Finally we are going to define civilization!

A definition just specifies what we agree that an arbitrary term means

There are no "true" definitions, and you can't "prove" a definition

instead, you accept a definition as a starting point, and then use it

as in "was Çatal Hüyük a city according to such-and-such a definition?"

We don't have to like each other's definitions, we just have to understand them or we can't communicate

A good definition would have several qualities:

It would capture the general idea or concept of the term

It would be explicit, specific, concrete, and clear

It would have criteria that are practical to apply

i.e. "towns of over 5000 people" is easy to apply; "large towns" is harder; "based on a shared religion" would be harder yet

Before we can define civilization, we need to define "city" and "state"

because many of the definitions of "civilization" use "cities" and "states" as criteria

There are three definitions of "city" in the (virtual) handout

They generally agree on the basic characteristics of a "city":

large population

a typical figure is at least 5000 people

dense settlement (urban)

lots of people who do things other than produce all their own food

craft producers, administrators, record-keepers, religious experts, etc.

these are supported by food surpluses produced by others

the city is part of a city-hinterland system

the city gets food from the surrounding hinterland

and residents of the hinterland get goods and services from the city

this may be organized on a market basis, or through something more centrally controlled like taxation, tribute, redistribution, etc.

this adds up to the city being economically complex, and the people living in it being economically interdependent

that is, the people who produce food, craft goods, and services need each others' products and services to continue living as they are accustomed to

The Whitehouse and Wilkins reading adds a few items that some anthropologists would not consider essential:

Large public buildings

A street system

Highly centralized administration

This selection includes two other idiosyncratic ideas
An unusual definition of "town" that says towns only exist as parts of more complex systems that include cities

They say that civilization can exist without cities, but cities cannot exist without civilization

So civilization must come before cities

This depends on how you define "city" and "civilization"

Many anthropologists would disagree

As we go through the Mesopotamian case and others, you might consider which seems to develop first, cities or civilization

The differences between the definitions are mostly matters of emphasis and details

General point: there is more to a city than just size

A bunch of people living in one place, without the rest of the features, do not amount to a city as anthropologists, sociologists, geographers, and others view it

There are seven definitions of "state" in the (virtual) handout

The "long list" definition of a "state" (Joseph Tainter)

The "short list" definition of a "state" (Stuart Fiedel)

The "non-kinship hierarchy and force" definition of a "state" (Robert McC. Adams)

The "coercive power" definition of a "state" (Robert Carniero)

The "three-level decision-making" definition of a "state" (Henry Wright and Gregory Johnson)

The "unique center" definition of a "state" (Ronald Cohen)

The "exploitation" definition of a "state" (Morton Fried)

These differ more than the definitions of "city", and in some interesting ways

Still, there are some areas of overlap:

A state is a kind of political organization

although some definitions throw in cultural features, too

States are typically said to involve, among other things:

A central authority or government

an administrative hierarchy, sometimes specified as comprising at least three levels

A monopoly on the legitimate use of force

Territorial sovereignty (a state has the right and power to decide what happens within its geographic boundaries, and to exclude other states from them)

Some definitions of “civilization” and “complex society”

I will often use those terms interchangeably, even though they are not quite identical

A textbook definition of civilization (Brian Fagan, People of the Earth)

Largely based on V. Gordon Childe's definition, below

Civilizations have the following characteristics (although not all must be present):

Urbanized society, based on cities

Large population in the region

that is, a large number of people interacting with each other

Note that this is a separate point from the presence of cities. One small city presumably isn't sufficient.

Very complex social organization
that is, many different statuses, degrees of wealth or power, social roles, occupational specialties, etc. creating a complex web of varied social interactions

– Symbiotic economy (i.e. composed of interdependent parts)

– the economy is based on centralized accumulation of capital and social status

– that is, concentration of wealth and status in a few hands or institutions - a wealthy class or aristocracy

– through tribute and taxation

– that is, there is a means of extracting surplus from some people to support the others who are concentrating it

– tithes (religious offerings that are more or less mandatory due to social pressure, and are usually standardized amounts or kinds) fit in this category, too

– allowing the support of hundreds or thousands of people who produce things or services other than food.

– Long-distance trade

– Division of labor and craft specialization

– Advances toward record keeping, science, math, writing

– Monumental architecture

– **The long list definition** of civilization (Charles Redman’s reorganization of V. Gordon Childe’s list)

– Civilizations generally have most of the following characteristics:

  – Primary traits (the organization of the society)

  – Cities

  – Full-time labor specialization

  – Concentration of surplus

  – that is, concentration of wealth, in the hands of institutions like "the church" or "the government", individuals, or both

  – Class structure

  – that is, people fall into economic or social status categories that have common points of view and interests, often different from those of other classes

  – classes often have different degrees of prestige and power

  – State organization

  – political hierarchy of power and administration; see the definitions

– Secondary traits (the material expression and results of that organization)

– Monumental public works

– meant at least in part to impress, like temples, palaces, city walls and gates, etc.

– Long-distance trade

– Standardized, monumental artwork

– big, impressive statues, murals, etc. in a specific, widespread style associated with the civilization

– Writing

– Arithmetic, geometry, astronomy

– **The “achievement” definition** of civilization (Richard Burger)

– a high level of cultural achievement in the arts and sciences
− as made visible in the form of material objects (buildings, sculpture, metalwork, etc.)
− ...probably always complex societies since such advanced cultural accomplishments imply the existence of
− a body of esoteric knowledge (religious symbolism, technical methods, sources of materials, etc.)
  − esoteric knowledge: things that most people would not know, and that probably take a lot of training to master, such as specialized techniques for certain crafts, complex or secret religious doctrines, writing, etc.)
− groups of specialized artisans
− a surplus of labor and/or food that can support the specialists
− the social mechanisms to appropriate it for non-domestic purposes.
  − that is, means of taxation, collecting tithes, etc.
  − "appropriating surplus": getting people to produce and hand over a surplus; by taxation, social or religious pressure, etc.
− ...this view of civilization presupposes a hierarchically stratified society
− ...only in a general sense, leaving the sociopolitical basis of each civilization open for investigation.
− ...it is possible to ask whether the city is invariably a precondition of civilization or simply a frequent correlate.”
− Note: this definition does not require cities, trade, state-level social organization… just a high level of "cultural achievement" which, according to Burger, could only exist if most of the rest were present

− The “social structure” definition of civilization (William Sanders and Barbara Price)
− The key feature of civilization is its complex social structure
  − which is made evident in several ways, described below
− Complex societies are stratified, that is, they have:
  − categories of people with different degrees of access to resources
  − a small, wealthy group in control of power
  − a larger, poorer group that is dominated
− Social class is more important than kinship in determining people’s roles and relationships
− Sanders and Price claim that this sort of society typically has monumental architecture, which is evidence of
  − a large, diversified labor force
  − specialists to control and coordinate it
  − taxation or redistribution to support it
  − that is, monumental architecture implies these kinds of complex social arrangements
− They say that civilizations are organized into a nested hierarchy of communities with at least three levels
  − For example:
    − at the lowest level there might be lots of little villages
    − at the next level, these are organized into counties, each of which is administered by a larger town that houses all the people and activities of a regular village, plus the people and facilities required to function as the county seat
at the next level, the counties are in turn lumped into provinces, each with a larger town yet that serves as a village, and as a county seat, and as a provincial capital
that is, there is a settlement hierarchy, from villages to towns to cities, with additional functions added to settlements at each step up the hierarchy
Comment: Sanders and Price suggest that all societies with cities are states, but not all states have cities. Cities are not listed as a characteristic of civilization in their definition.
Another comment: many definitions, including this one, emphasize the increasing importance of class over kinship. Is class really independent from kinship?
Aren't most people usually born into their class, and stay there?
Haven't lots of states been ruled by hereditary kings and aristocracies (based on kinship)?
Isn't family important even in our own state (the Kennedys, the Bushes)?
There may be some truth here, but it sounds like our own American cultural mythology
The “wasteful” definition of civilization (Kwang-Chih Chang)
“When we see an ancient society willing and able to devote considerable wealth for seemingly useless tasks, we would admire its people and call them civilized. The more wasteful they are, the greater their civilization looms in our eyes.”
by "waste", Chang means things like:
- monumental architecture
- religious art
- that are things that are remote from daily use or from subsistence needs
these are wasteful from a utilitarian point of view
- although the people who made and used them presumably thought they served a real purpose
- to medieval Catholics, there was nothing wasteful about building a cathedral
- but it was (probably) wasteful from a purely practical point of view
In order to be “wasteful”, a society must produce a big surplus to support the wasteful activities
but surplus does not automatically result from improved farming technology
people could just work less to produce the same amount
surplus is probably only produced if people are somehow convinced or coerced into producing more than they need
this probably only happens when there is an elite class to convince people to produce surplus, to organize them, collect the surplus, and administer its use
This concentrates society's wealth in the hands of a small segment of society
it gives them both the capability to create the wasteful hallmarks of civilization,
and the need to do so, in order to legitimize their privileged position
Chang suggests that large surpluses of wealth (and hence, civilization) arise only through interactions between classes
i.e. economic stratification
at a minimum, an elite class with access to a surplus of wealth, vs. a lower class
interactions between city and hinterland
cities where the surplus is concentrated and administered
surrounding rural hinterland that produces it
Relations with neighboring societies (states or civilizations) that have a similar level of complexity
Comment: do we agree with all of these? These are some complex ideas here.
Comment: For Chang, the presence of “wasteful” monuments and art automatically implies all the rest.
If so, this is a very practical, useful definition, really more like a theorem
   easy to tell if it applies
   all the economic and social features are automatically implied if there is “waste”; there is no need to find ways to document them separately
   but you would make a stronger case in a paper if you did so anyway
This is similar to Burger's definition, but focuses more on the magnitude of the use of resources than the quality of their use

**The short list definition** of civilization (Clyde Kluckhohn, cited in Whitehouse and Wilkins)
Civilized societies possess at least two of the following three characteristics:
- Towns of over 5000 people
- Writing
- Monumental ceremonial centers

**The "functional interdependence" definition** of complex society (Robert Wenke)
- complex societies are characterized by functional interdependence rather than functional redundancy
  functional redundancy:
  - society is made up of units (families, villages, etc.) that can do everything necessary to perpetuate their lifestyle
  functional interdependence:
  - neither the extended family nor the village could reproduce all the economic, social, and political activities necessary for physical and cultural survival
  - i.e. the units are dependent upon each other for goods and services that they cannot produce themselves
  - this is another way of saying “social complexity”

**The "cultural interaction" definition** of civilization (Eric Wolf)
civilizations are "cultural interaction zones pivoted upon a hegemonic tributary society central to each zone. Such hegemony usually involves the development of an ideological model by a successful centralizing elite of surplus-takers, which is replicated by other elites within the wider political-economic orbit of interaction."
what on earth does that mean?
- cultural interaction zone
  - a group of people who interact mostly with each other, and less with people outside their web of interaction
  - thus the members of a civilization share roughly the same culture, and are culturally different from people outside the “interaction zone”
- tributary society
  - a society in which elites extract surplus production (tribute)
    - from economically relatively independent producers (or communities of producers)
– by political or military coercion
– that is, these individuals or communities control their own means of production (land, canals, tools, mines, etc.)
– as in taxation of individuals, communities, companies, etc. that produce on their own, but then have to pay tribute
– or tribute that conquered communities must provide to conquerors
– this tributary society is **hegemonic**
  – the elites control the region
  – in any given place, there is generally only one group in control, not a chaos of competing gangs or warlords
  – such a society could include multiple political/economic units, each with its own elite
    – that is, one could talk about the hegemonic society of European nations, even though each nation is separate and has its own elite
    – the point is that all have the same general hegemonic structure European culture
– the **ideological model** is a worldview (often a religion, but also political beliefs) that makes the system of extraction and hegemony seem appropriate and natural
– like our ideological model in which "anyone can grow up to be President", success is based on merit and hard work, competition leads to the best products at the lowest prices, the government is democratic, and so on.
– ideas like these lead us to think of our government and economic system as normal, appropriate, and legitimate, so we cooperate with it
– if we lost our belief in too many of these ideas, we might become bitter, uncooperative, or even resist the government
– this is no airy-fairy intellectual game; real leaders really think about creating and maintaining ideologies. Why do you think you said the pledge of allegiance in school so often?
– this definition of civilization emphasizes interaction and shared culture (including ideology), along with the dominance of an elite that extracts tribute from producers.
– many features of the other definitions are not included
– but some of the features of other definitions probably have to be present, even if they are not specifically mentioned
  – like an interdependent economy
  – hierarchical, stratified society
  – the government (state) having a monopoly on the legitimate use of force
  – etc.