[67] A central assertion of Braudel's argument is, interestingly, that "the Mediterranean world constituted a unique civilization or set of civilizations, rooted in a particular ecology of sea and soil that set it apart from the civilization of northeastern Europe."[68] This notion that a civilization is defined by something so basic, so material as soil and ecology is very different from the ideologically charged discussion that usually takes place on questions of identity. In spite of its philosophical naiveté', it is also a refreshing stabilizer to the otherwise free-floating contest of ideological wills that often takes place in this discussion. This is a point that has arisen at each level I have discussed. Even though there is great room for ideological dispute, there is also an historical "center of narrative gravity," as I have previously indicated, that keeps us from moving too far from the empirical evidence.

The narrative of the West as a story of liberty becomes problematic, however, since the West loses its connection to the classical origins of the idea of liberty. Here I part ways with Braudel. The Western narrative reaches back to Ancient Greece and Rome whether or not the day-to-day lifestyle is similar enough. Braudel is confusing lifestyle with identity, or rather, making lifestyle too great a factor in determining identity.

Martin Lewis and Karen E. Wigen consider the concept of the West to imply a false binarism. The "East-West myth suggests that the globe is divided into fundamental and ultimately comparable groupings of humanity…this false binarism plays to a sense of European exceptionality, reinforcing the untenable distinction between Europe and Asia while doing nothing to solve the imbalance between the two."[69] What Lewis and Wigen miss, however, is the positive function of identification of a hostile other. The formulation of the "East" was certainly fraught with many methodological, factual and ethics problems, but the postulation of an Eastern "other" helped Westerners come to a sense of "Western" identity.

The definition of the West, like all identities, must always be understood in terms of its construction in terms of an "other," in this case, "the East," or more historically, "the Orient." This is, of course, part of the message of Edward Said's *Orientalism*.[70] Said points out on the very first page of his book that the East is "one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other," and that "the Orient has helped to define

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[67]Fernand Braudel, The *Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World During the Age of Phillip II*, trans. Sian Reynolds, New York: Harper and Row, 1976.
[68]Lawrence Birken, "What is Western Civilization?," *The History Teacher* 25 (1992), 454.
[69] Martin W. Lewis and Karen E. Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography*, Berkely: University of California Press, 1997, 48.
[70]Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1978.

Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience."[71] Said's thesis has led to an enormous outpouring of literature, but the core ideas for my purposes are (a) the idea that identity is constructed partly by contrast with an other, and (b) the notion of politicized or ideological definitions of identity. While Said has done a great service in uncovering the ideological function of the construction of the "East," not enough has been said about the positive delineation of the idea of the "West."

Turning to the idea of the possible decline or death of the West, we have an early warning from Oswald Spengler that decline is the inevitable fate of the West. Samuel Huntington also finds reason for pessimism regarding the West. It is easy to bemoan the rampant materialism, decadence and triviality of contemporary Western culture. It is also easy to see this state of affairs as unstable. Time will tell. But it will be contingent developments, trends and events that will tell the tale, not some inherent spirit of Thanatos or logic of disintegration.[72] That is not to say we cannot see certain negative trends afflicting Western civilization. The challenges are serious, but the only inevitabilities will be things like demographics and the limits to growth, not some logic of civilizations. Unlike humans, civilizations have no built-in genetic trigger for aging and death.

The case of China, which in addition to a mentality and nation may also be considered a civilization, is also instructive. Consider Wallerstein's argument against the whole idea of a continuous "China." Wallerstein denies that the term "China" is conceptually useful and amounts to reification. After admitting that most contemporary Chinese, Chinese thinkers and politicians would grant the term "China" to have an historical reality worth using in historical analysis, he goes on to question the ontological status of the concept by pointing to a methodological problem with the term. To support his claim he offers the conjecture that "China since 1945 or since 1850 is closer overall on a multitude of measures of social relations to Brazil since 1945/1850 than it is to the "China" of the Han dynasty." (Wallerstein, 1995, p.246).
While I can grant that there may certain kinds of question whose answer might require than we make clear distinctions between the social systems of Han China and contemporary China, it would be a mistake to believe that Han China simply ceases to exist to be replaced by a distinct "modern China." I would argue that doing so would be to make ontology overly dependent upon methodology. We may very well want to lump contemporary China and Brazil together when discussing characteristics of the semi-periphery of the modern world-system, but that does not mean we are warranted in severing the historical connections between modern and ancient China.

The key to understanding Wallerstein's mistake is to remember that China is a narrative construction in much the same way personal identity is a narrative construction. Following the logic of Wallerstein's argument, it would be better to think of my own identity as linked with other adults trained in philosophy than linked with the child at age six that later became the person I am today. But this is clearly

[71]Said, 1-2.
[72]See Jared Diamond's *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed: Revised Edition,* New York: Penguin, 2011.

absurd. Since John Locke, nearly all persuasive accounts of personal identity grant a large role to memory, which is the psychological equivalent to historical narrative. Wallerstein makes the mistake of believing that since he has rejected the narrative approach to historical writing he must also reject traditional notions of historical identity. But it may very well be Wallerstein's rejection of narrative that is the problem. It is a narrative connection that binds ancient and contemporary China. I argue the best way to think about civilizations, as with the other levels of identity, is to borrow again from Dennett's concept of the self as a center of narrative gravity. Maybe civilizations are not clearly defined entities but more general "centers of narrative gravity."

A better approach, therefore, would be to reserve ontological unity to narrative entities such as "China" while distinguishing the social or economic systems of ancient and modern China. I would argue that "China" has a narrative unity that is as real, indeed more real than the specific economic or social system that characterizes it at any given time. Interestingly, a similar problem arises in the philosophy of language where the question of reference is shown to be problematic. One popular theory of reference is that of Saul Kripke and Gareth Evans, who argue that the reference of a term is a function of its causal origin. As Evans puts it, "a necessary condition for x's being the intended referent of S's use of a name is that x should be the source of causal origin of the body of information that S has associated with the name."[73] Such a view of the reference fits nicely with a narrative conception of historical identity. China is therefore that entity denoted linguistically by the term "China," which, in turn, can be traced causally back to the Chin dynasty for the first uses of the term. That the term has denoted an entity with different borders (although always with some common territory) is no more problematic than the fact that our bodies have the same names from our early years to our old age even though the actual molecules are probably completely different.[74] What is important is that the term indicates a shared narrative history just as our personal names do. Note that names such as "the modern world system" have no such narrative history and are raised precisely to capture a different set of attributes than that denoted by terms like "China" or "France."

Globalization has led to the idea of the possibility of a world civilization. David Wilkinson conceived the idea of "central civilization" many years ago, and there does seem to be some plausibility to the idea that the world's separate civilizations are undergoing absorption into the civilization that began in Mesopotamia and grew eventually into the West.[75] George Ritzer's idea of McDonaldization draws upon the globalization phenomenon as well, but focuses more on what since Weber has been

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[73]Gareth Evans, "The Causal Theory of Names," in *Naming, Necessity and Natural Kinds*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977, 205.

[74]It is appropriate that many approaches to the question of personal identity rely heavily on memory, which may be thought of as a personal narrative history. See the articles by Locke, Quinton and Grice in John Perry, *Personal Identity*, Berkeley: University of California, 1975.

[75] Wilkinson, "Central Civilization," *Civilization and World Systems: Studying World-Historical Change*, ed, Stephen Sanderson, Walnut Creek: Altamira, 1995, 46-75.

known as the "rationalization process" that societies undergo when the "lifeworld" of traditional cultures becomes increasingly rationalized.[76] Ritzer also noted the reaction caused by the McWorld phenomenon, what he terms "Jihad," after the Islamic term for crusade. "Jihad" refers to the tribalistic and ethnic resistance to absorption into McWorld and a distaste for the elements of modernization.

A notable exception to those who are impressed by the globalization phenomenon is Samuel Huntington.[77] Contrary to the idea of a world civilization, which he vehemently rejects, Huntington famously postulates a clash of civilizations to characterize our present world politics. He is dismissive of the idea of a global identity and of the idea that Western civilization is absorbing the rest. He finds the idea that world commerce and American popular culture are transforming the identities of non-Westerners unpersuasive. "The argument now that the spread of pop culture and consumer goods around the world represents the triumph of Western civilization trivializes Western culture." The essence of Western civilization is the Magna Carta, not the Magna Mac. The fact that non-Westerners may bite into the latter has no implications for their accepting the former."[78] While Huntington may be correct in believing there is as yet no world civilization, his is far too overly dismissive of the phenomenon of globalization. When he goes on to state that "Somewhere in the Middle East a half-dozen young men could be well dressed in jeans, drinking coke, listening to rap, and between their bows to Mecca, putting together a bomb to blow up an American airliner,"[79] he is clearly missing the extent to which the bomb-making is a result of the young men feeling their civilizational identity is under assault while holding ambivalent attitudes toward this or that part of Western culture, toward "McWorld." Thus we see the growth of a world identity both in its positive manifestation as well as in the negative reaction to it.

Huntington is also rejecting Fukuyama's notion of an end of history and in this he is clearly correct.[80] Fukuyama's claim, as he himself now admits, quite premature. The clash of civilizations is evidence of the continued life of history. And if the clash of civilizations is not the only remaining motor of history, it is certainly one motor of contemporary history.

Huntington's quarrel with the one-worlders raises another important issue. Is it possible that people can have multiple identities? Huntington suggests as much in the following passage: "Two Europeans, one German and one French, interacting with each other will identify each other as German and French. Two Europeans, one German and one French, interacting with two Arabs, one Saudi and one Egyptian, will define themselves as Europeans and Arabs."[81] It is well-established in virtue ethics that as individuals we play multiple roles, father, son, professor, musician,

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[76]George Ritzer, *McDonaldization: The Reader*, Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press, 2002.
[77]Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of the World Order*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996.
[78]Huntington, *The Clash of Civilization*s, 58.
[79]Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 58.
[80]Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York: Avon Books, 1992.
[81]Huntington, p.67.

citizen etc. The same is certainly true of our cultural identities. I am a Michigander, an American, a Westerner and even an "Earthling." My "Earthling" identity I take to roughly the same as my humanity. We do assert human identity, after all, particularly when differentiating ourselves from animals.

A final point about civilizations and identity returns us to the question of the optimal amount of unity in an identity. One might argue that the Western and Islamic identities are too totalizing because they have a tendency to extend their form of life and to exclude other forms. One might even argue that the clash of civilizations is a result of this overabundance of unity in the West and Islam. This problem is parallel to the fascism problem we encountered at the level of national identity: too much unity can lead to negative consequences such as the construction of an "intolerable other."

VI. Level Six: World Systems

The transition from civilizations to world systems is both easy and difficult. It is easy because there is significant overlap between the two approaches. Indeed, some argue that they are the same.[82] It is not difficult to see the appeal of world-systems theory. While examining largely the same subject matter as civilizationists, it has the virtue of greater rigor than is sometimes the case with civilizationists. World systems theorists come mostly from sociology, although some are political scientists and most seem to concentrate on the economic realm, particularly international trade, which is very conducive to systems analysis.

On the other hand world systems theory is difficult to approach from the perspective of identity since it is scientistic in its approach and largely eschews narrativism. The rejection of narrative greatly undermines the use of the concept of identity as it has been used at the other levels I have discussed. It is interesting, however, that even within a more scientifically oriented methodology some of the patterns we have seen develop in our examination of identity theory reoccur with world systems theory's purely analytical notion. By "analytical" I do not mean to contrast with "empirical," for world systems theorists are nothing if not empirical; rather, I mean to contrast analytical with the hermeneutic identity concepts I have examined that are ultimately based on human culture and psychology. With the economic emphasis of world systems analysis, there seems to be little role for the cultural aspects of identity. Nevertheless, we will still find some of the same conceptual patterns develop in the debates among world systems theorists.

In "Hold the Tiller Firm: On Method and the Unit of Analysis," (1995) Immanuel Wallerstein argues at length about the proper unit of analysis is the world system. He writes,

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[82] David Wilkinson, "Civilization are World Systems," in *Civilization and World Systems: Studying World-Historical Change*, ed, Stephen Sanderson, Walnut Creek: Altamira, 1995, 248-260.

> In my venture into worrying about method, I decided that one key issue was the "unit of analysis," which is why one speaks of "world-systems analysis." The assumption is that the appropriate unit of analysis is a world-system, by which I originally meant something other than the modern nation-state, something larger than this nation-state, and something that was defined by the boundaries of an effective, on-going division of labor. Hence I started with spatial or geographic concerns. The basic metaphor of core-periphery is in origin and etymology a spatial metaphor. (Wallerstein, 1995, p.239)

Wallerstein's statement of approach supports my emphasis on historical identity, but it is of a different type, a type in which an attempt is made to reach a reflective equilibrium between explananda and explanans.

We have already seen that delineating boundaries, beginnings and endings is always a controversial process, and world systems analysis is no exception. Wallerstein is famous for originating world systems theory and moving the date of the beginning of capitalism back the 16th century. That set off a series of papers moving the date earlier and earlier until some theorists simply took it back 5000 years to the beginning of human history.

The criteria of identity or better, the unit of analysis, is connectivity. Much of the empirical work in world systems theory has been uncovering the existence of trade, markets, credit and banking in non-Western areas in non-modern time periods. World systems theory bases identity on connectivity rather than coherence, so the existence of trade networks of a certain quantitative level indicates the existence of a system.

Some argue that world systems theory has too liberal a view of connectivity. Mere trade between entities seems to suggest another entity that is the sum of the traders regardless of the form of life or mode of production characteristic of each entity. The logic of this approach is to create entities that are not there except theoretically. There is no requirement that any actor in the world acknowledge being part of a particular system. This, of course, will not trouble world systems theorists since they are not really doing anything like identity theory. They are utilizing "units of analysis." Cutting up reality is done on the basis of systemic usefulness rather than cultural identity.

Another criticism is that the entities can become both too large and too small depending upon how connected the trading networks are. Hence the arguments over whether there is only one world system or whether Ireland is a world system. It also creates the problem of comparing apples and oranges.

In favor of world systems theory, it is able to engage in analyses that seem to go beyond those of civilizationists. For example, Teggarts' argument that Chinese statesmen indirectly interact with Rome by making war on central Asian tribes that then are pushed to invade Roman areas makes more sense in the context of world systems theory than in civilizational analysis. World systems theorists can model the world to chart these sorts of long-range interactions between civilizations. Thus world systems theory does a service to historical thinking by creating another set of identities, or better, "unites of analysis," even if they are not identities adhered to by human beings in a cultural sense.

Another virtue of world systems theory is that it avoids problems such as Eurocentrism. World systems theory, particularly that of Frank and Gills, correctly shows that world history exhibits multiple centers and multiple peripheries, and rethinks the "rise of the West" by postulating several periods of dominance or hegemony in different parts of the world. These arguments are deeply political. They function to undermine the standard identity of the West in much the same way the postmodernists undermine national identity. Frank and Gills show us another, more negative side to Western identity. Instead of the civilization that arose bringing political liberty and free markets to the world, Western civilization or the Western world system is the temporary hegemon that broke through the more typical Asian dominance by confiscating gold and silver from the new World. The most considered position, in my view, about the West is that there is a bit of truth in each of these positions. While the West may have gained temporary hegemony from New World gold and silver, it is also the carrier of the idea of liberty. While it may be a way of demeaning "the other" in the process of defining itself, it also constructs an ideal that it tries to live up to. In the end there is no alternative but to accept the multiple and contradictory nature of the idea of the West. But this may be for the best since it keeps the argument going and thus keeps critique in play as the West tries to achieve its ideals.

Conclusion

These reflections on the notion of identity indicate that it has the following characteristics:

1. It is an essentially contested concept.
2. The logic of the concept at all levels is rooted in the philosophical and psychological ideas of selfhood.
3. In spite of the skepticism toward the notion, identity is generally granted at least a pragmatic role in action and communication.
4. It is formed in the interaction between self and other.
5. It is a political arena of argument in that human interests are at stake in the determinations we make of identity and that differentials of power are employed to achieve these interests.
6. Although there is a reality behind identities, identity is at least partly a construction and thus involves a logic of narrativity, which, in turn, implicates the temporal dimension of human existence and thus also the hermeneutic dimension of human life.
7. The beginnings and endings of identities are fuzzy.
8. Many identities are multiple.
9. Identities are not necessarily consistent: they may be contradictory at points.

This is possible because identities are not logical systems but narrative constructs. These characteristics show that the concept of identity is a dialectical one, but they are not meant to indicate that identity is totally without foundation. What counts as

foundational is often subject to argument, but these very arguments produce "cultural sediment" in the form of traditions that provide the material for further argument. The key here is that there are remnants of these on-going arguments that sometimes gain greater or lesser acceptance over time. Those that persevere become very real sediments that from then on are not to be denied, although, as we have seen, may be reinterpreted. At the level of the self, these are basically memories, which are then built into narratives. At higher levels of cultural complexity these sediments or remnants of identity are known as cultural artifacts. Selves, therefore, are not free-floating identities without any grounding in the cultural world. Nor are any of the other cultural unities such as classes, genders, nations or civilizations. This cultural sediment that arises out of the historical dialectic also arises out of the other fields of contested identity. Identity is contested in time, in history. History leaves traces in the form of material and ideational culture. These traces of culture form a sort of base line of interpretation in the contest of identity. Thus any argument over identity must necessarily refer to these cultural artifacts. And this is precisely what we see in those scholars who argue in favor of cultural identities. Delineating identities is not merely--at least not only--an aggressive imposition of one's interests upon others with similar identities; rather, it is an interpretive process that must make an argument on the basis of those cultural artifacts already associated with a particular form of identity.

This raises the question concerning the interrelationship between the concepts of identity, explanation, system and causal analysis. I believe that the relationship is a fluid one. Sometimes all we are interested in is identity as we saw with my examples from biography and art history. In these cases, there is a sense in which a thorough exposition of the identity constitutes an explanation. In other cases, identity serves as a starting point in the explanation, as the delineation of the explanandum, which as we have seen in the case of Wallerstein, is often half the battle in an historical argument. In these cases, the relationship between identity and explanation may be termed one of "reflective equilibrium." One adjusts the explanandum and explanans reciprocally in order to arrive at an explanatorily fruitful set of concepts and conceptual relationships. As I have indicated above, there are limits to the mutability of historical entities, however, and that one should be careful of too radically rearranging reality to fit the questions one asks of it. In such cases, it is better to coin new terms altogether than to do narrative injustice to a term in current and historical usage. In still other cases, the identity of the explanandum is taken for granted or understood to be unproblematic and the focus immediately goes to the explanans, which may or may not be nomological in character. What this shows is that history is a source of subject matter subject to several uses and open to many different methodologies.

What I believe I have produced above is ultimately a topology of cultural identity. My survey of the research shows there is clearly a common logic to identity at every level. What does this mean? It means we can expect arguments over identity to take certain forms, but it also means there are standard ways of adjudicating between them. It means that identity is temporal, that it may be expected to change over time. In the end, it means that identity has no more reality than that of a "center of narrative gravity," but also that it has no less. Identities are created, but they are nonetheless real. We must not reify identity, but we neither may we deny it.