Pursuing its ambitious development, the ICCI blog has decided now to open a "video games" section. And today, we are discussing the release of Civilization V, the last sequel of one of the most famous series in the history of video games.

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OK I was just kidding. There won't be any video games section. But why not after all? Video games are often portrayed as violent and simplistic, consisting only in racing cars or shooting people. Some of them, however, are quite different. Some are about breeding a pet, playing guitar or... developing a culture. In Civilization V, the player leads a civilization from prehistoric times into the future, achieving one of a number of different victory conditions through research, diplomacy, expansion, economic development, government and military conquest.

Of course, one could argue that the view developed in Civilization is quite unrealistic, reductionist and deterministic. You have to go through certain political and technical stages to develop and expand your civilization. In a way, it evokes the old evolutionist theories in anthropology. But is Civilization that bad from an anthropological perspective?

First, the whole process sounds quite realistic, and even familiar. Indeed, it shares with Diamond's Guns, Germs and Steel (and others) the assumption that geography, natural resources and technology partly determines political development.

Of course, Civilization is far from being a kind of natural experiment in silico (but some have tried to use massively multiplayer games to study the evolution of cooperation). However, it is not as deterministic as it may look like. Consider the domain of technology for instance. Relationships between each technology are far from straightforward as it appears in technology trees.
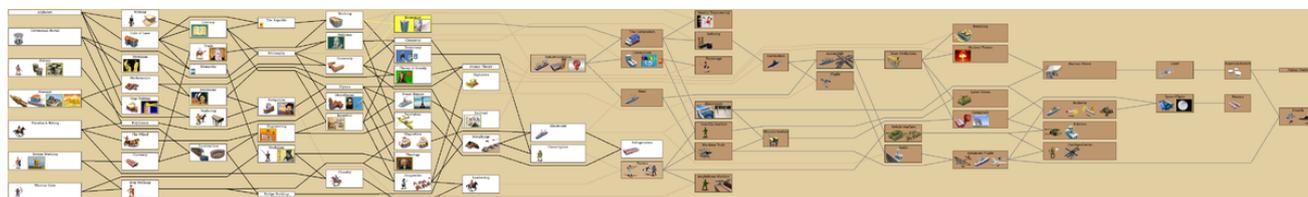
Finally, one could oppose the western or eurocentric vision of the world in which Europe or America's civilization stand as the final stage of civilization. However, on the whole, I rather find Civilization quite liberating. By using a variety of historical references from Harun al-Rashid for Arabia to Oda Nobunaga for Japan and Ramkhamhaeng for Siam, Civilization stands in opposition to some views according to which all technologies, political regimes and intellectual wonders invented in human history are not accessible to any culture. At a time when newspapers are full of folk theories about European genius, American ethics or Confucian culture, it may a good thing to see such a popular media like video games demonstrating how small differences in natural resources and geography can create huge inequalities in economic development. There is nothing particularly

European in democracy, science or economic development tell us Civilization V. No [protestant ethics](), no [christian metaphysics](), no [western values](). It was just a matter of good luck at the beginning of the game!

Next time, I'll try to blog on the implementation of massive modularity in [World of Warcraft]()'s characters or on the epidemiology of representations in [The Sims]()...