

# Books

## Surviving the Future by Arnold Toynbee

(Oxford University Press; 164 pp.; \$5.95)

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If beauty is in the eye of the beholder, is profundity or banality merely in the mind of the reader? Suppose your local rabbi or preacher had remarked: "Human beings dislike being governed dictatorially, but sometimes they resign themselves to this as being a lesser evil than anarchy." Would you think this profound? Or trivial? Suppose the chairman of your local school board observed: "Exceptionally able individuals ought to be given, I should say, the best education from which they are capable of profiting. . . . At the same time, all individuals should be given an education of some kind, because education in the broad sense is necessary in order to enable the human being to become a participant in society. We must all become participants, whatever our degree of ability, because man is a social animal. We cannot change that." Would you credit him as a person with profound insights? Or with common sense? Or with a penchant for platitudinous exhortation? Are these statements profound because Arnold Toynbee has written them? Are they relatively trivial because this reviewer does not have the mind to perceive their wisdom?

Why, for that matter, are the sayings of Chairman Mao, or of Jesus, profound to some, trivial to others? Do one's social credentials give warrant to a claim for attention to what one says about almost everything? If so, our octogenarian historian ought to be taken seriously as, in a few pages, he covers an agenda which in-

cludes most of the items social critics take at least one volume each to discuss. Of course it is the right of a senior statesman in any field to turn from his preoccupation of a lifetime and to reflect more widely, with more imagination, on his specialty and on life in general. He has a right to compose a will and testament of his distilled wisdom for the younger generation. Perhaps it was an error for someone pushing fifty to review a book which apparently has as its target "the younger generation." "Well, my first advice to you is to keep the spirit of youth until you are dead." "Try to put yourselves in the other people's place and see why they hold these opinions or do these things with which you strongly disagree." "Try to make your love prevail over your feelings of hostility, and then try not to become defensive-minded and repressive yourselves as you slide into middle age." Who knows? Perhaps this would ring with authentic wisdom to my students at Yale College.

"It is most unlikely, I fear, that [a worldwide state] will be established by the will, or even with the acquiescence, of the majority of mankind. It seems to me likely to be imposed on the majority by a ruthless, efficient, and fanatical minority, inspired by some ideology or religion."

Twenty-six pages later:

"I want to see a world government established, and, in spite of the formidable difficulties in the way, I think it not impossible that it

might be brought into existence by mutual agreement and not by the imposition of dictatorial rule on the majority of mankind by a minority which held the power conferred by technological 'know-how' and which, for its own selfish reasons, was determined to maintain 'law and order' at the expense of the masses."

Something might be "most unlikely," but "not impossible," and yet that hardly spares the reader from wondering if Toynbee is not vacillating on a crucial issue.

The contents of this book were produced first in the form of a dialogue between Professor Wakaizumi of Kyoto and Mr. Toynbee. As we have the text, each chapter begins with very good questions that all thoughtful people ask and the Toynbee response follows. For example, after setting the historical context in which the question comes up, the Japanese professor asks: "What should man live for?" How does one answer that in eight pages? True, this has often been answered in one sentence, and eight pages permit some development of Toynbee's three themes: "man should live for loving, for understanding, and for creating." The explication of love gets six pages, understanding and creating each get a long paragraph.

The exposition makes the claim that love is of absolute value, that in strength it will lead to self-sacrifice (shades of *agape*), that it is desire (shades of *eros* explicated in its positive and its corrupting forms), that it is an emotion, that it leads to true self-fulfillment. But the self finds fulfillment truly only by uniting itself "with the spiritual reality behind the universe, so this outgoing love, which is a form of reunion [shades of Tillich], a union with other people and with ultimate spiritual reality, is the true form of fulfillment." He goes on to speak of mutual love, of celibacy (which "may liberate love to embrace all mankind and to reach the spiritual presence behind the universe" but "may also warp human nature if it is found to be too difficult an aim to achieve"), of love for non-humans, and of preferences in love.

Under the heading of "obstacles" to the achievement of life's purposes, Toynbee writes about the evils of selfishness, greed, callousness and animosity, about the inescapability of power and its temptations to abuse (the power-holder ought to realize that he too is a miserable sinner, and he should not feel that his position is a privilege to be enjoyed, but a burdensome task to be undertaken). He writes of revolution in a way similar to Pope Paul:

"History shows that violent revolutions in the past have almost always provoked a violent reaction. This either takes the form of a re-establishment of the pre-revolutionary regime in a rather more unpleasant form than before, or it takes the still more ironical form of the conversion of the revolutionary regime itself into a caricature of the pre-revolutionary regime."

When Toynbee deals with technology, his deep sense of a need for a sovereign world state gets its first development. Such a state is necessary to develop and distribute the resources of the world more fairly. The loss of meaningful work creates unhappiness, and thus attention has to be given to what fulfills the human spirit. Cities can be humanized by breaking them up into "small self-contained sub-units," each of which ought "to be a replica of an Ancient Greek city-state."

"What is the future of religion?" "Religion is an attempt to discover how to reconcile ourselves to the formidable facts of life and death." The future needs religion; indeed, Toynbee's "hope is that we shall see a period of technological slowing-down and a new wave of spiritual advance." The world needs to follow the lead of the great spiritual leaders, who "were manifestly on the right track," such as the Buddha, Confucius and Laotse, Socrates and Zen, the Hebrew prophets and Jesus. But "we need another Socrates." All the great philosophies and religions have taught "that egocentricity can be conquered by love," and egocentricity remains the root moral problem of our time. Immortality: "I believe that at death a hu-

man being's soul is re-absorbed into the supra-personal spiritual presence behind the universe." Suicide: the Jewish-Christian-Muslim ban on it is "an undesirable superstition."

What about education? Its aim "is, or should be, to teach people to educate themselves. . . ." Toynbee shows how nations have learned from the experience of history, and he believes we still can. Human education should include the "greatest works of literature that the human race has produced," the study of visual arts and music, and of "all the higher religions and philosophies." Scholars should write not only for each other but for the "non-specialist cultivated intelligent public." What about the generalist-specialist problem? "I think the safeguard against both these dangers is to combine specialism in some particular field with a general knowledge of the rest of the field." Education ought to have "one side that is individual and is fitted to each particular person, and another side that is common to all members of the rising generation. . . ." He proposes a United Nations University whose official languages should be French, English, Arabic, Spanish, Russian and Chinese.

I have not completed my review of the agenda: it covers family life, sexuality, genetics, space exploration, communism and capitalism, and all the items we all ponder when we think of the future. Is there a theme? Not an explicit one. But what one senses is a profound longing for the overcoming of the divisions which have kept men from achieving the unity that is required if we are to live together on this globe. Its spiritual condition will be a vitality of love which overcomes egocentricity, its economic condition will be greater distributive justice, its educational condition will be a growing common set of values and outlooks on the world, its political condition will be a world state, its technological condition will be human use of the accumulation of culture. It is a noble vision, and it is rich in its mixture of elements. But somehow it does not inspire, as visions should.



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