

NOTE

HISTORY OF CIVILIZATION OF EASTERN EUROPE IN THE WORK OF ARNOLD TOYNBEE

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A Study of History, by Arnold J. Toynbee is a work which has quite deservedly attained wide renown not only in specialist circles but also among those of the general public interested in the problems of the philosophy of history and in schematic arrangements of the stages of development of human society. The appearance of this work, as has been pointed out more than once, is not unconnected with the concrete circumstances of the present historical moment. There are evident signs that theories reigning in the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century of a progressive development of human society in any particular direction, depending upon the point of view of a certain scholarly study, are unjustifiable. The historical reality of catastrophic wars and revolutions, of the decline and fall of powerful empires, of basic changes in social ideals and principles itself began to demonstrate most clearly and strikingly its lack of correspondence with most theories of human development from a simple to an intricate, or from a primitive to a perfected, or from a savage to a highly moral condition.

Under such conditions some scholars have returned to the ideas of Vico, so little popular in his own time, which postulate a cyclic development of social organizations of mankind. Spengler belonged to this group of scholars, but Toynbee does not include himself among them. However, although in his work he does not rule out the possibility of an unceasing and progressive development of a civilization not yet at its zenith, it becomes obvious that Toynbee's study is, in essence, of the cyclic school of historical thought.

Whether or not the reader is in agreement with Toynbee's arguments and final conclusions or with his outline of the development of human social organizations, Toynbee's study, in contrast to his predecessors, sets out much fascinating material about the development of social organizations. Much of this is due to the fact that Toynbee employed his specialist historical training in his study of the theory of the historical process. It would be out of place here to characterize all the aspects of Toynbee's study. For us, wishing to touch upon only the one definite theme, it will suffice to discuss them as briefly as possible.

Toynbee considers schemes based on a single historical process for all humanity to be incorrect and without foundation in facts. He believes that the process of historical development is paralleled in a series of social organizations united by community of culture and by a similar, closely related,

historical fate. Such a unification is completed within the limits of definite "civilizations," nineteen of which Toynbee distinguishes although he is prepared to extend this number to twenty-one. "Civilizations" may consist of one people and one social union, or of several, even many.

"Civilizations" themselves are presented as human societies in their historical development. Primitive tribes, not entering upon the path of development, remain centuries behind in their unchanging and unmovable form. "Civilizations" are divided into separate forms. Leaving a few out of account it may be noted that to Toynbee the most essential difference is that between civilizations which have followed the complete process of development and those civilizations in which the process has been incomplete, and which as a consequence of this, have been arrested and frozen in their development at a definite stage. Toynbee regards as a necessary cause of this developmental process the presence of definite material obstacles which a given society can surmount only by straining all its forces and only by leaving aside the primitive condition which does not allow the obstacle to be overcome. If the obstacles are too great, the society (as was the case with the Eskimos and with the Nomads of the Central Asian steppes) can be arrested in its development.

In the growth and development of each society, the creative minority within it plays the leading role. The broader masses of the people are passive and follow behind the creative minority, imitating it, and learning and drilling themselves according to its example. In the course of time, in a majority of the cases studied, the creative minority loses its ability to create new forms of society and to lead society along new paths. However, it remains in its privileged position for a long time to come, being reconstituted as the "dominant" rather than the "creative" minority.

From this time on, society enters upon the path of decline and disintegration. This also occupies centuries and may be accompanied by positive manifestations of external (for example, military) successes or by the development of technical skills. Characteristic and inherent in all known "civilizations" in the period of disintegration is the aspiration of the dominant minority to create a "universal" state. Inside this universal state which is being created or which has been created, the dominant minority is opposed by the proletariat, which Toynbee calls the Internal Proletariat. Now, in contrast to those periods when the minority was creative and the broad masses followed it, this is a force which is inimical to the dominant minority. Another enemy of the dominant minority of the universal state is the External Proletariat, which is presented as barbaric tribes and peoples surrounding the universal state.

In a most complete and detailed manner Toynbee describes and characterizes further the spiritual decay of civilized society and the preparation for its replacement by a new civilization. In this process, the compelling

feature is the adoption by both internal and external proletariat of a new and higher form of religion than the previous one.

This very brief summary of Toynbee's teaching can give only a very incomplete and, because of its brevity, frequently misleading characterization of the views of the English historian concerning the basic paths of development of human societies. Nevertheless this attempt had to be made, otherwise a further examination of a concrete part of Toynbee's study would be impossible or incomprehensible.

Many of Toynbee's theories and arguments have their doubtful aspects and parts are undoubtedly incorrect. Still, his work is a big step forward in the creation of an outline of the historical processes of human society. Among the indubitably positive sides of Toynbee's study, we believe, is his chief aim—a study of the historical path, not so much of individual social organizations united in states or nationalities, but chiefly of the whole complexes of these social unions united by the common possession of basic ideas and by basic similarities in historical development. In our opinion, this differentiation of human societies by their general ability to develop and, further, by their ability to travel completely and not only partially along the path of historical development is undoubtedly correct. Another positive gain is the line of demarcation established between individual civilizations, limiting the unscientific methods of defining the chronologically preceding civilizations by one of the early stages of civilizations chronologically following them, although these latter may have begun their development from far lower forms (for example the unscientific practice of characterizing the Greco-Roman civilization as the original stage of the subsequent European society). The stressing of the role of the "creative minority" is a positive feature, and the transformation of this minority into a "dominant," uncreative one and its subsequent conflict with the masses is incontrovertible.

Toynbee distinguishes nineteen basic civilizations. Among these are: the Sumeric, the Egyptian, the Chinese, the Andean (Inca), Minoan (Crete), Mayan (Central American), Yucatec, Mexic, Hittite, Syriac, Babylonian, Arabic, Iranian, Indic, Hindu, Hellenic, Orthodox-Christian, Western European, and Far Eastern. The author agrees, however, that the Far Eastern civilization must be divided by separating the Japanese civilization from it. The Orthodox-Christian civilization, too, must be divided into the Near Eastern (Byzantium) and the Russian. Thus twenty-one civilizations whose processes of development the author includes in the sphere of comparative research and summary evaluation are actually distinguished.

But here, to begin with, there are more debatable theses. Actually, so that Toynbee's outline of the development of human societies might be recognized as correct, it has to be demonstrably based upon concrete facts. If these concrete facts and historical examples taken from distinct historical periods of distinct social organizations or, in Toynbee's phrase—of separate civilizations, confirm his study, then his thesis will be demonstrated. If,

however, these facts and examples contradict the author's opinions then the latter will be untenable.

However, to provide such a clear and definite answer, the whole complex of historical facts and examples used by the author must also be clear and definite. In the process of verifying this complex of facts and of historical manifestation collected by Toynbee, we can, however, *a priori* admit the possibility that the author did not collect and examine all of them but only those confirming his theory, omitting facts and manifestations which might contradict it. In such a case his thesis would become, at the very least, debatable, and it would be the duty of a scholarly critic to review his schemes on the basis of a wider range of facts.

We may further allow that the facts and historical examples used by the author may be selected completely impartially, that is, those may be introduced which confirm his scheme as well as those which contradict it. However, even in this case the author may incorrectly evaluate the significance of these facts and manifestations and the verification of this evaluation and of the final conclusions upon which it is based are imperative.

It becomes obvious that such an examination of the author's theses is possible both as to the suitability of examples for the theme of Toynbee's work as well as the verification of detail. The first of these courses would demand a great deal of work and would be possible only for an expert with an extraordinarily wide range of knowledge, or for a group of people. The second course would be simple, but since it is concerned only with details, the author's basic positions would remain unaffected.

A middle course is probably more productive. That is the verification of facts relating to those individual civilizations into which Toynbee divides mankind and its historical processes. The confirmation or the refutation of his theses, as far as an entire civilization, is concerned might not be decisive in the evaluation of his work, but would be a vital factor in its general evaluation.

Thus choosing this middle course we limit ourselves in this article to an examination of Toynbee's conclusions relating to the "Russian" part of the "Orthodox-Christian" civilization. If the historical process of development of the peoples of Eastern Europe is examined in the light of a study chiefly of the Muscovite and later of the Russian state (itself a source of controversy, since this state was far from a homogeneous complex) then Toynbee's thesis that historical progress accompanies those peoples who find themselves in unfavorable material and geographic conditions and who, as a consequence of this, are forced to strain all their energies, appears to be strikingly and convincingly affirmed. Only by recognizing this thesis to be correct can the seemingly inexplicable be explained. A powerful state rose on the meager forest tracts of the Moscow river, it battled successfully with the states bordering the Russian, subjugated the peoples of the East European plain, incorporated the fertile Ukraine with a culture closer to that of Western

Europe, conquered its powerful neighbor to the northwest—the Grand Principality of Lithuania, and further subdued huge stretches of the Caucasus, Siberia, Central Asia, Finland, Poland, etc. The measure of external success is astounding when compared with the poverty and the meagerness of the material resources, with the severity of the cold and wet climate.

However, it would seem too that in the creation of the Muscovite state not only were unfavorable material conditions overcome but also certain spiritual foundations. By this we mean that not all the spiritual qualities of the Russian people guaranteed the creation of a great empire.

Agreeing completely with Toynbee when he denies any racial basis for the historicity of human societies, we *a priori* limit our examination of the greater or lesser ability of individual peoples to create a "universal state" and thus create its own independent "civilization." One can speak only of definite prerequisites in the basic character of a people. Often historical examples seem to indicate that the social forces regard the lesser spiritual prerequisites frequently as an obstacle, and in surmounting them find additional strength. The Russian state would seem to be an example of this action. Indeed, in the spiritual make up of the Russian nation there are undoubtedly many positive qualities, several of which are inherent in it to a greater degree than in other peoples. However, one cannot but recognize on the other hand that those qualities which, it would seem, are necessary to the great construction of social unions, are lacking. For example, the Russian people do not seem to have the extremely pedantic love for work or the organic quality of discipline of the Germans. There is little of the spirit of enterprise, of patriotic attachment to the traditional forms of life which distinguish the English, or of that condensation of logical thought which is inherent in the French. By nature, the Russian, taken individually, is more prone to anarchist tendencies. Yet it is this people which created the huge empire which has survived a series of unparalleled catastrophes.

Possibly, however, the following example may hint at the necessity for supplementing Toynbee's outline.

The pages dedicated to the Orthodox civilization of Eastern Europe are scattered throughout the whole work. This is due to his method of supporting definite theses and premises by examples taken from historical experience of various civilizations.

Let us recall that the growth of social organizations on the path of civilization is ascribed by Toynbee to the necessity for overcoming intricate and difficult obstacles. In his opinion, the Slavs entered upon the path of civilization late chiefly because of the absence of any stimulus to overcome these obstacles. The original center of the society established by the Eastern Slavs consisted of the lands along the upper reaches of the Dnieper. Later, in the twelfth century, the center moved to the east, to the banks of the Volga in response to attacks by the Finnish tribes. Still later the center of battle was again transferred to the south, especially to the lower Dnieper, a locale

which in the course of several centuries became the scene of battles with the steppe Nomads.

The universal Russian state was first founded in 1478 after the unification of the Muscovite state with that of Novgorod. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, during the so-called "Times of Troubles," the attacks of the Nomads were repulsed and by this time final conditions for the formation of the Orthodox state in Eastern Europe had been created.

Describing further the expansion of the Russian state, Toynbee pays special attention to the Cossacks of the south Russian and Ukrainian steppes. He regards them as the chief conquerors of the steppe peoples of the southeastern part of Eastern Europe. The Cossacks, Toynbee believes, had their origin somewhere along the lower course of the Dnieper; from this homeland the Cossack organizations branched out further to the Don, the Kuban, the Terek, the Yaik and the Siberia (Vol. II, p. 157). In battle with the Nomad peoples of the southeastern steppes and with the peoples of the Urals and Siberia, the Cossacks had the upper hand since, as agriculturists, they settled on and became completely acclimatized to the steppe land. Their method of advance to the southeast was to follow the banks of rivers which, depending upon local conditions, allowed them to dominate the entire river basins.

In the wars against the barbarians, the Cossacks, according to Toynbee, themselves were continually transformed from barbarians into fighters against barbarism. This, however, only came about during the course of time and not without opposition. The Dnieper Cossacks who defended their traditions with special stubbornness, in the sixteenth century chose Poland—Lithuania as their suzerain, and only in 1654 did they recognize the power of Moscow. However, even after the last large-scale uprising in 1773, their chief commune was destroyed; some of them went to Turkey, while others reconciled themselves with the Russian government and were resettled on the Kuban where they again entered the ranks of campaigners against the barbaric tribes (Vol. V, p. 313). The Cossacks of the Don, the Yaik, and the Terek were easier to incorporate into the all-Russian state. Later the Cossack organizations of Orenburg, Siberia, and Semirechiye, fulfilled a similar task in battling with the barbaric tribes of the Nomads. In these wars the author lays special emphasis upon the role of the Cossacks of the Yaik (Vol. V, p. 315).

To avoid returning again to the theme of the Cossacks, let us note that the author here commits a whole series of outright errors, most of them in the history of the Cossacks of the lower course of the Dnieper (Zaporozhe). They were not, of course, the creators of the Cossack military organizations on the southern and southeastern borders of the Muscovite state. The author forgets the special national character of the Zaporozhian Cossacks (Ukrainian) and the fact that they originated on the borders, not of the Muscovite, but of the Polish state. Consequently these Cossacks were not

obliged to choose the King of Poland as their suzerain in the sixteenth century; he was already their sovereign. There was no large-scale uprising of the Zaporozhian Cossacks in 1773; however, this is a minor point.

Although the pages devoted to the history of the Cossacks in Toynbee's work are very interesting (there is a very neat observation of the Cossack movement along the rivers and their occupation of the land along the shores) on the whole the significance of the Cossacks is not quite clear. Was this significance decisive in the historical development of the Russian state? The reader, familiar with the basic theses of Toynbee's philosophy of history will undoubtedly expect in his characterization of the historical development of the Orthodox civilization of Eastern Europe that attention will be directed to the chief problem: the birth of a creative minority, its creative activity, its transformation into a dominant minority. To what degree does the history of the Cossacks answer this question?

In this connection the history of the Cossacks does not illumine the basic problem, which is the activity of the aristocracy, that is, a minority moulded by the conditions of that epoch into a separate social class. There is a relatively minor treatment of the activity and the role of the Russian aristocracy in Toynbee's work.

True, the Cossacks also had their own creative (and then dominant) minority, but Toynbee does not touch upon this question. All his attention is concentrated upon the problem of a central Russian state developing into the universal state of Moscow and Petersburg. The universal state of Orthodox civilization which Toynbee identifies with the Russian state, existed, according to him, from the sixteenth to the seventeenth century in a pure form. This was followed by the period of degeneration (when the minority became dominant) most strikingly manifest in the nineteenth century in spite of the external success of this state (Vol. V, p. 311).

As to the internal and external proletariat who are hostile to the universal state, Toynbee makes the following observations. The internal proletariat, he thinks, had three sources in Russia. It was made up of 1) the children and descendants of the exiled schismatics and the later political leaders who came to oppose the state power; 2) descendants of conquered and subjugated western (Poland, The Balticum, Lithuania, Finland) and eastern (Caucasus, Transcaucasian lands) peoples; 3) of primitive barbaric nations in the north and nomadic nations in the southwest of East Europe (Vol. V, pp. 103-104).

It is difficult to agree with this thesis. With regard to the first point, if the descendants of the exiled political opponents of Moscow and Petersburg did not return to their former area and position, they settled in the border areas of the state, becoming organically fused with the local population of these border areas. On the second and third observations it must be noted that, on the whole, the populations of the subjugated nations and states joined to Russia remained in their former areas and continued their old occupations. Often the population thus lost its élite (creative or domi-

nant minority) but this for the most part maintained its position, becoming russified and entering into the body of the upper class of the Russian state.

The origin of the internal proletariat of Eastern Europe is, in essence, the same as in other civilizations: it springs from the population both of the metropolis and of the adjoining areas. According to Toynbee, the external proletariat made an appearance in the history of the civilization of Eastern Europe at the end of the twelfth century. The most striking examples of its battle against the universal state were the domination of the Tatars over Russia and the domination of the "forest barbarians"—Lithuanians over the Byelorussians and the Ukrainians in the Grand Principality of Lithuania (Vol. V. p. 312, n. 1.). This latter instance is not absolutely true, since in the Grand Principality of Lithuania there was no "domination" of the Lithuanians over the remaining population, and it would be more correct to speak only of the rule of the Lithuanian dynasty.

The nature of the external proletariat threatening the civilization of Eastern Europe in more recent centuries, especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, is not quite clearly stated in *A Study of History*. It is possible, however, that this problem of external proletariat as well as the external danger to the existence of a civilization and of the universal state can be at times regarded as a danger from representatives of other civilizations. Thus, to use Toynbee's terminology, the fall of the Andean, Mayan, Yucatec and Mexic civilizations was a consequence of their collision with the representatives of Western European civilization. As Toynbee notes, the concrete danger of a similar fall for the universal Russian state as a result of colliding with representatives of Western European civilization arose at the beginning of the seventeenth century, during the "Time of Troubles." By repelling this danger, the civilization of Eastern Europe, he believes, prolonged its path of independent development.

However, the possibility of a collision with and the defeat by other civilizations is not excluded, in our opinion, even in subsequent centuries. In our period it is theoretically possible, for example, for the universal state and civilization of Eastern Europe to be destroyed by the universal state and civilization of the Far East (China).

Toynbee is not inclined to consider the communist revolution in Russia and the Soviet state created by it as an expression of the ideas of Karl Marx's social teachings. These ideas (Toynbee boils them down to a repetition, in another form, of the teaching of the Bible, so that instead of God, Marx bows to "historical necessity," the chosen people in the person of the Jews being replaced by the proletariat, and the future kingdom of the Messiah by the dictatorship of the proletariat) were discarded in the conflict between Stalin and Trotsky, and afterwards, in spite of its special form, the Russian Soviet state once more occupies its place in the world as a national empire, similar to the empire of Peter I or of Nicholas I. Russian communism, in his opinion, becomes one of the local variants of national-

ism. Essentially, however, even apart from its ideological basis, (the Western European teaching of Karl Marx) the Russian communist state, far more than the preceding regime, has drawn closer to the Western European civilization.

Of course, many of Toynbee's ideas are disputable. In judging those aspects of Toynbee's work we have already described we are compelled to say that they present no harmonious and rounded view of the history of the development of East European civilization. Much detail, necessary for the further confirmation of the author's outline is not completely developed or is quite glossed over. Some reference has already been made to this. Thus, the basic problem of the formation of the creative minority and its development into a dominant minority is almost untouched. The sections on the internal and external proletariat contain much that is debatable. The year 1478 for the formation of the universal state in Eastern Europe is doubtful. Why is the uniting of the Muscovite Principality with Novgorod considered to be decisive, and not, for instance, the uniting with the Grand Principality of Tver—long-time rival of the Muscovite Principality—or the annexation of the Ukraine?

In the Muscovite state of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the decisive period of its growth, those traits most characteristic of it must be emphasized. Among these may be placed the unique position of the Russian creative (later dominant) minority in its special dependence upon the state it created. As to the state itself, its most characteristic symbol was the beginning of the centralization which has marked its whole history, expressed in the creation of a system of organs of central administration, the so-called "bureaus" (*priказy*), awkward in form but extraordinarily effective.

The changes introduced by the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 constitute a cardinal problem in the history of civilization of Eastern Europe. To say that Soviet Russia continues the foreign and, in part, the internal policy of the preceding period is to say very little. The fact is, that the problem of the dominant minority necessarily demands a solution. Can the Soviet state, therefore, still be correctly included in the old scheme of the Orthodox civilization of Eastern Europe? This is not merely to say that this state does not consider itself as "orthodox" but in actual fact it is not. The spiritual break with the preceding period is extraordinarily sharp. The minority, leading the masses, is quite different. Would it not be more correct to recognize that in this particular case we are dealing with an attempt to establish a new civilization accompanied by the acceptance on the part of one section of the population of Marxism as a new type of religion? The geographic concurrence of the borders of the Soviet state with the borders of the former Russian empire is only of secondary significance.

Finally one more note. Toynbee logically limits the problem of the universal state of Eastern Europe to the problem of the Russian state of Mos-

cow, and beyond, to the Russian empire. However, this is undoubtedly a simplification of the problem. The author himself more than once stressed that the presence of one central state formation, concentrating within itself the basic process of the development of a specific civilization, is a possible but not a necessary characteristic. The civilization of Western Europe has up to now not been able to organize such a single trait. Only now are we witnessing attempts at the creation of a Western European federation which, possibly, will remain merely attempts.

Similarly, the problem may be more intricate in the East European civilization, and the history of the development of this civilization is not compelled to limit itself to a simple repetition of the history of the Russian empire. There are, for example, large state formations which existed for a long time parallel to the Russian state. There is the state known as the Grand Principality of Lithuania existing from the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries; the state of the Ukrainian Hetmans, existing in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, and such old state organizations as the Georgian and Armenian states in the Caucasus. Is it correct to include the history of these states automatically into that of the Russian state? Is it correct to regard the unity of the civilization of Eastern Europe as dating from the creation in the fifteenth century (let us say) of the universal Russian state? Can one ignore the tendencies towards a national rebirth of the peoples of the Eastern Europe mentioned above?

If we give a negative answer to these questions, then by this very act we recognize the fallibility of a whole series of Toynbee's conclusions with regard to the civilization of Eastern Europe. These particular questions are especially important in connection with the Ukrainian and Byelorussian peoples. Toynbee does not definitely indicate whether they belong to the Eastern or to the Western European civilization. Certain parts of his book lead one to believe that he includes both these peoples entirely within the sphere of the Russian and Orthodox civilization; in other parts (particularly when he speaks of the conflict between the Grand Principality of Lithuania and the Muscovite state) he seems to relegate them to the civilization of the West.

This problem undoubtedly demands solution and necessitates some deeper and complicated research. For the present one can only say that the history of the development of these peoples is first of all an instructive picture of the action of influences from Western and Eastern Europe in rivalry with each other. In the future development of the civilization of Eastern Europe the role of these Slav peoples of the border areas may suddenly become significant.

Evaluating those parts of Toynbee's work dealing with the history of Eastern Europe and "Orthodox" civilization it should be noted that there are some errors, but this is understandable since no one can be a specialist in all fields of world history. More serious is the fact that his presentation does not in many cases support his main outline, and conversely,

material supporting the outline is frequently omitted. Thus, the accuracy of Toynbee's theory with regard to Eastern Europe remains in doubt.

However, this in no way reflects on the fallibility of Toynbee's theory as a whole. This theory, in those sections with which the author is more familiar, is far better supported. Besides this, as he pointed out, at the beginning of this note, the positive aspects make Toynbee's theory deeply interesting. The sections on the "Orthodox civilization" of Eastern Europe bear witness to the fact that Toynbee's scheme requires further verification, some changes, and some additions.