

our social relationships and our administration, in painting, literature, and dancing. Men are becoming the apes of robots." . . .

"Technological Civilization can create comforts, but it cannot create the Spirit. And without the Spirit there is no genius. A society without men of genius is doomed. This new Civilization, which is now superseding Western Civilization and which will eventually conquer the entire world, will perish in its turn." . . .

"The downfall of technocracy will be followed by a rebirth of human and spiritual values. This great light will probably come from the East, from Asia. But not from Russia. The Russians have bowed down and worshipped the electric light of the West and will suffer the same fate as the West. It is the Orient that, at length, will conquer this technocracy of ours and will keep electricity for lighting streets and houses instead of building altars to it and bowing down before it as Western society, in its barbarism, is doing today. The men from the East will not try to floodlight the hidden ways of life and the soul by means of neon tubes. They will subdue and control the machines of Technological Civilization by the power of their own spirit and genius, as a conductor controls his orchestra by means of an instinctive sense of musical harmony. But we shall not live to see those times—in our age man worships the electric sun like a barbarian."

"So we shall die in chains?" said the attorney.

"We ourselves almost certainly shall—as prisoners of the technological barbarians. My novel will be the epilogue of this phase of man's existence—this chapter of man's history."

"What will it be called?"

"*The Twenty-fifth Hour*," said Traian. "The hour when mankind is beyond salvation—when it is too late even for the coming of the Messiah. It is not the last hour; it is one hour past the last hour. It is Western Civilization at this very moment. It is NOW."

### ARNOLD TOYNBEE: *A Study of History* \*

Since 1925 the English historian Arnold Toynbee (1889–1975) has served as Director of Studies of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, London. The first three volumes of his *Study of History*, immensely popular in D. C. Somervell's abridgment, appeared in 1934. "Mr. Toynbee's study," says Crane Brinton, "belongs . . . with such

\* From *A Study of History* by Arnold J. Toynbee, abridged by D. C. Somervell, published under the auspices of the Royal Institute of International Affairs. Copyright 1946 by Oxford University Press, Inc. Pp. 245, 247–8, 251, 253–4, 552–4.

works as those of . . . St. Augustine, Vico, Buckle, and Spengler. It is philosophy of history, metaphysics, even theology, not narrative history."

### The Breakdowns of Civilizations

FOR OUR present purpose it is enough to observe that of the living civilizations every one has already broken down and is in process of disintegration except our own.

And what of our Western Civilization? It has manifestly not yet reached the stage of a universal state. But we found, in an earlier chapter, that the universal state is not the first stage in disintegration any more than it is the last. It is followed by what we have called an 'interregnum,' and preceded by what we have called a 'time of troubles,' which seems usually to occupy several centuries; and if we in our generation were to permit ourselves to judge by the purely subjective criterion of our own feeling about our own age, the best judges would probably declare that our 'time of troubles' had undoubtedly descended upon us.

\* \* \*

What, then, causes the breakdowns of civilizations? Before applying our own method, which involves the marshalling of the relevant concrete facts of history, we had better pass in review certain solutions of the problem which soar higher in search of their evidence and rely for proof either on unprovable dogmas or else on things outside the sphere of human history.

One of the perennial infirmities of human beings is to ascribe their own failure to forces that are entirely beyond their control. This mental manoeuvre is particularly attractive to sensitive minds in periods of decline and fall; and in the decline and fall of the Hellenic Civilization it was a commonplace of various schools of philosophers to explain the social decay which they deplored but could not arrest as the incidental and inevitable effect on an all-pervasive onset of 'cosmic senescence.' This was the philosophy of Lucretius (cf. *De Rerum Natura*, Bk. II, 11. 1144–74) in the last generation of the Hellenic time of troubles, and the same theme recurs in a work of controversy written by one of the Fathers of the Western Church, St. Cyprian, when the Hellenic universal state was beginning to break up three hundred years later. He writes:

'You ought to be aware that the age is now senile. It has not now the stamina that used to make it upstanding, nor the vigour and robustness that used to make it strong. . . . There is a diminution in the winter rains that give nourishment to the seeds in the earth, and in the summer heats that ripen the harvests. . . . This is the sentence

that has been passed upon the World; this is the law of God; that what has been must die, and what has grown up must grow old.'

\* \* \*

However, our latter-day Western advocates of a predestinarian or deterministic explanation of the breakdowns of civilization do not attempt to link up the destinies of these human institutions with the destiny of the Physical Universe as a whole. They appeal instead to a law of senescence and death with a shorter wave-length, for which they claim jurisdiction over the whole kingdom of life on this planet. Spengler, whose method is to set up a metaphor and then proceed to argue from it as if it were a law based on observed phenomena, declares that every civilization passes through the same succession of ages as a human being; but his eloquence on this theme nowhere amounts to proof, and we have already noticed that societies are not in any sense living organisms. In subjective terms societies are the intelligible fields of historical study. In objective terms, they are the common ground between the respective fields of activity of a number of individual human beings, who are themselves living organisms but who cannot conjure up a giant in their own image out of the intersection of their own shadows and then breathe into this unsubstantial body the breath of their own life. The individual energies of all the human beings who constitute the so-called 'members' of a society are the vital forces whose operation works out the history of that society, including its time-span. To declare dogmatically that every society has a predestined time-span is as foolish as it would be to declare that every play is bound to contain just so many acts.

We may dismiss the theory that breakdowns occur when each civilization draws near the close of its biological life-span, because civilizations are entities of a kind that is not subject to the laws of biology; but there is another theory which suggests that, for some reason unexplained, the biological quality of the individuals whose mutual relations constitute a civilization mysteriously declines after a certain or uncertain number of generations; in fact, that the experience of civilization is in the long run essentially and irremediably dysgenic.

\* \* \*

We have now disposed of three deterministic explanations of the breakdowns of civilizations: the theory that they are due to the 'running down' of the 'clockwork' of the Universe or to the senescence of the Earth; the theory that a civilization, like a living organism, has a life-span determined by the biological laws of its nature; and the theory that the breakdowns are due to a deterioration in the quality of the individuals

participating in a civilization, as a result of their pedigrees' accumulating too long a tale of 'civilized' ancestors. We have still to consider one further hypothesis, generally referred to as the cyclical theory of history.

The invention of this theory of cycles in the history of Mankind was a natural corollary to the sensational astronomical discovery, apparently made in the Babylonian Society at some date between the eighth and sixth centuries B.C., that the three conspicuous and familiar cycles—the day-and-night, the lunar month and the solar year—were not the only examples of periodic recurrence in the movements of the heavenly bodies; that there was also a larger co-ordination of stellar movements embracing all the planets as well as Earth, Moon and Sun; and that 'the music of the spheres', which was made by the harmony of this heavenly chorus, came round full circle, chord for chord, in a great cycle which dwarfed the solar year into insignificance. The inference was that the annual birth and death of vegetation, which was manifestly governed by the solar cycle, had its counterpart in a recurrent birth and death of all things on the time-scale of the cosmic cycle.

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Does reason constrain us to believe, quite apart from any alleged influence of the stars, in a cyclic movement of human history? Have we not, in the course of this Study, ourselves given encouragement to such a supposition? What of those movements of Yin and Yang, Challenge and Response, Withdrawal and Return, Apparentation and Affiliation, which we have elucidated? Are they not variations on the trite theme that 'History repeats itself'? Certainly, in the movement of all these forces that weave the web of human history, there is an obvious element of recurrence. Yet the shuttle which shoots backwards and forwards across the loom of Time in a perpetual to-and-fro is all this time bringing into existence a tapestry in which there is manifestly a developing design and not simply an endless repetition of the same pattern. This, too, we have seen again and again. The metaphor of the wheel in itself offers an illustration of recurrence being concurrent with progress. The movement of the wheel is admittedly repetitive in relation to the wheel's own axle, but the wheel has only been made and fitted to its axle in order to give mobility to a vehicle of which the wheel is merely a part, and the fact that the vehicle, which is the wheel's *raison d'être*, can only move in virtue of the wheel's circular movement round its axle does not compel the vehicle itself to travel like a merry-go-round in a circular track.

This harmony of two diverse movements—a major irreversible movement which is born on the wings of a minor repetitive movement—is

perhaps the essence of what we mean by rhythm; and we can discern this play of forces not only in vehicular traction and in modern machinery but likewise in the organic rhythm of life.

\* \* \*

Thus the detection of periodic repetitive movements in our analysis of the process of civilization does not imply that the process itself is of the same cyclic order as they are. On the contrary, if any inference can legitimately be drawn from the periodicity of these minor movements, we may rather infer that the major movement which they bear along is not recurrent but progressive. Humanity is not an Ixion bound for ever to his wheel nor a Sisyphus for ever rolling his stone to the summit of the same mountain and helplessly watching it roll down again.

This is a message of encouragement for us children of the Western Civilization as we drift to-day alone, with none but stricken civilizations around us. It may be that Death the Leveller will lay icy hand on our civilization also. But we are not confronted with any *Saeva Necessitas*. The dead civilizations are not dead by fate, or 'in the course of nature,' and therefore our living civilization is not doomed inexorably in advance to 'join the majority' of its species. Though sixteen civilizations may have perished already to our knowledge, and nine others may be now at the point of death, we—the twenty-sixth—are not compelled to submit the riddle of our fate to the blind arbitrament of statistics. The divine spark of creative power is still alive in us, and, if we have the grace to kindle it into flame, then the stars in their courses cannot defeat our efforts to attain the goal of human endeavor.

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#### The Disintegrations of Civilizations

These considerations and comparisons suggest that we are already far advanced in our time of troubles; and, if we ask what has been our most conspicuous and specific trouble in the recent past, the answer clearly is: nationalistic internecine warfare, reinforced, as has been pointed out in an earlier part of this Study, by the combined 'drive' of energies generated by the recently released forces of Democracy and Industrialism. We may date the incidence of this scourge from the outbreak of the French Revolutionary wars at the end of the eighteenth century. But, when we examined this subject before, we were confronted by the fact that, in the modern chapter of our Western history, this bout of violent warfare was not the first but the second of its kind. The earlier bout is represented by the so-called Wars of Religion which devastated Western Christendom from the middle of the sixteenth to the middle of the seventeenth century, and we found that between these

two bouts of violent warfare there intervenes a century in which warfare was a comparatively mild disease, a 'sport of kings,' not exacerbated by fanaticism in either the religious sectarian or the democratic national vein. Thus, in our own history too, we find what we have come to recognize as the typical pattern of a time of troubles: a breakdown, a rally and a second relapse.

We can discern why the eighteenth-century rally in the course of our time of troubles was abortive and ephemeral; it was because the toleration achieved by 'the Enlightenment' was a toleration based not on the Christian virtues of faith, hope and charity but on the Mephistophelian maladies of disillusionment, apprehension and cynicism. It was not an arduous achievement of religious fervour but a facile by-product of its abatement.

Can we at all foresee the outcome of the second and still more violent bout of warfare into which our Western World has fallen in consequence of the spiritual inadequacy of its eighteenth-century Enlightenment? If we are to try to look into our future, we may begin by reminding ourselves that, though all the other civilizations whose history is known to us may be either dead or dying, a civilization is not like an animal organism, condemned by an inexorable destiny to die after traversing a predetermined life-curve. Even if all other civilizations that have come into existence so far were to prove in fact to have followed this path, there is no known law of historical determinism that compels us to leap out of the intolerable frying-pan of our time of troubles into the slow and steady fire of a universal state where we shall in due course be reduced to dust and ashes. At the same time, such precedents from the histories of other civilizations and from the life-course of nature are bound to appear formidable in the sinister light of our present situation. This chapter itself was written on the eve of the outbreak of the General War of 1939-45 for readers who had already lived through the General War of 1914-18, and it was recast for re-publication on the morrow of the ending of the second of these two world wars within one lifetime by the invention and employment of a bomb in which a newly contrived release of atomic energy has been directed by man to the destruction of human life and works on an unprecedented scale. This swift succession of catastrophic events on a steeply mounting gradient inevitably inspires a dark doubt about our future, and this doubt threatens to undermine our faith and hope at a critical eleventh hour which calls for the utmost exertion of these saving spiritual faculties. Here is a challenge which we cannot evade, and our destiny depends on our response.

'I dreamed, and behold I saw a man cloathed with rags, standing in a certain place, with his face from his own house, a book in his hand and a great burden upon his back. I looked, and saw him open the book and read therein; and as he read he wept and trembled; and, not

being able longer to contain, he broke out with a lamentable cry saying "What shall I do?"

It was not without cause that Bunyan's 'Christian' was so greatly distressed.

'I am for certain informed (said he) that this our city will be burned with fire from Heaven—in which fearful overthrow both myself with thee my wife and you my sweet babes shall miserably come to ruine, except (the which yet I see not) some way of escape can be found, whereby we may be delivered.'

What response to this challenge is Christian going to make? Is he going to look this way and that as if he would run, yet stand still because he cannot tell which way to go? Or will he begin to run—and run on crying 'Life! Life! Eternal Life!'—with his eye set on a shining light and his feet bound for a distant wicket-gate? If the answer to this question depended on nobody but Christian himself, our knowledge of the uniformity of human nature might incline us to predict that Christian's imminent destiny was Death in his City of Destruction. But in the classic version of the myth we are told that the human protagonist was not left entirely to his own resources in the decisive hour. According to John Bunyan, Christian was saved by his encounter with Evangelist. And, inasmuch as it cannot be supposed that God's nature is less constant than Man's, we may and must pray that a reprieve which God has granted to our society once will not be refused if we ask for it again in a humble spirit and with a contrite heart.

## TEILHARD DE CHARDIN: *The Phenomenon of Man* \*

Not all twentieth-century philosophies of history are pessimistic. In *The Phenomenon of Man* (published posthumously in France in 1955) Pierre Teilhard de Chardin views history in the long time perspective of evolution and comes to decidedly optimistic conclusions. Teilhard (1881–1955), Jesuit Father and noted paleontologist, was professor of geology at the Catholic Institute of Paris, corresponding member of the Académie des Sciences, and for many years scientific adviser to the Geological Survey of China.

### A New Phase of Evolution

WE ARE, at this very moment, passing through an age of *transition*. . . .

. . . . To us, in our brief span of life, falls the honour and good fortune of coinciding with a critical change of the noosphere.

In these confused and restless zones in which present blends with

\* From *The Phenomenon of Man* by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Copyright, 1955 by Editions du Seuil. Copyright © 1959 in the English translation by Wm. Collins & Co. Ltd., London, and Harper & Row, Publishers, Incorporated, New York.

future in a world of upheaval, we stand face to face with all the grandeur, the unprecedented grandeur, of the phenomenon of man. Here if anywhere, now if ever, have we, more legitimately than any of our predecessors, the right to think that we can measure the importance and detect the direction of the process of hominisation. Let us look carefully and try to understand. And to do so let us probe beneath the surface and try to decipher the particular form of mind which is coming to birth in the womb of the earth today. . . .

In the last century and a half the most prodigious event, perhaps, ever recorded by history since the threshold of reflection has been taking place in our minds: the definitive access of consciousness to a *scale of new dimensions*; and in consequence the birth of an entirely renewed universe, without any change of line or feature by the simple transformation of its intimate substance.

Until that time the world seemed to rest, static and fragmentable, on the three axes of its geometry. Now it is a casting from a single mould.

What makes and classifies a 'modern' man (and a whole host of our contemporaries is not yet 'modern' in this sense) is having become capable of seeing in terms not of space and time alone, but also of duration, or—and it comes to the same thing—of biological space-time; and above all having become incapable of seeing anything otherwise—anything—*not even himself*. . . .

. . . . Man discovers that *he is nothing else than evolution become conscious of itself*, to borrow Julian Huxley's concise expression. It seems to me that our modern minds (because and inasmuch as they are modern) will never find rest until they settle down to this view. On this summit and on this summit alone are repose and illumination waiting for us. . . .

[However, it is not enough to say] that evolution, by becoming conscious of itself in the depths of ourselves, only needs to look at itself in the mirror to perceive itself in all its depths and to decipher itself. In addition it becomes free to dispose of itself—it can give itself or refuse itself. Not only do we read in our slightest acts the secret of its proceedings; but for an elementary part *we hold it in our hands*, responsible for its past to its future.

Is this grandeur or servitude? Therein lies the whole problem of action.

### A Feeling to Be Overcome: Discouragement

The reasons behind the scepticism regarding mankind which is fashionable among 'enlightened' people today are not merely of a representative order. Even when the intellectual difficulties of the mind in conceiving the collective and visualising space-time have been over-