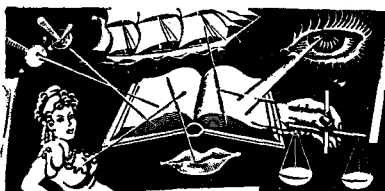


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THE PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

by BEN RAY REDMAN

"WHAT shall I do to be saved?" cried John Bunyan's Christian, and his words echo through the world today, with English-speaking voices the loudest of all among the troubled chorus. Fear and a sense of impotence have laid their cold hands on Western Man. Having shrunk the planet with his science, as Amazonian Indians shrink human heads; having pried open the doors of countries that sought to seal themselves against alien progress; having, in the pride of his reason, forced nature's most secret locks, he now looks on what he has wrought, and is scared nearly witless. But not quite. He has wit enough to consult the doctors of his tribe, and they in turn are ready with prescriptions more or less charged with hope.

At the heart of the situation, of course, lies war. Always one of humanity's chief occupations, war has so successfully enlisted the services of the most ingenious minds that it promises, next time, to be the equiva-

lent of race suicide. Or, at least and best, the death of civilization. So there must be no next time. But how can we prevent the fateful occurrence?

The answers are many, if often unimpressive, but here we shall consider only two: those of Arnold J. Toynbee, philosopher-historian, and of Pitirim A. Sorokin, historian-sociologist. The name of Sorokin is not yet famously current in popular magazines and women's clubs, for no one has condensed the four fat volumes of his *Social and Cultural Dynamics* in the way that D. C. Somervell has boiled down the first six volumes of Toynbee's *A Study of History*, thereby reducing it to a unit that may be easily paid for, and easily carried home from a bookshop, even though it may not be so easily read by all who buy and tote. Here, however, Sorokin will take precedence of Toynbee, for the former's *The Reconstruction of Humanity* [\$3, Beacon Press] is devoted wholly to the problem of our survival, whereas Toynbee's *Civilization on Trial* [\$3.50, Oxford University Press] deals with other subjects as well. In reading the summary of Sorokin's prescription one should remember

that he prides himself on his scientific approach to sociological history, and that his *Dynamics* rests on a broad statistical base, laboriously established.

Sorokin's program for abolishing war is radical and comprehensive. Partial measures and "quack cures" evoke his eloquent contempt. He chimes with the song that declares it must be all, or nothing at all. Those would-be physicians who place their faith in the spread of democratic ideas and ideals are fools. Look at democracy's record! Equally foolish are those who would seek antidotes to war in universal education, free enterprise, or legal action: the mounting horrors of war have kept pace with the rise of education; free enterprise has carried us into history's most destructive conflicts; law is always powerless unless it expresses the true convictions of those for whom it has been made.

Monopoly of weapons by one nation is no answer, the possibility of controlled armaments is only wishful thinking, and the fear of destructive weapons has never proved a check on war. Religion, particularly Christianity, is a failure because it has not been practiced. The United Nations organization is faultily conceived and necessarily incompetent. World Government could seem a solution only to men who had never heard of civil war.

From 500 B.C. up to 1925 A.D. in the history of Greece, Rome, and later European countries there were 967 international wars. Within the same period in the his-

tory of the same countries there were about 1623 civil wars, that is, wars occurring within the limits of a given sovereign state. The major civil wars were as devastating as the large-scale international wars.

In this opening portion of his argument, where he is concerned with demolishing current fallacies, Sorokin often labors the obvious; but he is justified by the popular faith in many of these same fallacies, and his destructive efforts are only a prelude to what he believes is constructive thinking. What is the character of that thought?

II

Love is the key-word. There can be no peace without altruism, and our sole hope lies in its universal dissemination. Because of the indivisible unity of socio-cultural phenomena, the campaign must be waged simultaneously on three fronts: cultural, social, and personal.

If we desire to eliminate war and to establish a harmonious world order, we must pay the fullest price for this value: we must transform in a creatively altruistic direction all human beings, all social institutions, and the entire culture of mankind in all its compartments, including science, religion, law and ethics, the fine arts, economics, and politics. Otherwise all attempts are doomed to be abortive and to prove harmful rather than beneficial.

This is a totalitarian program with a vengeance. But, according to Sorokin, nothing less will do. The unity of Western medieval culture, based on the ultimate "true-reality value" of God, has broken down, been atomized. So we must achieve a

new unity, even more comprehensive than the old, and a new absolute, with subsidiary values and norms that are universally held. To do this we must abandon the false and fractional values of our "sensate" culture, and seek truth through the exercise of superconscious powers (following the examples and techniques of western and eastern mystics) until we have made ourselves mere instrumentalities of the Godhead, or Divine Manifold. In brief, the human race must transform itself into a communion of saints.

The magnitude of this task might dismay some of us, but not Sorokin. He admits that the prospects of success are "somewhat dubious," but he assures us that "a genuine fighting chance assuredly exists," and he sees no reason why all that he proposes should not "be accomplished in orderly and peaceful fashion through the willing and concerted action of individuals and groups, guided by their consciousness, conscience, and superconsciousness." Nor should the transformation necessarily try our patience, since "the process may be effected in the comparatively short space of a few decades instead of requiring centuries."

Here, indeed, is faith at its full. And what makes it all the more remarkable is that Sorokin firmly believes that mankind has seldom if ever been more debased than it is today: we are sunk, he tells us, in a foul bog of "sensate" culture, the features of which he has itemized with scientific

thoroughness and profound personal disgust. In other words, he would appear to believe that a miracle of virtuous energy, unparalleled in human records, may be successfully performed by a society in which, according to his own most careful estimates, virtue is at its historical nadir.

One can hardly wonder, in the face of his faith, that he has not thought it worth while to grapple with the comparatively minor problem of how to keep all the nations abreast in the march towards sainthood; a problem that might prove to be not so minor after all, since it is obvious that, once a nation or nations lagged, the happy forward-lookers would suddenly and most unhappily be at the mercy of the unregenerate stragglers. But it is time to turn from the historian-sociologist to the philosopher-historian.

III

Turning, we encounter conclusions that were at least vaguely perceptible, years ago, to all readers of *A Study of History* in its original form. Now those conclusions are explicit. As we scanned the six volumes, triad by triad, with all their marvelous wealth of documentary erudition, we could see with increasing clarity the direction in which their author was heading: now, in this collection of related papers on the world's civilizations, the author's destination is announced without ambiguity.

Toynbee, like Sorokin, believes in the ultimate necessity of human saintliness; but he does not seem to

share the sociologist's conviction that it may be just around the corner. The fact that there never has been a communion of saints on earth does not discourage him, however. The explanation of this is that no human society has ever completed its communal enterprise. "Civilization, as we know it, is a movement and not a condition, a voyage and not a harbour. No known civilization has ever reached the goal of civilization yet."

Religion, Toynbee announces without reservation, "is the serious business of the human race." Salvation "is the true end of man and the true purpose of life on Earth." And, these things being so, it may be deemed fortunate by all Christians, at least, that "The Christian soul can attain, while still on Earth, a greater measure of man's greatest good than can be attained by a pagan soul in this earthly stage of its existence."

Like Sorokin, who considers religious hermits and isolated ascetics the most altruistic of men, Toynbee holds that "Seeking God is itself a social act." No mystic can take the first step towards union with God unless he is imbued with love of his fellow men. "The antithesis between trying to save one's soul by seeking and following God and trying to do one's duty to one's neighbour is therefore wholly false." (The fact that the records largely fail to support this thesis seems to bother neither Russian nor Englishman.)

Salvation is the end of man, and it may even be demonstrated finally

that the ultimate function of rising and falling civilizations is to produce ever higher religious; Christianity — product of the encounter between a Graeco-Roman and a Syrian civilization — being, of course, the highest that has yet appeared. But this is the long, long view. Meanwhile, disaster is close upon us. What has Toynbee to say under the shadow of this imminence?

The papers in *Civilization on Trial* cover a considerable period of years, but those pertinent to the present enquiry are recent, and their lines of thought are reasonably consistent. The most important effect of our age, as Toynbee sees it, has been the impact of Western civilization upon all other living societies. The tiny minority of the Western middle class "is the leaven that in recent times has leavened the lump and has thereby created the modern world." But now the West faces the alien civilization of Russia, with its Byzantine, Orthodox heritage; the two rival powers are struggling to win the political and ideological adherence of the peoples who lie between them in a kind of no-man's land; and the struggle lethally threatens not only the contestants but the whole world.

To obviate this threat, Toynbee proposes in several papers several courses of action. His least drastic suggestion is based on the vague hope that the nations of western Europe might achieve a way of life, somewhere between Russian Communism and American capitalism, which would

serve as an example to both sides and help to break down the barriers between the two.

At another point he declares that the great plagues of civilizations have been War and Class, that between them they have managed to "kill off nineteen out of twenty representatives of this recently evolved species of human society." Until recently our survival has been made possible by the limitations of their powers, but their potency has been so vastly increased that "Class has now become capable of irrevocably disintegrating Society, and War of annihilating the entire human race." We must, then, abolish both evils without flinching or failure; or see "them win a victory over man which, this time, would be conclusive and definitive."

And in still another place, in his title essay, having posed Christian's question, he answers it as follows:

In politics, establish a constitutional co-operative system of world government. In economics, find working compromises (varying according to the practical requirements of different places and times) between free enterprise and socialism. In the life of the spirit, put the secular superstructure back onto religious foundations. Efforts are being made in our Western world to-day to find our way towards each of these goals. If we had arrived at all three of them, we might fairly feel that we had won our present battle for our civilization's survival. But these are, all of them, ambitious undertakings, and it will call for the hardest work and the highest courage to make any progress at all towards carrying any one of them through to achievement.

The religious task is, of course, in this historian's view, the most important of the three. But the political and economic tasks are more urgent; the political most urgent of all. So Toynbee, in contradiction of Sorokin, recommends a fractionally progressive program, with spiritual rebirth as the distant goal rather than as an immediate *sine qua non*.

From these prescriptions of one of our most learned men, readers will take comfort in a measure proportional to their inherent optimism. For my part, as regards the short view and the short run, I find in them thin nourishment for hope. Nor do I believe that Toynbee himself, in our present human predicament, is as much sustained by reason as he is by faith. But, in addition to his faith, his long view helps to save him from despair.

IV

Suppose the worst does occur: that man, in his idiocy, lets loose the lightning which makes Jove's seem a childish toy. Even then, Toynbee argues, there is an excellent chance that the Negrito Pygmies of Central Africa would survive, and it is probable that starting with these little fellows (who "are said by our anthropologists to have an unexpectedly pure and lofty conception of the nature of God and of God's relation to man") it would take mankind only some six or ten thousand years to climb back to its present level.

And what is ten thousand years in

comparison with the six hundred thousand, or million, that the human race has lived; compared to the five or eight hundred million years during which there has been life on our planet? Man, we calculate, has been dominant on the earth for a mere hundred thousand years, whereas the giant armored reptiles reigned for some 80 million. Who knows what man may accomplish, if he enjoys even a fraction of this time?

On the other hand, taking a still longer view, "If the ants and bees were one day to acquire even that glimmer of intellectual understanding that man has possessed in his day, and if they were then to make their own shot at seeing history in perspective, they might see the advent of the mammals, and the brief reign of the human mammal, as almost irrelevant episodes, 'full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.'"

Summing up what our historian-sociologist and our philosopher-historian have to give us in their present volumes, it would seem that the first offers faith pure and undefiled, in place of readily demolished fallacies, while the second offers faith plus extensive views and valuable insights; the second class of gift being well represented by luminous remarks on Graeco-Roman civilization, Islam, and Russia's Byzantine heritage.

That Toynbee is, on one level of his thinking, cribbed and cabined by his Christian parochialism has long been apparent to his thoughtful readers; and the fact is conspicuous in

several portions of the book before us. For example, his developing theory that civilizations may exist for the sake of producing ever higher religions would, if carried out logically, indicate that Christianity must in its turn be superseded by an even superior faith; but this idea is rancidly distasteful to the Anglican philosopher, so he argues speciously that "it ain't necessarily so," and salutes Christianity as the probable "heir of all the other churches and all the civilizations." But, on another level, Toynbee's thinking is released; he ignores the limitations of revealed religion and engages in historical excursions and investigations of a breadth, depth and originality that are, in their combination, nearly unique in our day. This is not to say that his comprehensive scheme of history is sound, or even that his "civilizations" are entirely satisfactory units of study; we must go beyond Western civilization, for instance, to understand the Christianity which is itself so essential an element in any understanding of the West. But, even if the best that Toynbee has given us proves to be only a by-product of his historical labors, items produced in the course of creating a system that is not true as a whole, there can be little doubt that his gift will also prove to be of indisputable and durable value.

v

History is never written, of course, but is forever being written. No single book of even a single historical period,

however brief, is ever closed; but remains open always to the revising pen, the new interpreter. And no historian ever ends by being found satisfactory — much less complete — in all his parts and ways. If it is the business of the most ambitious historians to give their readers long views, it is equally the business of those same readers to make sure that they view their historians in historical perspective. There are a few books that will help one to do this, without devoting a lifetime to the relevant field of knowledge, and one of the best of these books has but recently been published. It is Emery Neff's *The Poetry of History* [\$3.50, Columbia University Press].

Readers of Mr. Neff's volume, in which literary skill and charm are happily combined with thorough scholarship, will perceive that Toynbee belongs in character to both the seventeenth and twentieth centuries. On the one hand, he shows his kinship with Bossuet, who "represented history as guided by the hand of God to the triumph of the Church and of the kings who governed in His name," and as "the uninterrupted unfolding of God's plan, in which the end was seen in the beginning"; while, on the other hand, Toynbee is but one of those twentieth century historians who "have been preoccupied with the problem of the collapse of civilizations, in contrast to the Romantic preoccupation with their origin and growth."

Mr. Neff's readers will also see

Toynbee in relation to Flinders Petrie, who "distinguished eight great periods of Mediterranean civilization, none deviating far from their average duration of 1330 years," and in relation to Spengler, whose chart of "regularly appearing phases in the great world cultures, the Egyptian, Classical, Chinese, Arabian, Western, using Petrie's special term 'contemporary' to describe their parallelism, is his most brilliant and least debatable achievement." They will note, in passing, Petrie's anticipation of Toynbee as well as Spengler in the use of "contemporary" in a special sense.

Looking further back, they will discover that Johann Gottfried Herder, in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, anticipated later historians with his theory that "Decay of one great society leaves the ground richer for the growth of another," and that he believed with Toynbee in humanity's "advancing" trend, but declared that the nature of this advance, "dependent upon a thousand concurrent causes, is beyond the power of the keenest mind to foresee."

Of course, Mr. Neff is not centrally concerned with Arnold J. Toynbee. This gentleman, indeed, occupies less than two of Mr. Neff's 220 pages of text. My approach to *The Poetry of History* has only been intended to show one use to which the book might be put by readers of one modern historian; it might be employed, in similar fashion, in connection with almost any historian of the last two

centuries. But, apart from its comparative value, there is an absolute value in the individual studies which compose Mr. Neff's volume.

Described on its title-page as being concerned with "The Contribution of Literature and Literary Scholarship to the Writing of History since Voltaire," it fulfills its promise by surveying and illuminating the work of such men as Herder, Vico, Niebuhr, Otfried Müller, Chateaubriand, Thierry, Michelet, Renan, Burckhardt and Green. If the author may be thought by some to have scanted Gibbon, it may be argued that he has let a great reputation retain its towering position without extensive critical examination, while choosing to consider and expose at length the brilliant historical thought of another man (Herder) whose present fame falls far short of matching his worth and importance. In doing this, Mr. Neff has well served the reader who is not a

specialist; and he has put us but slightly less in his debt by his views of Renan, Niebuhr and Michelet — not to mention his blasting of the plodding pupils of Leopold Ranke.

At this point *The Poetry of History* must be left without its having been done full justice, but in parting let me extract from it two statements by Herder. "Men," he declared, "are their own unpropitious spirits." And, again: "The soundness and endurance of a state does not rest upon the point of its highest culture but upon a wise or fortunate equilibrium of its living and working forces." On second thought, however, since we are concerned with historical perspective, it may be best to end with still another quotation from Herder; words written when he was twenty-two. — "No proposition is so foolish, as not to have been maintained by a philosopher, no religion so silly, that no nation has believed it."

PHRASE ORIGINS—33

HOB0: *The exact derivation of this word is not known, but there have been many interesting conjectures. It may come from ho (exclamation of surprise, delight or order) plus bo (boh, boa), another exclamation meaning much the same thing. It may come from adding the exclamation ho to bo, where the latter is a slang term meaning pal or friend. It may be a corruption of hoe boy, a term which once referred to tramps working in the countryside who had to do some hoeing for their suppers. It may possibly be taken from the first two syllables of Hoboken, the railway terminus which was once notorious as a place where tramps boarded or alighted from freight trains. Then it may be a contraction of homo bonus, the Latin for good man, which might have been applied ironically. Nobody really knows.*

JOHN BAKER OPDYCKE