

Seventh Edition

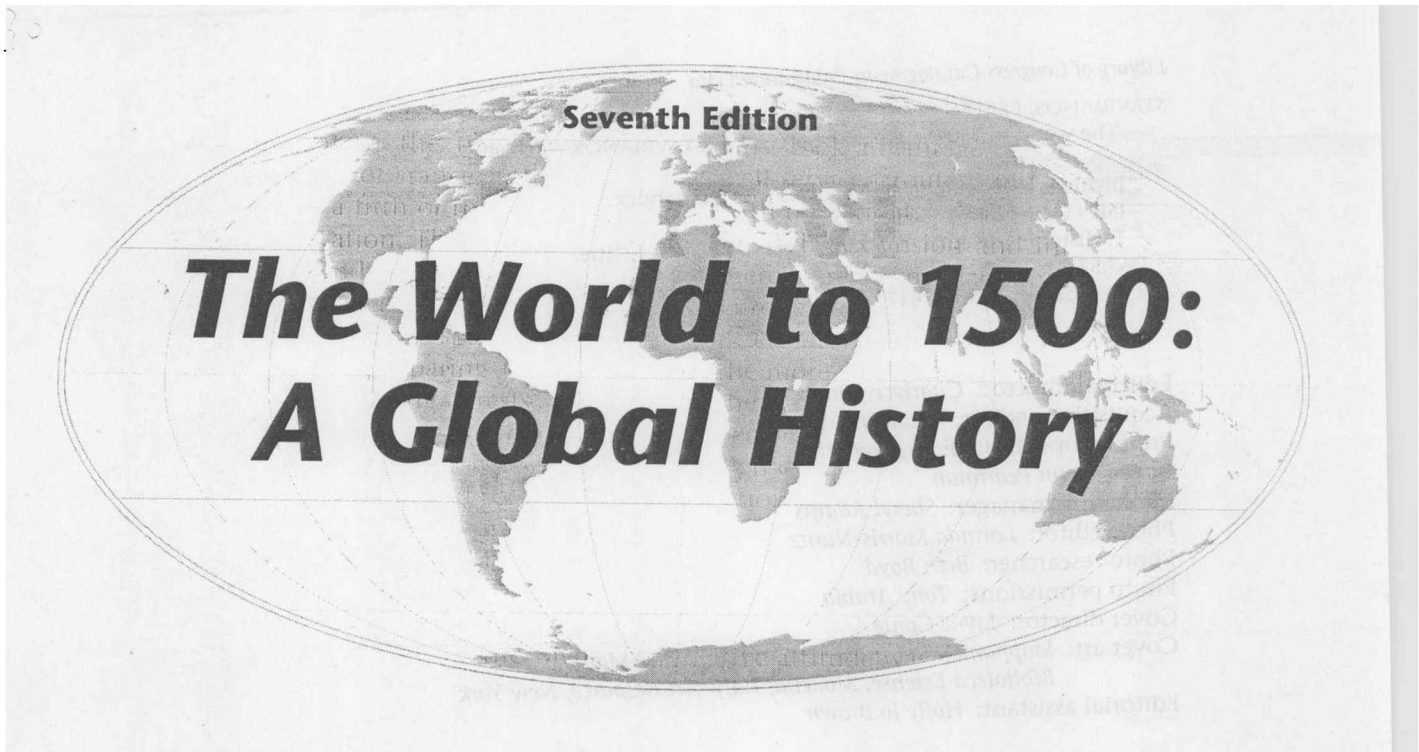


The World to 1500: A Global History

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Dedicated to Agustina Franco Serrano
with appreciation for her contribution
to the preparation of this edition

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From the Author to the Reader

Ours is a time of problems, of gigantic problems. Everything is being transformed under the magic influence of science and technology. And every day, if we want to live with open eyes, we have a problem to study, to resolve.

Pope Pius VI, May 18, 1969

WHY A TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY GLOBAL HISTORY?

Each age writes its own history. Not because the earlier history is wrong, but because each age faces new problems, asks new questions, and seeks new answers. This precept is self-evident today when the tempo of change is increasing exponentially, creating a correspondingly urgent need for new history posing new questions and offering new answers.

Our own generation, for example, was brought up on West-oriented history, and naturally so, in a West-dominated world. The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were an era of Western hegemony in politics, in economics, and in culture. But the two World Wars and the ensuing colonial revolutions quickly ended that hegemony, as evidenced by the disappearance of the great European empires from the maps of the world. The names and the colors on those maps changed radically, reflecting the new world that had emerged by the mid-twentieth century.

Slowly and reluctantly we recognized that our traditional West-oriented history was irrelevant and misleading in this world. A new global perspective was needed to make sense of the altered circumstances. The transition from the old to the new was achieved, albeit with much soul searching and acrimony. By the 1960s the reality of the shift was evident in the emergence of

the World History Association, in the appearance of the *Journal of World History*, and in the publication of the first edition of this text.

This brings us back to our original question: Why publish a new edition for the twenty-first century, only a few decades after the first edition? The answer is the same as the answer given to justify the first edition: Namely, a new world requires a correspondingly new historical approach. The postcolonial world of the 1960s necessitated a new global history. Today the equally new world of the 1990s, and of the twenty-first century, requires an equally new historical approach. The new world of the 1960s was in large part the product of the colonial revolutions. The new world of the 1990s, as Pope Pius VI noted, is the product of the "magic influence of science and technology." The pervasiveness of this influence is evident in the "gigantic problems" it has created in all aspects of our lives. For example, students of the late twentieth century doubtless remember their daily prostration under their wooden desks, probably wondering what protection those flimsy structures could offer against nuclear bombs.

That generation of students had to face up to not only new dangers to human life, but also to unprecedented peril to the mother Earth which had given birth to that life. Oceanographer Jacques Cousteau has warned: "Mankind has probably done more damage to the Earth in the twentieth century than in all previous human history."¹ Likewise the environmental organization Worldwatch Institute concluded in 1989: "By the end of the next decade the die will pretty well be cast. As the world enters the twenty-first century, the community of nations either will have rallied and turned back the threatening trends, or environmental deterioration and social disintegration will be feeding on each other."²

This dismal prospect of species and planet destruction has prompted the publication of a stream of books with titles such as *End of the American Century*, *End of the World*, *End of the Future*, and *End of History*. These gloomy titles seem to be justified if we view ourselves as but one link in a long species chain. Approximately 40 million different species of plants and animals now exist on planet Earth. Beyond that, somewhere between 5 and 40 billion species have existed at one time or another. Thus only one in a thousand species is still alive, making the survival record of Earth species a 99.9 percent failure. This record seems to provide statistical support for the current popularity of "end of" books.

The statistics are misleading, however, because of a fundamental difference between the human species and all those extinct species. The latter became extinct primarily because they proved incapable of adapting to changes in their environment, as occurred, for example, during the Ice Age. *Homo sapiens*, by contrast, being endowed with superior intelligence, was able to adapt environment to its needs by mastering fire, fashioning clothes, constructing shelters, and so forth. Thus *Homo sapiens* stands out as a unique species capable of adapting environment to its needs and thereby becoming the master rather than the creature of its destiny.

The crucial difference between master and creature is currently being dramatically illustrated by the changing relationship between humans and the smallpox virus, the most universally feared of all diseases. Appearing first in the Far East at least two thousand years ago, it reached Europe in the eighth century C.E. and then spread to the Americas after Columbus. With the European dispersal over other continents, the virus decimated overseas

populations lacking immunity. Hence the genocidal disaster suffered by Amerindians, Australian aborigines, and island populations in Polynesia and the Caribbean. The virus also persisted in Europe, reaching plague proportions, and ultimately carrying off one-third of the continent's population.

The taming of the virus began in 1796 when the English physician Edward Jenner discovered that a person inoculated and infected with cowpox was protected against smallpox. Today the smallpox-*Homo sapiens* relationship is completely reversed with a few stocks of the virus isolated in American and Russian laboratories. The last known case of smallpox was recorded in Somalia in 1977, and in 1980 the virus was declared eradicated in the wild.

Scientists have been recommending that the remaining stocks of the virus be destroyed lest it escape from storage, but a final decision has been deferred because of concern that the virus might be needed for future research. This concern has abated because scientists have been producing harmless clones of DNA fragments of smallpox and believe they now have the full genetic blueprint that will enable them to conduct research tests even if the virus itself were eliminated. In January 1996 the executive board of the United Nations World Health Organization agreed to set June 30, 1999 as the destruction date for all remaining stocks. So the killer virus, which for so long has tormented the human species, is now under lock and key, awaiting execution (and extinction) on a date set by its erstwhile victims. Thus *Homo sapiens* reigns supreme in both the animate and inanimate worlds.

["For the first time in the course of history," concludes physicist Werner Heisenberg, "man on earth faces only himself; he finds no longer any other partner or foe."] The great irony of our era is that this primacy is a root cause of our current global malaise and apprehension. Having eliminated all possible rivals, we humans no longer confront any foes. We confront only ourselves.

This new confrontation with our inner self rather than with the outside world is a formidable undertaking. It requires not merely the acquisition of more knowledge and technology, an enterprise in which we have proven unequalled. It requires also the crowning of that knowledge with an ethical compass to provide it with direction and purpose. In the seventeenth century, when the scientific revolution was emerging, the English philosopher Francis Bacon noted its potentiality and warned against its perils. He enthusiastically endorsed the pursuit of "knowledge and skill" through science, but he added that the pursuit should be conducted with "humility and charity," and not "for the pleasure of mind, or for contention, or for superiority to others, or for profit or fame, or power, or any of these inferior things; but for the benefit and use of life."³

The degree to which we have ignored Bacon's warning against "inferior things" is painfully registered in what we see daily on our TV screens, and also in Fordham University's annual report, *The Index of Social Health*. This monitors the well-being of American society on the basis of Census Bureau statistics regarding teenage suicide, unemployment, drug abuse, high school drop-out rate, and the availability of affordable housing. The *Index* recorded a drop from 75 in 1970 to 36 in 1991, which the director of the annual report labeled "awful."

The "awful" deterioration in social health is not limited to the United States. Oceanographer Jacques Cousteau recognized this in the course of a one-day walk in Paris from 7 A.M. to 7 P.M. During his walk he had a counter,

which he clicked "every time I was solicited by any kind of advertising for something I didn't need. I clicked it 183 times in all by the end of the day."

This experience is scarcely unique. It is the norm, regardless of whether one is walking in Paris or Athens or Los Angeles or Mexico City. But Cousteau, being the thoughtful scientist that he was, set out to probe the social significance of his personal experience. "It is the job of society, not of the individual person," he concluded from his probing, "to control this destructive consumerism. I am not for some kind of ecological statism. No. But when you are driving in the street and see a red light, you stop. You don't think the red light is an attempt to curb your freedom. On the contrary, you know it is there to protect you. Why not have the same thing in economics? . . . Responsibility lies with the institutions of society, not in the virtues of the individual."⁴

This conclusion, set forth in Cousteau's article entitled "Consumer Society Is the Enemy," is significant because throughout the world, consumer societies are becoming the norm. In China, for example, when Mao began his rule in 1949, the popular clamor was for the "big four" (bicycle, radio, watch, and sewing machine). Since then, consumer expectations have escalated to the "big eight," adding items such as color TV, refrigerator, and motorcycle. The list continues to lengthen, an outstanding recent addition being the automobile, which is becoming a status symbol among the billions of "have-nots" in the Third World. Between 1990 and 2000 the number of automobiles will increase in Indonesia from 272,524 to an estimated 675,000; in India from 354,393 to 1,100,000; and in China from 420,670 to 2,210,000.⁵

Environmentalists are concerned about the impact of millions of additional automobiles on the global atmosphere. Norway's former prime minister Gro Harlem Brundtland notes, however, that Western Europeans who initiated the industrial revolution and the ensuing atmospheric pollution, cannot now condemn "have-nots" to the status of "never-will-haves."⁶

These developments raise profound issues for individuals and for societies, today and in the foreseeable future. So we now find ourselves at a point where we can no longer avoid facing up to fundamentals. What is the meaning of life? What is the purpose of human existence? Francis Bacon confronted this head-on when he urged that the newly emerging discipline of science be employed for the "benefit and use of life" and not for "inferior things" such as "profit, or fame, or power." Thus Bacon posed the issue squarely: must *Homo sapiens* end up as *Homo economicus*, dedicated to achieving a bloated stomach and a bloated bank account?

The first objective of every society must be to satisfy basic human needs—food, shelter, health, education—so priority must be given to improving economic efficiency until those needs are satisfied. But once they are met, should economic productivity continue to receive priority regardless of individual, social, and ecological costs? This basic question has not received the consideration it warrants, so that by default, a mindless consumerism and materialism have spread over the planet, as Cousteau discovered during his walk in Paris.

Such equivocation cannot be sustained indefinitely. Consequently *Homo sapiens* now is engaged willy-nilly in a search for an alternative to *Homo economicus*, or more precisely, for an ethical compass to direct our rampant technology. This represents a great challenge to the human species—

the greatest in its meteoric career. Hitherto it has used its superior intelligence to master its environment, leading to its current primacy on planet Earth. But with this primacy achieved, and crumbling quickly into the current worldwide social and environmental degradation, humanity is confronted now with the novel challenge of achieving transcendence from the intelligent *Homo sapiens* to the wise *Homo humanus*—in short, from intelligence to wisdom.

In the forthcoming chapters we shall see that humans are facing up to the challenges of today, as they have repeatedly and triumphantly to those of the past. Consequently the world on the eve of the twenty-first century is undergoing unprecedented social experimentation and innovation. Their extent and significance are evidenced by the recent transformations throughout the globe. In China, for example, hardened revolutionaries are groping for “a communism with a Chinese face;” in the former USSR the economist Nikolai Shmelev advises his fellow countrymen not to fear losing their “ideological virginity”⁷; and even in the dominant market economies, capitalism itself is emerging in alternative forms. These include the American variety emphasizing untrammelled free enterprise; the German and Scandinavian varieties stressing the welfare state and worker participation in decision making; and the proliferating Asian melange with varying combinations of national economic planning, huge interlinked conglomerates, lifetime jobs in large companies, and government aid to export-oriented domestic industries.

Such effervescence suggests a twenty-first century of great potentiality as well as great peril. Lacking a crystal ball, historians cannot predict the outcome with any certainty. But they can predict with reasonable assurance a twenty-first century that is neither utopian nor dystopian, but a century of possibilities. Which of these will actually be realized will be determined by the readers of these lines who will be making fateful actions and decisions in forthcoming decades.

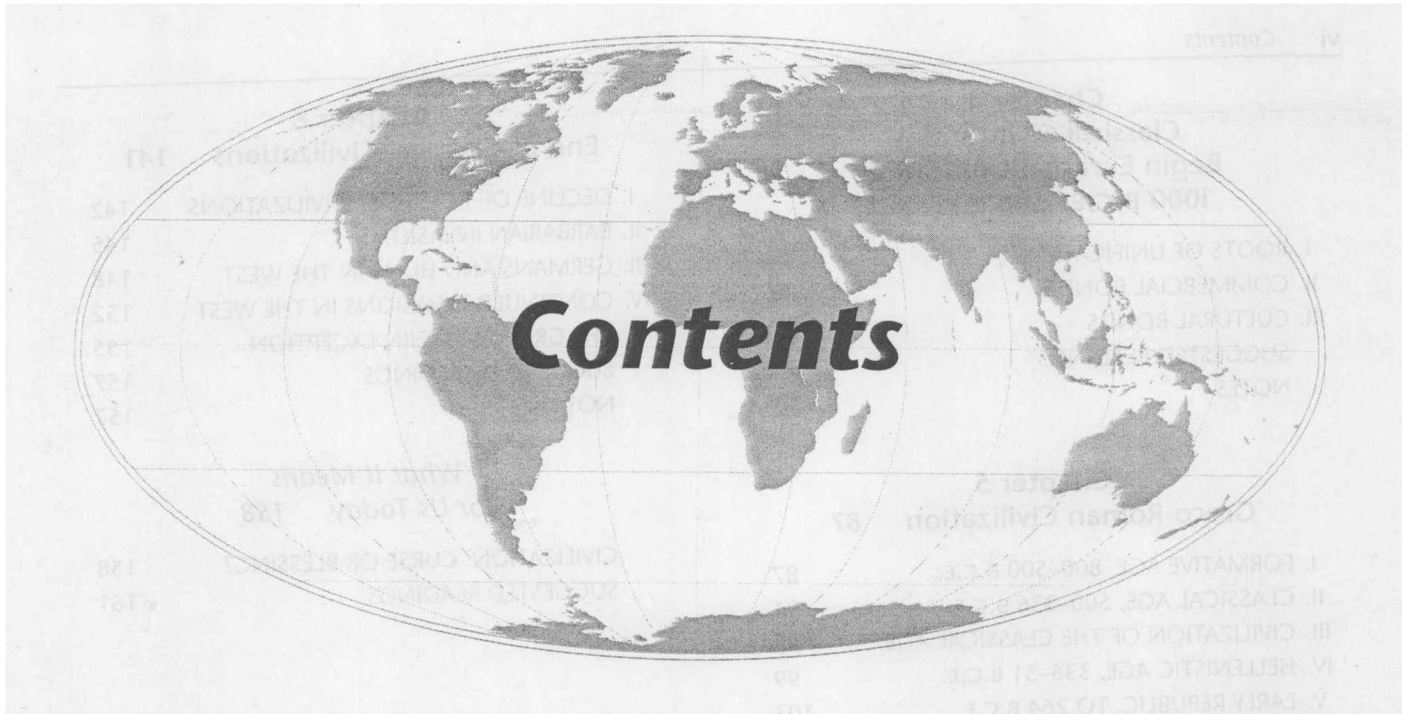
Given these circumstances, this is not a time for self-deluding utopian fantasies, nor is it a time for gloomy foreboding. Rather it is a time for hard-headed reappraisal of existing practices and institutions, retaining what works and discarding what does not—which is precisely what is going on now throughout the world. This new edition of the text has been prepared with the hope of facilitating the reappraising process and thereby contributing to Francis Bacon’s espousal of that which “benefits” life, and also to his rejection of “inferior things.”

NOTES

1. *New Perspectives Quarterly* (Summer 1996), pp. 48, 49.
2. *Worldwatch Institute Reports, State of the World 1987, 1989* (W.W. Norton, 1987–1989), pp. 194, 213.
3. Cited in A. Pacey, *The Culture of Technology* (MIT Press, 1983), pp. 114–15, 178–79.
4. J. Cousteau, “Consumer Society Is the Enemy,” *New Perspectives Quarterly* (Summer 1996) pp. 48, 49.
5. *New York Times*, June 6, 1996.
6. *New Perspectives Quarterly* (Spring 1989) pp. 4–8.
7. *New York Times*, June 25, 1987.

Acknowledgments

Grateful acknowledgment is made to the following authors and publishers for permission for quotation of the chapter opening epigraphs. Chapter 1, Clyde Kluckhohn, *Mirror for Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1949), p. 11. Chapter 2, R. J. Braidwood, "Near Eastern Prehistory," *Science* vol. 127 (June 20, 1958), 1419-30. Chapter 8, Robert Lopez, *The Birth of Europe*, © 1962 by Max Leclerc et Cie, Prop. of Librairie Armand Colin and © 1966 trans. by J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., and published in 1967 by M. Evans and Co., Inc., New York, by arrangement with J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd. Chapter 9, Lynn White, Jr., "Tibet, India, and Malaya as Sources of Western Medieval Technology," *American Historical Review* XLV (April 1960), 515, 526. Chapter 12, W. C. Bark, *Origins of the Medieval World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958), p. 66. Chapter 14, Lynn White, Jr., "Technology and Invention in the Middle Ages," *Speculum*, XV (1940), 156. Chapter 17, A. J. Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial*, © 1948 by Oxford University Press, Inc. Chapter 21, Lynn White, Jr., "Technology and Invention in the Middle Ages," *Speculum*, XV (1940), 156.



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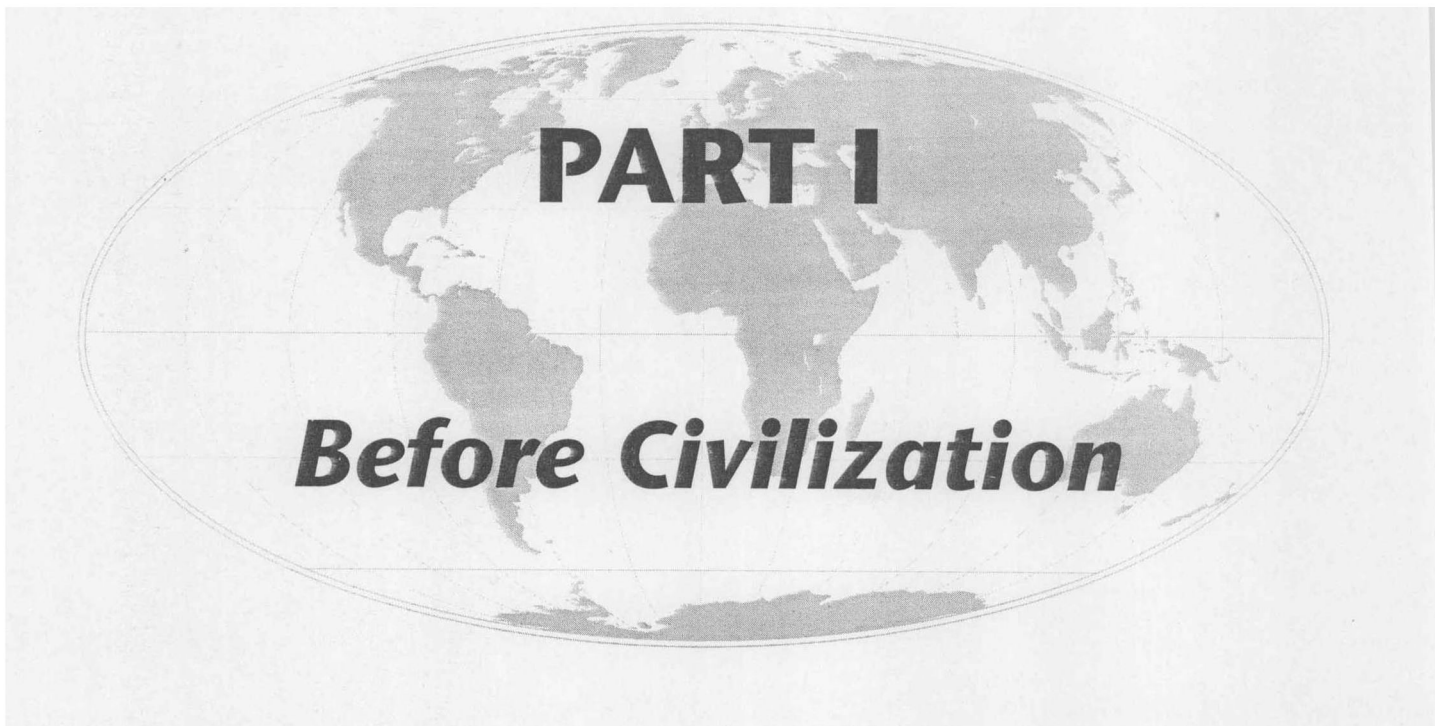
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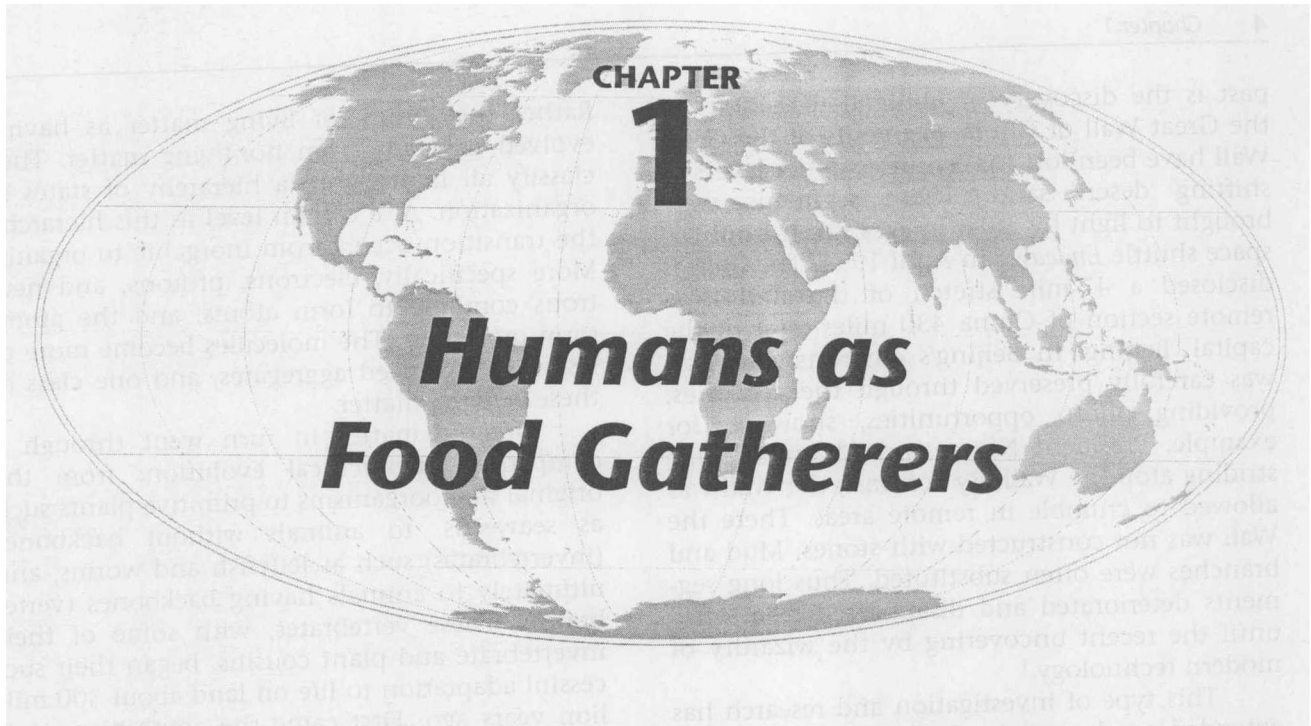
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Part I is concerned with the 4 million years before human civilization. The other parts of this book are devoted to history since humans became civilized, less than 6,000 years ago. Thus, by far the longest phase of human evolution will receive by far the briefest consideration. The reason for the disproportionate emphasis on the story of civilized people is the constantly accelerating tempo of human history. Geologic time is measured in billions of years, and human prehistory in thousands, but since the advent of civilization, the time unit has shrunk progressively to centuries and to decades, until fateful events now daily crowd us, unceasingly and inexorably. Indeed the pace of change has reached such proportions that it is a very real question whether the human species is capable of adjusting quickly enough to avoid obsolescence, or even extinction.

The disparity in the pace of events, and the corresponding disparity in emphasis in this study, should not lead us, however, to minimize the significance of what happened during prehistory. During those millennia, two developments provided the bedrock foundation for all later history. One was the gradual transition from hominid to *Homo sapiens*, or thinking human being. The other was the transformation of the human newcomer from a food gatherer who was dependent on the bounty of nature to a food producer who became increasingly independent of nature—the master of its own destiny. These two epochal events—the appearance of human beings and their invention of agriculture—are the subjects of the two chapters of Part I.



Anthropology holds up a great mirror to man and lets him look at himself in his infinite variety.

Clyde Kluckhohn

One of the outstanding achievements of modern peoples is their study and reconstruction of the past. The ancients had little understanding of what had happened before them. Thucydides, the most objective of Greek historians, began his study of the Peloponnesian War by stating that nothing of great importance had happened before his time. His ignorance of history prevented him from recognizing the unique glory and contribution of Athens. By contrast, our age is more history-minded than any other. We know more about the early history of the Egyptians, the Greeks, or the Chinese than they themselves knew. Furthermore, knowledge of our early human ancestors is being increased every year by the findings of scientists in various fields such as geology, archeology, anthropology, paleontology, and biology. To this list of fields should be added

space technology, which is being used to survey the surface and even the subsurface of the earth from satellites, space shuttles, and airplanes. These are equipped with sensors that can measure subtle variations in temperatures on the ground. Because sand, cultivated soil, vegetation, and different types of rocks have distinctive temperatures and emit heat at different rates, the sensors can identify loose soils that had been prehistoric agricultural fields or were covering ancient caravan routes or architectural ruins. Thus radar imaging systems have been used to map the ancient intercontinental Silk Road traversing Central Asia, as well as Maya causeways in the Guatemalan jungle and footpaths along the shore of Lake Arenal in Costa Rica.

A spectacular recent example of technology enabling us to recover lost chapters of our human