George F. W. Young

TOWARDS A THEORY OF HISTORICAL DYNAMICS

It was Voltaire, apparently, who coined the term "philosophy of history" in his *Essai sur les moeurs* (Geneva, 1756).[1] Since then, however, as a field of historical study philosophy of history has been pursued only intermittently and more by philosophers and moralists than by historians—witness the famous names: Herder, Hegel, Marx; Spencer, Spengler, Toynbee. In consequence, philosophy of history has been characterized by philosophical speculation and/or intellectual systematizing which, empirically considered, has not closely reflected reality. Yet some of the most recent writing on the subject together with the advance of archeological knowledge and the development of social science theory, especially anthro-

[1] The work was first published in abridged form at The Hague in 1753 under the title *Abrégé de l'histoire universelle depuis Charlemagne jusqu'à Charles-Quint,* and then in complete form at Genova in 1756: *Essai sur l'histoire générale et sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations depuis Charlemagne jusqu'à nos jours.* Voltaire is probably the first European to attempt a universal history (he included India, China, Mexico, and Peru); he was preceded only by the cyclic philosophy of history of Giambattista Vico (*La scienza nuova,* Naples, 1725), which however confined itself to Classical-Western history; see Philip Bagby, *Culture and History: Prolegomena to the Comparative Study of Civilizations,* Berkeley, 1963, pp. 12-14: see also H. Stuart Hughes, *Oswald Spengler: A Critical Estimate,* rev. ed., New York, 1962, pp. 36-40.

pological theory, allows at this juncture perhaps at least the beginnings of an empirical understanding of the longer sweep of human history, i.e., of the history of civilizations or of human societies since the inception of civilization. This essay is an attempt at formulating a working hypothesis for just such an understanding.

Hitherto the history of civilizations, or what this writer would prefer to call 'macro-history,' has been approached in two different ways: a) a holistic developmentalist approach, i.e., the history and evolution of the several civilizations as separate but comparable entities. The older efforts of Voltaire and Herder and the recent ones of Wells and McNeill[2] (and most 'world history' textbooks) would fall in the holistic developmentalist category, while from the late 19th century onwards the cyclical comparative approach has gained prominence presumably because it permits a comparative analysis of the evolution of various specific civilizations. Spengler and Toynbee,[3] of course, are the most notable protagonists of the latter approach. But their efforts have now been thoroughly rejected by nearly all historians as speculative systems, along with other similar efforts (e.g., Quigley).[4] What is it that has deluded them? In this writer's opinion the root problem is their conception of all civilizations as separate and equivalent entities. No doubt the comparative approach has merit, but in this instance the objects compared are improperly conceived.

* * *

A definition of civilization as a cultural phenomenon should probably include such factors as an economy able to produce an agricultural surplus, a hierarchical social structure, concentrations

[2] Herbert George Wells, *The Outline of History*, London, 1920; William H. McNeill, *The Rise of the West*, Chicago, 1963, and the same in condensed form in *A World History*, New York, 1967. McNeill is a kind of intellectual descendent of H. G. Wells, who in turn 'descends' from Voltaire and Herder (*Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, 4 vols., Riga and Leipzeg, 1784-91).

[3] Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, Vienna, 1918, and translated into English by C. F. Atkinson: *The Decline of the West*, 2 vols., London, 1934-61, and abridged by D. C. Somerwell (i.e., vols, 1-10): *A Study of History*, 2 vols., London, 1946-57.

[4] Carrol Quigley, *The Evolution of Civilizations: An Introduction to Historical Analysis*, New York, 1961.

of population in urban centers, and a division of labor between the food-producers and those that are free to follow other non-subsistence pursuits. An exact formulation of these factors, and probably some others, into a single coherent definition had best be left to anthropology.[5] Suffice it here to say only that civilization is characterized by urban-centered societies that are capable of generating elaborate non-subsistence cultural phenomena, most notably of course the so-called 'high culture' of great religious, intellectual, and artistic achievement.

Nevertheless, no matter how useful such a comprehensive view of civilization as a cultural phenomenon may be, especially to an anthropological analysis of what it is and how it arose, such a view is really too general for an historical understanding of its career over the past five thousand years. Hence historians have conventionally focused on the more particular regional and/or temporal manifestations of it. But here immediately a cluster of problems presents itself: what exactly are its particular regional and temporal manifestations; how many of them are there; what are their boundaries in space and their limits in time; have they developed successively, one from another, or discontinuously as independent entities? Spengler perceived ten civilizations and Toynbee some twenty odd; Bagby sees nine 'major' civilizations plus a number of 'secondary' ones, while Quigley has sixteen with a further eight possible.[6] So how many, in fact, are there? That has proven to be a difficult question.

The truth of the matter is that the boundaries in space between civilizations are as indefinite as their limits in time. Notwithstanding this fact, it seems that Western macro-historians have taken as 'given' the separateness of our own Western civilization from its predecessor, classical civilization, and then have proceeded to assume that all the rest of human civilization can be similarly partitioned off into separate entities. But consider, even in our own seemingly distinct Western case,

[5] See Bagby, *Culture and History,* pp. 159-165; see also Glyn Daniel; *The First Civilizations: The Archaeology of Their Origins,* London, 1968; Robert McC. Adams, *The Evolution of Urban Society: Early Mesopotamia and Prehistoric Mexico,* Chicago, 1966; and Rushton Coulborn, *The Origin of Civilized Societies,* Princeton, 1959.

[6] See Bagby, *Culture and History,* pp. 159-182; and Quigley, *Evolution of Civilizations,* pp. 32-37; see also Roger W. Wescott, "The Enumeration of Civilizations," *History and Theory,* Vol. IX, No. 1 (1970), pp. 59-83.

what about Byzantine civilization: is it, or is it not classical? And what about its successor, Russia: is Russian civilization an entity of its own on a par with Western civilization, or is it just a geographically peripheral part of the latter? Is it a direct or an autochthonous development of its own?

Most notably the problem of delineating distinct civilizations is presented by the Middle East. All agree that there was an ancient Mesopotamian civilization in the area—indeed it may have been the first of the lot—but then what about the Hittites and Canaanites, the Phoenicians and Assyrians? Were the civilizations of these peoples distinct entities or peripheral derivatives? And then, even more problematical, after the conquest and empire of Alexander the Great (336-323 B.C.) what were the distinctive civilizations in the Middle East? Spengler's answer was to invent his famous 'Magian' civilization beginning about the birth of Christ. Toynbee, however, discerns a 'Babylonic' and 'Syriac' civilization which in time gave way to 'Iranic' and 'Arabic' civilizations. Quigley's sequence is 'Mesopotamian - Hittite - Canaanite - Islamic.' Bagby, on the other hand, argues for a general all-inclusive 'Near Eastern' civilization following directly upon the earlier 'Babylonian' civilization.[7]

This confusion and indeterminancy—a sort of classificatory bedlam—in separating out distinct civilizations in that part of the world where civilization itself is at its oldest, is indicative (or at least should be) that something is wrong with the notion that there are everywhere distinct civilizations which are each individual entities. The Classical-Western instance notwithstanding, the notion is wrong at least in attributing entity-like separateness to the various regional and historical civilizations.

Furthermore, if the notion of separate entity-like civilizations is off the mark, then its corollary—the notion that each individual civilization should have a life-cycle or determined pattern of development—is in fact untenable. That a civilization should have a determined development and that there should be cyclical recurrences of the pattern in successive civilizations is

[7] See Bagby, *Culture and History*, pp. 167-169 and 178-180; and Quigley, *Evolution of Civilizations*, pp. 35-37; see also Wescott, "The Enumeration of Civilizations," pp. 63-65.

directly dependent on each being a separate entity. If such is not the case, however, then the universal cyclicism of many macro-historians is highly questionable. Indeed, what would be the regulating mechanism, the immanent nervous system as it were, which would govern the unfolding of the civilization's 'life-cycle?' As yet, nothing of this sort has been empirically demonstrated to exist. Seemingly only a divine supernatural force, or perhaps the 'collective unconscious' of the Swiss psychologist, Carl Jung,[8] might plausibly be the 'motors' which would control the development of a civilization from beginning to end. But these are at best metaphysical propositions whose reality must be accepted on faith.

That there is a certain combination of economic, social, and cultural factors which are essential to civilization everywhere, which make a society civilized, has already been accepted as true, but to hold therefore that civilization is everywhere uniform is patently false. How then to consider the particular historical and regional manifestations of civilization? Certainly they have a degree of reality even if they may not be perfectly self-contained entities with individual life-cycles.

Perhaps a simile might help here: civilizations are like the races of mankind. They have various traits which set them apart, but these traits do not negate their common humanity. Moreover, like civilizations, races are geographically distributed: they have 'centers' in different regions which commonly are said to manifest their 'pure' types, and between these centers there are transition zones which shade off gradually as one proceeds from one center to another. The existence of such transition zones particularly demonstrates that the several races of man, like his civilizations, are not each separate entities utterly independent of one another.[9] If they were, obviously, there could be no transition zones.

Consider, for example, Spain: From 711 to 1492 A.D. it

[8] For a critique of Jung's theories in historical context see H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society,* New York, 1958, pp. 153-160; Hughes concludes that Jung was a "mystagogue."

[9] Wells pointed out fifty years ago that in their desire "... to classify men into three or four great races and ... to regard these races as having always been separate things ..." students of mankind "... ignored the great possibilities of blended races ..."; *Outline of History*, 110.

was just such a transition zone between the Western Medieval Christian and North African Islamic civilizations—just as the belt across the southern edge of the Sahara desert, the 'Sudan,' is a racial transition zone between the white and black races. Or again, consider Russia: its civilization has strong elements of both Middle Eastern and Western civilization, just as its population runs from Nordic white to Tartar yellow.

What results, then, from considering the geographical layout of recent civilizations is that they seem to have centers or foci where the cluster of traits which are commonly seen to distinguish them are clearly recognizable. But away from these centers the cluster of traits either becomes attenuated as one approaches the 'backwoods,' or they blend with the cluster of traits of a neighboring center to form a continuous transition from one civilization to the next. Thus over the last two millenia, more or less, there has been a swath of civilizations reaching across the Old World from the Strait of Gibraltar to the Sea of Japan with each of the particular civilizations centered in different regions separated by transition zones in between.

This continuous chain-like quality also exists through time. Once civilization was achieved in Mesopotamia and Egypt, and then in India and China, all subsequent civilized societies have derived from one or more of these four sources.[10] In other words, the various historical civilizations have each been stimulated by, or have learned from, or have developed out of its antecessors and contemporaries in a continuum of direct descent from one or several of the first civilized societies. The

[10] The very first centers of civilization may have independently achieved their position, and some others may subsequently have done so (e.g., Crete; see Colin Renfrew, *The Emergence of Civilization: The Cyclades and the Aegean in the Third Millenium B.C.* London, 1972), because at first civilization was considerably less complicated than it later became and hence more easily approachable by a simple (neolithic) horticultural society. As civilization became more elaborated and complicated in the early centers, however, it became increasingly less approachable independently by a simple horticultural society, so that henceforth it must be learned and adopted from an existing center by an 'aspiring society' (e.g., Etruscan and Republican Rome). Today, of course, there is probably no place in the world that has not been touched either directly or indirectly by Western civilization (see Elman R. Service, *Cultural Evolutionism: Theory in Practice,* New York, 1971, pp. 151-157), so to compete in the modern world an 'aspiring society', even when civilized, must learn and adopt an enormous amount of complicated technological and socio-political patterns—most notably witness Japan!

only break in this chain of descent on this planet, of course, is in the independent origin of the New World civilizations in Mexico and Peru some three thousand years after the inception of civilization in the Old World.[11] But then, since the Spanish conquest, these New World civilizations have been incorporated into the continuum of Old World civilization.

In order to understand how this great continuum came about one is necessarily led to consider how civilization spread out from its original centers. It has been repeatedly the pattern of history that societies or groups of societies at the fringe of a civilized area have gradually adopted urban patterns of living and developed a cluster of traits which characteristically have given the said societies a physiognomy recognizably different from that of the adjacent civilization. These societies thus become civilized but with characteristics of their own, hence giving rise to new civilizations.

Perhaps the process could be likened to 'budding' in biology. The old stem gives rise, at its tender end, to buds which grow into new stems which in turn give rise, also at their tender ends, to still more buds and new stems. Or better, to avoid the organic analogy, the spread of civilization may be said to resemble the spread of inkspots on a blotter. They expand out from a center, and if a center appears on the edge of an old dried-up spot, it spreads both back over the old spot as well as out onto virgin terrain, as it were. In time the blotter may become covered with many spots, side by side, overlapping, and superimposed on each other—a veritable facsimile of the continuum of civilization on this planet.

Be it noted, however, that the continuum of civilization is uneven, being composed of civilized centers and intervening transition zones in space and civilized eras and intermittent transition periods in time. Its expansion is therefore characterized by fits and starts, by a kind of quantum-jump effect. In the process, it seems definitely that vigor and vitality appear most typically on the perimeter, i.e., at a civilization's frontier

[11] For the contrary view see Betty J. Meggers, "The Transpacific Origin of Mesoamerican Civilization: A Preliminary Review of the Evidence and Its Theoretical Implications," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 77, No. 1 (March 1975), pp. 1-27.

with 'barbarian' horticultural societies (but not primitive ones),[12] and that a whole region is affected, not just a few border tribes. Thus a 'frontier civilization' emerges at the edge of an older civilization. Still, the older civilized centers continue to remain civilized, but they have long ago been surpassed both in political power and intellectual creativity by the new centers on the ever expanding perimeter of civilization. Witness Mesopotamia (Iraq) today: it is still a civilized area—there are no barbarian or primitive societies living there except in the most remote mountain and desert refuges—yet what has Mesopotamia offered, created, contributed that is new to civilization in the past several millenia? Precious little. The new innovations and departures in civilized living during that period have been introduced from the more vital frontier civilizations to the north and west, south and east.

Now the concept of frontier civilizations is particularly important not only to an understanding of how civilization spreads, but also to an understanding of the apparent cyclicism in several historical instances. In fact, the cyclical theories of nearly all Western macro-historians are based on the seeming parallelism between the Mediterranean Classical civilization and our own Western civilization, nor is this instance of parallelism to be brushed aside lightly. It appears more or less as follows.[13] Western Europe, with its diversity of national states which grew out of the barbarian tribal kingdoms of the 'Dark Ages,' seems to have recapitulated the development of ancient Greece, whose diversity of city-states likewise grew out of the barbarian tribal groups of the Doric invasions during the so-called 'Greek Dark Ages.' Over a period of about a thousand years, ca. 1100-100 B.C., these city-states developed a characteristic civilization (Hellenism), expanded by colonization and conquest all over the Mediterranean and Black Seas, and created the great philosophical and esthetic achievements for which they remain everlastingly famous.

[12] Where a civilized society has directly confronted primitive societies—North America Argentina, Australia—it has simply overwhelmed them and ruined them; where it confronts horticultural societies it seems to stimulate inter-tribal warfare resulting in the disorganization (and enslavement) of the weaker less viable groups; see Service, *Cultural Evolutionism,* pp. 151-157.

[13] Cf. Bagby, *Culture and History,* pp. 205-209.

In similar manner, the European nation states in the thousand years since Charlemagne have forged a characteristic civilization of their own, have expanded likewise by colonization and conquest all over the 'seven seas' of the world, and have achieved equally great, if not in fact far greater technical, intellectual, and esthetic accomplishments.

Further to this, a new western state, much larger and hence more powerful than any Greek city-state, a composite of federated cities and allied tribes, namely Rome, conquered and ruled the Hellenic homeland after 146 B.C. as well as the whole Hellenized Mediterranean world. Rome was herself a Hellenized state, but with certain peculiarities of her own, particularly in law and engineering, and her conquest of the Hellenistic world (Asia Minor, Syria, Egypt, and North Africa) integrated that world into a single hegemonial state which eliminated 'international war' at least within its boundaries (the Roman Empire). The United States, it would seem, is the modern analogy of this ancient power in the west.

The United States shares its civilization with Western Europe yet has decided characteristics of its own, and again particularly in constitutional law and industrial technique. It is a recent state relative to European history and has expanded over a continent by co-equal federal incorporation of new territories and conquest; it is much larger with many times the manpower and resources of any single European state; and it has begun to dominate large parts of the Europeanized world, not to mention Europe itself. Furthermore, just as Rome had a running confrontation with Parthian Persia on her eastern frontier, so also has the United States its great antagonist in the Soviet Union which is similarly located on her eastern 'defense perimeter' and similarly an empire of a different historical tradition, although recently Europeanized as Persia had been recently Hellenized.[14]

Yet in this matter of parallelism between the development of our Western civilization and that of the classical civilization, one need not resort to universal cyclicism for an explanation.

[14] For a critique of the U.S.-Rome analogy see this writer's article "Civis Americanus Sum: Are We, too, to 'Decline and Fall'?." *The University of Chicago Magazine,* Spring 1975, pp. 17-21.

Rather, a solution may be found in the fact that both of these civilizations have been frontier civilizations. The classical civilization was the Mediterranean frontier of the ancient Middle East, while our Western Civilization in turn is the European frontier of the classical civilization. The whole essence of a frontier civilization is that it is a culture area where barbarian societies are for the first time becoming civilized; are being initiated into civilization, so to speak. It seems that possibly this process may have a certain pattern to it which in fact has recurred at least in two instances, and probably many more if one cares to look closely. Consider, for example, the multitudinous city-states and kingdoms lying north and west of Mesopotamia: the cities and kingdoms of Syria, Anatolia, and Armenia. This area emerges as civilized some time after the first achievement of civilization in Mesopotamia and Egypt but before the Greeks and Persians come on the scene. Indeed, this is the culture area where such innovations as the alphabet, coinage, and iron smelting were first invented and then bequeathed to all subsequent civilizations.

It would seem, therefore, that the area deserves to be recognized as an exceedingly important link in the expansion of civilization, but it has had a rather shadowy image sandwiched between the much more sharply defined achievements of the Mesopotamians and the Greeks. The complicating problem here, of course, is the fact that this culture area lay so close to the older civilized centers of Mesopotamia and Egypt that it has tended to be seen as an extension of the latter rather than as a civilization in its own right. Thus Toynbee sees more or less three civilizations in the area: Hittite, Babylonic, and Syriac, while Quigley sees it as Hittite, Canaanite, and Mesopotamian, and three 'secondary' ones: Hittite, Mitannian, and Syro-Phoenician.[15] In this writer's opinion, however, the said culture area represents one of the first quantum-jumps in the spread of civilization out from the Mesopotamian and (though less so) Egyptian centers. It was a frontier civilization with its own particular characteristics and probably ought to be called something like the 'Anatolian civilization.' It seems to have

[15] See Bagby, *Culture and History,* pp. 165-166, 169, and 178-179; and Quigley, *Evolution of Civilizations,* pp. 34-37; see also Wescott, "The Enumeration of Civilizations," pp. 63-64, 76-77, and 80-81.

been in full flower from about 2000 B.C. to the Persian conquest (ca. 600 B.C.).[16]

Further to the west, moreover, there appears to have been another frontier civilization in the Aegean area nearly contemporary with, or perhaps even a little earlier than the Anatolian civilization. Much more under the influence of Egypt, this culture area seems to have been centered on the island of Crete and is usually spoken of as the Minoan civilization. However, it also included the Aegean islands, the Greek mainland, and the Ionian coast (and Troy), and was therefore much more a maritime civilization than was the Anatolian. Beginning as many separate settlements on different islands and coasts, this 'Aegean civilization' came to be dominated first by the Thalassocracy of Minos and then by that of Mycenae. It flourished from about 2000 B.C. down to the Doric invasions of the Greek mainland and the Phrygian conquest of Ionia (ca. 1100 B.C.).[17]

Similarly, if one turns to the east of Mesopotamia, there seems also to have been a frontier civilization covering the territory of Iran, Afghanistan, and western Turkistan, though considerably later in time than either the Anatolian or Aegean civilizations. Nevertheless, here too a quantum-jump took place beginning about the time of the Medes. This area seems to have been covered by numerous small tribal kingdoms and cities which attained to a rudimentary civilized state and then were conquered by the Persians (ca. 550 B.C.). This is the background and early beginning of the civilization of Persia, as it is usually called in the West.[18]

And further east again it appears that a frontier civilization developed in the Ganges valley. It likewise experienced the cycle attendant upon a barbarian culture area advancing into civilization: first a multiplicity of contending princedoms and

[16] See Seton Lloyd, *Early Highland Peoples of Anatolia,* London, 1967; Sabatino Moscati, *The Face of the Ancient Orient,* London and New York, 1960, chs. v and vi; and Boris B. Piotrovsky, *The Ancient Civilization of Urartu,* New York, 1969.

[17] See Renfrew, *The Emergence of Civilization*; Emily Vermeule, *Greece in the Bronze Age,* Chicago, 1964; Smith College Studies in History, No. XLV, *A Land Called Crete,* Northampton, Mass., 1968; and the feminist maverick Jacquetta Hawkes, *Dawn of the Gods,* Toronto, 1968.

[18] On early Persia see William Culican, *The Medes and Persians,* New York, 1965; and Richard N. Frye, *The Heritage of Persia,* London, 1962, chs. ii and iii.

cities, expansion to the south and east (Burma and Ceylon), and finally integration into a single empire, the Mauryan, about 300 B.C.[19] No doubt, something of a similar sort may be seen in the expansion of Chinese civilization from its original center in the Huang-Ho valley both to the north (Korea and Japan) and to the south (the Yangtze valley and Indo-China).

Thus, to recapitulate, all these frontier civilizations developed on the perimeter of the original four centers of civilization, and are to be seen as the first expansions of civilization out from these centers. As frontier civilizations their experience was the incorporation of barbarian culture areas into the continuum of civilization, and in this experience they all seem to have followed a recurrent pattern, namely: a multiplicity of horticultural settlements and chiefdoms (such is the layout of a barbarian culture area) are first consolidated into a patchwork of numerous contending kingdoms; these send out colonists and conquerors into neighboring territory and then are usually integrated by a backwoods borderland state, rude in culture but vigorous at arms, into a single political unit.[20] This last, of course, is Spengler's 'winter of caesarism,' Toynbee's 'universal state,' and Quigley's 'universal empire.' But even if such be the case, one should still not be deceived by the 'terminalism' of these author's views. Although the single integrating empire may signal the end of the process of incorporating a barbarian culture area into civilization, i.e., the end of a frontier civilization, it certainly does not mean the end of civilization in the area. Indeed, it seems to be the threshold stage of cosmopolitanization.

And this is a crucial distinction, i.e., that between frontier civilizations, on the one hand, and cosmopolitan civilizations on the other. If the experience of a barbarian culture area advancing into civilization does in fact seem to have a definite pattern which may recur (it may be doing so presently in Latin America and in Africa), it is not necessary, therefore, that *all* civilizations must repeat the pattern. What, for example, happened in Mesopotamia after it was integrated into a single empire by the Babylonians? It simply continued thenceforth to

[19] See MacNeill, *Rise of the West,* pp. 298-299.

[20] See Matthew Melko, *The Nature of Civilizations*, Boston, 1969, particularly ch. v.

be a part of one empire after another. The same, of course, is true of Egypt, India, and China. Hence, what has happened at the original centers of civilization is definitely not the same as what has happened at the perimeter of civilization. At the original centers the pattern seems to be that local regions may be separated from one another and put together again like building blocks as now one empire and then another predominates in the area.[21]

Consequently, it would seem that frontier civilizations, when they cease to be at the perimeter of civilization, simply become cosmopolitanized. In fact, it would seem that our own Western civilization is presently undergoing just such cosmopolitanization after having conquered and enormously influenced the rest of the world's older already cosmopolitanized civilizations.[22] In this writer's opinion, the distinction between frontier and cosmopolitan civilizations successfully solves the problem of the apparent parallelism in the pattern of development of at least some civilizations. The distinction, moreover, has the further merit of destroying the notion of universal cyclicism so prevalent in Western macro-historiography. Thus, once a culture area has been initiated into civilization it becomes, sooner or later, cosmopolitanized and thenceforth follows a different pattern from that which it followed when it was first adopting civilized forms.

This distinction, however, does not solve the problem of 'rise and fall' of civilizations, nor does it address itself to the question of determining what exactly are the 'cluster of traits' which set one civilization off from another. To solve these problems requires a closer examination of both the internal structure of civilized societies and its mutability over time.

[21] The 'philosophy of history' of the Maghreban Moslem historian, Ibn Khalûn (1332-1406 A. D.), seems especially attuned to the pattern of cosmopolitan civilizations in its emphasis on the rise and fall of 'ruling houses' and not on the rise and fall of civilizations, as is the case with our modern Western macro-historians; see Ibn Khaldûn, *An Introduction to History: The Muqaddimah,* trans by Franz Rosenthal, abridged and edited by N. J. Dawood, London, 1967; see also Grace E. Cairns, *Philosophies of History,* New York, 1962, pp. 322-336.

[22] Surely the popularity of Spengler and Toynbee generally with the educated public in Europe and America is indicative of this cosmopolitanization, as is the interest in such books as F.S.C. Northrup's *The Meeting of East and West,* New York 1946.

* * *

Hitherto civilizations have been considered as holistic unified cultures spread over a considerable geographical area, 'culture continents' as it were. And in truth civilizations are the largest integrated culture units mankind has yet achieved. Larger still, of course, is the generic phenomenon of civilization in general, which lacks however the cultural integration of the several specific civilizations; and then there are the many smaller segments of the several specific civilizations, viz., American civilization, Mid-Western regionalism, and town-and-country localism, all of which have a certain degree of cultural integration. But an analysis by segment, though justifiable and useful on occasion, is less than helpful in trying to ferret out the fundamental factors working in the history of civilizations. Rather, one has to look at the whole phenomenon and analyze it functionally, not segmentally; 'horizontally' not 'vertically.'

All civilized societies can be seen as composed of three interacting layers of culture: first, at the bottom and necessary to the layers above it, is the subsistence technology and organization, or what this writer would prefer to call the 'economic fundament' of society. Next above and dependent thereupon, but yet with a degree of independent movement, is the layer of social organization, of in-groups and out-groups, kin-groups and kingdoms, classes and masses. This is the layer in which most of what is commonly regarded as history takes place. And finally on top, there is a third layer of culture which is particularly developed in civilized societies, namely the intellectual, esthetic, scientific, and religious spheres of activity or 'high culture' as it has sometimes been called. Typically this third layer is commonly seen as diagnostic of civilization. Yet all three layers are necessary to a civilized society as they are to all societies; only in civilized societies each of the three layers is enormously more complex and hypertrophied than is the case in barbarian and primitive societies.[23]

Thus, all human societies must obviously have an economic fundament, a means of producing an alimentary subsistence and

[23] For example see Robert Bierstedt, "Indices of Civilization," *American Journal of Sociology,* Vol. 71, No. 5 (March 1966), pp. 483-490; Bierstedt concludes that sophistication is the earmark of civilization: "... an uncivilized

minimal manufacture of clothing and tools. Civilized societies, however, must in addition be able to produce an alimentary surplus—hitherto it has always been agriculture—and have a division of labor which exempts a number of people from having directly to engage in subsistence activities. These people then congregate in cities and are free to turn their attention to devising more efficient methods of agriculture, manufacturing, and commerce; to political and military affairs; and to intellectual, esthetic, scientific, and religious pursuits. The number of people thus freed from subsistence activities is determined by the efficiency of the economic fundament, and of course the invention and application of elaborate technology to agriculture and manufacturing has prodigiously increased the output of the economic fundament of modern civilized societies. But such large-scale innovations as irrigation and slave labor already greatly increased the efficiency of the economic fundament of civilized societies shortly after their inception, nor have these innovations been forgotten.[24] Hence, at the level of the economic fundament technological innovations (the plow, potter's wheel, irrigation) and organizational innovations (markets, merchants, state granaries) appear to be cumulative, or at least subject to easy transmission from one civilized society to another even though there may be instances of relapse and breakdown from time to time.

In contrast to the cumulativeness in the bottom layer of culture, it would seem at first glance that the middle layer, that of social organization, is much less likely to be cumulative. But a more careful examination indicates that here too there is also at least a measure of cumulation both in political organization and in its concomitant, military organization. Bureaucracy, law codes, and parliaments once invented seem unlikely to be forgotten, and in regard to military science there is a long history of cumulative development in technology and tactics.

society has art but no aesthetics, religion but no theology, techniques but no science, tools but no technology, legends but no literature, a language but no alphabet ..., customs but no laws, a history but no historiography, knowledge but no epistemology, ... a *Weltanschauung* but no philosophy."

[24] That civilized societies existed before irrigation was invented, as per the thesis of Karl A. Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power,* New Haven, 1957, see Adams, *Evolution of Urban Society,* pp. 66-78.

Nevertheless, the age-old pattern of politics is that kingdoms rise and fall, that states come and go, that successive nations attain florescence and then subside. It is here amongst bodies-politic, or polities, that one finds the usual stuff of the economic fundament.

A polity is an aggregate of individuals, be it a tribe, nation, city, kingdom, empire, oligarchy, or aristocracy which has found the cohesion to act in common. Immediately there develops a need for an agreed-on course of action vis-à-vis other polities, i.e., a policy, and this policy in turn gives rise to the pursuit of objectives and aspirations. But in pursuing objectives and aspirations fortunes vary: success emboldens, failure disheartens. Hence, rise and decline, growth and decay, florescence and subsidence. Polities may be small-scale, local, and personalized as with the feudatories of Medieval Europe or the *polis* of Classical Greece, or on the other hand, they may be elephantine, elaborately structured, and bureaucratically administered as with Russia, Rome, or Manchu China. They may consist of a racially and culturally homogeneous population like the Republic of France or the City of Tyre, or they may consist of a conquered 'fellaheen' population harnessed and driven by an ethnically distinct ruling class like Spanish Mexico or ancient Sparta; or of any one of many diverse combinations and permutations of the rather polar types cited here.

A polity, no matter what its form, has the cohesion to act as an entity in history. It thereby acquires a destiny, a track record, a trajectory through time. The individual persons who make up a polity are consciously aware that together they have this common destiny and track record. Within limits (physical, economic, demographic, psychological) the members of a polity do in fact direct its actions and formulate its aspirations. Thus it becomes a metabionic organism: a seeming living thing. And within the purview of the variables which the members of the polity can control, it does act like a living being, indeed like a human being for human minds are the source of its lifelike quality.

And just as some individuals are more energetic than others, more ambitious, more creative, more aggressive, so also certain polities from time to time and place to place are likewise more energetic, more ambitious, more creative, and more aggressive. But in human affairs nothing is permanent, nothing remains

indefinitely unchanged. An individual or family must ever defend its position in society or lose it to some other individual or family. Much proverbial wisdom takes note of this human insecurity: "Pride goeth before a fall;" "Three generations from shirt-sleeves to shirt-sleeves;" "Easy come, easy go." In similar manner, polities also suffer insecurity. They must likewise ever defend their position against rivals—and all people and all polities have rivals. Human nature makes it so.

Hence, strength and accomplishment, whence prestige, are very significant qualities in both biography and history, for the more prestigious always hold hegemony over the less so. Alas, the meek have not yet inherited the Earth; it only comforts them to think they will. This is why military strength together with economic vigor, social integration, and intellectual accomplishment have always characterized the dynamic polities of history. The passive ones have been submerged and have definitely participated less in the elaboration of civilized history, if they have not been completely eliminated from it. The dynamic polities, therefore, are the key contributors to history; they lay out its course.

Such polities, like frontier civilizations, have usually arisen in the borderland between civilized centers and barbarism. They may be either the germinating kernel of a new frontier civilization (Carolingian France) or a new appendange to a developing and expanding frontier civilization (Macedonia or Prussia). In either case, the rude but disciplined vigor of the newly civilized barbarian gives dominance, prestige, and soul-stirring success to such polities and impels them on to elaborate a new civilization, if they are the kernel of such, or to conquer and subjugate an older one. The Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Arabs, the Spaniards, the French, and even the English were all once barbarians who attained to civilized forms while maintaining, for a period, their rude vigor.

Dynamic polities, however, may also arise in another manner, namely, renewal from within or the welling up of rough and ready men from the suppressed masses of an old long-civilized society. In this instance typically an intellectual movement causes or stimulates sectors of frustrated, unrefined, and vulgar social classes to push up and shove aside their social superiors and former rulers, who not infrequently have become self-indulgent,

delicate, and selfish. The rough and ready men who push up from beneath, of course, are fully acquainted with civilization for having lived in it, but again, they have a vigor (sometimes brutalized) which has been bled away from their social superiors. The Russian and Chinese communists, the French and Mexican revolutionaries, the Young Turks and Arab nationalists are all variants of this renewal from within. Indeed, the Americans themselves are an example of this, for they are overwhelmingly emigrants from the under-classes of Europe who have, in addition, been subjected to the 'barbarism' of the American frontier. There can be no doubt that a good part of their great success has come from their untamed vigor exerting itself in a very propitious environment.

That polities should become dynamic, rise, and prosper is an agreeable notion, especially to members of rising or successful polities. That the same should lose their vigor and fall into decay is decidedly a disagreeable notion both to members of declining polities as well as to members of dynamic ones, for it suggests that they too will someday decline. And so it is: "All things that rise must fall;" "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall;" "He who climbs the highest is liable to the greatest fall." The factors which cause decline, as in all things human, are many and diverse. To essay a final analysis here would be presumptuous in the extreme. Yet historical experience indicates some of the prime factors: addiction to excessive luxury and unrestrained self-indulgence, intellectual and economic listlessness, loss of confidence and personal identification with the destiny of one's polity, wide-spread acceptance of cynical-self-seeking egoism and greed as the basic motivations of human intercourse. Be it noted that there is no moralizing here: Hitler's Germany was a dynamic polity, heinous as it was; we are simply fortunate that it was defeated by more humane polities (save Stalinist Russia)! Indeed, humanitarian morality has no place in history unless polities put it there. The successful hold hegemony according to their lights.

The rise and fall of polities, however, does not explain the apparent rise and fall of civilizations. For an understanding of this matter one must turn to the third layer of culture. As indicated above, this third or top layer consists of the intellectual conceptions, the esthetic creations, the magic and/or scientific

knowledge, and the religious thought of a civilization. It is this third layer, the intellectual superstructure, which gives definition to a civilization, gives it its physiognomy. When one thinks of a civilization declining it almost invariably suggests decline, degeneration, or dissolution of the intellectual superstructure of that civilization. It may also be accompanied by a disorganization in the economic fundament of the civilization (as was the case in the Latin West after 200 A.D.) and by the decline or dissolution of one or several polities, but it should never be confounded with the destiny of any polity *per se*.[25]

Sorokin and Kroeber are the two best known 20th century macrohistoriographers most concerned with the intellectual superstructure of civilizations.[26] Sorokin, however, is a system-builder and a crypto-cyclicist not unreminiscent of Spengler and Toynbee. His conception of the intellectual superstructure of Classical and Western civilization as proceeding twice through 'ideational, idealistic, and sensate' phases since about 600 B.C. is a further amplification of the process by which barbarian culture areas attain to full civilization. His phases correspond directly with the traditional historical periods of Classical-Western history, and this has already been identified as the succession of two frontier civilizations. Sorokin, however, makes no attempt to examine civilizations in other parts of the world (not even the Byzantine), and hence has missed the distinction between frontier and cosmopolitan civilizations.

Kroeber, on the other hand, seems to offer a more modest but at the same time more useful and satisfying concept. He sees religious thought, intellectual speculation, esthetic creativity, and even scientific knowledge as developing within the constraints of a 'style' from primitive indefinite beginnings through masterful culminations into satiety and degeneration or to suspended

[25] For example, at a time when the Western intellectual superstructure was reaching certainly one of its culminations, i.e., the 17th century, Spain (or more exactly the Kingdom of Castile), even though it contributed in art and literature to this culmination, was headlong in decline as a polity.

[26] Pitirim A. Sorokin, *Social and Cultural Dynamics*, 4 vols., New York, 1937-41, and the same condensed by the author into one volume, *Social and Cultural Dynamics: A Study of Change in Major Systems of Art, Truth, Ethics, Law and Social Relationships*, Boston, 1957. Alfred L. Kroeber, *Configurations of Culture Growth*, Berkeley, 1944; *Idem, Style and Civilizations*, Berkeley, 1957; and *Idem, An Anthropologist Looks at History*, Berkeley, 1966.

cataleptic imitation. Kroeber's conception of style, however, not only applies to the various branches of intellectual and esthetic activity, where particularly it is most obvious, but also to the general tendency of the whole intellectual superstructure of a civilization. For example, during our Middle Ages the notion of God in history, of supernatural control of the forces of nature, of religious necessity in art conducted all thought toward a general Medieval Christian style which strongly suffused the whole civilization. Since the 17th century, however, a new style has come increasingly to predominate, namely, that of rational empirical understanding (Sorokin's second sensate phase). This new style has likewise suffused the whole intellectual superstructure of the West during the last several centuries.

Obviously taking his cue from esthetic history, Kroeber says that a style arises when a chaos of various features which may be parts of earlier style or new inventions become arranged and then fixed in a recognizable pattern or 'configuration.' Thereafter intellectual creativity, be it in music, theoretical science, or mundane costume,[27] takes place in the context of the stylistic pattern until a culmination is reached—a point where the potentialities of that particular set of features is felt by the creative individual to be fully exploited and to constrain and frustrate him. Then the style faces a crisis: it may continue on for a long time in epigonal imitation of the culmination (imitation, of course, is also a characteristic of colonial or peripheral areas), or it may attach to itself various features of other styles (eclecticism), or it may degenerate and dissolve the fixed configuration of its particular features and seek reformulation in a new style —again from a chaos of existing features and newly invented ones.

It is interesting to note here that the development of a style, its career as it were, is very similar to the conventional view of the history of a civilization, and not without reason. Our Western civilization is commonly said to have been formed out of three cultural influences: the classical, the Christian, and the barbarian. In terms of style what this means is that during our so-called 'Dark Ages' there was a chaos of various unorganized stylistic

[27] On this point see Kroeber's famous treatment of female fashions in *Style and Civilizations,* ch. i.

features coming from the said influences. Then gradually formulation began to take place in north-western Europe, i.e., on the perimeter of the earlier Classical civilization, at about the time of Charlemagne (note, however, that there were polities—the Germanic successor states—all during these 'Dark Ages,' not to mention the manorial organization of the economy). Once the formulation had begun, further intellectual activity reinforced it and elaborated it into the Christian civilization of the High Middle Ages. But the dissatisfaction and the influence of the more sophisticated Islamic civilization caused a loosening of the Medieval Christian style. A reformulation began to emerge, however, in Italy—the European area most in contact with Islamic centers in the Levant. This was the Renaissance, of course; it was avidly accepted in northern Europe during the 16th century and further elaborated there. And it in turn gave rise to the scientific rationalism which during the last two centuries has again recast and reformulated the style of Western civilization.

Perhaps it now appears to many Westerners that that style seems increasingly unsatisfactory. There is the influence of the intellectual styles of the whole non-Western world, on the one hand, and on the other, a definite feeling of satiety in the Western world with its inherited style. Maybe this is a time, like the Late Middle Ages, of a reformulation of the style and redirection of the intellectual superstructure of our civilization,[28] or perhaps it is just a period of loosening and/or disorganization as we become cosmopolitanized. Yet cosmopolitanization does not imply stylelessness: the growth of the Byzantine Christian civilization in the late classical world, or the spread of Islam throughout the ancient Middle East and beyond to India and Indonesia are dramatic indications to the contrary. Whatever the style may be that will sweep the cosmopolitanized West is an enigma of the future. It is only important here to recognize that the intellectual superstructure of a civilization, be it frontier or cosmopolitan, is controlled by styles, and though these styles grow and change, they are describable and understandable without resorting to grand cycles and great systems. In this writer's view, that is the great advantage of Kroeber's conception.

[28] See Kroeber, "Flow and Reconstruction within Civilizations," in *An Anthropologist Looks at History,* pp. 55 and 58-59.

* * *

A summing-up is now in order. First and foremost, a clear and positive distinction should be drawn between the decline of polities and that of civilizations. The rise and fall of polities is a direct function of the aspirations and capabilities—political, military, and intellectual—of an aggregate of individuals who identify with a particular body-politic vis-à-vis other bodies-politic. The decline of a civilization, on the other hand, is typically a degeneration in the intellectual superstructure of that civilization; a disorganization of the style of the civilization; a flagging in the mental effort and craftsmanship put forth by the creative individuals of that civilization. This flagging of mental effort, of course, may also take place in a declining polity, but as such it will not necessarily affect the civilization to which the polity belongs (e.g., 4th century Athens, or 17th century Spain) unless the whole civilization has been integrated into a single state as was the case with the Western Roman Empire.

The crux of the matter is to see the difference between the capabilities, maneuverings, and successes at the second level of culture on the one hand, and the fluctuation of intellectual activity at the third level on the other. This is not to say that the two levels operate utterly independent of each other; such is not the case. They influence and react with one another continually, yet they still have each sufficient integrity and independence to have an inner logic of their own.

Once this distinction is realized, it will be recognizably easy to study the rise and decline of polities (e.g., the Assyrian, Abbassid, or American), to investigate their inner logic and not have it confused with the larger inquiry into the growth, culmination, and disintegration of the intellectual styles and substyles of a civilization (e.g. the Mesopotamian, Islamic, or Western). This has been a confusion in kind and not in degree. Polities, of course, may also have their own style and substyles, but these are only segments of the larger intellectual superstructure of a civilization unless, again, a polity has politically integrated a whole civilization into a single state.

In contrast with styles and polities, the bottom layer of culture, i.e., the economic fundament, is less segmentalized and

more apt to be uniform over large areas. However, it also has a direct effect on polities and their intellectual creativity, for a rising polity must necessarily have a vigorous economy, and it seems that a declining polity will almost surely have a lethargic economy. Furthermore, if the economy stagnates or declines over a large area, then a whole civilization and not just a few selected polities may suffer decline and retrogression. Indeed, it would seem that frontier civilizations particularly enjoy vigorous expanding economies, while cosmopolitan civilizations seem to rest on static established economies. This may account for the greater intellectual creativity and political power associated with frontier civilizations. Cosmopolitan civilizations, at least to us Westerners, have an aura of timeless lethargy about them which is not unrelated to their economic fundaments.

The theory of historical dynamics sketched in this essay, then, is an attempt at sorting out the several factors which seem to be operating in the history of civilizations. In no way should it be taken as a final statement, a grand theory, or a 'systematic historiology.' Indeed it is a reaction to the great systems and cyclicisms of past macro-historiography. By way of conclusion, then, perhaps a few words should be said about the general tendency of history, its evolutionary goal or universal destiny, if one wishes. In this writer's opinion, there is no such thing. Human history has proceeded blindly, like the workings of organic evolution, by adaptation, accomodation, and innovation. If in the process it has elaborated great civilizations with great religious systems, great esthetic creations, and great technological achievements it is because these new departures have proven advantageous to those who practiced them. There is no teleological goal to which human society is evolving, no general tendency of history except in retrospect; human society will continue to change, evolve or devolve, according to the will of individuals as expressed through the three layers of culture. If civilization has appeared to have become more humane, to be cumulative in many aspects, it is because men have sought to make it thus. There is no guarantee, however, that this will always be so. Men will make what they want, always of course subject to the limits of human psychology, natural forces, and hazards of chance.