

# KEY TERMS

[CF courses are intended to provide students with a new perspective on the world and their place in it; this new perspective involves both an enriched historical understanding and a greater conceptual reach. Both will involve, for most students, a considerable extension of conceptual vocabulary. New facts require new terms and new abstractions for dealing with them. The following list of “key terms” is just a beginning; be prepared to add other key terms to this list as the course proceeds.]

## CIVILIZATION

*Preliminary definition:* a complex form of human culture, a type found only in complex societies. **Civilization** in this sense is sustained by a profound cosmological outlook or vision that promotes cultural creation, shapes human social interaction, and defines institutional structure.

**CIVILIZATION** may be seen as a bundle of cultural traits often including the appearance of cities whose populations are supported by intensive agriculture, stratification into high and low social classes, the emergence of writing, etc. While the “causes” of **civilization** are not fully understood, it appears to be the case that **civilization** has arisen independently at different times and in many parts of the world; it is not the exclusive invention of any one people. One term for independently-evolved **civilizations** is *pristine*.

## CLASS

*Preliminary definition:* within a society, a **class** is a collection of individuals enjoying roughly the same status (that is, all members of the **class** are entitled to similar marks of respect and have access to comparable shares of the society’s goods).

The emergence of social **classes** is a feature of complex societies (for this reason, simple societies are sometimes referred to as classless or egalitarian). Prior to the industrial and democratic revolutions, we can usually distinguish three **classes**: the aristocracy, the middle **classes**, and the peasants. In this period, members of the aristocracy and the middle **class** together are outnumbered by the peasants by a factor of about 20 to 1. For all practical purposes, then, members of the two **classes** constituted an elite stratum of society. The **class** structure becomes more complex as we pass through the democratic and industrial revolutions. The old aristocracy becomes less important. A large industrial working **class**, the proletariat, appears, as does a new **class** of the owners of the new industries, a group called the bourgeoisie by Karl Marx.

*Note:* within a given society, males and females of the same **class** may be treated differently, as may older and younger members of the same **class**. Another important institution which has some bearing on the question of **class** is that of slavery (it is important to note that the social and legal nature of slavery differs greatly among societies that practice it). Legal codes often shed a great deal of light on the question of how **class** is institutionalized in a given society.

## COSMOLOGY

*Preliminary definition:* A society’s shared picture of the world is its **cosmology**. A society’s **cosmology** is an essential part of its culture, informing individuals about their world and their place in it. Many **cosmologies** express a relation between living and dead members of a society by providing a picture of an afterlife, and

## KEY TERMS

their representations of gods, demons, rewards, and punishments reinforce socially approved behavior and discourage behavior that is not socially approved. **Cosmologies** also have an ideological function, since the ordered world they depict is seen as the source of power wielded by elites. Finally, **cosmologies** underwrite the ultimate sacred propositions making up what we might call the social contract in the broadest sense: valued behavior like truthfulness, and more generally not harming members of one's social group, are placed beyond question by the myths and rituals, the art and architecture, that express a **cosmology**.

## CULTURE

*Preliminary definition:* the sum total of knowledge, attitudes, and habitual behavioral patterns shared and transmitted by members of the same human society. The means by which **culture** is transmitted is education in the broadest sense: it is thus the sum of the socially acquired components of human existence. The capacity to learn a language is innate; what language we learn first, or whether we learn any language at all, depends on the **culture** surrounding us, and that **culture** is borne by a group of individuals, a **society**. In this sense, then the institutions by which an individual is acculturated constitute a bridge between **culture** and society. **Culture** as a mental fact is an inference from the observed behavior or surviving artifacts (including written records) of a society.

## EMPIRE

*Preliminary definition:* a group of nations under a single central political authority. A clear modern example of **empire** in this

sense is the Austro-Hungarian **Empire**, whose hyphenated name recognizes the two chief nations, Austria and Hungary, embraced in its single political system. Like most empires, the Austro-Hungarian was relatively short-lived, as was the more recent example, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Within that empire, too, many nations and nationalities were present; more than a dozen of these are now politically independent and sovereign states. An **empire** in this sense need not have an emperor as its head; for several centuries Rome had a sizable **empire** administered by the Senate.

The control exerted by the central authority of an **empire** may be direct, incorporating the subject nations into a single political system, or indirect, relying on the threat of force and the compliance of an elite to keep neighboring states in line. An **empire** of the first kind is called territorial; an **empire** of the second kind is called hegemonic. In its heyday, the Soviet Union incorporated the Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia as components of its territorial **empire**; while neighboring Poland, East Germany, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, etc. were "satellite" states in its hegemonic **empire**.

## INSTITUTION

*Preliminary definition:* the link between culture and society: regularly established practices which translate ideas into reality. Example: in a given society, the institution of marriage regulates relations between males and females for the purpose of reproduction and the transmission of culture (though note: marriage has other functions as well). Other important **institutional** functions are: to govern, defend, teach, entertain, cure mind and body, and offer meaning. In this course, then, we will be primarily concerned with political,

## KEY TERMS

economic, military, religious, and educational **institutions**.

**Institutions** may also be seen as problem-solving mechanisms, concerned with meeting basic social needs. In this light consider the quotation from Walter Goldschmidt: "What is consistent from culture to culture is not the institution; what is consistent are the social problems. What is recurrent from society to society is solutions to these problems."

## MASTER INSTITUTION

*Preliminary definition:* the central, dominant, controlling institution in a given society, for which it serves as the ultimate source of integrating symbols and spiritual authority. Note that the term **master institution** differs from institution in a very crucial way. Institutions are an observable part of our world; they have a verifiable, concrete reality. **Master institutions**, on the other hand, is an ideal concept; in a given society, a certain institution may come close to satisfying the definition, but it is arguable whether any institution in any society has ever completely satisfied it.

## NATION

*Preliminary definition:* a people bound together by ethnic, religious, or linguistic ties. People who recognize themselves as being of one blood, sharing one faith, speaking one language, or springing from common soil may conceive of themselves as belonging to a single **nation**, regardless of the state institutions under which they find themselves. As empires disintegrate, nations may detach themselves and form states. With the breakup of the former Yugoslavian state, which was an empire in our sense, the Serbian and Croatian **nations** each acquired a state of their own, but many ethnic Serbs and Croats -- that

is, people who belonged to the Serbian and Croatian **nations**, live outside these states in neighboring states like Bosnia. The civil war in Bosnia is a consequence of the poor match between **nation** and state in this region of the world.

It will be seen from this discussion that the concept of **nation** is prior to and broader than that of the state; hence "NATIONALITY" is not the same as "citizenship." At the same time, in the minds of those who belong to it, a **nation** is often linked to a particular territory. Thus the term **nation**, though broader than state, is richer and more concrete than society. In the **nation states** of the modern world., the presence of minority nationalities often creates a problem for the central government; cf. The Basque and Catalan separatists in Spain, who are seeking political institutions that will express their sense of identity as **nations**, or the nationalist movements currently vexing the Canadian government as the French-speaking population of Quebec demands to be recognized as a **nation** or perhaps as a **nation state**.

## SOCIETY

*Preliminary definition:* a group of individuals who interact with one another more than with other individuals, who collaborate for certain goals, and who as a group are capable of maintenance and reproduction. It is important to bear in mind that any **society** must be capable of extracting enough energy from its environment to sustain the individuals composing it and to provide for a new generation; otherwise, the **society** disintegrates.

**Societies** range in scale from groups of tens of individuals in which face-to-face interaction occurs daily among all members of the group (as in hunter-gatherer

## KEY TERMS

bands) to groups of hundreds of millions of individuals where any given pair of individuals may never interact in the course of their entire lifetime (as in the larger mass **societies** of the modern nation-states).

### STATE

*Preliminary definition:* “a form of government in which authority is backed by force. In a **state**, political power is institutionalized, enacted, and official, and it employs, threatens, or implies the actual use of force.” (Elman R. Service, *Origins of the State and Civilization*, New York: Norton, 1975, p. 14; adapted).

The emergence of civilization as a pattern of culture is often, though somewhat controversially, linked to the emergence of the **state** as a set of political institutions.

At the outset of this course, we will merely note that the **state** and civilization both appear when a certain level of social complexity has been reached.

*Note:* it follows from the above definitions of **State** and nation that the United States of America is not a convenient example to cite when explaining or defining these terms as we do in CF 3333. A **state** (in our sense) is not a part of a whole called a nation (in our sense), and it takes a very careful reading of constitutional law, and of American history, to fit this example to the terms as we have defined them for this course. *Another note:* ponder the concept of the state as you read Marx. He believed that the state was a tool of the capitalist class. The **state**, he predicted, would wither away with the triumph of the proletariat.