

# Patterns in the Graeco-Roman and Western Civilizations

*A Study of Toynbee's A Study of History*

Master Thesis in Philosophy  
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Roskilde University 2012

## Acknowledgements

The writing of this thesis has been quite a journey and several people have been instrumental in its completion. Finn Østrup, Brian McGuire and my father, Henrik Kærgaard, have all been helpful in reading and commenting on drafts along the way. Ida Gilda Mastroso from Università degli Studie di Firenze was kindly recommending literature and providing access to the university library when I was working in Florence in spring. Rolando Minuti from the same university renewed my belief in the project at an important moment. Finally, my own professor and mentor Aksel Haaning has shown great interest in the project from the very beginning and has been an invaluable source of inspiration and feedback all the way through.

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## Introduction

The present thesis is a discussion of a particular view of history. Namely the view set forth by the British historian Arnold Joseph Toynbee (1889-1975) in his monumental 12-volume *A Study of History*, produced in the years 1934-61. The view is that the intelligible field of study for the historian is not nation-states nor individuals nor concepts or ideas, but entire *civilizations* which are born, grow, break down and disintegrate according to certain patterns and rules that can be observed from one civilization to another. According to this view, current Western Civilization is now living through a time very reminiscent of one experienced by the ancient Greeks and Romans some time in the 1<sup>st</sup> century before Christ.

One of Toynbee's crucial points is that during the beginning of a civilization's growth it consists of a multitude of sovereign states that share the same overall culture, but are nevertheless politically independent. At a certain stage these states will begin to wage war on one another with an ever-increasing intensity and brutality. Toynbee calls this the *Time of Troubles*. At one point, the enmity and brutality of these wars become so extreme that the civilization breaks down under them, or to use Toynbee's words: *'it inflicts mortal wounds upon itself'*. The sense of unity that pervaded the civilization on a cultural and spiritual level disappears and can now only be recreated in a political form, a so-called *Universal State*, which unifies the entire geographical area of the civilization, and often beyond.

The view is fascinating, not the least because of the supposed prophetic potential inherent in it, and Toynbee accordingly became one of the most famous historians of the 20th century. In 1947 he was on the front page of Time Magazine and that, together with the abridgement of his work by D. C. Somervell, was paramount in disseminating his ideas to the wider public. Americans in a Post-World War II world felt that Toynbee had an important message for them, and the abridgement alone sold way over 200,000 hard cover copies in the United States<sup>1</sup>; an unprecedented number for such a work. During the 1950's Toynbee lectured routinely at several prestigious American universities and in 1957 he took an 18 month long journey around the world, visiting archaeological sites and places he had written about in *A Study*. During this time he lectured at universities and met with

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<sup>1</sup> McNeill, p. 215 plus note 30.

heads of states and other leading people of the time, which all together contributed to solidifying his status as global figure.

However, popular as *A Study of History* was, criticism from academic circles was also mounting during the 1950's. Specialists thought that Toynbee, attempting to generalize from historical events, chose only those events or aspects of them that supported his theory. Toynbee engaged willingly and enthusiastically in the discussion of his work, which eventually prompted him to write the 12<sup>th</sup> and last volume of *A Study of History*, titled *Reconsiderations* where, as the title says, he reconsidered many of his central tenets, conceded to several of his critics' points and debated others. *Reconsiderations* and the mammoth work *Hannibal's Legacy* which Toynbee also produced in the late 1950's demonstrated to the academic community that he was more than just a prophet and poet as some had mockingly called him. He was indeed an eminent historian who knew his métier painstakingly well. According to Toynbee's biographer William H. McNeill, however, a consequence of *Reconsiderations* was also that the unifying vision of history that had been presented in *A Study* lay somewhat shattered and Toynbee did not put the pieces back together. Due to this and no doubt also due to the general interest of academic historians shifting decisively away from world history during the 1960's Toynbee's work has been virtually absent in the academic debate since his death in 1975.

What then is the purpose of bringing attention to it again? If it has been debated and found not to be consistent what more can there be to say? First of all, I do not believe that Toynbee's system is entirely wrong-headed. As will be discussed further in chapter 1, much of the critique levelled against Toynbee aims at various smaller parts of his system and at his tendency to be too ambitious in formulating laws for the various aspects of the growth and decay of civilizations. And this is true, he does stretch his conclusions too far on several occasions. Yet having pondered the points of multiple critical essays, it seems to me that the greater structure of his system, the very idea of focusing on civilizations, the larger phases he attributes to their life, the idea of the Universal State, etc., do seem to remain largely intact. It could seem as if, although the wheels and pipes of his historical machine may have encountered some congestion, the factory surrounding it still stands.

I should underline at this point that I deal only with the Graeco-Roman (or in Toynbee's words the Hellenic) and the Western Civilizations. Toynbee attempts with his system to account for world history as a whole and so much of the fair critique

levelled against it – for instance of his account of Jewish history – is irrelevant in this context. In other words, much of that critique may be relevant and just, but it may not impinge on there being a recurring pattern in the Graeco-Roman and Western Civilizations. Even if the pattern of the Graeco-Roman Civilization did not occur in the history of any other civilization it might still occur in that of The West for the simple reason that the latter has been born out of the first and thus might be repeating some of its patterns.

To specify the purpose of this thesis, it is as follows: *1) To discuss, with a basis in Toynbee's system, to what extent there can be said to be a recurring pattern in the evolution of the Graeco-Roman and the Western Civilizations in order to qualify a discussion of the point of development of our civilization today, and 2) to discuss Toynbee's system in the process and suggest some alternative conceptualizations of some of his key terms and some of the periods and processes he describes. In short, I attempt with this thesis to do something which as far as I know has not been done for a long time. I try to think along with Toynbee, taking into account some of the main points of criticism levelled against him, and to see if – with modifications and concessions – this can bring us somewhere interesting.*

In the first chapter I will look into some of the key factors – private and professional – in Toynbee's life that not only shaped him as a person and an historian, but that also formed his views on the world and ultimately influenced his great work *A Study of History*. I will look especially at his relationship to Oswald Spengler and the change during his life towards a strongly religious view of history that I label his 'religious turn'. I will look at some of the critique that has been levelled against *A Study* and mention a few other notable figures that have been inspired by and kept working with the perspective on history pioneered by Toynbee and Spengler. Finally, I will make some general considerations on a feasible way to approach Toynbee and his way of working with history.

In chapter 2 I will outline the general course of development for a civilization according to Toynbee's 'traditional' model, the one based on the Hellenic civilization. After that I will exemplify the model by telling the stories of the Hellenic and the Western Civilizations, as they are presented by Toynbee. The task of summarizing anything that Toynbee has written invariably presents the person doing

the summery with a delicate problem. Toynbee is not always consistent in the way he uses even his most central concepts, they can be bend here and there, depending on the context, making the interpretation of his work a somewhat creative act. One has to exercise a good sense of judgment now and then. Moreover, *A Study* was written over a period of many years and Toynbee changed his mind on certain topics or added to them during his life. Add to that the fact that he produced an all-together insurmountable amount of text which makes getting an overview of his production and how his thought changed during his life an Heracleian achievement in itself. I must frankly confess that I have read far from everything that Toynbee wrote. I have concentrated primarily on relevant parts of the 12-volume *Study*, the two abridgements of it by D.C. Somervell, Toynbee's own one-volume edition from 1972 and *Hellenism* from 1959. These form the basis of the narrative in chapter 2. In a few places I qualify it by adding more recent data.

In the account in chapter 2 I focus mainly on the pattern in the civilizations' social and political development. Toynbee also speaks about patterns of development within the cultural sphere, such as vulgarization in the arts and language when the civilization begins to break down, but this is another large part of his system that unfortunately I do not have room delve into here.

In chapter 3 I will look into some of the central concepts of Toynbee's system, above all the concept of *civilization*. How are we to understand this term which is so key to his system? As it will show, Toynbee is by no means consistent in his usage of it. I aim to clarify his various uses of the term and suggest to understand the essence of a civilization to be what I call a *shared cosmology*: a meta-myth about the nature of the universe and of life which gives a common cultural platform to the members of the civilization. Such a cosmology is often embodied within a religion. I continue by discussing Toynbee's notion of *growth* and attempt to give a more thorough and nuanced definition of the concept that is applicable both within and outside of Toynbee's system. Finally, I find that his term *Time of Troubles* is quite illuminating as far as it goes, but that it seems to be part of a larger pattern including the civilization's physical expansion through three successive waves. This I attempt to illustrate. This analysis suggests that Western Civilization is currently living through a time which is in some ways reminiscent of the Graeco-Roman Civilization in the beginning of the 1st century B.C. Chapter 3 is also the 'philosophical' part that distinguishes this work from a thesis of history.



One last thing what I wish to bring attention to before proceeding to the presentation of Toynbee's work is my usage in the thesis of Toynbee's terms the *Hellenic Civilization* and the *Western Civilization*. The Hellenic Civilization corresponds to what is normally meant by the Graeco-Roman Civilization, which reflects the notion – of which Toynbee is a main but by no means the only proponent – that Greek and Roman history have to be understood together. As I shall argue in chapter 3, if we attempt to understand a civilization as being essentially a *shared cosmology*, then it is indeed reasonable to treat these two societies under a common heading. In my opinion, this does not downplay the uniqueness of Rome, although Toynbee does that at some instances.<sup>2</sup> Along with Toynbee, I also at times use the term 'Hellenism' as an abbreviation for the Hellenic Civilization.

Regarding Western Civilization, Toynbee also refers to this as the Western Christian Civilization, Western Christendom, or simply The West. With this he means the feudal society that sprang out of a Roman Catholic religion and meta-culture as a response to the general challenge of chaos in the medieval Dark Age and which developed from there onwards. In other words, according to him the Western Civilization begins around the 10th century A.D. This is important to keep in mind, as the term The West or Western Civilization can also be taken to mean the Western tradition as a whole, including everything back to the city-states in ancient Greece. In this thesis however, I use the term in Toynbee's sense, although in chapter 3 I will argue for an expansion of what counts as being part of a civilization.

## Chapter 1: *A Study of History* – its context and reception

How did such a massive work as *A Study of History* come into being? That is the question we will be looking into in this chapter. We will consider both the personal and professional factors plus the events of the larger society that shaped Toynbee and his view of history. Thereafter we will have a brief look at the tradition originating

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<sup>2</sup> J. F. Leddy criticizes Toynbee for exactly this in his article 'Toynbee and the History of Rome' from 1957, and it is true that Toynbee especially in the first parts of *A Study of History* is not very sympathetic towards Rome's achievement. However, in some of his later writings he speaks quite warmly about the peace and prosperity provided by the Universal State, as in *Change and Habit: The Challenge of Our Time* from 1966.

from Toynbee (and Spengler), some of the critique of Toynbee's system, and a few preliminary reflections on how to approach Toynbee best.

### **Biographical details and basis for *A Study of History*<sup>3</sup>**

Arnold Joseph Toynbee seemed from early on destined to become an historian. His uncle and namesake, Arnold Toynbee, had been an extremely influential economic historian in his short life who, among other things, coined the term 'industrial revolution'. Arnold J's mother had been one of the first women to take exams in history at Cambridge University and came out with the best results of that year, and she passed her interest on to her son. During Toynbee's teenage years his father's career was faltering and he ultimately lost his mind in 1910 and spent the rest of his life in a mental institution, putting extra pressure on his son to achieve what his father had not. Thus, there were all-together great expectations and strong pressure on the young Toynbee.

Toynbee did extremely well in school and won several prizes for the best papers. He also won scholarships for Winchester and later for Balliol College at Oxford, which was necessary since his family was struggling even to uphold a middle class standard. When Toynbee finished his exams at Balliol he took a year off, travelling Italy and Greece by foot, exploring the ancient sites and places he had read about during his school years. In 1911 he returned to teach ancient history at Balliol, and in 1914 married the daughter of Gilbert Murray, one of Toynbee's old teachers and now a colleague at Balliol. During World War I Toynbee managed to eschew military service and instead did propaganda work for the British government, documenting the atrocities that the Turks, Germany's allies, were committing against the Armenians. It was as an expert in Near-Eastern matters that Toynbee in 1919 attended the Peace Conference as part of the British delegation.

Toynbee's participation in and disappointment with the results of the Peace Conference led him gradually towards what McIntire and Perry in *Reappraisals* call his second professional field<sup>4</sup>. The first was his firm basis in the classics as an ancient historian of Greece and Rome. The second became his acute interest in current

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<sup>3</sup> Unless stated otherwise, biographical details about Toynbee is taken from McNeill's thorough biography *Toynbee: a life* from 1989.

<sup>4</sup> McIntire, *Reappraisals*, p. 6.

international affairs. Due to a feeling of guilt that he had survived the war while so many of his friends and colleagues had died in the trenches and determined to do his utmost to avoid another war, Toynbee in 1927 commenced working for the Chatnam House, an independent institute with the aim of informing the public about current international affairs, with the exact purpose of avoiding another war being triggered by diplomatic blunders that no one in the public knew about. Thus from 1927 onwards Chatnam House released an annual survey of international affairs, compiled and written primarily by Toynbee.

These two fields, his firm basis in classical history and his strong preoccupation with international politics, together formed the basis of his third professional field: universal history and philosophy of history, which found its outlet in *A Study of History*. Toynbee commenced working on *A Study* from about 1929 and published the first three volumes in 1934. The next three came in 1939, two weeks before the beginning of World War II. During the war Toynbee was once again occupied with war work for the British government so it was not until 1954 that the last volumes of *A Study* appeared. Following intense debate and scholarly critique especially of the last four volumes, Toynbee wrote and published *Reconsiderations* in 1961 which together with an historical atlas from 1959 completed *A Study*.

It is interesting to note that Toynbee wrote *A Study* while he was working on the annual surveys for the Chatnam House. The surveys alone were a mammoth achievement and when Toynbee retired in 1955 no one could be found to replace him. As Stromberg observes in *Reappraisals* no such enterprise has ever existed since<sup>5</sup>. Toynbee himself thought that he could not have done one without the other, that *A Study* provided the necessary background for the understanding of current affairs, and conversely that constant analysis of current power politics gave him an insight into the workings of the past.

### **Professional influences**

As should be evident from the above description of Toynbee's first two professional fields he certainly was a man of facts, and consequently *A Study* is a study of history. But perhaps a more appropriate title would have been 'An Interpretation of History'

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<sup>5</sup> McIntire, *Reappraisals*, p. 141.

for at the same time it does not look quite like any other history book. It is rich in quotations from the Bible, mythic allegories and at times highly poetic representations of historical processes. Toynbee read widely and omnivorously and many different works gave him inspiration for *A Study: When I travel I carry in my pocket a copy of the Bhagavad-Gita, a volume of Dante, an anthology of the metaphysical poets, and 'Faust' – books I read over and over again. Some people live by Freud and 'Hamlet'. I live by Jung and 'Faust'*.<sup>6</sup> Toynbee also makes use of myth in the creation of his most central concept, *Challenge and Response*, which is probably the Toynbeean term that has entered most widely into the general vocabulary of historians<sup>7</sup>. He claimed that Plato taught him to make use of myth whenever he reached the land inaccessible to the intellect.

Apart from these many rather metaphysical inspirations it is also possible to place a couple of more secular writers among Toynbee's inspirations. Dr. Teggart was an Irish professor teaching at Berkeley who was one of the first to point to the fact that the origin of civilizations was not only to be found in the Near-East, but also in India and China. He exercised some influence on Toynbee. Regarding the tragic plot-structure that Toynbee imposed on the Hellenic Civilization, McNeill, Toynbee's biographer, points to the ancient Greek historian Thucydides as his main inspiration. Toynbee gave a lecture at Oxford in 1920 titled *The Tragedy of Greece*, which caught quite some attention. This was the first time his thoughts about the Hellenic Civilization took largely the form that they were to have later in *A Study*. Toynbee based his ideas on Thucydides' description of the Peloponnesian War and the psychological more than physical damages this war caused on Hellas. Toynbee felt a keen parallel between this war and the war that he and the world had just lived through. He saw the Peloponnesian War as the very breakdown of the Hellenic Civilization and took the tragedy of this particular war and expanded it into the story of Hellenism as a whole. The model he thus developed was the one he subsequently used to describe the lives of all the world's civilizations.

The closest parallel, however, between Toynbee and any other historian, and one deserving special attention, is that with Spengler. In 1919 the German philosopher and historian Oswald Spengler published the notorious *Der Untergang*

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<sup>6</sup> McIntire, *Reappraisals*, p. 115.

<sup>7</sup> Rune Larsen makes a survey of the term's occurrence in publications in JSTOR, showing the strong dissemination of the term's use since the publication of *A Study*.

*des Abendlandes*, where he prophesied the inevitable doom of Western Civilization. Spengler was the first to do a systematic large-scale survey of all the civilizations known to have existed on Earth<sup>8</sup> and his verdict was merciless. He saw a pattern of growth and decline in civilizations, which he described in terms of the seasons – spring, summer, autumn, winter – with the fields of art, religion, politics and science expressing themselves in distinctive ways in each season, observable from civilization to civilization<sup>9</sup>. According to Spengler this scheme was an ‘iron law’ of history that left no room for exceptions or salvation and he held no doubt that The West had entered into its final stage of life, where a *culture* as he called it entered into its *civilization-phase* characterized by massive cities, overt materialism, artificial monetary systems, and breakdown in the style of the culture, the arts and in religion.

Spengler’s work perhaps more than any other caught the *zeitgeist* of Post-World War I Western Europe. The optimism and trust in the steady progress of Western Civilization had received a shattering blow and some intellectuals began to argue that the previous trust in Enlightenment reason to temper and master the destructive aspects of human nature were far from justified<sup>10</sup>. Yet even if the tone and morale in Spengler’s work was very much coloured by the times it still was a masterful analysis that fascinates to this day. Toynbee later noted about reading Spengler’s work:

*”As I read those pages teeming with firefly flashes of historical insight, I wondered at first whether my whole inquiry had been disposed of by Spengler before even the questions, not to speak of the answers, had fully taken shape in my own mind. One of my own cardinal points was that the smallest intelligible field of historical study were whole societies and not arbitrarily insulated fragments of them like the nation-states of the modern West or the city-states of the Graeco-Roman world. Another of my points was that the histories of all societies of the species called civilizations were in some sense parallel and contemporary; and both these points were also cardinal in Spengler’s system. But when I looked in Spengler’s book for an answer to my question about the geneses of civilizations, I saw that there was still work for me to do, for on this point Spengler was, it seemed to me, most unilluminatingly dogmatic*

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<sup>8</sup> Although he ignored the ones in the Americas.

<sup>9</sup> For a quick overview of Spengler’s thought, Wikipedia has an excellent article on *Decline of The West*.

<sup>10</sup> McIntire, *Reappraisals*, p. 95-96.

*and deterministic. (...) Where the German a priori method drew blank, let us see what could be done by English empiricism.*"<sup>11</sup>

Although Toynbee still found work for himself to do, he clearly also found much to agree with in Spengler's work. Interestingly though, references to Spengler are conspicuous by their absence in *A Study* and when Toynbee does refer to him it is mainly to refute him. He also remarkably excludes him from the list of people and places to whom he acknowledges his debt at the end of *A Study*<sup>12</sup>. McNeill, I think, hits the point in his essay in *Reappraisals* where he suggests that the 'ambitious young historian' was simply frightened by Spengler's imposing figure:

*"... perhaps his spare references and belittling remarks about Spengler are to be understood as a kind of self-protection – a way of standing on his own feet, and avoiding the reduction of his own work to the status of a commentary upon or dialogue with his predecessor."*<sup>13</sup>

McNeill notes that Toynbee, according to his own words from 1948<sup>14</sup>, received a copy of Spengler's work from a friend in the *summer* of 1920. While his seminal lecture on Oxford where he gave enduring form to his account of the Hellenic Civilization took place in the *spring* of that year. Supposedly then, Toynbee's structuring of the historical material from this ancient civilization had been completed *before* he encountered Spengler. But McNeill says that he knows of no evidence that Toynbee had thought of applying it to the histories of other peoples – as he does full-scale in *A Study* – before reading Spengler. I might add, perhaps not even to what he was later to treat as the civilization of The West.

It seems reasonable to assume that Toynbee got this inspiration from Spengler. And even if he strongly emphasized throughout his life that breakdown was not inevitable for civilizations and that it depended on the choices made by their members – one of the key points on which he distinguished himself from Spengler – his own analysis showed that every other civilization so far known had already perished or broken down, The West being the only one where the diagnosis was at

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<sup>11</sup> Toynbee, *Civilization on trial*. s. 9-10.

<sup>12</sup> *A Study*, vol. X, p. 213-42.

<sup>13</sup> McIntire, *Reappraisals*, p. 35.

<sup>14</sup> Toynbee, *Civilization on trial*, p. 9.

least still uncertain<sup>15</sup>. In practise then, his verdict over the civilizations of the world came significantly close to Spengler's iron law.

Clearly, as testified by Toynbee's own words, his and Spengler's works share many fundamental assumptions. It seems to me that regarding the various phases that the civilizations live through they are also largely compatible. Spengler has the notion that towards the end of the life of a *culture* it passes into the stage of *civilization*. Spengler's term *culture* corresponds roughly to the active growth phase of Toynbee's *civilization*, being the young, creative phase of the society in question. While Spengler's *civilization* seems to be a fitting parallel to Toynbee's *Universal State*, erected when the creative life has left the society and characterized by materialism, massive cities, bureaucracy, cultural decadence, and new religions. Thus, although highlighting different aspects of the process, they do seem to share several fundamental ideas<sup>16</sup>.

The Danish writer Johannes Fabricius published a book in 1967 about Toynbee and Spengler, notably treating the two writers together. He makes, I believe, an apt parallel between Toynbee's relation to Spengler and Jung's relation to Freud<sup>17</sup>. In both cases, pioneer work was done by Spengler and Freud but the full consequences of their ground-breaking work was only realized by their predecessor, to the extent that the discoveries of the one cannot be fully appreciated without those of the other.

I would add to this that Toynbee seems to be sharper and more precise in his analysis of physical historical developments than Spengler was. Spengler, however, seems to me to have a more profound and keen understanding of what a culture and civilization actually is. With his idea of a *culture's soul* and its various cultural manifestations, Spengler had a spiritual perspective integrated in his philosophy from the start. Consequently, one senses a greater coherence in his work on this level. Toynbee, on the other hand, was opened to the importance of religion during the latter half of his life and although he can be said to have had illuminating and

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<sup>15</sup> This can certainly also be questioned. In my own experience after travelling for 5 months in the Arabic World, the Islamic Civilization is most certainly still alive in the sense that it has a coherent cosmology which, as I shall argue in chapter 3, is really what gives unity to a civilization. Being younger than The West, the Islamic Civilization is still in its state of intense religious fervour where The West was in the Late Middle Ages.

<sup>16</sup> It is beyond the scope of this thesis to make a detailed comparison between Toynbee and Spengler's systems, but a detailed study of the extent of their compatibility would surely be an important and illuminating work.

<sup>17</sup> Fabricius, preface.

fascinating insights in this field too, it is not, in my opinion, where he displays his greatest abilities. This can be seen, perhaps, from the way he changes his mind fundamentally several times about the higher religions. This leads us to take a look at what influenced him in his religious turn.

### **Religious turn**

The most important change that Toynbee's thought on history underwent during his creation of *A Study* was the role he assigned to religion. In the beginning he saw religions simply serving as mid-wives of civilizations, the civilizations growing out of a so-called *chrysalis-church* and being the true goal and flower of humanity's endeavour. During the 25 years he took to produce *A Study* he turned this value system upside-down as to assign preeminence among man's creations to the so-called *higher religions*: these most advanced of man's attempts to live in accordance with 'Absolute Reality'. This meant that it was now the higher religions that were the goal and flower of humanity's journey through the world and the civilizations mere vehicles to bring those religions about. And if they did not, as in the case of a third generation civilization born out of a chrysalis-church without itself giving birth to a new higher religion (as was the case of The West), he interpreted the entire life of that civilization as nothing less than an evolutionary regression or, at best, a useless repetition.

This surely is a drastic turn and probably the one that has done most to anger his critics. But where did Toynbee's religious turn come from? Perhaps from primarily three sources. The first was a number of influences from people close to him. These included his childhood exposure to the Anglican faith, which was propagated to him from his firm but moderate parents, and from his more fanatical old 'Uncle Harry'. Toynbee's wife Rosalind's conversion in 1932 to Roman Catholicism also had a strong impact on him as did his friendship with the Catholic Father Columba with whom he had an extensive correspondence over several years. Thus, when Toynbee did open up for a religious view on history towards the end of the 1930's it was for many years an expressly Christian<sup>18</sup> historical view. In the first

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<sup>18</sup> In *Reappraisals*, p. 65, McIntire explores if and when Toynbee's thought can be classified as belonging within the tradition of a Christian philosophy of history. He suggests these 'straight-forward criteria' for what we might understand by a Christian philosophy of history: "[it] is one whose basic



volumes of *A Study* he gave equal importance to different religious forms of humankind, but with his religious turn he for a long time assigned preeminence to Christianity. Later he shifted more towards Hinduism and Mahayana Buddhism because of the stream of intolerance he saw in Christianity<sup>19</sup>.

The second factor was The World Wars. The first war and indeed the second broke the optimism of Western intellectuals about the prospects and future of Western Civilization. Many concluded that Man was not inherently good nor rational as the Enlightenment philosophers had claimed. And Toynbee along with many others began to question the ability of reason to deal with these baser aspects of human nature. Thus, many, including Toynbee, called for a revival of religion as the only means by which to temper the vile nature of man.

The final and perhaps strongest cause was a number of mystical experiences that Toynbee claimed to have had during his life. Two strong life-altering experiences occurred in moments of deep personal crisis, plus a number of 'time travelling' experiences catalysed by reading a fragment of a classical text or by visiting an ancient site. In these instances, Toynbee felt himself momentarily transported through time as to participate in a particular event in the past. He describes these events in significant detail in vol. X of *A Study* under '*The Quest for a Meaning Behind the Facts of History*'. In the most noteworthy of them, Toynbee "...found himself in communion, not just with this or that episode in History, but with all that had been, and was, and was to come. In that instant he was directly aware of the passage of History gently flowing through him in a mighty current, and of his own life welling like a wave in the flow of this vast tide."<sup>20</sup>

The two life-altering experiences were not related to history in particular but gave Toynbee a clear experience of a greater presence beyond the physical universe coming to his aid. One was an experience in 1929 where he felt such a greater presence helping him through an intense emotional distress caused by his being powerfully attracted to a woman colleague from the University of London. The other was ten years later when Toynbee was sitting at the deathbed of Tony, his eldest son, who had shot himself on the day of the outbreak of World War II due to an unhappy

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*inspiration and character are given by the ultimate meaning found in Jesus Christ; notions and categories not explicitly related to the symbol of Jesus Christ are counted as belonging to a Christian philosophy of history if they are, or have been, found within the Christian community of discourse about history.*"

<sup>19</sup> McIntire, *Reappraisals*, p. 84-85.

<sup>20</sup> *A Study*, vol. X, p. 139.

love affair. There Toynbee had the experience that perhaps more than anything opened him to a spiritual perception of the universe:

*”It felt as if the same transcendent spiritual presence, standing for love beyond my, or my dying fellow human being’s, capacity had pulled aside, at that awful moment, the veil that ordinarily makes us unaware of God’s perpetual closeness to us. God had revealed himself for an instant to give an unmistakable assurance of his mercy and forgiveness.”*<sup>21</sup>

Whichever way we should interpret the religious and mystical journey of Toynbee<sup>22</sup> and the influence it had on his philosophy of history, it is incredibly interesting. However, an investigation of it is not the primary goal of this thesis, so this quick touching upon the most important parts of it is mainly meant to serve as background knowledge of the main events and forces within this field of Toynbee’s life that shaped his great work. What we can say at this point is that these various experiences all together caused Toynbee to view the central drama of world history as humankind’s perpetual attempt to move closer to God (or ‘Absolute Reality’ as he named it) and to live in harmony with it. He cherished the notion that all the higher religions were revelations of a part of that ultimate truth and thus all ‘equal’ (even if assigning preeminence to Christianity at first). In a ‘prayer’ in the end of volume X of *A Study* he gives tribute to a great number of prophets and mystics from different cultures throughout the ages<sup>23</sup>. This more than anything made his critics call him the prophet of a new ‘mish-mash religion’.

The other important thing to note here concerning religion is that, even though Toynbee changed his view fundamentally regarding the *purpose* of the relationship between civilizations and religions, there *is* a relationship. A large number of his critics jumped on exactly his religious turn and consequently his new *interpretation* of that relationship, which has been perhaps the point of controversy that has done most to cloud a fruitful discussion of the deeper machinations of his system.

Whichever way that relationship is interpreted it is clearly there and forms part of the

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<sup>21</sup> McNeill, s. 176.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas W. Africa makes an attempt in McIntire, *Reappraisals*, p. 105-126.

<sup>23</sup> *A Study*, vol. X, p. 143-144.

evolutionary pattern of a civilization. I will return to this in chapter 3 where I will discuss the nature of civilizations.

### **Reception and critique**

Spengler and Toynbee are by far the most famous, but several other writers have written within the theoretical framework of Comparative Civilizations. This is not the place to give a full summary of that tradition, but two notable figures can be mentioned. The first is Carroll Quigley<sup>24</sup> and his *The Evolution of Civilizations: An Introduction to Historical Analysis* that mentions both Spengler and Toynbee and is generally quite favourable towards the latter. Quigley in his turn inspired Samuel Huntington and his work *Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* which, like *A Study*, attracted a great amount of popular readership, but was soundly dismissed by the academic community<sup>25</sup>. Generally it must be said that although many great thinkers and personalities have been influenced and inspired both by Toynbee and Spengler – Henry Kissinger, Joseph Campbell, Ludwig Wittgenstein to mention but a few – the Comparative Civilizations approach to history has not had many adherents within academic circles, although new works commenting on or discussing their systems continue to appear<sup>26</sup>.

Critique, on the other hand, has been plentiful. The first collection of critical essays appeared in 1956 titled *Toynbee and history: Critical Essays and Reviews*<sup>27</sup>. It contains 30 essays that are almost all very critical towards various aspects of the Toynbean system. The second collection came in 1989 titled *Reappraisals*<sup>28</sup>, commemorating Toynbee's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. It contains 13 essays that are quite different from the ones in the 1956 collection. One senses that Toynbee has become a kind of 'cultural treasure' at this point, a field of research. And while there are also reassessments of parts of his system in *Reappraisals*, great emphasis is given to the act of understanding the man, what made and influenced him, and to the piecing

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<sup>24</sup> Quigley is mostly famous for another of his works, *Tragedy and Hope*, that details some of the secret workings of the 'Anglo-American Establishment' – the title on his last book. He has been repeatedly quoted, at times more than he liked, by people arguing for the existence of a secret elite controlling society from behind the scenes.

<sup>25</sup> Larsen, p. 3. Plus note 3 and 5.

<sup>26</sup> Also by non-English writers and historians: For instance Teodoro Tagliaferri's work *Storia Ecumenica: materiali per lo studio dell'opera di Toynbee* from 2002 in Italian.

<sup>27</sup> Montagu 1956.

<sup>28</sup> McIntire and Perry 1989.

together of various more or less relevant details of his life. These two collections of essays have been the main focus in my investigation of relevant points of criticism levelled against Toynbee's system.<sup>29</sup>

Much of the criticism that appears in *Toynbee and History* and *Reappraisals* is, however, irrelevant for our present investigation because of the parts of Toynbee's system they deal with. For instance, seemingly relevant and interesting points have been levelled against his interpretation of Jewish and Chinese history, but since the present thesis focuses on his account of the Hellenic and Western Civilizations, these and other interesting treatments we can leave aside. Yet reading through the articles in the two collections there are a number of critical points that recur and which are relevant for our investigation. I have identified four such general points of criticism, which could be described as follows:

1. Toynbee's tendency towards inconsistent usage of his own terms. This applies mainly to his use of the term *civilization*.<sup>30</sup>
2. Toynbee's combining Rome and Greece in the same civilization.<sup>31</sup>
3. Toynbee's tendency to pass very strong and value-laden judgments on certain historical actors and periods. For example the purpose of civilizations vs. the so-called higher religions, and Rome's role in history.<sup>32</sup>
4. Toynbee's notion of *growth* and how it occurs in civilizations. This is one of the parts of his system that has received the severest critique.<sup>33</sup>

The question is to what extent these points of criticism impinge on the deeper structure, the skeleton, of Toynbee's system. They surely are relevant, but do they rip away every bone or is some structure remaining? A work that attempts to reassess the validity of Toynbee's system – even if only regarding the two civilizations of

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<sup>29</sup> Others works on Toynbee include Roland Stromberg's *Arnold J. Toynbee: Historian for an Age in Crisis* from 1972 that gives a good summary of some of the critique. And then there is the full bibliography of Toynbee's own work plus reviews and articles by others, compiled in 1980 by S. Fiona Morton.

<sup>30</sup> See e.g. Montagu, p. 46, where Pieter Geyl notices some of these inconsistencies. Similar points are noted by W. den Boer on p. 237. We will look further into this in the beginning of chapter 3.

<sup>31</sup> W. den Boer discusses this several places in his article in Montagu, p. 221-42. J. F. Leddy deals with the issue in the article *Toynbee and the History of Rome*.

<sup>32</sup> On the religious issue, virtually every reviewer who comments on Toynbee's religious turn and interpretation of history. On Rome, W. den Boer in Montagu p 221-42, and J. F. Leddy.

<sup>33</sup> Chiefly Pieter Geyl, several examples in Montagu, p. 39-72.

Hellenism and The West – needs to consider these points. This I will do in chapter 3 under a general treatment of Toynbee’s system.

### **Approaching Toynbee**

Before we look further into Toynbee’s tale of Hellenism and The West we may make one more preliminary reflection. This in a way concerns a fifth point of critique which could be described as Toynbee’s tendency to simplify historical matters by describing only that aspect of them which fits into the grander scheme of his system. It could also be called a tendency to over-generalize.

This is potentially a very large discussion that contains the whole epistemological question of what we can know about history in the first place. It is not my intention to open it here. The point I want to make is simply this: One may think Toynbee makes wrong generalizations or that the patterns he describes do not exist. One may think other generalizations or patterns could be made that he does not touch upon and which would be more illuminating. But if *A Study of History* is to seem of any use, then one has to be open to the very possibility that generalizations *per se* can be useful in providing knowledge about the world, and that there can exist patterns of development in ‘social dynamics’ over time. Without an openness towards these basic tenets one will find nothing of value in Toynbee’s system, save perhaps a good story.

These do not sound like outrageous assumptions to make, though. I would say that we make use of them all the time in order to be able to function in the world. We make general assumptions about people and events. We judge from past developments what may come to happen in the future, and we base our actions on those assumptions. Sometimes they are wrong, sometimes they are right, and in most cases they enable us to deal with reality well enough to get us safely through the day. Being open to the possibility that these assumptions *can* be right should not constitute a leap of faith then. Yet it is worth stressing because one sometimes encounters articles by reviewers who tend to dismiss Toynbee out of a simple *a priori* conviction that ‘there are no patterns in historical development’.

## Chapter 2: Patterns in the Hellenic and Western Civilizations

### The Life Cycle of Civilizations

The historical system of Toynbee revolves around *civilizations*. These come into being by overcoming a *challenge*. In the case of the civilizations that arose out of tribal life or primitive Neolithic culture, the challenge was from nature. Of later civilizations the challenge came from other humans. Toynbee suggests that since in history we are speaking about human beings, we cannot use the methods of natural science to explain their behaviour. We cannot look for one cause that always and everywhere produces the same result, because what really matters is how humans *respond* to the challenge facing them. And that we cannot predict "... *any more than a military expert can predict the outcome of a battle or campaign from an 'inside knowledge' of the dispositions and resources of both the opposing general staffs, or a bridge expert the outcome of a game from a similar knowledge of all the cards in every hand.*"<sup>34</sup>

Toynbee thus observes that the same challenge produces entirely different reactions among different individuals or groups of people. And this leads him to formulate the thesis of *Challenge and Response* by which he believes that civilizations come into being and grow. He also observes that if the challenge is too weak or non-existing it does not give rise to growth. If it is too hard the respondents are either overwhelmed or they only just manage through a *tour de force*, which exhausts them to such an extent as to render them unable to respond to further challenges and grow any further. Challenges within the scope of *the golden mean* are what enable continuous growth.

Toynbee notes that since different groups of people belonging to the civilization will respond differently to the challenge – that is, come up with different solutions – the growth process leads to cultural differentiation. When one group or individual finds a successful solution to the common challenge, the others copy or 'adjust' that solution to their particular situation through the act of *mimesis*. This is the way in which the successes of the creative minorities or individuals become common treasures for the whole of the civilization. Another aspect of the growth

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<sup>34</sup> *A Study*, vol. I, p. 300.

process is that when a solution has been found, it tends in time to create an imbalance, an *elan vital*<sup>35</sup>, which in its turn brings about another challenge.

Civilizations break down, according to Toynbee, when they don't manage to find a successful solution to the challenge facing them. In that case the challenge does not disappear but keeps presenting itself to the unhappy civilization. Termination of the growth phase can happen for many reasons and one of the passive ones is that the members of the civilization start idolizing their past achievements and thus lose the creative momentum. However, by far the most common cause is suicide due to all-out warfare. This brings us to the crucial term *Time of Troubles*.

Toynbee observes that at the beginning of a civilization's Time of Troubles it consists of a number of sovereign states that share the same overall culture, but are nevertheless politically independent. These states then begin to wage war on one another with an ever-increasing intensity and brutality until it becomes so extreme that the civilization breaks down under them. To use Toynbee's words: '*it inflicts mortal wounds upon itself*'. The sense of unity pervading the civilization on a cultural and spiritual level disappears and can now only be recreated in a political form, a so-called *Universal State*, which unifies the entire geographical area of the civilization, and often much more.

The creation of the Universal State is typically performed by the state that wins the series of all-out wars that led to the breakdown of the civilization. The erection of the Universal State stalls the disintegration process for a while, but it is, according to Toynbee, only a temporary respite. The disintegration has set in and shows itself in the separation of the body social of the civilization into three distinct groups: A *dominant minority* which creates and upholds the Universal State, an *internal proletariat* that 'live in but do not feel themselves as part of the society', the members of which create a *Universal Church* or *chrysalis-church*, different from the ancestral religion of the civilization. And finally an *external proletariat* which creates heroic poetry and hordes of barbarian warriors who clash against the frontiers of the Universal State.

Toynbee moreover sees a rhythm in the disintegration process whereby the first breakdown, or *rout*, is followed by a *rally* (a re-establishment of order and a period of peace), then another rout and a rally in the form of the Universal State, then

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<sup>35</sup> Toynbee takes this term from the French philosopher Henri Bergson. It may be translated as 'vital impetus'.

yet another rout followed by a rally as a time of restoration, and finally a rout from which the civilization has no more strength to recover. The disintegration process thus proceeds in a rhythm of 'three and a half beats'. There is nothing magical about this number, Toynbee tells us, but he claims that it fits a number of civilizations.

He also notes that around the time of the first breakdown or rout, there is an awakening of reason and along with that an emerging questioning of inherited beliefs, typically the religious ones at the very core of the civilization, and the creation of various philosophies occurs. Later, as a sign of cultural disintegration during the establishment of the Universal State, there occurs a progressive vulgarization and barbarization of the dominant minority, which shows for instance in the language and the arts. Another feature of the Universal State is the emergence of a *lingua franca* that allows for easy communication throughout the world state. Finally, the many cultures that flow together through the unifying effect of a Universal State also produce new and syncretistic forms of religion.

The barbarians who in the end give the dying civilization its final blow then erect *successor-states* out of its disintegrating body, to a vast degree employing the organizational and administrative structures of the now dismembered Universal State. They are, however, doomed to failure. After a relatively short period they also collapse, followed by an *interregnum* (or *Dark Age* or *Heroic Age*, Toynbee calls it by several names) of general chaos and upheaval where the barbarians produce their main pieces of so-called heroic poetry. This is the end of the civilization, yet it is not the end of all things. The Universal Church of the inner proletariat survives the cataclysm and proves to have a far more promising destiny than the short-lived successor-states, as it in time gives rise to a new civilization that springs from this new spiritual spark.

Toynbee identified three 'generations' of civilizations, the first containing the ones which supposedly sprang out of primitive tribal or Neolithic culture. Most of these originated about 6000 years ago. Civilizations of this generation include Minoan Crete, which we will touch upon shortly. The second generation of civilizations then sprang out of the first, either created by the dominant minorities in the first civilization or by its external proletariat in the form of invading barbarian war bands. The Hellenic civilization belongs to this category. Finally, there are the civilizations of the third generation, to which our own Western civilization belongs, all of which originated according to the scheme outlined above, through a chrysalis-



church forming within the Universal State of the disintegrating second generation civilization.

These are, as one of Toynbee's critics Pieter Geyl expressed it, the dry bones of the Toynbeean system. In a short while we shall attempt to put some flesh on the bones, illustrating the system first with the civilization that Toynbee originally used as the basis for formulating his model: The Hellenic. This will be followed by Toynbee's rendering of the history of Western Civilization, to investigate how far the comparison goes. The reader may thus judge on his or her own to what extent there can be said to be a recurring pattern in the two civilizations.

### **The end of the Minoan Civilization**

#### The Universal State of the Minoan Civilization and its barbarian successor-states

Toynbee's tale of the Hellenic civilization begins with the end of another, namely the Minoan civilization on ancient Crete. This civilization had during the beginning of the 2nd millennium B.C. established a 'thalassocracy' – a sea-empire – which according to Toynbee was the Universal State of the Minoan Civilization that maintained peace and order in the Eastern Mediterranean. Our knowledge of the Minoan Civilization is rather limited, but we know that they developed a significant economy based on redistribution of goods with very precise accounting. We also know that they were quite advanced in metallurgy and had extensive trade relations with the other peoples in the Mediterranean. The primary deities of worship were Goddesses, and this has led some to believe that Minoan Crete was a matriarchal society. However, the strong presence of valuable weapons in the graves of Minoan men suggest that men as warriors also held a very significant position.<sup>36</sup>

The Minoan Civilization collapsed in the 14th century B.C., the palace of Knossos being destroyed about 1370 B.C. We don't know exactly why, but there are strong indications that they were taken over a while before, violently or otherwise, by the Myceneans, a people with a strong warrior aristocracy who lived at this time in Hellas. In 1950 some tablets were found at the Knossos palace written in an adaptation of the Minoan script and dated from before the destruction of the palace.

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<sup>36</sup> Martin, p. 26.

Research revealed that they were written in Greek, the language of the Myceneans, suggesting that representatives of this people had come to dominate the palace society on Crete some time before its destruction.<sup>37</sup>

According to Toynbee then, the Myceneans are the external proletariat of the Minoan Civilization. The art and goods of the Myceneans in the middle of the second millennium B.C. are clearly reminiscent of the Minoan style, and it is only after having been in contact with the Minoans for a couple of centuries that the Myceneans begin to build their own palace complexes on the Greek mainland. Their redistributive economic systems also resemble that of Minoan Crete. Since the Minoans had colonized various Aegean islands, and possibly also sites on the mainland, and since there had been significant trade between the two societies, it is reasonable to suppose that the Myceneans had been inspired along the way. The story is reminiscent of that of the Roman Empire some two millennia later. Here there were also much contact and trade across the Northern frontier, in the end no doubt mostly to the barbarians' benefit, to the extent that much of the Roman army and even some of the last emperors were of Germanic origin.<sup>38</sup> This corresponds well to Minoan Crete supposedly being ruled in the end by the Myceneans.

After the final destruction of the palace of Knossos the Myceneans ruled for about two more centuries. They never united, but existed as several independent states. Much about their religion remains obscure, but we know that they worshipped deities like Zeus, Hera and Poseidon. In all likelihood, these are the Hellenes that Homer depicts in his epics *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* and these poems also tell us of a society drenched with warrior virtues like honour, courage, strength and desire for glory. The war against Troy, led by King Agamemnon, which is narrated in *The Iliad* is to have taken place around 1200 B.C. These epics, written down some four hundred years after the events they allegedly relate, are the heroic poetry of the barbarians and they succeed in becoming the common heritage and canonical point of reference for all later Hellenes. Indeed, these two epics to a great extent embody the spirit that was later manifested in the Hellenic Civilization.

Shortly after the War against Troy the Mycenaean society collapses. In his book *Ancient Greece* Thomas R. Martin attributes the causes to both internal strife

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<sup>37</sup> Martin, p. 28.

<sup>38</sup> In Toynbee's words: when the frontier of a civilization is no longer pushed ahead but remains firm, time works in favour of the barbarians.

and war and outer invasions. Toynbee sees it as the result of a major migration wave of northern barbarians. The ancient Hellenes of later times remembered an invasion of Greek-speaking Dorians. Whatever triggered the movement, in the following two centuries the Eastern Mediterranean experiences massive migration and displacements of peoples to the extent that the mighty Hittite Civilization in Anatolia is destroyed and the Egyptians only just manage to stem the tide against the invading 'sea-peoples' as they are called in Egyptian records. Martin doubts that there occurred any one larger invasion, however, the influx must have been massive if it could destroy a civilization such as the Hittites'. Whichever details are correct, the Mycenaean society was also destroyed in the process, triggering the Dark Age in Hellas: a cultural setback and a time of great movement of peoples, social upheaval and instability. Most significantly, the Hellenes seem to revert to illiteracy in this period.<sup>39</sup>

## **The History of the Hellenic Civilization**

### Birth and growth

Toynbee then posits that the Hellenic civilization is born out of the *challenge* of political instability and turmoil in this period. And that this challenge, after a couple of centuries, was solved through the invention of the political institution of the city-state. These were formed gradually during the Hellenic Dark Age, whereby inhabitants slowly revived urban centers and conquered the more out-lying areas, especially the often savage semi-barbarian tribes inhabiting the highlands around the cities. Over a couple of centuries, this resulted in a new political stability and in Hellas being politically organized into numerous little independent city-states. Some of the Panhellenic cultural and religious centers, like Delphi, are also founded in this period and we begin to have the first games being held, like the Olympian and Phrygian games.

This new stability and increasing prosperity, however, led to the next challenge. An end to the migration period, lack of fighting and less destruction of the land because of marauding armies; all this led to growth in the food supply and

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<sup>39</sup> Martin, p. 30-36.

population increase. Yet Hellas is a mountainous land and the maximum amount of food that can be grown there is limited. So sometime around the 8th century B.C. the population began to outgrow the means of subsistence.

Toynbee sees this as the next challenge confronting the Hellenic Civilization as a whole during the 8th-6th centuries B.C and to which the various city-states reacted in quite different ways. Most of them reacted in the perhaps rather uninspired way of simply exporting the population surplus through the creation of colonies around the coasts of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. Thus, the challenge did not create any significant transformation within the body social of the exporting city-state; instead, the pressure was simply diffused.

Differently so in the case of Athens and Sparta. Perhaps because Sparta did not have any immediate access to the sea, they decided to instead attack and conquer their nearest Hellenic neighbours, the Messenians. After a prolonged war the Messenians were subdued and turned into slaves, now farming their former land for their Spartan masters. The Spartans satisfied their hunger for land, but in order to keep the servile Messenians down they had to transform themselves into a full-time professional warrior aristocracy who were forbidden any other profession than war. The system worked and certainly the highly militarized Spartans played a decisive role in fighting off the Persians about a century later. However, it was, according to Toynbee, also an evolutionary dead-end. The Spartans stiffened in their militarism, held captive by the constant threat of Messenian uprisings and were thus unable to develop further.

The Athenians chose another path. They also eschewed the path of colonization, but instead of putting conquest in its place they specialized their agricultural production towards production of olive oil and wine with the purpose of export. This allowed them to import sufficient amounts of grain, the mainstay of the ancient Mediterranean diet, for their livelihood. In time Athens became the great trading and seafaring city-state that Pericles later claimed to be 'The school of Hellas' where all the cultural, political, intellectual and artistic achievements took place that have been such an inexhaustible inspiration for later times. The challenge of over-population is perhaps Toynbee's most illustrious example of how the growth process leads to still greater differentiation within the civilization, because its members react differently to the challenges with which they are faced.

In volume III of *A Study of History* where Toynbee describes the growth process of the Hellenic Civilization he recounts three 'chapters' in that process. The first two are the ones just presented. Since the Hellenes had now succeeded in establishing an economically interdependent society, each city-state found that it had important interests at stake beyond the geographical boundaries of its territory. This interconnectedness on the economic plane necessitated the development of an equal degree of unity on the political plane, or of some kind of Pan-Hellenic political forum where the Hellenes could solve political problems. And this was the third challenge that they did not manage to find a solution to in due time and which, according to Toynbee, caused the breakdown of the Hellenic Civilization.

However, in his book *Hellenism* which Toynbee wrote much later than the first volumes of *A Study* he operates with two extra challenges falling between the second and third 'growth chapter'. The first of these is the combined challenge from Etruscans and Phoenicians who halted the Hellenic expansion in the Mediterranean during the 6th century B.C. The second is the invasion by the Persians in the beginning of the 5th century B.C. Since he includes these two challenges in his later account of the Hellenic Civilization we must assume that they should also be counted as part of the growth period.

The challenge from the Etruscans and Phoenicians meant that the still growing population could no longer be exported through the creation of colonies. Since there was an aristocracy who at this point owned a great deal of the limited amount of land, this created significant social tension in a time of such scarcity. Two other developments contributed further to this process, according to Toynbee. One was the invention of cheaper iron weapons and phalanx warfare that gave a disciplined close-formation unit of yeoman hoplites superiority over a traditional bronze-clad 'Homeric' chariot-borne champion. This new military ascendancy of the yeoman farmer made him feel that he too should have a share in the political power. The other factor was the invention of coinage that spread throughout Hellas from about 625 B.C. Coinage made the establishment of an organized loan market possible, which was in turn heavily exploited by the aristocracy who still had a surplus to lend. If the borrower was unable to pay his debts he would, if he was a peasant, lose his land and if he was a landless labourer, the creditor would have the right to sell him and his family as slaves overseas. This in time led to severe social tension and ultimately revolutions in most of the Hellenic city-states in which the

aristocracy was disposed from power and supplanted either by a coalition of yeomen farmers and businessmen, the so-called oligarchies as in the Isthmian states, or by a new system which radically enfranchised all free-born male citizens, such as in the Athenian democracy. Thus, the outer challenge from the Hellenes' competitors found its response in a social and political transformation of the city-state. And according to Toynbee in *Hellenism* this challenge also spurred the economic specialization that had begun as the result of the Malthusian challenge of over-population.

We sense already that the process of growth is perhaps more complex than that outlined by Toynbee in the first volumes of *A Study of History*. We shall return to this point in chapter 3 under '*The Notion of Growth*'.

The second of these two 'new' challenges came with the Persian invasion. And this, Toynbee says, ironically gave the Hellenes a golden opportunity to come up with a solution along the lines of a Pan-Hellenic political framework. In order to stand a chance against the invading Persians, the Hellenic city-states were forced to band together, though this was very much against their traditional practice of regular interstate warfare. Athens, Sparta and a couple of other Hellenic states managed to put their mutual grievances aside and form the alliance that against all odds defeated the Persians. This is one of the most celebrated victories in the western tradition and there is no need to recount it in detail here. Yet in the fifty years following this miraculous feat the Hellenic spirit soared to the heights from where it produced the age we now know as Classical Greece.

### Time of troubles and breakdown of Hellenism

Unfortunately for the Hellenes the alliance against the Persians did not translate into a permanent political framework uniting all of Hellas. With Athens creating the Delian League to police the sea and Sparta heading the Lacedaimonian League with the landed army, the scene was set for the Peloponnesian War 50 years later. This war was so devastating that the Hellenic society was never the same and it was, according to Toynbee, the first breakdown of the Hellenic Civilization. Sparta eventually won the war and inherited the Athenian empire, but exercised their rule even more harshly than the Athenians had done. The 66 years following the war saw the attempts of various federations of city-states to create political concord and stability, as well as attempts of other individual city-states – Thebes for a quick moment – to be the

leading city-state in Greece. They all failed. Peace and concord is temporarily restored when Macedonia under Philip II imposes her supremacy on the Hellenic city-states and creates the League of Corinth in 337 B.C., an alliance of all European Hellenic city-states with the exception of Sparta. However, this factor that could have stabilized the political situation is nullified. Alexander squanders Macedonia's strength in his ten-year campaign against and beyond the Persian Empire, and after his premature death his generals continue fighting each other for 50 years in parcelling out his empire, the wars now fuelled by the immense plunder from the Persian Empire.

Toynbee sees some balance of power emerging around 275 B.C. between the four successor-states of Alexander's empire and some measure of stability being restored during the 3rd century B.C. This is his first *rally* phase. But it doesn't last long. In the other end of the Mediterranean, Rome and Carthage collide in the 2nd Punic War in 218 B.C. which eventually engulfs the rest of the Mediterranean world and all the other powers in struggles with Rome from which she emerges supreme. In an act of ultimate vindication Rome annihilates Carthage and Corinth in 146 B.C., which leaves no power left to challenge her in the Mediterranean. But it is not enough. During the next 115 years Rome is constantly engaged in warfare until the Empire – and the Hellenic culture – is spread out over most of Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. After several bouts of internal strife, civil wars and violent revolutions the Roman Empire, and Hellenism as a whole, finally finds peace and restoration from the saving hands of Augustus in 31 B.C. Toynbee calls the period 218-31 B.C. *The Age of Agony*, his second rout. It is followed by Augustus' rally and creation of the Universal State and *Pax Romana*. In other words, it is the Romans who finally provide the Hellenic Civilization with the Pan-Hellenic political solution that it had needed desperately for 400 years. But the solution comes too late. The creative spark of the civilization had succumbed due to the continuous wars and according to Toynbee, the unification of Hellenism under Roman arms could only postpone, not avert the disintegration.

#### Universal State-phase and barbarian successor-states

The Universal State of the civilization preceding our Western Civilization is The Roman Empire. This state maintains a more stable and durable form after Augustus'

victory at Actium in 31 B.C. The Roman Empire is Toynbee's archetypal example of a civilization's Universal State and the Romans exhibit tremendous energy in uniting their Empire on the outer practical level. Toynbee mentions a number of examples of this, including the creation of a well-kept system of roads extending throughout the empire, the codification of Roman Law, a universal system of weights and measures, a consistent and, in time, fair administration of the empire's provinces, and of course the vital system of garrisons, fortifications and standing armies that protected the Empire against the barbarians. The *lingua franca* of the Empire are Latin and Greek, the latter of which had already been spoken for several centuries in the areas conquered by Alexander. Of the philosophies that originate from the beginning of the Time of Troubles, Toynbee mentions Platonism, Stoicism, Epicureanism and Pyrrhonism.

At the same time as the Universal State is coming into being, another very peculiar process is taking place. Through Rome's conquests in the East the indigenous religious movements of these areas, the so-called mystery cults, begin flooding into the Roman Empire. There is Isis worship from Egypt, Mithraism from Persia, Judaism and, in time, Christianity from Israel to mention but a few. Of these, Christianity wins out and becomes the spiritual spark that gives birth to the new Western Civilization. The early Christian Church functions as Toynbee's *chrysalis-church*, carrying and maturing this religious spark until it can unfold itself fully in a new civilization.

Meanwhile, the creative, spiritual life of the old civilization is gradually ebbing away. To a still greater extent, its inner life is gone and it is being held together only by the outer structure of its Universal State. Toynbee sees a long *rally* in the two centuries after Augustus whereas the civilization then collapses again in the 3rd century A.D., the Empire falling virtually apart in the period of the Soldier Emperors between 235-284 A.D. This is the third *rout*, during which time there were several independent states or miniature-empires in the area of the Roman Empire. Yet the Illyrian armies manage to put the Empire back together in a third *rally* and the Empire, and the Hellenic Civilization, experience the last longer period of peace and restoration in the 4th and parts of the 5th century. Finally, the barbarians break through a number of times during the 5th century and *rout* Hellenism for the last time.



The invading barbarians then erect their various successor-states, the Visigoths in Spain and parts of France, the Vandals in North Africa and other tribes elsewhere. They are generally short-lived, the strongest last a couple of centuries, and to a great extent build on the social and administrative structures of the now dismembered Roman Empire. The most successful of them is no doubt Charlemagne, king of the Franks and successor to the Merovingian dynasty, who for a while manages to reunite a large part of Europe in what Toynbee calls 'a ghost of the Roman Empire'. In the civilizational cycle these successor-states correspond to the Mycenaean lords who took over the Minoan Civilization – with a Frankish Charlemagne being an apt equivalent of a Mycenaean Agamemnon: both legendary warrior kings of the successor-states<sup>40</sup>. There are also other interesting parallels between the two. They both wage a long and seemingly unnecessary war – Agamemnon against Troy and Charlemagne against the Saxons – which, despite its being ultimately successful, does not prevent their victor's ruin. According to legend, Agamemnon dies at the hands of his wife on his return. Shortly afterward follows the great migration period of the 12th century B.C. which destroyed both the Mycenaean realms and the great Hittite Civilization. And according to Toynbee, it was exactly Charlemagne's war against the Saxons that unleashed the fury of the Scandinavian Vikings, which together with the Magyars from the Eurasian steppe and the Saracens from North Africa, harried Europe in the subsequent centuries.

The most significant difference between the Myceneans and the Frankish and other successors to the Roman Empire is that the Myceneans kept their own religion and that their heroic poetry, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, became the common heritage of the Hellenes and the mythological foundation of their civilization. On the contrary, the various Germanic and Gothic tribes parcelling out the Roman Empire did not keep their own pagan religion; instead they became willing converts to Christianity. As noted previously, Toynbee thus observes that the Hellenic Civilization, along with most other 2nd generation civilizations, were founded by the *external* proletariat of the preceding civilization, in the form of the invading barbarian war bands. Whereas the Western Christian Civilization, along with the other 3rd generation civilizations, grew out of the chrysalis-church founded by the *internal* proletariat of the preceding

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<sup>40</sup> To my knowledge, Toynbee does not mention this parallel anywhere, yet I find it conspicuous.

civilization; that is, by the Christians and their church which developed within the framework of the Roman Empire.

Another interesting difference is that in the Hellenic case, the heroic poetry is created by the first 'line' of barbarians: the Myceneans who crush the Minoan Civilization. The second line following in their wake with the great migration period, as far as we know, did not create anything except havoc. In the case of The West it is opposite. The first line of the barbarians that become almost immediately Christian and create their successor-states to the Roman Empire did not create anything resembling Homer's epics. While the second line, with the Vikings, was very productive. Their creations include such works as the poem *Beowulf*, *The Icelandic Sagas* and *The Edda*. These are the heroic poetry of what Toynbee calls *the abortive Scandinavian Civilization*, which according to him seriously threatened the young Western Christian Civilization at one point during the medieval Dark Age. Another historical scenario could have been, he says, that the Vikings had succeeded with their sieges of London, Paris and Constantinople and that it had been the Gods of Asgaard that had delivered the impulse to the new civilization – as the Olympians did to the Hellenic – instead of the Christian. It went otherwise and the Christian West managed to ward off the series of barbarian *challenges*, both through hard-pressed military defence and, more significantly, through conversion of the invaders, first on the lands they conquered and secondly through missionaries in the barbarians' homelands.

## **The History of the Western Civilization**

### **Birth and growth**

Toynbee does not give a full coherent account of the history of The West as he does, for instance, of Hellenism. Its history lies scattered across the pages of *A Study of History* to be assembled by the persistent reader. The response to the Viking raids, which constitutes the first chapter in the growth process of The West, is thus to be found in volume II under *The Stimulus of Pressures*<sup>41</sup> while 'chapter 2 and 3' in this growth process is described in volume III, under the general analysis of the growth of

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<sup>41</sup> *A Study*, Vol. II, p. 194-201, with the sub-heading *In the Western World over against Scandinavia*.

civilizations<sup>42</sup>. Chapter 4, which is the challenge of anarchy that the world was facing in his time, he deals with extensively in several of his later writings.

According to Toynbee, the Western Civilization is born out of the struggle against the Viking invasions in the end of the medieval Dark Age. These continuous raids prompted the development of the Feudal System, because a far more efficient fighting-machine was needed to deal with the Scandinavian attacks than the traditional poorly equipped militia consisting of small free householders. Military equipment such as the horse, coat of mail, and well-forged swords and helmets were expensive and needed more people to chip in to equip a single warrior. Thus there gradually emerged a professional mounted fighting force – knights – each supported by a number of smallholders. As Toynbee's authority on the subject says: "*One might say – using political expressions with some caution – that the more ancient democratic arrangement had to be replaced by an aristocratic one.*"<sup>43</sup>

Toynbee also notes that not only the Feudal System, but also the kingdoms of England and France came into being as a response to the Vikings raids. And that the capitals of these two new kingdoms became London and Paris which bore the main burden of the attacks and which also at crucial moments prevented the Vikings from advancing further up the Thames and Seine. This somehow made them more preferable as capitals than other cities that were both more easy to defend and also more prosperous at the time. The reaction of Western Christendom also shows in the creation of the English and French national epics *The Battle of Maldon* and *Chanson de Roland*, which may be seen as examples of *heroic poetry* on the side of the 'defenders'. Since both France and England were heavily settled and influenced by Vikings it is perhaps not unreasonable to assume that they influenced the Christian culture with their poetic vein. Indeed in France there developed a flourishing heroic poetry with the numerous *chanson de geste* which became the beginning of the French literary tradition.

After the Vikings had been resisted militarily or allowed to retain their conquests against converting to Christianity, Western Christianity then took to the offensive by sending peaceful conquerors to the homelands of the Vikings in the form of monks and missionaries. This second reaction to the challenge is so successful that

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<sup>42</sup> *A Study*, Vol. III, p. 341-363.

<sup>43</sup> Vinogradoff, Paul: *English society in the eleventh century* (Oxford 1908, Clarendon Press), p. 30 and 34. See *A Study of History*, vol. III., p. 200.

during the 11th century virtually all of Europe is brought within the fold of the Roman Catholic Church<sup>44</sup>. And indeed, the converted Vikings become a powerful military asset for Western Christianity. The descendants of Rollo's Vikings who settled in Normandy in the beginning of the 10th century are found conquering areas from both the Muslims and from Orthodox Christendom in the Mediterranean a little over a century later. Indeed, some have described the first crusade that went out primarily from Normandy in the late eleventh century as essentially a Viking campaign under Christian banners<sup>45</sup>.

The next chapter in the growth of The West comes with the Renaissance in Italy. And Toynbee compares this with the growth phase in the Hellenic Civilization where Athens made her prime contributions: "*Like Attica in Hellas, Lombardy and Tuscany in Western Christendom served, after withdrawal, as a segregated social laboratory in which the experiment of transforming a locally self-sufficient agricultural society into an internationally interdependent commercial and industrial society was successfully carried out.*"<sup>46</sup>

It is not really clear in Toynbee's analysis what the *challenge* was that brought the Italian city-states to perform this creative act. In any case, they do it, and Toynbee determines their achievements to be three in kind: "*The substitution of a democratic for an aristocratic form of government; the substitution of a commercial and industrial for a purely agricultural economy; and the introduction of a new standard of business-like efficiency into the conduct of both economics and politics.*"<sup>47</sup>

The Italians were not alone in Europe in experimenting with the new city-state way of life, although they have had the greatest legacy. In Flanders there was a large cluster of independent city-states too, several in South and West Germany and Switzerland, plus the strong Hansa towns in Northern Germany. Yet this form of political organization was not 'native' to Western Christendom, says Toynbee. The city-states had emerged in Hellas out of the chaos of the Dark Age, while in The West the response to that challenge had been the formation of the medieval feudal kingdoms and principalities. Thus, even though by the end of the 14th century the

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<sup>44</sup> This is apart from certain areas to the east like Poland and Lithuania that were converted during the 13th and 14th centuries.

<sup>45</sup> Somerwell, vol. I, p. 158.

<sup>46</sup> *A Study*, vol. III., p. 342.

<sup>47</sup> *A Study*, vol. III., p. 354.

'feudal darkness' of Europe was thickly sown by the starry light from the new flourishing city-states, this new city-state cosmos proved ultimately abortive. The Italians got rid of it themselves in the process of welding 70-80 minor city-states into 10 larger ones, because they all – except Venice – lost their new-won democratic freedom in the process. Despite this sacrifice the Italian city-states were still not able to hold their own against the feudal kingdoms of Transalpine Europe. The other city-states of Europe banded together in various federations, which were all in time defeated by the neighbouring feudal kingdoms, with the notable exception of the Swiss.

With these developments it was decided that The West was not going to be a society of city-states. There originated instead the challenge of applying the political and economic inventions of the city-states of Renaissance Italy to the much larger feudal kingdoms of the rest of Europe. Toynbee sees this as the third grand challenge in the history of the growth of Western Civilization<sup>48</sup>. Both the Dutch and the Swiss take up this challenge but because they ultimately are city-state federations themselves and not the feudal kingdoms which the challenge lies in transforming, and because they are not isolated enough to carry out their creative work, they fail. It becomes England that solves the problem by adapting the medieval institution of 'parliament' to a new use. Originally, this was an institution whereby representatives of the Estates of the Realm would meet periodically with the Crown in order to vent their grievances and consult with or criticize the government. The achievement of the English was, when the time came, to transform this medieval institution into a body that could actually run the government instead of merely consulting with it. It was, in other words, the invention of representative democracy. This new political liberty for the common man and increased influence and control over one's life was also essential, Toynbee says, for the subsequent industrial revolution that was triggered precisely in England. In the old city-states, these two inventions had also gone hand in hand, although on a much smaller scale.

As for the last challenge that Toynbee believes faces Western Civilization, it is the same that broke the neck of the Hellenic Civilization: namely of creating some form of political unity in a world that has become irretrievably interconnected and

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<sup>48</sup> Again, it does not appear crystal clear why this was a challenge. We will discuss this further in chapter 3 under *growth*.

interdependent on the economic level. A world of still more potent and dangerously contending powers. This brings us to the Time of Troubles.

### Time of Troubles and *possible* breakdown of The West

Toynbee is quite wary about expressing his opinions about our own civilization and whether it has broken down or not. He regularly expresses the difficulty of this assessment in allegories such as it being impossible for the crew of a ship, while undertaking their voyage, to know whether the ship will be destroyed on rocks, caught and sunk by storms or whether it will find a safe harbour somewhere at an unknown destination<sup>49</sup>. He does, however, believe to detect a rhythm following the breakdown-rhythm of the Hellenic Civilization.

He sees two clearly distinguished paroxysms of all-out warfare, namely what he calls 'The Wars of Religion' and 'The Wars of Nationality'. The first begins with the violence unleashed by the Reformation that raged across Europe during the sixteenth century and escalated into the Thirty Years War from 1618-48. After these Toynbee sees a temporary *rally* emerging in the end of the seventeenth century and stretching into the eighteenth, brought about by the 'Principle of Religious Toleration' which served to moderate the religious tempers. In this period, though short, wars did occur but were mostly a kind of 'sport of the kings', shorter and more moderate. However, with the Napoleonic Wars following the French Revolution the Wars of Nationality began: the second series of all-out wars in The West, culminating with World War I and II in Toynbee's own lifetime. The wars of this second *rout* or breakdown were even bloodier and more ferocious than the first, both because of the increased destructiveness of the weapons and the number of soldiers enrolled in the armies, but also because '*the object – or pretext – of the hostilities was less sublime and ethereal*'.<sup>50</sup> As Toynbee says, the human soul abhors a spiritual vacuum, so when it ousted religion it decided to worship nationality in its place<sup>51</sup>, only with a worse result. The Napoleonic Wars were also the first attempt at creating the Universal State of The West through force of arms that came relatively close to success during the

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<sup>49</sup> *A Study*, vol. VI, p. 313.

<sup>50</sup> *A Study*, vol. VI. P. 317.

<sup>51</sup> A similar point is made by Carl Gustav Jung.

first half of Napoleon's reign. The second attempt was Hitler's, likewise almost successful for a short period, but also doomed to failure.

During the second rout of the Western Time of Troubles we see the emergence of the mass cities that Spengler talks about: London, Paris, New York, and which the Hellenic Civilization saw emerging during the Hellenistic Period in cities like Rome, Carthage and Alexandria. We also see the emergence of two new *lingua franca*: French and later English. Latin was of course *lingua franca* all through the Middle Ages in Europe but it was a remnant, perhaps the most enduring one, from the Roman Empire. English and French are the new *lingua franca* of The West that emerge during the modern period. During the Time of Troubles there also emerge, according to Toynbee, the Western philosophies of 'Cartesianism' and 'Hegelianism', corresponding to the Greek philosophies of the Hellenistic Period.

Toynbee's personal experience of having lived through two World Wars and the general climate of the Cold War in which he lived during his older days, made him an unwavering proponent for the establishment of some kind of global political world order or actual world government. He claimed that The West over the preceding centuries had 'cast its political and economic net' out over the rest of the world to such an extent that all other civilizations on Earth had become incorporated in the *internal proletariat* of The West. The world government that he so longed for was thus what would become the Universal State of The West – global in scope for the first time in history. His historical analysis had convinced him that militarism had been the doom of nearly every other civilization having existed on Earth and in an age of atomic weapons and two contending superpowers, The West and indeed the whole world were suspended in the constant threat of sudden, final annihilation. The only way Toynbee foresaw that this catastrophe could be averted was through the creation of some kind of world government that could perform the same service for a Westernized world that the Roman Empire performed for the Hellenic Civilization. Yet towards the end of his life he wasn't optimistic about its prospects.

#### A Western Universal State and new religions?

Toynbee died in 1975 and did not see any signs of a Western Universal State emerging in his later years. Can we, if we accept the basic premise of his system that a civilization towards the later part of its life becomes unified in a Universal State,

see any signs of it now, 37 years after his death? If we do accept that premise, I find it reasonable to assume – as I will argue further in chapter 3 under ‘*Time of Troubles vs. the Expansion-breakdown-model*’ – that we are now at a point of development in The West that corresponds roughly to where the Greeks and Romans were in the *beginning* of the 1st century B.C. At this time, Rome was clearly dominant in the Mediterranean, but was still being severely challenged on several occasions – for instance by King Mithridates VI of Pontus during several wars from 88-63 and by the Parthians in 53. Thus, the Empire did not come out in its Universal State form before the *end* of the 1st century B.C. Accordingly, if we look for possible signs of an emerging Western Universal State we should keep in mind that it may only just be... emerging.

One obvious sign seems to be the emergence of the EU, the first serious political unification of the heartland of the West since the Roman Empire. This is unquestionably a significant achievement. The Europe that conquered and colonized the world through centuries and then ravaged it in two devastating World Wars is now working peacefully towards still greater integration and co-operation. Such a reunification on the political level after we have lost it on the spiritual (or, as I will argue later, cosmological) level is a clear feature of an emerging Universal State. However, The West today is much more than Europe, so we should not let ourselves be deceived into considering modern Europe to be the equivalent of the Roman Empire. That role befalls the United States. The European Union is rather the parallel of some Greek confederacy.

There are several intriguing parallels between ancient Rome and present-day United States. They are both made up by immigrants from the motherland of the civilization (the Romans maybe not so much in reality, but according to their own legend which tells us where their cultural allegiance lay). They also seem to share enough characteristics in their national cultures to make a comparative study of their national mentalities highly interesting. But since this is not the proper place for a deeper cultural analysis, let us limit ourselves to a few hard facts from three different fields. First of all, with more than 700 military bases on every continent of the world<sup>52</sup>, the US navy permanently stationed in every major ocean and US expenditure

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<sup>52</sup> Sources vary on this one, but most put it above 700. Republican candidate for President Ron Paul in a presidential debate on Sept. 12, 2011, put it as high as over 900 overseas bases.



on 'defence' accounting for 41 percent of the total world military budget the US is the undisputed military hegemon on the planet today. Of course, in an age of nuclear weapons no one power can ever gain complete supremacy but by every other military measure, the US has it. It is also the only country that continues to wage expensive full-scale wars in foreign far-away countries. Economically it still is the largest economy in the world and with the dollar being the world's reserve currency (*the* reason that made it possible for them to accumulate such staggering amounts of debt) it also has an absolute advantage on this level. Indeed, this privileged status of the dollar is what made it possible for the US to pay for its military supremacy<sup>53</sup>. Finally, on the political level, we may note the leading role that the US played in the creation of the host of UN and international financial institutions that were founded after World War II and which by now could be said to perform some form of emerging global governance. In short, noting just a few of the most conspicuous features, the US might be interpreted as at least *attempting* to perform a similar role to that of the Roman Republic in the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. Whether they will succeed is of course an open question.

The final development that has occurred since Toynbee's death and which clearly has a parallel in the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. Hellenic Civilization is the emergence in The West of new and old religions. Toynbee took a world tour in 1956-57, and one of the declared goals was to look for possible signs of new syncretistic religions<sup>54</sup>. He didn't find many and attributed this to the 'continuous vitality of the Christian Church'. Apparently, he did not notice what was going on around him about a decade later with the Youth Revolt of the late 1960's and the exploding interest in Eastern religions in much of the counterculture of that period. Since then, interest in religions, ideas and spiritual practices from other cultures has increased to the point that today one will find classes in yoga, meditation, Buddhism, tantra and a host of other New Age philosophies and self-help practices on virtually every street corner in every medium sized Western city. Not to mention, of course, the growing size of Islamic communities within Western societies of today. Clearly, the cultural and religious melting pot that is another conspicuous feature of a civilization's Universal State has become a reality in The West today, and one that continues to grow.

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<http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2011/sep/14/ron-paul/ron-paul-says-us-has-military-personnel-130-nation/>

<sup>53</sup> Layne, Christopher. Article.

<sup>54</sup> McNeill, p. 235.

## Summary

If we should sum up the essence of Toynbee's system it might be as follows: Both the Hellenic and the Western Civilizations originate out of a Dark Age of general chaos. For several centuries they each share a common culture and religion but are split up in a multitude of independent political units. Circa half way between the civilization's birth and the coming into being of its Universal State, various 'secular' philosophies begin to occur, questioning inherited religious beliefs, and the Times of Troubles begin. It comes in two main routs and after the second, the only remaining superpower creates the Universal State (which remains to be seen full-scale in The West). The couple of centuries leading up to the creation of the Universal State see the creation of massive cities and the emergence of two new *lingua franca* that allows for easy communication throughout the Universal State. Around the time of the creation of the Universal State new and old religious movements gain footing and become increasingly popular within the civilization.

We ought perhaps to include also the obvious parallel between the barbarian successor-states of Agamemnon and Charlemagne, but strictly speaking, they belong to the interregnum *before* Toynbee's civilizations come into being. This definition of civilization, however, we will deal with in the following.

## Chapter 3: Discussion of Toynbee's system and the critique

In the foregoing chapter I have presented the essentials of Toynbee's account of Hellenism and The West. In the present chapter we will be giving this account and the system that he presents for the development of these two civilizations a serious treatment. There are two basic questions that will be guiding us in this inquiry. One is an attempt to assess the validity of his system, the patterns and processes he describes. Are they real? Do they occur the way he describes them? If they are wrong or imprecise can we then clarify, amend or update them in any way?

The second question and interest is: If there are any such patterns, then *why* do they occur in this particular way? This, in other words, is an attempt to understand the deeper mechanisms of Toynbee's system. Not merely acknowledging that this cogwheel turns in that direction and that pipe runs over there, but understanding why they do so. In a sense, this is perhaps the question that makes this a philosophy thesis. We might just lean back and enjoy the historical ride that Toynbee takes us on, or discuss whether this or that process actually occurs or not – all good and important undertakings – but the philosophical impulse ventures one step further and asks why it is so. In so far as there are some recurring patterns that we can establish with reasonable certainty, then why do they occur?

For instance, why does a civilization get a Universal State at a late stage of its life? And why do people at this point begin to feel attracted to new religions? These are some of the parts of a civilization's pattern that seem most clearly observable. There are of course many possible answers to these questions and they can be illuminated from many angles. Most branches of the human and social sciences will have some theory to explain the rise of new religious movements today. I think an interesting perspective on this theme may be reached if we probe the question of what a civilization actually is. An explanation of what a civilization really is ought to be able to present at least some understanding of the processes occurring within a civilization.

This, then, is the question we will be pursuing in the following. It is the question we will begin with because the explanation that I will venture may help us when we next turn to the discussion of the growth process and whether there can be discerned a recurring pattern here. Finally, we will look into the term Time of Troubles and consider if this dynamic fits together with the civilization's physical expansion.

### **A Cosmology as the Core of a Civilization**

The Dutch historian Pieter Geyl is one of the writers who notes Toynbee's inconsistent usage of the term *civilization*. For instance during a discussion of Toynbee's analysis of the origin of civilizations and his use of Holland as the example of this, he remarks that: "*The civilization of Holland, however, is no more*

*than a parochial part of the great Western civilization*<sup>55</sup>". According to Toynbee's own definition that is. W. den Boer notes a similar case regarding Sparta's relation to the Hellenic Civilization, where Toynbee has classified Sparta as one among five *arrested civilizations* that have ceased to grow. Boer does not suppose that Toynbee had simply made a mistake, but instead assumes that he deliberately "*segregated and removed [Sparta] from Greek civilization as an alien body*"<sup>56</sup>. In *Reconsiderations* from 1961, however, Toynbee skipped the notion of arrested civilizations, and it clearly seems like a simple misapplication of terms.

More troubling could seem his frequent updating of the list of civilizations, how many there were and which historical societies they were comprised of, although it surely demonstrated his willingness to reconsider his previous conclusions. Yet this is also of less importance to us, since the civilizations of Hellenism and The West and the grander phases that they had gone through in their lives, remained unchanged in Toynbee's system throughout his life.

The main difficulties and inconsistencies regarding *civilization* really arise when Toynbee attempts to define it. Let us see if we can clarify what he means. In the one-volume edition of *A Study of History* from 1972 Toynbee writes the following about the nature of civilizations:

*"A. N. Whitehead sure hits the truth in a passage ... in which he declares that 'in each age of the world distinguished by high activity, there will be found at its culmination, and among the agencies leading to that culmination, some profound cosmological outlook, implicitly accepted, impressing its own type on the current springs of action'.*

*Christopher Dawson is making the same point when he says that 'behind every civilization there is a vision'. (...) Following Whitehead's lead, I should define civilization in spiritual terms. Perhaps it might be defined as an endeavour to create a state of society in which the whole of Mankind will be able to live together in harmony, as members of a single all-inclusive family. This is, I believe, the goal at which all civilizations so far known have been aiming unconsciously, if not consciously.*"<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Montagu, p. 46.

<sup>56</sup> Montagu, p. 237.

<sup>57</sup> *A Study*, one-vol. edition, p. 44.

The keyword here seems to me to be 'cosmology' and the whole idea that our conception of the world influences, indeed directs, our actions. Toynbee then expresses his belief that harmonious co-living of Humanity is the purpose of civilizations. If so, it must certainly still be said to be a work in progress and as a definition of what constitutes a 'civilization' it seems to me hopelessly vague. It doesn't tell us anything about what a civilization actually is. So can we get any clearer on what it means to define civilization 'in spiritual terms'?

*“Civilizations are invisible, just as constitutions, states, and churches are, and this for just the same reasons. But civilizations, too, have manifestations that are visible, like the Prussian state's gold-crowned eagles and spiked helmets, and like the Christian Church's crosses and surplices. Set side by side an Egyptian, an Hellenic, and a pre-Renaissance Western statue. It will be impossible to mistake which of these is the product of which school of sculptors. The distinctiveness of each of the three artistic styles is not only visible; it is definite – more definite than any of the visible products or emblems of any church or state. By exploring the range, in space and time, of a civilization's distinctive artistic style, one can ascertain the spatial and temporal bounds of the civilization that this style expresses. (...)*

*The visible works of art that reveal so much about their civilization are merely expressions of it. They are not the civilization itself. That remains invisible, like a church or a state. When the anthropologist or the cultural historian tries to analyze the observable qualities that have been his clues to the diagnosis of a culture, he analyses them, as Bagby notices, in terms of ideas and values.”<sup>58</sup>*

So, civilizations are invisible but they have observable manifestations, most notably the arts. But what, for Toynbee, is this invisible something which is the civilization? It is not clear and the quotation leaves us with at least two possible interpretations. The last sentence “... when the anthropologist... tries to analyze the observable qualities... of a culture, he analyses them... in terms of values and ideas...” points, again, towards the notion of a 'cosmology' being the essential part that defines a civilization. As I will argue a little later, there are several good reasons to suppose

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<sup>58</sup> *A Study*, vol. XIII, p. 46.

this. However, Toynbee can also be interpreted in another way. The whole idea of the arts expressing the essence of a civilization sounds very much like Spengler's idea that a culture's soul expresses itself in the areas of *religion, art, science and politics*. And to Spengler this soul is something *real*, a spiritual presence of some sort that permeates all of the culture's manifestations and from which they ultimately originate. In other words, a civilization is not just a cosmology existing within the skulls of its members, it is something that exists beyond the individuals who are members of that civilization.

Given Toynbee's religious turn and the way he writes about the arts, he could be interpreted as adhering to this view, but I think the most probable answer is that he wasn't clear on it himself. His own vague descriptions of the term – and, as we shall see soon, his ambiguity gets even stronger – testify to this. However, it perhaps doesn't pose a major problem since the two views are not necessarily mutually exclusive. A civilization could be seen as being alive and growing when its cultural soul is present in it and/or as long as it has a coherent or partially coherent cosmology. It could be seen as breaking down, creating its Universal State (or entering into its civilization-phase in Spenglerian terms) when the cultural soul leaves the civilization and/or when the cosmology breaks definitively down.

The idea of a culture/civilization having an actual soul can be fascinating in its own right, but it is difficult to work with and still more difficult to prove. So, without ruling it out, I will in the following work with an understanding of a civilization as being held together by what we could call a *shared cosmology*. I suggest that we understand the nexus of a civilization as being essentially a meta-narrative, a set of myths that gives meaning and order to the universe and that explains the role and purpose of human beings in that universe. Such a shared cosmology also defines the primary values and virtues of life, the aspects of human nature to be expressed and the ones to be suppressed and overcome, or even denied. And through this definition of the nature of the universe, the purpose of human existence and the primary values of life, the cosmology also lays out certain tracks of development for the civilization, opening some roads and closing others.

In the next paragraph I will investigate further the nature and dynamics of this cosmology. For now, given the way Toynbee approaches and works in practise with his civilizations in *A Study*, it seems like a workable definition. Yet there is one more

problem. For whether he understands a civilization as being endowed with an actual live spiritual presence or whether he understands it as being essentially its cosmology, he clearly defines it 'in spiritual terms'. Yet doesn't this contradict his previous claim that the Hellenic Civilization came into being with the *political creation* of the city-states as the reaction to the preceding chaos of the Dark Age, and The West with the equally *political and social invention* of the Feudal System as the response to the medieval interregnum? Here he clearly seems to understand the civilization in terms of its outer manifestations.

There may be a simple answer to this apparent contradiction. Namely the fact that Toynbee describes the genesis of these civilizations in the first volumes of *A Study of History* which was published in 1934 and at this time he still held a mainly scientific outlook on the world. While the one-volume edition of *A Study* where he gives the above quoted definition was published in 1972, long after his life-altering mystical experiences. It reflects perhaps also the other discrepancy in his thought which we investigated as his 'religious turn' in chapter 1, which is the value he – at different moments – attribute to the civilizations and the so-called higher religions. In the beginning of his life and career, the civilizations are the purpose and flower of history and the religions, in the form of chrysalis-churches, serve as midwives for the birth of civilizations. While towards the end of his life, after his various mystical experiences, this system of valuation is turned upside-down, the civilizations now only having a *raison d'être* at all in so far as they 'minister to the process of religion'.

The reasoning seems a bit naive and I catch myself smiling when I read it. Why exactly is it that either has to receive its *raison d'être* through its contribution to the other's existence? The turning fortunes of the two protagonists so obviously reflect the turn of events and experiences in Toynbee's own life. Yet there is more to this than a mere biographical interpretation. For on a deeper level this whole justification of the one's existence through its contribution to the other's can also be seen as reflecting a deeper schism in the Western psyche. For a thousand years medieval Christianity shunned physical life and viewed it essentially as a prison and a trial leading to the real and true existence in God's kingdom, while from the Late Middle Ages onwards Western man increasingly delved into matter until he finally ejected God and anything spiritual from his account of the universe, leading to the extreme materialism that permeates our society today. We still have not found a balance, and Toynbee clearly did not either.

As should be clear by now, Toynbee is very inconsistent both about defining what a civilization is and on the value he attributes to it. On this whole aspect, I believe Spengler has a more profound and useful understanding. He sees all the cultural expressions – whether political, religious, artistic, scientific or whatever – as manifestations of that particular culture’s soul. There is no valuation or judgment of one type of expression being better than another. To him the important thing is that an expression *is* a manifestation of that soul, and that is why he abhors the *civilization-phase* where, according to him, that soul has left the culture.

Following this Spenglerian notion, I would define *Civilization* as being *both* the invisible and the visible: that is both the particular civilization’s cosmology *and* the multifarious cultural manifestations – religious, artistic, political, economic, social, scientific, intellectual, etc. – that are coloured by it. We may note here that in the life of our two civilizations under treatment the cosmology in both cases came first, in the form of a religion. In the case of Western Civilization’s relation to the Catholic Church and worldview, this is obvious, that cosmology came first. And at the dawn of the Hellenic city-state cosmos in the 9-8th centuries B.C. there also already existed a common Hellenic culture and religion, indeed, there did so already at the time of the war against Troy if we are to trust Homer, and also if we adhere to modern research<sup>59</sup>.

If we define *civilization* in this way, being both its cosmology and the various visible cultural expressions, it would mean that we would have to include in a civilization’s history the account of the formation of that civilization’s cosmology. In the case of The West that would include the account of the formation of the Christian church and worldview from the birth of Christ up to the beginning of the post-Dark Age society of The West around the year 1000. As we shall see in the following section on *growth* I believe we can even tell significant parts of that story using Toynbee’s terms *Challenge and Response*, and perhaps they even fit better here than they do on his subsequent story of the development of The West, which we recounted in chapter 2.

In the case of the Hellenic Civilization this revised notion of what counts as being part of a civilization will include the formation of the Olympian Pantheon and the Eleusinian Mysteries in the ages preceding maybe even Mycenaean society,

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<sup>59</sup> Martin tells us that the origins of Hellenic religion are obscure, but that the Mycenaean worshipped the gods of Zeus, Hera and Poseidon. Martin, p. 30.



although the details of this remain largely obscure. At any rate, in both cases there is a long period of gestation of the cosmology before it spawns its own post-Dark Age society, organized and inspired along the lines of that cosmology and not merely on the structures of the preceding civilization's Universal State. In the case of The West, that formative period lasted a thousand years, approximately the same amount of time as the whole active growth phase of our civilization, as related by Toynbee. This way of understanding civilizations also means that the Hellenic and Western Civilizations actually co-existed in the same geographical area for the better half of a millennium, the Hellenic in its outward, practical Universal State-phase and The West in its budding formative mainly cosmological form where it was still defining its place in (and understanding of) the world.

With this revised idea of what a civilization is and of what counts as being part of its history we can proceed to discuss the nature and importance of the glue that keeps it together: The cosmology.

#### A Civilization's cosmology – function and dynamics

In this paragraph I will try to penetrate a bit further into the question of what a cosmology actually is and the function it performs for a civilization. In doing so, I will advance somewhat beyond a mere discussion of Toynbee's theory, yet it is my hope that this attempt in clarifying the function of the cosmology will also shed some light on some of a civilization's developments as they are recounted by Toynbee, for instance the creation of its Universal State and the rise of new religions.

First of all, it should be unmistakably clear how important human beings' values and conception of the world is for their interaction and co-operation. This is a recognition that hardly needs any proof. Think of the examples in the recent years where a Danish cartoonist and lately an American film ridiculed the prophet Mohammed. Do the same thing with Jesus and hardly anyone in The West would notice, save perhaps a few modern Christians who might feel offended, but surely wouldn't have a public case. Yet the Muslim world was in uproar. Think of an extreme act as the burning of innocent women as witches from the late fifteenth century onwards. You obviously don't do that unless you believe, as those people did, that women stood closer to the devil and that things such as magic and evil eyes were real and effective. Or think of the 1968 landing on the Moon. One does not

undertake such a project if one still believes that the Moon and the other heavenly bodies are being dragged across the sky by oxen in a cart or whatever else people might have believed to be the case.

It should be self-evident then that the importance of our understanding of the world – the cosmology that we consciously or unconsciously accept – can hardly be overestimated. It shapes our actions, our emotions, our understanding of ourselves. It is worth stressing because we often end up taking a particular worldview for granted when we live under its influence. Having recognized the cosmology's importance, it also makes sense that it originates way before the society that it inspires comes into being, since any kind of coordinated action becomes difficult if people do not share the same fundamental views and values. I'm sure anyone who has tried to orchestrate a complex work process with people from many different cultures can testify to this. Things can be explained at times very thoroughly, yet at the end of the day they mean different things to different people, or within different worldviews, and different actions are the result. If a work situation of that kind can be difficult then imagine trying to build a civilization together. It seems reasonable then that the cosmology has to come first.

Can we be more specific about the influence and function that the cosmology performs for the civilization? I think we can, and I think it can be said to be important in two ways. First, the particularity of the cosmology colours the civilization. It allows certain actions and expressions of human nature and denies others, or at least values and interprets them in different ways. Secondly, the cosmology is what gives unity to the civilization. Indeed, I would suggest that it is, in the first many centuries at least, what makes it *a* civilization at all.

Let us look at the first aspect. The cosmology colours the civilization in question, but it should not be understood so that all the civilization's manifestations originate from it – as Spengler would say is the case with the culture's soul giving rise to all that culture's creations. It is rather that the cosmology gives the various cultural expressions a particular flavour. An example can illustrate this. Think of the more warlike aspects of human nature. In the cosmologies of our two civilizations these aspects are regarded entirely differently. In the Hellenic Civilization a man was supposed and encouraged to exhibit all the warrior's virtues of courage, honour, strength and outward aggressiveness. The primary test of his worth was in battle. Most of the gods in the Olympic Pantheon were great warriors and the common

literary treasure of all Hellenes, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, are about great heroes and military adventures. The emphasis on warrior virtues in this civilization can hardly be overestimated, indeed, they seem to have *intrinsic* value. In Catholic Christianity it was to the contrary – at least in certain parts its history<sup>60</sup>. Christianity deliberately distanced itself from the overt militarism of the Greco-Roman culture. A true Christian was supposed to be devoted to God and not to the fight over the petty spoils of this world. Yet Christians are also humans and humans have aggressions. This was especially the case with the newly Christianized Normans, Viking settlers from Scandinavia. So, in short, the crusade was invented, sanctioning violence if it served God's purpose on Earth. The point is, the warlike aspects of human nature find their expression in both civilizations, but the value attributed to them and the ways of justifying them are entirely different.

Another example is religious manifestations. The religious impulse is inherent in human nature and asserts itself in every civilization. But different cosmologies give rise to wholly different rites, rituals, sacraments, offerings, prayers, initiations, marriages, funerals, etc. Human nature is human nature, but it is given different manifestations depending on the cosmology under which we live. Even when people rebel against the cosmology implicitly accepted by their society – and this certainly occurs, there have always been dissidents – that cosmology also tends to colour their actions in that they become 'anti-' that particular cosmology. As for instance with modern science that, being born in a strongly Christian age, has become decidedly anti-spiritual.

Secondly, I suggest that beyond colouring the civilization the cosmology really is what makes it *a* civilization at all. Or put in another way, that the body social which the pattern identified by Toynbee occurs in is defined by the cosmology shared by its members. If we look at our Western Civilization the Christian meta-narrative was our original cosmology. Accordingly, during medieval times when that cosmology was still whole and intact, all the great philosophers, mystics and cosmology-builders generally worked within a Christian framework – one could mention a Peter Abelard, a Thomas Aquinas, a William of Ockham, a Dante, a Francis of Assisi. But from the

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<sup>60</sup> It is of course a well-known fact that Christianity in practise has been one of the most violent religions to have ever existed on Earth. The point to notice here is not the amount of actual violence, but the way violence is *perceived* and *justified*, and here there seems to have been a significant difference.

time of the Protestant Reformation onwards, this begins to change. The great cosmology-builders that we remember from the modern age, a Galilei, a Copernicus, a Descartes, a Newton, an Einstein do not describe the world in Biblical terms. They describe their findings in the emerging language of science.<sup>61</sup>

If the cosmology is what gives unity to the civilization, then it is of course a dire moment when that cosmology begins to break down. It seems that when this happens there emerge a number of attempts to 1) rescue the old cosmology by defending it as it is or by integrating new views or discoveries into it, 2) create new cosmologies that tend to reuse some of the basic assumptions of the old one and 3) recreate unity, not on a cosmological level, but on the outer political, judicial and economic level in the form of a Universal State. In other words, if we should define the key plot in the life and death of civilizations it might be something as poetic as *the creation and loss of cosmological unity and the quest to find or re-create that unity again, in whatever form.*

Again, if we look at our Western Civilization an example of the first kind of attempts would be, for instance, the Counter-Reformation of the Catholic Church following the Protestant Reformation. Ironically, Catholic attempts to create a new and more accurate calendar may have triggered important parts of the scientific revolution<sup>62</sup>. More recent examples are the various attempts to reconcile the discoveries of science with the Biblical Genesis Myth that insists on the creation of the universe by the Abrahamic God. Attempts of this kind have developed since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, continue to develop and are generally known as ‘Creationism’<sup>63</sup>. They include everything from die-hard fanatics of the medieval Christian cosmology who claim that the Earth is only 6000 years old to proponents of, for instance, the theory of ‘Intelligent Design’ who more moderately claim that *‘certain features of the universe and of living things are best explained by an intelligent cause, not an undirected process such as natural selection.’*<sup>64</sup> Generally, it must be said that none

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<sup>61</sup> It should be said, though, that most of these men were deeply religious and that many of them went to the study of nature with the exact purpose of understanding God through his workings in the created world. However, even if we admit this gradual historical development of the modern scientific worldview and if we admit the ‘positive’ influence of religion on early science, the result of it - the modern scientific worldview – and the religious cosmology of the High Middle Ages surely are radically different.

<sup>62</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Counter-Reformation>

<sup>63</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Creationism>

<sup>64</sup> Webpage of the Discovery Institute, promoting the theory of Intelligent Design: <http://www.discovery.org/csc/topQuestions.php#questionsAboutIntelligentDesign>

of these attempts have acquired anything near the meta-cosmological status on a civilizational level enjoyed by the Christian cosmology in the Middle Ages, and thus, judged as attempts to recreate unity on a civilizational level in the form of a *shared cosmology*, they have failed.

The new cosmology that has taken over from the Christian one is, of course, science. We turn to science today when we want to know something about the world. It was the discoveries of science that dismembered the Christian cosmology and erected a scientific one in its stead. The question is: Can science perform the function of giving unity to our civilization on a cosmological level like the Christian cosmology did? Or will we need to have unity re-imposed on us on the outer level in the form of a Universal State? As Toynbee says this third kind of attempt to recreate unity in The West has been tried a couple of times, first by Napoleon and then by Hitler. Surely we would all like to avoid another attempt along those lines. So could science perform the work instead?

The question of course presumes that it is a cosmology that makes a civilization a civilization and that, when it breaks down, there is a longing to recreate that unity. But if we accept this, then it is an important question. In our search for an answer, we may first notice one more characteristic about a unity-endowing cosmology; that such a cosmology can be said to consist of two parts: A descriptive part that makes sense of the universe, and a prescriptive part that tells us how to live in that universe. In other words, in such a cosmology a meaningful existence, a philosophy of life, is derived directly from the account of the nature of the universe that human beings inhabit. One's life and actions are directly and intimately connected with the cosmos.

Such a cosmology brings the macrocosmos and microcosmos together in a powerfully coherent whole. In that way, it is unifying in two senses of the word: It unites a group of peoples into what we have called a civilization, and it unites the lives of human beings with a vision of the grander structure and purpose of the cosmos. If we were to put such an understanding of *Cosmology* on a general formula it would be: "*The world is X, therefore thou shalt do Y*". Translated into Christian terms this would be something on the order of: "*God has created the universe and has given us his divine revelation, so thou shalt do as he says.*"

Can we put science on a similar formula? It may not be put equally simple, but thinking about the matter we do find a number of fundamental assumptions about

the world that are shared by probably every scientist in virtually every field and by the large majority of Western people today. A few of these most important and general assumptions might be formulated as: *“The universe is made up of dark matter and atoms and stars and galaxies. The Earth is round and certainly not the center of the universe. Humans have developed from the apes, making us simply an advanced animal, and the whole lot was created 15 billion years ago by a huge blast out of nothing.”*

This is of course greatly simplified, but I think the reader will agree with me that most Western people today and every living scientist will accept this as self-evidently true. It is formulated very broadly and that is exactly the point, because we are looking here for those very cornerstones of our understanding of the world that everybody shares and that we never question. And the above statements are certainly among them. But what then? Does science, on the basis of this, tell us how to live? Can we derive a philosophy of life from the above formulated creed? The answer is: Science does not and we cannot. It reveals the void between the stars, between the sub-atomic particles, in human life, but it is up to us to fill that void again. In itself science is not a prescriptive cosmology and therefore it cannot direct action. It cannot tell us how to live. It needs to be coupled with something else in order to be prescriptive, such as an ethical or political philosophy. And given its flexibility, it does lend itself readily to several such philosophies.

Throughout the modern age various ethical and political philosophies have been developed that claimed to be based on science, or were presented in a scientific language. On the ethical level we could mention the philosophies of consequentialism and deontology – apt equivalents of Stoicism and Epicureanism in Hellenistic times. On the political and economic level Marxism and capitalism have been the two protagonists. Toynbee’s own philosophy of history is an attempt to give meaning to world history that also – like Marx before him, but with a very different result – claimed to be based on science. The point I want to make here is that, from a perspective that considers a cosmology as the essential glue of a civilization, all of these various modern philosophies can be interpreted as attempts to complete the ‘half’ only descriptive cosmology of science. They may be interpreted as attempts to add a normative leg to science.

If we interpret them in this way, then the next question is: Have any of them acquired meta-cosmological status today? Many surely haven’t, but it seems fair to

say that a combination of democracy, capitalism and civil and human rights has become the unquestionable model for the structuring of a society in The West today. These are values and ideas that we take virtually for granted. Much like science, they are ideas that we share and which are an integral part of our worldview. We could consider to regard this cocktail of ideas together with science as a ‘modern secular Western cosmology’. They make sense of the universe, tell us how to live in and organize a society, urge us to produce and consume. It is also this cosmology that, through the agency of corporate and financial institutions who translate that cosmology into practise, is conquering the world in these years. Most countries in the world have accepted these Western ideas and are integrating the majority of them into their own societies. In that sense, this modern cosmology might be said to form the ideological basis for The West’s emerging Universal State.

The combination of science, democracy and capitalism surely are ideas and values that are shared across our civilization. As such, it may also have given our civilization some sense of unity again – especially after the defeat of its communist and fascist rivals. Yet as a cosmology, I would say that it still fails in one important respect. It may, at times, give us the feeling of living in a meaningful and just society, but it cannot provide the feeling of living in a meaningful *universe*. It does not bring the macro- and microcosmos together the purposeful way that a religious cosmology does. In this way, I think the notion of a cosmology may serve as one possible explanation as to why increasing numbers of Westerners today feel attracted to the old cosmologies of The East in the various forms that they appear, and thus to the rise of new religious and spiritual movements that we have seen in the last 40-50 years. It is because there is, deep within the core of what it means to be human, a desire to live in a meaningful universe. And the de-spiritualized way of making sense of the world and of organizing society that we have developed in The West can, for all its successes, never provide that meaning.

The notion of the cosmology, and its function of giving unity to a civilization, could of course be explored much further. It is not the purpose here, however. The aim has been simply to show how this concept may contribute to our understanding of some of the processes that Toynbee describes and some of the developments that we experience in The West today.

## Answers to parts of the critique

Having explored what lies at the core of a civilization and having argued that this is a cosmology, we may use this to provide an answer to some of the points of the critique listed in chapter 1. Indeed, this conclusion is itself an answer to the first objection: that Toynbee is inconsistent in his definition and usage of the term *civilization*. He certainly is, but he does seem to have an intuitive and practical understanding of it; enough to be able to work with it and discern a pattern in it. He also circles around the idea of the cosmology even if he never really coins it as the essential thing. In any case, given the way he describes and works with his civilizations, and given my above investigation of the nature and function of a cosmology, it seems to me that a cosmology is a pretty good answer to the question, ‘what defines a civilization’.

If we agree that what we can call a *shared cosmology* really is what defines a civilization then we can also propose an answer the second point of critique: That it does make sense that Toynbee treats Hellas and Rome as being part of the same civilization. With a clearer idea of the nature of a cosmology and the function it performs for the civilization, we are able to suggest *why*: because they by and large share the same cosmology.

The cosmology of the Hellenic Civilization originates, obviously, in Hellas, but the Romans became from early on ‘converts to Hellenism’ as Toynbee says. This is perhaps a somewhat strong formulation, but it is a fact that the Romans were heavily influenced by Hellenic culture from early on and embraced it often wholeheartedly and matter-of-factly. A few examples of this are, first and foremost, the deliberate identification of the Roman deities with the Hellenic ones, the Roman historians’ strong inspiration and often structuring of their narratives along the lines and style of the Hellenic classics, the iconic status that Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* received in Rome just as it had in Hellas, and the Roman myths about being blood-related to the Spartans<sup>65</sup>, and about Rome’s founder Aeneas who was one of the surviving Trojan heroes and whose mother was Aphrodite. In other words, whether the Romans were biologically of Hellenic origin or not, they spun themselves thoroughly into the web of Hellenic culture and myths: into the Hellenic cosmology.

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<sup>65</sup> Cartledge, Paul, Introduction.



Rome was even considered Hellenic by the native Hellenes. One thing is for a people to identify themselves with another and to consider themselves of their kind. It is another for that second people to actually adopt the prospective newcomers and regard them as part of their culture. But there is clear evidence that at least some Hellenes did. Already in the earliest mention of Rome in extant Greek literature, the 4th-century Greek scholar Heracleides Ponticus describes her as 'a Hellenic city'<sup>66</sup>. This speaks for itself. Indeed, the cultural difference between Rome and Hellas were perhaps not greater than that between the US and Europe today. And clearly we would regard both the US and Europe as part of The West with the obvious 'homeland' of our civilization being Europe. Likewise, it makes sense to regard Rome and Hellas as being part of the same civilization. And it is, of course, not for nothing that that civilization is generally called by the name 'The Graeco-Roman Civilization'.

Finally, we may give an answer the third point of critique: Toynbee's tendency to pass extremely value-laden judgements about the different phases in a civilization's life and about the different historical actors that comprise it. This is a point that resounds in essay after essay treating his system. Few reviewers note this as a general point, but attack various manifestations of it, for instance Toynbee's judgement of the Universal State and thus Rome's role in history. As recounted in chapter 2, Toynbee is generally not favourable towards the Universal State. He sees it as a temporary remedy to halt the already inevitable disintegration of a dying civilization and as a time when growth has essentially ceased to occur. At best, the Universal State is the womb out of which emerges a new higher religion. However, it should be said that in his later writings Toynbee was not as unequivocal in his judgements of the Universal State. He thought it absolutely paramount that our own civilization managed to create one in order to avoid certain ruin.

Valuations of it aside, the term Universal State seems useful. Rome does bring about the political unification of the area conquered by Hellenic culture and arms, it does emerge as the sole surviving state out of the chaos of centuries of war, and it does provide lasting peace and a working framework for the mixture of cultures and religions for centuries thereafter – just as Universal States do according to Toynbee's description. He then has some very strong and shifting opinions on the

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<sup>66</sup> *A Study*, vol. V, p. 55, footnote 4.

value of it, but my point is that we need not follow him in any of his shifting judgments. We may simply note that there is something that we can call a Universal State originating at a specific moment in the history of a civilization, being a reunification of it at a time when it has lost its original inner coherence, and then leave the valuations of it to those who feel they need to have a qualitative opinion on it. The important thing to recognize is that Rome performs this role for a magnified Hellenic culture and that the emergence of a Universal State is a crucial part of the life cycle of this civilization.

The same approach I think can be applied to Toynbee's much criticized 'religious turn'. As we have seen, this turn causes Toynbee to assign prime value to the 'higher religions' being the purpose and flower of all of history. Whereas before, they were simply serving as mid-wives for history's then flower and purpose: the civilizations. Now, his first interpretation was widely accepted and attracted no significant criticism. The second, however, assigning primary importance to the religions at the cost of the civilizations (and writing off the whole range of tertiary civilizations, including The West, as useless repetitions of the civilizational cycle in so far as they did not create any new higher religions) did not fare well in a scientific age. Toynbee was accused of having 'gone soft', and one of his more mocking critics called him the prophet of a new 'mish-mash religion'.<sup>67</sup>

Again, the whole discussion of Toynbee's religious turn is a big one and probably the one that has been most instrumental in diverting minds from an actual fruitful discussion of the deeper machinations of his system. For whether one assigns primary importance to one or the other, it is evident that there is a *relationship* between religions and civilizations. Surely, once it had survived the Colosseum and the various pogroms in the first centuries the early Christian Church benefited immensely from existing within the framework of the Roman Empire, which provided both the peace and the necessary infrastructure for the Christian missionaries to reach the farthest corners of the Empire preaching the word of God<sup>68</sup>. Needless to say, it benefited even more once it had conquered the imperial administration and had been declared state religion. On the other hand, as shown in the previous discussion on the nature of a civilization, the Christian Church's function in preparing the ground for the subsequent society of The West is

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<sup>67</sup> Trevor-Roper, p. 20.

<sup>68</sup> Somerwell, vol. II, The serviceability of imperial institutions, p. 21-75.

incontestable. The Church and the Christian cosmology came first and after the Dark Age a new medieval society developed along Christian lines.

The point is, pure and simple, that there is a relationship between religions and civilizations. And again, we need not, as Toynbee does, give one importance over the other. We can simply note the function that they perform for each other at various times and note that these functions seem to be repeated at the 'philosophically contemporary' moments in the history of the two civilizations. (The cosmology existed before the emergence out of the Dark Age of the society of both the Hellenic Civilization and The West, and regarding the flood of new religions into the Roman Empire we are, as argued in chapter 2, experiencing the seeming beginning of a similar process today in The West). In summery, the two most serious criticisms of Toynbee's value-laden judgments do not seem to impinge significantly on the deeper machinations of his system.

### **The Notion of Growth**

The notion of growth and how it occurs in civilizations is one of the parts of Toynbee's system that has received the severest critique. And there are generally good reasons for this. But for all the criticism no one, not even Pieter Geyl<sup>69</sup> who was one of Toynbee's sharpest critics on particularly the growth question, ever seems to question the assumption that there exist civilizations and that they grow. In this part, I will try to investigate if we can get any clearer on what that means. In particular, I will suggest a new understanding of growth that can account for some of the obvious cases of it that Toynbee leaves out. Finally, I will consider if we can use this extended understanding of growth in our search for possible recurring patterns in Hellenism and The West.

Let us recall for a moment what Toynbee tells us about growth. Growth, he says, is new political, social or economic inventions conjured up by creative minorities as a response to a challenge facing the civilization as a whole. Through the process of *mimesis* the uncreative masses then copy the successful creations of these

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<sup>69</sup> Geyl focuses his criticism mainly on the process of *Withdrawal and Return* and on Toynbee's claim that groups of people with a glorious past typically do not invent a solution to the next challenge because they idolize their past achievements. Geyl shows that there can be brought up at least as many specific arguments speaking against Toynbee's examples as there are for them. His critique is relevant and yet, he limits himself to dismembering some parts of the mechanism in Toynbee's growth process. The very idea that there is growth in civilizations he never questions.

minorities. Toynbee stipulates that the creative responses are worked out through the process of *withdrawal and return* whereby the minority, in the form of a creative individual, group or state, somehow withdraws from the life of the wider civilization to experiment with its creative work in seclusion. The new creations should be counted as growth, he says, if they enhance the *self-determination* of the civilization in question, giving an ever greater command over the physical environment and thus increasingly making the civilization a master of its own fate, and if, over the long run, the challenges *etherialize*: that is they to a still greater extent manifest within the growing body of the civilization plus become of a more moral and spiritual nature.

Now, there are basically two different questions to keep in mind here. The first: What is growth at all for a thing and what should be counted as growth? The second: How does growth occur? To the first we may level the objection that the definition of what is considered growth is too narrow: that growth certainly happens in other fields than the political, social and economic ones. To the second question we may level the objection that even within these fields there are crucial new inventions that affect the civilization as a whole and which surely ought to be regarded as growth, yet Toynbee does not count them as such, apparently because they don't fit with his theory of *how* growth occurs. To this we can add that his own examples of growth ought indeed to be recognized as such, though many of them also do not follow his description of the growth process.

### Growth is more

Let us begin with an expansion of Toynbee's notion of growth. It seems greatly inadequate to limit growth only to political, social and economic inventions. Also when we look to Toynbee's own criteria that growth should contribute to the self-determination of the civilization. What then about growth in religious ideas? Consider, for instance, Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*. This work more than any other helped in establishing the Christian cosmology which, as we discussed in the previous paragraph, has been the essential thing which kept Western Civilization together – indeed, made it a unified body at all – until a few centuries ago. Should this not be counted as growth? And what of developments of an intellectual and technological kind? What of the advent of science? Surely, this more than anything has contributed to the self-determination of The West. Even growth in the field of art

could be seen as contributing to this self-determination. The development of the distinctive artistic style that Toynbee more than anything else sees as an expression of the civilization, if that resonates with people throughout the civilization giving them a feeling of a shared culture and identity, surely that will contribute to the civilization's sense of itself and to its unity. Is that not growth?

In short, I think we should enlarge our conception of growth to include any new cultural creation, whether it is of a social, political, economic, artistic, intellectual, technological or spiritual/religious nature. And perhaps it will prove useful to distinguish between *cultural* and *civilizational* growth. *Cultural growth* would be any new creation within the above mentioned fields. Such new inventions, of course, happen all the time and some of them will obviously have much greater impact than others. Some wither away almost before they have been born. Others become so successful that they spread throughout the entire civilization in one form or another and become a common heritage. It is these last ones that Toynbee seems to warrant as cases of growth and these that I would suggest labelling *civilizational growth*.

The distinction is important because many critics of Toynbee seem to feel that he downplays many of the cultural achievements of our civilization, which he does at times. My point is that he has his gaze fixed on the civilizations and from that perspective many of these cultural achievements may be regarded as irrelevant. But I don't think he would deny that many of these achievements should be regarded as *cultural growth* according to the above definition. In any case, as argued above, even when it comes to *civilizational growth* there surely are also examples of this in areas that Toynbee does not mention.

Growth occurs in many ways – not just through *Challenge and Response*

So far so good, but the oddity of Toynbee's notion of growth is not yet accounted for. For even in the fields where he claims to find growth there are conspicuous examples of it that he does not regard as such. One telling example<sup>70</sup> from his own account in *Hellenism* will suffice. It concerns the invention of coinage in some of the Hellenic city-states in Asia Minor in about 650 B.C. This invention has a profound effect on

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<sup>70</sup> that we touched upon in chapter 2.

the rest of Hellenic society in that it enables the creation of an organized loan market which ruins many of the free small holders. This again contributes to social tension and ultimately the revolutions which replaced the aristocracy in most of the Hellenic poleis. In terms of its effect, the fact that it is an economic invention that spreads throughout the Hellenic civilization, it surely ought to count as an example of growth, according to Toynbee's own criteria. However, he does not regard it as such. Is it simply because it doesn't happen as a response to any challenge? At least Toynbee doesn't mention any challenge so we must assume this to be the missing element. But who would deny that an invention as important as that of minted metal should be considered growth? Both *cultural* and in this case because of its impact also *civilizational* growth according to the above made distinction. It seems unreasonable to let the one missing element of a definable challenge rule out the invention of coinage from the portfolio of growth.

Regarding Toynbee's own examples of growth in the Hellenic Civilization, they generally seem to lend themselves to the interpretation of being a response to some kind of challenge. It seems plausible to regard the chaos of the Hellenic Dark Age as a challenge out of which emerged the political response of the creation of the city-states. Toynbee's classic example to illustrate the growth dynamic, the Malthusian challenge of over-population in Hellas and various city-states' different responses, also seems generally persuasive. So do the obvious challenges of Phoenician and Etruscan competition in the sixth century and the Persian invasion in the fifth. And the international anarchy and chronic warfare in the Hellenic world in the last centuries B.C. surely can also be seen as the political challenge that found its solution in the Roman Empire<sup>71</sup>. But regarding Western Civilization, *Challenge and Response* seems useful in explaining Toynbee's own examples of growth to a somewhat lesser degree. It seems like a plausible explanation to the emergence of the medieval feudal society as a response to the chaos of the medieval Dark Age to a similar extent as its Hellenic counterpart, the creation of the city-states out of the Dark Age preceding that civilization. It also seems very reasonable to see the constant threat of nuclear warfare during the Cold War as a challenge that necessitated a political response along the lines of closer international relations and cooperation, a response that seems to have largely manifested in the host of international institutions

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<sup>71</sup> For a more thorough description of these challenges and responses, see the 'birth and growth' section of the History of the Hellenic Civilization in chapter 2.

founded during, precisely, the Cold War. But when it comes to the various cultural creations of the Italian city-states of the Renaissance and to the adaptations of those creations to the medieval European feudal kingdoms – Toynbee’s chapters 2 and 3 in the history of The West – what were exactly the challenges that prompted these developments? Toynbee is quite imprecise concerning the details of this when treating these chapters of growth. Regarding the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter, for instance, he writes that “... *the problem was to discover how the new Italian and Flemish way of life could be lived, on the kingdom-state scale, by the Western World as a whole.*”<sup>72</sup> It isn’t clear why that was a challenge and it does not get much better elsewhere in the text. On the other hand, no one would deny that the cultural creations of Renaissance Italy and the invention of representative, parliamentary democracy in Britain and the subsequent industrial revolution are among the most important and ingenious examples of cultural and civilizational growth in The West. So seemingly, even Toynbee’s own examples of growth cannot all be completely accounted by *Challenge and Response*.

In conclusion then, *Challenge and Response* is in many ways an illuminating concept when working with the growth and development of civilizations. As Rune Larsen has pointed out it is also *the* Toynbeeian term that has become most widely incorporated in the general vocabulary of historians, but it cannot account for all cases of growth. Not even all of Toynbee’s own examples and surely not when we expand our notion of growth as we did in the preceding paragraph. It may for instance be difficult to locate any particular challenge prompting growth and development within the arts. What challenge made Rembrandt or Picasso develop their distinctive styles? I don’t know, but surely they should be considered cultural growth.

We may note in passing that Toynbee’s further description of the growth process with the term *Withdrawal and Return* encounters even greater problems. Of an already severely criticized growth concept this was the part that took the heaviest blow. It is treated in most detail by Pieter Geyl in his essay *Toynbee’s System of Civilizations*<sup>73</sup>, and Toynbee tellingly skipped the term all-together in his revised one-volume version of *A Study* from 1972. That said, it seems obvious that new cultural creations are virtually always developed by certain creative minorities, only then to be dispersed within the wider civilization. Indeed, the new creation has to originate

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<sup>72</sup> *A Study*, vol. III, p. 351.

<sup>73</sup> Montagu, p. 39-72.

somewhere. And intuitively at least, it seems plausible that sometimes new creations have to be developed in some form of seclusion. In any case though, I think it would be a false track to turn *the way growth occurs* into a criteria for its being growth or not. Following that line, I think we can likewise dispose of Toynbee's idea of *etherialization* as a criterion for growth being growth. First of all, it is incredibly vague, and Toynbee's own examples do not always follow such a process either. If *etherialization* means that the challenges over time come less and less from the outer, physical surroundings and more and more originate within the body of the growing civilization itself, then why do the painfully physical challenges of the outer, hostile enemies of Etruscans, Phoenicians and invading Persians come after the Malthusian challenge that developed within the body of the Hellenic Civilization itself? As a criterion of growth in Toynbee's elaborate description of that concept *etherialization* can be safely discarded.

#### Towards a new notion of growth and its usefulness for our inquiry

To sum it up, I suggest that we view *cultural growth* as any new cultural creation, it being of a social, political, economic, artistic, intellectual, technological or spiritual/religious kind. Some of these creations do indeed originate as a response to a challenge. Some as a response to a challenge facing the whole of the civilization. Some even through what might in some cases be said to be a process of *withdrawal and return* by a given minority. But certainly many do not occur as a response to any challenge, not even a local one. They simply occur because their creators get inspired, for whatever reason, and they certainly do not always withdraw or return in any discernible way. Some of these creations then over time become so successful that they become a common heritage for the whole of the civilization, changing it for good. In that case, I suggest that they should be labelled as cases of *civilizational growth*.

The next question is what we can use this new notion of growth for. Can we use it in our investigation for recurring patterns in our two civilizations? I think we actually may make a general observation to this effect. First, however, there is another thing we can use it for. We can combine it with our enlarged idea of what a civilization is and then we can use it to tell the story of the growth of the civilization's cosmology. As I have mentioned before, *Challenge and Response*



actually seems to be a useful term here. In the case of the Hellenic Civilization, however, we unfortunately have insufficient knowledge to tell that story. But in the case of The West, we can.

In the following then, I will outline very briefly what could be taken to be the main chapters in the history of the formation of the Christian cosmology. The purpose is to show how *Challenge and Response* – even if it cannot account for all cases of growth – may be illuminating also in fields that Toynbee did not consider. After that I will return to the other potential use of our new notion of growth.

In the history of the formation of the Christian cosmology the first chapter could be seen as the challenge of presenting the teachings of Jesus the Jew within the framework of a dominant Hellenic culture. This is a primarily intellectual and cultural challenge, and Paul, a Hellenized Jew, is instrumental in its response. What emerges as the product of this process is Christianity, significantly altered from its origins from having gone through the Hellenic filter. For instance, the idea that God incarnates as a human being is blasphemy in Judaism, while in the Hellenic myths it happens all the time.

The second chapter could be seen as the challenge of worshipping or not worshipping the emperor. If the early Christians had sold out on this key element they would have lost the claim to monotheism which is absolutely essential to their religion. Christianity might then never have had its subsequent proliferation and success. On the other hand, if they took up the challenge they risked annihilation. They chose to face it and the martyrs died for it in Colosseum and in the various pogroms in the first centuries. Their ultimate victory and successful response to that challenge could be seen as the conversion of that very seat of power that had demanded their worship.

Chapter 3. In 410 Rome is plundered by the Visigoths, first time in 800 years that the city has fallen to a foreign invader. Choruses of criticism rise against Christianity, alleging that the disaster is the revenge of the ancient gods for the Romans having abandoned them. A rather intellectual challenge that receives a highly intellectual answer in the form of Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*. Augustine forcefully repudiates the criticism and at the same time carves out the Christian conception of World History, which was to become the standard model for all Christian historical writing in the next thousand years and a cornerstone in the Christian cosmology: a

tremendous cosmological achievement and one of the most important works in the establishment of the Christian worldview.

Chapter 4. The fall of Rome. Christianity had conquered Rome and then Rome was conquered by the barbarians. All that the Christians had won were in danger of being lost. This challenge was mainly met through peaceful conversion of the invading barbarians. It could be said to be overcome when a Christian Charlemagne reunited a large part of Europe and was crowned Holy Roman Emperor. Soon after that, the second line of barbarians ushered in, the next challenge out of which emerged the new Christian post-Dark Age society that Toynbee calls Western Civilization.

These are of course only an ultra quick touch on some of the major developments in Christianity in the first thousand years of its existence. There are many more and they are much more complex. However, each of them are vital and the point is that *Challenge and Response* do seem to be a useful concept in shedding some light on their dynamics and origin.

The other potential use of our new notion of growth is whether it can be used in the identification of any recurring patterns in the life of our two civilizations. Clearly, as Toynbee also notes, the growth process is characterized by differentiation and variety, and since we have now also discarded the at least somewhat orderly progression of *Challenge and Response*, it may seem futile to look for any recurring pattern in the process of growth. Yet again, if we consider the idea of a cosmology's role in giving unity to a civilization we may be able to make a very general observation.

It seems that, in the strongly religious period that follows after the civilization comes out of its Dark Age, lasting roughly until the time of the Protestant Reformation in The West (ca. 1000-1500) and till the emergence of the nature philosophers in Ancient Greece (ca. 9<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.), much of the growth in the different cultural fields work together in creating, upholding and developing a *shared cosmology*, that is maintaining the cosmological unity of the civilization. For instance, as we recounted when discussing the cosmology, the great philosophers and cosmology-builders of these periods work within the framework of the established religious cosmology and the arts are dedicated to representing the inner world of that religion. The great works of architecture of this period are churches and temples, and

every cultural field is strongly coloured by the religion. After the first breakdown, however, there is a gradual change. Growth certainly still occurs in all of these different fields, but they gradually detach themselves from the religiously oriented cosmology and begin to pursue goals of their own. Philosophy pursues alternative ways of understanding the universe, increasingly independent of religious ideas. The arts detach themselves from religious motives and finally become abstract (in The West). Architecture diverts its attention from churches and temples to city planning, aqueducts, parliaments, apartment blocks and skyscrapers. In other words, there is lots of growth, and although the creations from the many cultural fields may be shared across the civilization and may thus give an outer impression of unity, its inner coherence may still be disappearing. Some growth, for instance in science, actively dismembers that inner coherence as it existed in the religious cosmology. Finally, to create unity anew, the Universal State is created. But, as we discussed previously, that also cannot provide that ultimate *purpose* of existence that was provided by the religious cosmology. So people again begin to search for new and old cosmologies that can put some degree of meaning and coherence back into a fragmented world.

If we should sum it up in one sentence, we might say that growth in all the different cultural fields in the first half of the life of the post-Dark Age society tends to support the religious cosmology, while in the latter half of that society's life growth tends to gradually work away from the cosmology, at times actively causing its destruction. In summary then, Toynbee's notion of growth is in itself not very helpful in defining recurring patterns in our two civilizations. But with the revised understanding of growth and the idea of a cosmology being the core of a civilization, we may suggest a general pattern as outlined above.

### **Time of Troubles vs. the Expansion-breakdown-model**<sup>74</sup>

We come now to the last part of Toynbee's system to be treated in detail in this thesis. It is Toynbee's concept *Time of Troubles*. He seems, to my mind, to have a point with this notion. It does seem as if there is a period in a civilization's life where the main opponents cease being barbarians or other civilizations and instead become

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<sup>74</sup> The historical data in the argument in this section forms part of my general historical knowledge and is thus very difficult to footnote. Factual details that I did not remember, have been checked at Encyclopaedia Britannica.

warring states within that civilization itself. And the wars do escalate in scale and brutality, both because they are being waged by still larger political units commandeering ever more resources, and perhaps also due to a progressive breakdown in the standard of behaviour in war. It does seem that during the last phases of a Time of Troubles nothing is holy: whole cities like Carthage and Corinth being razed to the ground, their inhabitants savagely butchered and the remaining few carried off to slavery. And the deliberate, systematic bombing of civilian cities during World War II, with Hiroshima and Nagasaki as apt equivalents of Carthage and Corinth, certainly makes our modern world live up to the *Times of Troubles* of the past.

However, as cruel and deplorable as this is, it is not the only aspect of this later part of our civilizations' history. The *Time of Troubles* of the Hellenic Civilization is also the time that sees the establishment of all the four great Hellenic philosophical schools and the establishment of the Library in Alexandria, the first international community of scholars in the ancient world with the declared aim of gathering all knowledge then in existence. It sees continuous developments within the arts, sculpture, theatre, poetic and historical writing. The *Time of Troubles* of our Western Civilization has seen the development of modern science. It has birthed breathtaking pieces of art, it has seen classical music reaching its zenith and it has, as Toynbee rightly observes, seen the ancient city-state-scale democracy brought to new, durable form within the modern nation-states. All these examples are achievements that we should consider growth according to the discussion in the previous paragraph. Moreover, both the Hellenic and the Western Civilizations have in these ages seen the vast expansion of their cultural sphere of influence, which of course may be said to have been both for good and for bad.

So, can we find a more nuanced way of conceptualizing this age than the gloomy *Time of Troubles* with its uneven focus on war? I believe we can. The escalating wars between still fewer and larger political units are not the only pattern that can be discerned in this period. I believe that there can – for our two civilizations in question – be discerned a larger pattern of which these wars are part. I call it the 'Expansion-breakdown-model' or for short the 'Expansion-model'. Each cycle of expansion and breakdown seems to occur three times from the centuries before the Time of Troubles until the erection of the Universal State.

Let us outline it in general terms first. It seems that when the civilization has reached its first stable form, coming successfully out of the challenge of chaos in the interregnum or Dark Age, it begins to expand. This expansion is carried out by the multitude of political units that the civilization consists of at this moment and it continues for some centuries, until it is brought to a halt which seems to cause some kind of conflict within the civilization. Then there is a consolidation phase taking place, with the civilization gradually forming into two opposing power blocks. At one point there is a major confrontation – Toynbee’s first *rout* or breakdown – in both cases after some ideological break or fundamental estrangement has occurred. Out of the debris of this first conflagration a Second Wave of Expansion follows, carried out by and resulting in fewer and larger political powers than the wave preceding it. After some centuries the second conflagration takes place in a series of all-out wars, Toynbee’s second *rout* or breakdown. After this, all the combatants are worsted and one state only remains supreme, now embarking on the Third Wave of Expansion. This is followed by a Third Breakdown – with the difference that this time the wars are to a less extent waged between contending states, because one is now clearly dominant. Instead it takes the form of civil wars, social upheaval and change of the political system in that dominant state and in the civilization at large. When the dominant state is consolidated again in its new form it has emerged as Toynbee’s *Universal State* and hereafter, expansion is limited.

### First Wave of Expansion

Let us see how this pattern applies to the Hellenic and the Western Civilizations. In the Hellenic Civilization, we have as the First Wave of Expansion the Hellenes colonizing the shores of the Black Sea and the Mediterranean during the 8-6th centuries B.C, after the Hellenic city-state cosmos had emerged from the preceding Dark Age. In the Expansion-model this will then correspond to the Christian Crusades the majority of which falls between the end of the 11th and the end of the 13th century in the Christian era, where Christian knights ventured out to re-conquer the Holy Lands and succeeded in establishing temporary kingdoms in and around Jerusalem. To this wave of expansion should also be added the Reconquista which started a couple of centuries before the Crusades and whereby Christian princes over

several centuries gradually re-conquered the Iberian Peninsula from Moorish Muslim rulers.

Both these waves of expansion have a commonality in that they were carried out over a couple of centuries by forces from many different political units. In Hellas it was the numerous city-states primarily from the European mainland and in Christian Europe it was the multitude of feudal kingdoms and principalities, with a strong predominance of Normans in the first crusades. Differences are that the Christian crusaders in theory had a common declared goal – the conquest of the Holy Lands for Western Christianity – although they often strayed away from this, as with the massacre of the Jews in central Europe during the First Crusade and the conquest and sack of Orthodox Christian Constantinople in 1204. The Hellenes some two millennia prior certainly all went out to conquer and colonize, but they never went out as a united force with a declared common purpose. Instead, the primary driving force behind the Hellenic expansion was the need to disseminate the population surplus while for the Crusaders it was a primarily religious motivation. However in both cases, the effect was a spread in the influence of their civilization.

Finally, we can take account of the difference in success of the two waves. The areas colonized by the Hellenes in this period pretty much remained within the body of the Hellenic Civilization for the rest of its history. On the contrary, the Crusader kingdoms in the Holy Land were short-lived and lasted at most a couple of hundred years. The most notable success was in Spain where the Muslims were driven out for good from most of their strongholds during this period. The significant difference in success can probably be explained by the character of the adversaries that the aggressors encountered. The Hellenes met mostly culturally backward peoples or even vacant spaces where they created their colonies. The Crusaders on the other hand challenged a well-organized high culture like their own and thus met with considerably greater resistance. Accordingly, when in the end of the period the Hellenes were confronted with the combined opposition from the high culture of the Etruscans and Phoenicians their advance was equally halted. And when the European colonial powers in their Second Wave of Expansion overseas encountered only tribal societies or high cultures with hopelessly inferior weapons and *morale* they expanded over most of the surface of the Earth.

Before the First Breakdown following the First Wave of Expansion there can be observed another similarity. The Etruscans and Phoenicians backed by the rising

Persian Empire brought the expansion of the Hellenes to a halt by the in the end of the 6th century. Toynbee in my opinion rightly sees this (the fact that the internal pressure can no longer be diffused by exporting the population surplus) as contributing to the internal social and political strife taking place during the 6th century and leading to a change in regime from aristocracy to oligarchy and democracy in most Hellenic city-states. Likewise, the increasing resistance met by the Crusaders could be seen as having contributed to growing strife within the body of Western Christendom, not in the form of class struggle and regime change, but in the form of the recurring wars between the Papacy and the Holy Roman Empire during the 13th century. In other words, the idea would be that when the expansion is checked it instead leads to convulsions within the expanding civilization.

After this halting of the expansion, both civilizations meet with a powerful alien adversary. In the early 5th century B.C. we have the Persian Wars where the Hellenes just about manage to stave off the immense Persian army commanded by King Darius and Xerxes successively. The equivalent for Western Christendom could be seen as the rise of the Ottoman Empire in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, which captures Constantinople in 1453 and thereafter puts severe pressure on the rest of Southeast and Central Europe. The Ottomans come as far laying siege to Vienna twice, in 1529 and 1683, each time unsuccessful.

### First Breakdown

Before the first wars of the Time of Troubles there occurs what we might term a Schism in the Inner Life of the Civilization. In the Hellenic case, an ideological estrangement develops between Athens and Sparta, who share the same general culture and worship the same gods as the rest of the Hellenes. As we have seen in the previous chapter their respective reactions to a common challenge set them off in the direction towards two completely different – and mutually opposing – ways of life: the Spartans move towards a militarily potent but highly conservative oligarchic regime, including even the archaic and peculiar institution of a dual kingship; a way of life where the expression of the diversity of human nature is denied to the Spartans, the only profession permitted to them being war, and this entire way of life being sustained only through the subjugation and enslavement of their fellow Hellenic neighbours, the Messeniens. Athens on the other hand embodies a creative,

flamboyant, risk-willing spirit, including every freeborn male citizen in the governing of their city and giving birth to all the diverse celebrated cultural achievements within commerce, architecture, philosophy and art, all of which were forbidden to the Spartans. It seems probable at least that the conflict between the two cities that exploded in the Peloponnesian War (431-404) was not merely a conflict over the protection of political and economic interests in the Hellenic world, but also fundamentally a struggle between opposing ways of life. It might thus be interpreted as a sign of a growing fissure within the Hellenic cosmology. From about a century before we see the first Hellenic philosophers beginning to question the reality and usefulness of the Olympic gods, thoughts which led to the development of early forms of 'science' in the Hellenistic Period.

If we are right in assuming that the diverging roads of development that Athens and Sparta took were part of the reason for the ensuing conflict, then the obvious parallel in Christian Europe is the Reformation. This is a point that doesn't need much elaboration. The Protestant Reformation drove an ideological cleft through Europe which never healed and which led directly to the religious wars of the 16th and 17th centuries, culminating in the Thirty Years War of 1618-48. As things developed these wars became fuelled with territorial and political concerns, yet the religious issue was the trigger. According to Toynbee the Peloponnesian War and the religious wars in Europe were the First Breakdowns of these civilizations, but as suggested I will argue that there in both cases was a breakdown or a gradual and fundamental estrangement occurring on the cosmological level even before.

The course of development of the strife and the wars in this First Breakdown were somewhat reversed in the two civilizations. In the Hellenic it started with the cataclysm of the Peloponnesian War. Thereafter the political situation in Hellas through most of the 4th century was characterized by continuous warfare, strife and shifting alliances. On the contrary, the Reformation precipitated first a series of mostly local, although still very violent, conflicts between different religious or social groups, which then over a century escalated into the Thirty Years War engulfing almost all of Europe. So in the Hellenic case the all-out war happens in the beginning of the First Breakdown period, whereas in the Western case it happens in the end.



## Second Wave of Expansion

In Hellas this first bout of systemic strife ended with Philip of Macedon's conquest and federation of all the Hellenic city-states on the European mainland, except Sparta, into the League of Corinth in 337 B.C.. Philip was assassinated in the following year and it was left to his son, Alexander the Great, after some initial campaigns in Hellas to keep the league together, to lead an expeditionary force of Macedonians and Hellenes against the Persian Empire in 334. In the next 10 years Alexander's armies conquered the entire Persian Empire including Egypt, vast tracts of Central Asia and parts of Northwest India, spreading the culture and dominance of Hellenism throughout this entire area. This Second Wave of Expansion of Hellenism is carried out with a speed and success that hardly finds any parallel in history. In terms of vigour and dynamism and also in terms of the myth Alexander managed to create around himself a fitting parallel could be Napoleon, although Napoleon's principal role was not to expand the Western cultural sphere of influence, but to make war on his neighbours. In so far as Rome at this point could be said to be a proponent of Hellenism, as Heracleitus Ponticus suggests<sup>75</sup>, we may also add Rome's conquest of central Italy in this period to the Second Wave of Expansion. Carthage was at this point the other strong power in the Western Mediterranean that collided with the others in the Second Breakdown, but Carthage probably did not take part in the Hellenic cosmology to the same degree that Rome did – although they surely must have been influenced by it – being as it were a colony founded by the Phoenicians.

Alexander dies shortly after his great campaign and about 50 years of war ensue between his generals, greatly fuelled by the gold from the Persian Empire. Around 275 B.C. a balance of power emerges with four strong states: The Antigonid dynasty in Macedon and central Greece, the Ptolemies in Egypt, the Seleucid dynasty in the main areas of the former Persian Empire, and the small Attalid Kingdom in Anatolia. There also emerged an Indo-Hellenic Kingdom in Bactria of which not much is known. All of these kingdoms strongly encouraged emigration of Hellenes and Macedonians to fill their armies, serve as officers in their administrations and populate the new cities they founded. This led to the further spread of Hellenic

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<sup>75</sup> See chapter 3, under *Answers to parts of the critique*.

culture in these areas and the period from Alexander's death to the final Roman conquest of Ptolemaic Egypt in 31 B.C. is generally known as the Hellenistic Period.

The rulers of these Hellenistic kingdoms competed in many ways and not only militarily. They also attempted to make their kingdoms attractive to live in in order to attract the so favoured Hellenic and Macedonian emigrants. Thus these rulers did much to turn their main cities into centers of learning, research, culture and art, with Egyptian Alexandria and its renowned library being perhaps the most famous of the period. So although frequent clashes still occurred between the main kingdoms, this was also a period that saw new developments and growth within various cultural fields.

In the case of the West the Second Wave of Expansion was carried out by the maritime European colonial powers. This wave begins with Portugal and Spain slightly before the Reformation and continues steadily during the following breakdown. When peace is concluded in Europe in 1648 at the end of the Thirty Years War, energies are released primarily for The Netherlands, England and France to sail out and compete overseas with each other and with the powers of the Iberian Peninsula. The colonies established in the New World secede from their founding countries after a couple of centuries, thus achieving a status similar to that of the ancient Greek colonies in the Mediterranean to their mother cities two millennia before. After that the European powers look to the old world and the colonization of India, Southeast Asia and later "The Scramble for Africa" take on speed. In the latter half of the 19th century Germany and Italy emerge as modern nation-states and join the race, thus completing the consolidation of the European nation-states that end up clashing together in the last cataclysm of the Second Breakdown. In this period, the colonial powers and nation-states are also the political framework around the cultural growth that Europe exhibits in the modern age.

There are several differences between these Second Expansion Waves. First we can note that in the Hellenic case the expansion was carried out mainly by *one* state, Macedonia, (and to some extent Rome) and only afterwards did Alexander's empire split up in the rival successor-states. In the Western case the expansion was carried out by states that existed before the expansion and which would continue to exist when the colonies had ultimately been lost. The time of the expansion is also of a stunning difference. The expansion of Alexander happened in a mere ten years (and then, of course, with the gradual immigration of Hellenes and Macedonians

afterwards) whereas the Western colonial expansion took place over more than 400 years. When we look at the form the expansion took there is another interesting difference. We may distinguish between expansion carried out primarily through military campaign or through colonization. Alexander's expansion was carried out through an astonishing military campaign, thus resembling more the Crusaders of the first Western wave than the European colonial powers of the second, and both Alexander's campaign and those of the Crusaders gave rise to kingdoms rather than colonies. Kingdom is here to be understood as a sovereign state established through conquest over an already existing and functioning society and being politically independent of the homeland of the conquerors, whereas a colony is a newly founded and populated area or city that at least at first tends to be politically subjugated the colonizing country. Likewise, as the second Hellenic wave resembles the first of the West in this respect, so the first Hellenic wave of expansion through the establishment of colonies around in the Mediterranean resembles the second Western with its colonies around the world. These are of course rough generalizations and in each wave we can find traces of the other phenomena too. Yet one of the patterns seem to be predominant in each wave.

### Second Breakdown

The Second Breakdown is, in the Hellenic case, not as easily defined as the first. Does it, for instance, begin with the Wars of the Diadochi (322-275), the wars between Alexander's generals out of which emerged the Hellenistic kingdoms? Does it begin with the 1<sup>st</sup> Punic War (264-241) between Rome and Carthage for the dominion over Sicily? It seems fair, I think, to regard these large-scale wars as the beginning of the Second Breakdown, since they were waged between the states that carried out the Second Wave of Expansion – and continued to carry it out during the Hellenistic Period. The most peculiar thing about this is that it places the beginning of the Second Breakdown immediately after the first burst (Alexander's campaign) of the Second Wave of Expansion. Perhaps we could instead phrase them 'the first of the wars that led to the Second Breakdown'.

The height of this breakdown period is more obvious. Surely, this must be considered to be the Second Punic War (218-201) where Rome fought for her life during 15 long years on Italian soil against Hannibal's armies – plus its aftermath

which ended up engulfing most of the major powers in the Mediterranean in struggles with Rome. The end seems also rather easy to determine. It is the Third Punic War (149-146) where Rome razes Carthage and Corinth to the ground and emerges as the supreme power in the Hellenic Mediterranean world. From then onwards Rome is still engaged in numerous wars and continuous slave uprisings but none, it seems fair to say, that came close to threatening her dominant position in the Mediterranean as Carthage did during the Second Punic War.

In Europe the Second Breakdown following the Second Wave of Expansion seems more clearly discernible. It corresponds to Toynbee's Wars of Nationality, which is his second rout of Western Civilization, and it comes in two turns. The first is the wars of Napoleon and a century later the two World Wars. The World Wars decisively break the power of the European empires that drove the Second Wave of Expansion and almost all of the last of their colonies secede during 1960's.

There is the peculiar difference here that the Second Breakdown period in the Hellenic case ends with Rome standing supreme. While in the case of The West after World War II there emerge two strong contending powers in the world, the US and the Soviet Union. If the criterion for the end of the Second Breakdown is that only one state remains supreme in the geographical area affected by the civilization, that might lead us to place the end of the Second Breakdown of The West in 1991 with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. However, I think there are two main reasons that it should still be placed at the end of World War II. The first is that the dissolution of the Soviet Union happened with no direct confrontation between the two opposing powers, but instead due to internal exhaustion in the Soviet Union. It certainly was a different case with Rome's destruction of Carthage in 146 B.C. The second reason is the apt parallel between the finality of the destruction in the Third Punic War and World War II. As noted in the beginning of this paragraph, the parallel between the annihilation of Carthage and Corinth and 21 centuries later Hiroshima and Nagasaki is striking. We may also appreciate the fact that, had nuclear weapons not been invented, the US would have been unquestioningly superior according to conventional military standards and thus already the hegemon during the Cold War that it became 'officially' after 1991. Finally, we can note that Toynbee does not even consider Russia as part of Western Civilization since Orthodox and Catholic Christianity split off from one another from early on. Whether Russia should be considered part of The West or not may be open for debate, but if we follow Toynbee

on this one deciding that Russia is not then it is indisputable that US was the one supreme remaining power in The West at the end of World War II and that thus, the end of the Second Breakdown should be placed there.

### Third Wave of Expansion and Breakdown

The Third Wave of Expansion of Hellenism is carried out by Rome. Rome both defeats and integrates areas that were already Hellenized, such as Greece (obviously), Macedon, vast areas of the decaying Seleucid Empire and finally Ptolemaic Egypt. And she conquers and Hellenizes new areas such as the Iberian Peninsula, and Gaul and Britain through Julius Caesar's campaigns. No one can really stand against Rome after 146 B.C. although many try. But with the vast expansion of Roman rule the traditional social and political structures of the Roman Republic got stretched, finally to a point greater than they could take. In the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. Rome plunged into a series of brutal civil wars and social upheavals that I would define as the Third Breakdown which ended up destroying the Republic. When Augustus finally restored peace in 31 B.C. the Roman society emerged in a new political form, the Principate with what was essentially an emperor – or dictator. Roman rule in the Mediterranean was now absolute and the Universal State of the Hellenic Civilization had come into being.

There is an important distinction to be made here since Toynbee includes the Roman Civil Wars of the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. in his second rout or breakdown of Hellenism. That is, he puts the Punic Wars and other related wars of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. together with the Civil Wars of the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. I believe there is an important difference here, since the Punic Wars and the related wars following them were conflicts between sovereign states, the states that carried out the Second Wave of Expansion of Hellenism. Contrarily, the wars of the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. are primarily wars between contending fractions within the Roman Republic itself. That is, along with and following the Third Wave of Expansion comes the Third Breakdown, but it comes mainly in the form of internal strife since there are no powers left in the Hellenic world to seriously threaten Rome.

As touched upon in the end of chapter 2 the US is the state today that continues the expansion of Western Civilization. We have seen and still see this on a military level, we see it on the corporate and economic level and we have seen it on

the political level through the US contribution and initiative to those international institutions that could be interpreted as a form of emerging global governance. It seems fair to say that we see it also with still unspent force on the cultural level, given the continuous attraction of non-Western peoples to Western culture and lifestyle. As mentioned in the paragraph *A civilization's cosmology – function and dynamics* in the present chapter, one could argue that there were two competing waves of Western expansion during the Cold War – since Communism was essentially a Western idea. It seems that it may be difficult after all to place Russia either inside or outside Western Civilization. In any case, today there surely is only one such wave and it is emanating chiefly from the United States.

If then, the US is playing the role for The West that Rome played for the Hellenic Civilization and *if* that same pattern will recur in some form, then we should expect a Third Breakdown some time in the future – perhaps fairly soon. If we count from the end of the Second Breakdown that we suggested above to be in 146 B.C. and 1945 respectively, then we would be now where the Roman Republic were some time in the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. when the Social War was raging between Rome and those of her Italian allies that had been denied Roman citizenship. Out of that conflict emerged the other series of Civil Wars that eventually brought down the Republic.

Now, as should be clear by now, nothing repeats with exactitude in history. Such a Third Breakdown could happen in many ways and it could also not happen at all. But there are contemporary developments that give reason to worry. It still remains a possible scenario that the continuing global financial crisis could develop into a global financial meltdown. That would have the potential to trigger a prolonged period of uncertainty and instability. In the past, several empires have been brought to their knees by a collapse of their currency.

Summing up, the expansion may occur in different forms from wave to wave and from civilization to civilization. Sometimes it may last a bit longer, other times a bit shorter. Sometimes it happens primarily through military conquest and establishment of independent kingdoms, at other times principally through colonization. This suggests that the key aspect to focus upon is exactly *expansion* since whichever way it occurs, it does occur, each time carried out by and resulting in fewer and larger political units than the wave preceding it. Thus the multitude of Hellenic city-states became the successor-states of Alexander's generals, which again

became The Roman Empire. And the multitude of medieval feudal kingdoms and principalities became absorbed by the European colonial powers and nation-states which are now becoming ever more integrated into a new global order pioneered and driven by the United States. It seems to my mind that the idea of successive waves of expansion fits well together with Toynbee's description of successive breakdowns in the Time of Troubles.

### Conclusion: summery of the revised pattern

In this thesis, I have presented the essentials of the Toynbeean system, the growth process and the patterns he sees in the Graeco-Roman and Western Civilizations. I have presented some of the main factors that shaped Toynbee privately and professionally and thus also his magnum opus *A Study of History*. I have touched briefly upon the tradition of Comparative Civilizations that have developed from Spengler and Toynbee, and I have considered some of the most notable points of critique that have resounded in essays by critical reviewers.

One of my initial motivations for undertaking this work was a feeling that many of these critical essays were focusing on the more extravagant, provocative parts and the obvious flaws in Toynbee's system, thus diverting attention from a constructive discussion about the deeper structures of his system. Penetrating the smoke of the sometimes heated discussions, I have found that there does indeed seem to be an intact structure remaining, a general pattern of development that recurs in the Graeco-Roman and Western Civilizations. In other words, much of the levelled critique is relevant, but it does not rip apart the system in its entirety – some part of the pattern of development seems untouched. In the following I will recount the results of my treatment of Toynbee's system followed by a summary of this revised pattern.

In my discussion of Toynbee's system I have suggested some re-conceptualizations of some of his most important terms. For instance, I have proposed a more precise definition of the term *civilization* than Toynbee ever produced himself, yet one that – I think – captures the phenomenon in the way he

works with it. I have suggested a civilization to be defined by what I call a *shared cosmology*, a religious meta-narrative explaining the purpose and nature of the universe and the role and purpose of human beings in that universe. Yet a civilization should not be seen as only that which is ‘invisible’ as Toynbee claims in his later writings. Instead, I suggest that it is both a *shared cosmology* and the multitude of cultural expressions that are coloured by that cosmology. Such a definition can, I believe, reconcile matter and ‘spirit’, civilizations and religions in a way Toynbee never managed.

I have also suggested that when that cosmology begins to break down, there originate a number of attempts to either salvage it, create a new cosmology or restore unity on the outer political level in the form of a Universal State. I proposed that these can be interpreted as attempts to recreate the original unity of the civilization on either a cosmological or physical level. The cosmological understanding of a civilization that I propose also means that we should include the history of the formation of the cosmology in the history of that cosmology’s civilization. In the case of The West, for instance, this means adding to our civilization’s history the account of the formation of the Christian Catholic Church and worldview.

I moreover found that a religious cosmology tends to provide a philosophy of life that is based on the account of the very nature and purpose of the universe that human beings inhabit. In that way, such a cosmology intimately connects the individual’s life with a grander vision of the purpose and nature of the cosmos. Thus, it provides human beings with a *meaningful universe* to live in. The modern ‘secular cosmology’ of The West, based chiefly on science, cannot provide a meaning on that level and I suggested this as one of several possible explanations as to why increasing numbers of modern Westerners feel attracted to the religious and spiritual movements and cosmologies of The East.

Regarding the growth of civilizations I have concluded, together with many others, that Toynbee’s description of the growth process is far from adequate, but that he does illuminate seemingly important aspects of it. *Challenge and Response* does seem like a useful term in many instances, although it cannot account for all cases of what ought to be considered *growth*. I argue for an expansion of Toynbee’s notion of growth to include not only developments within the political, economic and social fields, but also within the fields of art, thought, science, technology and religion. I furthermore distinguish between *cultural* and *civilizational growth*; the first being



any new creation within the above mentioned fields, the latter being those of such developments that succeed to the point of expanding throughout the civilization, changing it for good and becoming a common heritage. I think that this distinction may serve to reconcile Toynbee and some of his critics who seemed to feel that he downplayed many of the important cultural achievements of The West during the Modern Period. My point is that he has his gaze fixed on the civilizations and thus considers only what I term *civilizational growth*, while he probably would not deny that there occurs lots of *cultural growth* in all the various fields of human activity according to the above made distinction. Concerning possible recurring patterns in the growth process I observe that there seems to be a long-term development where growth in the various cultural fields at first tends to support and uphold the established religious cosmology, whereas later on they gradually detach themselves from it and begin to pursue goals of their own.

Regarding Toynbee's term Time of Troubles I find that it does seem to describe an important development in our two civilizations. It does seem as if there is a progression towards ever more large-scale, all-out, brutal wars, where the standard of behaviour disintegrates to the point of allowing wholesale destruction of entire civilian cities. In this respect, ancient Carthage and Corinth are apt equivalents to Hiroshima and Nagasaki of twentieth century. That being said, Time of Troubles also seems like an unfairly gloomy term for two periods that also see tremendous cultural growth in most of the above mentioned fields and a radical physical expansion of the civilizations. I have suggested an alternative model that I call the Expansion-breakdown-model whereby I attempt to show that both civilizations have expanded in a series of three successive waves, each time carried out by and resulting in fewer and larger political units than the wave preceding it. Toynbee's two breakdowns occurring during the Time of Troubles fall in between these waves of expansion.

Based on the results of this treatment of Toynbee's system it seems appropriate to summarize what our two civilizations now seem to have in common. First of all, we can say that in the life of both Hellenism and The West the cosmology originated first, in the form of a religion. The cosmologies of Hellenism and The West originated in different ways, Christianity within the Roman Empire and Olympianism among the barbarians dismembering the Minoan Civilization. However, both these religions had the honour of being the official cosmology in the barbarian successor-

states that followed the fall of the preceding civilization's Universal State – Christianity in Charlemagne's Holy Roman Empire and Olympianism in Agamemnon's Mycenaean realms.

After that, both civilizations experience a Dark Age of invasions and general chaos and both come out again comprising a multitude of political units in response to that chaos. Shortly after this new stability has been achieved both civilizations embark on their First Wave of Expansion, Hellenism with the colonies around the shores of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea and The West with the Crusades to the Holy Land and the Reconquista in Spain. After a couple of centuries this expansion is halted by opposition from foreign cultures, seemingly contributing to internal strife within the civilization.

After some centuries both civilizations experience what might be termed as a growing dissension or crack within their cosmologies, Hellenism with estrangement developing between the way of life of Athens and Sparta, The West with the Protestant Reformation. Both of these growing fissures contribute to the wars of the First Breakdown, which in Hellenism culminates with the Peloponnesian War and in The West with the Thirty Years War. At this time, there are also the first tendencies of reason beginning to detach itself from the original religious cosmology and increasingly attempting to make sense of the universe on its own. The cultural growth within the fields of art, architecture and philosophy, that before supported, upheld and expanded the religious cosmology now gradually begins to work in other directions. Some, like science, actively dismembering the religious cosmology and in time erecting one of its own.

Out of the debris of the First Breakdown the Second Wave of Expansion occurs, carried out by and resulting in fewer and larger political units than the wave preceding it. These are Alexander's conquests in The East and his generals' successor-states and to some extent Rome, and they are the maritime colonial empires of The West. Both civilizations then experience a Second Breakdown through several brutal all-out wars, in Hellenism beginning perhaps with the Wars of The Diadochi between Alexander's generals and the First Punic War and ending with the Third Punic War. In the case of The West the Second Breakdown begins with the Napoleonic Wars and ends with World War II.

After the Second Breakdown one state is left supreme, Rome in Hellenism and the United States in The West (two in The West if we consider Russia as part of

The West) which now embark on the Third Wave of Expansion. In Hellenism this third wave continues into the Third Breakdown, which mostly takes the form of civil wars, social upheaval and change of the political system since there are no other states left in the Mediterranean to seriously match Rome. Out of that Third Breakdown emerges the Hellenic Universal State in the form of the Roman Empire. In the case of The West we are perhaps now seeing the beginning of the Third Breakdown with the global financial crisis and consequent social disruption.

## Final thoughts

There are many further perspectives one could explore on the basis of a thesis like this, many new directions that could be taken. First and foremost, it seems necessary to say that all of the perspectives discussed here could of course be treated in much greater detail. Though not the norm in academic work, I have chosen, much in Toynbee's style, to illuminate a greater number of parts in order to, hopefully, shed light on their connections in the greater picture. This is clearly at the cost of the number of details illuminated in each part, but exactly because most academic work on Toynbee tends to focus – often with great results – on one particular part of his system, life or intellectual development, I have chosen to take a more synoptic view. As far as I am aware, no other writer has undertaken the task of seriously exploring whether there remains an intact structure somewhere in Toynbee's knocked about system. And I reasoned that a somewhat broad approach would be most useful in that investigation.

I shall be the first to conclude that that task is far from finished. It is only just begun here. As mentioned, each concept and process treated in this thesis could be dealt with in far greater detail. It ought to be in the future. If the basic structure of the argument is accepted, it would also remain to investigate the similarities and dissimilarities between the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. Graeco-Roman world and the 21<sup>st</sup> century Western. Would such a study support the idea of the existence of a recurring pattern or would it undermine it? And how should such an assessment be carried out, what should qualify as similarities and what should not? When that has been determined,

how many similarities must there be before we can reasonably speak of the existence of a pattern? The questions are plentiful.

Even if the project may seem daunting I believe it has a purpose. Toynbee never claimed to have found *the* truth of history, instead he said that he had investigated just one of its patterns "... *just as, in dissecting an organism, you can throw light on its nature by laying bare either the skeleton or the muscles or the nerves or the blood circulation. (...) I should be well content if it turned out that I had laid bare one genuine facet of history.*"<sup>76</sup> He also justified his project by saying that it was an imperative need of his time to try to make sense of history.

I think he has a point, and a point that is still relevant today. Human beings need a sense of knowing where they come from, they need a 'History' that makes sense. Nietzsche observed over a hundred years ago that such a history serves life. It gives life a horizon – a cosmology we might say – within which to exist. It gives identity and perhaps an idea of where one is going. Not just as individuals, but also as society, as humanity. It can give a certain mental robustness that could prove a vital ally for many people in the time of continuously accelerating change in which we live.

This of course does not mean that we should tell each other grand and lofty stories just because we need something to believe in. That would seem like a reversal of some of the greatest achievements of our civilization. Yet it is crucial to perceive that our world is made up of stories, each of them making sense of its own little piece of reality. Sometimes, once or twice in a generation, someone comes along who feels an compelling urge to tell a grand narrative, that all the little stories may be fitted into. Toynbee was clearly one of these people. It is an ungrateful task as the score of criticism show. But they have to try and we have to wrestle and wrangle with their stubborn visions. We need to tear them apart and put them together again, in new and ever more creative and mysterious forms. Out of that melting pot sometimes, very rarely, a new grand narrative is born. One that may last a millennium and birth a civilization. Luckily we can only guess when that may be.

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<sup>76</sup> McNeill, p. 224.

## Abstract

The thesis is a discussion of the view of history set forth by Arnold Joseph Toynbee (1889-1975) in his 12-volume *A Study of History*, published in 1934-61. The thesis presents the private and professional influences that shaped Toynbee and his view of history, e.g. his relationship with Oswald Spengler, and it presents the parts of Toynbee's philosophy of history that deals with the Graeco-Roman and Western Civilizations. Toynbee detected a recurring pattern in the development of these two civilizations that places current Western Civilization at a point of development roughly equivalent to that of the Graeco-Roman Civilization in the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.

Many reviewers have attacked Toynbee's system and pointed to flaws in its method and conclusions. I present and discuss some of this critique and conclude that much of it is fair and reasonable, yet that it does not seem to impinge on the general structure of his system, such as the very idea of focusing on civilizations and the larger phases they go through. These parts seem to remain largely intact. I note that many reviewers have focused on the more 'extravagant' parts of Toynbee's system, for instance his differing interpretations of the value of certain historical actors and processes, which has diverted attention from a careful discussion of which parts of his system remain sound. The present thesis is meant to contribute to that discussion.

In chapter 3, I discuss three parts of the Toynbeean system. I investigate more closely the term 'civilization' and conclude that Toynbee is not consistent in his use of it. I then propose to define a civilization by what I call a *shared cosmology*, a set of myths that explain the purpose and nature of the universe and the role of human beings in that universe. The defining cosmology in both civilizations came in the form of a religion, and it seems to me that this definition captures the phenomenon 'civilization' in the way Toynbee works with it.

Secondly, I investigate Toynbee's notion of the 'growth of civilizations' and conclude, along with many others, that Toynbee's description of the growth process is far from adequate, but that his main term *Challenge and Response* does indeed seem useful in explaining many instances of growth. I suggest a new definition of growth and a distinction between *cultural* and *civilizational growth*, which I believe may clear up some of the controversy over the concept. Finally, I conclude that Toynbee's term *Time of Troubles* does seem generally useful and that it seems to fit

into a larger pattern whereby the civilization expands physically through three successive waves, each time carried out by fewer and larger political units than the wave preceding it. This leads towards the civilization being united under one political framework, Toynbee's Universal State.

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