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Civilization as a Phase of World History

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WE think we know the zoological basis for man's domination of the earth. His dermal, circulatory, respiratory, and digestive systems fit him for nearly every climate and terrain and diet the planet offers. He is agile: runs, swims, climbs, and burrows. He is dexterous, with apposable thumbs, and has stereoscopic vision. His reproductive system keeps him in rut the year round, and his period of infantile dependency is extremely prolonged, so that he acts in concert with other members of his species throughout his life. The large human brain, a magnificent learning instrument, of course gives him an advantage. It enables the individual to improve his performance as he goes and the species to pool experience.

This equipment in a purely mechanical sense is not to be slighted. Porpoises and elephants, to name two outstripped evolutionary competitors, might have reached a very high degree of intelligence could they handle objects and flourish in a wider range of natural surroundings. The big cats and the larger birds of prey, to take another example, are powerful hunters, but

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the apparatus of muscle and speed and weaponry that makes them so requires rich feeding. The more they kill, the harder and farther they must look to maintain their "standard of living." As for animals that commit themselves to special tissues to meet an evolutionary situation, they are the original models of built-in obsolescence.

On the basis of biological equipment, however, man is not all that promising as an animal, to judge by the modest position of his simian cousins in the bush. Many creatures—among them the social insects as well as numerous forms of cooperative aquatic life—reproduce at a rate that would seem to overwhelm him. Many herd, pack, and flock animals are individuated enough to equal him in the capacity of single members to enact the biological repertory of the species. The ability to mimic, play, and signal is not uniquely human. Up to a point even learning is not the most effective means to survival. If a duckling reacted to a hawk's shadow only after puzzling out the death of the rest of the brood, education might be interrupted by extinction.

If his biological apparatus does not fully account for the dominance of Homo sapiens, still less was the development of that apparatus a cut-and-dried affair. Just as the Punic Wars may be subsumed as a verifying datum under some socioeconomic theorem, so the emergence of man does not contradict the theory of evolution. But those who pursue history must have an account of the wars in addition to, perhaps in preference to, the theorem, and those who study life will be aware of the chanciness in specific evolution. "It would come as a shock to those who believe firmly that the scroll of the future is fixed," writes Loren Eiseley, to know that man's ratlike Paleocene ancestors came out of the swamps, experimented successfully with grassland life, but then were driven back by the true rodents. Many primates died off; those who survived struck out on a new line that brought them transformed from the rain forest fifty million years later. "It is conceivable that except for the invasion of the rodents . . . , we might be there on the grass, you and I, barking in the high-plains sunlight."[1] Since within nature man is a radically local phenomenon—much as on the historical board Henry VIII is not wholly reducible to a formula like growth of nationalism —"prehistoric" is an excellent tag for the evolutionary aeons before humanity: determined and unconscious, yet prefiguring history in contingency.

In becoming himself, Homo sapiens was wrenched out of underlying nature. Phenomenologists, who use the word "reflexion" to designate the opera-

[1] Loren Eiseley, *The Immense Journey* (New York, n.d.), 7, 10.

tion of consciousness, distinguish two movements. "Reflect means," on the one hand, "to concentrate oneself, to go from multiplicity towards unity by a centripetal motion. The subject thus moves from a state of dispersion or distraction; he turns to himself, he collects himself, simplifies himself, and concentrates himself at his center." Drawn toward consciousness and thereby alienated from underlying nature, early man would need to "collect himself" to act with the singleness that a lower animal cannot escape. This is the fall from innocence, unfitting man for nature. "Reflect," on the other hand, also means

> to project onto a new level, and then it is the movement by which the subject, starting from a sort of original unity which cannot be grasped as such, tries to grasp itself by dissociating itself, by dividing itself or by doubling back on itself, by multiplying itself. . . . Reflexion . . . gradually reaches a state of greater expansion and proliferation around the original central point. . . .[2]

This is the basis for an indefinite amount of new purpose. Man, in the words of José Ortega y Gasset, "invents for himself a program of life."[3]

Historians are clearly entitled to set the time before the dawn of consciousness aside as prehistoric. Why they should shy away from the hundred thousand years or more between the emergence of Homo sapiens and the appearance of writing is less clear. Researchers from other disciplines uncovered the era; still other researchers, trained to find and interpret nondocumentary evidence, explore it. Historians have a literary bias—a point to be touched on later—that leads them to approach even contemporary illiterate societies through the writings of literate observers. Yet, with consciousness, a second nature became possible, and one supposes historians would want to familiarize themselves with it as ecologists familiarize themselves with primary nature. One would expect them, especially if the high cultures are their ultimate target, to adopt a name such as "protohistoric" for the time in which culture itself was created. That gigantic task of the protohistoric era does not deserve to be put down as merely inchoate.

In adapting underlying nature to his purposes, man introduced regular transmission of experience and deliberate teaching. Instead of the child learning and imagining at random as he encounters the world, he is introduced to a ready-made plan of life based upon accumulated experience and decisions. Both in the sense of selection and in the sense of confrontation his culture provides in advance an area of concern. Since every culture that functions at all gives more control over underlying nature than animal

[2] This and the preceding quotation are from Pierre Thévenaz, *What Is Phenomenology?* ed. James M. Edie (Chicago, 1962), 114.

[3] José Ortega y Gasset, *History as a System* (New York, 1962), 215.

behavior does, the child not only meets a world already stamped by culture, but prefers it. The density of the cultural environment, its patterned, stylized formation, and its irresistible attraction are what suggest that it is tantamount to a second nature. In A. L. Kroeber's phrase, "cultural development has largely taken over the determination of what will happen on this planet both to life and culture."[4]

The assertion was made that much chance or fluctuation entered into the evolution of humanity. The same underlying natural laws that shaped Homo sapiens could, through a minor eruption on the sun, have boiled terrestrial life away. The primate nervous system could, by responding to broad hints from nature, have elaborated itself into tactile equipment instead of a huge central brain. Similarly, though culture is a "nature," an imposed system, it allows a fair amount of practical freedom. The key experience of a mouse dropped into a box fifty miles square is not restraint.

Culture in fact offers considerable latitude to the individual. In the sense that a way of life is distinguishable from the people who practice it, as a musical composition is distinct from the orchestra that plays it, a culture is not a society. "The [culture] patterns are not deterministic laws but more or less definite ways of acting, thinking, doing things, developed by people who, as they become conscious of them, may acquire great skill and mastery in evolving and controlling the patterns."[5] An individual earns the praise "cultured" in the Arnoldian sense precisely by adding or transmuting values in his particular culture.

Almost certainly as the breeding ground of culture the protohistoric phase is worth intensive study by more historians. For this phase the evidence may be meager: some objects and bones and buried sites, a few wall paintings, leavened by whatever analogies anyone has the confidence to draw from the life of surviving primitive people. That only makes additional finds more valuable and dictates that all available evidence be turned over in many minds. Regrettably, few historians, conditioned to the library and the archives, are interested.

The discipline of history, despite the present tabulation and concern with methodology and the historians' lack of employment outside teaching, remains a branch of literature. Historians are interested in events and interpretation. Even the duller sort of Marxist historian, aside from the politics of glorification and after insisting on the "necessary course" of development,

[4] A. L. Kroeber, *An Anthropologist Looks at History,* ed. Theodora Kroeber (Berkeley, Calif., 1963), 197.

[5] Milton Singer, foreword to *ibid.*

will in the end imply, indeed convey, that Nikolai Lenin, for example, is interesting in his own right. Historians share with other artists a bias against letting events be submerged in postulates and are convinced at bottom that each segment of experience that historical imagination molds into a picture carried its own self-sufficient, irreducible value.[6] In so far as this keeps them from treating man fundamentally as an object, all is well. But as literati, though often concealed from themselves like Émile Zola, they are sentimental about high culture. After their fashion, they talk as tough as Ernest Hemingway: "Toynbee has done a great disservice to the comparative study of civilizations and tended to bring discredit on the whole enterprise by undertaking his investigations in so ill-conceived and unscientific a manner."[7] What they tend to do is another matter: eschew world history for metropolitan history and avoid as "prehistoric" the phase for which literally all the evidence is objective.

It is difficult to reconcile the dismissal of protohistory by historians proper with the views of primitive peoples presented by archaeologists, anthropologists, and art historians. The theological rigor and courtliness of savages have often been demonstrated. As far as complexity goes, a trained observer usually requires a long period of study to grasp the pattern of life in a few clusters of huts, while illiteracy was the rule for the masses in many historic civilizations. Cultural relativism seems to underscore the distinctiveness rather than the amorphousness of lower cultures. From the very heights of Bloomsbury we are admonished not "to suppose that civilized artists are either superior or inferior to uncivilized" or to "maintain that civilization is either favourable or unfavourable to art."[8] At the same time, early protohistoric man has been applauded as a sort of self-taught engineer. He is man the toolmaker, weapon thrower, fire builder. Indeed, he is presented as a go-getter along the lines of Henry Ford (even similar in having a nasty disposition), and students are asked to admire the technology he created despite his humble origins.

Can historians accept this? Surely the *technological* content of the protohistoric phase was scanty? What counts is that the pitiably crude articles are found on sites that suggest they were used by groups and generations. Man was creating culture, the prior condition for all technology, and cultural or-

[6] "A work is bad when it is not itself, when it does not amount to something like a unique being or entity, existing independently of any other. It is . . . irreplaceable, non-interchangeable." (Eugene Ionesco, "The Writer and His Problems," tr. John Weightman, *Encounter,* XXIII [Sept. 1964], 14.)

[7] Philip Bagby, *Culture and History* (Berkeley, Calif., 1963), 181.

[8] Clive Bell, *Civilization* (New York, 1928), 85–86.

ganization was the chief protohistoric task. We might even refer to early protohistory as man's constitutional era in the same sense that we speak of the constitutional period in American history.

Of course no culture leaders suspend coming to grips with things while they draft a scheme. Early man did not spend one year counseling and the next year drying salmon. But there are periods when the chief actors simply make do with whatever technics lie at hand. To continue the analogy with government, founding fathers often pass a crisis in deliberation, riding various waves of popular enthusiasm or confusion, without money, arms, storehouses, communications, or other technical means.

Only when the Neolithic age supplanted protohistory could technics be said to have first boomed. Again, life was not one-sided. Lewis Mumford and other writers conjecture that Neolithic societies were excellently ordered, with room for expansion, benign religions, and a standard of living that was rising but would not yet permit sustained warfare. Technics pure and simple did boom, however.[9] Settled agriculture (with plowing, irrigation, and domesticated plants and animals), wheeled and sail-driven transport, craft specialization, and measurement were established. Since technological advances of this caliber serve world-wide appetites and yield their advantages almost regardless of cultural variations, they are nearly irresistible. (To give a current illustration, if a peasant society is tempted to go over to cash cropping, the traditional extended family may be turned into a help rather than a drawback—as a savings and investment and labor pool in the initial absence of banks, large firms, and similar institutions.) Too much should not be made of the "transcultural" character of technics. No doubt some Neolithic societies rejected technical innovations until their immediate neighbors threatened to eradicate them. Each society may have tended to borrow first what was most congenial to its values and quickly to mold the new utensils in its style. (Even today the difference in shape and proportion between Russian and American missiles cannot be wholly accounted for on technical grounds.) Without question in Neolithic times innovations were transmitted by direct contact, so that much cultural interchange accompanied the diffusion of technics. Nevertheless, the keynote of the age was radical and rapid material gain for humanity as a whole.

Historians are forestalled in several ways from granting the Neolithic

[9] In *The Rise of the West* (Chicago, 1963), W. H. McNeill cites calculations by Edward S. Deevey, Jr. ("The Human Population," *Scientific American,* CCIII [Sept. 1960], 195–204), "which suggest that human population multiplied about sixteen times between 8000 and 4000 B.C. as a consequence of the agricultural revolution."

Revolution its proper weight. Partly out of a conviction that civilization is the culmination of human development and partly because only civilized life, through records and monumental remains, falls within their self-chosen range, they are forced to give the heaviest dramatic emphasis to the advent of civilization. And only in the later periods of civilization is it possible to work on a fine enough scale, such as biography, to use the subtler methods of dramaturgy: irony, understatement, suspense, and the like. The advent of civilization must be dramatized as the feature act. What is called good timing in the theater requires civilization to come on bigger, brighter, and louder than the prologue. This obscures the fact that the technics employed in the Mesopotamian irrigation works and the Egyptian pyramids, for example, were, *in principle,* laid down during the Neolithic phase. Nor did civilization invariably move in the direction of complexity. The merging of local gods into centralized gods perhaps erased as many versions as civilized theology later elaborated. The foreshortening of water, for example, from a multitude of words designating this or that aspect of place, temperature, dampness, light, and purpose to a wiggly line of writing was in some respects a return to the fixed-response animal world—and had to be undone by "civilized" poets.

Bringing on civilization as an engineering triumph not only hides the truly technological character of the Neolithic phase, but it also repeats the mistake made with the protohistoric phase by disguising the fact that civilization was a great leap forward in cultural and social organization. From a series of refinements no more exciting on the surface than one cited in *The Rise of the West*—"Hammurabi's administrative machinery was sufficiently developed to permit him to scatter soldiers at various points far from his person and summon them for service when necessary"—sprang the libraries of Mesopotamia, the bathhouses of the Indus civilization, and the post roads of ancient China. When man massed his numbers in cities and utilized his collective powers through the state and its auxiliary institutions, he had got hold of the most productive "tool" of all.

Ruthlessness of manpower exploitation, as distinct from efficiency, is not solely the property of civilization. Savages in their well-known nobility are capable of using each other mercilessly. At a more rudimentary level still, the family is a thoroughgoing tyranny, with the child dependent on his immediate kin not only for sustenance and protection but also for a dispensation of affection in order to become a sane adult. Nor should the preponderance of coercive power in the hands of an elite be exaggerated. Shoddy work gets

done at knife point. Even when thousands of slaves were worked to death in the making of showy civilized edifices, a much larger majority of the population volunteered their consent in the most earnest possible way—by continuing to focus their lives through the system. Time and again barbarian conquerors of civilized centers elected to become leaders rather than exploiters.

The situation of invaders from the marches is well represented in the description W. H. McNeill gives of the Germans in Roman times: ". . . German tribesmen had begun to settle down to a more intensive agriculture as early as the time of Tacitus. Their numbers correspondingly increased without at first altering the warrior ethos they had inherited from an earlier, more pastoral style of life."[10] Typically, these are groups who have already come more than halfway to civilization and are gathering momentum. As mercenaries, captives, and tributaries, advance parties have already trickled over the line. The whole people has mastered Neolithic culture, and a dim determination to develop a more fulsome way of life, though usually not the way of the metropolitan power, prevails. So irresistible does the craving for civilization become that the people of the marches risk their existence, literally taking a gamble formerly reserved as an ideal for young males. Until nearly overrun, the defending power looks upon the struggle as a graduated affair, with territory to be lost or won, booty to be seized or relinquished, campaigns to be checked or expanded. The invaders, on the contrary, leave their homeland, give up the possibility of supporting themselves on a sustained basis, and expose their population to total war. What is often interpreted as the softening and acculturation of barbarians who conquered civilizations might also be seen as the appropriation of what they came to get.

But why, if civilization exploits manpower without necessarily giving the benefits of productivity to the individual, are the people of the marches attracted? What draws such figures as the subsistence farmer who more or less consciously chooses to become a slum dweller? The answer has to do with the cultural amplitude of metropolitan life, its diversity, pageantry, and self-generating character. Far from being totally a workshop (a state we recognize as sociopathic), a civilization is its own management and its own demanding customer.

The creator of culture as a second nature overlying physical nature thrives on roles and style. Within the high cultures he builds a third nature that might be labeled individualism. He develops the capacity to stand aside from

[10] McNeill, *Rise of the West*, 387.

himself and see himself as a cog in the enterprise. He is able to follow the nuances of his personal history with an acute sense of consistency, yet weigh that history as only one actualized possibility out of the many existences he might have been. For transcendent consciousness, the self becomes a medium. Whether brought by greed, force, or birth into civilization, very few men returned to one-dimensional or two-dimensional nature.

All this might sound like Hegelian slush were civilization not a brute success—a huge, vulgar, unblinkable historical fact, the broadest cultural unit yet established, absorbing most of the human species and dominating the mind until recently. Barring a handful of Han and Islamic historians who sensed the immense cultural variety of the world and noted the gap between cultural dispersion and political control, hardly anyone over the two thousand years from Herodotus to Voltaire thought of world history (as distinct from religious and philosophic attempts at universality). Even today there are fewer important studies of world history than of, say, seventeenth-century England.

The reluctance to subsume one's civilization into a class with others should not be blamed entirely on willful parochialism or lack of resources for comparative study. Effectively, none of the score or so of civilizations that operated in history were much smaller than the box into which the mouse was dropped earlier in this article. Each gave the single person wide scope within underlying nature, culture, and individualism. The widest social unit—state or empire—was often so comprehensive that the person in it never conceived of a greater cultural unit. Even when, as in Pharaonic Egypt, political and cultural boundaries nearly coincided, individuals looked no further in their reflective moments than the limits of dynasty, generation, city, occupation. As much as petty-mindedness, the amplitude and duration of civilizations made them seem unique and all-encompassing from within.

The archaeological and philological discoveries of the past 150 years, enhanced by psychological and anthropological widening of horizons, have only begun to stimulate a feeling for world history. The high degree of interchange between cultures is better known. Analogies between civilizations and organisms are under suspicion. Still today, however, we combine some eighteenth-century clichés with a contradictory preference for dealing with fragments.

The words commonly used in English to describe the termination of a civilization—and comparable words are used in other languages—imply that it succumbs from inner weakness: decline, fall, degenerate, wither, weaken, dissolve, collapse, decay, die. This idea of the inherent enfeeblement of civili-

zations gains support from the common-sense observation that things pass, from the emotions aroused by mutability, from the religious hope of renewal, and from the concept of finitude. Yet can we in truth find many historical instances of a civilization, out of fatigue, despair, corruption, or whatever supposed weakness, voluntarily and unilaterally voiding itself? Can we find any?

If they were approaching the question *de novo,* historians might not feel obliged even to look, since logic indicates that the answer is "No." The complex that the abstraction "a culture" designates is a collective style or orientation. Properly speaking, it must be lived; it cannot be merely potential. It is generated in corporeal consciousness, manifested through objects, and located in history. But it points indefinitely beyond actual groups living a version at any given time, because it pre-eminently includes ideas, values, norms. In the philosophy of Edmund Husserl, "the human belongs to the universe of objective facts, but as persons, as egos, men have goals, aims." Since striving for goals and upholding norms is a task that never ends as long as the will accepts it, "the particular *telos* of separate nations . . . lies in infinity." "There is essentially no zoology of peoples."[11] Should a people in possession of one culture replace it with another, they have not used up the old; rather, under duress they have left it eternally unfinished, in the process usually dispersing what was "the people." Aging is a biological concept, not a historical one. A culture, by its nature, is under no *organic* necessity to wear down.

But of course historians do not ask the questions innocently. They are heir to the literary vice of their profession, which for centuries steeped itself in the Latin writings and fostered a craving for the fiction of a strong, austere, scrupulous Roman Republic versus a rotten, degenerate Empire. The viciousness of the vice is intensified by the fact that education in Latin is perfunctory or nonexistent for most historians today; thus the notion of "decline" comes unexamined. Worse still, non-Westerners trained in historiography, primarily a Western creation, catch the attitude subliminally at third hand. And so historians must look at specific conditions to see that to be overthrown is not the same as to dwindle.

Consider from Roman history itself the following events that occurred within a period of twenty years. First a Roman politician assembled a body of cavalry four thousand strong—a far cry from the days when only a few equestrian nobles accompanied the legions. When this leader's army was

[11] Edmund Husserl, *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy,* tr. Quentin Lauer (New York, 1965), 183, 158.

routed, he tried to prevent the news from reaching Rome. Not long after, a *nouveau riche* general massed an unprecedentedly large army and led it to destruction. Subsequently the second largest city on the Italian peninsula betrayed the government at Rome. Amidst these tribulations the Romans began the practice of cutting off the hands of captured messengers, they starved to death the senators of a disloyal town, and they played the gruesome trick of throwing the head of his brother over the wall to an enemy. About this time, when certain young nobles were asked to join a special force for the defense of the fatherland, the parents of many tried to buy exemptions. It was not long before a faction in Rome sought perpetual rule for a successful young adventurer.

Seemingly only a few virgins ravished by apes would be needed to make this sequence playable in Hollywood, and yet it took place two hundred years before Caesar crossed the Rubicon: during the Second Punic War, when Cato himself was alive to censure the "effete Greek" ways of Scipio Africanus, the man who defeated Hannibal and declined to accept supreme power for life. Tiberius Sempronius and Terentius Varro, both elected consuls, were the bumbling generals, and Capua was the city that revolted, quite understandably since Rome at this time had not even unified the peninsula. Quite likely such events would be interpreted as signs of decadence if they had occurred later.[12]

By definition, senescence implies a prior period of maturity and growth. Those who believe in cultural senescence therefore believe in growth, and growth follows a fixed path. Prejudged in terms of a biological metaphor, the early failures and afflictions of a civilization never look as serious as in fact historically they were. To return to Roman examples, only the Greek naval victory at Cumae allowed the Romans to get out from under Etruscan suzerainty in the beginning. Celts raided the Po Valley and plundered the Balkans before the birth of Christ. Rome never mastered irrigation on a scale suitable for a centralized regime. It bumbled into a wrenching economic depression toward the end of the first century A.D. and was swept by plague two centuries later.

Such examples of weakness and misfortune from beginning to end are the more telling in that they pertain to states, which can "make mistakes" in the sense of overextension, inefficient institutions, and so forth. Civilizations, however, transect competing and successive states, as is especially the

[12] In his *Hannibal's Legacy* (2 vols., New York, 1966), Arnold J. Toynbee advances the extreme thesis that the corruption and centralization engendered by Rome's struggle with Hannibal foredoomed the Roman Empire.

case with European or Western civilization. Moreover, civilizations which lasted an extremely long time and in which cultural and political boundaries approximately coincided provide especially good examples of the converse of behavior appearing early that would be called decadent if it came later. Namely, behavior that would be called seminal if it appeared earlier frequently appears late.

Traditional China, for instance, so old that even its "times of trouble" from a distance appear to have an antique perfection, did not pass away in its sleep, a little fitfully, after a quiet old age. From 1500 to 1800 the Chinese *increased* their capacity to accommodate outside pressure, found a place for Europeans in the Middle Kingdom, and Sinicized the Manchu conquerors before they came. The educated class of China entered the twentieth century loyal to the "way." What led to the overthrow of the old system was its disadvantage, growing unmistakable, against new enemies. British gunboats and marines overran the Chinese in the 1840's. European countries and the United States obtained trade privileges on the basis of practices that violated Chinese tradition. Japan, the most Westernized country in Asia, raped China in the 1930's. Against this background, the Chinese did not so much repudiate Confucianism as snatch at a new culture to improve their position.

Assyro-Babylonian culture—sometimes called Akkadian to distinguish it from the Sumerian culture that preceded it and the Persian and Islamic cultures that supplanted it in Mesopotamia—showed if anything greater vigor at its end than at the beginning. The Chaldean dynasty, which included the Old Testament figure Nebuchadnezzar II and was one of the ablest ruling groups in two millenniums, rose in the last century of Akkadian civilization. The proportion of slaves decreased toward the end of the culture, while the aqueduct and the cotton plant (for which Sennacherib claimed credit) were introduced over fifteen hundred years after the first Akkadian king, Sargon I. A thousand years after Sargon had, to the envy of the Sumerians, coined the catchy title "King of the Four Quarters of the Earth," the Assyrian kings were no less resourceful in devising a special "southern" title to gratify the national pride of their Babylonian subjects. The building, shifting, and rebuilding of capitals continued in a line that led from Uruk to Ur to Kish to Akkad to Isin to Larsa to Babylon to Assur to Calah to Nineveh. In warfare the Akkadians went on innovating with chariots, cavalry, loose formations, and archers. Almost to the time of Christ, beyond the Persian conquest, each generation of scribes mastered the Sumerian borrowings of about 2300 B.C., but also extended the Akkadian

word lists and multiplied the formulas for various kinds of tablets. In short, this was a culture where most was kept, but much was added.[13]

Still another factor that undercuts theories of cultural death from old age is that usages, crafts, values, and the like—the very stuff of culture—seldom disappear entirely. Anthropologists have found patterns from West African kingdoms being transmitted in twentieth-century Georgia, and historians of science have found features of caliphate medicine in use in Bourbon Europe, to give only two examples. As Nicholas Berdyaev wrote: "The fall of Rome and the ancient world, then, is not synonymous with death, but rather with a sort of historical catastrophe; an upheaval on the surface of the earth during which some new element is added to the foundations of history and the basic principle of ancient culture is left intact."[14]

Yet civilizations do perish, and not because of the inexplicable incursion of a mysterious ailment into a charmed life. The causes are exactly and only those causes that are accessible to historians—particular choices, relations, conditions, personalities, and happenings. Of course no pin-point theory of history is intended, with all hanging on a single battle or a bad farming practice. Instead, the regularity that emerges from this interpretation of the perished civilizations has to do, not with inevitable growth and decline, but with the universal ambition of civilizations and protocivilized cultures to vanquish what is alien to them if they can. Whether they can, and when they can, works out historically. What holds constant is the urge to destroy.

It may be that civilizations gain more or less stamina according to how widely they diffuse operational responsibility. The Indus civilization apparently concentrated cultural as well as political power in the hands of a very few managers and hence crumbled almost instantly before the onslaught of the Aryans. By contrast, the Egyptians, who conceived of themselves as members of a single "household," recovered from the invasion of the Hyksos, and of course the traditional Chinese, who held that their emperor was the link between heaven and all mankind, absorbed numerous conquerors. Much of the durability and portability of Jewish culture stems from its shared quality. To the extent that civilizations that assigned large numbers of people only so much of a place as was needed to draw upon their brute labor were the most perishable, oppression is not the key to cultural endurance. Yet diffusion of responsibility does not often entail egalitarianism. Many times the chief actors in a high culture—tutor, queen,

[13] See Robert Erwin, "Cities without Vistas," *Virginia Quarterly Review*, XLII (Winter 1966), 43–57.

[14] Nicholas Berdyaev, *The Meaning of History*, tr. George Reavey (Cleveland, 1962), 109–10.

commander, prophet, founder of dynasty—have been in effect slaves. More to the point, inclusiveness is no absolute guarantor against aggression.

In this respect and others, the archetypal civilizations are those of the New World. In Mexico, at least as represented by the Aztecs, civilized man devoted his highest energies to bribing gods with the blood of his neighbors and then was himself put to fire and sword by Westerners. Mayan civilization was long thought to demonstrate the opposite case, of internal decay: the Mayas exhausted their land, tore themselves apart in civil wars, stifled creativity through theocracy, and so on, ran the speculations. But recent research points toward overthrow ahead of decline and before the ravages of the Europeans. "A final occupation at Altar de Sacrificios dates from the Post-Classic period or from the time of the 'collapse.' The ceramics and figurines of this late phase of culture differ from those of the characteristic Classic Maya traditions and suggest instead an invasion of alien, perhaps Mexican, peoples from the north and west."[15] And Peruvian culture illustrates nearly all the arguments laid down here.

In line with the "manpower" thesis, the first great advance made in Peru following the Neolithic Revolution appears to have depended on the organization of considerable bodies of men for sustained tasks. This is manifest in the impressive ruins at Chavín de Huantar, where there is no evidence that new "equipment" was available in the erection, around 700 B.C., of immense stone buildings with ventilating shafts. Ribald—some would say pornographic—paintings, which in a "Roman" perspective should show up in a degenerate phase, present themselves in Salinar pottery nearly two thousand years before the Incas, and mass production of ceramics—romanticism about handicrafts notwithstanding—may be detected in Moche remains from five hundred years before the expansionist period. Contrary to notions of synthetic cosmopolitanism, the Chímu people, the most urbanized Peruvians prior to the Incas and partly contemporary with them, apparently had no state religion and hardly any communal worship at all. As for the Incas, their "decadence" may be gauged from the fact that in less than a century before the Spanish conquest they had integrated an empire covering 350,000 square miles. Some of their laws would have satisfied Cato himself: citizens were not allowed to travel for pleasure; adultery with a noblewoman was a capital offense. Numerous Inca administrative practices deserve comparison for soundness to those of modern Israel, for example, surplus crops being sent to regions where they were not grown in order to

[15] Gordon R. Willey, "Maya Archaeological Research at Harvard University," *Harvard Foundation for Advanced Study and Research Newsletter* (Mar. 1964), 5.

vary the diet of the people.[16] Finally, the conquest represented in melodramatic form the "natural" end of civilizations. In full flower, Peruvian culture was simply hacked to pieces by the Europeans at first sight.

How, on balance, should civilization be judged as a scale on which to live? Its amplitude has been mentioned, offering to date the most control over physical nature and the richest facilities for creating styles of life. Looking backward (and from a civilization that especially values diversity), the Westerner may feel that the form is grand indeed. Yet from the very diversity—systems as distinguishable from one another as a greyhound is distinguishable from a bulldog—it is obvious that no one high culture came close to accommodating the full range of human versatility. Already partial and restrictive, each civilization operated at its best only for relatively short periods among small groups in particular localities. Civilized efflorescence was at most a phenomenon of an age in an empire, most often a school of thought, a group of practitioners, a class of leaders for two or three generations: a matter of subunits. Not only were multitudes excluded from the "average" culture of the civilization to which they belonged, but the average culture itself was remote from the bursts of peak creativity.

If this restrictive side of civilization is held in view along with its amplitude, then the way in which the historic civilizations perished, always at the hands of aliens as argued here, allows historians more freedom in the interpretation of events, but is even less comforting than conventional theories of "decline." Though probably no historic civilization stylized itself to such a degree that it excluded life in the main, neither could any of them brook others. Consequently the form civilization seems to require that new styles of life develop at the expense of other styles that have not wholly realized themselves.

When this conclusion is reflected upon in the context of the twentieth century, interesting questions arise. The diverse civilizations and surviving Neolithic cultures that existed in Galileo's time have passed, and no new ones replace them. The entire world seems to be in the process of adopting Western industrialism, often most eagerly where the West has lost political control. It is hard to see how Western civilization will be overturned by another, and thus confirm the conclusion, when no other is flourishing.

Is the Communist bloc perhaps the beginning of a new civilization? Even if this were so, the conclusion would not necessarily hold, for indus-

[16] For a judicious account of Inca government, see J. Alden Mason, *The Ancient Civilizations of Peru* (London, 1957).

trial technology makes global domination feasible, and the Communist bloc explicitly aims at such domination. The overthrow of the West would simply carry forward the question of a monocivilized world. But of course the question need not be carried forward. The Communist bloc is a wing of European culture. As Michael Polanyi writes,

> In 1789 France broke away and led the world toward a revolutionary consummation of the contradiction inherent in a post-Christian rationalism. The ideology of total revolution is a variant of the derivation of absolutism from absolute individualism. . . . This logic is, alas, familiar to us, and we can readily identify its more or less complete fulfilment from Robespierre and St. Just to Lenin, Bela Kun, Hitler, and Mao Tse-tung.[17]

Instead of witnessing either a "totalitarianizing" of civilization or an exception to the rule that civilizations are destroyed only by each other, twentieth-century man is possibly struggling through the prelude to a form of culture more comprehensive than civilization. Though industrialism originated in one of the historic civilizations, which Oswald Spengler aptly called Faustian, and though the world has been exposed to it through the classic civilized mediums of force and intolerant proselytizing, the peoples who are giving up their traditional cultures in the rush to "modernize" are perhaps not really subscribing to Western civilization. As yet they do not know how to separate technics from the historical wrapping, but the Industrial Revolution is like the Neolithic Revolution, an expansion of man's field of action. It leads to a sudden, gigantic increase of population, resources, coordination, and power for happiness and misery such as permitted civilization to begin in the great river valleys five thousand years ago.

Civilization, to repeat, originated in more efficient exploitation of manpower; the founders of the historic civilizations were conquerors and revolutionaries. On the basis of this record, there is no reason to believe that a higher phase of cultural development would be launched except through the will to power.

The will to power is strong and incessant, but its course, like that of a river with soft banks, is hard to predict. The nuclear weapons that have come out of the modern surge of technics make civilization look obsolete in a positive as well as a negative sense. In terms of utilizing human resources, a postindustrial culture matrix might compare to civilization as the yield from a few ounces of uranium in a reactor compares to the yield from a ton of coal in a boiler. Civilization may not, however, appear so primitive to those who exercise power in its centers. The "take" in comfort, status, and

[17] Michael Polanyi, "Beyond Nihilism," *Encounter,* XIV (Mar. 1960), 39.

gratification for functionaries even in an old-fashioned agrarian despotism is considerable. The interplay among the power elite between preserving the cultural *status quo* and being tempted by ambition to try a change of culture form will, as a matter of fact, probably revolve around nuclear weapons. Their possession is the means to ultimate sovereignty of the civilized type. Their use obliterates what one has sovereignty over (and oneself). That these conditions are irreconcilable affords no grounds for believing a "sensible" course is going to be taken through the will to power. Most men have always wanted to live and to use their resources, and the outcome has been slaughter.

Should partisans for a new culture form nevertheless appear, they could do worse than to adopt a strategy of mingling. Nuclear weapons bear some resemblance to the very large dinosaurs that could not catch the very small dinosaurs that ate their eggs. Rival power centers close enough to each other geographically would constitute one and the same indivisible target area. The question is how to induce rival powers to mingle their functionaries and populations. This is a special case of the general problem of breaching the cultural wall around civilizations and the state frontiers inside civilizations.

The most promising legacy that can be drawn from civilization for this purpose is the institution. In general, the furthest effective social unit within civilizations has been the state, precariously segregating itself from others of its kind. The furthest effective cultural unit has been the single civilization, achieving a style by exclusion. At times the only bridging devices have been rudimentary Neolithic practices such as interdynastic marriage and the exchange of hostages. At other times, however, institutions have straddled frontiers and trained their members to set aside local loyalties. Economic institutions come first to mind in this respect: transport agents, trading houses, banks. Religious institutions have succeeded in recruiting functionaries to spend a lifetime in the service of an enterprise whose political domain they never enter. Through scientific symbology much communication is feasible within and among institutions whose members do not know each other's supposedly value-determinant native languages.

Perhaps omens of an institutional phase of culture are already in the air. A recent article titled "Companies Outgrow Countries" describes how the balance of payments of developed economies as large as Britain and Italy can be affected by the purely business decisions of multinational firms, some of which "go so far as to maintain expert full-time [internal] foreign

exchange departments."[18] NATO officers in the "trade union of soldiers" have been known to help each other lobby with their national governments. Today's numerous international organizations, conferences, and exchanges seem to be a combination of conspicuous consumption and subterfuge on the part of the power centers. Still, they offer scope for Hammurabic ambition, and they intertwine bureaucracies.

The object would be to lead as many self-perpetuating institutions as possible, each unintentionally compromising the sovereignty of its society, to crisscross their lines throughout the world. If this resulted in uniformity, the diversity of civilization would be preferable (short of nuclear suicide). But it should lead to a greatly enlarged and more open form of the interdependent variety which civilization created in the city.

Whatever new phase, if any, develops beyond industrialism, we are at least able at this juncture to begin using the word "civilized" without either cynicism or naïveté. A ghetto is civilized, and so is a *corps de ballet*. Contrasted with one another, they seem to have opposite value and no common function. But compared with the menstrual huts and village dances of Neolithic humanity, they stand forth as coexamples of civilization—a more ample apparatus for realizing similar intentions. Man is implanted in the world as it is given. Intentions multiply, however. To the extent that consciousness transcends underlying nature, culture patterns, and, in the clinical sense, the individual's life style, man defines himself. The ultimate purpose of according the same weight to "civilization" as to "triangle" is not to exchange moral presumption for deterministic resignation. It is to clear the way for an inquiry into what this facility built by man is really worth.

[18] *Economist*, Oct. 17, 1964, 272.