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CAN WE KNOW THE PATTERN OF THE PAST ?

DISCUSSION BETWEEN P. GEYL

PROFESSOR IN THE UNIVERSITY OF UTRECHT

AND ARNOLD J. TOYNBEE

PROFESSOR IN THE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

CONCERNING TOYNBEE'S BOOK

'A STUDY OF HISTORY'

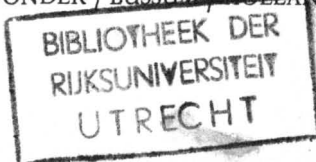
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*Professor P. Geyl*

The six volumes of Toynbee's *Study of History* appeared before the war, but it is since the war that the book and the author have become famous. A generation only just recovering from the terrible experiences of the war and already anxious about the future, is reading the work in the hope of finding in its pages the answer to its perplexities. It is indeed the author's claim to discover for us, in the at first sight chaotic and confusing spectacle of human history, a pattern, a rhythm.

I am going to be very critical. I am going to attack the method and the system itself. But I should like to say how much the work has impressed me. It is based on a vast learning, it is under the control of a powerful imagination, and it is presented in a vivid, colourful, and, at the same time, supple style.

According to Toynbee, history is enacted within the framework of civilisations, much larger units than are the national states to which the attention of historians has been directed far too exclusively. Of such civilisations he counts twenty-one in the whole of the six thousand years of which we have records.

One of the most essential of his observations is that human activities are governed by a law of challenge and response. It is not easy conditions that bring out the best qualities of the human race; it is obstacles and hardships which are overcome. The best qualities – these are for him the spiritual ones. After the genesis of a civilisation, Toynbee sees it grow, that is to say, deal successfully with challenges and thus gaining new ground. There is not, in his view, a predestined end to the growth of any civilisation. On this important point his

theory differs from that famous book *The Decline of the West* of Spengler, of whose system one is nevertheless reminded when one sees Toynbee emphasising the independent and organic life of civilisations so much. At any rate according to him, civilisations may go on growing indefinitely. In practice, history shows most of them succumbing sooner or later. But if they do succumb it is owing to a failure to respond to a challenge; it is not a matter of iron necessity, it is a matter of human shortcoming.

Once broken down, however (I'm still summarising Toynbee's system) a civilisation is irretrievably doomed. It enters upon a period of disintegration which even the most active, most original, most courageous of its 'members' are powerless to stop. The creative personality, or the creative minority, cannot now do any more than

fight rearguard actions and put off the evil day without preventing the final catastrophe. 'Challenge and response' at this stage becomes 'rout and rally.' Instead of differentiation there is standardisation, the leading minority becomes a ruling class and the majority a 'proletariat'. Of course this is not the end of all things. Within the universal church, which is in Toynbee's vision another feature of the disintegration stage, a sect has been forming, and this is the chrysalis from which the new civilisation will in due time arise.

Now how has the writer arrived at this scheme of development? If we are to believe him, he has deduced it from his unprejudiced observations of human history. He claims that his method is a strictly empirical one. And, true enough, he begins every one of his arguments by presenting a number of cases or instances

by way of illustration. The abundance of his knowledge and the unflagging vigour of his presentation are simply amazing. Nevertheless, there are two points which are of such importance that they should be borne constantly in mind, but which Professor Toynbee doesn't seem to be sufficiently aware of.

He bases an argument on, say, twenty cases selected at random from the histories of all peoples and all centuries. The impression made may be ever so convincing, but the twenty cases are selected cases – selected out of two hundred, or two hundred thousand!

That is the first point, and the second is this: that even the twenty cases selected could most of them be presented in a slightly, or radically, different way, with the result that they would no longer support the argument. An error which I

think underlies a good deal of Toynbee's systematising is the assumption that the historical events or phenomena on which he bases his conclusions are firm and unshakeable data: that the particular significance which he attaches to them in order to bring out their mutual likeness (that likeness by which he wants to establish the rule, or tendency, or law) is inherent in them and indisputable. I grant that comparison, with all due reservations, has its use. Without it no general ideas about history could ever be formed. But to detach, for the purposes of comparison, a historical fact from its own particular and never to be repeated circumstances only too easily leads to violence being done to history. And so there is hardly an incident or a phenomenon quoted by Toynbee to illustrate a particular thesis which does not give rise to



qualifications in the reader's mind - if the reader happens to know something about the fact in question.

Take the passage where he advances Holland as a striking instance of a civilisation owing its rise to the hard conditions created by the sea. In doing so he obviously overlooks the fact that the exposed parts of Holland were made inhabitable with the help of people dwelling in easier countries who had awakened to civilisation earlier, that the soil of Holland, once the water was tamed, proved excellent, and that her situation was extraordinarily suitable for international commerce. Is it right, one feels impelled to ask, to isolate the hard conditions from among the multifarious complexity of reality, and to suppress the favouring conditions?

Yet it is on the strength of so one-

sided an argument that Toynbee propounds the thesis: 'The greater the challenge, the greater the stimulus', adding that this seems to be 'a law which knows no limits to its validity'. We have not, he says, 'stumbled upon any palpable limits at any point in our empirical survey so far.'

Now I suggest that before speaking of laws and of empiricism, and evoking the methods of science, there ought to be a far stricter examination, in every single case, of cause and effect, there ought to be far more careful elimination, isolation, definition.

Let me add, in fairness to Toynbee, that he does not leave it at the law which I quoted. He feels that he cannot go on raising his challenges indefinitely. We soon find him meditating 'an overriding law' to qualify the absolute tenor of the first law. After a dazzling display of further instances

he concludes that: 'there are challenges of a salutary severity that stimulate the human subject to a creative response: but there are also challenges of an overwhelming severity to which the human subject succumbs.' To my mind it is in fact very simple. If I give you a knock on the head it is very likely that your energy will be strongly roused and that you will strike back with vigour. But the knock may be so powerful that you will not have anything to reply, or, (to put it in the style of our author), that the source of your energy will dry up for ever. One need not conduct a learned, allegedly empirical, historical investigation to understand that things are likely to happen in the same fashion in the world of communities. But Toynbee in the end formulates his overriding law very impressively in what he calls 'scientific terminology':

‘The most stimulating challenge is to be found in a mean between a deficiency of severity and an excess of it.’

And what next? I should like to ask him. When we try to apply this law – scientifically formulated, if not, I am afraid, scientifically established – we shall first of all discover that in every given historical situation it refers to only one element, one out of many, one which it will prove very ticklish work indeed to abstract from the others. Moreover, is not the thing that matters, to define what is too much and what too little, where lies the golden mean? As to that, the law has nothing to say. That has every time to be defined anew by observation.

I must come straight to the main features of the system. Has Toynbee proved that the histories of civilisations fall into these sharply marked stages of growth and

disintegration, separated by breakdown? Has he proved that the work of the creative minds, or of the creative minorities, can be successful only in the first stage and that in the second it is doomed to remain so much fruitless effort?

In my opinion he has not. How do I know that the difference is caused by the triumphant creator acting in a growing society, and the hopelessly struggling one in a society in disintegration? I have not been convinced of the essential difference between the phases of civilisation. There are evil tendencies and there are good tendencies simultaneously present at every stage of human history, and the human intellect is not sufficiently comprehensive to weigh them off against each other and to tell, before the event, which is to have the upper hand. As for the theory that the individual leader, or

the leading minority, is capable of creative achievement in a growing society only and doomed to disappointment in one that is in disintegration – that theory lapses automatically when the distinction is not admitted in the absolute form in which our author propounds it.

I am glad that you are present here, Toynbee, and going to reply. For this is surely a point of great practical importance. *A Study of History* does not definitely announce ruin as did Spengler's book by its very title. But in more than one passage you give us to understand that Western civilisation broke down as long ago as the sixteenth century, as a result of the wars of religion. The last four centuries of our history would thus, according to your system, be one long process of disintegration, with collapse as the inevitable end – except for the

miracle of a reconversion to the faith of our fathers.

There is no doubt, when we look around us, a great deal to induce gloom. But I do not see any reason why history should be read so as to deepen our sense of uneasiness into a mood of hopelessness. Earlier generations have also had their troubles and have managed to struggle through. There is nothing in history to shake our confidence that the future lies open before us.

*Professor Arnold Toynbee*

Well, the BBC has put on for you a kind of 'historians' cricket match'. The bowler has just delivered his ball, but, when I have replied to Professor Geyl and we have exchanged some ideas afterwards, it will be for you to judge who has got the best of the over. Of course,

it wouldn't be worth bothering about that if this were just a personal contest between players. Geyl may bowl Toynbee out, or Toynbee may spoil Geyl's bowling average, and in either case the world won't come to an end. But the fate of the world – the destiny of mankind – *is* involved in the issue between us about the nature of history; and no doubt it is because this does matter – and matters enormously – not just to the two of us here, but to you and to everybody now alive, and to generations still unborn, that the BBC has arranged this debate between my old friend and colleague, Professor Geyl, and me.

In replying to him now, I am going to concentrate on what, to my mind, are his two main lines of attack. One of his general criticisms is: 'Toynbee's view of history induces gloom.' The other is:



‘Toynbee has set himself to do something impossible. He is trying to make sense of human history, and that is beyond the capacity of the human mind.’ I will pay most attention to this second point, because it is, I am sure, by far the more important of the two.

Let me try to dispose of the ‘gloom’ point first. Suppose my view of history did point to a gloomy conclusion, what of it? ‘Gloomy’ and ‘cheerful’ are one thing, ‘true’ and ‘false’ quite another.

Professor Geyl has interpreted me right in telling you that I have pretty serious misgivings about the state of the world today. Don’t you feel the same misgivings? Doesn’t Professor Geyl feel them? That surely goes without saying. But what doesn’t go without saying is what we are going to do about it; and here Professor Geyl has been handsome to me in telling

you where I stand. He has told you that I disbelieve in predestination and am at the opposite pole, on that supremely important question, from the famous German philosopher Spengler. He has told you that my outlook is the reverse of historical materialism; that, in my view, the process of civilisation is one of vanquishing the material problems to grapple with the spiritual ones; that I am a believer in free will; in man's freedom to respond with all his heart and soul and mind when life presents him with a challenge. Well, that is what I do believe. But how, I ask you, can one lift up one's heart and apply one's mind unless one does one's best to find out the relevant facts and to look them in the face? – the formidable facts as well as the encouraging ones.

In the state of the world today, the two really formidable facts, as I see them,

are that the other civilisations that we know of have all broken down, and that in our recent history one sees some of those tendencies which, in the histories of the broken-down civilisations, have been the obvious symptoms of breakdown. But what's the moral? Surely not to shy at the facts. Professor Geyl himself admits them. And also, surely, not to be daunted by the 'sense of uneasiness' which these formidable facts are bound to give us. 'I don't see any reason', said Professor Geyl just now, 'why history should be read so as to deepen our sense of uneasiness into a mood of hopelessness'. That is a telling criticism of Spengler, who does diagnose that our civilisation is doomed, and who has nothing better to suggest than that we should fold our hands and await the inevitable blow of the axe. But that ball doesn't take my

wicket, for in my view, as Geyl has told you, uneasiness is a challenging call to action, and not a death sentence to paralyse our wills. Thank goodness we do know the fates of the other civilisations; such knowledge is a chart that warns us of the reefs ahead. Knowledge can be power and salvation if we have the spirit to use it. There is a famous Greek epigram which runs: 'I am the tomb of a shipwrecked sailor, but don't let that frighten off you, brother mariner, from setting sail; because, when we went down, the other ships kept afloat.'

'There is nothing in history', said Professor Geyl in his closing sentence, 'to shake our confidence, that the future lies open before us.' Those might have been my own words, but I don't quite see what warrant Professor Geyl has for using them. The best comfort Professor Geyl

can give us is: 'If we take care not to unnerve ourselves by trying to chart the seas, we may be lucky enough to get by without hitting the rocks.' No, I haven't painted him quite black enough, for his view is still gloomier than that. 'To make a chart of history', he says, 'is a sheer impossibility.' Professor Geyl's own chart, you see, is the 'perfect and absolute blank' of Lewis Carroll's bellman who hunted the shark. Geyl, too, has a chart, like Spengler and me. We all of us have one, whether we own up to it or not, and no chart is more than one man's shot at the truth. But surely, of those three, the blank is the most useless and the most dangerous.

Professor Geyl thinks I am a pessimist because I see a way of escape in a reconversion to the faith of our fathers 'This' says Professor Geyl, 'is an unnecessarily

gloomy view of our situation' – like the old lady who was advised to leave it to Providence and exclaimed: 'Oh dear, has it come to that?'

What was our fathers' chart of history? As they saw it, it was a tale told by God, unfolding itself from the Creation through the Fall and the Redemption to the Last Judgement. As Professor Geyl says he sees it, it seems like a tale told by an idiot, signifying nothing. You may not agree with our fathers' view that history is a revelation of God's providence; but it is a poor exchange, isn't it, to swap their faith for the view that history makes no sense.

Of course, Professor Geyl is no more singular in his view than I am in mine. What one may call the nonsense view of history has been fashionable among Western historians for the last few generations.

The odd thing is that some of the holders of this view, I don't know whether I could count Professor Geyl among the number, defend it principally on the ground that it is scientific. Of course, it is only human that historians should have wanted to be scientific in an age when science has been enjoying such prestige. I am, myself, a historian who believes that science has an awful lot to teach us. But how strange to suppose that one is being scientific by despairing of making sense! For what is science? It is only another name for the careful and scrupulous use of the human mind. And, if men despair of reason, they are lost. Nature hasn't given us wings, fur, claws, antennae or elephant's trunks; but she has given us the human intellect – the most effective of all implements, if we are not too timid to use it. And what does this

scientific intellect do? It looks at the facts, but it doesn't stop there. It looks at the facts and it tries to make sense of them. It does, you see, the very thing that Professor Geyl takes me to task for trying to do with the facts of history.

Is history really too hard a nut for science to crack? When the human intellect has wrested her secret from physical nature, are we going to sit down under an *ex cathedra* dictum that the ambition to discover the secret of human history will always be bound to end in disappointment? We don't need to be told that Man is a harder - a very much harder - nut than the atom. We have discovered how to split the atom and are in danger of splitting it to our own destruction. By comparison with the science of physics, the science of man is so difficult that our discoveries in the two fields



have gone forward at an uneven pace till they have got quite out of step with each other. It is partly this that has got us into our present fix. Is science to shirk trying to do anything about it? 'The proper study of mankind is man,' says Pope. 'The human intellect', sighs Geyl, 'is not sufficiently comprehensive.'

- I say: We can't afford such defeatism; it is unworthy of the greatness of man's mind; and it is refuted by the human mind's past achievements. The mind has won all its great victories by well-judged boldness. And today, before our eyes, science is launching a characteristically bold offensive in what is now the key area of the mental battlefield. Why, she has got her nut-crackers round this nut, this human nut, already. One arm of the pincers is the exciting young science of psychology, which is opening out entirely new mental

horizons for us, in the very direction in which we are most in need of longer vistas. The other is the forbidding yet rewarding discipline of statistics. Science has set herself now in good earnest to comprehend human nature, and, through understanding, to show it how to master itself and thereby set itself free. Science, so long pre-occupied with the riddles of non-human nature, has now joined in the quests of philosophy and religion, and this diversion of her energies has been timely. There is, indeed, no time to be lost. We are in for a life and death struggle. And, at this critical hour, is science to get no support from our professedly scientific historians?

Well, in this 'mental fight', I have deliberately risked my neck by putting my own reading of the facts of history on the table. I should never dream of claim-

ing that my particular interpretation is the only one possible. There are, I am sure, many different alternative ways of analysing history, each of which is true in itself and illuminating as far as it goes, just as, in dissecting an organism, you can throw light on its nature by laying bare either the skeleton or the muscles or the nerves or the circulation of the blood. No single one of these dissections tells the whole truth, but each of them reveals a genuine facet of it. I should be well content if it turned out that I had laid bare one genuine facet of history, and even then, I should measure my success by the speed with which own work in my own line was put out of date by further work by other people in the same field. In the short span of one lifetime, the personal contribution of the individual scholar to the great and growing stream

of knowledge can't be more than a tiny pailful. But if he could inspire - or provoke - other scholars to pour in their pailfuls too, well, then he could feel that he had really done his job. And this job of making sense of history is one of the crying needs of our day - I beg of you believe me.

*Professor P. Geyl*

Well I must say, Toynbee, that I felt some anxiety while you were pouring out over me this torrent of eloquence, wit and burning conviction, but that was of course what I had to expect from you. And now that is over I'm relieved to feel that I'm still there, and my position untouched.

Professor Toynbee pictures me as one of those men who mistake the courage to see evils for gloom, and who when

others sound the call for action take refuge from the dangers of our time in an illusionist optimism. But have I been saying that we are not in danger? And that no action is required? What I have said is that Toynbee's system induces the wrong kind of gloom because it tends to make action seem useless. 'But I am a believer in man's free will', Toynbee replies. I know. But nevertheless, his system lays it down that the civilisation which has been overtaken by a breakdown is doomed. Now Toynbee has repeatedly suggested that our Western civilisation did suffer a breakdown as long ago as the sixteenth century, and that consequently, try as we may, we cannot avoid disaster. Except in one way, except in case we allow ourselves to be reconverted to the faith of our fathers. And here Toynbee exclaims: 'You see, I'm not so gloomy

after all.' Perhaps not. But if one happens to hold a different opinion both of the efficacy and of the likelihood of application of his particular remedy, one cannot help thinking that Toynbee is but offering us cold comfort. He talks as if we cannot advance matters by 'so hotly canvassing and loudly advertising', as he contemptuously puts it, 'our political and economic maladies.' It is the loss of religious faith that is the deadly danger. To most of us this is indeed condemning all our efforts to futility.

Of course, Toynbee, it is only your picturesque way of putting things when you describe me as one of those historians who cling to the nonsense view of history. Because I cannot accept either your methods or your system it does not follow that to my mind history has no meaning. I do not believe that at any time

it will be possible to reduce the past to so rigid a pattern as to enable us to forecast the future – granted. Yet to me, as to you, the greatest function of the historian is to interpret the past – to find sense in it, although at the same time it is the least scientific, the most inevitably subjective of his functions.

I am surprised that you class me with those historians who believe that their view of history rests securely on scientific foundations. In fact it is you who claim to be proceeding on the lines of empiricism towards laws of universal validity, while I have been suggesting that these and other scientific terms which you are fond of using have no real meaning in a historical argument. Even just now, didn't you deduce from the conquest of the mystery of the atom the certainty that man's mind will be able to conquer

the mystery of the historical process as well? In my opinion these are fundamentally different propositions.

Let me remind you especially of what I have been saying about the uncertain nature of historical events, and the difficulty of detaching them from their contexts. And also of my contention that the cases and instances strewn over your pages have been arbitrarily selected from an infinite number and haven't therefore that value as evidence which you attach to them.

*Professor Arnold Toynbee*

There can be no doubt that you look upon this last point as an important one, Geyl, because you made it in your opening statement and you've come back to it again. I see what you're getting at. I set out to deal with history in terms of civilisations, of which there are, of course,



very few specimens, but in the illustrations I give, and the points I make, I don't confine myself to these rare big fellows, I hop about all over the place, bringing up as illustrations of my points events on a much smaller scale, which to you seem to be chosen arbitrarily, because they're just a few taken out of a large number. They also, as you point out, lend themselves to more interpretations than one. Yes, I think that's fair criticism, and quite telling. In answer I'd say two things. I think, as I said a minute or two ago, the same historical event often can be analysed legitimately in a number of different ways, each of which brings out some aspect of historical truth which is true as far as it goes, though not the whole truth. I have myself sometimes made the same historical event do double or treble duty in this way, and I don't

think this is a misleading way of using facts. As I've said before, several different dissections can all be correct, each in its own line.

My second point is, that I bring in these illustrations taken from the small change of history, not for their own sake but to throw indirect light on the big units, which I call civilisations, which are my main concern. I helped myself out in this way because, in the very early stage in human history in which our generation happens to be living, the number of civilisations that have come into existence up to date, is still so small—not more than about twenty, as I make it out.

To take up the case of your own country, Holland, now, which I have used to throw light on the rise of the Egyptian and Semarian civilisations: you challenged my account of Holland's rise to greatness. I found my explanation of it in the sti-

mulus of a hard country. The people of Holland had to wrest the country from the sea and they rose to the occasion. Your criticism is that I've arbitrarily isolated one fact out of several. The Dutch, you say, didn't do it by themselves, they were helped at the start by efficient outsiders, and then the country, when it had been reclaimed, turned out to have a rich soil, as well as a good situation for commerce.

Yes of course, those are also facts of Dutch history, but my answer is that they're not the key facts. If the outsiders that you have in mind are the Romans, well, the benefits of Roman efficiency were not enjoyed by Holland alone; Belgium, France and England enjoyed them as well. So Holland's Roman apprenticeship won't account for achievements that are special to Holland and

that distinguish her with her neighbours. Then the fertile soil and good location: these aren't causes of Holland's great feat of fighting and beating the North Sea, they're effects and rewards of it. It is a case of 'to him that hath, shall be given'. What the Dutch had, before these other things were given them, was the strength of will to raise their country out of the waters. The terrific challenge of the sea to a country below sea-level is surely the unique and distinguishing feature of Dutch history. With all deference to you, Geyl, as a Netherlander and a historian, I still think I'm right in picking out the response of the people of Holland to this challenge, as being the key to the greatness of your country. I do also think that the case of Holland throws valuable light on the cases of Egypt and Babylonia, two other places where people have had

to fight swamp and sea in order to reclaim land, and where this struggle between man and nature has brought to life two out of the twenty or so civilisations known to us.

Of course if one could lay hands on some more civilisations, one might be able to study history on that scale without having to bother about little bits and pieces like Holland and England. I wish I were in that happy position, and if you now, Geyl, would help me by taking up your archaeological spade and unearthing a few more forgotten civilisations for me, I should be vastly obliged to you. But even if you proved yourself a Layard, Schliemann and Arthur Evans rolled into one, you could only raise my present figure of twenty-one known civilisations to twenty-four, and that of course wouldn't help me to reduce my margin of error appreciably.

To turn for a moment to a different point, I want to correct an impression that I think our listeners may have got, of something else that you were saying just now. Anyway, I got the impression myself that you still thought I claimed to be able to foretell the future from the past, that I'd laid it down that our own civilisation was doomed. This is a very important point and I want to make my position on it clear beyond all possibility of mistake. So let me repeat: I don't set up to be a prophet, I don't believe history can be used for telling the world's fortune, I think history can perhaps sometimes show one possibilities or even probabilities, but never certainties. With the awful warning of Spengler's dogmatic determinism before my eyes, I always have been and shall be mighty careful, for my part, to treat the future of our own civilisation as an open

question – not at all because I'm afraid of committing myself, but because I believe as strongly as you do, Geyl, that it is an open question.

*Professor P. Geyl*

Well I'm glad, Toynbee, that you've taken so seriously the objections I've made to the profusion of illustrations from national histories. As to the case of Holland, let me just say that I was not thinking of the Romans only and not even of foreigners primarily. What I meant was that Netherlands civilisation did not have its origin or earliest development in the region which was exposed to the struggle with the water, but, on the contrary, this region could be described as a backward part of the Netherlands area as a whole. And as regards the future, in one place of your book you are very

near to drawing – as you put it – ‘the horoscope of our civilisation’ – from the fates of other civilisations, and you suggest repeatedly that we have got into the disintegration stage, which you picture to us so elaborately in your book as leading inevitably to catastrophe. I’m glad to hear now that you did not in fact mean to pass an absolute sentence of death over us.

*Professor Arnold Toynbee*

No, I think we simply don’t know. I suppose I must be the last judge of what my own beliefs are.

But now, Geyl, here is a ball I’d like for a change to bowl at you. You’ve given me an opening by the fair-mindedness and frankness you’ve shown all through our debate. You’ve done justice to my contention that while historical facts are in some



respects unique, there are other respects in which they belong to a class and are therefore comparable. There is truth, you say, in this, otherwise no general ideas about history could ever be formed, but isolating the comparable elements is ticklish work. It certainly is ticklish work, I speak with feeling from long experience in trying to do precisely that job. But may there not be a moral in this for you and every other historian as well as for me? May not it mean that we ought all of us to give far more time and far more serious and strenuous thought than many of us have ever given to this job of forming one's general ideas? And there is a previous and, to my mind, more important job to be done before that.

We've first to bring into consciousness our existing ideas and to put these trump cards of ours face upwards on the table.

All historians are bound, you see, to have general ideas about history. On this point, every stitch of work they do is so much evidence against them. Without ideas, they couldn't think a thought, speak a sentence or write a line on their subjects. Ideas are the machine tools of the mind, and, wherever you see a thought being thrown out, you may be certain that there is an idea at the back of it. This is so obvious that I find it hard to have patience with historians who boast, as some modern Western historians do, that they keep entirely to the facts of history and don't go in for theories. Why, every so-called fact that they present to you had some pattern of theory behind it. Historians who genuinely believe they have no general ideas about history are, I would suggest to them, simply ignorant of the workings of their own minds, and

such wilful ignorance is, isn't it, really unpardonable. The intellectual worker who refuses to let himself become aware of the working ideas with which he is operating seems to me to be about as great a criminal as the motorist who first closes his eyes and then steps on the gas. To leave oneself and one's public at the mercy of any fool ideas if they happen to have taken possession of one's unconscious, is surely the height of intellectual irresponsibility.

I believe our listeners would be very much interested to hear what you say about that.

*Professor P. Geyl*

This is very simple. I agree with you entirely about the impossibility of allowing, as it used to be put, the facts to speak for themselves, and the historian who

imagines that he can rule out theory or, let us say, his own individual mind, his personal view of things in general, seems to me a very uninteresting being, or in the majority of cases, when he is obviously only deluding himself and covering his particular partiality with the great word of objectivity and historical science, a very naïve person, and perhaps a very dangerous one.

As a matter of fact this is the spirit in which I have tackled you. When you said that I was an adherent of the nonsense view of history, you were mistaking my position altogether. In my own fashion, when I reject your methods and your conclusions, I am also trying to establish general views about history. Without such views, I know that the records of the past would become utterly chaotic and senseless, and I think I should rather

be an astronomer than devote my life to so hopeless and futile a study.

But, to me, one of the great things to realise about history is its infinite complexity, and, when I say infinite, I do mean that not only the number of the phenomena and incidents but their often shadowy and changing nature is such that the attempt to reduce them to a fixed relationship and to a scheme of absolute validity can never lead to anything but disappointment. It is when you present your system in so hard and fast a manner as to seem, at any rate to me, to dictate to the future, that I feel bound to protest, on behalf both of history and of the civilisation whose crisis we are both witnessing.

You have twitted me for inviting the world to sail on an uncharted course. Yet I believe that the sense of history is

absolutely indispensable for the life of mankind. I believe with Burckhardt that there is wisdom to be gained from the study of the past, but no definite lessons for the actual problems of the present.

*Professor Arnold Toynbee*

Well there! It looks as if, on this question anyway, our two different approaches have brought us on to something like common ground. If I am right in this, I think it is rather encouraging, for this last issue we were discussing is, I am sure, a fundamental one.

*Professor P. Geyl*

Well I see, Toynbee, that our time is up. There are just a few seconds left for me to pay tribute to the courage with which you, as you expressed it yourself, have risked your neck; not by facing me here

at the microphone, but by composing that gigantic and impressive scheme of civilisations, which was bound to rouse the sceptics and to be subjected to their criticism. Now I am not such a sceptic as to doubt the rightness of my own position in our debate, but I am one compared with you. Perhaps you will value the assurance from such a one that he himself has found your great work immensely stimulating and that, generally speaking, in the vast enterprise in which we historians are engaged together, daring and imaginative spirits like yourself have an essential function to fulfil.