Kenneth Winetrout. *After One is Dead: Arnold Toynbee as Prophet*

Wayne M. Bledsoe
*University of Missouri at Rolla*

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr

**Recommended Citation**

Bledsoe, Wayne M. (1990) "Kenneth Winetrout. *After One is Dead: Arnold Toynbee as Prophet,*" *Comparative Civilizations Review: Vol. 22 : No. 22 , Article 7. Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr/vol22/iss22/7*

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Comparative Civilizations Review by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.
BOOK REVIEWS

THE PROPHETIC TOYNBEE


It should be stipulated at the outset that Kenneth Winetrout’s work on Toynbee is not a biography, nor is it an attempt to redefine or explain Toynbee’s place in that nebulous sea of scholarship we call historiography. It is first and foremost a series of essays, written by an ardent Toynbee admirer, designed to honor the great civilizationalist during this, his centennial.

A second Winetrout objective is reflected in the title, but it is not readily discernible. By way of explanation, it should be noted that Winetrout’s text is both a tribute to and a defense of Arnold Toynbee. Winetrout rightly perceives that Toynbee’s greatest vulnerability at the hands of critics has been that he happened to be a “generalist” living in a world dominated by “specialists.” Even in death, Toynbee continues to be assailed by the specialists. In an issue of the New York Review of Books (June 1, 1989), George F. Kennan, writing on the “History of Toynbee,” concludes that Toynbee’s uniformities in civilization “... arouse in me the same discomfort that I normally experience when great generalizations are used to describe highly varied versions of the human predicament.”

When tried in the court of the academic specialists, Toynbee, the self-proclaimed generalist, has always been found wanting. While it is true that most academicians, regardless of their discipline, credit Toynbee with immense erudition, unquestionable dedication, legendary industriousness, and prodigious literary output, invariably, these same individuals reject his work as being too grandiose or too simplistic. For example, in the aforementioned article by George Kennan, Toynbee receives polite praise only to be dismissed ultimately on the grounds that “... history is made by individuals and Toynbee never deals with the individual.” Such criticism, says Winetrout, trivializes Toynbee’s work and in rejoinder Winetrout sets forth a Toynbee who stands above any academic discipline in hopes of gaining a more equitable hearing for the renowned civilizationalist. In place of Toynbee the historian, Winetrout calls forth Toynbee the prophet; one who clearly stands alone from any academic specialization.

Also, with regard to Winetrout’s title, it should be noted that Arnold Toynbee had a special affinity for Bertrand Russell’s pronouncement that “One ought to care very much about what is going to happen after one is dead.” Thus, based on Toynbee’s fondness for Russell’s quote and Winetrout’s desire to honor “Toynbee the Generalist,” we have the present volume, After One is Dead: Arnold Toynbee as Prophet.

Published by BYU ScholarsArchive, 1990
Winetrout is not the first to label Toynbee as a “prophet” but he is the first to do so as an act of praise. Chapter VIII in Pieter Geyl’s Debate with Historians is entitled “Toynbee the Prophet,” but Geyl’s intent is to denigrate Toynbee as an historian while Winetrout’s intent, by way of contrast, is eulogistic. In support of his objective, Winetrout identifies six attributes that he perceives to be prophetic qualities and he attempts to demonstrate that all six were more than passing concerns of Toynbee.

Perhaps the most obvious characteristic to be associated with a prophet is that of a deep religious concern. Winetrout devotes two chapters to Toynbee’s religious views, as well as alluding to them in most of the remaining chapters, and he establishes, emphatically, the following conclusions: number one, Toynbee was not a Christian; and two, no twentieth century scholar made religion such an integral, critical aspect of his general theory as did Arnold Toynbee. In Chapter One, entitled “Is Toynbee a Christian?,” Winetrout analyses the issue, considers the controversy surrounding the topic, but finds no reason to reject Toynbee’s own assertion, “I am not a believer. When I was an undergraduate, I ceased to believe in the doctrines of Christianity.” As the author demonstrates, Toynbee’s departure from Christianity was not a casual act of youthful rebellion, but rather a long, deliberate, thoughtful, history-based decision that was inspired in large measure by his Greco-Roman education. Quoting once again from Toynbee, “My Hellenic education prevailed over my Christian education.”

Toynbee’s unequivocal assertion certainly begs the question: if not a Christian, then what? In the most general terms, Toynbee’s religion was non-conventional, unorthodox and, to say the least, diverse. At times he called himself an agnostic and at others, a “trans-rationalist;” that being one who follows reason as far as it will carry them, and accepts the findings of reason without reservation. However, “trans-rationalism” alone was insufficient for Toynbee as reason disallows things spiritual. Thus, “... reason will take one only so far and then one must turn to intuition or faith.”

Toynbee’s religion also included an abiding respect for non-human nature and a human relationship to what he termed the “ultimate reality” that lies behind and beyond the phenomena of the universe. Toynbee’s “ultimate reality” was itself an unverifiable hypothesis, but it referred to a universal, all-embracing religion that served all mankind. It was a universal godhead that assumed numerous forms. In short, Toynbee was a pluralist wanting maximum religion with minimum dogma. He believed that neither man nor civilization could survive without religion, but his call was for toleration, not consensus.

The second prophetic quality Winetrout found in Toynbee was his message: “Repent or Perish.” With all the fervor of an Old Testament prophet Toynbee warned civil society to turn from its transgressions or face destruction. While Toynbee identified many specific problems threatening mankind, the world’s quandary, collectively, emanated from “unbridled greed” and a desire for “growth at any cost.” The West in
particular transformed greed into a virtue and the world in general placed the environment in jeopardy with its intemperate increases. As Toynbee expressed it, “Nations . . . civilization itself . . . all being fueled by greed, growth, and generalized aggressiveness are on the path to self-destruction.” Toynbee further proclaimed that “Only a religious attitude toward human life and its environment can enable us to recognize again, as our ancestors did, that man is a part of nature and must coexist with it . . .” Speaking to the 21st century Toynbee called for a global society that was socialistic at the economic level and free-minded at the spiritual level. We live in a finite world so there are limits to wealth. There need to be population control and economic stabilization to avoid world-wide catastrophe. The time has come for us to make peace with each other so that we can make peace with the world. Instead of greed and growth, Toynbee called for a monastic-type attitude toward life.

In Chapter four of Winetrout’s text we find Toynbee as the “Prophetic Counselor,” instructing youth on the role of education in dealing with the world’s problems. After making comparisons between the education of Edward Gibbon, Henry Adams, and himself, Toynbee advocated support for “classical education,” which he defined simply as an initiation into a culture that was older than one’s own. As Toynbee the counselor advised, a classical education provides an individual with a vantage point from which they can view their own civilization as an outsider. When viewed from the outside, or classical standpoint, one’s own, familiar, culture undergoes a metamorphosis that is startling, but instructive. Toynbee credited his own Greek and Latin studies as the saving grace that prevented him from over-estimating the importance of modern Western civilization.

Toynbee, the generalist, also issued a word of caution to students about being corralled into the enclosure of the specialist. The specialist, he warned, frequently becomes so devoted to “perfection” and “completeness” that inertia results. He also praised the student virtues of “openmindedness” and “disinterestedness” and he admonished students to hold on to both for “. . . when you are twice as old you will have twice the need for them.” Students today are the first human beings who have become citizens of the world as a whole. They already enjoy a worldwide en rapport with one another and their next goal is to bring about a political unification of the world.

Another prophetic characteristic Winetrout finds in Toynbee is his use of cycles or stages to foretell the future. The author devotes chapter five of his text to Toynbee’s four stages of civilization, which include an “Age of Growth,” “Time of Trouble,” a “Universal State,” and an “Age of Disintegration.” Winetrout’s objective is to demonstrate that Toynbee’s third stage, the Universal State, has much in common with what the Trilateral commission attempted to effect in the world during the 1970’s. In Toynbee’s four stages of civilization the “Universal State” follows a “Time of Troubles” and, according to Toynbee, the world fell upon just such a time in the ’70s. Toynbee’s list of troubles included “war, excessive
nationalism, overpopulation, pollution, over specialization, racial injustice, greed, excessive reliance on technology, lack of personal self-discipline...," and a host of other maladies. According to Toynbee, when troubles reach sufficient magnitude, there are only two choices: accept inevitable disaster, or, the establishment of some form of global government that is capable of keeping the peace and re-establishing the balance between man and the rest of the biosphere.

Toynbee was of the opinion that the member states of the Trilateral Commission [Japan, Western Europe and the U.S.] experienced just such problems in the later part of the last decade. All three saw a shift in values away from work-oriented, public-spirited interests to a society whose values were inspired predominately by greed. The Trilateral governments became so saturated with selfish demands from the citizenry that they ceased to be effective. For Toynbee, the situation was ripe for the creation of a "Universal State," an institution that would check the headlong decline of a disintegrating civilization. It should be noted that Toynbee's Universal State need not be literally world-wide, but simply embrace the whole territory of a single civilization experiencing trouble.

Of course, if a prophet is to fulfill his mission, he must do more than simply admonish his people, he must also hold forth hope. Here, Toynbee the Prophet directs the reader's attention to China as a possible saviour of civilization. For several reasons, Toynbee maintained that China could become the leader of a worldwide world-state. China is twenty-one centuries old; is imbued with an ecumenical spirit; has the humanism of the Confucian Weltanschauung and the rationalism of Confucianism and Buddhism. China realizes that any attempt to dominate the universe is self-defeating and China knows that man should live in harmony with nature. Of course, Toynbee realized that China was becoming altogether too infatuated with Western technology and might decide to go the unfortunate way of the West. But even if such happened, there was still hope that a heavily industrialized China, with western values, would probably result in a bond between the United States and the Soviet Union for mutual protection. A Universal State could still result.

While Winetrout devotes at least a chapter to each of the above mentioned characteristics of a prophet, the greatest of all prophetic attributes is that a prophet must care very much about what is going to happen after they are dead. To this end we can conclude that Winetrout's entire text stands as evidence for it was Toynbee's concern for the future that inspired most of his scholarship.

While Winetrout's tribute to Toynbee has considerable merit, it is going to receive criticism; particularly from those who have been critical of Toynbee. Just as Toynbee was criticized for being a "generalist," Winetrout's work, as he states himself, is a work written by a generalist to be read by other generalists. Likewise, some specialists will find fault with the similarities Winetrout posits between past and present societies.
Winetrout's comparison between Toynbee's "Universal State" and the efforts of the Trilateral Commission, will perhaps be viewed by some as too contrived to have merit, while others may think the envisioned role of China as the saviour of civilization is more in line with the thinking of a "visionary" than a prophet. Some may even find fault with the repetition that occurs within the various essays in Winetrout's text, although such is common in collections of this nature. The Toynbee critics will also find fault with Winetrout's organization of the text, which includes, in true Toynbee fashion, a series of "Annexes" after each essay, that provide the reader with additional elaboration on the central theme of each chapter.

While the Winetrout text may receive criticism from various sources, it has merit. Winetrout is successful in introducing a Toynbee that is quite distinct from "Toynbee the historian." Winetrout successfully provides the reader with insight into the ecumenical interest and scholarship of Arnold Toynbee. He is successful in penetrating the eclectic mind of a "generalist" and demonstrating that there is more to the study of civilization than the recording of the deeds of individuals. He successfully focuses attention on sources that only a precious few scholars have read and in the process demonstrates the polygonal nature of Arnold Toynbee's research. Winetrout based his research on the "dialogue volumes," which included such items as the "Toynbee-Ikeda Dialogue," "Surviving the Future," "Toynbee on Toynbee," "An Historian's Conscience," and, perhaps to the chagrin of the purist, even references to Toynbee's Playboy interview.

In conclusion, perhaps the most laudable thing that can be said about Winetrout's efforts is that I strongly suspect Toynbee would have approved of the work and if the subject of a eulogy approves, then who is to find fault?

Wayne M. Bledsoe

INTERPRETIVE ARCHAEOLOGY


This collection of three essays discusses the excavation and significance of the Templo Mayor (Great Temple) of Tenochtitlan, discovered by construction workers in Mexico City in 1978. These essays use divergent intellectual approaches to explore the connections between the symbolism of the temple, its architectures (it was expanded some seven times), the offerings it contained, and the symbolic, political, and economic structure of the Aztec empire. The discussion of the temple presents a rare opportunity to juxtapose archaeological and ethnohistorical materials since there are accounts recorded by Spanish explorers in the early sixteenth century. All three authors use these...